RENEWAL







Lot Renewal Resource Guide

The Lot Renewal Resource Guide acts as a broad and inclusive summary of the goals, policies and procedures, strategies, and guidelines for converting underutilized lots into active spaces and productive properties that uplift our shared community. The guide's purpose is to help neighbors, groups, and other interested organizations as they envision a vacant lot project.

The City of South Bend thanks you

for your interest, effort, and stewardship in creating projects throughout the City. If you have a good idea for creating a lot project, whether in your neighborhood or across the City, this guide will help bring it to life. We look forward to collaborating with you and watching your projects thrive.

For questions please refer to the Vacant and Abandoned Properties Website: southbendin.gov/vap

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Hyperlinks that are <u>underlined dark blue</u> will take you to the resource (webpage or pdf) being referenced outside of this document.

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TABLE OF LEGISTATION OF LEGISTATION

BEFORE YOU PRINT:

This document is created for easy use as a PDF in Adobe or in an Internet web browser/window.

These page numbers are linked to the section. Click directly on them to go to the section.





WHAT IS THIS GUIDE?

The Lot Renewal Resource Guide aims to help empower residents and neighborhoods to activate underutilized lots and vacant land throughout the City. To support this process, this guide connects people to resources, ideas, steps to complete projects, and others who also want to uplift the shared community.

As an informational tool, this guide expands on recent City efforts to improve neighborhoods while incorporating the ideas of numerous residents, groups in the community, and similar resources around the country. It also provides step-by-step checklists to help ensure each project is successful.

This guide provides common solutions, tools, and methods for visualizing ideas and activating lots.

Together, people and land represent two of South Bend's most vital assets. They embody the City's past and will shape the City's bright future.

Transforming vacant properties to make them active spaces will increase community pride and have numerous benefits.

WHY IS THERE A NEED **FOR A GUIDE?**

Unmanaged vacant land can negatively affect individuals' and community health—from ecological and environmental, to mental and physical, and to social justice issues.

Renewed Lots Benefit Everyone

Purposeful, open green space has positive impacts on people and communities. These benefits include:

- Improved aesthetics of neighborhoods: Activating an empty lot can improve the beauty of a space.
- **Social benefits:** Activating empty spaces creates opportunities for social interactions among residents, neighborhoods, and cultures. Neighbors can work toward a common vision.
- **Health and economic benefits:** Studies show that activating vacant lots can help lower neighborhood violence, reduce depression, and improve the overall economic health of the community.



- Recreation and entertainment opportunities: Activated lots can be used for a number of recreational and entertainment activities, including sports activities, farmers' markets, musical performances, art shows, walking trails, and more.
- Improved physical environment:
 Natural environmental features
 are reintroduced into the area.
 These can clean and protect the
 environment. Some projects
 will provide shade to keep
 neighborhoods cool or create
 green infrastructure that can
 reduce stormwater runoff, lower
 sewage system costs, and improve
 water quality.

The process of activating vacant lots builds connections among residents and neighborhoods, promoting a sense of place and pride and creating stable, thriving neighborhoods.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

This guide can help us with the goals of improving quality of life, increasing value, and promoting long-term community resiliency. It will take everyone pitching in to make it happen.

Developing a plan for a vacant lot is one way to meet our collective goals.

Everyone can help by using this guide to make sure all the basics are covered. The Lot Renewal Resource Guide provides an accessible tool to improve South Bend. The rest is up to you.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

What does it take to make your idea become reality? Working with lots requires access to resources. You need the right people at the right time; it's not just about land!

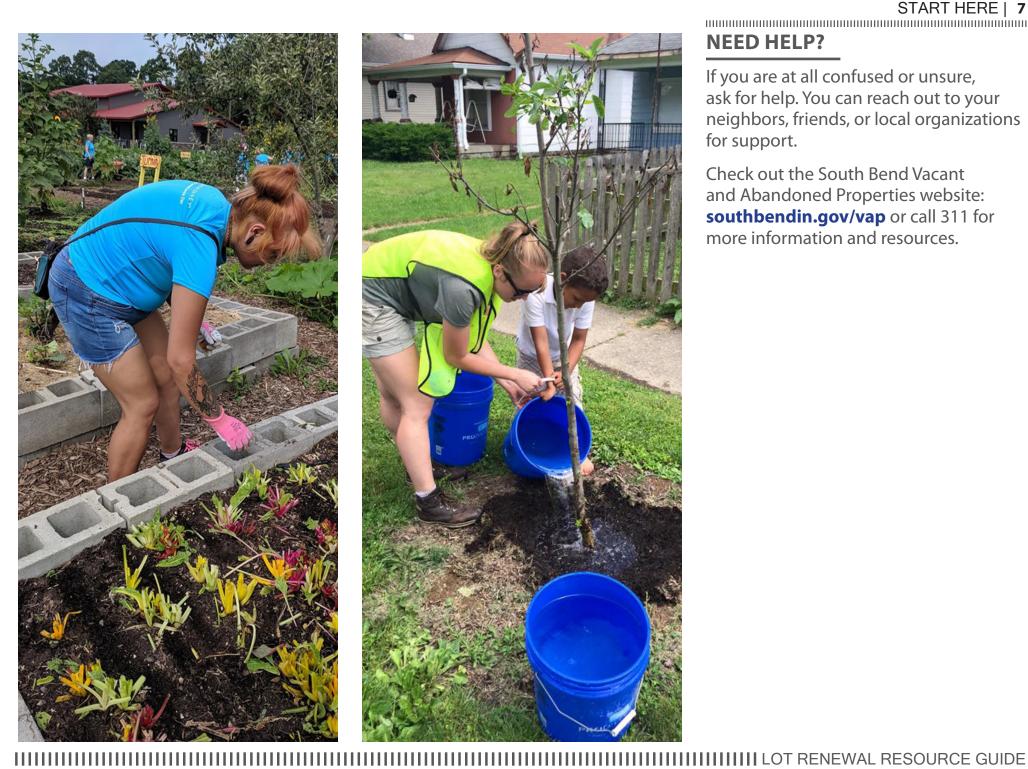
You can use this Lot Renewal Resource Guide over time. It is okay if you don't complete every step! Time is a resource—you may end up building your landscape in phases or across multiple seasons.

Do you have a specific lot in mind? Turn to the *Prepare and Organize* section and figure out what's next.

Are you curious about what this will cost? Turn to the *Tools Section* to make a budget.

Are you working with a group? Check out the *Teamwork* section to learn how to gather and identify resources.

Otherwise, keep to *The Basics*.





NEED HELP?

If you are at all confused or unsure, ask for help. You can reach out to your neighbors, friends, or local organizations for support.

Check out the South Bend Vacant and Abandoned Properties website: southbendin.gov/vap or call 311 for more information and resources.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why is this lot vacant?

Some lots are vacant because they cannot be built on, such as land in a floodplain. Some lots are temporarily vacant. For example, a building may have been demolished because of the poor condition it was in.

Are there restrictions on vacant lot reuse?

Yes. Land does have restrictions due to zoning. You will need to check the **zoning map** to ensure your reuse plan meets the **zoning code** and fits the overall character of the neighborhood or commercial district. You are encouraged to use the ideas in this handbook and adapt them to fit within local context.

Who maintains vacant lots?

The City of South Bend Venues Parks & Arts manages the upkeep of cityowned vacant land.

With privately owned, land is maintained by the owner. City codes guide land owners about how to maintain their private properties. If you purchase a lot or enter into an agreement with the property owner, it likely becomes your responsibility to maintain the lot by mowing, weeding, and removing snow and litter.

Will most lot strategies be small?

Yes, many lot activation strategies in this guide are smaller, making them more manageable.

What is the best way to go about creating a plan to activate and care for a lot?

Here are some tips to get you started:

- Begin with your neighbors and those who might use the space. Collaborate with them to learn their ideas.
- Look at examples from around South Bend and other communities.
- Ask for input from community experts. You may want to get help from professionals, such as planners, landscape architects, or engineers.



This guide will walk you through tips for individual strategies, including:

- Understand that every lot is different. Consider which activities fit the space you have.
- Consider the surrounding area and external factors such as proximity to houses and buildings, lighting, etc.
- Identify people willing to help you with your project.
- Draft or sketch your reuse strategy and ask someone with knowledge or expertise to review it.
- Identify costs and funding sources to implement your strategy.
- Be creative when gathering resources. Businesses and organizations may donate material and manpower to a worthy cause.
- When your project is ready to go, continually evaluate it to ensure it's working.
- Talk with the people who use it (if it's public) and any neighbors who live next to it (be a good neighbor).
- The tools, ideas, activities, and checklists in this guide will help you think through the steps of

- planning your project.
- Ultimately, you want to see that it still meets your intended purpose and that there is nothing that should change to make it meet community need better.

THE BASICS: ACTIVATING A VACANT LOT

The Basics Checklist

Choose a Lot
Pick the right lot for the right reaso

- I have an idea, now I need to find a location for your idea (MACOG Parcel Map)
- I see a lot and want to do something, what things should I consider

Determine Ownership
Seek permission for usage

• Property map (MACOG Parcel Map)

Get Access Through Ownership

Determine how to access the lot

Discover Allowable Uses
Explore current uses and potential use ideas

- Citywide Comprehensive Plan (City Plan)
- South Bend Neighborhood Plans (South Bend Plans and Studies)

Plan for the Long Term Consider future uses

- How is the lot zoned? (City Zoning Map)
- What are allowable uses in each zone? (<u>City Zoning Ordinance</u>)
- Do I need a permit? (Permit Checklist and City Building Department)



OVERVIEW

A surplus of vacant lots has created issues for neighborhoods. Who manages and monitors activity in these lots? Who makes sure the lot is an asset to the neighborhood?

The availability of vacant lots has also created opportunities. From side yard expansions and property enhancements, to neighborhood amenities, community gardens, and stormwater management solutions, or infill development, there are many possibilities. The potential for positive outcomes is endless.

Whether you are a new property owner in South Bend or a longtime resident, addressing a vacant lot will not only add value to your neighborhood, but it will also improve overall quality of life and enhance the City's tax base.

