Refurbishing the Rust Belt: Vacant Land Reuse in Baltimore, Maryland and Cleveland, Ohio

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Master of Arts

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This thesis titled
Refurbishing the Rust Belt: Vacant Land Reuse in Baltimore, Maryland and Cleveland, Ohio

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Abstract

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Refurbishing the Rust Belt: Vacant Land Reuse in Baltimore, Maryland and Cleveland, Ohio

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Vacancy contributes to a downward spiral of blight that many cities in the old American industrial belt struggle to escape. While the causes of vacancy and the effects – economic, environmental, and social – of vacant properties are well covered in the literature, successful reuse strategies and related supportive networks are not. This research investigates and compares the land reuse process in Baltimore, Maryland, and Cleveland, Ohio, two cities with large amounts of vacant property. Stakeholders in both cities utilized a variety of land interventions in reuse projects, with the most common being the establishment of greenspaces, though the obstacles facing successful reuse varied between and within the cities. Governance networks and interorganizational relationships play an important role in reuse, and each city has opportunities to enhance and build upon these to aid future work.
Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank my respondents, who took time out of their busy schedules to share their expertise and experiences with me. This study would not have been possible without them. I especially would like to thank Parks and People, in particular Ashe Smith, for providing me with a great introduction to Baltimore. Secondly, I would like to acknowledge the financial support of both Ohio University and the National Science Foundation’s Long-Term Ecological Research Program (grant number DEB-1027188), as well as those who secured this funding: Dr. Geoffrey Buckley, my advisor, and Dr. J. Morgan Grove, of the USDA Forest Service. I am grateful to not only my committee members, but all the faculty and staff of the Ohio University Department of Geography for providing guidance and support. Finally, I am forever indebted to and greatly appreciate my friends and especially my family for their encouragement. Thank you.
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List of Abbreviations

BES: Baltimore Ecosystem Study
BFA: Baltimore Farm Alliance
BHPC: Baltimore Homeownership Preservation Coalition
BOP: Baltimore Orchard Project
CAQDAS: Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software
CCLB: Cuyahoga County Land Bank
CDBG: Community Development Block Grant
CDC: Community development corporation
CLC: Community Law Center
CMOS: Community-managed open space
CUDC: Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative
CWRU: Case Western Reserve University
GI: Green infrastructure
HUD: Housing and Urban Development
IRB: Institutional Review Board
JHU: Johns Hopkins University
KSU: Kent State University
MICA: Maryland Institute College of Art
MSU: Morgan State University
NDC: Neighborhood Design Center
NEOSRD: Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District
NPI: Neighborhood Progress, Inc.
ORC: Ohio Revised Code
OSU: Ohio State University
RTA: Regional Transit Authority
SCFBC: Stockyard, Clark-Fulton & Brooklyn Centre
SVD: Slavic Village Development
T6B: The 6th Branch
UMB: University of Maryland, Baltimore
UMBC: University of Maryland, Baltimore County
V2V: Vacants to Value
VAPAC: Vacant and Abandoned Property Action Council
WRLC: Western Reserve Land Conservancy
Chapter 1: Introduction

Cities in the old manufacturing belt of the U.S. have been losing population since the 1950s. These cities, colloquially known as Rust Belt cities (see Appendix E for discussion of this term), have generally been characterized by Short and Mussman (2014) as having populations in “steady decline.” Both Baltimore, Maryland, and Cleveland, Ohio have experienced steadily declining populations since their pre-suburban era peaks in 1950. Figure 1 illustrates the severity of this decline.

Figure 1: Baltimore and Cleveland’s populations from 1940–2010. Baltimore’s population decreased by approximately 33% and Cleveland’s by approximately 55% from 1950 to 2010. Data from Gibson (1998) and United States Census Bureau (2012).
Population loss is relatively uncommon in American urban history, despite its current effects on some deindustrialized cities. Beauregard (2009) delineates three periods of U.S. urban population trends. The first, from 1820 to 1920, is characterized by overall population growth. With few exceptions, this was a period of urban expansion.

The second period, from 1950 to 1980, is marked by urban population decline. Forty-two of the hundred largest U.S. cities experienced at least a decade of decline, and twenty-four of those lost population for two or three decades. It should be noted that many cities, especially those in the West, did not undergo any loss during this period. A shift back to urban growth started in 1990 and continues to this day. During this interval, only twelve major U.S. cities lost population. However, of these twelve cities, nine had previously suffered through three decades of population loss from 1950 to 1980. These cities are: Baltimore, Buffalo, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Detroit, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, and Washington, D.C. With the exception of Washington, these cities are generally considered to be part of the Rust Belt. Similarly, their economies have suffered since the American economy began deindustrializing in the 1970s, providing a strong migratory push factor out of the city (Moretti 2012). Attitudes towards them have turned negative as well. Baltimore, nicknamed “Charm City” in the 1970s, currently struggles to live up to this moniker (Sandler 1995). Cleveland, once known as “The Best Location in the Nation,” has been described as “fight[ing] to make sure we don't become the worst” (Larkin 2009).

Cities like Baltimore and Cleveland have infrastructures designed to support much larger populations than their current ones, which has inevitably caused a number of
problems. Declining tax bases lead to cuts in civic services such as road maintenance and fire protection. Delinquent properties sit vacant, contribute to blight, and attract crime. Citizens who can afford to often relocate to municipalities with fewer problems, shrinking the tax base further. “Shrinking cities” are caught in a downward spiral. However, these same cities have an opportunity to overcome their challenges in a way that cultivates a more sustainable and resilient urban environment (Schilling and Logan 2008).

The purpose of this research is to investigate how vacant property is being reused in Baltimore, Maryland, and Cleveland, Ohio. One of the most visible effects of urban population loss is a subsequent rise in abandoned properties and vacant lots. While there is no standard definition of a vacant lot (U.S. Government Accountability Office 2011; Whitaker and Fitzpatrick 2012), they all include an uninhabited structure or the former presence of one, and usually this uninhabited structure poses some public safety threat. From a more theoretical viewpoint, such spaces can be viewed as “urban voids” or “terrain vague” (Hall 2010). These are spaces that were once useful in some way but are now physical manifestations of a city’s distress.

The problems of vacant buildings are strongly connected to those of vacant lots and they cannot be cleanly separated from each other, so both are discussed in this thesis. The issue’s scale is staggering and it is difficult to assess the true amount of vacant property. Some properties are privately owned, whereas others have reverted to city ownership. For example, Baltimore has 17,169 city-owned vacant lots (City of Baltimore 2013) but nearly 30,000 abandoned properties in total (Baltimore Office of Sustainability
2013). Cleveland has an estimated 15,000 vacant buildings, along with 3,300 acres of vacant land (City of Cleveland Office of Sustainability 2010).

Research Questions

Vacant properties present both challenges and opportunities for cities. This research seeks to answer the following questions on this topic:

1) How do stakeholders in Baltimore and Cleveland view vacant property? What problems do these properties cause?

2) How has vacant property been successfully reused? What are the obstacles to success and how are they being overcome?

3) What networks do stakeholders utilize to aid in reuse efforts? What do stakeholders envision their cities as with the input of successful reuse programs?
Chapter 2: Methods

Study Sites and Research Background

Cleveland and Baltimore were chosen as study sites for several reasons. Both have experienced large, sustained population and job loss. Both cities have large amounts of vacant land. Each city has a sustainability plan and a sustainability office that lists vacant land as a major problem, so each government is invested in finding progressive solutions. Both have existing local resources such as foundations and community non-profit networks.

However, the cities differ enough to present an interesting comparison. Cleveland is in a region where almost all nearby metropolitan areas have experienced similar decline in population and employment. In recent times, Ohio has done poorly in terms of population growth and job creation, and the closest out-of-state metropolitan regions, Detroit and Pittsburgh, face varying degrees of these usual Rust Belt problems. Baltimore is part of a largely stable urban conglomeration on the East Coast, and its proximity to globally and nationally prominent cities such as New York and Washington, D.C. places it in a different position and context compared to Cleveland. Baltimore has its economic problems, but Cleveland’s poverty rates are notably high. Cleveland’s government also differs from Baltimore’s in that Cleveland is part of a larger county, Cuyahoga, and Baltimore is an independent city. Figure 2 highlights some demographics for further comparison.
Figure 2: Selected demographics for Baltimore and Cleveland. Both cities have notable economic issues, though Cleveland’s economic indicators signal more distress, particularly its child poverty rate. Data from 2008-2012 American Community Survey from U.S. Census Bureau (2013).

As a native of the Cleveland area I am familiar with the city. Due to previous experience in the city’s non-profit sector, I had an idea of what I wanted to study and where to start the research process. Through my advisor, I was introduced to the National Science Foundation's Long-Term Ecological Research Baltimore Ecosystem Study (BES). During my first year at Ohio University, I had an opportunity to learn more about the city and to establish contacts with people involved in a number of vacant lot reuses.

The main data collection method utilized for this thesis was semi-structured interviewing, but site visits and archival research were also used to place it in the appropriate context. Since this research involved human subjects, I submitted my research plan Ohio University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval. However, it fell under IRB category exemption 2, since the information collected was not sensitive.
The study was assigned IRB number 13E164 by the Ohio University Office of Research Compliance. Appendix C includes the IRB approval information for this research.

Participant Selection

Participants for this study were selected based on their involvement in vacant land reuse programs. In Cleveland, I initially went through community development corporation (CDC) websites and contacted the person whose job title seemed the most relevant to vacant land. Some CDCs had a dedicated position for vacant land, such as “Vacant Land Manager,” whereas for others I contacted a general email or an administrative assistant who directed me to the best person. In Baltimore, where the CDC network is not as developed as that in Cleveland, I began by utilizing contacts made through the BES. CDCs and other formal neighborhood organizations were the easiest to contact and were the best about responding and agreeing to be interviewed. I followed Dunn’s (2010) outline for contacting possible interview respondents.

I used a snowball sampling method, where a respondent who “fulfills the theoretical criteria” helps the researcher locate another respondent through their social networks (Warren 2002, 87). Before the study, I had assumed that this sampling method would help me gain access to involved neighborhood residents who were not formally employed in neighborhood redevelopment or community work and who I had little ability to contact on my own. Unfortunately this was not the case. However, it did aid me in accessing local government officials such as council members and local government employees. Snowball sampling gave me an “in” that allowed me to bypass a problem that
some of my respondents discussed: getting someone from a bureaucratic office to respond to calls and emails. This sampling method was more useful to me in Baltimore, where I did not have the same background knowledge of the city, its government, and its non-profit sector.

Aside from CDC employees, my respondents included city councilpeople, policy advisors, planning practitioners, neighborhood citizens, and employees and volunteers of other neighborhood and urban design organizations and non-profits. A list of participants and their relation to vacant land is included in Appendix A. I did not speak to as many residents spearheading their own vacant land reuses as I initially thought I would. Often, I could not find current contact information for them, or, if I did, they did not respond. However, I was able to access a wider variety of viewpoints for background purposes in Cleveland through the ReImagining Cleveland project’s interview archive and in Baltimore through the Enoch Pratt Free Library’s newspaper archive and collected resources (Neighborhood Progress Inc. 2010; Enoch Pratt Free Library 2014).

Respondents were involved in some capacity with a wide variety of organizations. Some had a city-wide mission while others were limited to one or a few neighborhoods. Though funding is an issue throughout the community development sector, some organizations had many resources, whereas others did not even have a paid employee and were completely operated by volunteers. Some respondents took a more theoretical approach towards the study of vacant land, while others were more hands-on. This diversity served the study well. A table of participants noting their organization, the type of organization, the scope of their organization, and their titles is included as Table 1.
Table 1: A comparison of interview respondents’ cities and organizations. Sutter and Weslian; Westbrook and Jakimowicz; and Clarke and Leahy were interviewed together. Landymore was interviewed twice – once individually and once with Culbertson and Hynson.

