

## 596 Acres 2011-2012 Recap

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## Our Mission

### 596 Acres is helping neighbors transform vacant public land into community resources.

Hundreds of acres of vacant public land exist in New York City, hidden in plain sight behind chain-link fences in neighborhoods where green space and other public amenities are scarce, concentrated in neighborhoods disproportionately deprived of beneficial land uses. These vacant lots collect garbage, much like the privately owned lots being warehoused in those same neighborhoods, waiting for the economy to make them profitable.

We see these vacant lots as sites of opportunity. We are building tools for communities to acquire the keys legally and unlock all these rusty gates—and the opportunities within them.





## NYC Program

### In 2012, 596 Acres helped neighbors find the lot in their lives by:

- (1) making municipal information available online and on the ground (e.g. by placing signs on vacant public land that explain a lot's status and steps that the community can take to be able to use this land);
- (2) providing education about city government and ways to participate in decisions that shape neighborhoods;
- (3) assisting communities with legal support and campaign-development on land use issues;
- (4) maintaining a network that allows communities to share knowledge and relationships with decision-makers;
- (5) working with groups after they get access to land to build sustainable community governance as they become stewards of a public and inclusive resource; and
- (6) advocating for municipal agencies to increase participatory decision-making surrounding public resources.



# YOU'VE FOUND <sup>THE</sup> LOT <sup>IN</sup> YOUR LIFE

NOW WHAT?



**GET THE KEY**  
*grow something!*

IT'S NOT ALWAYS A STRAIGHT LINE. IF YOU NEED HELP CONTACT 596 ACRES AT ANY TIME.

**596 ACRES.ORG**







## On the Ground Successes

Since August 2011, eight official sites have been created with support from 596 Acres network and facilitation.

*Brooklyn:*

Myrtle Village Green  
The Java Street Garden Collaborative  
Patchen Community Square  
A Small Green Patch  
462 Halsey Community Garden  
South Brooklyn Children's Garden  
100 Quincy Community Garden

*Manhattan:*

The Siempre Verde Community Garden on the Lower East Side

And four sites with nearly official status:

*Brooklyn:*

Celestial Buffalo Center in Weeksville  
Misba's Lot in City Line  
340 Thompkins in Bed Stuy  
Fulton and Saratoga Triangle in Ocean Hill

In June and August, 2012, we released data about public vacant lots in Manhattan and Queens. Our online map now shows information about 1182 public vacant lots covering 404.7 acres in three boroughs. That's so much opportunity!

We broadcast this information online and have put have put signs on hundreds of lots this year! In addition, at the request of community groups we have led over two dozen vacant land visioning sessions in 2011-12.

Of the 404.7 acres of abandoned city-owned land that we have posted information about in three boroughs, 48.1 acres - over 10% - has become the target of organizing by residents in neighborhoods (95 sites!). Ten of those sites are real places now that have names.

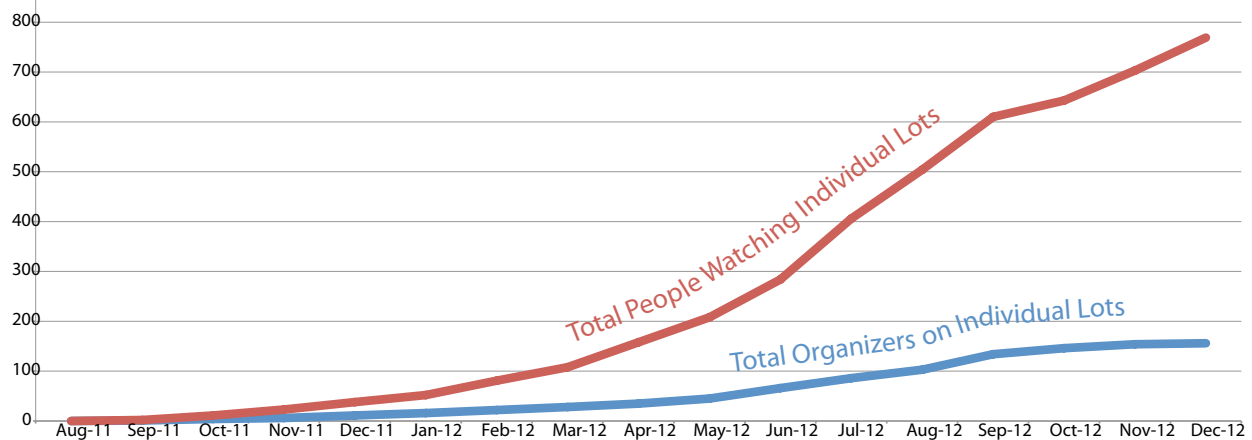
Together, they have become 2.4 acres of community controlled resources that did not exist before August 2011.

# Online Community Building

Over 30,000 different **people** visited our website since its launch!

330 individuals are watching lots in their neighborhood to get updates about how the community is working together to activate that lot.

