

Vacant Lot Greening Options in Buffalo

Robert Grimaldi



Vacant Lot Before Greening



Vacant Lot After PUSH Development

What are the main goals of PUSH Buffalo?

The main goals of PUSH (People United for Sustainable Housing) and its development subsidiary, the Buffalo Neighborhood Stabilization Corporation (BNSC), are to mobilize residents to create strong neighborhoods with quality affordable housing, to expand local hiring opportunities, and to advance economic justice in Buffalo.¹ (This fact sheet will use “PUSH” to refer to both PUSH and BNSC).

How does PUSH develop vacant lots to accomplish these goals?

The purchase, development, and maintenance of vacant lots converts unsightly blight into beautiful and functional spaces that can be enjoyed by all members of the community.²

How is PUSH vacant lot greening funded?

The largest funding source was \$540,000 in federal stimulus funds that PUSH received in 2009 and has since used to purchase 22 properties. The funds are still being expended on the development and maintenance of those lots.³

What is the process of acquiring a vacant lot?

PUSH begins the vacant lot development process by researching lots, preferably multiple contiguous lots, in a neighborhood that would

embrace one of its uses. The lots are then purchased, after a title search, at the City’s tax foreclosure auction or from private owners.

Once purchased, PUSH employs a contractor has to “clean and green” the lot, by grading it, removing all concrete and debris, and planting grass. The time span varies greatly from lot to lot, but the entire process, from research of available lots to garden readiness, can take as long as 2.5 years.⁴

What options has PUSH developed for greening vacant lots?

Currently, PUSH employs 7 different vacant lot strategies in Buffalo: (1) Open Community Garden, (2) Fenced and Locked Community Garden, (3) Clean and Green Lot, (4) School Community Garden, (5) Birds, Bees, and Butterflies Garden, (6) Food Project Garden/Nursery, and (7) Tree Farm.

Several of these projects involve collaboration with other non-profits. The Food Garden supports the Massachusetts Avenue Project, which provides nutritious food to areas of the city that lack access to fresh foods,⁵ and the tree farm supports Re-Tree WNY, which plants trees all throughout Buffalo to replace trees damaged by the October 2006 storm or removed.⁶



Do different communities respond to various vacant lot strategies differently?

Yes, PUSH has noticed that different communities have responded differently to the various types of gardens. Many communities value the open space afforded by the clean and green lots, as well as the opportunity for gardening with neighbors in the open community gardens. One group of gardeners—mostly Burmese refugees—equipped with years of gardening experience, preferred a fenced and locked garden, where they can have a secured plot.⁷

What full-time staff is required for lot maintenance?

PUSH employs one full-time landscaper, assisted by a part-time worker in the summer months, to maintain its 22 properties. His main duties include weekly mowing of lots, trash removal, lot inspections, and clearing of sidewalks in the winter months, along with several tasks particular to the type of lot use.⁸

Do neighbors of vacant lots present any opposition throughout the stages of vacant lot development?

PUSH employees have noticed that neighbors of lots often fear that the gardens will lead to pest problems, which has never been the case. After debris is removed from the lots, there have been no complaints of rats or other pests.⁹ Any neighbors who have expressed concern during the development stage have embraced the finished product.¹⁰



Are there any zoning considerations in vacant lot development?

No, the lots are zoned as “vacant lots,” and PUSH has only had to acquire city permission for the building of a garage on one of its lots.¹¹

Does PUSH take out liability insurance on the properties?

Yes, along with the payment of annual property tax and water and garbage fees, PUSH maintains liability insurance policies on all of its properties.¹²

Vacant Lot Development Strategies Menu

1. Community Garden

18th St. (between Massachusetts St. and Hampshire St.)