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<th>Respondent</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Organization(s)</th>
<th>Organization Type(s)</th>
<th>Relevant Position(s)</th>
<th>Geographic Scope</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Noah Sutter</td>
<td>Cleveland</td>
<td>Slavic Village Development</td>
<td>Non-profit - CDC</td>
<td>Vacant Land Manager</td>
<td>Several Neighborhoods</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marlane Weslian</td>
<td>Cleveland</td>
<td>Slavic Village Development; Resident</td>
<td>Non-profit - CDC; Area Resident</td>
<td>Neighborhood Development Officer; Resident</td>
<td>Several Neighborhoods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brain Cummins</td>
<td>Cleveland</td>
<td>Cleveland City Council</td>
<td>Government - Legislative</td>
<td>Councilman</td>
<td>Ward - Several Neighborhoods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sasha Ottoson-Deal</td>
<td>Cleveland</td>
<td>SCFBC Community Development Office (CDC)</td>
<td>Non-profit - CDC</td>
<td>Development Specialist</td>
<td>Several Neighborhoods</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frank Ford</td>
<td>Cleveland</td>
<td>Thriving Communities Institute; formerly at Neighborhood Progress Inc.</td>
<td>Non-profit - Conservation; Non-profit - Intermediary</td>
<td>Senior Policy Advisor; former Senior Vice President for Research and Development</td>
<td>State; City</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jay Westbrook</td>
<td>Cleveland</td>
<td>Cleveland City Council</td>
<td>Government - Legislative</td>
<td>Councilman</td>
<td>Ward - Several Neighborhoods; City</td>
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<td>Bob Jakimowicz</td>
<td>Cleveland</td>
<td>City of Cleveland</td>
<td>Government - Operations</td>
<td>Planning and Development Advisor</td>
<td>City</td>
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<td>Lilah Zautner</td>
<td>Cleveland</td>
<td>Cuyahoga County Land Bank; formerly at Neighborhood Progress Inc.</td>
<td>Public Authority - Land Bank; Non-profit - Intermediary</td>
<td>Manager of Special Projects and Land Reuse; former Sustainability Manager</td>
<td>County; City</td>
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<td>Joel Wimbiscus</td>
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<td>LAND Studio</td>
<td>Non-profit - Design</td>
<td>Project Manager</td>
<td>City</td>
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<td>Anita Brindza</td>
<td>Cleveland</td>
<td>Cudell Improvement</td>
<td>Non-profit - CDC</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>Several Neighborhoods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terry Schwarz</td>
<td>Cleveland</td>
<td>Kent State University; Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative</td>
<td>Academic / Non-profit - Design</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Several Counties</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nayeli Garcia</td>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>Resident; Waverly Improvement Association</td>
<td>Area Resident; Community Organization - Neighborhood</td>
<td>Resident; Board Member</td>
<td>Neighborhood</td>
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<td>Mowbray</td>
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<td>Nina Beth Cardin</td>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>Baltimore Orchard Project</td>
<td>Non-profit - Local Food</td>
<td>Founder</td>
<td>City</td>
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<td>Ashe Smith</td>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>Parks and People; Whitelock Farm</td>
<td>Non-profit - Foundation; Community Organization - Local Food</td>
<td>Community Greening Coordinator; Founding Member</td>
<td>City; Neighborhood</td>
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<td><strong>Mark Cameron</strong></td>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>Baltimore Office of Sustainability</td>
<td>Government - Operations</td>
<td>Landscape Architect</td>
<td>City</td>
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<td><strong>Tracey Barbour-Gillett</strong></td>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>Abell Foundation; Baltimore Homeownership Preservation Coalition</td>
<td>Non-profit - Foundation; Non-profit - Intermediary</td>
<td>Community Development Program Officer; Vice Chair</td>
<td>State; City</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Dave Landymore</strong></td>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>The 6th Branch</td>
<td>Non-profit - Local</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>Neighborhood</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Becky Witt</strong></td>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>Community Law Center</td>
<td>Non-profit - Legal</td>
<td>Staff Attorney</td>
<td>City</td>
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<td><strong>Mary Pat Clarke</strong></td>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>Baltimore City Council</td>
<td>Government - Legislative</td>
<td>Councilwoman</td>
<td>Ward - Several Neighborhoods</td>
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<td><strong>Cindy Leahy</strong></td>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>Baltimore City Council; North Baltimore Neighborhood Coalition</td>
<td>Government - Support; Community Organization - Neighborhood</td>
<td>Council Assistant; Chair</td>
<td>Ward - Several Neighborhoods; Several Neighborhoods</td>
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<td><strong>Nick Culberston</strong></td>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>The 6th Branch</td>
<td>Non-profit - Local</td>
<td>Executive Board Co-Chair</td>
<td>Neighborhood</td>
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<td><strong>Briony Hynson</strong></td>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>Neighborhood Design Center; Maryland Institute College of Art; The 6th Branch</td>
<td>Non-profit - Design; Academic; Non-profit - Local</td>
<td>Deputy Director; Board Member</td>
<td>County; City; Neighborhood</td>
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Procedures and Analysis

This research utilized a semi-structured protocol for qualitative interviewing as outlined by Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte (1999) and Dunn (2010). On the topic of general interview methods, Warren (2002) says “qualitative interviewing is a kind of guided conversation… in which the researcher carefully listens ‘so as to hear the meaning’ of what is being conveyed” (85). Fontana and Frey (1994) note that the method can be used for a variety of purposes, including the collection of academic data, and that “its scope can be the understanding of an individual or a group perspective” (361). Dunn (2010) agrees, commenting that interviews are “an excellent method of gaining access to information about events, opinions, and experiences” and are used to “fill gaps in knowledge that other methods… are unable to bridge efficaciously” (102). Most importantly for this thesis, interviews “collect a diversity of meaning, opinion, and experiences… [and] provide insights into the differing opinions or debates within a group, but they can also reveal consensus on others” (Dunn 2010, 102). Since this study aims to compare the experiences and perspectives of respondents on an intra- and inter-city basis, qualitative interviewing is a sound methodological choice.

Semi-structured interview protocols, in terms of flexibility, fall between structured interviewing, where a set of questions is rigidly adhered to, and unstructured interviewing, where questions are “almost entirely determined by the informant’s responses” (Dunn 2010, 111). Dunn (2010) explains that semi-structured interviewing is “organized around ordered but flexible questioning” and that the questions are more “content-focused” rather than informant-focused (110). The focus on content, while still allowing for individual variation, was beneficial to this work. It allowed me to set a
baseline for comparison across certain topics, as all respondents were asked the same set of original questions. Examples of topics I discussed with every participant included their definition of a vacant lot and intra- and intercity idea-sharing networks regarding vacant land reuse.

Choosing a semi-structured interview protocol also ensured I was able to follow up on any interesting comments respondents made and tailor questions to respondents’ specific experiences. It also allowed me enough flexibility to accommodate changes in the interview process, such as an unexpected second respondent invited by the first to their interview or the necessity to complete some interviews by phone. I moved towards a looser framework as my research progressed, as I became more experienced in the process, and as I realized some questions were not eliciting any useful information. However, this was not to the extent where the interviews would be considered unstructured, as all respondents were still asked a core set of questions. A sample interview protocol is included as Appendix B.

Interviews were conducted in person or via telephone and recorded. The in-person interviews were usually at a respondent’s place of work. I preferred to do interviews in person, but due to time and financial constraints, this was not always possible, particularly for Baltimore participants. Respondents were given a copy of the IRB consent form created for this study. If the interview was in person, I possess a signed copy. If the interview was via phone, I sent a copy of the form several days before the interview, answered any questions, and recorded their verbal consent. The interviews
with Cleveland participants were conducted between July and October 2013, and those with Baltimore participants were conducted between October 2013 and January 2014.

In addition to recording, I took notes during interviews, especially to remember follow-up questions, areas of more research, and possible future contacts. Dunn (2010) points out that some interviewees may be inhibited by the presence of an audio recorder in a formal situation, particularly when discussing sensitive topics. However, this study, while important, was not controversial, and the recorder did not seem to inhibit respondents when I talked to them in person, as many of them have been interviewed by the media or other researchers previously. Some respondents reacted favorably to the IRB process, with one saying they wished the press had such standards.

I transcribed interviews using a free software called Listen N Write (CNET 2011). It allowed me to use keyboard shortcuts instead of a transcription pedal to pause my audio recordings. I coded my transcriptions using a free software called Weft QDA, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) program designed for coding text documents (Fenton 2013). The usefulness of CAQDAS analysis tools in coding is outlined by Peace and van Hoven (2010), but in essence it simplifies and streamlines the process.

I followed coding and memoing procedures described by Saldaña (2009), Cope (2010), and Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011). Coding is necessary to the qualitative research process as research “produces masses of data in forms that are difficult to interpret or digest all at once,” such as the interview transcriptions in this thesis (Cope
2010, 284). Memos allow researchers to “identify and explore theoretical directions and possibilities” (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011, 123) and aid in the analysis of data.

I also visited vacant land reuse sites, both with those involved in their rehabilitation and on my own. I visited a few of these sites twice, showing seasonal changes in the appearance of their greenspace.

Some of the sources in this thesis, particularly those that deal with current reuses, are pulled from urban planning and policy blogs and news sites. While these are not traditional scholarly resources, I found them valuable due to the contemporary and evolving nature of vacant land reuse and other scholarly texts did not address the most recent developments in this field.

Organization

Chapter 3 is a literature review. It discusses the general drivers of population loss and vacancy, and then concisely describes common consequences associated with vacant property. New methods of urban planning are explained and examples of how they apply in high-vacancy cities are reviewed. A variety of vacant land reuses are explored. The review ends with discussion of governance and institutional analysis, which form the theoretical background of this thesis.

In Chapter 4, respondents from both cities consider a variety of definitions of vacant land, which were reflected in the types of land reuse strategies used. They also examine a number of ways land becomes vacant, focusing on long-term urban disinvestment, population loss, and the 2008 recession. Much discussion is devoted to the
problems that vacant structures and land cause, including crime and the effects on local
attitudes towards high-vacancy neighborhoods. The conflict between the rehabilitation
and demolition of vacant houses is also explored.

Chapter 5 focuses on Baltimore, where the most common reuses are greenspaces,
particularly community gardens. Respondents also discuss the obstacles they have
encountered in the reuse process, with the most universal concerns being funding,
communication between land reuse projects and the city government, and concern that
the land projects are located on will be open for development. This chapter also discusses
the new ideas that have arisen in Baltimore regarding the planning of these projects.
These include formally changing the city’s zoning code to support the creation of
greenspace, diversifying the types of reuse projects, creating reuses that aid
neighborhoods and residents in multiple ways, and utilizing the momentum from trends
in sustainability.

Chapter 6 is organized similarly to the preceding chapter, but concentrates on
Cleveland. In this city, the most prevalent land reuses are yard expansions and
community gardens. Some obstacles, like funding, are seen in both cities, but Cleveland
respondents also noted a struggle with attitudes within and outside of the city, as well as
with keeping projects maintained. Regarding new ways of thinking in the city, Cleveland
has amended its zoning code to aid in reuse initiatives, as well as taking a proactive
approach to claiming vacant property and using an innovative data system.

Finally, Chapter 7 discusses intra- and inter-city relationships at both study sites,
as well as how stakeholders envision the future of vacant land. Intra-city networks appear
to be very strong, though, of course, there is room for improvement. Inter-city networks are not utilized as often and there is opportunity for more resource- and idea-sharing. Stakeholders’ visions varied, but could generally be seen as supporting economic growth, protecting the environment, challenging social issues, or some combination of the above.
Chapter 3: Literature Review

Population Loss and Vacancy

While city populations may decrease due to catastrophes and disasters, declining birth rates, and out-migration, only out-migration has had a significant influence on Baltimore and Cleveland. In the United States, catastrophes cause major population loss in very specific situations, such as post-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans (Robertson 2011). Recently, the U.S. birth rate has dropped below replacement level, but it is unknown if this is a temporary response to the 2008 economic recession or indicative of a larger trend (Mather 2012). However, out-migration is a cause that both Beauregard (2009) and Grigsby and Rosenburg (2012) highlight when discussing the various factors behind declining urban populations and the subsequent increase in abandoned housing and property.

The drivers behind this out-migration are economic restructuring, job loss, and suburbanization (Beauregard 2009; Grigsby and Rosenburg 2012). As the Rust Belt began deindustrializing in the late 1970s, many cities did not have a diverse or resilient enough economy to support large numbers of the newly unemployed (Glaeser 2011; Moretti 2012). An illustration of some of this manufacturing job loss is included as Figure 3.
Figure 3: The number of people employed by manufacturing firms from 1964–2002 in the Baltimore and Cleveland Metropolitan Statistical Areas. These data only include industries in NACIS sectors 31-33 (Manufactures) and do not include trades auxiliary to manufacturing, including, but not limited to wholesalers, transporters, and warehousers. Data from Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013).

Joblessness pushed people to leave for cities with more employment opportunities – economic out-migration – which in turn had a domino effect on the remaining residents. Neighborhoods with a majority of low-income residents experienced disinvestment and rents were insufficient to support general upkeep. This created neighborhoods that residents often left if they could afford to do so, which in turn caused conditions in these neighborhoods and the city overall to decline further – the cycle discussed in the introduction of this thesis. With the loss of the tax base from industry, former residents, and associated commerce, the quality of city services (such as public schools and police protection) decreased, in turn causing even more residents to relocate.
to different cities or to the suburbs, which were then free from a number of stereotypically urban problems (Accordino and Johnson 2000). From the 1950s on, federal policies that promoted suburbanization, including the Federal Highway Act and the GI Bill, also drained central cities’ populations (Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck 2010). Another driver of out-migration was racial tension (Beauregard 2009; Grigsby and Rosenberg 2012). Prior to and during deindustrialization, many whites abandoned inner cities as schools were desegregated and large numbers of blacks moved in, looking for employment. Blockbusting and redlining, which played into racial fears and the status quo of segregated neighborhoods, were also drivers of this process (Atwood 1997; Ergungor 2010). The ramifications of this are reflected in the current racial makeups of Baltimore and Cleveland, both of which have notably larger proportions of racial minorities than Maryland and Ohio overall (United States Census Bureau 2012).