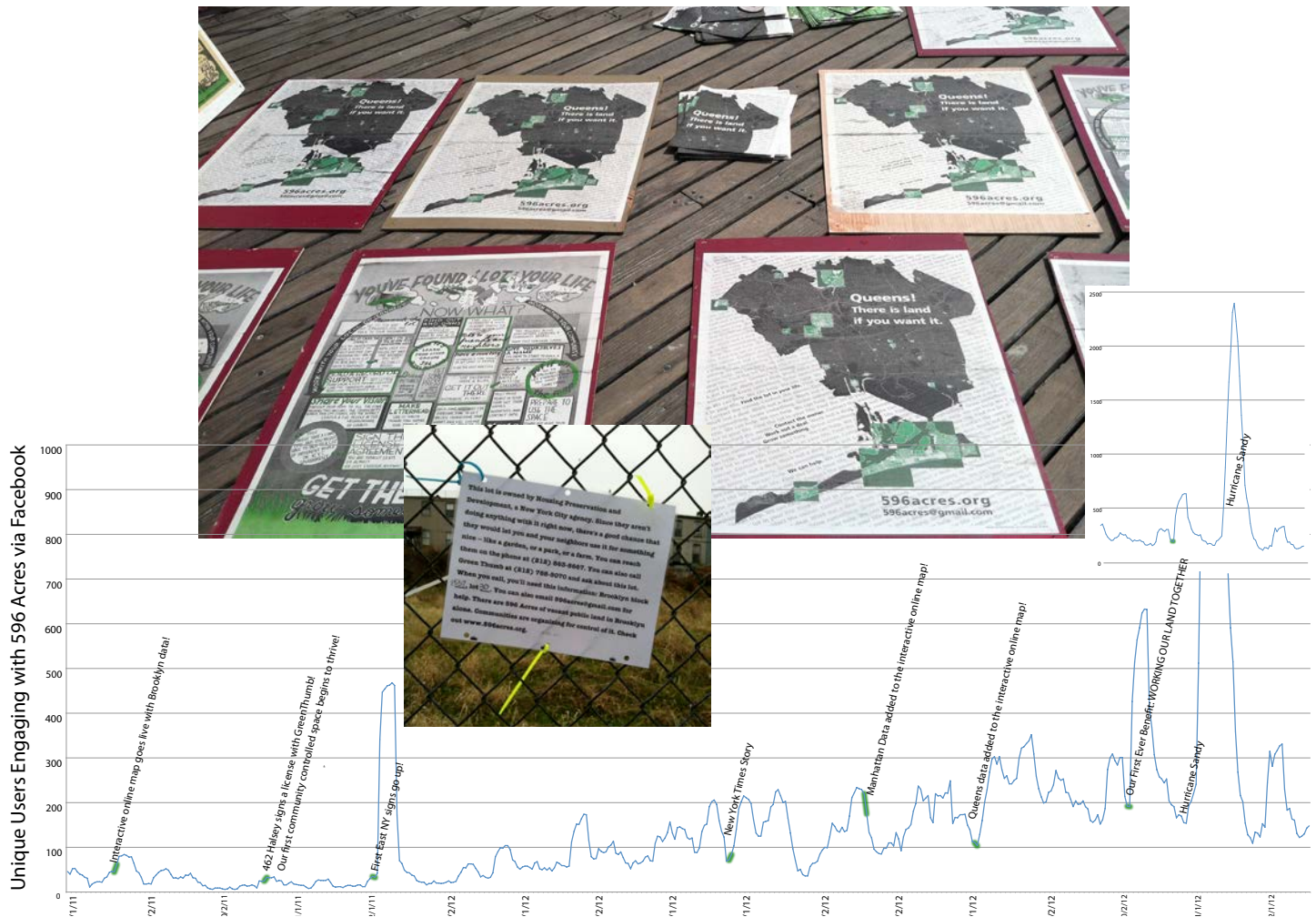
125 have self identified as organizers who are working to bring their communities together around shared goals of transforming these disused parcels into resources.





# Online Community Building

We're reaching even further through social media, building a potential constituency for participatory land-use decisions and getting people excited about working in community as land-stewards.



