

596 ACRES

2 0 1 5 ANNUAL REPORT

DEATH
ING CAPABLE
THE GARDEN'S PAST LIVES
THE OLDEST THINGS
THE COMMON
THE AGE OF THE LAND
A GROOMING BEAUTIFUL FUTURE FOREVER FOR ALL
THE INEVITABLE
THE LONELY
AGE
THE LOBBY
TIME
THE NOPEFUL
THE OLDEST GARDENER
THE SELF PORTRAIT
THOSE DESCRIBED BY SUPERLATIVES
THE SELF MADE MAN
THE BEST THINGS
ONLY ONE PERSON
MORE THAN ONE PERSON
BEING REPRODUCTIONS OF OURSELVES
CONSUMER GOODS
75% OF OUR SHIT
EMPTYNESS
ALIENS
GARDENERS
THE GARDEN THAT USED TO BE HERE
LIMITATIONS OF THE INDIVIDUAL
MOVING ROCKS
TASKS THAT REQUIRE MORE THAN ONE PERSON
THE BLOCK ASSOCIATION
THE COMMUNITY
EATING FOOD
NYLGL
GROWING FOOD
COMMUNITY
PEOPLE
GROUPS OF PEOPLE
THINGS THAT MAKE THEMSELVES
OUTER SPACE
THINGS THAT DON'T NEED TO BE MADE

MILKING THE MILK
A TRUCK FULL OF DIRT
EATING
THINGS THAT OUGHT TO DECREASE
THE GUY WHO LIVES NEXT DOOR
PRESENTS INFLUENCED BY MEMORY
MEMORIES TRANSFERRED INTO PRESENTS
NEBRASKA!
D.L.
NOT REMEMBERING ALL THE ACRONYMS
CITY GOVERNMENT
CITY ORGANIZATIONS
ACRONYMS
RAINWATER
UBCF
DEC
DCAS
HRD
DEP
PARKS
THE

THE PROPORTION OF STREET TREES TO STREET MEAT
STREET MEAT
STREET TREES
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WE ARE WINNING.

Over the last twelve months, 596 Acres has helped hundreds of New Yorkers create thriving spaces out of decaying vacant lots in their neighborhoods. This year, our organizing tools, community land access advocacy, and leadership have led to decisive wins.



The landscape is changing.

New and formidable challenges have arisen this year as well. Changes in city land-use protocols blockaded land access strategies New Yorkers rely upon; new development programs threatened to uproot vibrant but unprotected spaces without the knowledge of either local elected officials or land stewards; and unscrupulous developers redoubled their attempts to evict community groups. To continue democratizing urban spaces in the face of these new challenges, this year, we took the fight beyond the lot in your neighborhood to the courts and the State Capital.



From vacant lot to community space.

We are evolving.

As 2015 concludes, we will expand our staff, including searching for a new executive director to maintain our core programs and increase our influence. Our founder, Paula Segal, will continue to be our Director of Policy and Advocacy, and our NYC Community Land Access Program will gain a dedicated manager to guide local groups and global networks.

Meanwhile, organizers are joining our online platform by the hundreds, people around the city are mobilizing to set down roots, and cities around the world are planting seeds of technical and advocacy innovations modeled on 596 Acres. 🌱

COMMUNITY LAND ACCESS PROGRAM

BY THE NUMBERS

34

SPACES FROM
VACANT LOTS
SINCE 2011

TRANSFORMED

4

NEW SPACES
IN 2015

Local organizers have turned 34 once-vacant lots into vibrant spaces thanks to 596 Acres tools and support.

14

SPACES
GAINED
PROTECTIONS

PROTECTED

12

SPACES FROM
VACANT LOTS

596 Acres helped achieve land transfers, inclusion in land trusts, and leases with public authorities.

3

EVICIONS
STOPPED

DEFENDED

1

NYS SUPREME
COURT WIN

596 Acres has won three stupendous victories against fraudulent property ownership claims against community spaces in NYC.

GAINING GROUND IN 2015

A Crown Heights institution for over 34 years, the **1100 Bergen Community Garden** is now protected in perpetuity from tax debt and vulnerability. 596 Acres facilitated an arrangement to bring the garden into the Brooklyn Queens Land Trust, with Paula Segal representing the gardeners on the historic deed transfer.