Source: https://shelterforce.org/2018/11/13/transforming-vacant-land-into-community-assets/



STEP 1: CHOOSE A LOT

Pick the right lot for the right reason

- I have an idea, now I need to find a location that works (MACOG Parcel Map)
- I see a lot and want to do something, what things should I consider (See Step 2)

You might already have a site in mind and just want to know what you can do with it. Or, maybe you have an idea, but you don't know which vacant lot might be suitable. Location needs vary. This section looks at the many factors and considerations that may affect your lot selection.

Adjacent Property Considerations

- Does what you want to do fit in with your neighborhood?
- Where are the nearest neighbors?
- What do the neighbors think?

Lot Factors

- Do you have enough room to do what you want to do on the site?
- Have you considered noise of potential activities and respect of the neighbors who are nearby?
- What are the required setbacks on the lot that might affect usage or

- the size of the project?
- Will your project grow in size in the future?

Access, Flow, and Visibility

- Can people and equipment get to the lot easily?
- Can people and equipment move in and around the lot without obstacles?
- How visible is the lot?

Site Conditions

- What used to be on the lot?
- What types of plants exist and what do they look like?
- Does water pool on the lot or does it drain?
- What is the sun exposure like?
- What types of soils are there and what is the condition of the soils?

Water and Electric

- Do you need access to water?
- Do you need access to electricity?
- If you have access, is the electric hook-up underground or overhead?

Building Permits

 Do you need a permit to do the work you have planned?



Use these questions to investigate sites before starting. Depending on your project there may be additional items to consider or think about. Some sites may have environmental hazards, neighbors who are not excited about your idea, or other issues that might not work for your plan. In those cases, you may need to find a different lot or adjust your plan.

If you do not have a lot in mind, you can walk/bike/drive around your neighborhood and use the **MACOG Parcel Map** to look for vacant lots.

Source: https://www.wesa.fm/post/redeveloping-vacant-lot-pittsburgh-can-be-full-refrigerator-sized-surprises#stream/0



Source: maps.macog.com/Html5Viewer/Index.html?configBase=http://maps.macog.com/Geocortex/Essentials/Ess443/REST/sites/MACOG_HTML5/viewers/MACOG/virtualdirectory/Resources/Config/Default

Step 2: DETERMINE OWNERSHIPSeek permission for usage

Property map (<u>MACOG Parcel Map</u>)

When pursuing a vacant lot project, you should first obtain permission from the owner, unless you purchase or already own the lot. You will need to communicate directly with the lot owner because the City does not have authority to sell a lot it doesn't own.

Determining Ownership

To find the owner of a lot for which you do not know the exact address, visit **MACOG's Property Viewer** website, the Michiana Area Council of Governments' GIS website. Then, follow these steps:

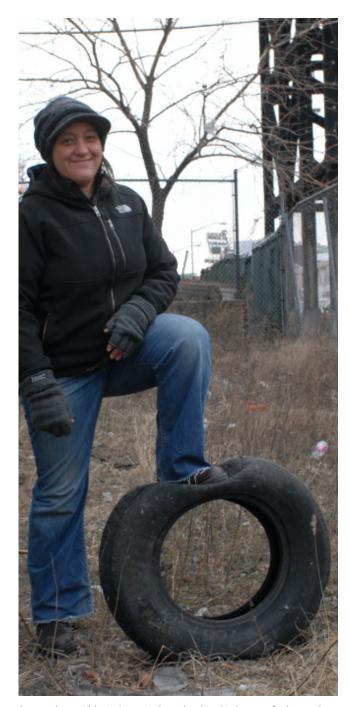
- 1. Using your computer or mobile device, zoom into the area where the lot is located. **Note:** Street names and property layouts (parcels) are already turned on for both South Bend and Elkhart.
- 2. Click on the property you are interested in. A pop-up window displays the owner's name, the property address, and a parcel number. **Note:** By clicking on the Additional Details link, additional

information (size, legal description, and the owner's mailing address) display.

Note: If you have trouble with the link, you can contact the Assessor by phone at (574) 235-9523. To visit the Assessor in person, go to the 3rd floor of the County Building at 227 W. Jefferson Blvd.

To find the owner of a lot for which you know the address follow the previous steps or visit the St. Joseph County's **Property Record Card Search** website. Or go to **sicIndiana**. **com**, select the "Departments" drop-down menu, select "Assessor," and then in the dark blue bar, click "Property Record Card Search." From here, follow these steps:

- 1. On the Property Record Card Search website, in the search menu in the blue bar on the left, click "Address". Follow the prompts, and then enter the address of the lot in the search box.
- 2. Click the Parcel ID that appears in the main search field for additional information, such as the owner's name and address, location information (flood hazard and utility services), and assessment



 $\textbf{Source:} \ https://blog.ioby.org/whose-land-is-this-how-to-find-out-whoowns-vacant-lots-in-your-neighborhood/$

- information (including the recently assessed value).
- 3. On the blue menu bar, click Tabs to find the available improvement information, such as street-level pictures of the property, sales history, and the valuation of the land and other property records.

Buying Or Using The Property

- **Purchasing a lot:** If the property is owned by the City, then "City of South Bend" will be listed as the owner. To determine if a lot is available for purchase, contact the Department of Community Investment by calling 311. If you are interested in buying private property, contact a realtor or the property owner directly.
- Lot usage: If you want to use the lot, but don't want to take ownership, contact the owner to see if you can enter into an agreement for temporary use and to determine how the lot can be used.

Note: If you choose to have temporary use make sure you can remove/relocate any improvements you plan to make. (*Think about what will*

happen in 1, 3 or 5 years when you can no longer use the property.)

• Code violations or cleanup:
Whether a property is city-owned or privately owned, you can call 311 to notify the City if the lot needs to be cleaned up. By law, property owners are required to keep their properties in a condition of good repair, which includes mowing and weed control. Through 311, you can share complaints specific to the property—such as tall grass, trees, weeds, litter, building issues, or sidewalks in disrepair.



Step 3: GET ACCESS THROUGH OWNERSHIP

Determine how to access the lot

If you are ready to move forward with a project and do not own the lot, you need access to it. Consider these scenarios:

- For a long-term project with substantial improvements to the lot (tree removal or hardscape improvements), purchasing the lot is recommended.
- If the project is temporary or less intensive, written permission from the site owner may be enough.
- If the project is a basic cleanup for the purposes of neighborhood safety, you may just need permission from the owner, unless the Indiana Good Samaritan law is invoked. This law allows you to do basic cleanup such as mowing and picking up litter without permission (see IC sec 34-30-26-5); however, additional work including entering a building requires permission from the owner.

There are two options for acquiring properties:

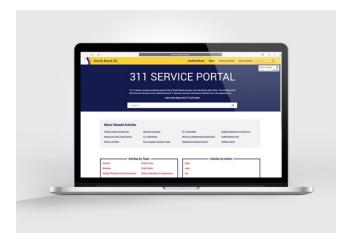
1. Acquire the property directly from the current owner.

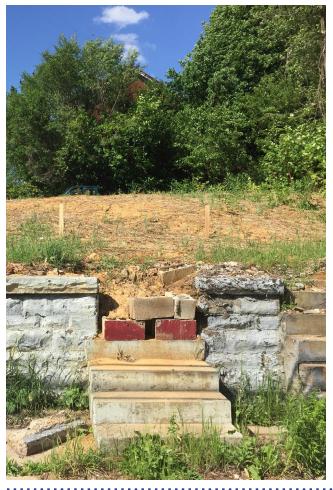
2. If the property has back taxes, acquire it through the tax sale process.

If you are purchasing a lot directly from the owner:

- Contact Owner: Refer to Step 2
- Limited Liability Company:
 Sometimes the owner is listed as a limited liability corporation (LLC) or the owner's mailing address is listed as the property in question (which doesn't have a house). To find the owner, search Indiana's Secretary of State website. If you enter the name of the LLC in your search, you can find the registered agent of the LLC, who is often the owner, and their address.

 Additionally, a mailing address for the LLC is listed on the property record card.
- Quit claim deeds: Sometimes, the sales transaction occurs using a quit claim deed and no title work has been completed. The owner may not know of back taxes or special assessments charged to the property, which would be the buyer's responsibility to pay. You may consider completing title work to protect ourself from costs.





- Right of entry: If the owner choses not to sell the property, ask them if they are willing to do a temporary use agreement. You will need a legal agreement with the owner which provides temporary access to the property. This may require seeking legal counsel.
- The owner may not be aware or may not tell you about back taxes and special assessments, such as liens. If costs exist, and the owner or you are unable/unwilling to pay, then you should look for another property.

If you are purchasing a lot from the owner, check the legal requirements or fees associated with the purchase. These can include:

- Note: Any individual can conduct the following research, but receiving a title report from a title company is a safe approach.
- Code Enforcement: Before
 purchasing a property within the
 city limits, you should complete
 a payoff request to find out if
 code orders or civil penalties exist
 against the property. Certain code
 orders stay with the property
 such as housing violations and

continuous enforcement orders whereas environmental violations, such as grass and litter, will stay with the property owner's name. Check the City website for How-to-check if a property has-outstanding Code Enforcement-violations, invoices, and fines.

- County Recorder (for mortgage):
 Start with the Recorder's office and search public records. Filing the deed or mortgage with the County, which helps resolve ownership disputes. Legal and financial consequences can arise if you do not file.
- Taxes/assessments: To determine if a lot has back taxes or special assessments, you can search property records which are maintained by the County Treasurer's office.
- Bankruptcy: The lot owner may have declared bankruptcy. To determine this, you can search records at the Bankruptcy Court and County Recorder.
- Liens: Lots can have liens that will become your responsibility after the lot is transferred to you; liens can be thousands of dollars.

To ensure the lot does not have liens on it, conduct a title search through a title company or check at the Recorder's Office.

with the Department of Community...

