

596ACRES.



2016

ANNUAL REPORT

462 HALSEY
COMMUNITY GARDEN

ALL WELCOME!

Please come in

PETS must be on a
LEASH

Winter Hours → Saturday
Nov 1 - April Only
Compost Drop-off → 10am - 3pm

 EVENTS 
COME ON IN
FREE BLACK WORKERS
LIBRARY 
IS HERE
TODAY !!!


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The Year in Review: Our Impact in 2016

“I would like to take this time to thank Paula and anyone else involved in posting the lots I am involved in for all of the pictures and valuable information connected to the lots. Thank you for letting me be a part of this amazing journey.” — Wanda, Rockaway

Since 2011, 596 Acres has worked across New York City’s five boroughs to ensure that people living in our neighborhoods have access to the vacant public land around them. Nothing happens without a place. We helped neighbors create three brand new places in 2016, bringing the total number we have directly helped neighbors transform to 37 since 2011. Dozens of other successful campaigns around the city were started with accurate information from LivingLotsNYC.org or seeded by our signs on fences.

Communal land stewardship imparts unforgettable lessons in how to work together to make the world better, one lot at a time. Thousands of New Yorkers with different backgrounds and skills have united to grow produce, turn food scraps into soil, host gatherings, program arts and

culture events, and take care of themselves and each other. Connections made through creating and managing community spaces are the foundations of a strong, just and equitable city.

Resilience depends on the strength of our communities; community strength depends on community spaces. This past year 596 has tirelessly supported communities using land to build their strength.

How We Work: The Data in Action

We started 2016 with a huge victory: we helped residents permanently preserve 36 community spaces across New York City. Many were spaces we helped neighbors create out of vacant public land since 2011, and some had been community gardens and farms for much longer than that.

This success was a response

to the threat posed by Mayor Bill de Blasio’s Housing Plan. In January 2015, NYC’s Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) quietly published a list of 181 “vacant” properties that intended for sale for \$1 to housing developers. We read the it. Cross-referencing its list with the LivingLotsNYC.org database, we learned that 18 of the lots offered for sale were active community gardens and farms. We sounded the alarm: we told the NYC Parks Department, called the stewards of the impacted sites, informed

City Council Members of the proposed garden-closings in their districts, activated our partners in the gardening and greening communities, and published a list and map of these threatened community spaces.

In February, over 150 New Yorkers rallied on the steps of City Hall, joined by City Council Members Antonio Reynoso and Robert Cornegy. What followed was a year-long campaign that included community boards, City Council and advocates in every level of the administration.



On December 30, 2015, the NYC Departments of Parks and Housing Preservation and Development agreed to permanently preserve 15 of the gardens on the list in the NYC Parks inventory. Community pressure was so great that the list was extended to 21 additional community spaces that had

not been offered to developers yet but were at risk because the City considered them temporary. A huge win: 36 community spaces transferred to the NYC Parks Department for permanent preservation and community stewardship.



Manhattan:

- The Electric Ladybug Garden in Harlem
- Henry Garnet Garden
- Harlem Valley Garden
- Casa Frela Sculpture Garden
- Siempre Verde Garden

Brooklyn:

- Chestnut Street Garden
- Ashford Teaching Garden
- Ashford Variety Garden
- South Brooklyn Children's Garden
- Pirate's Cove Community Garden
- Java Street Garden
- Saratoga Farm
- La Casita Verde
- Patchen Community Square
- Halsey Ralph Howard Community Garden
- 462 Halsey Community Farm
- Willoughby Avenue Garden
- EL Garden

Brownsville Student Farm Project

- Ten Neighbors Garden
- Green Valley Community Farm
- Imani II Garden
- Isabahlia Garden
- James McKeather Garden
- Prophecy Garden
- President Street Garden
- East 43rd Street Block Association Garden
- Hattie Carthan Herban Farm
- Her-King Alagantic Garden
- Positive Seeds of Life Garden
- Surfside Garden
- Pagan's Garden

Queens:

- McKinley's Children Garden

Bronx:

- Libertad Urban Farm
- Rincon Criollo
- Havemeyer Garden

This was a vacant lot full of weeds and garbage when we put signs on the rusty fence surrounding it in the summer of 2011. Neighbors took notice. They contacted us. We connected them with one another. They collaborated and built a garden, started a community compost program, iterated, experimented and developed a community farm.

