



City of Rochester

Vacant Lot Handbook

A Guide to Reusing, Reinventing and Adding Value to Rochester's
City-owned Vacant Lots

The Vacant Lot Handbook

IN SUMMARY

If you have a good idea for developing a city-owned vacant lot in your neighborhood, the City wants to hear it. If the lot is next to your home, it could be a sideyard expansion. If you have gardening skills, it could be a source of fresh food in the summer. If you are more ambitious, and want to add a building or structure to a vacant lot, the City welcomes those proposals too.

If you are interested in helping the City achieve its sustainability goals, your vacant lot could be a site for a sustainable new home or home addition.



Vacant Lot Handbook

Basic PROCESS

- STEP ONE: IDENTIFY CITY-OWNED VACANT LOT
Use the City's website to identify lot as City-owned. If you are not sure, call (585) 428-6951.
- STEP TWO: DEVELOP YOUR IDEA
Sketch out an idea for the vacant lot you plan to use. If you plan to place permanent structures on the lot, you must purchase it. If not considering a permanent structure, you may obtain a temporary license agreement from City Real Estate Division.
- STEP THREE: CHECK ZONING
Check the current zoning uses for the lot- call the City's Permit office or lot onto www.cityofrochester.gov/propinfo.
- STEP FOUR: PROPOSE YOUR PLAN
Show the City what you plan to do with the lot you want to purchase or lease.
- STEP FIVE: PREPARE TO PURCHASE OR OBTAIN PERMIT
Contact the Division of Real Estate at (585) 428-6951 to obtain a garden permit or purchase for use as a side lot if you are the adjoining owner, or submit a development proposal if constructing improvements.
- STEP SIX: BUILD YOUR IDEA!
You are now the owner/permitted user responsible for the property. Contact the Permit Office for any permits necessary or code requirements for your plan.

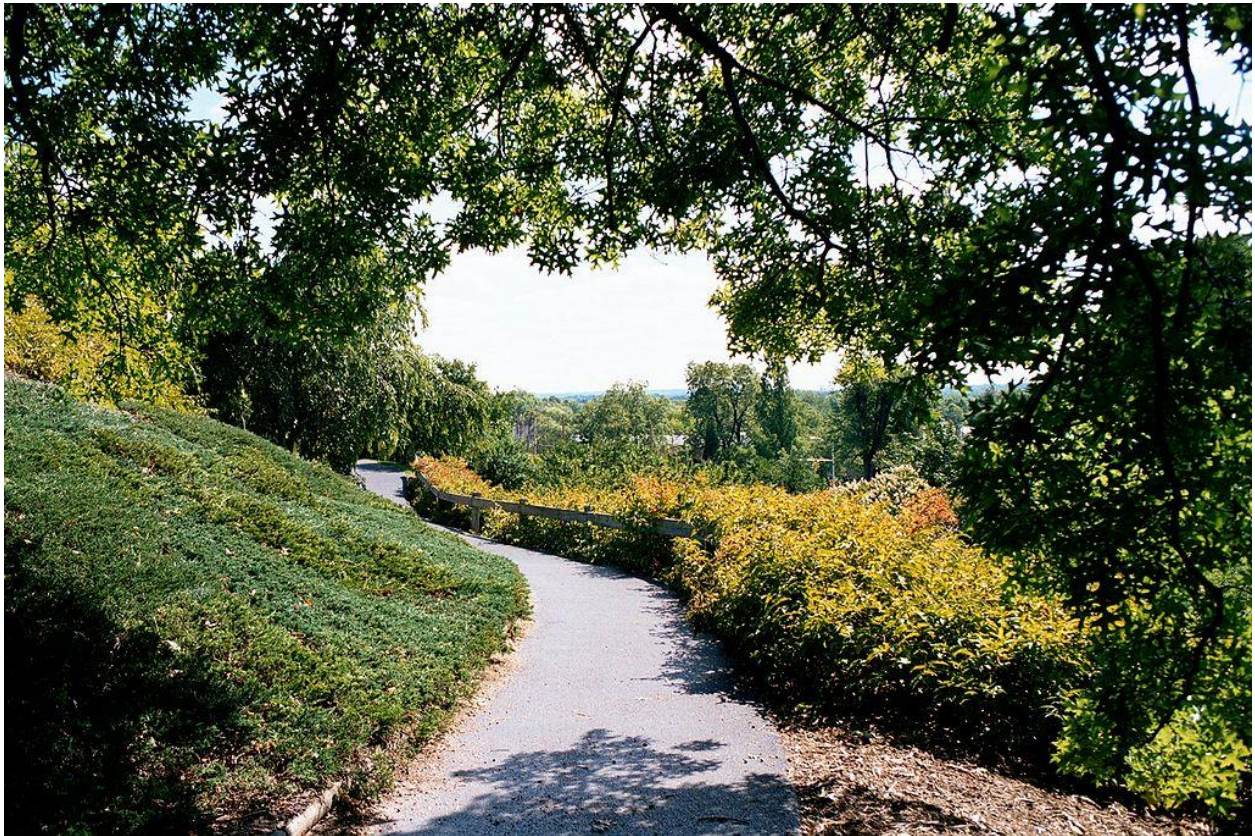


The City owns and maintains more than 3,400 vacant lots. Some lots are sold for large development projects, many are used as community gardens and many are waiting for their hidden potential to be realized.