City Owned Properties &

Source: https://southbendin.gov/department/community-investment/

To acquire a property through the tax sale process:

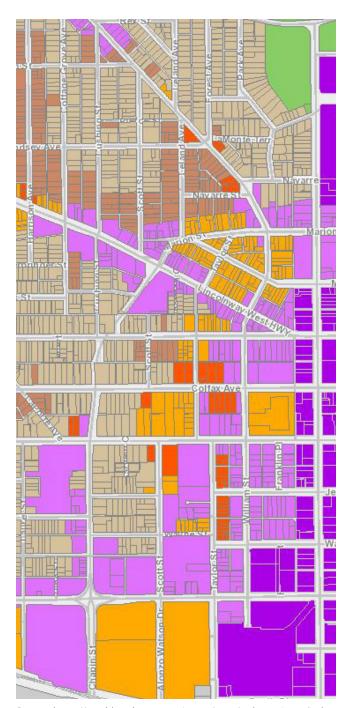
- The property must have back taxes; not all vacant lots are available through the tax sale process.
- Before buying property through tax sale, make sure you understand the legal requirements. You may wish to get legal assistance.
- Properties with back taxes have their tax certificate sold in an online auction format.

- The buyer must be able to pay the winning bid amount and the costs of the required legal work.
- Acquiring a tax certificate for the property through the Commissioners' Certificate Sale reduces the minimum bid price and time for obtaining ownership.
- Before you own the property, you must follow a legal process that takes time and money.
- The buyer is responsible for future property taxes.

The City offers resources to assist with obtaining ownership of a property.

Purchase from City: When the City owns a parcel, residents can request

to purchase it. If the City is willing to sell the property it must follow state statutes (the process differs depending on which City entity holds the title). The process does not guarantee the person who initiates the sale will obtain ownership. Refer to the <u>City Owned Properties</u> site for more information.



Source: https://southbend.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index. html?id=d95daf77ca50463cb62738d2f88a62b1

STEP 4: DISCOVER ALLOWABLE USES

Explore current uses and potential use ideas

Zoning

- How is the lot <u>zoned</u> and what are the <u>zoning requirements</u>?
- Check the zoning ordinance permitted uses.

Land Use Plans

- Is anything planned there already and what are neighboring landuses?
- Check existing <u>neighborhood</u> <u>plans</u>. Do your plans fit within existing plans?

Site Design Factors

Potential flood zones: Check the **Floodplain Information Portal** to see if your lot is in an impacted area.

Natural areas to preserve: The Indiana Dept. of Natural Resources
lists considerations for natural areas

Geological impacts: The <u>Soil Survey</u> website provides resources to identify soils for planning purposes.

Historic Value: Check out the **Historic Preservation Commission's** standards to see if there are any requirements for the use.

What is the best use for this lot? Is the lot being considered for a commercial or residential use soon?

YES --> Clean up the lot, removing any trash, tall grass, or any other hazards.

Is there a long-term plan?

NO ☐ In addition to cleaning up the lot, low cost and/or temporary improvements will be the best fit.

Do you want to use the lot for private or community use?

Private use: Purchase the lot.
Visit the private landscapes
activation category for ideas on uses.

Community use: Is there an engaged group to help?

YES 7 Visit the ideas and teamwork section to see who could help and how. If that is not feasible, consider activations that are easier to set up and maintain, such as community gardens or wildflower lots.

Are you thinking active or passive use?

Active: Visit the open spaces or working landscapes activation categories.

→ Passive: Visit the green infrastructure and natural landscape activation categories.

8TH & BERKS CITY OF PHILADELPHIA







https://next city.org/features/view/why-the-greening-of-vacant-land-is-a-smart-long-term-investment-in-cities

STEP 5: PLAN FOR THE LONG TERM

Consider future uses

Some questions you should think about as you plan your vacant land renewal project:

How will your project change over the next several years?

What will it look like as any plants grow?

What materials will need to be replaced?

How will it look after 5 years?

How will it be maintained in the long term?

How long do you want it to last?

Do you have enough help to build and maintain the project?

How much time and effort will be needed to maintain this project?

Do you need more help?

Does the community living around the lot support your project?

How will your project benefit the community?

Do community members have ideas to make it better?

Will they help?



Teamwork Checklist

Collaboration and Group Participation in Lot Renewal Projects

Make collaboration a priority

- Why collaboration is important
- · Community buy-in and participation
- Activity 1: Who Can Help?

 Determine who can help
 - Goals
 - What you need for this activity
 - Activity tips
 - Activity 1 instructions
 - Activity 1 questions
- Activity 2: What's Important?

 Set priorities
 - Goals
 - What you need for this activity
 - Activity tips
 - Activity 2 instructions
 - Activity 2 questions



COLLABORATION AND GROUP PARTICIPATION IN LOT RENEWAL PROJECTS Make collaboration a priority

One of the biggest factors that contribute to the success of any project, especially lot renewals that are public, is the support of a group of people. With the different considerations and steps to bringing an idea to life, seeking help promotes neighborhood unity, creativity, and inclusiveness.

Seeking support involves identifying who can help with your project, including who can bring ideas to the project, who can manage the project details, who can help provide resources, and who can help with physical labor. Working in teams can be more efficient and effective compared to working alone on a project. Support also means getting buy-in from stakeholders like adjacent property owners and the surrounding community.

Collaboration + Participation

 col·lab·o·ra·tion: The action of working with someone to produce or create something.

Teamwork + Cooperation

 team-work: The combined action of a group of people, especially when effective and efficient.

Questions to Answer

- Who is active in the neighborhood and what are they doing?
- What organizations or groups are involved in the area?
- Who is the <u>Common Council</u> <u>representative for the District</u>, and will this project need that kind of help?
- Who will use the lot now and in the future?









Why Collaboration Is Important

Working toward the same goal can inspire a team and result in a better project. The following are other benefits of the collaborative work of teams:

- **Equal involvement**: Collaboration encourages all team members to participate and share ideas, making your project more inclusive. Consider all age groups, races, and genders when bringing people together.
- **Talent sharing**: Use the skills of all of your team members. Effective collaboration empowers everyone to share their skills and talents. Working together you can resolve problems by bringing the best solutions to the project.
- **Speed up work**: Teams achieve more in less time. Dividing larger tasks (divide and conquer strategy) or supporting tasks that cannot be accomplished by one person alone (lifting heavy objects) will improve efficiency.







Community Buy-In and Participation

It's important that the community or neighborhood your lot project is in understands and "buys in" to your project. The more people who are informed about and join in the planning the more likely it is that the resulting plan will benefit the whole community or neighborhood. Before starting a lot project, talk about the process and get support from the community or neighborhood. Methods of communication can include:

- Using a social media website
- Posters, flyers, or notices
- A highlight in the neighborhood newsletter
- Announcements at community events (like neighborhood picnics or parades), council meetings, or at other organizations' meetings

To identify people who might want to participate in the planning process, consider:

- Long-term residents who are likely involved community members
- Newcomers to the community

- Formal and informal leaders
- Volunteers
- Members of the neighborhood fire station and area police officers
- Local business owners
- Local politicians and city employees
- Community or neighborhood families and youth

Initially, you may only think about those people you want to get information from or whose specific help is needed. As the project gets farther along, the list of stakeholders might expand to include those individuals or organizations who may want to see results of the lot renewal planning. This could include policy decision makers, such as a Common Council representative, or it may include someone who has helped fund your project.

Activity 1 WHOCAN HELP?



Goals

- Discover who is interested/able to help.
- Make a list of available people, including their role and preferred contact information.
- Outline potential resources, such as money, person power, materials/tools, expertise/knowledge, donations, etc.
- List of additional people/ organizations to contact

What You Need for this Activity

- Something to write with.
- Contact List page

......

• Blank paper (as needed for notes).

Activity Tips

- Working with a group helps to spur more ideas. As you create your lists, think about how everything is connected (ideas, people, places, and things).
- You can write directly in this book for all your notes, lists, and ideas!
- Make sure to talk about which people will do follow-up

Activity 1 Instructions

 Spend at least 10 minutes as a whole or in smaller groups talking about who should be involved in this project. Consider who is available to help and what expertise you need. Use the following questions to guide the conversation.

Activity 1 Questions

- Who here is interested in helping?
- Who should be involved? Are neighbors interested in helping?
- What resources do we need? Are resources available? Do we know someone who might help us obtain resources?
- What organizations or groups are active in the area? Could any of them be interested in helping?



Activity 2 WHAT'S IMPORTANT?



Goals

- Determine the common concerns and ideas for activating a lot.
- Determine how this project benefits the community.
- Identify what's important to everyone in improving the lot.

What You Need for this Activity

- Something to write with.
- Blank paper (as needed for notes).
- Sticky notes (for a fun alternative and helpful in keeping ideas short and to the point).

Activity Tips

- It's okay to figure out what doesn't work.
- A major priority should be determining the ideas and concerns related to the project.
- Start with why you're doing the project, and then address how to do it.
- Each participant can use sticky notes to answer questions; then post about ideas and have group discussions.

Activity 2 Instructions

 Spend at least 20 minutes as a whole or in smaller groups talking about how this project will benefit everyone.
 Be sure to listen to everyone and be open to all the ideas and concerns.
 Use the following questions to help guide the conversation.

Activity 2 Questions

- What is the goal of this project?
- What is most important to everyone?
- What does the group agree upon?
- What are some ideas for reaching the goal? What is the most surprising idea?
- How does improving a lot benefit you (individually and as a group)?
- What needs to happen in order for the lot activation project to be successful?





Prepare + Organize Checklist

- Understanding the Location
 Discover the lot's potential
 - Observations and patterns
 - Photos
 - Tips for taking good photographs
- Identify Lot Characteristics & Conditions

 List the strengths and challenges
 - SCOT analysis
 - Common strengths with vacant lots
 - Common challenges with vacant lots
- Identify Problems to Solve and Things to Highlight What are the opportunities and threats with the lot?
 - How is the lot already great?
 - How can you make those aspects better?
 - What items should be improved?
 - What is missing from the area?
 - What elements will keep the lot from being successful?
- Stabilize the Lot
 Address all threats before proceeding
 - Clean-up the soils
 - · Remove overgrown or unsafe vegetation
 - Fix any ground issues, such as ruts or exposed foundations



UNDERSTANDING THE LOCATION *Discover the lot's potential*

Being familiar with the conditions of the lot will help make your project more successful. The first step is to collect information, writing your own observations and taking photos of important elements. Later, you can go into more detail about key elements.

