# 596 Acres 2011-2012 Recap

## Table of Contents

- Our Mission
- NYC Program
- On the Ground Successes
- Online Community Building
- Vacant Public Land In NYC
- Queens and the Rockaways
- The Future: The Bronx & Staten Island
- Working in Other Cities
- Awards and Other Recognitions
- Financial Overview
  - Foundation Support
  - Private Donations
  - How You Can Contribute
- Our Team
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.
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 a Lot in Your Life

Now what?

1. Research the lot.
   - Go to the map at 596acres.org and talk to your neighbors.
   - Call or email the owner.
   - Go to 596acres.org for a script to help with your conversation.

2. Find out who owns the lot.
   - The lot could be privately-owned or owned by one of 16 government agencies.
   - Talk to your friends and neighbors.

3. Draw some press from the community board and the borough president's office.
   - Build a record of support.
   - Get letters from local city organizations.

4. Share your vision.
   - Present your plan to all the stakeholders.
   - This includes the community board, your city council rep, the district leader, and the people in your neighborhood.

5. Make letterhead.
   - Use it. Write thank you notes and emails.

6. Sign the license agreement.
   - You are totally legit, or almost or just enough anyway.

7. Get the key.
   - Grow something!

8. Raise money.
   - Use 108y.org. They are friends of 596 acres and a non-profit. They are set up to be your fiscal sponsor and have a nice website for raising money online. It's easy.

9. Get insurance.
   - 596acres.org can help you get insurance for free.

10. Put it on the map.
    - Figure out what your group is going to do in the space first & make specific plans.
    - Perhaps... prepare to use the space.

11. Make a meeting.
    - Establish a core group of at least 10 people, plan the next meeting.

12. Give yourselves a name.
    - You have to start building a record of your organizations.

13. Identify a shared vision.
    - Write a mission statement.

    - Hold some meetings for everyone, some to get specific things done. Your group's idea will change. Be open to it.

15. Start a petition.
    - Meet more people in your hood. Get their names, addresses, and contact info.

    - 596acres.org can help you get insurance for free.

Design by Hannah Learner - hlearner2@gmail.com
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 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.
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.
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%).
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/
YOU'VE FOUND THE LOT IN YOUR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Research the lot.

Go to the map at 596acres.org and talk to your neighbors.

Call or email the owner.

Contact 596 acres.org for a script to help with your conversation first. Ask if the owner is interested. Find out who owns the lot. It could be privately-owned or owned by one of the government agencies. (This is more comprehensive.)

Find out who's interested in who has already known the history of the lot. Talk to your friends and neighbors.

Come to a learning group from other groups. Have a meeting.

Establish a core group of at least 10 people.
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!
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.
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

Total Expenses: $117,193
- Operations Personnel: $35,500
- Operations Supplies & Services: $3,286
- Program Personnel: $75,760
- Program Supplies & Services: $2,647

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 Shifman, 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