These problems were compounded by the mid-2000s economic recession and the associated foreclosure crisis (Schwartz 2007; Gass 2009; Cleveland Plain Dealer 2010; Koehnen 2010). Cities with weak markets, including those in the Rust Belt, were struck harder and earlier by the foreclosure crisis, with Cleveland in particular showing early warning signs (Koehnen 2010). While non-Rust Belt state such as Nevada and Florida also experienced problems with delinquent mortgages and foreclosures, Keating (2010) discusses how the causes of the crisis differed geographically, with cities such as Baltimore and Cleveland suffering more due to predatory lending, and Western cities such as Las Vegas suffering because of the housing bubble.
Minorities, which make up the majority of the populations in Cleveland and Baltimore, are affected disproportionately by the foreclosure crisis. Brenman and Sanchez (2012, 32) state:

African-Americans are 2.5 times as likely to be in foreclosure than their white counterparts. At that rate, more than a million African-American homeowners will have lost their homes in the recent four years. According to the NAACP, in a lawsuit filed against major banks in 2009, black homebuyers have been 3.5 times more likely to receive a subprime loan than white borrowers, and six times more likely to get a subprime rate while refinancing. Blacks were still disproportionately steered into subprime loans when their credit scores, income, and down payment were equal to those of white homebuyers.

A later study found that both Hispanics and blacks were 2.5 times more likely than whites to receive subprime loans despite qualifying for conventional ones (Perkins 2013). Some banks made a choice to switch to a more predatory and lucrative model of lending when deregulation occurred in the 1980s (Schwartz 2007). Aggressively trying to make money in already weak markets may serve the banks well in terms of profits, but as Cuyahoga County Treasurer Jim Rokakis asks, “Who pays for the damage done to these communities?” (Quoted in Bajaj and Nixon 2004).

The City of Cleveland attempted to sue mortgage lenders for race-based discriminatory practices and the public nuisances their actions created in the form of vacant structures and land, but the case was dismissed (Rothstein 2012). The City of Baltimore is one of several plaintiffs currently suing Bank of America over upkeep of properties in majority black neighborhoods (Sherman 2013). Oftentimes, banks try to rid themselves of problematic properties to avoid upkeep costs and lawsuits. Foreclosed properties in cities with declining populations often go unsold at auction, meaning that the bank or other lending institution can take the title back and try to sell it themselves.
Banks do not want to assume the costs of these properties since many of them are in neighborhoods undesirable from a real estate point of view. They are often offloaded to speculators who try to turn them as quickly as possible to make a profit (Keating 2010). The houses offered to speculators are generally in poor condition and, in some cases, are already condemned or in the process of condemnation. However, the people who are buying them from the speculators are not always aware of the state of their new property. For example, in 2011, a firm in Chillicothe, Ohio, located in the southern part of the state, bought a home from a bank for $2,500 in the high-poverty, high-vacancy St. Clair/Superior neighborhood of Cleveland. The investors, who may have never seen the property, put it on eBay with a misleading listing using older pictures of the house, and a British man purchased it for $4,500. He later found that it had a $10,000 demolition lien against it and is now responsible for this cost (Solman 2011). This illustrates the effects of unregulated secondary market sales and how unscrupulous absentee landowners can be. Sorting out the legal details of a single case like this is a chore that becomes exponentially more difficult when neighborhoods are full of these properties.

Despite the greater scale of the problem today, residents have noted abandoned properties and vacant lots have been noted as an issue for several decades. For example, in 1969, 16.9% of Baltimore residents considered abandoned housing and littered lots a “big problem” in their neighborhoods (Grigsby and Rosenburg 2012). More recently, Accordino and Johnson (2000) found that all residents surveyed in cities with declining populations saw vacant and abandoned property as a problem, with 50% deeming it a “big problem” and an additional 9.4% deeming it the “biggest problem” facing their city.
(Accordino and Johnson 2000, 306). Respondents in Accordino and Johnson’s study also said vacant lots damaged the vitality of their cities’ housing, neighborhoods, and commercial districts, increased the need for crime prevention efforts, and decreased the overall quality of life. This demonstrates how vacant lots exacerbate, if not outright cause, a multitude of problems. On this topic, Accordino and Johnson state that vacant lots have “been viewed as a symptom, and not a cause” of urban disinvestment (2000, 302). This symptomatic viewpoint does not encompass the entirety of the problem. There has been a notable shift in how we view property vacancy: moving from viewing it as a symptom of decline, to treating it as a “disease” in its own right, to seeing it as “a distinct feedback mechanism which accelerates and perpetuates urban decline” (302).

Consequences of Vacant Lots

The proliferation of vacant lots in cities has measurable consequences. Maintaining a large number of vacant lots, even to a minimal degree, is costly, particularly for cities already dealing with deficits due to the loss of their tax base (Schilling and Logan 2008). For example, the City of Cleveland attempts to mow vacant land before grass grows higher than eight inches, and this stopgap measure costs the city $3.3 million a year (Tortorello 2011). Buffalo, New York manages 10,000 – 13,000 vacant properties. Each abandoned lot is estimated to cost the city $12,000 - $20,000 every five years, which works out to an annual bill of $24 – 52 million (Schilling 2008).

Vacant lots not only sap money from city budgets, but also depress tax revenues. Vacant lots reduce the values of neighboring properties (Schilling 2002; U.S.
Government Accountability Office 2011; Whitaker and Fitzpatrick 2012). A number of studies cited by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (2011) suggest that the closer to a vacant lot a property is, the more its value is negatively affected, and this effect is intensified with more vacant properties in an area. A decrease in property value diminishes tax revenue, which further aggravates the economic struggles of Rust Belt cities.

Public hazards commonly associated with vacant lots include fires, crime, and other health and safety issues (Accordino and Johnson 2000). Schilling (2008) notes that from January to October of 2007, 41% of all fires and over 90% of arson cases in Buffalo occurred on vacant properties. Vacant homes catching or being set on fire is a commonplace occurrence in Detroit (Binelli 2012) and Detroit firefighters see themselves as “just managing misery” when it comes to dealing with the problem of arson on vacant land (Putnam and Sanchez 2012).

Baltimore residents have been concerned about fires and explosions caused by people manufacturing or using drugs in abandoned homes (King 2009b). Residents also worry about the violent crimes occurring on vacant, unwatched property. One resident pointed out that “sometimes they find dead bodies in [vacant houses]” (King 2009a) and police and residents say vacant properties are often hotspots of criminal activity, such as drug dealing (Wilson 2011). Property crime is also an issue, with scrappers stripping homes of metal to sell (Cooper 2013), which in turn makes the properties more expensive to rehabilitate. Breaking and entering into abandoned structures for this purpose also puts the rest of the neighborhood on edge.
People dump trash on vacant lots instead of disposing of it in a safe and sanitary manner, which not only makes areas unappealing, but may also pose a danger to anyone passing through the lot (Baltimore Office of Sustainability 2009). Tires, construction materials, and household trash are often dumped on empty lots (Allard 2013). Sometimes, residents allege that vacant land attracts rats, but this is only likely if a source of food is available (Landers 2006; Ewinger 2008). Regardless, the perception of rat infestations is detrimental to a neighborhood.

In some cases, such as that of Baltimore’s row houses, a vacant building can share a wall with an inhabited one. If the vacant building is damaged, it can adversely affect the neighboring property. For example, in 2010, a vacant row house adjoining an inhabited one in Baltimore caused over $10,000 in water damage to the adjoining home’s ceiling, walls, and basement, as well as provoking a black mold problem. This posed a serious health risk, especially for the two toddlers living in that home (Hopkins 2010).

Many vacant lots are partially, if not totally, covered in an impervious surface like concrete or asphalt. Impervious surfaces create heat islands and stormwater runoff problems (Platt et al. 2008). The heat island effect occurs when an area with cement, concrete, or asphalt coverage captures and holds on to more heat than a vegetated area under the same climatic conditions (Stone, Vargo, and Habeeb 2012). This causes the temperatures in urban areas to be between 4° and 22° F higher than in less-developed areas with similar climates. While this is useful during a cold winter, it has fatal consequences for people during the summer, especially during a heatwave (Klinenberg
2013). As global temperatures rise with climate change, the heat island effect will have increasingly deadly repercussions.

Impervious surfaces are also a problem as they do not let water infiltrate into and percolate down through the soil. The water runs off into the nearest drain, sewer, or stream. Instead of the gradual rise and taper of water levels one sees in a vegetated watershed, urban streams experience a sharp spike in stream level after precipitation events, as shown by Figure 4.

![Figure 4: Urban versus rural stream flows. Mercer Creek is an urban stream whereas Newaukum Creek is in a nearby rural area. The sharp spike in the discharge of Mercer Creek indicates the possibility of flash flooding with the sudden rush of water, whereas the gentle uptick for Newaukum Creek indicates a less likely chance. Hydrograph from Konrad (2003).](image)

This results in stream degradation, called “urban stream syndrome” by Pyke et al. (2011). With a greater amount of water flowing into streams more quickly, banks erode, damaging wildlife habitat; flooding increases, damaging property; and water quality decreases, harming human and animal health (Karvonen 2011; Pyke et al. 2011). Sewer
systems and sewage treatment plants are also stressed under these conditions, which can lead to chemical and bacterial contamination of drinking water sources.

However, the abandonment problem does have a few positive consequences. Fewer people mean less strain on natural resources in an area. It has been posited that the surprisingly fast clean-up of the Cuyahoga River from the heavy pollution it was infamous for in the 1960s and 1970s was aided not just by stronger environmental laws, but also by people moving out of the river’s watershed (McClelland 2013).

Shifting Planning Priorities

The most straightforward way to fix the vacancy problem is to reverse population decline. Cleveland has numerous initiatives, some privately-funded, to attract young professionals back into certain neighborhoods, such as the East 4th area of Downtown (Quinton 2013). Younger generations are also attracted to the low cost of living in many Rust Belt cities (Aronowitz 2013). The millennial generation’s migration into Baltimore has caused the first uptick in the city’s population since the 1950s (La Noue 2013). Baltimore has also encouraged immigrants to settle in the city (Scola 2013). While there are some sizeable communities of various immigrant Arab and Balkan groups in Cleveland, the city itself has remained notably silent on the issue (Al-Marashi 2013; McGraw 2014b).

Despite these efforts, several factors suggest repopulation is a questionable solution. These cities have lost hundreds of thousands of people (Gibson 1998; United States Census Bureau 2012). Just because young people or immigrants move into a city
does not mean that they will not move out after they save enough money or leave because of crime, poor schools, or property taxes (McClelland 2013). Rust Belt cities need to be realistic about their redevelopment potential (Roberts 2013). Accepting that these cities’ populations are not recouping their losses is necessary for pragmatic work on vacant land. This can be supported by viewing a city as having “too much space” instead of “too few people” (Schwarz 2008, 79). New planning paradigms and creative solutions need to be used in these cases of extreme population decline because “where population has declined by 40% or more… traditional planning regulations become increasingly irrelevant” (Schwarz 2009, 58).

American planning has generally favored suburbanization and the abandonment of city centers (Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck 2010). This leads to “doughnut cities” with sprawling urban peripheries and suburbs (Andalusia Center for Contemporay Art 2013). The first change that must occur in the planning process is to value urban infill over greenfield development, meaning a reconstruction of the thriving urban centers of the past, at least to whatever extent possible. However, even in cities that prioritize infill development, there are cases where a realistic awareness of the vacancy issue is limited. While both Baltimore and Cleveland have many vacant lots and abandoned homes, there are areas that are generally well-off with only scattered vacancies. Distressed areas of a city are sometimes not seen – physically or mentally – by other residents of the city, creating “a section of the city that isn’t part of the city” (Pezzullo 2011). Needless to say, the residents of these forgotten areas lack political power, as they are usually low-income and/or people of color. For older residents of these areas, the negative feelings
engendered by the “urban renewal” programs of the 1960s may still linger (Wolf and Lebeaux 1967). A framework of participatory planning would allow these residents to share power with greater city government and make decisions for their own neighborhoods. Residents have firsthand knowledge of what will work and will not and their opinions are important to take into account. Butler (2013) says of neighborhood change: “There is no single catalyst for change: It is the result of hundreds of people, including average citizens, working over many years.”

United States law currently mandates public participation in some decision-making processes, such as the comment periods for EPA notices. However, Innes and Booher (2004) contend that the public participation processes in place are flawed. For example, many people do not have the information, time, or wherewithal to attend public meetings. The current processes at times exclude “the disadvantaged groups that want to participate” (Innes and Booher 2004, 431) and are often slanted so those in power continue to exert power unchecked. Brenman and Sanchez (2012, 20) list factors that make public participation a fair process, which are often unseen in mandated participation processes:

Descriptors associated with successful public participation include: accessibility, fairness, perceived understandability, empowerment, openness, consistency, dialogue early and often enough to keep stakeholders engaged, protection of minority rights and interests, improved decision making, even political playing field, even resource playing field, comprehensive representation, information flow, response, legitimacy, early involvement, dialogue and discussion, adequate time to talk, clarity about how the input will be utilized, conducive to collaboration.
Innes and Booher (2004, 422) propose a “collaborative participation” framework that is committed to all stakeholders and inclusive of the ideas espoused by Brenman and Sanchez:

…participation must be collaborative and it should incorporate not only citizens, but also organized interests, profit-making and non-profit organizations, planners and public administrators in a common framework where all are interacting and influencing one another and all are acting independently in the world as well. This is not one-way communication from citizens to government or government to citizens. It is a multi-dimensional model where communication, learning and action are joined together and where the polity, interests and citizenry co-evolve.