Observations and Patterns

Write down your first impressions. The following are some observations and patterns to note:

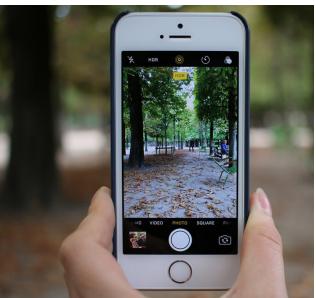
- What is the sun doing? Does the lot have shade or is it sunny? Sun exposure may affect some projects.
- Do people currently use the site?
- How do people get to the site?
- How do people move around it?
- Observe how animals use the site.
- Examine the soil quality and type, especially if you plan to plant directly in the soil (versus raised beds).
- Visit the lot at different times of day to observe how the space changes.

Photos

Pictures that show what the lot is like now will help you determine how







much work may be involved with the proposed project.

Photos serve as a reminder for important coordination elements, such as utility or structure locations as well as potential hazards that need to be addressed in the proposed project.

They are a great reference for developing layout plans and for sketching out ideas.

Tips for taking good photographs:

- Always take more photographs than you think you'll need, especially from multiple angles.
- Take close up and far away shots to capture detail and context.
- Take photos of things you think are important, things you are unsure about, and things you want to remember.
- Stand in one spot and take photos all around you. Then, move to another spot and do the same thing.

You can use these photographs later to help talk about ideas, sketch concepts, and get a sense of what the lot will look like when you're finished.

After observing the lot, you'll need to interpret that information. The next sections describe how to do just that.





IDENTIFY LOT CHARACTERISTICS & CONDITIONS

List the strengths and challenges

SCOT Analysis

A Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities, and Threats (SCOT) analysis is a way to evaluate different and interconnected aspects of any project. Strengths are the things that are done well or the qualities that make the project unique, including resources such as people who are involved or physical assets like beautiful trees. Challenges are the things that are lacking or resources that are missing. Opportunities are the demonstrated need or support of the project. Finally, threats are the elements that limit the success of the project. The following series of questions help to identify the SCOT elements. Be sure to add your own ideas or questions for each as you prepare your lot project.

Common Strengths with Vacant Lots

Building on what the lot has to offer will make the activation you choose more successful. While people's ideas of what is a strength may differ, some common strengths include:

Healthy Trees: Trees contribute value to their environment - providing oxygen, preserving soil, improving air

quality, or offering shade - but it can take a long time for them to mature. If the lot you are activating has healthy trees be sure to consider how you can make them part of the plan.

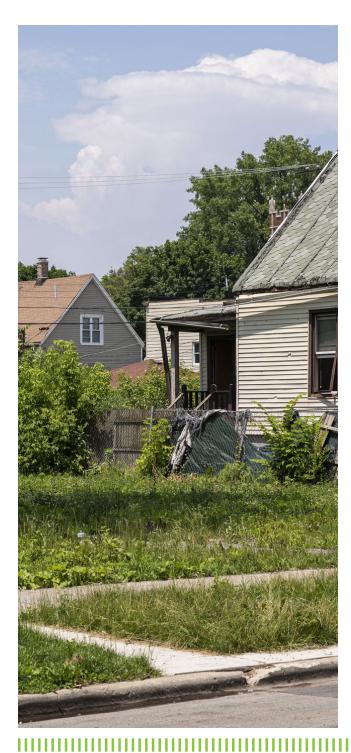
Good Sun Exposure: Adequate sunlight for plants is important for their health. Lots with good sun exposure also support different types of activities, such as gardening, which can be more difficult in shady areas.

Water Availability: Water is an excellent resource to have throughout the project. Access to water provides a place to fill up water bottles or a way to keep the plants watered.

Easy Access: Whether for bringing supplies to make improvements or for enabling people to come to the lot after the project is completed, easy access makes the overall experience of the lot better.

Power Availability: An active electric meter is useful, especially if an outlet is also available. This can enable charging batteries or powering tools during work time as well as increasing the types of amenities the lot can support such as lighting.

Having an inventory of beneficial items or characteristics before beginning helps make sure you have all the project needs



met. A list of strengths may also shape how you improve the lot.

Common Challenges with Vacant Lots

Protect yourself and others by making sure that any potential unsafe conditions are addressed before starting a renewal project. Some frequent hazards include:

Unsafe Trees: Weed species, dead or rotten material, roots, and overgrown trees can be costly to remove or trim, but they can also be a serious hazard to both adjoining properties and the personal safety of anyone on the lot.

Holes, ruts, and sunken areas: A basement that has been filled in or other buried items (like trash or rotted tree roots) can settle, making the ground unstable. Holes or depressions can be trip hazards and dangerous. Some holes just need more fill and compaction, whereas others are unstable and may need excavation work or another solution.

Trash: Depending on the history of the lot, trash can consist of a range of items including old tires, mattresses, glass bottles, appliances, and construction debris like concrete.

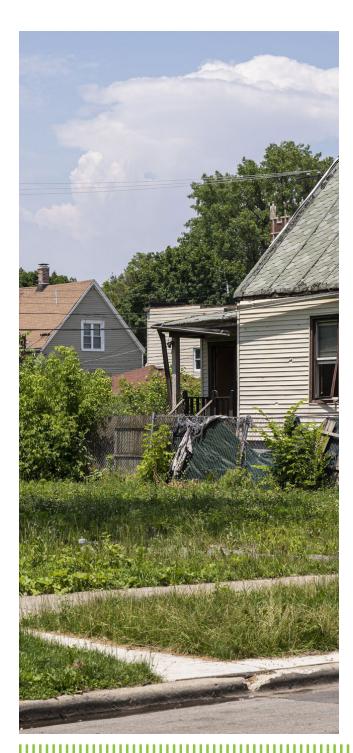
Exposed Foundations: Concrete or masonry structures sticking out of the

ground can damage yard equipment and make it difficult to perform work on a lot.

Soil Suitability: Working toward healthy soil is a critical starting point for several types of projects. Soil types vary. Soils on lots that used to contain houses can be subject to compaction, lack of organic matter, debris, and other issues as a result of the demolition process. Given the variability of soil in the City, it is important to have soil tested both for nutrient content and possible contamination before starting a lot activation project.

Heavy Metal Contamination: Any lot that once had a home on it that was built before 1978 could have lead contamination, and historically, commercial sites contain a range of contaminants.

Knowing what you will have to do to stabilize a lot and make it safe before beginning will help you make an informed decision about the scope, timeline, or cost of your project.



IDENTIFY PROBLEMS TO SOLVE AND THINGS TO HIGHLIGHT

What are the opportunities and threats to the lot?

After you have determined the character and condition of the lot, to help shape your ideas about the a project, listing opportunities and potential threats helps prepare for long term success.

How is the lot great already? (Strengths)

- What do you love about the space?
- What aspects make this lot a perfect place for your idea?
- What elements trees, location, neighbors, size, etc. - do you like?
- Who is involved that will make this project go more smoothly?

How can you make those aspects better? (Challenges)

- Do the trees need trimming?
- How will people know about the good things nearby?
- Should there be a sidewalk to help people get to your favorite parts of the lot?
- In what ways do the people involved need support?

What items should be improved?

What repairs need to be made?

What is missing from the area? (Opportunities)

- Fill in the blank: "This neighborhood could really use a _____."
- Check out nearby parks or other open spaces to see what elements are already there and what is not.

What elements will keep the lot from being successful? (Threats)

 From better sun exposure to missing sidewalk connections, what are the most important things missing from the lot?

The answers to SCOT analysis will help shape the direction of your lot project and make it more successful.



Sources

https://www.dkiservices.com/blog/2018/04/27/how-to-spot-hazardous-trees-on-a-property/

https://sbvpa.org/wp-content/uploads/Photo-Aug-01-11-03-46-AM-1365x1024.jpg

STABILIZE THE LOT *Address all threats before proceeding*

The SCOT analysis will help to identify any threats that may be present. You will need to address the hazards to avoid potential health and safety risks that could result in physical injury. Your options include actually removing or replacing the hazard, or isolating the hazard from people.

Clean up the soils:

- How does water behave on the lot? Be sure to note where there is any standing water, like puddles, or if there are any muddy patches.
- Check all around the lot. Are some areas wet?
- What types of soils does the lot have? Sand, silt, and clay are common elements. You can find this information on <u>USDA</u> website.
- If you are concerned about the presence of lead or other potential contaminants, please check out the Indiana Department of Environmental Management's Soil Clean Up website. This website provides greater detail on how to investigate, how to determine if it is a hazard, how to choose the best cleanup plan, and how to develop a long-term plan if you find a hazard.

Remove overgrown or unsafe vegetation:

- Cut back vegetation in the alley, along sidewalks, or anywhere else that is not desirable for your project.
- There are trees and plant types that won't work well in your project or that are not appropriate in your city. Give careful thought to tree and plant selection.
- The Venues, Parks, & Arts
 <u>Department Forestry website</u>
 maintains a list of undesirable
 trees as well as licensed arborists
 who can help remove them.
- The website also lists tree requirements, such as spacing recommendations and considerations for nearby utilities.

Fix any ground issues, such as ruts or exposed foundations:

 If the ground is uneven, consider filling in the ruts. Remove exposed foundations or incorporate it into any element, so it isn't a hazard. If areas have a steep slope, provide a railing.

Fixing these and other potential hazards will make sure your lot project is safe for everyone.

EXPLORE IDEAS: DETERMINING WHAT YOU WANT TO DO

Lot Design Checklist

Activation Categories Select an activation category

- **Working landscapes**
- **Open spaces**
- **Green infrastructure**
- **Natural landscapes**
- **Private landscapes**
- **Key site elements**

Programming + Site Plan Layout Determine programming

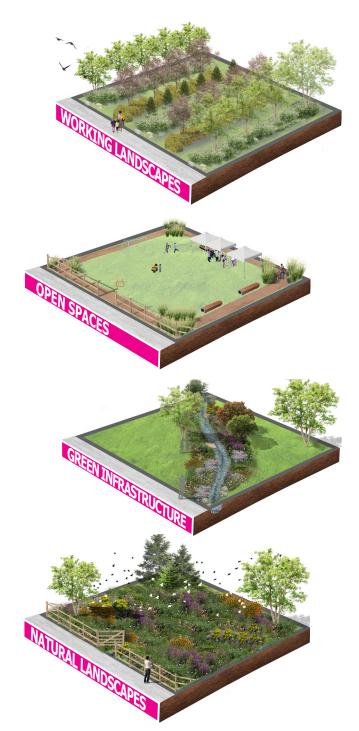
- What do you want to happen at your site?
- **Review previous observations**

Materials Select materials you need

- Soil and mulch
- **Gravel and paving materials**
- Site furniture

Basic Site Preparation Prepare the site

- Grading
- **Tree removal**
- **Accessing water**
- **Permits**



ACTIVATION CATEGORIESSolvet an activation sates are

Select an activation category.