OVERVIEW -Vacant Lots in City of Rochester

Rochester's current surplus of vacant lots has created issues for the various neighborhoods. Who maintains the lots? Who makes sure these lots are not eyesores to the neighborhoods? The availability of these vacant lots has created opportunities for side yard expansions, community gardens, and residential and commercial infill development.

If you are a new property owner or a longtime resident, the ability to expand your existing property with a vacant lot (plus improvements) will not only add value to your Rochester neighborhood, it will enhance the City's tax base.





Why is there so much vacant land?

Some land is vacant temporarily because a building has recently been demolished due to neglect or deferred maintenance. The homes were blighted and the City has demolished many of those structures, thereby creating temporary vacant lots.

How will I know if there are any restrictions on the vacant lots I want to reuse?

Before the City sells the land, it wants to be sure the reuse meets the zoning code (found on the City's website at cityofrochester.gov/zoningcode) and will fit the overall character of the neighborhood or commercial district.

Who maintains vacant lots?

The City of Rochester's Department of Environmental Services manages the upkeep of the city-owned lots. Lawns are mowed, snow is cleared and debris is picked up on a regular basis. If you purchase the lot or obtain a permit, it will be your responsibility to maintain the lot. Additionally when you purchase an adjacent lot, it must be combined with your structure. It must be combined with your structure.

Let's get Started

Frequently Asked *QUESTIONS*

What do I need to know about developing a strategy for reuse?

- Sketch your reuse strategy and ask someone with expertise to review it.
- Identify the costs involved and funding resources needed to implement the project.
- Think outside the box. Local businesses or organizations may donate material and/or manpower to a worthy cause.
- Consider your proposal in relation to the lot, how much space is included, who surrounds it, etc.

Should I purchase a vacant lot from the City or obtain a temporary garden permit?

If you plan on placing permanent structures on the lot, you must purchase it from the city. If you think you are only going to make temporary improvements, such as a seasonal garden, a permit is all you will need. In many instances, the City holds vacant lots for the "highest and best use" but still makes them available for gardens-permitted only basis.

If you wish to purchase the vacant lot adjacent to your property, you must contact the City's Division of Real Estate to begin the process. If you wish to purchase vacant land for construction of permanent structures and do not reside next door, you must submit a development proposal. You can contact us at (585) 428-6951 or go online to www.cityofrochester.gov/realestate for the necessary forms.

Green Space and Neighborhood Amenities



The easiest way for the City to return a vacant lot to productive use is to sell it to the owner of the adjacent property for a sideyard expansion.

- Sale of city-owned vacant land is contingent upon the purchaser's presenting an appropriate proposal for use, financial ability to complete the project and cannot have open code violations or unpaid taxes on any other properties owned in the city of Rochester.
- The new owner must agree to combine the vacant lot being purchased with their other property creating one tax bill.
- A vacant lot sale can be split in the event that neighbors on either side of the property have an interest in acquiring it.
- The new owner of the lot assumes maintenance and upkeep-mowing, sidewalk snow removal, debris and litter removal.

Residential sideyard expansion allows for a larger garden, lawn, green space to park your cars and can increase the value of the home and enjoyment of the owner.

Fencing TREATMENTS

A fence in combination with landscaping visually defines the lot as being cared for or is in use. It can also prevent unauthorized access to the lot.

Temporary or easily removable fencing is recommended for lots that have permits for use as gardens or green space.

Residential DEVELOPMENT



Constructing new houses on the vacant lots available for sale in Rochester, is a way to strengthen the neighborhood and build the City's tax base.

The City has partnered with developers and non-profit organizations such as The Greater Rochester Housing Partnership, Cornerstone and Habitat for Humanity to create large scale or scattered site residential development in neighborhoods where multiple vacant lots are available.

Small Structures

Building small structures on vacant lots can complement and enhance other reuse strategies. For example, a greenhouse can extend the growing season for a garden. Garden sheds, garages or small structures such as gazebos or trellised patios, can be good additions to side yards or gardens.

Accessory buildings and dwelling units require a building permit and variances from zoning.