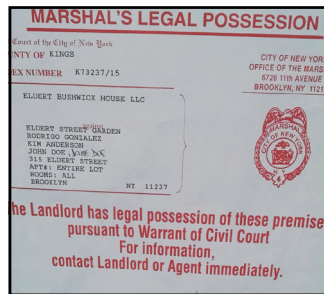
The **BACDYS Community Garden's** lease with the MTA is the result of more than two years of advocacy by 596 Acres and the Bangladeshi American Community Development and Youth Service (BACDYS). The garden will grow above a subway tunnel in East New York in a space originally designed as a pocket park and then fenced off for over 20 years. The New York Restoration Project provided materials and labor for the new garden, with GreenLab Studio contributing pro bono architectural design in collaboration with Grain Collective.

596 Acres helped neighbors at **227 Garden** through two years of local and city-wide advocacy to gain access to this vacant lot in Harlem. It was a tough journey, but in February 2015, this community-organized space emerged as a new NYC Parks Department Garden! GrowNYC came to help them build.

The **Warwick Street Greenery Glow Garden** is nearly back in action. East New York neighbors have organized a group and submitted a GreenThumb registration. The lot is already in the Parks Department inventory, so land access is just a fence-repair and signature away! This will be the 34th vacant-lot-to-community-space transformation that 596 Acres has facilitated! 🌱

COURT VICTORIES IN 2015

This year, three vibrant spaces faced eviction from deceptive developers who presented dubious deeds to their lots. Local organizers at the Maple Street Garden, Eldert Street Garden, and Roger That! Garden decided they would resist if 596 Acres would provide support. We promised to go the distance with them.



596 Acres educated organizers on their rights as occupants, briefed police precincts, intervened during attempted evictions, got the media involved, and brought in allied advocates from across the city. We carried the fight to the courtroom and all the way to the State Capitol. Meanwhile, neighbors continued to invest in their spaces: they hosted events, created art with local children, composted, grew vegetables, and served as forums for community discussion.



As 596 Acres provided on-the-ground support, Paula Segal took the gardens on as pro bono legal clients. We won. This fall, a series of court decisions brought each of the evictions to a halt. We are now working toward permanent protections. 🌱



“Paula Segal’s recent string of court victories directly benefited our garden, but beyond that the rulings suggest to me that the game has changed, at least in Brooklyn. Developers and landlords can no longer assume that they can flout the law without resistance. Tenants, the courts, and the press are all waking up to the many abuses that till now have been standard operating procedure.”

— Tom LaFarge, Organizer,
Maple Street
Community Garden

NEW SHOOTS IN 2015

Know Waste Lands in Bushwick had a ribbon cutting, celebrating their creation of a Parks Department-protected garden with a youth compost program.

remediation and stewardship. 596 Acres facilitated the creation of these neighborhood spaces.

Ten Neighbors Garden had its first work days, after 596 Acres helped gardeners who had been displaced 15 years ago organize with new neighbors to access this city lot in Brownsville.

Modeling it on the agreement that 596 Acres helped create for **Smiling Hogshead Ranch**, the MTA has requested proposals for the remaining 4.2 acre Montauk Cutoff. Stakeholders are crafting a vision together with 596 Acres guidance.

The Greenpoint Community Remediation Fund awarded grants to Brooklyn’s **61 Franklin Street Community Garden** and **Java Street Community Garden** for their community-led environmental

With 596 Acres collaboration and support, organizers created the **Hill Street Community Garden** group and rallied a bevy of South Bronx institutions and neighbors around their plan turn an entire street into a thriving garden.

72

VACANT LOTS THAT BECAME ORGANIZING TARGETS

12

NEW CBOs ORGANIZING ON THE 596 ACRES PLATFORM

95

NEW INDIVIDUALS ORGANIZING ON THE 596 ACRES PLATFORM

Neighbors in Brownsville asked 596 Acres for help turning a NYCHA lot into a [Guns Down, Life Up](#) community garden. Lead organizers want to let local youth plant something of their own in their neighborhood and cultivate a life away from the violence they see on the streets. 🌱



“596 Acres is one of the important players in maintaining the balance between green activists and developers. Turning empty lots into flourishing gardens is incredibly important to all New Yorkers. We still have a long way to go.”