In January 2015, NYC's Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) quietly published a list of 181 "vacant" properties that intended for sale for \$1

to housing developers. We read it. We organized and won the transfer of the lot to New York City Department of Parks & Recreation for permanent preservation as a community-stewarded growing space.

Now this community can rely on this anchor institution to be there for their support and with their love for years to come. In 2017, the space is eligible for capital improvements. They will finally be getting a more welcoming official Parks Department fence via GreenThumb.





Winning! #eminentdomain4good

Eminent domain is the power of the state to take possession of private property for public use. For over two hundred years, eminent domain has been used to create New York's parks and open spaces. Prospect Park, Central Park, Astor Place and over 350 other parks and open spaces were created when the City used its power.

We met Prospect Lefferts neighbors ready to take on a lot full of trash on their block in 2012. The City refused to intervene: the lot was “private property.” But the last known owner had passed away twenty years before, leaving a home that subsequently burned to the ground, and an unsettled estate. The neighbors cleared the garbage away and started growing. They hung a swing from the branches of the decades-old willow tree and started a community compost program,

transforming food scraps from local home kitchens into healthy growing soils. Our hypothesis was this: if we organize, we can convince the City to use eminent domain to preserve the value that residents create when they transform abandoned and neglected vacant lots into community spaces.

In 2016, the city had set aside \$1.25 million for the Department of Parks and Recreation to acquire the lot for permanent preservation as parkland. We continue to support the community as they battle speculators' claims for the property and organize to support the Department's Uniform Land Use Review Process (ULRUP) to formally approve acquisition.



The Tax Lien Sale

Hundreds of community spaces are currently at risk of disappearing due to the Department of Finance's tax lien sale. Each year, New York City sells between \$70 and \$120 million in unpaid property tax debt to a private trust in the Department of Finance tax-lien sale. This sale includes

debt against properties owned by charitable organizations that act as key community hubs—daycares, gardens, churches—that are, under the New York State Constitution, entitled to remain exempt from property taxes. And it includes debt against a couple thousand vacant and abandoned properties with no owner to hold accountable.¹

596 Acres is advocating for the exemption of community-owned properties and vacant lots with absentee owners from future sales. We are also working to mitigate the harm



Following the hearing, the weak bill that was its subject, Intro 1182, was significantly expanded, reflecting many of our requests, and then signed into law. We asked for and got: an online, public, searchable database of any properties with deed restrictions placed since 1966; notification of any deed restriction removal request to the local Council Member, Community Board and Borough President; a new rule that all removal request must be reviewed the potential impact of the request on the neighborhood, the availability of community-based services and affordable housing. Previously, there was no public information about deed restrictions, no notification requirements, and the only review conducted had been of the financial value of the restriction.

of the 2016 lien sale, which included 89 properties owned by churches, daycare centers, mosques, community gardens organizations, non-profit developers, and veterans' organizations. All of them are entitled to tax exemption under New York State Law.

We reached out directly to administrators of organizations we found on the tragic list, facilitated a workshop at which they could interact directly with NYC Department

of Finance staff responsible for exemptions and the lien sale, and alerted Council Members and Community Boards that have specific properties in their districts at risk of foreclosure.

The Garden of Youth in the Bronx was spared from foreclosure when we convinced the City to cancel the debt sold to the trust. The Queens-based Al-Muneer Foundation, denied exemption for their mosque since 2010, was granted its property

tax exemption as a result of our efforts. Dozens of other organizations, including Bed Stuy's Black Veterans for Social Justice and Rockaway's Haven Ministries are in the process of reversing tax liens that put their properties at risk as a result of our data-driven advocacy.²

Deed Restrictions Held for the People by the City

This September, 596 Acres testified before City Council, asking for much stronger rules governing the City lifting deed restrictions than were introduced by members at the time.

1. Paula Segal, "CityViews: Stop the Tax-Lien Sales That Will Destroy Community Gardens". CityLimits.org, May 10, 2011

2. D.W. Gibson, "For Sale: Non-Profits" Urban Omnibus, November 9, 2016.



Intern Projects: Developing the Data

Behind every success community land access campaign is an unfolding story of people sharing a neighborhood. To capture these stories of challenge and success in community spaces, Francisco Miranda conducted a series of interviews with gardens across the city during his internship. His visits helped us gain insights into how

transformed land is impacting neighborhoods that are helping us strategically direct our advocacy going forward.