Activating a lot means taking a vacant lot and converting it to a usable space. The ideas included are not all-inclusive, but should help you think about what you can do. You can combine ideas from one or multiple lot activation categories. The categories are:

Working Landscapes: Lots that are productive as part of a larger community system.

Open Spaces: Any open piece of land that is undeveloped (has no buildings) and is accessible to the public for active or passive recreational use.

Green Infrastructure: An approach to stormwater management that protects, reestablishes, or mimics the natural water cycle.

Natural Landscapes: The original condition or native state of a landscape before human activity. "Rewilding" a lot means to create an area, primarily using vegetation (trees, shrubs, and perennial plants), that operates without human interference.

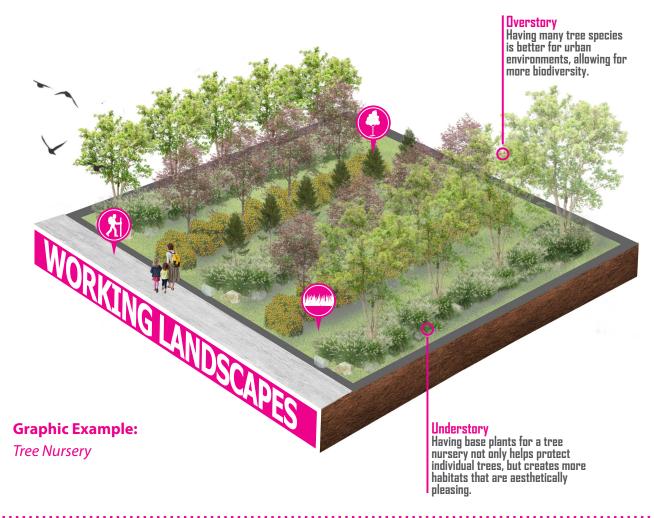
Private Landscapes: These tend to be closed off from the community.

Key Site Elements

The core of every lot design revolves around five main categories: **paths**, **field/turf**, **vegetation**, **water**, **and structure**. You will find at least one of these prescribed elements on any site, but it is important when thinking of what your lot will look like to try to incorporate more than one element:



WORKING LANDSCAPES



LANDSCAPES THAT **COMMUNICATE, GROW FOOD, AND SUPPORT LEARNING**

TYPES OF WORKING LANDSCAPES

- Kiosks / Message boards
- Community / Unity gardens
- Education / Sensory gardens
- Mini orchards
- Tree nurseries
- Little free libraries

Working landscapes are landscapes and elements within landscapes that have a productive role and external community value. The term "working" often relates to agriculture or forestry, but may involve other functional aspects such as education or communication.

The working use could benefit the community a number of ways. For example, it could communicate information, grow food, or support learning.

WORKING LANDSCAPES



KIOSKS / MESSAGE BOARDS

- Small informational signage structure
- Great near sidewalks or gathering spots
- Meets communication needs
- Outreach tool

Kiosks and message boards are signs that provide a quick way to display or provide information to someone. They can simply inform those passing by or they can be used for educational purposes. Kiosks and message boards also help guide people, eliminating the need for someone to be on site at all times. They are also often used to share ideas or celebrate something at the location, whether it's historical information, place-related, or an artistic celebration.



COMMUNITY GARDENS

- Vegetable garden (private)
- Good for neighborhoods
- Reduces carbon footprint of food
- Individual focus with social benefits

Community gardens are gardens created and maintained by community members. They typically involve management by people who maintain their own individual garden within the larger lot. They can have positive health and wellness effects in that they provide fresh, locally grown produce and opportunities for low impact physical activity. Access to the garden is restricted and maintenance of the area is a requirement of participation.

A local example of a type of community garden is Unity Gardens. This organization helps set-up vegetable gardens, providing resources, but are open for anyone.



EDUCATION/SENSORY GARDENS

- Learning + teaching environments
- Great for areas near schools
- Improves intellectual health goals
- Community focused

Education/sensory gardens are immersive landscapes that provide opportunities to stimulate the mind and body. Sensory gardens are geared specifically to activate a person's five senses; sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch. Education gardens utilize physical experiences to achieve learning objectives. Each of these landscapes aim to maximize the physical environment.

Most educational/sensory gardens are divided into sections to help distinguish between the senses or intended educational lesson. These gardens allow for more creativity when designing for specific senses.

WORKING LANDSCAPES



MINI ORCHARDS

- Produces seasonal fruit
- Great for food deserts
- Meets pollinator + sustainability goals
- Food production

Mini orchards produce fruit. Though they are not common in towns, cities, and urban environments, they are popular places for family activity and have health benefits (producing and making fresh fruit available). Typically, orchards are located at the outskirts of urban environments due to the types of conditions the ecosystem requires land, sunlight, airflow, etc.



TREE NURSERIES

- Growing trees for transplanting
- Ideal for lots with great sun exposure
- Improves the urban tree canopy
- Increases access to trees

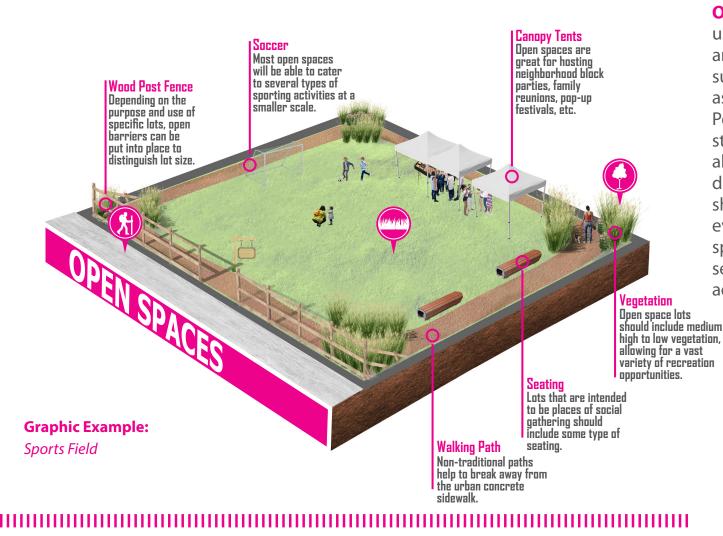
Tree nurseries are where trees are grown to a usable size. These are common lot projects for cities that want to increase their overall tree coverage. This type of application not only allows for maximum lot usage of a particular site, but also serves multiple purposes for neighborhoods, including improving local ecology, sharing local resources, adding easily manageable plant material, and providing aesthetically pleasing sites to a community. Trees are intended to be transplanted to their permanent location once they grow big enough. Logistics and cost of relocation should be considered.



LITTLE FREE LIBRARIES

- Access for free books
- Great fit for literacy deserts
- Improves community education
- Low cost, dependent on donations

Little free libraries are book exchanges. The idea of these is to allow people to "take a book, return a book." The free book exchange lets its users benefit from the generosity of others by sharing. Adding these libraries throughout a community can establish trust and ownership among residents. They also provide a way to encourage reading and education. You could pair it with a seating area to allow people to sit and read.



Open spaces are landscapes that allow users to define the activity. Their flexible areas, such as lawn or pavers, can support group or individual recreation as well as a variety of activity types. Permanent amenities, such as play structures and benches, should also allow for a range of users, including different ages and abilities. Open spaces should be perceived as being open to everyone to use. The purpose for these spaces is to promote the interactions of several people ranging from children to adults in family safe environments.

LANDSCAPES THAT ARE **FLEXIBLE AND PROMOTE SOCIAL INTERACTION**

TYPES OF OPEN SPACES

- **Playgrounds**
- Parks / parklets
- **Plazas**
- Trails / paths
- Workout stations
- Sports fields

- Community events / gathering spaces
- Green amenity expansions



PLAYGROUNDS

- Safe, play environment
- Good for areas with families
- Meets active recreation needs
- Supports health and imagination

Playgrounds or play areas are an area designed for children to play freely, usually as part of a school or public park. Playgrounds typically have amenities or structures to encourage recreation, with important safety guidelines such as fall zones applied to the layout.

One type of playground, the natural playscape, is designed to take advantage of the benefits of nature. These playscapes provide an engaging environment for play using more organic materials, such as logs and tree stumps, as well as vegetation and natural hardscape materials, like boulders. While using these elements have many benefits, safety guidelines still apply.



PARKS | PARKLETS

- Space for open activities
- Helpful for areas without nearby parks
- Improves park access goals
- Supports community health

Parks are larger areas of natural, semi-natural or planted space used for enjoyment and recreation or for the protection of wildlife and natural habitats. Urban parks are green spaces set aside for active and passive recreation.

Parklets are smaller extensions of public open spaces, frequently between buildings. Because of their smaller size, they often support less active recreation and fewer activities. Instead they focus on providing gathering spaces.



PLAZAS

- Public space, typically hard surfaces
- Great for centrally located spaces
- Provides outdoor amenities
- Functions as a type of public square

Plazas are public open spaces, often utilizing pavers or other hardscape elements as the main surface, that encourage residents and neighbors to gather. Plazas are frequently surrounded by buildings or are situated between key pedestrian routes, and sometimes located near or within larger open spaces. A plaza usually has areas for resting, eating, or recreating.

Like parklets, plazas extend the public space by providing paved surfaces, seating, and /or amenities that make public gatherings more enjoyable for users of the space.



TRAILS | PATHS

- Pedestrian oriented infrastructure
- Ideal for areas with limited sidewalks
- Supports health + sustainability goals
- Encourages alternative transportation

Trails are a form of infrastructure that supports recreation and transportation opportunities, such as walking and bicycling. With lot projects, these pathways can serve as additional connections for the sidewalk system or as small loops contained within the lot.

It's important that these pathways are done in a way that helps move users easily in and around a site to maximize the accessibility to all kinds of users. Trail amenities can provide places to rest, take in views, or recreate. They have an overall positive effect on health and wellness in a community.