— Jason Price,
Harlem, NY
123rd St Block Association

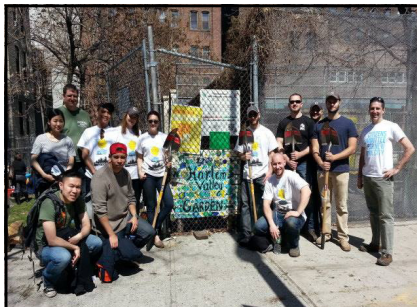
LOST OR ENDANGERED SPACES IN 2015

After four years of cultivation, [A Small Green Patch](#) closed its doors this April after the City moved forward with its plan to ready the lots for development. Tami Johnson, a lead organizer, broadcasted this message through 596 Acres: “Thank you for every hole you dug, every bag of mulch you moved ... every person you taught how to farm/garden/grow. Everything that each person brought to share is truly incredible.” The lots remain empty as the year ends.

A Crown Heights institution for decades, the [Imani Community Garden](#) suddenly needed help staving off development from all sides. First, the City offered part of the property for development as part of the [#HPDlist](#); then, a private developer acquired another part of the property through a post-tax-lien foreclosure referee sale. 596 Acres is working with gardeners on ways to save the garden and its iconic willow tree, raised planting beds, greenhouse, and famous chicken coop. 🌱

“Without 596 Acres to help bring these community issues to light, our city and home would be helpless against the corrupt, greedy developers attempting to take away what should rightfully belong to the families and residents of NYC.”

— Rodrigo Gonzalez, Organizer,
Eldert Street Garden, Bushwick



#EMINENTDOMAINFORGOOD

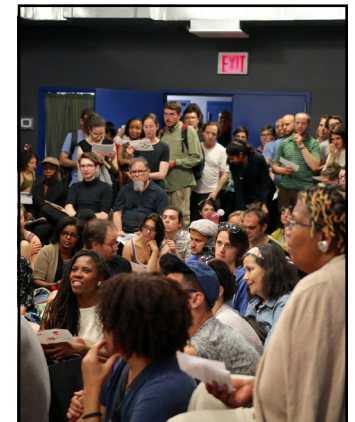
Responding to challenges and opportunities, 596 Acres helped craft bills directing the use of eminent domain to acquire and preserve the Maple Street and Roger That! gardens as community-managed open spaces. Now in legal limbo, the properties would be acquired by the City or the State and continue to be stewarded by their community gardeners. State Senators, Jesse Hamilton and Velmanette Montgomery, and Assembly member, Diana Richardson introduced legislation in Albany, while Brooklyn Borough President Adams is instructing the NYC Parks Department to consider a similar acquisition. Our tenacious defense has not only lifted long sieges on local gardens, but opened the door for using existing tools of municipal governance for the community. 🌱

ADDRESSING ROOT CAUSES OF VACANCY AND ABANDONMENT: THE TAX LIEN SALE

A big reason that private owners of vacant and abandoned properties in our neighborhoods don't face consequences when they don't pay taxes and let weeds and trash pile up on their properties is that the City sells the tax debt to private collection agencies instead of keeping the debt and enforcing it. This is done through the “Tax Lien Sale.” 596 Acres is advocating to the newly formed City Council Tax Lien Sale Task Force that all vacant and abandoned properties be taken out of future sales. 🌱

REAL ESTATE INVESTMENT COOPERATIVE (REIC)

In April 2015, 596 Acres co-produced an education event that springboarded the creation of the NYC Real Estate Investment Cooperative. More than 450 initial members are pooling their money and power to secure spaces for community, small business, and culture to thrive in NYC. NYC REIC is not a program of any one organization; it is new a way for New Yorkers to participate in deciding the future of their communities. The REIC's facilitation team and working groups are still developing its bylaws and governance structure, and readying to make first investments in 2017. 🌱



RISK OF EROSION: GARDENS FOR SALE



In January 2015, NYC Housing Preservation & Development (HPD) published a list of properties available for private development at potentially no cost—a list that included 18 active community spaces. HPD did nothing to let the gardeners, GreenThumb program, City Council, or Community Boards know that their gardens were in jeopardy.

596 Acres created a map of the #HPDList lots and hit the streets to let stakeholders know their thriving lots were on it. We rallied organizers, neighbors, and allies to the steps of City Hall; obtained letters from a bevy of community boards and local politicians, including City Council Members Antonio Reynoso, Robert Cornegy, Mark Levine, and Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer; and used every means available to demand careful reconsideration before giving away our precious public land resources. The movement we created won this response from the Mayor: “We’ll take a hard look at whether communities are best served by these gardens staying as they are. We’ll make those decisions in partnership with each community.”