Likes





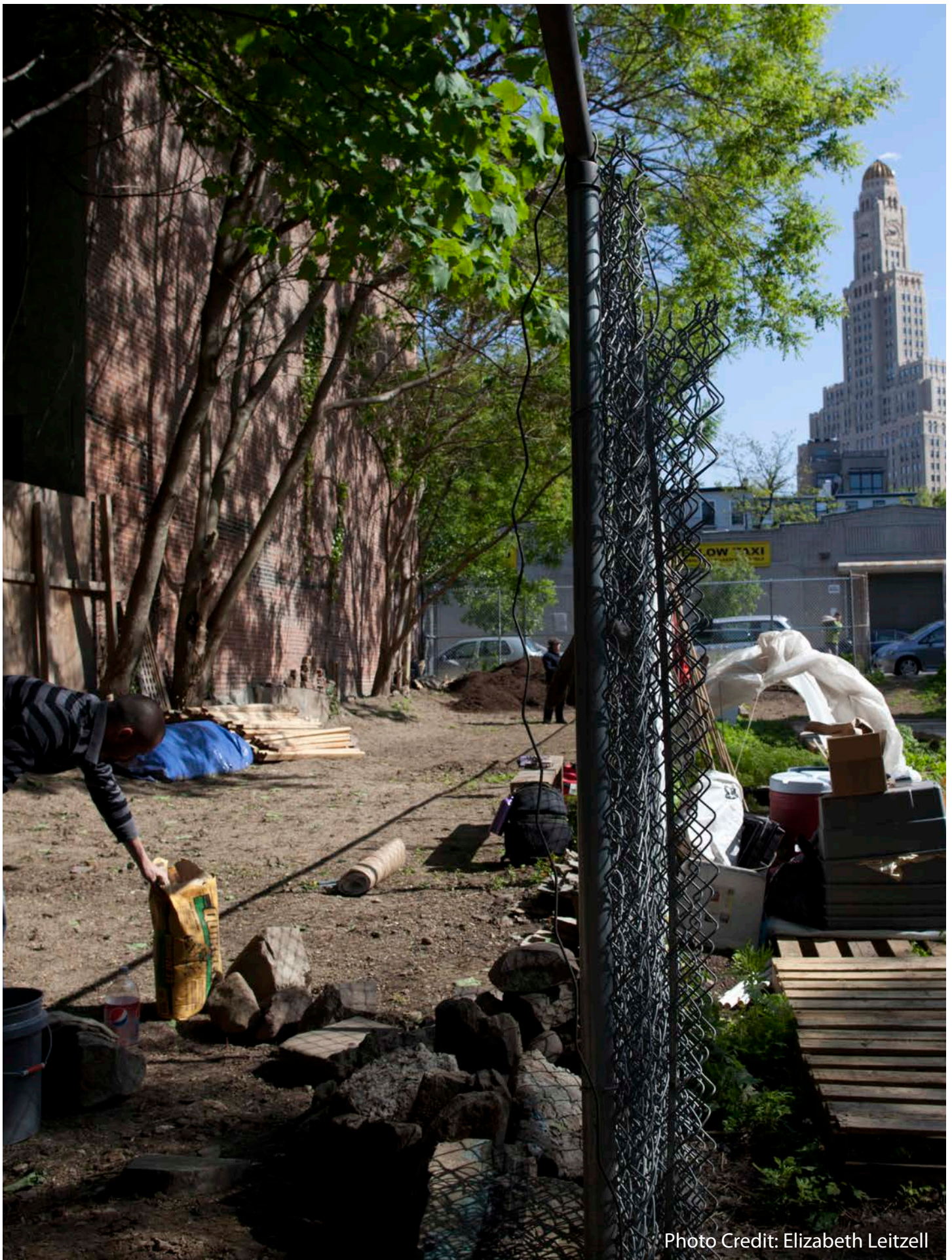


Photo Credit: Elizabeth Leitzell



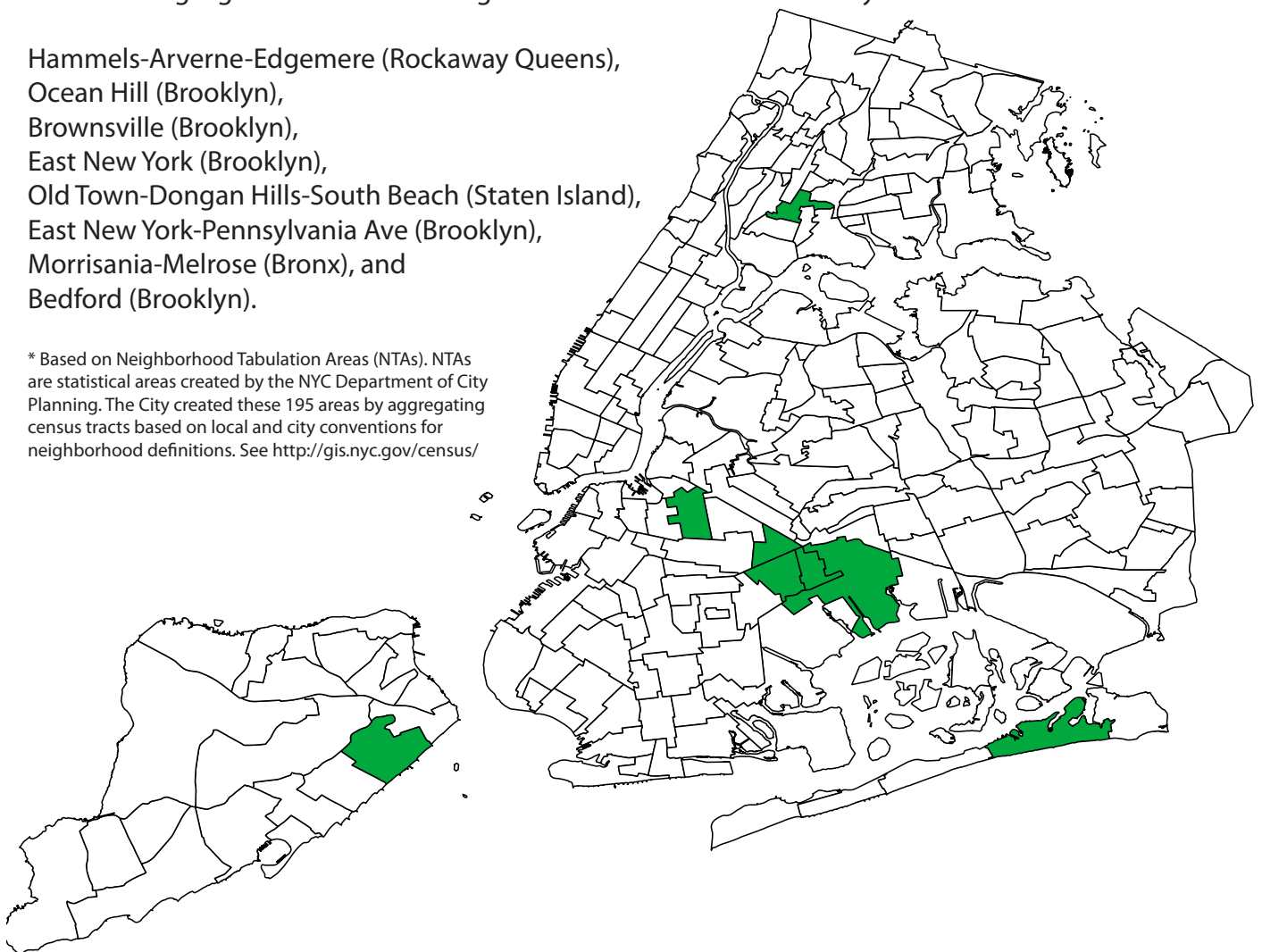
# Vacant Public Land In NYC

Our tools connect neighbors of fenced-in, underutilized lots, creating access to new possibilities for New Yorkers who live in communities underserved by municipal and commercial infrastructure.

The following eight areas\* have the highest vacant lot counts in the city:

Hammels-Arverne-Edgemere (Rockaway Queens),  
Ocean Hill (Brooklyn),  
Brownsville (Brooklyn),  