Jeffres (2010) also highlights ideas similar to Brenman and Sanchez’s (2012) in his discussion of civic engagement and communities’ communication capital.

Participatory budgeting has been used as a tool of collaboration between governments and citizens. It is simple: “[it] allows residents of a given area to directly vote on how government money is spent within their community” (Clark 2013). This gives the public with more decision-making power. Despite being used in thousands of cities globally, this process has only been used in five city wards in the United States: four in New York City and one in Chicago (Whitman 2012). While there are possibilities for corruption and an issue in the amount of time citizens must commit to the process, but with limited funds available to citizens in inner-city neighborhoods, this may provide them more control in developing amenities in their areas.

This new outlook on planning and participation is reflected in city sustainability plans. Sustainability is a nebulous concept with a variety of definitions, but a common one is “meet[ing] the current environmental, social, and economic needs of our community without compromising the ability of future generations to meet those needs”
This definition implies a departure from traditional planning paradigms, which is needed as the act of planning for sustainability “requires a new way of thinking” (Ling, Hanna, and Dale 2009, 231). Both Cleveland and Baltimore have had full-fledged sustainability plans in place since 2009 and both mention vacant land reuse (Baltimore Office of Sustainability 2009; City of Cleveland Office of Sustainability 2010).

A key component of sustainability planning is citizen involvement (Ling, Hanna, and Dale 2009; Meyer-Emerick 2011; Ramaswami et al. 2011). Not only is it equitable to bring community stakeholders into the process, an action – even those with the best of intentions – can fail if the community buy-in for the project is not there (Fields 2009). Some public participation efforts in developing sustainability plans were made in both cities. Baltimore’s plan states that it gathered data using an open creation process and included input from over a thousand citizens (Baltimore Office of Sustainability 2009). Cleveland’s plan was formulated via a method called “appreciative inquiry” that was based around summits that a representative cross-section of the population attended (Meyer-Emerick 2011).

A sustainability plan does not solve all problems. A city having a plan that discusses vacant land reuse would sensibly support efforts to work on this issue, but problems still plague the process even when there is civic support. Funding may be sporadic and cannot always be applied to the projects cities would like to do (Pincetl and Gearin 2005). Coordinating funding from both public and private sources can be very challenging for governments, let alone private citizens and grassroots groups, who often
lack experience in fundraising and administering grants (Schilling 2002). Another issue is navigating the multiple layers of institutions and governance that play a role in the process of reusing a vacant lot or whatever other sustainability initiative is in question (Zeemering 2012; Mincey et al. 2013). For example, someone wanting to reuse a lot may have to get permission from many, possibly hard to contact, city offices before being able to legally start a project. Operating within the current constraints of a city government is a more structural example of this issue, noted by Kipfer and Keil (2002), who say “City planners have little control over investment and thus see their role restricted to managing the contradictions of capitalist urbanization and codifying real estate trends through the politics of development approvals” (228). For further critique of the idea of sustainability itself, please see Appendix E.

Cities can create programs or offices to support citizens in navigating bureaucracy. A number of entities exist to aid residents with the reuse process in Rust Belt cities. Baltimore’s Vacants to Value program and the Cuyahoga County Land Bank (CCLB) offer low-cost properties with extant homes that can be refurbished (Lacroix 2010; Williams 2010). These programs have the benefit of helping to stem the flow of residents and tax funds out of the city. Parks and People is a non-profit organization very involved in aiding and funding park, garden, and other greenspace projects in Baltimore (Baltimore Office of Sustainability 2011). In Cleveland, the Neighborhood Progress/ReImagining Cleveland coalition and GreenCityBlueLake have offered substantial resources to those interested (Zautner 2011), and various neighborhood development organizations have been organizing neighborhood-wide greening projects.
There have also been a number of projects designed to foster involvement in land reuse issues. Cleveland’s Housing Court provides citizens with ways to manage abandoned nuisance properties in their neighborhood (Pianka 2014). Code for America has produced a website that streamlines the process of residents finding out the status of vacant land in their neighborhoods (City of New Orleans 2014) and the Fund for the City of New York has a project called 596 Acres that aids residents in reusing vacant land and provides tools for such reuses (596 Acres 2014).

Solving the Problem

Whatever the reuse strategy, it needs to fit into the context of both the neighborhood and the city. In order to be successful, redevelopment “must build upon the locational advantages and natural assets that [the city] still possesses” (Friedman 2003, 18). Once a stakeholder has decided to do something with a vacant lot and has access to necessary resources – problems in and of themselves – there are many options for reuse. While residents generally view vacant lots as problems, which they undeniably cause, some planners and governments take a more positive approach and frame vacant land as an opportunity (Baltimore Office of Sustainability 2009). Regardless of the way one looks at it, some first steps toward altering the state of vacancy include knowing its scope and limiting it from happening. For example, the Center for Court Innovation (2009) recommends a number of methods to stop the vacant land problem from deteriorating further, such as a registration system for vacant property and making failure to abate serious nuisances a felony. The Center also recommends demolitions and better
prosecution of predatory lending, which are limited in usefulness because of inadequate funding or because the problem is already there and cannot be prevented.

Extant housing does not always need to be demolished since, in many cases, it can be rehabilitated. There are a number of programs that focus on housing rehabilitation and sale. For example, Baltimore’s V2V program is a city-run market-based program that streamlines these processes. It is innovative in two ways – its targeted neighborhood approach and its emphasis on public outreach (Benfield 2013a; 2013b). With regard to public outreach, the program offers home tours for people looking to move into the city, workshops to help potential buyers navigate the process of purchasing, and in some cases, remodeling a house (Shen 2013).

Land banks also sell vacant homes – some remodelled, some in need of care – to the public, as well as vacant parcels (Gillotti and Kildee 2006). Alexander (2009) describes land banking as:

…Serv[ing] four functions that are directly analogous to more familiar forms of banking: storing assets; stabilizing secondary markets; holding capital reserves; and operating within a regulatory framework. The biggest difference might be that whereas traditional banking often focuses on national and international markets, land banking specializes in neighborhood and community stability and land-use planning.

Some land banks offer extra incentives for certain groups to purchase and inhabit properties. An example is the CCLB’s veterans program (Tobias 2013). Land bank properties are also sometimes purchased as investment properties (Hayes 2013), which can have social and economic ramifications if the owner is a “slumlord,” an uninvolved, absentee landlord.
There is also precedent for vacant structures being used as art spaces. In Columbus, Ohio, some vacant houses have been repurposed as gallery space (Gazala 2013). A program in Detroit is giving writers rehabilitated homes in the city in an effort to promote the arts and attract residents (Cavanaugh 2013). Housing aimed towards artists may not pull in large amounts of tax revenue, but it is definitely “better than vacant” for struggling regions and may also lead to the creation of an arts district, which can encourage additional development (McClelland 2013, 280).

Due to the high numbers of abandoned structures, their generally poor condition, and the relatively weak real estate market, demolition is a necessary tool that must be employed to resolve the issue (Mallach and Brachman 2013). Demolition is a contentious topic. Currently there is not enough state or federal funding for struggling cities to demolish abandoned housing, despite cities’ demonstrated desire and need for more money (Kobie 2013; Williams 2013). Empty land is not necessarily a boon for a community, but often it looks less dangerous than a problematic structure that can attract troublesome activity. While some homes may be located in desirable neighborhoods or have historical value, many are located in highly distressed areas with low demand for real estate. Also, large, empty parcels of land created from widespread demolition allow for easy redevelopment in the future. The City of Cleveland has demolished thousands of houses that would be uneconomical to remodel and resell, and it still has thousands more rated as condemned or demolition-worthy (Gass 2009). Alternatively, these structures could be “deconstructed” instead of demolished, and their constituent parts would be reused instead of destroyed, but the cost-effectiveness of this relies on landfill tipping
fees and city subsidies (Gass 2009). Regardless of the method, demolition does not cure the underlying problems that produced vacancy in the first place – it is simply treating a symptom of decline (Piiparinen 2013a).

A solution related to demolition is neighborhood consolidation. Neighborhood consolidation is an idea discussed in cities with largely abandoned neighborhoods, to the point where there may be only a single resident on a city block. Because it is too expensive to provide infrastructure to those scattered residents, the idea is that they should move to a more populated area to cut these costs for the city (Ewing and Grady 2012). While this makes sense from an economic standpoint, people do not want to move out of homes they have owned for years. They do not want to leave their neighborhoods behind and, to some, these plans ring of the racialized urban renewal of the 1960s the destroyed thriving black neighborhoods (Davey 2011).

Reusing vacant land with no existing structures presents a different set of possibilities that residents and groups can invest in to improve their neighborhoods. Many inner-city areas are food deserts, lacking a grocery outlet with healthy options within a walkable distance (Corrigan 2011). Due to a disproportionate reliance on public transit, the majority of residents in these areas are less able to travel to large suburban supermarkets; therefore they shop at local convenience stores and eat at fast food restaurants. Because of disinvestment and suburbanization, these neighborhoods often have vacant lots, which, in order to help alleviate the food desert problem, could be reused as gardens, farms, melon patches, or even orchards and vineyards (Cunningham and Ellis 2002; CoolCleveland 2011; Zautner 2011).
Some see urban agriculture as backward and undesirable, but others reason that it is better to live by a farm than a garbage-filled lot (McClelland 2013), especially if it is sharing its produce or providing local opportunities for employment. If urban agriculture becomes more widespread, as it did by necessity in Havana, Cuba, the general perception of urban agriculture as a neighbor may change (Moskow 1999). In some areas of the United States, community gardens have a long history, so there are models to build upon (DiPaola 1982; Moore 2006). These types of vacant land reuses not only provide neighborhoods with a source of healthy food, they also provide community gathering spaces, improve the aesthetics of an area, and teach younger generations where food actually comes from (Schmelzkopf 1995; Corrigan 2011). Larger operations can provide communities with jobs and income as well (Zautner 2011).

Community gardens in Cleveland currently produce food worth $1.2 - $1.8 million annually. With $89 million being spent annually on produce in the city itself, there is room for the expansion of urban growers (Grewal and Grewal 2012). Restaurants, bars, and farmers markets that use or sell local food have also benefitted from the expansion of local agriculture (Moskin 2013). In Cleveland, there is official city support for the expansion of gardens, as evidenced by the recent inclusion in the city zoning code of a relatively new “urban garden district” (Lacroix 2010). However, not all of these reuses are necessarily formal, as in the case of guerilla gardening (Ring 2009).

Lack of greenspace is an issue that plagues some neighborhoods of Cleveland and Baltimore (Boone et al. 2009; Cleveland City Planning Commission n.d.). While 85% of Baltimoreans live within a half mile of a park, the distribution of amenities is inequitable
because black residents have access to far fewer acres. Additionally, they have had little opportunity to participate in the decision-making process (Boone et al. 2009; The Trust for Public Land 2012). Cleveland ranks high among comparable cities for per capita rates of recreational spaces like baseball and softball diamonds, basketball hoops, and swimming pools (The Trust for Public Land 2012), but is also home to a number of “park deserts” (Cleveland City Planning Commission n.d.), which shows the need for expanded and accessible parks. Another issue with parks is that if they are not maintained, often the case in disinvested neighborhoods with little political clout, they can become unsafe or be perceived as such and will not be used (Brownlow 2006). Smaller parks, also known as pocket parks, may be easier to police and keep safe, and can be made out of smaller parcels of land— for example, from a few adjacent residential lots. These neighborhood parks often have an everyday presence in residents’ lives, compared with larger, more distant parks that are not visited as frequently.

Other non-park greenspace reuses for vacant land include rain gardens and natural pathways (Cunningham and Ellis 2002; Baltimore City Office of Sustainability and Baltimore Green Space 2010; Zautner 2011; Center for Community Progress 2013). Greenspace is very important to a city’s ecological health, whether it is an official city park or just an informal neighborhood gathering place. Parks and open space “provide a context for social interaction” and “offer ‘gateways’ or opportunities for people to escape for a while from the stresses of urban life” (Burgess, Harrison, and Limb 1988, 459). The removal of asphalt from vacant lots and the subsequent increase in plants and pervious surfaces lessens the deleterious impacts of stormwater runoff on city watersheds and
systems. Additionally, if these plants are trees, they have the beneficial effect of shading the buildings around them, reducing the urban heat island effect (Pincetl and Gearin 2005; Karvonen 2011). The reuse of vacant lots as greenspace has been linked to a drop in various crimes, ranging from gun violence to disorderly conduct, and to an improvement in some residents’ health issues, such as cholesterol and stress levels (Branas et al. 2011). Greening programs in Philadelphia were found to generally raise property values in the area (Heckert and Mennis 2012).