ROOT SHOCK: LOSING INTERIM-USE LICENSING



This year, Housing Preservation & Development (HPD), which controls over approximately half of the vacant public land citywide, stopped issuing interim-use licenses for the creation of community gardens. This effectively closes one of the most reliable channels for communities to transform vacant lots into green spaces and puts a number of already well-organized and active projects into limbo. It also forces 596 Acres to think outside the box to empower community

determination over vacant land—particularly through means such as lobbying for the transfer of vacant lots to the Parks Department so that they can be transformed into gardens. Historically, Parks has only agreed to accept jurisdiction of already-developed community spaces. The strategy is working: thanks to determined advocacy by 596 Acres and organizers, the Parks Department took jurisdiction of five vacant City-owned lots so neighbors could create community gardens.



“596 Acres’ strong advocacy on behalf of disenfranchised and displaced peoples, in facilitating access to publicly owned land, is laudable and worthy of support.”

— Ena K. McPherson, Gardener, Tranquility Farm, #HPDlist, Bed Stuy

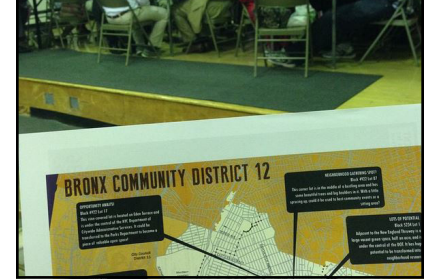
REAL ESTATE ASSETS, NOT “SURPLUS”

For the first time since 2013, New York City has decided to auction City-owned vacant lots and buildings, abandoning neighborhoods that could be stabilized via community resources built on land the public already owns. These spaces can easily become permanently affordable housing, affordable commercial, cultural, retail, or manufacturing spaces, or gardens; instead they are being sold to private developers. 596 Acres rallied local organizations and elected officials, wrote letters and made phone calls, and took the issue straight to the auction at the Bronx courthouse.

Working with Council Member Ruben Wills, the NYC Real Estate Investment Cooperative, Picture the Homeless, Banana Kelly, and the NYC Community Land Initiative, we kept a City-owned building in Jamaica, Queens from being auctioned off to a private developer. Now this property is being re-examined for uses that benefit the community.

NEW YORK STATE COMMUNITY GARDEN TASK FORCE

In 2013, 596 Acres organized a statewide coalition that won passage of a bill expanding the obligations of the NYS Office of Community Gardens and created a Community Garden Task Force. This year, we have continued to work with the State on its imple-



mentation of the new law. Because the Task Force has yet to be convened, 596 Acres is working to ensure that advocates from across the state are included in the conversation.

WORKING WITH COMMUNITY BOARDS

596 Acres continued its crucial outreach project to city Community Boards, teaching critical skills and raising awareness about their role in expanding public access to vacant properties. Thanks to a grant from the New York Community Trust, 596 Acres was able to meet with the seven community boards with the greatest amount of vacant public land. We shared our district-specific vacant property maps and our New York City Advocate’s Guide to Land Access, introduced community board members to the neighbors spearheading projects in their districts, and worked with board members and residents to improve communication around local public space initiatives. We also brought vital information about changes at HPD – the City had not informed community boards about the termination of interim licensing or the #HPDlist – and corrected misconceptions about land use policy. In every district we visited, new residents began working with us to improve their neighborhoods.

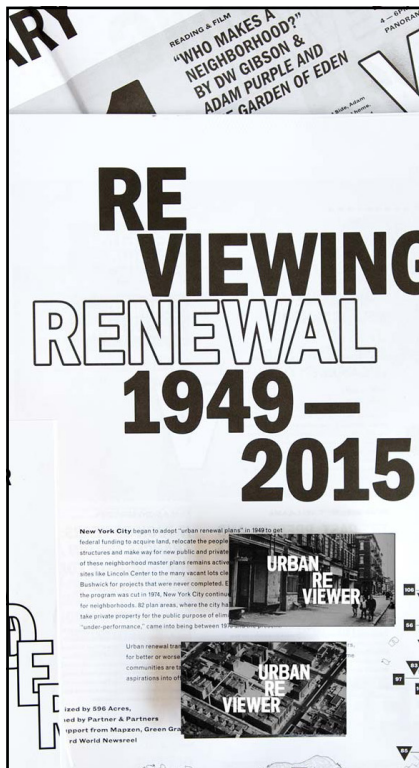
COMMUNITY LAND ACCESS CULTURE

CHANGING THE CONVERSATION IN 2015

596 Acres has been changing the paradigm of urban development, getting more people to see that communities have rights—even in the face of developers, and despite a history of top-down political determination.