East New York (Brooklyn),  
Old Town-Dongan Hills-South Beach (Staten Island),  
East New York-Pennsylvania Ave (Brooklyn),  
Morrisania-Melrose (Bronx), and  
Bedford (Brooklyn).

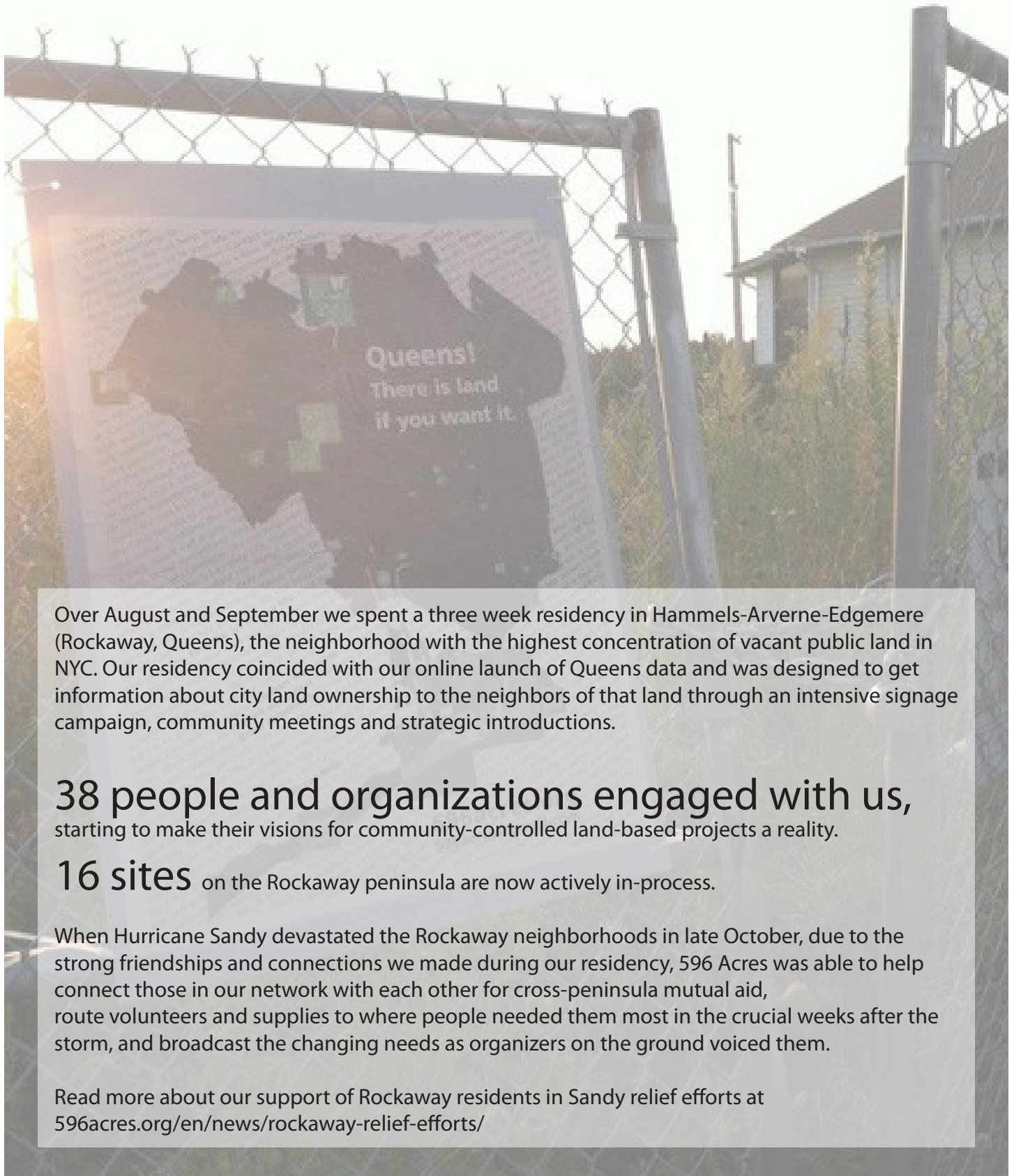
\* Based on Neighborhood Tabulation Areas (NTAs). NTAs are statistical areas created by the NYC Department of City Planning. The City created these 195 areas by aggregating census tracts based on local and city conventions for neighborhood definitions. See <http://gis.nyc.gov/census/>