There is some skepticism about reusing vacant lots as greenspaces. Residents worry about who will be responsible for the care of space. Often, neighborhood residents will need to commit to maintain a space, which can be a struggle with both time and funding. However, there are some creative solutions available (e.g. using goats instead of lawnmowers) that can be extended to support other vacant land reuses, such as farming (Milligan 2012).

Greenspace can also sprout in less manicured settings. Zautner’s (2011) recommendations for neighborhood beautification include native plantings in vacant lots. Abandoned lots growing wild can support levels of biodiversity not usually found in a city, though residents are not always happy with how these look (Tortorello 2011). However, with some human intervention and a large enough lot, a reintroduction of the native plant ecosystems into city land they once inhabited is a possibility. Once they are fully grown into a preserve-type area, residents may view them as greenspace amenities (Zautner 2011).
If an individual lives next to a vacant lot, they may be able to purchase it at low cost, particularly if it is city-owned. They can split the lot evenly with a neighbor, or they may own adjacent properties that function as one lot (Zautner 2011). This is called a sideyard expansion, and it can give homeowners more space for children, pets, parking, house expansion, or a private garden. Armborst, D’Oca, and Theodore (2008) call these expansions a “new suburbanism” (47), due to how they increase traditional city lot size to traditional suburban sizes. While less density is not ideal for a sustainable city, it does provide local owners for property, tax dollars for the city, and beautifies the area, so is ultimately beneficial for cities that have lost a large amount of their population. Many city lots are small, so this process will not necessarily bring residential density down to a point where something such as public transit could not be supported.

Public art is another possible reuse for vacant lots. It can be applied as an auxiliary enhancement to a greenspace project (Zautner 2011), or used to integrate an abandoned property back into the neighborhood (Articulate Baltimore 2012). Murals are a common accessory to other vacant land reuses, and can be painted on a removable, weather-resistant canvas to be moved if redevelopment seems likely to happen in the area (Kilar 2011; McAfee 2013).

Temporary reuses, like a removable mural, can jumpstart other, more permanent reuses (Schwarz 2009). Temporary reuses can be anything from an extensive performance art / hotel project designed by local teenagers in Halle, Germany to a one-day dog park in Cleveland (Malloy 2009; Schwarz 2009). Some can turn what may be viewed as a problematic characteristic of a site into something attractive. For example,
cold weather generally drives people to stay inside, but reframing it as an amenity for some cities opens the door for potential interesting reuses (Franklin 2013). Vacant areas can be used as temporary ski courses or for outdoor winter festivals (Schwarz 2009; Richmond 2013). These sorts of temporary reuses generate excitement and other ideas about what can be done with other vacant parcels.

There are also a number of experimental and proposed reuses that do not seem to have been put into practice or seriously considered – some for good reason. Residents of Baltimore have posited that vacant homes could be used as city-owned subsidized housing for homeless or low-income persons (King 2009b; 2009a). There are more vacant homes in the United States than there are homeless people, which makes this an appealing idea, especially if the logistical and funding nightmares are ignored (Tanuka 2011). Local business incubators are another option in vacant buildings (Stein 2010). However, this idea’s success would be very dependent on the economic conditions of a particular neighborhood. Biocellars, another newer idea, are greenhouses made out of the undamaged basements of demolished vacant houses. The first model in the world is being built in Cleveland for the purpose of mushroom farming (Chilcote 2013). Power generation – via geothermal, wind, solar, or biomass means – are also possibilities, but these are limited by the size of a contiguous site and by funding (Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative 2008). A last option, suggested by Vergara (1999), is placing monasteries or other religious sites on large swaths of vacant land, though it is not clear how this would work in the current American cultural context.
A Theoretical Look

Vacant land is an interdisciplinary issue and requires a multi-modal solution. Government alone has not been able to provide an answer, and new forms of urban governance have arisen in an effort to resolve a variety of urban problems, not only vacant land. Governance is defined as “the development of governing styles in which boundaries between and within private and public sectors have become blurred” (Stoker 1998, 17). Generally this results from continued interactions between actors such as municipal governments, non-profit organizations, community groups, and private foundations (Stoker 1998; Martin 2004), but also includes a more abstract “constellation of gendered and racialized class forces, political coalitions, ideologies, and discourses that tie civil society to policy patterns and administrative forms of the local state” (Kipfer and Keil 2002, 234).

These blurred sectorial boundaries and the resulting inter-sector collaboration arise from the need for programs that governments cannot or will not implement for reasons including budget deficits, a lack of expertise, or political attitudes and the inability of “‘old’ bureaucratic forms of local government” to confront systemic challenges stemming from the process of globalization, which require difficult solutions (Blanco 2013, 76). These complex problems require complex answers, especially when they affect many stakeholders (Ernstson et al. 2010; Blanco 2013). Vacant land is a complicated problem facing post-industrial American cities, and in today’s social, economic, and political context, it requires governance networks and multiple stakeholders to work toward a solution. Other examples of urban issues that have been
solved (though it must be noted that the success of these solutions is debatable) through governance include waterfront redevelopment, the upkeep of city parks, and the creation of sustainability plans (Bassett, Grif, and Smith 2002; Perkins 2009; Zeemering 2012).

Governance can be viewed as a result of “the minimal state” and as “the acceptable face of budget cuts” (Rhodes 1996, 653), arising from the trend of privatizing formerly government-provided services (Stoker 1998). In line with the neoliberal economic policies of the United States, the privatization of public services is controversial and often leads to a placement of the profit motive above societal well-being (DeFilippis 2007; Perkins 2009; Porter 2013). Jessop (2002) argues that governance is actually “central to securing the neoliberal project as it is pursued in different forms and to different degrees in different local, regional, national, and transnational contexts,” instead of simply a consequence of these sorts of economic systems.

However, the outsourcing of some public services can, at times, lead to increased democratic participation and grassroots power (Martin 2004). Brenman and Sanchez (2012, 96) note that this increase depends on the level of government at which this occurs, with more direct citizen involvement fostered at local levels:

Inclusiveness is the basis of democracy. The extent to which the public can be involved in the decision-making processes varies by scope and scale of the level of government (federal, state, regional, community, neighborhood, etc.). Federal- and state-level engagement typically happens through the electoral process, while regional, community, and neighborhood offer a greater number of opportunities through volunteerism and appointments.

But even with increased public involvement, there is a danger of regional governance becoming inequitable. A “region” would reach beyond a Rust Belt
city’s central urban core into the suburbs and possibly into exurban and rural areas. DeFilippis (2007, 279) argues that “fold[ing low-income communities] in with the larger metropolitan area” places these marginalized communities into “political dependence on a larger suburban population that has demonstrated that it largely does not care about them,” which erases them from public discourse and devalues their social networks. As a further example, Kipfer and Kiel (2002) note that with the amalgamation of a number of municipalities into the City of Toronto, the influence of groups like anti-poverty organizations, immigrants, and the LGBTQ population on the city’s planning are falling to the wayside in favor of business interests with transnational capital and the provincial and national governments.

Governance theory also relates to a newer perspective towards urban systems: institutional analysis. In this framework, institutions are defined as either an equilibrium, seen as a “stable behavioral pattern,” or as a norm or rule followed by stakeholders (Mincey et al. 2013, 558). According to Mincey et al. (2008), the first definition of “institution” is critiqued as not encapsulating all levels of possible equilibria. The institutions as norms/rules approach enjoys greater support and defines three different forms of institutions (Mincey et al. 2013). The first form, rules, are “institutional prescriptions for behavior which require, prohibit, or permit some action or outcome and include sanctions… if a rule is not abided” (Mincey et al. 2013, 559). Rules may be formal or informal. The main requirement is that they include a sanction if not followed. The second form of institution, norms, “are the values an individual places on actions or
strategies in and of themselves, not as they are connected to immediate consequences” (Mincey et al. 2013, 559). Unlike rules, they do not have a defined sanction or punishment if broken. Strategies, the last form of institution defined in this framework, arise from actors’ knowledge of norms and rules.

Institutions vary by context and geographic location (Mincey et al. 2013), as do different forms of governance (Kipfer and Keil 2002). The actors in governance theory are constrained by the institutions of their geographies on an international, national, state, city, and neighborhood level. Governance networks can be long-term or short-term, depending on the policies they are supporting and the political and economic conditions they operate under (Blanco 2013). An understanding of why governance networks arise is important in understanding how various stakeholders interact in establishing vacant land reuse initiatives.
Chapter 4: Vacancy and Its Consequences

See Figures 12 - 15 at the end of this chapter for maps of Baltimore and Cleveland that show neighborhoods, council districts and wards, and specific reuse sites.

Defining Vacancy

When considering the problem of vacancy, it is important to note that there is “no formal or standardized definition for vacant land” (Pagano and Bowman 2000, 2). A number of questions arise as a result. For example, should a parcel be classified as vacant if it has a standing structure on it? Does the presence of an abandoned building cause a parcel to not be defined as vacant, even if the building is condemned? The U.S. Postal Service keeps a record of properties mail carriers suspect are vacant. However, 90 days must pass between a carrier’s first report and the property’s listing (U.S. Government Accountability Office 2011). In contrast, local governments that use utility records or physical inspections to determine the vacancy status of a property experience no such delay. These differences only serve to obscure the true numbers of abandoned properties, therefore making the problem harder to quantify and solve.

Since Pagano and Bowman (2000) noted a number of discrepancies in the way planning departments defined vacant land, they adopted a standard definition for their study. This reduced confusion among participants and made their results consistent. With their results in mind, every interview in my study included some version of the question “How do you define vacant land?” I found that the issues of empty, structure-less land and those of lots with abandoned buildings were inseparable, and while some respondents
did not include land with structures in their definition, they did with their answers to other questions.

Two interview respondents, Frank Ford, Senior Policy Advisor at the Thriving Communities Institute, part of the Western Reserve Land Conservancy (WRLC), in Cleveland; and Jay Westbrook, a now-former Cleveland City Councilperson, echoed Pagano and Bowman’s (2000) call for a standardized definition of vacant land. Westbrook says, “A vacant lot is a legally defined parcel that is vacant of any structure… [however] any examination of the problems of vacant and idle property does require definition” (Westbrook 2013, interview). Ford (2013, interview) delves further into the question, saying: “Vacant property could be land or structures… I think the term vacant lot or land would be the absence of structures. When we say abandoned property we tend to mean structures, but we could argue that a vacant lot has been abandoned by its owner. It's tricky, but you sort of have to at least know when to pose a question about it.”

A number of respondents agreed with Westbrook and Ford’s definition of vacant land as empty land. Marlane Weslian, a Neighborhood Development Officer at Slavic Village Development (SVD) in Cleveland, simply states “A vacant lot is simply a lot that has no structure on it” (2013, interview). Similar definitions were provided by Anita Brindza, Executive Director of Cudell Improvement Inc. in Cleveland; Mary Pat Clarke, a Baltimore Councilperson; Sasha Ottoson-Deal, a Development Specialist at the Stockyard, Clark-Fulton and Brooklyn Centre (SCFBC) Community Development Office in Cleveland (SCFBC); Terry Schwarz, the Director of Kent State University’s (KSU) Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative (CUDC); and Lilah Zautner, Manager of Special
Projects and Land Reuse at CCLB. (Again, a brief overview of interview respondents is included as Table 1, and a full list is located in Appendix A.)

Some respondents offered a broader definition of vacant land, or gave the topic a positive spin. Brian Cummins, Cleveland City Councilperson for Ward 14, said that he “would define a vacant lot as... lots that don't have any other structures on them” (2013, interview). He added that land should currently have “no functional, positive attribute or use” and that these areas should be considered “somewhat of a liability in terms of their image that they convey or the physicality of what they're doing to the immediate area” (Cummins 2013, interview). He expanded his definition to include blighted buildings, whether they were under neglectful ownership or completely abandoned. His definition is broader than some, and the inclusion of land (non-)use allows for a more flexible view of the issue.

Some respondents were involved with the work of The 6th Branch (T6B), a Baltimore non-profit founded and run by veterans with the goal of using their military skills for community service in the Oliver neighborhood. All of them defined vacant land broadly, including Briony Hynson. Hynson currently serves as Deputy Director of the Prince George’s County (Maryland) Office of the Neighborhood Design Center (NDC), and worked with T6B as part of her work as a master’s student at The Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA). She views vacant lots as an “unstewarded space” that people would like to see stewarded or “productive for the residents who are impacted by it” (Hynson 2014, interview), mirroring Cummins’ view.
Nick Culbertson, a volunteer at T6B, acknowledged multiple definitions of vacant land, but says, “I think that the definition that matters is the one that the community holds and that's that no one really takes ownership of it, no one really knows who owns it” (2014, interview). In other words, he is saying vacant land is an ignored space. Dave Landymore, executive director of the organization, takes a similar view, saying, “They're not really assigned to be something, [they aren’t] places like we think of them, they're just kind of there. They're at the mercy of nature” (2013, interview). The idea of vacant land as a non-place and a forgotten space is very similar to Pezzullo’s (2011) idea of distressed areas of a city being “a section of the city that isn’t part of the city,” particularly when the overlap of vacant land and distressed urban areas is taken into account.