596 Acres held a groundbreaking exhibition in partnership with the Queens Museum, **Reviewing Renewal**, with more than a thousand attendees over five weeks of programs. As part of the exhibition, we unveiled a game-changing new tool for democracy: **Urban Reviewer**, the first publicly accessible database of every urban renewal plan ever adopted by New York. Open-source and online, Urban Reviewer empowers people to advocate for plans that have never materialized, influence plans that are ongoing, and engage more directly with the evolution of their neighborhoods.

The series helped us better visualize planned open spaces and brought urban renewal and community decision-making into a public conversation as never before—letting us glimpse possibilities for planning in the public domain beyond top-down urban renewal.



“What 596 Acres’ success suggests is that... given a nudge to see them as opportunities, ordinary people are poised to reimagine and re-configure the sacrifice zones left behind by the reigning calculus of land valuation ... making maximum use of them as a collective resource, in a maximally inclusive way.”

— Adam Greenfield, Scholar, London School of Economics

At **Ideas City Festival**, hosted by the New Museum, 596 Acres teamed up with Deborah Berke Partners and GRT Architects to bring attendees on a tour of tax lot lines, leases, settled court cases, City-agency jurisdiction assignments, cleared garbage heaps, community land trusts, and New Yorkers struggling and succeeding to create and control the space of the city, together.

At **Hangouts!**, a medley of presentations, conversations, and performances curated by the Van Alen Institute, 596 Acres brought #HPDlist gardeners before attendees (including the Parks commissioner) to explore the relationship between physical space, personal experience, community, and to examine the meaning of secure access to public space. 🌱

ACCOLADES IN 2015

596 Acres is a **2015 Buckminster Fuller Challenge Semi-Finalist**, one of 15 international projects. The Fuller Challenge is commonly regarded as “socially-responsible design’s highest award.” The award recognized our Living Lots platform’s “whole systems approach to problem solving” as one which excelled at their seven criteria: it is visionary, comprehensive, anticipatory, ecologically responsible, feasible, and verifiable.

This winter, the web-based journal Technical.ly named 596 Acres as one of **Six Tech Groups Building a Better Brooklyn**. 🌱

NEW TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIALS IN 2015

We upgraded and revamped our interactive community land access maps, and migrated to **LivingLotsNYC.org**. Thanks to financial support from the Sunlight Foundation, legal support from the Berkman Center for Internet & Society CyberLaw Clinic, and Cleis Design, we added powerful new features, better user functionality, the ability to search by community district, and more.

- 10+ Community Land Access Workshops in New York City
- 21st Annual GreenThumb GrowTogether Conference
- Brooklyn BRIC’s BK LIVE
- NCGIS2015, Raleigh
- 34th Annual Making Brooklyn Bloom
- Just Food Conference, Columbia Teachers College
- Smart Cities Montreal: “Civic Engagement through Open Government Initiatives”
- Association of Landscape Architects of Quebec 50th Anniversary Conference: “The Right to the City: One Vacant Lot at a Time”
- An Inventory of What’s Possible, NYC
- EcoStationNY Earth Week Celebration
- Van Alen Institute, HANGOUTS!
- 2015 Allied Media Conference, Detroit
- Land and Water: A Long Term Perspective, Brown University
- GreenThumb Harvest Fair, NYC
- LabGov IASC “City as Commons,” Italy



We also published a ring-bound set of **Community Governance Cards**, user-friendly guides to running a successful community group. The tools in this card set will assist groups in establishing accountability, making collective decisions, running successful meetings, cultivating open communication, and engaging all of the people in the community. 🌱

GLOBAL IMPACT IN 2015

Heritage Montreal works to protect the area's architecture, history, nature, and culture. This year, they adapted the Living Lots approach to vacant and vulnerable sites with the **H-MTL** project. Launched this fall, it allows people who live in Montreal to identify buildings that they believe should be preserved and then work together to access and repurpose them.