WORKOUT STATIONS

- Exercise equipment
- Ideal for areas with limited park access
- Supports community physical health
- Fitness geared for individuals

Workout stations are outdoor exercise equipment that are frequently organized into stations. To make easy to access by users who are already exercising outdoors, these stations can be located in parks or along trails/multiuse paths. Workout stations use bodyweight or gravity to challenge users, so that anyone can utilize the equipment to their own ability level. These stations can also be built to accommodate users with mobility challenges focusing on cardiovascular, strength training and flexibility exercises.



SPORTS FIELDS

- Large, playing area for sports
- Good for large, flat areas with sun
- Flexible activities that improve health
- Benefits community recreation needs

Sports fields are large, flat areas of grass with little or no other vegetation. Because of the limited materials, these lots are easier to maintain or adapt to other uses. Buffers should be utilized between the field and any adjacent uses, especially structures and houses or traffic areas, to prevent injury. Remember that the lot does not need to be a regulation sized field to support different sports.

However, the most important part about having a sports field is understanding how it will affect your neighbors; noise, property damage, etc. Make sure you take this into consideration.



COMMUNITY EVENTS | GATHERING

- Assembly space
- Great for centrally located spaces
- Goal of bringing people together
- Community social common space

Community event spaces provide space for social gatherings of all types. These spaces are important assets to a neighborhood and help build identity and pride. They also support familiarity and foster relationship building, improving community social health. Typical activities include neighborhood block parties and meetings.

Gathering space(s) can be incorporated into other open space types as well. They do not need to be a stand-alone use.

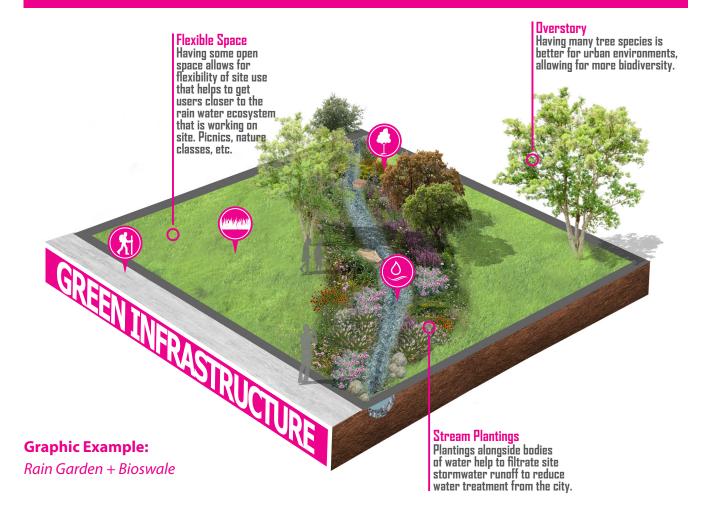


GREEN AMENITY EXPANSIONS

- Green space extensions or connections
- Great for lots near existing green space
- Increases the value of the green space
- Supports a more resilient community

Green amenity expansions connect or expand existing green spaces. Lots that abut these amenities should be evaluated for how they might support or improve usage. While additional green spaces can support all three aspects of sustainability - good for the environment, people, and the local economy - this type of lot activation should be evaluated for how it improves the existing amenity. Does it connect more people to the space? Does it increase the usability of the space?

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE



Green infrastructure is an approach to water management, particularly stormwater, that relates to the natural water cycle that occurs in and around the city. It helps to reduce the amount of water entering the stormwater system, which can help reduce flooding, standing water in streets or on lots, and sewer backups.

Green infrastructure solutions can be applied on different scales, incorporating both the natural environment and engineered systems. They provide clean, filtered water and a wide variety of benefits to people and local wildlife.

LANDSCAPES THAT COLLECT

AND CLEAN STORMWATER

TYPES OF GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

- Rain gardens + bioswales
- Retention ponds
- Cistern

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE



RAIN GARDENS + BIOSWALES

- Temporary stormwater storage
- Great near downspouts and low spots
- Meets smaller stormwater storage needs
- Lower maintenance, attractive

Rain gardens or bioswales have essentially the same meaning. They consist of a group of native perennials and shrubs that are designed to slow down and filter an overflow of stormwater runoff during large rain events. If done correctly, this designated area helps to reduce the amount of stormwater that goes into the city's stormwater infrastructure while actively filtrating out almost 80-90% of the possible nutrients, chemicals, and sediments. This type of system is a more cost-effective and natural way to relieve water runoff.



RETENTION PONDS

- Stormwater storage
- Good for low areas
- Meets larger stormwater storage needs
- Habitat creation, potential recreation

Retention ponds have become a permanent fixture of design for many site designs today. These "ponds" were originally used for the purpose of providing additional storage capacity for water during rainfall events. People now like them for their landscaped banks, natural ecology, and nearby surroundings. Proper measures must be taken, such as appropriate barriers and ledges, to ensure safety requirements are met.

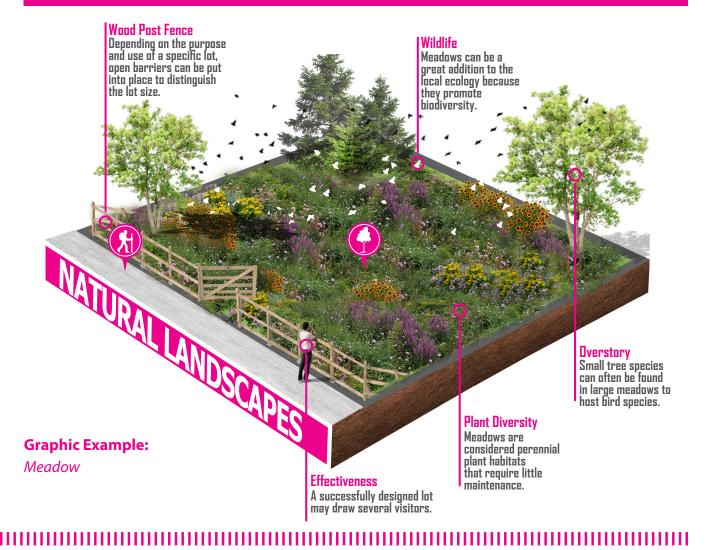


CISTERNS

- Stormwater storage for reuse
- Great for tight areas and poor drainage
- Meets smaller storage and reuse needs
- Functional, longer term use of water

Cisterns are mostly known as objects or containers that store water for a prolonged time. Collecting water this way is a great way to spread awareness and start a conversation about how others can capture rainwater, too. With collection systems like rain barrels, artistic rain spouts, and natural vegetated depressions, lots can serve as a collection point of rainwater for several nearby houses or could be used to provide water on site.

NATURAL LANDSCAPES



LANDSCAPES THAT IMPROVE THE ENVIRONMENT AND **HEALTH IN A COMMUNITY**

TYPES OF NATURAL LANDSCAPES

- Nature parks
- Patch forests / Wooded lots
- Meadows and Wildflower lots
- Cover crops

Natural landscapes are part of an overall conservation effort, aimed at restoring and protecting natural processes and ecosystems. By increasing biodiversity and improving important habitats, such as planting wildflowers for pollinators, these are one of the easiest and most important vacant lot project types. The natural landscapes activation projects are a relatively inexpensive and effective way to beautify and expand a city's amenities with minimal long-term maintenance programs, making them one of the most common lot activation categories.

The positive environmental effects are well documented: improved air quality, improved stormwater management, increased biodiversity, and beautifying the area, to name a few. However, it's the health and wellness effects that are encouraging more of these projects. Natural landscapes are known to have many positive effects on people: their mood, stress levels, and physical health.

NATURAL LANDSCAPES



NATURE PARKS

- Passive recreation
- Ideal for quiet areas
- Increases exposure to nature
- Low-impact activation

Nature parks are naturally landscaped parks used for passive recreation. These lots are moderately planted to limit maintenance, with trails/paths that promote exploration and support lower impact activities. Many of these parks have educational components to them that serve to teach those who come to explore how the natural ecosystem works.



PATCH FORESTS | WOODED LOTS

- Lot with mature canopy trees
- Ideal for lots with great sun exposure
- Improves the urban tree canopy
- Low impact habitat development

Patch forests resemble naturally wooded areas, especially over many years. Trees planted on these lots are intended to be permanent, adding value to a street, neighborhood, or community. Wooded lots provide more than trees, with understory plants that are shade tolerant. These lots usually contain plant life and animal life that, if left alone, can grow and bloom into a fully functioning ecosystem. Minimal human interaction is necessary to encourage this growth, though these patch forests may have walking paths that meander through, avoiding impacting the trees and dense areas of understory.



MEADOWS AND WILDFLOWER LOTS

- Area with low, uniform vegetation
- Ideal for limited maintenance options
- Meets activation goals
- Supports biodiversity + habitat

Meadows are areas covered by native grasses or similar vegetation that can tolerate some wet conditions.

Wildflower lots feature blooming plant material which are beneficial to animals and insects, especially pollinators.

In addition to their visual and functional appeal, meadows and wildflower lots are a low maintenance option. These types of lots meet activation goals, particularly cleaning up a lot, while also providing a flexible land use that can easily adapt to a future use.

Plant material heights are lower in each case, which supports visibility and safety needs of the community.

NATURAL LANDSCAPES



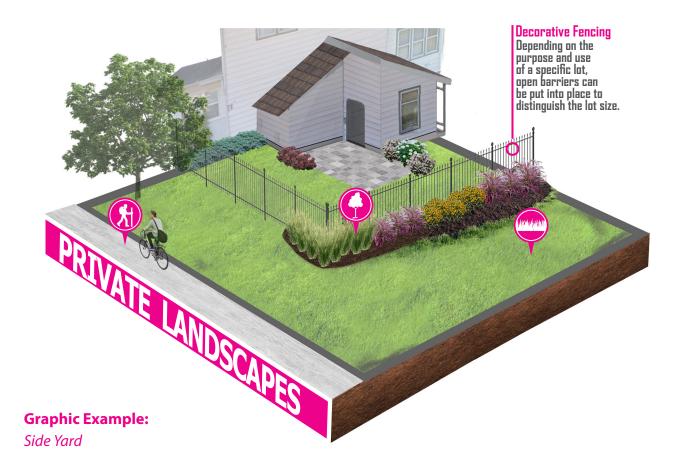
COVER CROPS

- Soil management system
- Ideal for sunny areas with poor soils
- Improve soil quality
- Supports healthy environments

Cover crops are cultivated plantings, like clover, that are grown specifically for the protection or enrichment of soil (rather than for the purpose of being harvested). While cover crops are associated with growing produce, they help manage soil erosion, improve soil fertility and overall quality, while also managing water, weeds, pests, diseases, and wildlife. These plantings persist over winter and may be plowed under to increase nutrient content prior to pursuing other activation options.

