

Vacancy to Vibrancy in

# WALNUT PARK EAST



**Green City Coalition (GCC)** connects neighborhood residents with partners and seeks opportunities for funding to design, install and maintain public green spaces that align with local priorities and interests. We achieve this goal by:

- identifying vacant properties for potential conversion to green space amenities;
- coordinating Coalition partner and member efforts for maximum impact;
- establishing a system for land acquisition, preservation and management;
- engaging communities throughout all aspects of project development and implementation.

## FRAMEWORK

The GCC mission is to co-create and conserve ecologically rich urban green spaces that promote healthy, vibrant and engaged communities through a deeper connection with nature. Anchored in a formal partnership between the City of St. Louis, St. Louis Development Corporation (SLDC), Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC), and the Metropolitan St. Louis Sewer District (MSD) - and in collaboration with a growing network of cross-sector organizations – the Coalition is working collaboratively with neighborhood residents to convert vacancy to vibrancy.

## FOCUS NEIGHBORHOODS

GCC focuses on neighborhoods where access to nature is constrained by decades of disinvestment, and where there are high concentrations of vacant properties and stormwater issues. These neighborhoods are working to reverse the negative effects of high vacancy including decreased sense of community, reduced property values, and lower potential for reinvestment and job creation. Transparency, collaboration, and community engagement are vital to success, which is grounded in a **with-not-for** approach to community-based conservation and development.

## GOALS

- increase sense of community and vitality
- enhance neighborhood safety and aesthetics
- increase prosperity and equitable reinvestment
- improve health and well-being
- improve environmental health and resilience

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## WALNUT PARK EAST COMMUNITY PLANNING WORKSHOPS

**October 5, 2017** – *Community Workshop at New Northside Conference Center*: discussed and mapped community assets, opportunities and challenges

**October 24, 2017**– *Student Workshop at Northwest Academy of Law*: discussed and mapped community assets, opportunities and challenges

**October 30, 2017** – *Community Workshop at New Northside Conference Center*: confirmed Green Space Focus Area; reviewed demolitions and green space options

**January 18, 2018** – *Student Workshop at Northwest Academy of Law*: re-imagined Carter Park and adjacent vacancy as unified community open space

**February 1, 2018** – *Community Workshop at Northwest Academy of Law*: prioritized project areas & green space options; connected community members with GCC partner organizations

## WPE: CURRENT PROJECTS

### URBAN WATERS LEARNING LAB @ NORTHWEST ACADEMY OF LAW

Through computer modeling and input from Walnut Park community members and Northwest students, vacant properties that line Carter Park (along Robin, near Lillian) were identified as part of the neighborhood's Green Space Focus Area. Northwest students created a design that reflected their vision of what Carter Park could look like, if it absorbed both the troublesome stormwater and the adjacent vacant properties. During this design process, it was revealed that the baseball diamond in the park, closest to the school, routinely floods and is rarely able to be used by students. The design then included the repurposing of this section of the park into a large rain garden that can absorb excess stormwater and serve as an outdoor classroom. The Urban Waters Learning Lab can alleviate local stormwater overflow issues while providing an opportunity to learn about the impacts of concrete and climate change on our cities. By incorporating an outdoor pavilion, the area can also provide space for any outdoor learning opportunities, including yoga, literature, and art. By converting the adjacent LRA vacant lots into an urban orchard and raised garden beds, the outdoor classroom can provide an opportunity to grow healthy foods, including composting stations for waste from the school cafeteria. *Grants are pending for this project.*

### ART IN WALNUT PARK

Art in Walnut Park is a collaboration between Northwest Academy of Law's Activism Club (art + activism) and local artist Cbabi Bayoc, and currently includes two phases:

#### *Phase 1: Vacant to Vibrant Building Board Ups*

Working with the City's Building Division, the team painted board-ups on vacant and abandoned buildings that face Carter Park. This includes all vacant buildings along Lillian, Robin and Theodore that face the park and school.