According to the 2010 Census, while New York City as a whole is 66.7% non-white, the eight areas with the highest concentration of vacant public land are 91.3% non-white. These eight areas also have more residents who are under 18 (28.9%) than the rest of New York City (21.6%).



# Queens and the Rockaways



Over August and September we spent a three week residency in Hammels-Arverne-Edgemere (Rockaway, Queens), the neighborhood with the highest concentration of vacant public land in NYC. Our residency coincided with our online launch of Queens data and was designed to get information about city land ownership to the neighbors of that land through an intensive signage campaign, community meetings and strategic introductions.

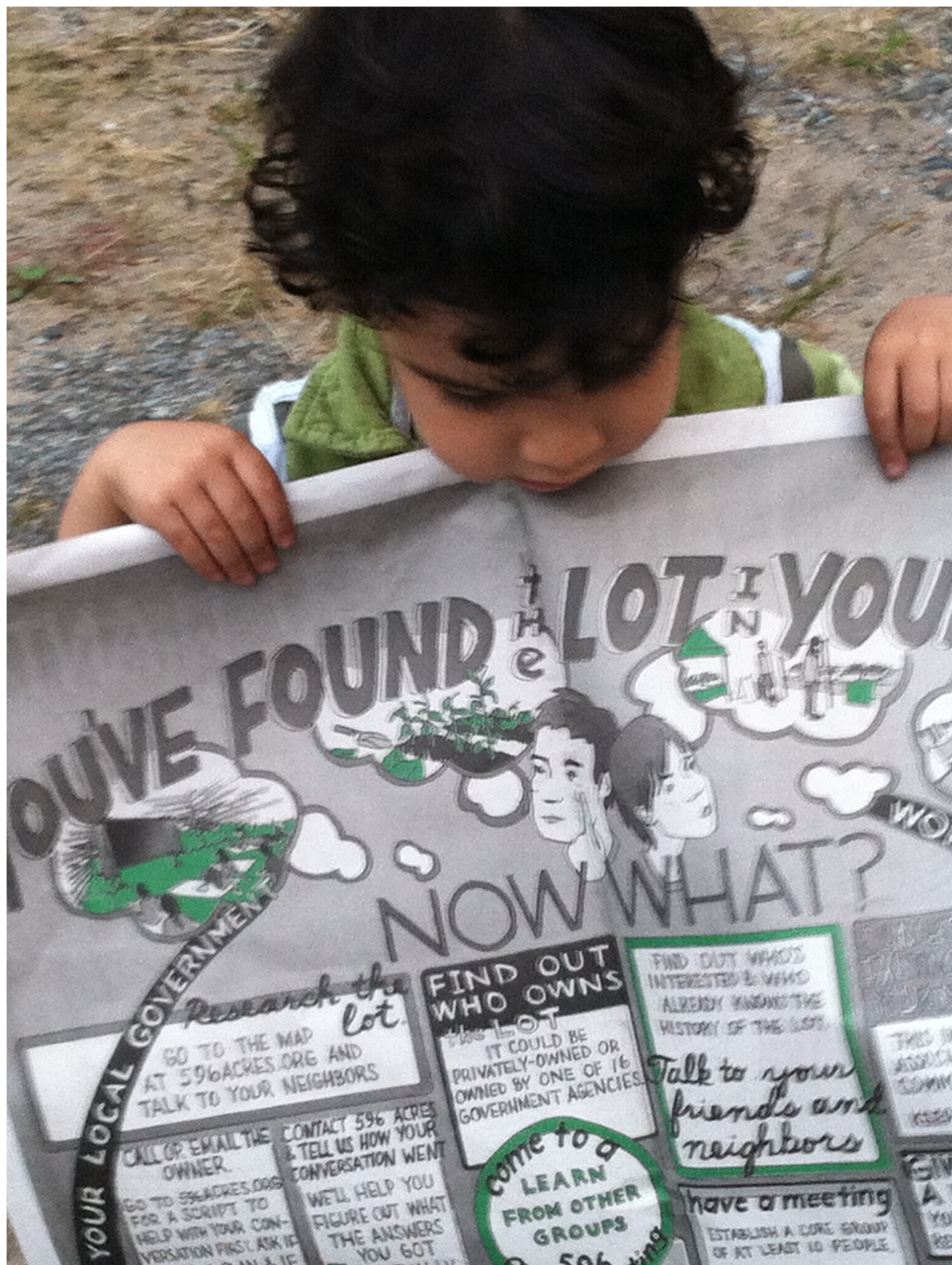
**38 people and organizations engaged with us,** starting to make their visions for community-controlled land-based projects a reality.

