

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Vacant Land in the NSA

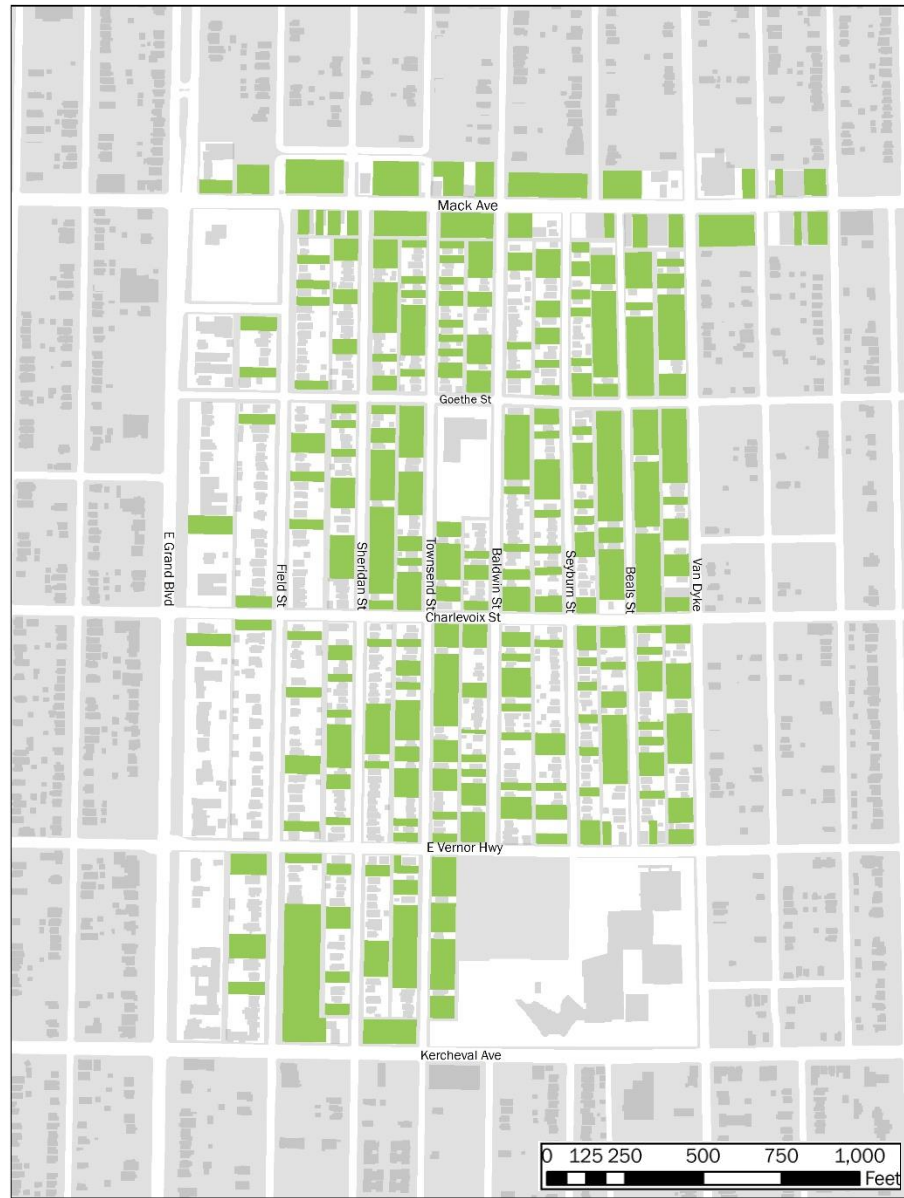


Figure 1.
Green depicts all vacant land in the Islandview NSA

Publicly Owned Vacant Land in the NSA

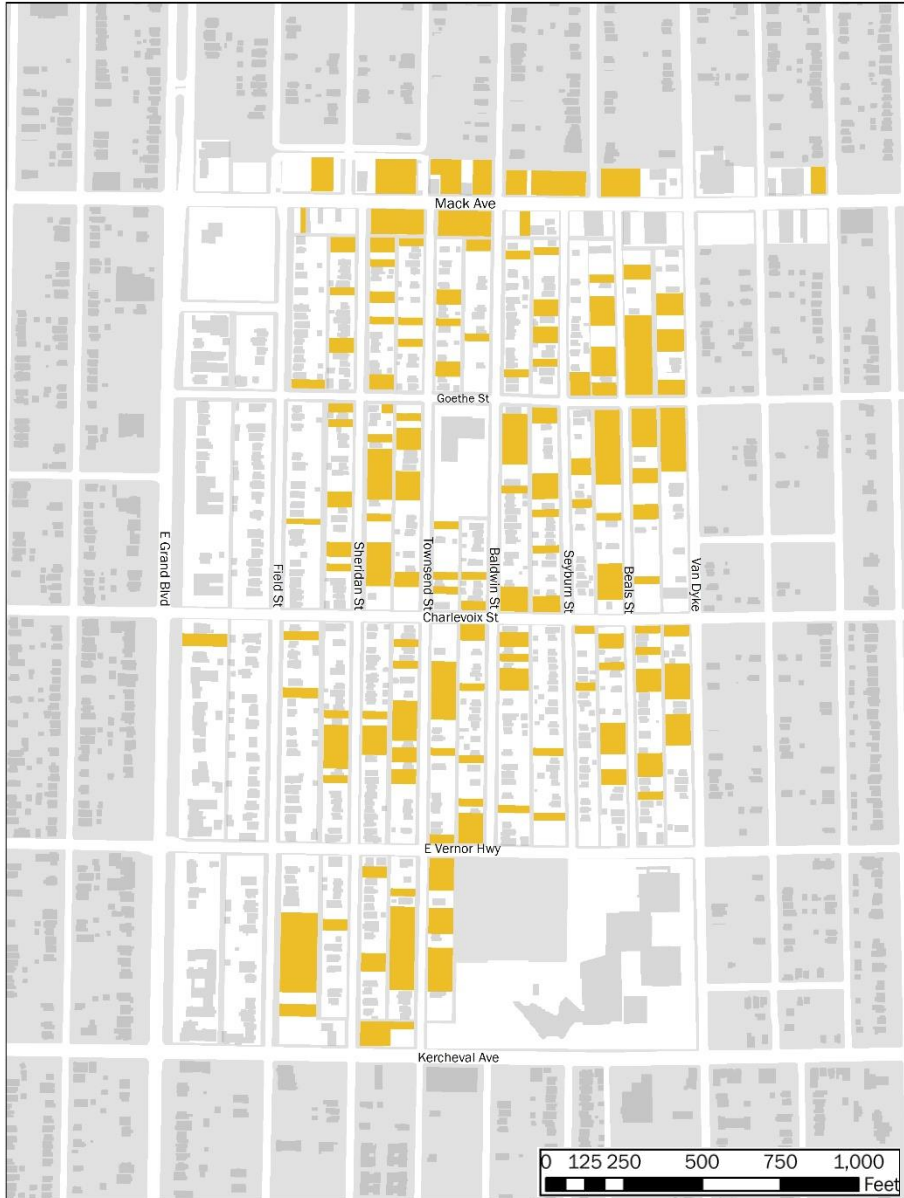


Figure 2.
Yellow depicts vacant land that is publicly owned within the Islandview NSA

WHY A PUBLIC LAND STRATEGY IS NEEDED

Urban planning is about curating a city’s fabric and its land uses to meet resident needs in the near term as well as proactively anticipating needs and aspirations for the city’s future. While the City of Detroit is in the midst of incredible investments in the vertical direction through building renovation, historic preservation, adaptive reuse, and varying scales of redevelopment, there is equal energy and enthusiasm towards Detroit’s horizontal landscape – its unoccupied land, particularly land owned by the City of Detroit.

There is a definitive interest from the existing and emerging Detroit community to purchase publicly owned vacant land for a variety of land-based ventures. Land-based ventures use land for urban agriculture, gardening, beautification, or other productive uses, whether for profit or as a community-based activity. However, there is less clarity regarding the City’s position on its near and long-term aspirations for its land. As a result, applicants wishing to obtain land from the city are often stalled, sometimes indefinitely, as direction and guidance are discussed and deliberated. The cyclical and often inconclusive conversations have brought this challenge to the forefront of City and community conversations. It is the stated intention of the City of Detroit to place land back into the hands of its residents, therefore the City of Detroit is actively working on a Public Land Strategy to proactively untangle decision-making delays and disposition obstacles. The overall objective of the Public Land Strategy is to fully obtain a pulse on the city’s vacant land inventory and identify land bundles the City can be actively marketing for a menu of future land uses to serve and support neighborhood growth and community health.

Until a Public Land Strategy is devised, the City of Detroit will continue to be reliant on an aging Master Plan and Zoning Ordinance to guide its land uses, which may not be reflective of the current development context of present-day Detroit. It is the intention of this Practicum initiative to take a more detailed look at one neighborhood region, where the City has a large volume of vacant land holdings, and provide a framework that will support strategic planning in Islandview and spur continued investments in the surrounding neighborhoods.