#### *Phase 2: Robin & Lillian Public Art Installation*

The stretch of vacant properties along Robin, that are adjacent to Carter Park, is highly visible from Northwest and the park and is prone to illegal dumping. Northwest Activism students and Cbabi are working to design a public art installation to be installed in the Fall of 2018. This project will be faced by Phase One painted properties, will deter illegal dumping, and will provide artful community gathering space. *Fundraising is under way for this project: [www.ioby.org/project/art-walnut-park](http://www.ioby.org/project/art-walnut-park).*

### THROWING AND GROWING OUTDOOR CLASSROOM

Throwing and Growing Foundation is a local non-profit that provides after-school programming for girls of all ages, and recently received the Board of Alderman's Youth at Risk grant for 2018. After-school programs are housed at St. Matthew's School at the intersection of Wren and Thekla, and within the neighborhood's Green Space Focus Area. GCC partners are working with students to design a vacant lot reuse project:

#### *Phase 1: Vacant Lot Reuse Field Trip*

In April, 2018, students took a field trip to Good Life Growing, a production and demonstration farm in the Greater Ville, and to an outdoor garden and classroom at Clay Elementary in Hyde Park.

#### *Phase 2: Designing Throwing & Growing Project*

Students then explored potential locations for their own outdoor growing space and design the area based on their field trip experience and partner advice. We also installed three raised beds and began growing food as we prepare for a larger community garden project next growing season.

#### *Phase 3: Install Community Garden – Spring 2019*

## **GREEN SPACE FOCUS AREA**

Project demolitions are funded through the Urban Greening Program, which aims to remove impervious surface and alleviate combined sewer overflows. Within the Green Space Focus Area in Walnut Park East – defined through a combination of computer modeling and community participatory mapping workshops – all LRA-owned vacant buildings have been demolished<sup>1</sup> (27), and all privately-owned vacant and abandoned buildings are being reviewed to determine their eligibility for demolition (*e.g.* structural condemnations, roof and fire damage, etc.). Within this Focus Area, all vacant properties will receive deed restrictions<sup>2</sup> that ensure stormwater absorption needs are met, as this is an area prone to stormwater issues (*e.g.* basement backups, local flooding, etc.). Because each demolition that is funded through the Urban Greening Program requires a deed restriction, the restrictions are clustered into this focus area so as to not detract from potential redevelopment in the surrounding areas. Demolitions funded through this program can occur in additional eligible areas without receiving any deed restrictions, as long as a deed restriction is placed on an existing vacant lot within the Focus Area. Parcels that have demolitions outside of the Focus Area, *i.e.* demolitions occurring on adjacent blocks or near open schools, will not receive deed restrictions.

The **Green Space Focus Area** is approximately **14 acres** in total, representing **12.5% of all the vacant land** in Walnut Park East.

## **DEMOLITION CANDIDATE SELECTION & REVIEW**

Vacant and abandoned buildings on blocks that are surrounding the Green Space Focus Area, or that are within 500 feet of a school, are being reviewed one-by-one by the Urban Greening Program Working Group, GCC staff, the Problem Properties Unit, the Neighborhood Stabilization Officer, the Cultural Resources Office, and Alderwoman Boyd, to determine their need for demolition.

## **PRIVATE VACANT & ABANDONED BUILDING REVIEW**

Privately-owned vacant and abandoned properties are also being reviewed on a case-by-case basis and, if determined to be in need of demolition, the process can take a year or more to complete.

### *<sup>1</sup>DEMOLITION STANDARDS*

Demolitions funded by the Urban Greening Program (MSD/City program to remove impervious surface) require that no man-made materials be left on the site, basements and building materials are fully removed, basements are filled with soil, and that demolitions are wetted throughout the process to prevent the spread of fugitive dust that could contain lead or other potentially hazardous particles.

### *<sup>2</sup>DEED RESTRICTIONS*

Deed restrictions state that the amount of stormwater absorbed by a parcel cannot be reduced in the future. If, for example, a parcel with a deed restriction were to be used for development, the owner would be required to manage stormwater absorption on site through rain gardens, bioswales, rain barrels, etc.