**16 sites** on the Rockaway peninsula are now actively in-process.

When Hurricane Sandy devastated the Rockaway neighborhoods in late October, due to the strong friendships and connections we made during our residency, 596 Acres was able to help connect those in our network with each other for cross-peninsula mutual aid, route volunteers and supplies to where people needed them most in the crucial weeks after the storm, and broadcast the changing needs as organizers on the ground voiced them.

Read more about our support of Rockaway residents in Sandy relief efforts at [596acres.org/en/news/rockaway-relief-efforts/](http://596acres.org/en/news/rockaway-relief-efforts/)





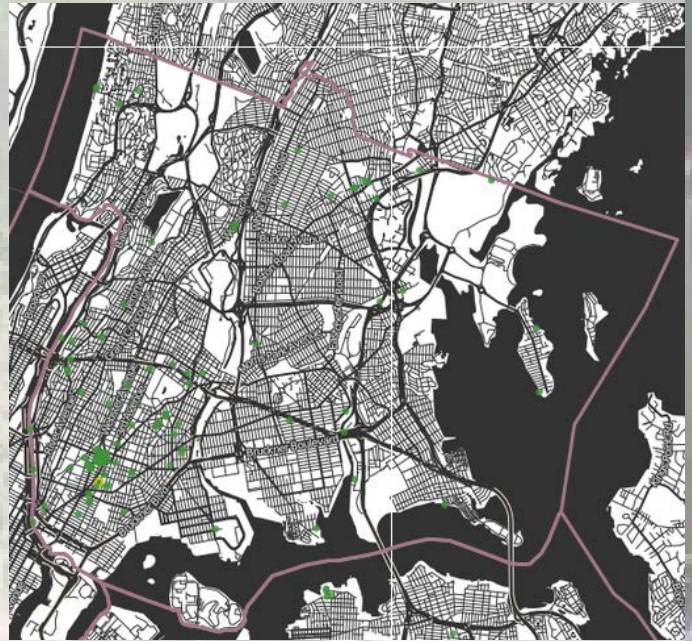


# The Future: The Bronx & Staten Island

In preparation for launching campaigns in The Bronx and Staten Island, we have mapped vacant public land in those boroughs and are making that information available to key organizers who work there. Two key partners are New York City Community Garden Coalition and Make the Road New York.

In The Bronx:

**141 public vacant sites**  
**41.6 acres**



In Staten Island:

**206 public vacant sites**  
**157.7 acres.**

We are looking forward to a bright future of being able to support communities in these boroughs in activating this public land!







## Working in Other Cities



**596 Acres provides a platform that connects a single site to a networked plan. It allows us to tackle city-wide issues through a network of emergent local conditions.** -- Rena Mande, DSGN AGNC

Our mapping tool is an excellent way for state and local governments, nonprofits and community groups to aggregate data from their cities around the number and use of vacant lots, both public and private.

In January, we will start working with the Garden Justice Initiative of the Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia to custom-build an online tool for the Philadelphia land stewardship community. Like the tools we've built in New York, this map will help individuals and groups in Philadelphia identify, organize around and access publicly-owned vacant land in Philadelphia, as well as provide information about pathways to protected land tenure for Philadelphia groups that are already land stewards.

We are really excited to continue conversations with vacant lot transformation facilitators in other cities as we head into 2013.



# Awards and Other Recognitions

In November 2012, 596 Acres was featured as part of the BRIC Arts Rotunda Gallery show "On Purpose: Art & Design in Brooklyn, 2012."

In August 2012, the Institute for Urban Design selected 596 Acres to represent the U.S. at the Venice Architecture Biennale as part of a presentation is on "Spontaneous Interventions." The U.S. Pavilion won a Special Mention for National Participation from the Biennale Jury.