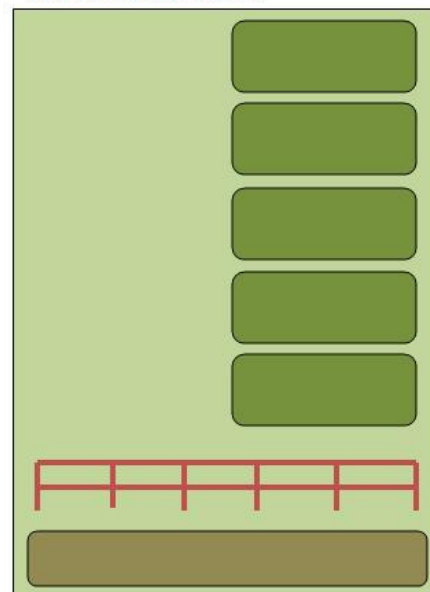
This lot contains five raised beds available to community members for the gardening of either flowers or vegetables. There is no locked fence. Originally, this was a “clean and green” lot, but a neighbor approached PUSH and asked permission to convert it to a garden. PUSH made a written agreement with her outlining responsibilities. Other gardeners can also apply to PUSH to garden there.

Maintenance: Weekly mowing, trash pick-up, and inspection, as well as weeding, mulching, fence maintenance, and seasonal snow removal.

Costs: The costs for this lot, outside of regular maintenance, include topsoil and lumber for raised beds, as well as posts and lumber for fence just inside the sidewalk, about \$1,000 installed, or \$200 and 2 days of labor.

Dimensions: 30’ wide x 100’ deep.

Community Garden



2. Hampshire Street Vegetable Garden Hampshire St. (between 15th St. and Lawrence Pl.)

This garden is comprised of fifteen 200 sq. ft. individual raised beds, which local residents may garden for an annual fee of \$25. A locked fence surrounds the plots, providing a sense of ownership and security.

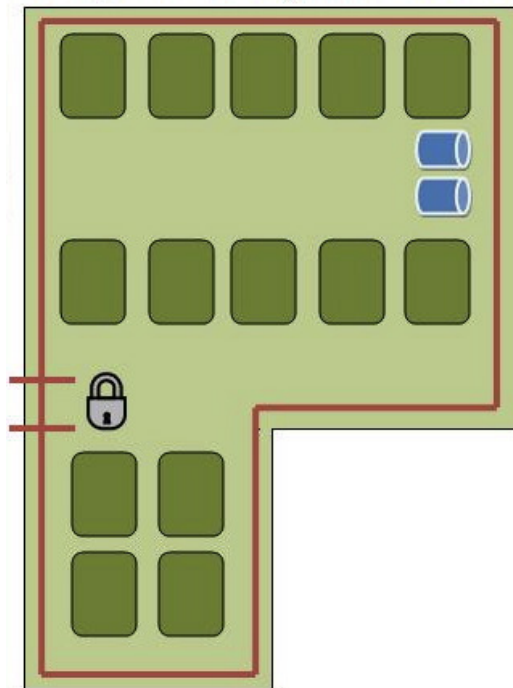


Maintenance: Weekly mowing, trash pick-up, inspection, and filling of water tanks, as well as weeding, mulching, fence maintenance, and seasonal snow removal.

Costs: \$16,000 total for acquisition and preparation of lots, including installation of gated fence, and development of 15 individual plots. \$2,800 annual cost in weekly maintenance, \$425 property tax and \$1,050 insurance.

Dimensions: 100' wide on Hampshire, 100' deep, 60' wide in back.

Hampshire St. Vegetable Garden



3. Clean-and-Green Lot 37 19th St.

This lot has been cleared of all debris, graded, and seeded with grass to provide the street with a level, clean open-space for recreation and events.