Cover crops are a good option to consider prior to implementing any of the working landscapes, especially if poor soils are a concern.

PRIVATE LANDSCAPES



Private landscapes are what most people think when they see an open lot alongside a residential home. How can this be an extension of one's personal property or is there a possibility of the lot being shared by more than one homeowner to create a shared space?

Private landscapes are ideal for limiting the number of people who have access to their lot. It also allows the property owner to personalize the space.

Private landscapes can also serve many residents while still restricting the general public. Following the City of South Bend's zoning ordinance, there are many ways to create passive or enclosed private lots.

LANDSCAPES THAT EXTEND **PERSONAL USE**

TYPES OF PRIVATE LANDSCAPES

- Side yards
- Infill housing developments
- Small-scale developments

PRIVATE LANDSCAPES



SIDE YARDS

- Extension of existing property
- An option for empty lots next to your house
- Meets owner and neighborhood goals
- Improve adjacent property values

Side yards are undeveloped lots next to a structure, common within residential areas. They are ideal for those wanting to increase the amount of land they own.

There is no limit to what a side yard can look like, but you will have to look to the city's building ordinances if you plan to add structures, and its important to also look at the city's zoning ordinance. As this is private property, neighborhood use would be restricted without owner permission.

If other adjacent property owners are interested in the same lot, the property can be split. Owners are required to get lot surveys and pay for recording the consolidated plat.

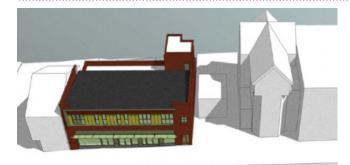


INFILL HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS

- New homes for existing neighborhood
- Ideal for established neighborhoods
- Increases neighborhood vibrancy
- Improves community density

Infill housing developments repurpose available land in older residential neighborhoods for the purpose of adding homes.

It is important to understand the character of the neighborhood and typical housing types to determine what will fit into the community. You must also check the zoning requirements and ordinances.



SMALL-SCALE DEVELOPMENTS

- Infill building projects
- Ideal for lots in commercial areas
- Improves density and vibrancy
- Supports continuity of an area

Small-scale developments are small projects that meet a community need and fit into the surrounding area. These can include a small storefront, a small residential building with multiple units, or a combination of a storefront and housing.

PROGRAMMING + SITE PLAN LAYOUT

Determine programming

Determining the programming of your lot is the next step. Programming is what you want to happen at your site, or how you want to use the site. It may include elements like:

- Paths
- Gardens
- Art
- Hardscapes (concrete, gravel, boulders, or pavers)
- Signs
- Lawn/open space
- Structures (including buildings, green houses, sheds, or pavilions)
- Vegetation (including trees, shrubs, ground cover, and perennial plants)
- Play equipment
- Seating (benches or retaining walls)

After all the program elements are identified, a layout plan can be created. This includes a detailed arrangement of all the things you want to see on the site. Don't forget to think about the boundaries of the property, nearby

roads, and nearby buildings. Completing a scaled (reduced in size) drawing of the property will help ensure there is adequate space and help you determine the materials needed to do what you want to do.

Use the **Tools** section, which includes grid paper you can draw on, to create your layout.

As you are drawing, review what you have observed about the lot and be sure you can answer the following questions:

- How will visitors access the space?
- Do you need access to utilities (such as electricity or water)? If so, do you have access? Are there obstructions preventing you from accessing the utilities?
- What is the distance to important elements around the lot, such as nearby houses? Are there any conflicts or potential conflicts?
- Can people move around the lot?
- Does anything need to be moved to improve accessibility for people moving around the lot or through the lot?
- Can you move equipment around

- Is there enough space for all the programming? Do you need to reduce?
- Where will people sit or gather?
- Is there space to accommodate groups and individuals?
- How are the elements arranged and do they fit together in a way that makes sense for how they will be used?
- *Hint*: don't use too many elements. Keep your plan simple and clear.

MATERIALSSelect materials you need

Project materials include all the things you will need to complete your lot renewal project. By creating a complete list of all materials, you can calculate the estimated cost of your project. Keep in mind that one unit of a material may not cost much, but several units may be expensive and ultimately change what you are able to do on the site. The following are several types of material to consider:

Soil and mulch: These materials help to create healthier planting beds for vegetation that you bring to the site. Good soils are the foundation for any garden, including rain gardens. Different plants require different soil content, so keep in mind the soil recommendations from where you purchase your plants. Mulch helps to control weeds and maintain moisture levels in the soil. Both soil and mulch are available for free (for all City residents who load it themselves) from the South Bend Organic Resources facility at 4340 Trade Drive in South Bend.



Gravel and paving materials: These elements help make the "floor" of your lot more accessible by creating harder surfaces that are easier to walk on or push a stroller on. They also help to create boundaries between one area from another and help guide people through the space.

Site furniture: This includes features such as seats, trash receptacles, lighting, picnic tables, play equipment, and fencing. Site furniture supports the overall programming of the site, such as providing seating for guardians while children play, or places to dispose of trash and compostables after eating. These items can be tricky to install, so be sure to have help. Also, consider having a minimum of 2 to 3 feet of open space around each item for

better flow of people.

Choosing the right materials will help reduce long-term maintenance and improve the durability of your lot renewal.

You can phase work if costs are too much. Start with the most important elements of your project and then add things over time. An example would be starting with a gravel path and adding other features as you can.

Visit the *Tools* section for a budget sheet to help compile a list of all project materials and their potential costs.

BASIC SITE PREPARATION *Prepare the site*

Site preparation involves getting the lot ready for improvements. Depending on the existing conditions and the materials that need to be removed, this can take a few days or a few weeks to complete. Typical site preparation involves:

- The demolition of any structures (this should be handled by professionals if you are not familiar with the work)
- The clearing of any unwanted or hazardous vegetation
- Grading or shaping the land
- Utility preparation (connecting water or electric lines)

Be sure to get any necessary permits before you begin site preparation work!

Grading

If your goal is a smooth, easy-to-maintain lawn, you might need to grade the lot.

Depending on the conditions, you may be able to bring in dirt to fill holes or divots. If extensive grading is required, you can also hire a landscaping company to use heavy equipment to remove debris, remove foundation stones, smooth out holes



and high spots to create a smooth and even surface, or add topsoil to help establish growth of new grass.

Grading can get rid of weeds, roots, and shrubs, making it easy for uniform grass to become established.

Hiring someone to grade a lot and add topsoil can cost \$800–\$1,500, not including any material costs and other debris or tree removal. These factors can increase the cost of the project significantly.

Get quotes from at least three reputable landscaping companies before signing a contract to get large-scale landscaping work done.

Tree Removal

If there are trees on the lot you consider hazardous or that you don't want to keep, you will need to budget for tree removal. Costs can range from \$150–\$1,500 for one tree removal. The price is determined by difficulty of the job, the height of the tree, proximity to power lines, tree condition, and tree species.

Stump removal is sometimes not included in the tree removal price and you can expect to pay between \$60–\$100 per stump, depending on the size.

Use an approved arborist when dealing with trees. Check with the City of South Bend Venues, Parks, and Arts Forester for a list.

Accessing Water

Water may be required. Important considerations for water service include:

- If possible, capture rain water from nearby roofs and hard surfaces.
 This is the least expensive way to provide water to the lot.
- You can also ask a neighbor for access to their hose and pay them for extra water usage.
- For long-term projects that you may need to install a water tap for, you can expect more expense, including:
- South Bend's city tap fee; this is the cost to dig up the street (\$5,000-\$10,000 on average).
- It costs approximately \$850 for a contractor to install a lockable yard spigot and approximately \$200 to get a water meter from the Water Department.
- Contact the South Bend Water
 Department (311) for information
 about installing city water
 spigots for a lot activation project
 or to fill out an application.

Permits

Getting permits for lot projects is usually a simple process that can save a lot of time and expense, as the City can make you change the location of something if it is sited incorrectly. Usually, you do not need a building permit if you are not building a fence, a permanent structure, or doing any plumbing or electrical work.

Permits are a necessary part of working in the City, and they can help you make sure your project complies with local building and zoning codes, so be sure to confirm if you need a permit. The **Building Department** is the entity that will determine whether your project requires permits. Contact them to begin that process.

You will also need to make sure your project complies with the City's Zoning Ordinance. Meet with the City of South Bend Zoning Division to review any requirements. They are located on the 14th Floor, County-City Building, 227 West Jefferson, in downtown South Bend.

Bring a basic site drawing with you to the zoning office when you apply. Once the zoning office approves your plans, they can direct you to the building department if your plans will require a building permit.

Special exceptions are a possibility depending on the use for the lot and

require a slightly different process. An example of a special exception would be proposing a park project in a residential area.

Zoning staff can answer whether your project use is allowable and whether the project development plan meets the code.

ONGOING VOUR PROJECT IS

READY FOR THE LONG-TERM

05



Source: https://shelterforce.org/2018/11/13/how-to-fight-vacancy-do-it-all/

MAINTENANCE

You are responsible for maintaining your lot project. By developing a maintenance plan, you can determine when you think items will need to be replaced and you can prepare for potential costs. Maintenance plans are especially important for projects that will have public involvement to prevent any potential liability issues, such as unsafe walking surfaces that may become uneven after winter.

In addition to a plan, it is good practice to inspect all project elements to make sure that they are in good working order, that they continue to function safely, and to determine if any improvements need to be made.

Key things to consider for each of the activation categories:

- Check all stormwater collection areas, such as rain gardens, to make sure all sediment is cleaned up and water can flow freely through the system.
- Check all pathways for uneven surfaces to avoid trip hazards.
- Check all equipment and furniture for rust or for the need to repaint.