In December 2011, 596 Acres was judged the Greenest App in the NYC BigApps 2011 competition.



# Financial Overview

This was an amazing year for 596 Acres! Due to the gracious donations of time from so many people we were able to accomplish all our goals with a minimal budget. We've created some fantastic relationships with foundations, and we continue to look for new and innovative sources of funding. 596 Acres is grateful to receive financial support from the following:

## Foundation Support

### Norcross Wildlife Foundation

Protects open space, wetlands and deep woods. Assists organizations to purchase and protect land, build nature centers and trails, print and distribute educational materials, provide services to clients and conduct ground-level program activities

### Small Planet Fund

Supports courageous movements bringing to life citizen-led solutions to hunger, poverty, and environmental devastation around the world.

### Awesome Foundation

Aims to conserve, sustain, and support the worldwide ecosystem of awesomeness.

### Citizen's Committee for NYC

Supports volunteer-led neighborhood groups carrying out community improvement projects in the most underserved neighborhoods and schools across all five boroughs.

### The Clif Bar Family Foundation

Supports grass roots groups with inspiring ideas and limited funds. The Foundation believes in the wisdom of starting small, seeing what works, and growing it genuinely.

### The SDK Foundation for Human Dignity

Supports any thing and every thing that has the potential of enhancing human dignity

## Private Donations

Therese Aldgard, Erin Barnes, Barrie Cline, Lauren Connolly, Press Elizabeth, Julie Elmore, Olga Flowers, Tamara Greenfield, Robert Guempel, Danielle Hlatky, Helen Ho, Ryan Nuckel, Jill Nussbaum, David Orr, Robert Quackenbush, David Rankin, John van Schaick, Judith Seid, Jose Serrano, Shannon Smith, Merran Swartwood, Lacey Tauber, Daniel Wilenchik, Wendy Wolf, Teuta Zoto

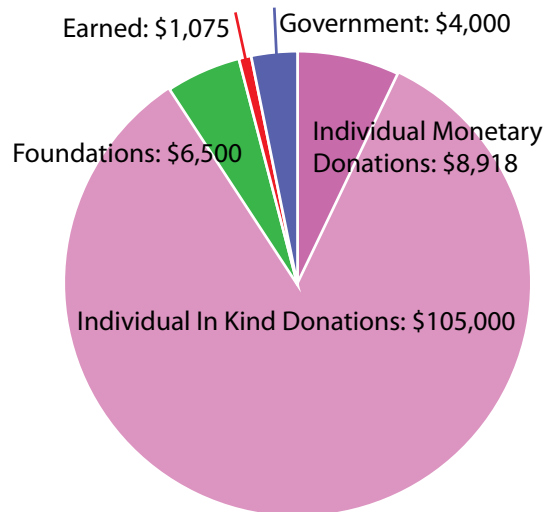
We'll be looking to expand a great deal in the next year and so our funding plan includes creating further foundational relationships through both grants, and by selling our map and services to grantees of those foundations who might share an interest in the work we do.



# Financial Overview

Total Income: \$124,084

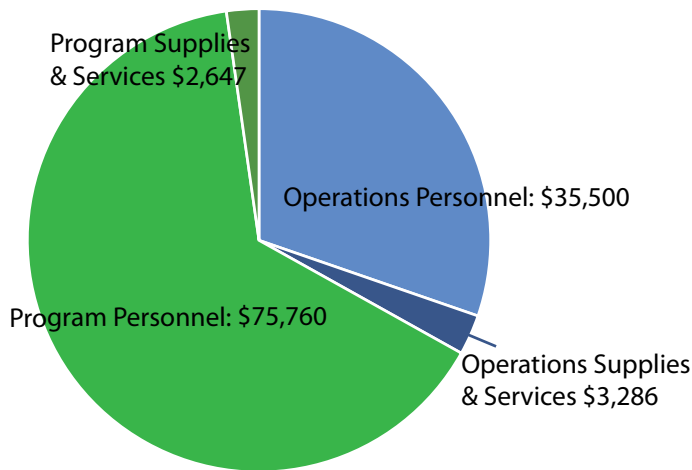
Individual In Kind Donations: \$105,000  
Individual Monetary Donations: \$8,918  
Foundations: \$6,500  
Government: \$4,000  
Earned: \$1,075



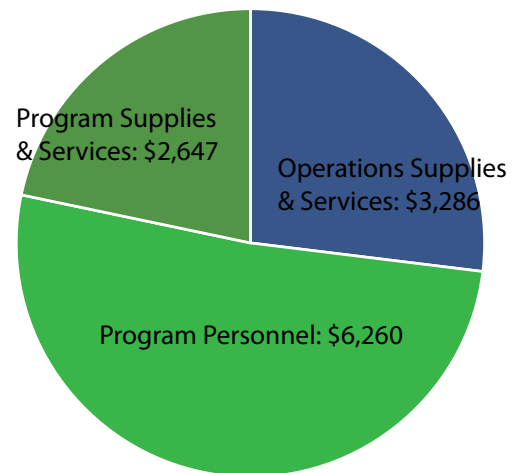
INCOME 2011-2012: \$124,084

Total Expenses: \$117,193

Operations Personnel: \$35,500  
Operations Supplies & Services: \$3,286  
Program Personnel: \$75,760  
Program Supplies & Services: \$2,647