Joel Wimbiscus, a Project Manager at LAND Studio in Cleveland, sees “different degrees” of vacant land (2013, interview). At one end of his spectrum, there are echoes of Hynson’s idea unstewarded spaces. Wimbiscus defines a “pure vacant lot” as fundamentally unstewarded, saying, “Vacant land that no one is actively caring about or there’s no ownership that's actually caring for it or has a vested interest in it anymore. That's the most vacant thing I can think of.” He also sees a lesser degree of vacant lot, noting that some lots might be technically or legally vacant, but do not have the same effect on an area as the “pure vacant lot.” He comments, “I know the guy next to my house, the guy wants to sell it for 80k or build a house on it. It's a vacant lot, but it's his investment. It's maintained” (Wimbiscus 2013, interview). Stewardship is important in how we define and value a vacant space.
Other respondents describe different kinds of vacant lots in their definitions.

Becky Witt, a Staff Attorney at Baltimore’s Community Law Center (CLC), adds aesthetic description to her definition. She says:

I think of a grassy, or maybe gravelly, empty space that is usually not being cared for or maintained, but other than that it can look a lot of different ways. There's so many different kinds of vacant lots. I guess I would even call it a vacant lot if it were grassy and was being maintained but the community didn't have access to it because it's not being useful to the neighborhood in any way (Witt 2014, interview).

Her inclusion of community access echoes some of T6B’s sentiments but it was not directly stated by any other respondent. When looking at the importance of community input and participation in planning projects highlighted by Innes and Booher (2004) and Brenman and Sanchez (2012), this points to a possible gap in where a theoretical definition may fall flat in practice.

Ashe Smith, who is involved in a local urban farm and works as the Community Greening Coordinator at Parks and People in Baltimore, sees two dichotomies of vacant land. The first is privately-owned land versus city-owned land, with the latter preferable because of the ease with which it can be repurposed. The other dichotomy is “clean and green” versus land he describes as “eroded away, paved over, it's really just an impervious surface. It's just compacted with bad dirt” (Smith 2013, interview). “Clean and green” is preferable to the “bad dirt” because the former is more attractive and is easier to reuse, particularly for any reuse involving plants. Smith also gives vacancy a positive twist, saying “There's a lot of negative terms [regarding vacant land], but we focus on, you know what, it's not really a vacant lot, it's an opportunity to improve our community” (2013, interview).
In some areas vacant land may be viewed as a “double-edged sword,” according to Brindza (2013, interview). The her organization’s service area (the neighborhoods of Edgewater and Cudell) is one of the more stable in Cleveland, and while it has seen an increase in vacancy, it has not suffered as much as other areas in the city. She notes that “sometimes vacant lots are a blight on the community” but, on the other hand, sometimes “vacant land is welcomed because the next door neighbors like to divide the lot and enlarge their sideyards” (Brindza 2013, interview). Having a little vacancy in a neighborhood could provide opportunities for change and growth, but once it begins to look too vacant, it becomes a problem.

Westbrook also views vacancy as an opportunity, though with reservation: “If you look at it as public cost benefit analysis, you can look down the road and say, yes, this can be converted into opportunity... but it's still a huge cost” (2013, interview). The reframing of vacant land as an opportunity is important because it attempts to renegotiate stakeholders’ – particularly neighborhood residents’ – views of vacancy into something more optimistic.

Respondents did not necessarily use the word “vacant” to describe vacant spaces. “Abandoned” was commonly used, particularly in regard to structures. “Empty” was also used in the context of vacant land without buildings. “Idle” was not as common, but also was used to describe structure-less land. For the rest of this thesis, I will be using a definition of vacant land that includes, but is not limited to, lots with structures on them.
The Path to Vacancy

Stakeholders’ views of how the vacant land problem came to exist are important to understand. It is difficult to solve a problem without knowing how and why it occurred. Respondents noted a number of causes that triggered or exacerbated vacancy in both cities, though details varied. For example, the 1966 Hough Riots in Cleveland contributed to the further decline of the Hough neighborhood, accelerating disinvestment, and causing many, both black and white, to move out of the city due to fears of racial tension and violence. However, Cleveland was one of the only cities to not experience violence after Martin Luther King, Jr.’s murder in 1968, whereas Baltimore saw eight days of race riots stemming from that event (Lackritz 1968; University of Baltimore 2014). The specifics of these riots differ, but they ultimately triggered population loss, in particular white flight, in both cities. While some causes may have affected the process of vacancy in different ways, the same general themes come across in both cities.

Areas of Baltimore and Cleveland have been experiencing vacancy, neglect, and disinvestment for decades. Often these areas are populated by minorities and/or those with lower incomes. Additionally, they were the most heavily subjected to disastrous urban renewal policies, such as the building of interstate highways in the 1950s and 1960s. Ford comments, “There have been issues and concerns about vacant land going back thirty years. It was a different cause [then] and the volume wasn't the same” (2013, interview). Figure 5 provides a general outline of the process of vacancy and reuse.
Figure 5: The process of vacancy and reuse. This thesis discusses effects of blight and the process of demolition but largely focuses on the formal and informal reuses of vacant land. Diagram by author.

Recent causes of vacancy include the financial and subprime mortgage crises of the late 2000s. Their symptoms were felt earlier in Rust Belt cities than in the rest of the United States because of the cities’ already-weakened economies and housing markets, previously hurt by the structural economic and social change resulting from deindustrialization and suburbanization. Cuyahoga County, where Cleveland is located, has been described as the “epicenter” of the foreclosure crisis. Further investigation has found that rising foreclosure rates related to predatory lending stems back to the mid-1990s (Schwartz 2007; Koehnen 2010; Ford 2013). Researchers are still determining the exact economic details of the crisis and governments are still struggling to effectively deal with the foreclosure problem (Koehnen 2010; Kiel 2012). There has been confusion
– in the public, in the media, and within the ranks of academics, economists, and government officials – regarding how exactly the crisis unfolded. Westbrook says, “People didn't really understand what was happening. There wasn't a very accepted set of either academic or policy research efforts to understand and there was a lot of misunderstanding” (2013, interview). While this misunderstanding was occurred, neighborhoods, residents, non-profits, and local governments were trying to cope with wide-scale vacancy.

The case of Slavic Village (labelled Broadway-Slavic Village in Figure 15) in Cleveland is illustrative of what foreclosure can do to a neighborhood (Katz 2006; Christie 2007; Aalbers 2009; Kotlowitz 2009). Weslian (2013, interview), who not only works for the local CDC, but is also a long-time resident of the neighborhood, discusses the area’s decline: “We got to a place where we ended up with a lot more vacant lots than we had expected because of the predatory lending foreclosure process crisis… The predatory lending is really what took hold. As a matter of fact, in the 2000 Census we were one of two [Cleveland] neighborhoods that had population growth.” Slavic Village survived waves of unemployment resulting from deindustrialization, waves of disinvestment and population loss resulting from suburbanization, and came out of it with population growth, only to be drowned in the highest foreclosure rates in the nation at the height of the crisis (Christie 2007).

There is debate surrounding the use of the word “predatory” to describe the problematic lending practices seen in the foreclosure crisis (Delgadillo, Erickson, and Piercy 2008; Ruzich and Grant 2009). Some predatory practices are, in fact, legal, or at
least in the gray area of “not illegal” (Ford 2013, interview). Predatory practices can include lending a borrower an amount multiple times the value of their house, robosigning mortgage documents, pushing a borrower to frequently refinance with little benefit to them but with monetary gain to the bank, and not informing the borrower that the terms of a loan are negotiable (Katz 2006; Wright 2008). There are many examples of banks taking advantage of people who were not financially literate – some even functionally illiterate (Wright 2008). Clarke (2014, interview), the Baltimore councilperson, describes this advantage: “It's very simple, no more than 30% of your income should be for housing, but if somebody tells you, ‘Oh, no, you can,’ especially if you've never owned a house before and Mr. Banker's telling me I can afford it? Except you find out you can't.” Baltimore was not as hard-hit by the mortgage crisis as Cleveland, though some neighborhoods were devastated by foreclosures (Sherman 2013; Clarke 2014).

The media have taken to using “subprime” instead of “predatory” as an adjective for these lending practices, which implicitly shifts the blame from lenders to borrowers (Longobardi 2009). Delgadillo, Erickson, and Piercy (2008) note how financial professionals differentiate between “predatory” and “abusive.” Call it what you will, but it is obvious that these practices, at least in some areas, turned criminal and decimated neighborhoods. On this topic, Weslian further discusses Slavic Village:

We started seeing what would become the result of the predatory lending. We started seeing houses go vacant, we started seeing investors who, through fraud – the appraiser was committing fraud, the mortgage broker was committing fraud – and they were snapping up properties that typically probably either would have gone through a [mortgage] processor or something and instead they were snapping them all up for as little as they could and then flipping them. And once
we saw that, I mean, it was very clear, we started tracking it. And once we started tracking it, and this was probably about 2005, we knew something bad was happening. We didn't know for sure it was fraud, but we started having some interns track all of the transactions and we went for about two years doing that, and we handed it all over to the state attorney general and it turned out that it was fraud, that you could identify that one mortgage company and one appraiser had put together a deal – a hundred houses – which really impacts a community and flipped them and did fraud (Weslian 2013, interview).

Westbrook also highlights fraud as a major factor in the destruction of areas across Cleveland:

The fiction, all these pieces that came together to create this fiction – which we find now was really driven by predatory lending practices and from the highest level of Wall Street down to people with phony real estate licenses and real fraudulent credentials inflating the values of these homes – and when the fiction burst, the bubble burst, these neighborhoods have been just gutted out (Westbrook 2013, interview).

He further characterizes the process of the mortgage crisis in Cleveland as: “A slow and steady erosion of the neighborhoods [that] accelerated like a forest fire and just blew through these neighborhoods. And now elements of abandonment are so extreme in pockets. It's not from border to border of the city, but in very, very major pockets of the city” (Westbrook 2013, interview).

Westbrook also points to the practices of the financial sector in general, particularly a shift away from local institutions with investment in the community, as contributing to problems:

Another factor that plays into this is a very widely held, high value of the rights and roles of private ownership. Conservatives tend to be ‘So that's [Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac] what caused the foreclosure crisis.’ I think the evolution is much more in line with what we call ‘predatory actions’ where Wall Street created this idea of securitized loans. Mortgage loans went from your kind of local bank where they might go out, check, and make sure you have insurance on your home. They said yes, keeping up this asset is important to us as well as it is to you. Your
performance is something we care about. Then all of a sudden your mortgage is in Deutsche Bank, the top bank in Germany (Westbrook 2013, interview).

The financial sector is still playing a role in the continued disinvestment in and blight of these neighborhoods. Brindza believes the institutions need to take responsibility for their actions and help stop the problems they caused:

It's important that some of the players who were responsible for the predatory lending and the foreclosure crisis here have to pay to help stabilize the community, because you're not stabilizing the community if you're continuing to dump properties, like Fannie Mae is, and continue to flip them and sell them to somebody on the internet for $1,500, some sap who thinks he's just bought a great house and then gets here and finds out it's been condemned and it's got violations. That's still happening today. There just needs to be some real integrity here on the part of people who say they want to help the neighborhoods (Brindza 2013, interview).

Not all foreclosures are related to predatory lending practices. In any economic crisis, there is rising unemployment. Brindza identifies vacancy as also being caused by people losing their jobs and defaulting on their mortgages (2013, interview). The economic crisis had ramifications for investors and landlords, halting housing construction and causing new, unsold houses to be foreclosed upon. This was the more common foreclosure pattern in “Sun Belt” states, such as Arizona and Nevada (Kilston 2013), but it also occurred in Rust Belt cities. Cummins shares an example:

We had a brand new six-unit condo property that was being built in 2003. [In] 2004 and 2005, this individual investor started to get in some financial difficulties, but by 2006 he was in bankruptcy. By 2006 and 2007, within four years, those new construction condos, six of them, had to be deconstructed… So it's not just old structures, in this case it was new structures (Cummins 2013, interview).

Respondents also identify chronic urban problems as drivers of the vacancy process. Suburbanization and sprawl were mentioned in passing by a number of
respondents, but no one discussed fighting it with the same intensity they did with the foreclosure crisis. Suburbanization and continual outward growth have been the status quo of American urban planning for over half a century. While respondents would like to attract residents back into the central city, it is not the most pressing and immediate issue most of them are dealing with at this time, despite the acknowledgment of it as the root of the problem. Westbrook discusses how planners once thought that suburbanization was not harmful to central cities:

The spatial displacement [of urban populations] that occurs is not just some natural phenomenon or some issues of preference and choice. There are things that are fueled by an old paradigm based on building on and moving out with the idea that new populations would replace in the urban core, either immigrants or migrants (Westbrook 2013, interview).

Westbrook (2013, interview) also discusses the systemic racism behind suburbanization and inner city disinvestment:

There [were] mindsets that drove these behaviors that you can look back on and say how destructive and dangerous this proved to be… There's racism, people would say, ‘Well, the neighborhood was changing.’ It was becoming more people of color moving in and that was a sign that it was time to sell your house, it was redlining.