LA Open Acres: our tool for Los Angeles is live and being used by Community Health Councils.

Last year, 596 Acres partnered with the Garden Justice Legal Initiative to create **groundedinphilly.org**, based on the 596 Acres platform. The site launched its second stage in 2015.

Lande launched in Montreal this spring, inspired and consulted by 596 Acres. A land access tool, Lande allows Montrealers to track down vacant land in their neighborhoods and begin participating in the transformation process. The **Neighborhood Academy at Prinzesinnengarten** in Berlin, Germany invited Paula Segal to conduct a residency this August,



with the goal of starting to make Berlin's hidden commons visible to residents for potential reclamation. Working with Berlin's community land access advocates, we helped create an online map after the Living Lots model and began placing signs on Berlin's potential "commons." 🌱



"One of the great learnings from the summer [residency with 596 Acres] and what we started manifesting through the mapping, was the need to stop thinking 'one space at a time' but to start building the big picture ... to be embedded in a strategy for the neighborhood as a whole.."

— Elizabeth Calderón Lüning, Nachbarschaftsakademie im Prinzesinnengarten, Berlin

596 ACRES FINANCES & PERSONNEL

REVENUE	2011-12*	2013	2014	2015
Individuals	\$8,918	\$14,101	\$18,630	\$62,426
Foundations	\$6,500	\$40,000	\$43,500	\$29,746**
Government	\$4,000	-	-	\$17,000***
Earned	\$1,075	\$19,074	\$35,976	\$6,947
TOTAL	\$20,493	\$73,176	\$98,106	\$116,119

EXPENSES	2011-12*	2013	2014	2015
Personnel	\$6,260	\$35,799	\$75,776	\$95,855
OTPS	\$5,933	\$7,054	\$16,880	\$22,771
Administrative costs/ FCNY 9% service fee	n/a	\$3,857	waived	\$10,670
TOTAL	\$12,193	\$46,701	\$92,656	\$129,236

* We started as a fiscally sponsored project of IOBY, Inc.

** Thanks to New York Community Trust & the Clif Bar Family Foundation for supporting community land access for New Yorkers this year!

*** Discretionary funds from City Council Members Robert Cornegy, Brad Lander, Steve Levin, & Antonio Reynoso. Additional funds have been committed for 2016 as well!



"It's not an organization that goes out and builds space on its own. The best part of 596 Acres is that it's bringing awareness to people in the 'hood, empowering them, telling them what they can do, giving them tools to actually do it."

Shatia Strother, Co-Founder, 462 Halsey Community Garden, Bed Stuy, Brooklyn

OUR TEAM IN 2015

STAFF

Paula Z. Segal, Esq., Executive Director & Legal Director of NYC Community Land Access Program
 Eric Brelsford, Lead Developer & Data Analyst
 Mary Elizabeth Prall, Organizer, NYC Community Land Access Program
 Meredith Degyansky, Program Administrator, NYC Community Land Access Program, Fall 2015

VOLUNTEERS

Moses Gates, Demographer
 Jonathan Lapalme, Strategist
 Anthony Mohen, Attorney
 Stephan von Muehlen, Design Manager & Strategist
 Gabriel Willow, Chief Naturalist & Ecological Advisor

INTERNS

Rachel Albetski, Winter-Spring 2015 Intern
 Alexandra Venner (Zanny), Spring 2015 Intern
 Jakob Winkler, Spring 2015 Intern
 Isaiah Young, East New York Farms! Summer 2015 Extern
 Josh Bisker, Fall 2015 Intern

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Liz Barry, Co-founder, Public Laboratory for Open Technology and Science & TreeKit
 Eric Brelsford, Lead Software Developer and Data Analyst, 596 Acres
 Patrick Foster, Senior Attorney, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
 Moses Gates, Professor of Demography, Pratt Institute
 Kristin Booth Glen, Professor, CUNY & former CUNY Law School Dean
 Rachel Dobkin, Writer and Attorney
 Paula Z. Segal, Esq., Founder, Director, 596 Acres