TOTAL EXPENSES 2011-2012: \$117,193



MONETARY EXPENSES 2011-2012: \$12,193

## How you can contribute

We know what we do works, and we want to continue to help create access to unused public spaces for communities. But this cannot happen without your support. We need your continued support to keep building on what we've begun this year through increasing outreach, launching our maps of the other boroughs, and expanding our services to other cities.

The best way you can help is of course through working in your community to find the lot of your life, but we also need funding to keep doing the work we do. Please consider making a sustainable donation of \$5-10 dollars a month to 596 Acres. This type of donation is so meaningful for the work we do because sustainable donations are less taxing to our supporters due to the small amount given each month, they keep you connected to our work by reminding you monthly to check in with us and see what's going on, and they tell foundations that we have a very serious, engaged membership, interacting with our work on a monthly basis.

We could not do this work without your support, and we welcome you to contact us and see how you can plug into what we're doing either through monetary support or by a gift of your time. Thanks so much for everything!



# Our Team

## LEADERSHIP

Eric Brelsford, Lead Software Developer and Data Analyst

Eric is the freelance programmer who put the 596 Acres website together. He also works on other projects like 596 Acres (Farming Concrete, Food Census, Garden Maps). He is interested in the potential uses of collective data collection and analysis as tools for direct action and organization.

Paula Z. Segal, Founder, Director & Lead Facilitator

Paula is a facilitator- and annotator-at-large who has lived in Brooklyn for ten years and focused her work on building capacity and providing technical assistance for local community-based organizing and decentralized pedagogic practice. Paula is a graduate of City University of New York Law School at Queens College, where she was a Haywood Burns Fellow in Human and Civil Rights and worked in the Economic Justice Project at Main Street Legal Services. She is a founding member of the NYC National Lawyers Guild Street Law Team. Before joining the legal profession and founding 596 Acres, Paula taught English to Speakers of Other Languages, developed curricula and ran an all-volunteer adult English school on the Lower East Side. She was also a member of the Empty Vessel Project. Paula is an attorney admitted to practice in New York State. In 2013, she will be a partner in her own practice, Mohen & Segal.

## TEAM MEMBERS

Anthony Mohen, Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) Attorney

Julia Samuels, Digital Imaging Specialist

Andrew Tucker, Development Associate

Stephan von Muehlen, Design Manager & Strategist

Gabriel Willow, Chief Naturalist & Ecological Advisor In Residence

ALUMNI: Eva Meszaros, Lucy McFadden, Oksana Miranova, Cameron Moss, Mary Prall, Richard Semegram, Vanessa Valenzuela

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Liz Barry, Public Laboratory for Open Technology and Science and TreeKit co-founder

Eric Brelsford, 596 Acres Lead Software Developer and Data Analyst

Patrick Foster, environmental justice advocate and attorney

Kristin Booth Glen, former CUNY Law School Dean

Paula Z. Segal, 596 Acres Founder, Director & Lead Facilitator

Shatia Strother, 462 Halsey Community Garden Co-Founder

## ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Our programming is developed by an advisory committee that is made up of local project leaders that have emerged from sites that have organized using our tools (approximately 50%), members of partner organizations and the paid and volunteer team members who actually carry out the day-to-day work of the project. Chad Berkowitz, Alexis Bhagat (Patchen Community Square Core Member), Andrew Blancero, Wendy Brawer, Amy Laura Cahn, Leah Feder, Jane Gish, Mara Gittleman, Helen Ho, Tami Johnson (A Small Green Patch Founder), Jane Moisan, Aazam Otero, Quilian Riano, Ronald Shiffman, Mark Taylor.





## OFFICIAL STATUS

We plan to incorporate under the New York State Not-For-Profit Corporation Law in early 2013. 596 Acres is fiscally sponsored by our partner ioby (In Our Backyards, Inc.). We love working with our friends.

*ioby is dedicated to providing tools (online and offline) that deliver resources to great environmental stewards and neighborhood leaders with the explicit purpose of inspiring others to participate and building political will around local civic actions. Your work with 596 Acres has inspired thousands of people into becoming great leaders and stewards in their neighborhoods, and you've built a great tool for building neighborhood cohesion. 596 Acres and projects in these vacant spaces—462 Halsey, A Small Green Patch, FEEDBack Farms, Java Street, Myrtle Village Green—are exactly the people that ioby was designed to serve. And, all these new community groups are also inspiring others to join them. Like ioby, you started in Brooklyn and are growing bigger every day. We couldn't be happier about it. - Erin Barnes, Director, IOBY.org*