Shannon Pepper collected and analyzed data about neglected and underused buildings owned by the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation. Her investigation was initiated due to the Sarah D. Roosevelt Park Coalition's Stanton Building Task Force,

a campaign supported via NYCommons, a collaboration of 596 Acres, Common Cause / NY and the Urban Justice Center Community Development Project.

Our initial investigation was of Manhattan's Lower East Side, where we found a dozen buildings that have been

closed since the City's fiscal crisis in the 1970s.³ We set up a system that volunteers can use to report on buildings in other neighborhoods, too. Since then, the data keeps flowing

in and we are discovering underused Parks-owned buildings all over the city. Contact organizers@596acres.org to add buildings in

"As I continue on my visits, I keep trying to challenge different definitions of 'public land' and 'property.' The stories behind the gardens are a strong and compelling testament to how we need to protect them and keep fighting for our right to public land." — Francisco Miranda, Summer 2016 Intern

your Parks that need some attention to the map.

The City keeps giving vacant public vacant land away to for-profit developers for \$1.

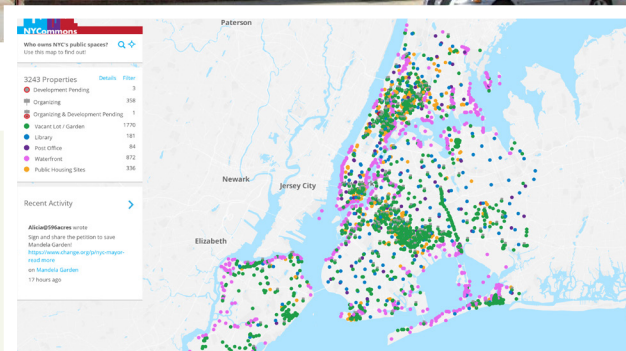


3. Mapping Tool Aims to Keep Public Spaces Public, Next City
BY OSCAR PERRY ABELLO | DECEMBER 21, 2016
<https://nextcity.org/daily/entry/new-platform-maps-nycommons-parks>



Tiera Mack and Claudia Newell used public property information from Automated City Register Information System (ACRIS) and the City Register to figure out just how common this practice is under the current administration. It's pretty common: since 2014, the city has sold 121 lots for \$1, most to private developers.

Anton Cullo gathered information about privately owned US post office and



library buildings, with the goal of identifying aspects of the city's public infrastructure that were in actuality owned by a private entity and at risk of disappearing when leases end.

2016 By The Numbers

Spaces Transformed, Protected, Defended:

37

facilitated transformations of vacant lots into community spaces since 2011.

53

facilitated preservations of community spaces since 2011.

3

Warwick Greenery Grow, Brownsville 9 Moffat, Bushwick Hooper Park, Southside Williamsburg

2

community spaces successfully defended from evictions by speculative developers in 2016: Eldert Street Community Garden in Bushwick & Maple Street Community Garden in Prospect Lefferts.

39

community-stewarded gardens, parks and farms were permanently preserved via transfer to the Parks Department in 2016.

\$1.25M

#eminentdomain-4good funding was secured for the Maple Street Community Garden!



Shaping the Field of Community Land Access Advocacy

In American cities, the opacity of the land use process is frequently exacerbated by a history of racially and economically biased land use policies. A tremendous amount of urban land is owned by the people via our local governments, but it comes with a legacy of redlining, disinvestment, urban renewal, and speculation. Disproportionately locked up, unused public land is located in low-income communities. As community land access advocates, we believe that people should have a say in how the land in their neighborhoods is used and by whom. In New York City, the process by which the government determines how land is used tends

to exclude the average resident. Community land access advocates can create pathways for community members to participate in shaping their neighborhoods and their cities.



We are building the field of community land access advocacy, based on these five pillars:

1. Access to clear, reliable data that can be translated into information about places through online tools and physical signage.
2. Local advocates do not need other people to organize them, but they do need to have their own organizing supported through space and staff resources.
3. Policy advocacy, legal support and campaign development on land use issues, not only to defend endangered community spaces and counsel communities, but also to identify opportunities for vcommunity land access and look at the corporate structuring it takes to put communities in charge. This work includes advocacy for policy changes to increase participatory decision-making surrounding public resources.
4. Tools to do design-based advocacy. With communities, create pictures of the world as it could be and then advocate to make it happen.
5. Best practices sharing between communities. Maintain networks that allow communities to share knowledge and develop relationships with decision-makers, and work with groups after they get access to land to build sustainable community governance for stewards of a public and inclusive resource.