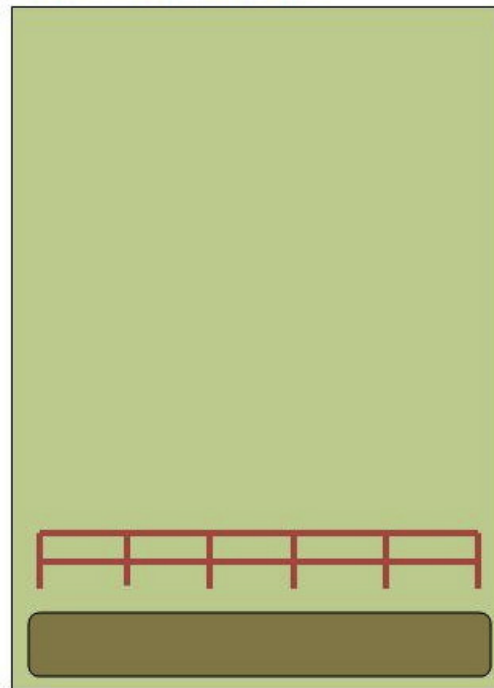


Maintenance: Weekly mowing, trash pick-up, and inspection, as well as weeding, mulching, fence maintenance, and seasonal snow removal.

Costs: 6 fence posts and 30 feet of lumber costs about \$200, or \$1,000 if professionally installed.

Dimensions: 50' wide x 100' deep.

Clean and Green Lot



4. School 30 Community Garden 608 W. Utica St.

This large corner lot has picnic tables, raised flower and vegetable beds, and a large area devoted to perennial fruit bushes. This lot provides the students of Public School 30 with a space for recreation and education.

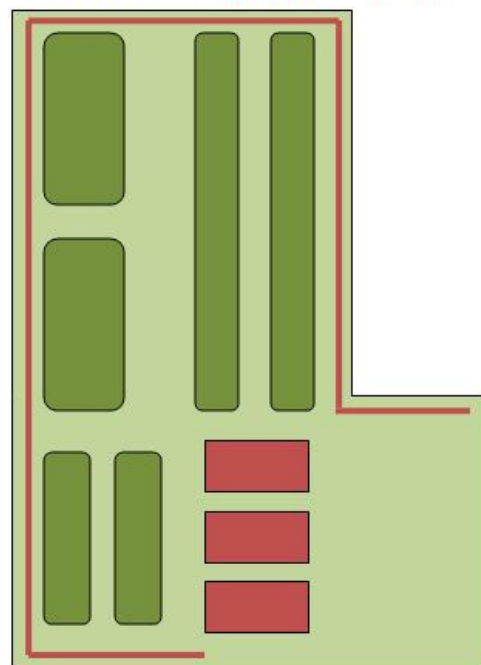


School 30 Community Garden

Maintenance: Weekly mowing, trash pick-up, and inspection, as well as weeding, mulching, fence maintenance, and seasonal snow removal.

Costs: \$1,200 in fencing materials, exclusive of labor for installation. Picnic tables, raised beds.

Dimensions: 150' wide on 15th St., 40' wide on W. Utica, 50' deep in back.



5. Birds, Bees, and Butterflies Garden 445 W. Ferry St.

This property serves as a community garden specially designed with plants that flower through the seasons and attract butterflies.

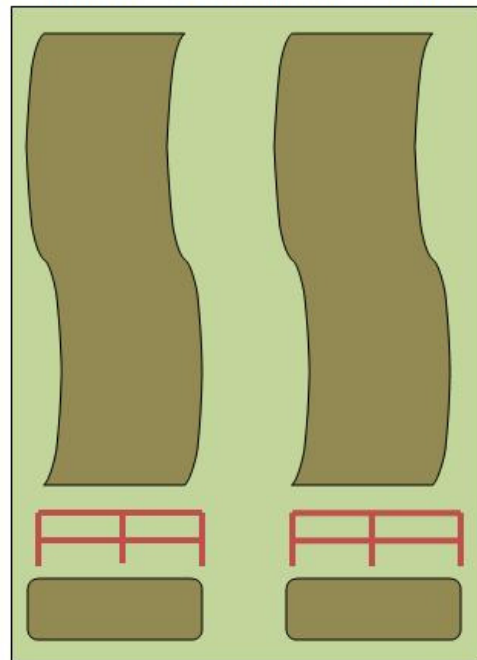


Birds, Bees, & Butterflies Garden

Maintenance: Weekly mowing, trash pick-up, and inspection, as well as weeding, mulching, fence maintenance, and seasonal snow removal.