- Check that all utilities continue to operate as they should (electricity continues to work and water continues to flow with no leaks).
- Check to make sure all plants are still alive (not just dormant) after seasonal changes.
- Make sure any exposed nails are re-pounded and flush with surfaces.
- Continually empty all trash receptacles.
- Check on the expected life span for any equipment and plan for their eventual replacement.

It is important to anticipate these long-term needs with a predictive and preventive maintenance plan rather than wait for a crisis that requires immediate attention.

Don't forget day-to-day maintenance needs. This should address issues like:

- Mowing
- Litter cleanup
- Shoveling snow off sidewalks or paths
- Gardening (such as pruning or "dead heading", planting annuals and perennials, weeding, etc.)



OWNERSHIP

Determine early on in any lot renewal project who the owner of the lot will be.

You may not be the long-term owner but may still wish to create a lot activation project.

Long-term ownership involves being responsible for maintenance needs of the lot, insurance and liability requirements, property taxes, and potential ongoing costs (monthly utilities).

Other long-term ownership considerations include being responsible for repairs/damages as they arise and making sure that your project looks good!

Even if you have a temporary access agreement and are not the owner, you will still have most, if not all, of these elements to consider. Your agreement should clearly say who is responsible for what costs.



Source: https://mdplanningblog.com/2017/08/09/growth-commission-challenges-md-students-to-plan-sustainable-future/

LONG-TERM PLAN FOR LOT

You do not have to do it all at once. Creating a long-term plan for the lot and phasing in your ideas helps make start-up costs more manageable by spreading them out over time. This also allows you to see what parts of your ideas work the way that you intended and what aspects of the project need to be improved. Key things to think about with phasing your project:

- What components are essential to using the lot immediately?
- What parts of your idea will have the biggest impact on visitors?
- How much time, effort, and money can you invest in getting your project going?
- Ask the question, "What parts do I want and what parts do I need?" to help prioritize each component and determine phasing.
- Phasing in the project enables you to strengthen the parts of the project that are most successful (most used or that are working the best). These may not have been what you originally thought, but will ensure that your project

continues to work the best way possible.

TOOLS PUTTING THE PLAN TO ACTION



PROJECT SIGN-UP / CONTACT LIST

NAME	PHONE NUMBER	EMAIL

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PROJECT BUDGET

Write down all materials needed for your project. Make the list as detailed as possible to eliminate extra cost later on!

LOT COST:	
YOUR BUDGET:	

MATERIALS	AREA	QUANTITY	UNIT	UNIT COST	TOTAL COST
What item do I need to complete this project?	How big is the area this material covers?	How many do you need?	Each = EA Lump Sum = LS Linear Feet = LF	What is the cost per unit?	This is the cost of the item multiplied by the quantity needed.
Brick pavers	100 square ft.	435	Ea.	\$4.00	\$1740.00

PROJECT BUDGET CONT'D

MATERIALS	AREA	QUANTITY	UNIT	UNIT COST	TOTAL COST

TOTAL COST OF MATERIALS:	
LOT COST + MATERIALS:	

GOAL:

Draw and measure your lot with attention to detail. This will help you better tailor the design you select to the lot you have.

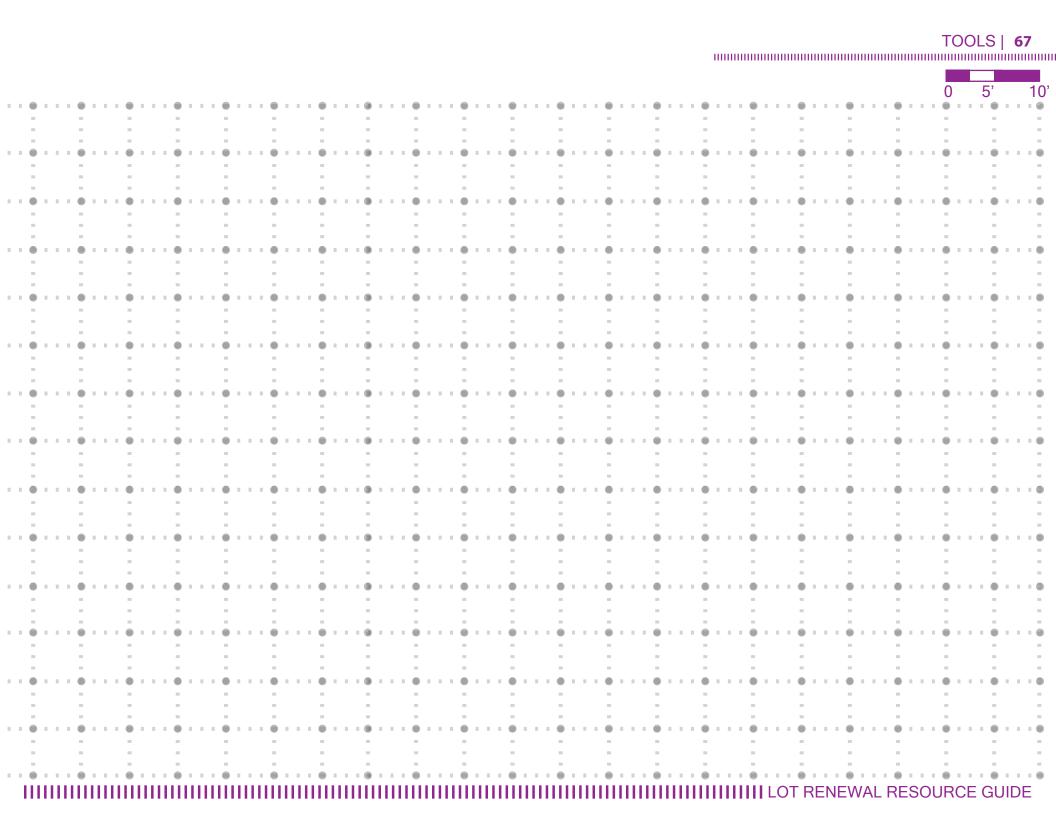
Don't forget to include existing site features! Is there a tree or shrub that you will keep? Draw them too!

Drawing to scale, dimensions of the different elements, and orienting the plan (typically with North pointing up to the top of the page)

- A standard scale for a small lot plan is 1 inch equal to 10 feet (shown as 1"=10' or referred to as 10 scale). This means for every 1 inch drawn on the plan, it references something that is 10 feet in real life. For instance, a 3-foot by 5-foot bed would be drawn 1/3 of an inch by 1/2 of an inch at 10 scale.
- As you draw, think about how big things are. How big are benches? How big would you like the flower bed to be? Etc.

HOW BIG IS THIS PLACE?

Length: ______ Width:





Summary of Websites Used In Document

Vacant and Abandoned Properties Website: southbendin.gov/vap

South Bend Zoning Map: https://southbend.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=d95daf77ca50463cb62738d2f88a62b1

South Bend Zoning Code: http://docs.southbendin.gov/WebLink/Browse.aspx?dbid=0&startid=291740&row=1&cr=1

MACOG Parcel Map: http://maps.macog.com/Html5Viewer/Index.html?configBase=http://maps.macog.com/Geocortex/Essentials/Ess443/REST/sites/MACOG-HTML5/viewers/MACOG/virtualdirectory/Resources/Config/Default&run=MACOG-StJosephParcelSearch

South Bend Comprehensive Plan: <a href="https://southbendin2.sharepoint.com/sites/webcontent/Department%20of%20Community%20Investment%20Content/Forms/AllItems.aspx?id=%2Fsites%2Fwebcontent%2FDepartment%20of%20Community%20Investment%20Content%2FPlans%2FPlans%20%26%20Studies%2FCity%20Plan%2Epdf&parent=%2F-sites%2Fwebcontent%2FDepartment%20of%20Community%20Investment%20Content%2FPlans%2FPlans%20%26%20Studies&p=true&originalPath=aHR0cHM6Ly9zb3V0aGJlbmRpbj-luc2hhcmVwb2ludC5jb20vc2l0ZXMvd2ViY29udGVudC9fbGF5b3V0cy8xNS9ndWVzdGFjY2Vzcy5hc3B4P2RvY2lkPTAxMDVkMThlNDI5ZDM0NWU4OThmNWlyOTMyMDgxMzBmMiZhdXRoa2V5PUFTd3Nxb0lNZ25kM0JZV3BjcWJlakhJJnJ0aW1lPTRkWEpRZGFTMTBn

South Bend Plans and Studies: https://southbendin.gov/department/community-investment/planning-community-resources/plans-studies/

Permit Checklist: https://southbendin.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/2019.3.15_YES-You-need-a-permit.pdf

South Bend Building Department: https://southbendin.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/2019.3.15 YES-You-need-a-permit.pdf

MACOG Property Viewer Website: http://www.maps.macog.com

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Soil Survey: https://websoilsurvey.sc.egov.usda.gov/App/WebSoilSurvey.aspx

St. Joseph County Property Record Card Search: https://www.sjcindiana.com/1648/Property-Record-Card-Search

St. Joseph County Website: https://www.sjcindiana.com/

Check on Code Enforcement Violations: https://311.southbendin.gov/knowledgecenter/article/?id=KA-04366

City Owned Properties: https://311.southbendin.gov/knowledgecenter/article/?id=KA-04404

City Resident Legal Assistance Program: https://southbendin.gov/initiative/vacant-abandoned-properties/

City Resident Legal Assistance Program Guidelines: https://southbendin.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Resident-Legal-Assistance-Program-Guidelines.pdf

City Resident Legal Assistance Program Application: https://southbendin.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Resident-Legal-Assistance-Application.pdf

Floodplain Information Portal: https://dnrmaps.dnr.in.gov/appsphp/fdms/

Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR): https://www.in.gov/dnr/naturepreserve/4740.htm

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Soil Survey: https://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/

South Bend Historic Preservation Commission: https://southbendin.gov/department/community-investment/historic-preservation-commission/

South Bend Common Council Districts: https://www.arcgis.com/apps/Viewer/index.html?appid=5b8d6959a23f48f49c36f7ce700d3c1c

South Bend Venues, Parks, & Arts Forestry Division: https://sbvpa.org/forestry/

Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) Clean-ups: https://www.in.gov/idem/cleanups/2329.htm

South Bend Zoning Division: https://southbendin.gov/department/community-investment/planning-community-resources/zoning/