596 Acres and our Collaborators

NYC Community Land Initiative

We've focused on Community Land Trusts through collaboration with NYC Community Land Initiative. NYCCLI is an alliance of social justice and affordable housing organizations and academics committed to winning housing for all New Yorkers. They are laying the groundwork for community land trusts and other non-speculative housing models that promote development of housing and neighborhoods for and with community members not served by the private market.

NYC Real Estate Investment Cooperative (NYC REIC)

The NYC REIC facilitates New Yorkers pooling their money and power to secure space for community, small business, and cultural use in NYC. Consistent with the principles and spirit of the cooperative movement, NYC REIC makes long-term, stabilizing, and transformative investments for the mutual benefit of member-owners and local communities. 596 Acres provided incubation for the start up phase of the NYC REIC (and we still share our phone line!).

Sure We Can #60MillionCans

#60MillionCans is a campaign to secure the future of Sure We Can, a recycling center, community space and sustainability hub, and its community of canners, people who collect cans and bottles from the streets to make a living.

Legacy Lead

Legacy Lead is a conversation co-facilitates between individuals and organizations working to address lead contamination in urban dirt and dust. Legacy Lead is laying the groundwork to develop and implement system-wide best practices for mitigating exposure to heavy metals and remediating lead in soil.

Smiling Hogshead Ranch morphing into the Ranch on Rails

Earlier this year a group of businesses, community organizations, architects, scholars and residents joined together to create the Cutoff Coalition to focus on the adaptive reuse of the Montauk Cutoff in Long Island City, Queens. With 596 Acres meeting facilitation and project management, they put together a 120-page proposal



NYCommons

NYCommons is a collaboration between Common Cause/ NY, the Community Development Project at the Urban Justice Center, and 596 Acres. NYCommons helps New Yorkers participate in decisions about public land and buildings in their neighborhoods. In 2016, we launched a beta version of NYCommons.org, based on the the Living Lots™ source code, which includes public vacant lots, libraries, post offices, waterfronts, and public housing campuses. We also supported groups organizing for control of specific public assets in Staten Island (an unbuilt waterfront park), Red Hook (energy infrastructure and public housing land), and on the Lower East Side (neglected NYC Parks buildings).

for the site. The document outlines innovative plans for urban agriculture, educational programs, and a commercial composting program built on a platform of renewable energy use. A major feature of the plan is the preservation of the existing Smiling Hogshead Ranch, a community-run farm on a spur off of Montauk Cutoff. MTA has agreed to the incremental implementation of the the Ranch on Rails in 2017, adding structures to support a tool lending library and bicycle repair cooperating to the existing Ranch and expanding its territory will be the first step!

News and Achievements

“The thing I love about parks is they really are the last real democratic meeting spaces. Rich people, poor people, diverse up the yin yang, everybody uses a park or walks through it. Just this garden has been so wonderful to have because of the mix it represents, and the possibility of mixing with somebody who doesn’t understand you. You just have the possibility of making common cause with somebody you may not

agree on anything else with, but you do love flowers. Or playing soccer. They are to be treasured and they are to be stewarded enough by the local community so that they feel the ownership that allows them to take care of it.”

- , K Webster, NYCommons organizer, Stanton Building Task Force

Ashoka Fellowship Recognizing Field-Building

“A little love from Montréal. Keep changing the world, one lot at a time, you’re an inspiration to us!” — Lande

This fall Paula Segal was awarded an Ashoka Fellowship, one of 13 people across the country to receive the honor in 2016. Ashoka is the oldest and largest network of social entrepreneurs in the world and it supports fellows in 90 countries whose organizations focus on everything from gun violence to food access to education. The award recognizes global social entrepreneurs who have committed to reforming their

chosen field in wide-reaching and impactful ways. Paula and 596 Acres were recognized for the development of accessible high and low-tech tools, for the way they have repositioned vacant land as an opportunity to share common goods equitably and for the successful creation of a network mobilized to address inequality in New York City and around the world.

Our New Website

In October of this year 596 Acres debuted a new website. The streamlined site makes relevant information easier to find and includes features like a new portfolio site that explains the organization and more targeted information. We’ve also made it easier to find and use our three online advocacy tools: livinglotsnyc.org, nycommons.org, urbanreviewer.org and have included ways for people to engage in the movement in other cities. Stay tuned for updates and check it out and let us know what you think.