NEIGHBORHOOD STABILIZATION AREA (NSA)

PROJECT BOUNDARY

Mack Avenue (North); Van Dyke Street (East); Kercheval Avenue (South),
E. Grand Boulevard (West)

INVENTORY

First, an inventory of the planning area’s vacant parcels was taken, and important information about each parcel was compiled. Utilizing GIS and Google Earth technology, an active database of the NSA’s vacant parcels was built in ArcMap. This work will serve as the foundation for a larger vacant land database to be used citywide. The database shows each vacant parcel’s parcel ID, address, zoning, zoning description, vacancy, ownership, acreage, readiness ranking total score, and the recommended use for the parcel. There are 1,129 parcels included in the database.

LOCATING LAND COMBINATIONS

An inventory of vacant land only reveals the quantity and volume that the City needs to address. However, it is important to evaluate what land combinations there are that would be prime for development – traditional and/or land-based development. Using the City of Detroit Planning and Development Department's "vacant land typologies" system, larger aggregations of publicly owned parcels, or "bundles," were identified. Certain bundle layouts are more attractive for development; in this case, "A," "F," and G-Bundles within residential neighborhoods and E-Bundles along commercial corridors. For this reason, this report focuses only on these bundle typologies. 39 publicly owned A, F, G and E type bundles were identified within the NSA.

PUBLIC LAND CATALOG

An online catalog for the NSA’s publicly owned bundles was also created, documenting the variables noted in the database, as well as relevant GIS maps and Google Street View images of each parcel within the bundle. This catalog will be used to visually market available bundles to interested developers and can be accessed both through the ArcMap database and on the city’s website. Section 5.2 of this report also documents identified bundles in print form.

RANKING METHODOLOGY

Next, a "Readiness Ranking Formula" was developed to gauge the ease with which each bundle could be developed from a transactional perspective. The formula used to determine each bundle’s rank is:

$$R + N + V = T$$

where R = Site Readiness, N = Number of Owners, V = Estimated Assessed Value, and T = Total Score. A full description of this formula can be found on page 115. This ranking system provides a snapshot of the challenges or lack thereof associated with the development of vacant bundles within the NSA. The bundles with fewer obstacles to acquisition will have a lower Total Score and will be prioritized for disposition.



Figure 3. Islandview/Greater Villages and the NSA within the City of Detroit

LAND-BASED VENTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

IDENTIFY DEVELOPMENT AND PHASING PRIORITIES

Based on each bundle's ranking, as well as the City of Detroit's future development priorities, 4 bundles were identified as best-suited for near-term land-based ventures. The recommendations for their development as land-based ventures are based on the Center for Community Progress's report as well as a comprehensive literature review and successful case studies.

TARGETED LAND-BASED VENTURES – RESEARCH AND CASE STUDIES

One of the primary reports that guides this practicum project was written by the Center for Community Progress (CCP). Their report identifies key barriers to implementing land-based ventures in the Islandview/Greater Villages area. The information in this report was foundational for this project as the practicum team sought to narrow down from 300+ parcels of land to four final recommendations. The urban agriculture recommendations were based largely off existing ventures in Detroit, while the community garden recommendations looked outside Michigan for case studies. Other literature that was reviewed focused on the solutions that land-based ventures can provide for underserved urban areas.

PHASE 1: PUBLIC LAND RECOMMENDATIONS & NEAR-TERM DISPOSITION

This research provided the basis for the team's recommended Public Land Strategy for the bundles identified. The team recommends that bundle F16 become a community garden associated with the community anchor East Covenant School, which will provide children and older community members alike a safe space to further their environmental education. Commercial urban agriculture is recommended for Bundle F19, which, when partnered with the Pocket Gathering Space recommended for Bundle E1, will provide NSA residents with access to fresh produce grown within their own neighborhood. Along Mack Avenue, a temporary community garden is recommended to make the corridor more visually appealing to traffic commuters and pedestrians alike.

NEIGHBORHOOD & COMMUNITY IMPACT PROJECTIONS

The implementation of the practicum team's recommendations will positively impact the NSA, as well as strengthen the Islandview Neighborhood as a whole. This section outlines the expected direct and indirect impacts of this Public Land Strategy and outlines the significance of our recommendations. Due to the practicum team's limited scope and timeframe, this report projects a variety of impacts but does not present a quantitative analysis. Further evaluation and additional projections are recommended.

Islandview/Greater Villages Neighborhood Stabilization Area (NSA)



Figure 4.