Costs: \$2,000 for fencing materials, topsoil, mulch, and perennial flowers.

Dimensions: 30' wide x 100' deep.



6. Massachusetts Avenue Project Garden/ PUSH Nursery

40, 42, 44 Winter St.

These three contiguous lots serve two main purposes. The first is provision of vegetable planting space in raised beds to the Massachusetts Avenue Project, which supplies fresh locally grown food to residents of the West Side of Buffalo. The lot also serves as a nursery for flowers and other plants to be transplanted to other vacant lots.



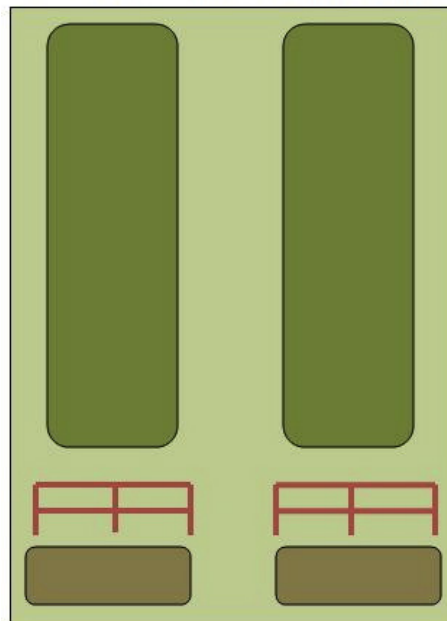
Mass. Ave. Project Garden/Nursery

Maintenance: Weekly mowing, trash pick-up, and inspection, as well as weeding, mulching, fence maintenance, and seasonal snow removal.

Costs: Purchase of three lots, transplant of a great deal of topsoil to build up beds, \$200 for fencing materials (\$1,000 installed), \$1,200 for topsoil, \$600 for bed in front of lot.

Dimensions: 60' wide x 100' deep.

7. Re-Tree WNY Tree Farm



307 14th St.

These two large contiguous lots house a tree farm for Re-Tree WNY, which has been in operation since 2006 and has planted over 23,000 trees in Buffalo.¹³

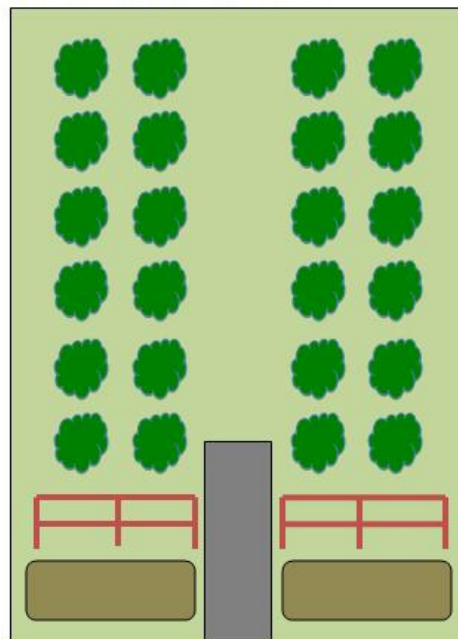


Maintenance: Weekly mowing, trash pick-up, and inspection, as well as weeding, mulching, fence maintenance, maintenance of service driveway and seasonal snow removal.

Costs: \$200 for fencing materials (\$1,000 installed), \$700 for stone driveway, \$1,200 for topsoil and mulch for temporary holding of trees.

Dimensions: 90' wide x 150' deep.

Re-Tree WNY Tree Farm



¹ <http://pushbuffalo.org>.

² Interview with Sean Ryan, Oct. 6, 2011.

³ Id.

⁴ Id.

⁵ <http://www.mass-ave.org/>.

⁶ Interview with Josh Smith, Oct. 13, 2011.

⁷ Id.

⁸ Id.

⁹ Id.

¹⁰ Id.

¹¹ Id.

¹² Id.

¹³ <http://www.re-treewny.org/main.html>.

Partnership for the Public Good
www.ppgbuffalo.org
237 Main St., Suite 1200, Buffalo NY 14203