Collaboration with Fordham Law School Community Economic Development Clinic & the Fordham Urban Law Center

Founder Paula Z. Segal was a Visiting Instructor at Fordham Law School’s Community Economic Development Clinic and a Fellow at the Fordham Urban Law Center for the year. There, she shared our work with her students, young lawyers in supervised practice. 596 Acres got support for our work protecting community property from the tax lien sale via an opportunity to collaborate to develop a pilot outreach presentation for the NYC Department of Finance Taxpayer Advocate to use

in outreach to Not for Profit administrators and other community leaders. The NYC REIC was represented by student lawyers under Paula’s supervision in developing a corporate structure and regulatory compliance plan. NYC REIC, Inc. is now an independent organization poised to collaborate with communities by pooling small investments to stabilize key cultural, community and work spaces.



In the Collection at Columbia University!

Our print materials were archived into a beautiful exhibition-in-a-box by Booklyn. One box was purchased by David Smiley and Lauren Kogod and donated to the collection of Columbia University’s Avery library.

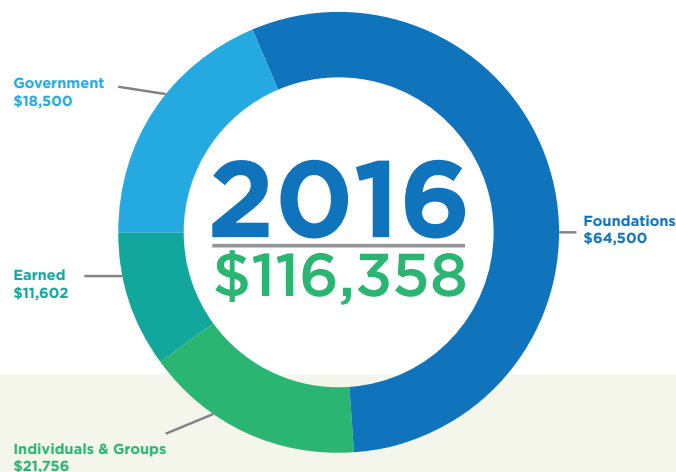
We made an edition of five; the other four are still looking for homes. All our web-based tools have also been included in the Avery library digital archive for scholars to access for decades to come.

Staff

To help support our goals and solidify our impact we hired two new part-time employees in 2016: Executive Assistant Mara Kravitz and Community Land Access Program Organizer Alicia Rodgers. In 2017, we hope to expand both positions to full time.

United States Patent and Trademark Office Recognition
“596 Acres” and “Living Lots” are now USPTO-recognized trademarks that belong to us!

Funding and Finances



Revenue	2011-12*	2013	2014	2015
Individuals & Groups	\$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

Donors, We Thank You

- Todd Arena
- Hannah Arnett
- Sashti Balasundaram
- Bethany Bingham
- Tanya Bley
- Toby Blum-Dobkin
- Wendy Brawer
- Corinne Brenner
- Amy Laura Cahn
- Evan Casper
- Jesse Chan-Norris
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- Lacey Tauber
- Karen Washington
- Heidi Wendel
- Omar Zoheri

Expenses	2011-12*	2013	2014	2015	2016
Personnel	\$6,260	\$35,799	\$75,776	\$95,855	7,900 ****
Other Costs, including contractors	\$5,933	\$7,054	\$16,880	\$22,771	64,438
Admin. Costs/FCNY 9% Service Fee	n/a	\$3,857	waived	waived	waived
Total	\$12,193	\$46,701	\$92,656	\$118,566	\$72,338

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

** Thanks to Ashoka, New York Community Trust and 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 and Antonio Reynoso. Additional funds have been committed for 2017 as well.

**** In 2016, much of 596 Acres' Community Land Access Program labor was donated by Paula Z. Segal.

Staff and Supporters

Staff

Mara Kravitz, Executive Assistant

Alicia Rodgers, Community Land Access Program Organizer

Interns

Francisco Miranda, Summer 2016 Intern

Shannon Pepper, Summer 2016 Intern

Tiera Mack, Summer & Fall 2016 Data Intern

Anton Cullo, Fall 2016 Data Intern

Claudia Newell, Fall 2016 Data Intern

Board of Directors

Paula Z. Segal, Founding Director of 596 Acres

Eric Brelsford, Lead Software Developer and
Data Analyst, 596 Acres

Mary Elizabeth Prall, Former 596 Acres Staff Organizer

Chad Berkowitz, attorney

Patrick Foster, attorney, New York State Department of
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Thomas Hallaran

Tiera Mack

Wendy Brawer

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



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noted

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