Hynson (2014, interview) also comments on this topic: “In the [19]60s, there was a lot of urban renewal that was not necessarily taking into consideration the wishes and desires and needs of underserved communities and not respecting and using the innate resource of the knowledge of those communities to know what works and what doesn't.” The ignorance and dismissal of various communities diminished the livability, and therefore viability, of some neighborhoods, opening them to disinvestment.
There is also the structural issue of poverty itself. Landymore is speaking specifically about the Oliver neighborhood in Baltimore in the following quote, but it applies to many persistently underserved communities in both Baltimore and Cleveland:

When you talk about the types of social maladies that affect communities like ours – chronic unemployment, entrenched poverty – there's a lot of issues that can't be solved no matter how many volunteers you throw at it... You can have a million vacant land reuse projects, but that doesn’t make vacant land go away because the fundamental issues are still there. Vacant land with troubles will not be eradicated until these issues are improved upon (Landymore 2013, interview).

We can improve and reuse vacant land but it is still a symptom of a greater problem.

Problems with Vacant Structures

So what are the “troubles,” mentioned above by Landymore, that stakeholders are seeing associated with vacant land? First of all, lots with structures on them are viewed as inherently more problematic than those without structures. Vacant buildings – in this case houses – were the focus of the interviewees’ strongest concerns. This is not to take away from the problems caused by vacant land, but instead to stress the toll abandoned structures take on neighborhoods.

Baltimore’s abundance of rowhouses, as opposed to detached single- or two-family dwellings, adds another layer of difficulty in mitigating the issues from abandoned housing. Since rowhouses share walls, an abandoned unit cannot easily be demolished and the problems of abandoned units directly affect extant ones. Figure 6 illustrates this.
Figure 6: An inhabited rowhome (the light yellow one on the right) in a block of abandoned ones. If the roof of the unit to the left of the yellow house leaks and causes water damage to the adjoining wall, that creates a problem that the residents cannot easily fix. The red and white Xs inform firefighters that the structures are unsound and possibly dangerous. Photo from Fielding (2013), taken by Ben Marcin.

Cindy Leahy, Baltimore Councilwoman Clarke’s council assistant discusses this:

Vacant homes affect us much, much more [than vacant land]... You know, we have all these rowhouses in the city and somebody lives next door. That's much more everyday for us. There's this house that nobody's taking care of. This roof is leaking so now my roof is leaking, this basement is flooding so now my basement is flooding. They deteriorate for a very long time and with landlords who are uncooperative. That's much more of our everyday life here, is figuring out how to get our agencies to help them the best they can (Leahy 2014, interview).

Witt also mentions water damage spreading from one house to another as a notable problem (2014, interview). Ford notes that homes with water damage, regardless of if they are connected to another unit, can become “mold factories,” which pose a significant health hazard (2013, interview). Dumping, as well as rat and other vermin infestations, are other health and safety hazards associated with abandoned buildings (Witt 2014,
Cummins remarks that abandoned buildings have become breeding grounds for animals such as possums, skunks, and raccoons (2013, interview). Despite common assumptions, possums are generally harmless, eat insect pests, and are rarely rabies vectors, but skunks and raccoons do pose nuisances (The Humane Society of the United States 2012; Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management 2014; Vantassel et al. 2014). While some residents appreciate the presence of animals in the city, others do not. Regardless, increased vacancy leads to increased animal populations and more human-animal interaction (Wolch 2002).

Health hazards notwithstanding, crime is the major problem respondents link with vacant homes. A common crime associated with vacant buildings is metal theft, or scrapping. Scrappers break into abandoned homes, often within days of their abandonment, to remove materials such as copper wiring or plumbing, and to take whatever else of value they can find (Ford 2013, interview). Figure 7 shows some of the damage scrapping can do to a structure.
Figure 7: A home in Slavic Village that has been nearly completely stripped of its metal siding by scrappers. Councilperson Anthony Brancatelli, the ward’s representative, walks in front of it. Photo from Cooper (2013), by Peter Larson.

Weslian notes that scrappers might get $50 worth of scrap metal, but have caused $2,000 worth of damage to the house if it were to be renovated (2013, interview). This breaking and entering causes cities to have to continually reboard homes (Cummins 2013, interview; Leahy 2014, interview). Boarding is not very effective and neither are more high-tech materials which are also more expensive. Ford (2013, interview) explains, that with boarding materials made of steel, “[People] just take a saw and they cut a hole in the side of the house and they go in that way. It's not going to stop people, if you really want to get in, you're going to get in.” Opened homes can be used as drug houses, for
drug stashes, or for squatting (Cummins 2013, interview; Leahy 2014, interview).

Cummins describes the squatting problems in his ward:

> We've had multiple cases of evicting squatters from properties, which has not been easy if you don't have good, documented info about the owner of the property and who's supposed to be there or not. It's hard to work with the police because you have no evidence of who's supposed to be there. But we've been successful in tracking down owners and confirming that no one rents there and we've actually removed squatters, arrested squatters, because they had open warrants for their arrest. It's evidence of a danger being present where you've got people with warrants for their arrests squatting in properties (Cummins 2013, interview).

Ford also recounts a story about the dangers of unsecured properties:

> They harbor crime or they can be places where, even a house that's secure, but the garage is open in the back, those are pretty dangerous. You will find, almost always, beer bottles, wine bottles, alcohol, or worse and in nice weather it's where people want to hang out. A few years ago there was a policeman who saw two guys drinking in a garage behind an abandoned house. He walked back there to investigate and they killed him, they shot him. That was the notorious one that was a wake-up call (Ford 2013, interview).

The blight, crime, and hazards associated with vacant homes cause nearby property values to decline. Cummins (2013, interview), Weslian (2013, interview), and Clarke (2014, interview) all discuss this as an issue in their areas. This is an immediate problem, in terms of tax revenue for the city and for the resale value of the properties, but it also has longer-term complications. Bob Jakimowicz, a planning and development advisor for the City of Cleveland, discusses the socioeconomic consequences of vacancy:

> One of our fundamental concerns was that, historically, in trying to improve low-income families’ lives, one of the easiest, most efficient ways of developing personal equity has been buying a home, creating equity over time, paying it over time, the value of that home for the future. Because we saw the rapidity of the destabilization of real estate rates, we saw low- and even middle-income families losing the equity value in their homes. We had these external things of the home looking dumpy and all that but the more fundamental harm economically was that the equity that they built up was disappearing. As their value is dropping, their
equity is. It's a big step backwards in terms of the American Dream and working hard and moving ahead, and getting equity in the thing that's the most accessible in low-income families historically of creating [equity], of making life better for you and your kids. All these myriad of things that we put in play to address these issues, the underlying or the real concern of saying, how do we help the normal family in moving forward, in helping them develop personal wealth (Jakimowicz 2013, interview).

This point is well taken. Income inequality in both Baltimore and Cleveland is above the national average for metropolitan areas (Berube 2014). Intergenerational economic mobility is below the national average for both cities as well (Chetty et al. 2014). Both cities also have large minority populations, black in the case of Baltimore and black and Hispanic in the case of Cleveland. On average, black and Hispanic populations have six times less wealth accumulation than white populations (Mckernan et al. 2013). The ramifications of the loss of housing equity as a means of wealth creation are enormous for poverty alleviation and racial equity purposes.

Another long-term effect of vacant structures is the negative impact on both external and internal attitudes regarding the community. Slavic Village, again, provides an interesting example of this, as it was relatively stable before the foreclosure crisis. Weslian discusses how the decline has “created a lot of misconceptions about the community” as well as how former residents, or relatives of former residents, view the community upon visiting now:

They'll go, “Oh my God, my grandmother's house was torn down” or they go and the neighborhood looks terrible and, really, driving up and down streets where you were familiar at some point in your life and seeing abandoned houses, stripped – we understand how that makes people feel, and that makes us feel the same way (Weslian 2013, interview).
Current residents have also suffered from “a lack of neighborhood confidence” (Weslian 2013, interview). Weslian highlights how abandonment, scrapping, and crime conflict with homeowners who invest in their homes and cause people to react in two ways, fight or flight:

You've got some people who, because this has been going on now for seven years – you've got people who have said “I'm gone. I'm not staying, I'm not raising my kids next to this.” And then you've got other people saying “I'm gonna fight back. I'm gonna do everything possible to try to get these houses condemned, knocked down.” So clearly those kinds, it's like if you don't do something about it then the house ends up stripped, the house gets graffiti on it, then the house has people going in it and out of it. It hits people hard (Weslian 2013, interview).

The residents’ fear resulting from vacant properties is further addressed by Weslian, as well as by Ford (2013, interview) and Cummins (2013, interview). Residents have a palpable sense of uncertainty and fatigue on the topic of vacant buildings. Weslian says that the length of the foreclosure process is upsetting to people, who are frustrated that they have to live next to abandoned property for years (2013, interview). Ford (2013, interview), whose research includes site visits and investigations of the interiors of vacant houses, says, “Frequently when I'm out visiting houses a neighbor who’s outside will call out ‘Are you with the city? Are you with the bank? What's gonna happen to that house?’ I usually disappoint them, saying I'm not with them, I can't do anything about it, I’m researching this stuff.” He also comments on how his visits draw attention to the problem in a way that a simple pass through the neighborhood does not:

A drive-by would not give you the sense of what's really going on. The street level view, the front looks intact, but when you get out of the car and walk around the back, you see the back door's ripped open, the windows are knocked out. And then you put yourself in the shoes of the woman who lives two doors down and she's got three kids, a vacant house that's wide open is unfortunately an attractive nuisance [for criminality] (Ford 2013, interview).
He asserts that it is simply a waiting game for a house to be broken into once, if not multiple, times and asks, “What is the damage, psychologically, to living across the street or next door to a house that's vacant” (Ford 2013, interview)?

Cummins cannot quantify that damage, but he discusses the “mental toll [properties have] taken on people”:

[An] example is people that are retired, on disability, they wake up every morning with their cup of coffee, they look out their window every day, and they see this vacant house! That is a stressor, 24/7, they're living with this vacant house. They don't know what the status is. We've tried to do education in how to look up the auditor's site for taxes, how you look up the sheriff’s sale, how you look up the court site, but a lot of people don't have internet access. So they wake up, they see this vacant house for two years, every day, not knowing what in the hell is wrong and what is going on with this property, and they see no resolution to it. (Cummins 2013, interview).

Vacant houses damage communities on multiple levels. The question now is what should be done with them?

Rehabilitation or Demolition

There is a debate among governments, non-profits, and preservationists regarding whether abandoned homes should be rehabilitated or demolished. This debate is particularly strong in Cleveland, but it also exists in Baltimore. While a contextual outlook is necessary and wholesale demolition, in many cases, would be harmful, it is obvious from the stakeholders’ perspectives that demolition is a necessary tool in handling vacant buildings, particularly those damaged by scrapping.

There are several arguments for housing preservation. Sasha Ottoson-Deal, who is a Development Specialist at the SCFBC Community Development Office, located in
Cleveland, says that her organization would prefer to save houses if “they possibly can be because they're part of the history of the neighborhood,” regardless of if they are deemed historic by a registry (2013, interview). She continues, saying “If a house can be kept secured, if it can be maintained, so from the street it does not appear to be abandoned, it really does not have a negative impact on the neighborhood” (Ottoson-Deal 2013, interview).

Lilah Zautner, at the CCLB, raises a similar point, “A lot of people say, these are historic structures, you don't want to demolish historic structures. Just because you have a population decline now doesn't mean we're not going to grow in the future” (2013, interview). Clarke notes that there are CDCs in Baltimore “who are rehabbing houses beautifully because there is some fantastic housing stock” which supports neighborhoods’ historical character (2014, interview). There is support in Cleveland for preservation, most notably from a number of council members (Ford 2013, interview). Lastly, Zautner mentions that, from a sustainability standpoint, preservation is better: “There's all that embodied energy [in the building], you're destroying something that took a lot of energy to be constructed. So a lot of times the most sustainable thing is what's already existing” (2013, interview).

Aside from saving housing stock, preserving the character of neighborhoods, and sustainability concerns, there is an opportunity for neighborhood real estate growth with rehbbed structures. Ottoson-Deal (2013, interview) says: “The one advantage that Cleveland has right now is our rental market is really strong. So rehabbing houses for rentals, if they're good landlords, is good for neighborhoods because it keeps people in
the house, keeps the house intact, keeps it well-maintained.” This leads to a stronger neighborhood and city, which is the ultimate goal of vacant property reuse initiatives.

However, the costs and problems of rehabilitating a vacant structure present obstacles. Ottoson-Deal brings up counterarguments to her points on home rehabilitation:

Who’s going to [secure the buildings]? It has to be a professional maintenance company who’s visiting on a regular basis to take care of it, or there has to be an involved neighbor who goes over every week to mow the lawn when they do their own, takes down any junk mail, and that’s a big burden on neighbors to keep that up over a long time period (Ottoson-Deal 2013, interview).

She also mentions the vandalism, criminal activity, and safety concerns surrounding many vacant properties and how “in those kinds of cases we consider it better to not have that,” so demolition is often necessary (Ottoson-Deal 2013, interview).