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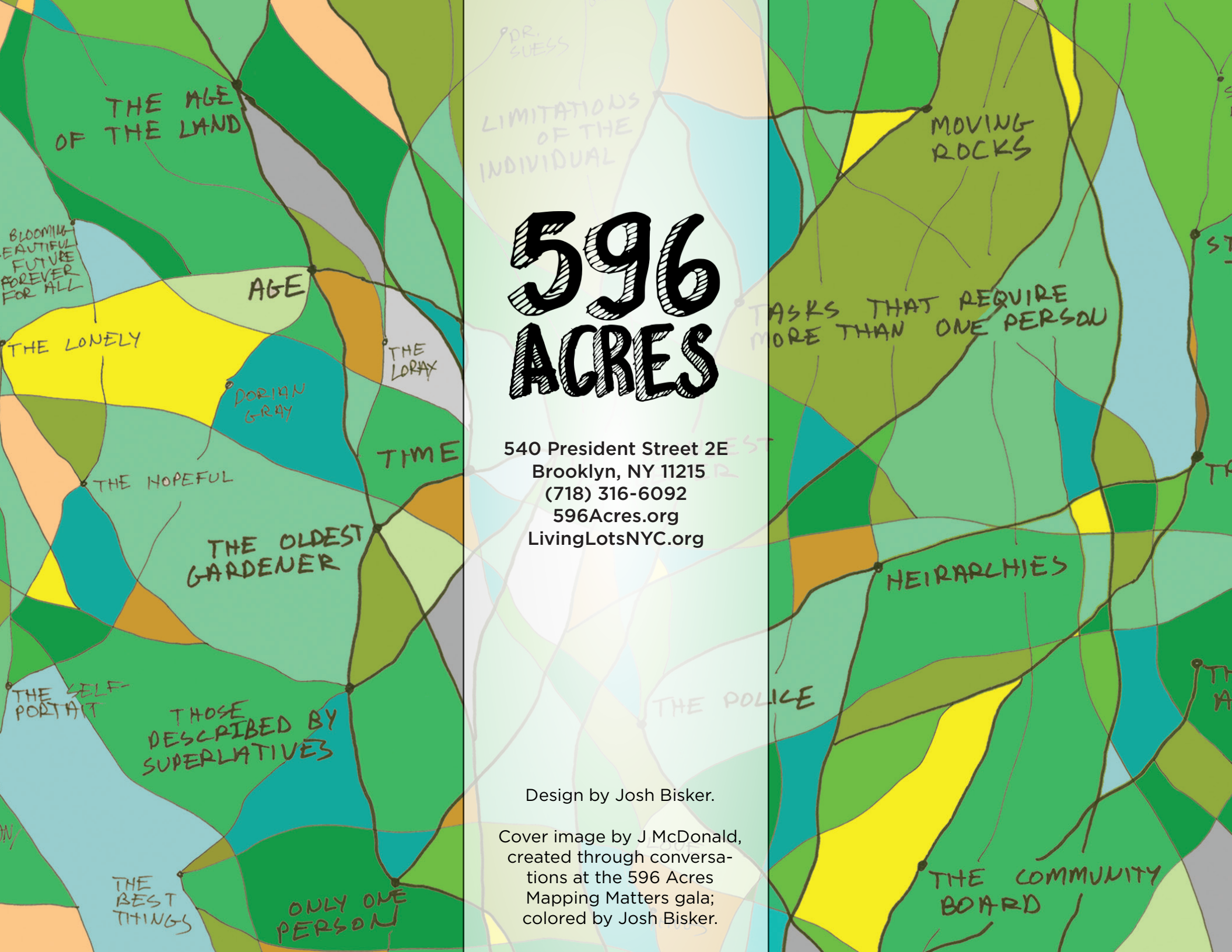
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Aubrey Murdock	Fidelity Charitable	Madeleine Milan
Barbara Rogers	Gabriel Willow	Mandy Deroche
Benjamin Cohen	Gabrielle Bendiner-Viani	Map Zen / Samsung Research
Benjamin Meyers	George Edwards	Maple Street Community Garden
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David Gates	John Rinehart	Nextdoorganics
David Smiley		

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596 Acres is a Partner Project of the Fund for the City of New York.



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596 ACRES

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LivingLotsNYC.org

MOVING ROCKS

TASKS THAT REQUIRE MORE THAN ONE PERSON

HEIRARCHIES

THE POLICE

THE COMMUNITY BOARD

Design by Josh Bisker.

Cover image by J McDonald, created through conversations at the 596 Acres Mapping Matters gala; colored by Josh Bisker.