Zautner feels similarly regarding the need for demolition despite the validity of arguments for rehabilitation:

There are a lot of arguments for keeping these structures up but at the same time, when you look at a city like Cleveland and you drive around and you see 16,000 vacant structures? You cannot save them all and the damage that they're doing to the communities around them and the rate at which it's happening, there's a really strong argument that they – yeah, I understand all the historic preservation, I understand we might have to rebuild these in the future – but in the meantime it's causing serious, serious issues (Zautner 2013, interview).

She also states that for important historical structures, rehabilitation’s cost is not as much of an issue. However, for many buildings at the CCLB, it is not cost-effective to bring them up to code, and it is actually cheaper to demolish them and build a new structure instead (Zautner 2013, interview). Brindza believes that in the current market subsidies would be required for many rehabilitation projects to break even, let alone be profitable (2013, interview). Much of Ford’s research is on this topic and preliminary results of a
Harvard University study he is part of show that the cost of rehabilitating houses to a competitive market level is not currently practical. He cites this as the major argument for demolition (Ford 2013, interview).

Another argument for demolition is that some housing was not intended to last a long time. Weslian points to housing built next to the railroad tracks in Slavic Village, constructed cheaply for industrial workers in the earlier parts of the 20th century (2013, interview). Its intent was to be temporary, so there is not much reason for its preservation. Brindza says that changing family sizes led to some housing in her neighborhood not having a place in today’s market. For example, six bedroom houses, intended for families with ten or more children, are not in demand (Brindza 2013, interview).

Finally, what the community wants is important. While some representatives or citizens may be in favor of preservation, Ford says, “It’s clear to me while [residents] might be very happy to see it renovated, that's not that important to them. Having it taken down would be fine” (2013, interview). Residents simply do not want to live next door to a vacant house, and would like to see its vacant state changed by any means.

In some cases, community members’ input is utilized to decide what buildings to demolish. Selective demolition allows houses that are not too badly damaged to be available to rehabilitators through either Cuyahoga County of Cleveland Land Bank in Cleveland or the Vacants to Value (V2V) program in Baltimore, but removes the worst blight from the community. Cummins explains how this process works in his ward, which has drastically improved its ability to demolish and rehabilitate houses through collaboration with the local CDC, the SCFBC Community Development Office.
Residents help grade (on a scale of A – D, A is best) and choose which properties should be demolished in the neighborhood based on their condition and consequences on the neighborhood:

It is a multi-prong approach so you take the inventory A – D. You look at the worst and the best, what can be rehabbed, what should be demolished, you also look at the historic and architectural value. We take the location into consideration, because rentals and sales, you need location. Out of the first properties demolished, I believe more than forty were actually within a thousand feet of a school and another twenty had been vacant for more than four years. Some of them – garage structures had roofs that were off or collapsed for multiple years. We inherited properties in this community that had fire damage, sitting for three years. So the first 60 to 70 properties [demolished] were just unbelievably blighted, having huge, huge impacts. We work with such large numbers that people think of them as just these big blocks, you know, of numbers. But in actuality, it's been a very pragmatic, systematic approach, to getting to the worst of the worst, also at the same time, getting to the best of the best. Because the longer you leave the A- and B-rated properties alone, the longer they're targets for stripping and they'll float back into the C- and D-rated range (Cummins 2013, interview).

Demolition, at least selectively, is what communities need to use in order to manage the abandoned structure problem, but there are some barriers in this process that must be navigated by stakeholders.

One obstacle is finding the funding for demolition, an issue cited by multiple respondents. Weslian notes that the sheer volume of needed demolitions is an issue, saying that “We typically, still right now, have seven hundred vacant structures. Seven hundred vacant structures! So that's a lot. And so if we did forty-one [last year]... We're just a CDC. If we did forty-one, the city did like eighty demos last year. You can see that we're barely keeping up” (2013, interview). The sheer amount of structures needing demolition, which increases as those in better condition deteriorate, continually pushes costs higher. Ford questions why funding for demolitions, what he feels is the solution to
the most pressing and “desperate” issue, is facing competition – at least when it is sourced from philanthropic organizations: “Those who have philanthropic resources that we need, they're hearing that ‘Oh yeah, the new thing, let's figure out what to do about vacant land’ when there's still 16,000 vacant homes, and at $10,000 per house” (2013, interview)? He warns of the potential for conflict and competition for resources within the community development sector. Rust Belt cities, already hard-pressed for money, are looking for and have received funding from their respective states and from the federal government, but have also raised funds on their own (Ford 2013, interview).

Because funding is limited, cities have to carefully choose where to demolish and spend money. While the previous explanation from Cummins shows how communities are involved in this process in Cleveland, in Baltimore some neighborhoods may be sacrificed for the benefit of others. It should be noted that some east-side neighborhoods in Cleveland have complained of similar treatment. Witt explains how Baltimore has been targeting areas for V2V, its home renovation program:

Baltimore City has being focusing all its energy on selling lots in certain little clustered neighborhoods [and] the V2V program in those neighborhoods, and then they're not at all focusing on the highly distressed neighborhoods. In those neighborhoods, you can do whatever you want, the city doesn't send housing inspectors out there. They don't cite for any violations, they're just not concerned with those neighborhoods. The V2V neighborhoods are the ones who are close to strong neighborhoods, so they feel like they are investing their money in neighborhoods that will come back in the next few years (Witt 2014, interview).

Witt is not the only person to observe this (Cassie 2012; Shen 2012; Yeebo 2012). She continues, saying that a triage method for neighborhoods “makes sense from a financial perspective but still [is] difficult for the neighborhoods that are being ignored.” When
asked how this affects relationships between the city and neighborhood residents, she says:

I don't envy the Mayor or anyone else in city government because they do have a really hard job and they have a ton of problems to deal with and very little money to deal with it so I’m not personally angry at the city. But then, I live in a neighborhood where crime is not as much of an issue, vacants are not as much of an issue, and I’m not ignored. So it's hard to tell. It's hard to tell for me. And those neighborhoods tend to be much less densely populated and the people are not as connected because there are so many more vacants that there's just a smaller population in that neighborhood so they tend to be not as organized. Their voices just aren't heard as much. It's kind of sad because the city is just kind of waiting those people out a little bit to see if they're going to stick around or if they're going to leave (Witt 2014, interview).

A city government ignoring the needs of its most disadvantaged residents is nothing new, especially when financial concerns are involved.

So what happens to residents that the city is “waiting out” if the city decides to move on with a demolition plan? If they are renters, relocation aid would be sufficient, but what about a homeowner whose assets are nonexistent because their home is now worthless? In Baltimore, this is specifically a problem because of the rowhouse construction – rows are generally demolished wholesale or left alone. Mark Cameron, a landscape architect at the Baltimore City Planning and Sustainability Offices, discusses two blocks of rowhouses, next to a railroad, that are up for demolition. Thirty-six out of forty are abandoned. He explains what the city is doing to help the people still left on the block:

Let's say there's a renter living in their house, or you own it. They will work with you, renter or homeowner, to relocate you. If you're a homeowner, they look at these relocation costs as being maybe $160,000– $180,000. So what they will do is they will effectively give you a new house. What that means, and this is, to me, one of the really good stories that come out of this, is that they said, “We have a moral obligation. It's not right to leave that one house standing on a vacant
block.” And that house is worth practically nothing even if you paid it off, you own it outright, you have nothing to give your kids. They're providing an opportunity to leave and get a new house (Cameron 2013, interview).

This is the ethical thing for the city to do in this situation. Relocation plans similar in practice, but much larger in scope, have failed in Detroit and Youngstown (Rybczynski 2013), so perhaps other cities should try to buy out smaller areas in the future like Baltimore has.

The question of demolition versus rehabilitation, illustrated by the above examples, reflects the discourse about plans advocating for a forced shrinkage of the city’s footprint versus those that look to manage it, but not necessarily control it in such a rigid manner. This is part of a new planning paradigm arising to meet the needs of shrinking cities. Schilling and Logan (2008) call these plans “right-sizing,” Pallagst (2007) labels them as “shrinking smart,” and Krohe (2011) refers to them as “smart decline.” Whatever the name, the literature agrees that some planning solution is needed for shrinkage as a general issue, but like this study’s respondents discussions of demolition, the extent and reach of any solution is heavily debated. Demolition and rehabilitation is a specific problem regarding land (re)use, but is still indicative of the larger issues.

Vacant Land

As mentioned previously, stakeholders see vacant land as preferable to vacant buildings. Ford explains, saying, “There's no question that a vacant lot, we could give it a number and say that's the level of blight being created by that vacant lot, but using the
same 1–10 scale I would then say the house that used to sit there is a 10 on the scale” (2013, interview). However, vacant land still has consequences for neighborhoods. Zautner points out that it decreases the value of surrounding properties, and though its safety risks are, in reality, much less than those of vacant structures, they “definitely creat[e] an environment that people don't want to live in” (2013, interview).

Respondents highlight three main problems residents bring up to higher authorities. The first is illegal garbage dumping, which is less likely to happen if the lot appears to be cared for in some way (Leahy 2014, interview). While this was cited as an issue in both cities, it appeared to be more of a problem in Baltimore. Cleanliness and anti-litter initiatives merit an entire section in Baltimore’s sustainability plan, which is not the case for Cleveland (Baltimore Office of Sustainability 2009; City of Cleveland Office of Sustainability 2010). Nayeli Garcia Mowbray, a resident of Baltimore’s Waverly neighborhood and a member of the Waverly Improvement Association’s board, discusses the city’s garbage problem:

We also have a lot of trash, and even if [homes are] lawfully occupied… 33rd Street is horrible all the time. That's a mixture of people putting their trash out improperly, not closing bags. We have an issue with the rat population stemming from some of these issues, we also have construction going on close by. We in Baltimore have a big, big littering issue. Even if everyone's home [meaning the area is occupied], it looks terrible. And we also have some elderly, frankly because of their age and their health, they can't do much (Garcia Mowbray 2013, interview).
Garcia Mowbray is on a self-assigned mission to make a vacant lot on her block into a public greenspace. The lot is mapped in Figure 8. The parcel is privately-owned, and the past three owners have not kept the lot in adequate condition, leaving the block’s residents to clean the property. Pictures of the lot in various states of maintenance are included as Figures 9 - 11.

*Figure 8:* The location of the lot Garcia Mowbray discusses. It is accessible from Venable Avenue, a local side street, and E 33rd Street, a major commercial thoroughfare that also provides access to Johns Hopkins University (JHU) several blocks to the west of the map. Map from City of Baltimore (2014a), edited by author.
Figure 9: The Venable lot before a cleanup, looking south towards E 33rd Street. Not only is the garbage unsightly, but some, like the rusted-over paint can, can be toxic. The wine and liquor bottles point to other unwanted usages. Photo courtesy Nayeli Garcia Mowbray.
Figure 10: The Venable lot, same view but a bit farther back, after a cleanup in April 2013. Photo courtesy Nayeli Garcia Mowbray.
Figure 11: The Venable lot from the same location in August 2013. More dumping has occurred and it may suggest a person squatting in the lot. Photo courtesy Nayeli Garcia Mowbray.
Witt also addresses the issue of dumping:

There's a lot of renovation happening in Baltimore with all the vacant houses and in a lot of places these vacant houses are being fixed up which is great, but kind of ‘unsavory construction dudes’ are filling up a lot of vacant lots with a lot of garbage from those renovations. People get really frustrated because as soon as you clean it up, in one night someone can come along and fill it back up again and it's just never-ending. That is one of our big things, filling up with just dumping (Witt 2014, interview).

On this same point, Landymore (2013, interview) discusses how, in Oliver, when his organization was starting, the neighborhood was full of trash: “We just went about, first just picking up trash because there's so much of it, all over the streets… A reasonable person might fill up the back of a pickup truck and take it to the dump, [but] instead they take it to Oliver and dump it in a vacant lot because nobody cares…” Oliver, a highly disinvested neighborhood with high vacancy rates, was seen by both its own residents and outsiders as a place where dumping was acceptable. If nobody cares about vacant lots or the neighborhood, there is no reason to treat these spaces – and therefore their residents – respectfully. Landymore mentions how continually cleaning trash in Oliver, T6B’s first action in the area, helped the neighborhood begin to view itself differently, in this case as a place where dumping was not ignored and was seen as unacceptable (2013, interview).

The second major problem respondents observed was the overgrowth of vacant lots. Overgrowth makes lots look unkempt and ignored. Cities are responsible for mowing publicly-owned lots, a job constrained by funding and time. Ford says that the city is “very good” at cutting down overgrowth (2013, interview), but Cummins disagrees: “The city government isn't good at maintaining. Right now the city's doing
cuts of vacant lots at a rate of about once every seven weeks. Don't cut your lawn for seven weeks and look at what it looks like” (Cummins 2013, interview). Brindza says that the city “cite[s] homeowners when the grass is more than eight inches but the vacant lots are way more than eight inches” (2013, interview). Ottoson-Deal says the city only guarantees that they will mow vacant lots twice a year and that this bothers many neighborhood residents, especially those who are homeowners who keep their property up to code (2013, interview). Garcia Mowbray notes that one of the former owners of the property in her neighborhood “would come once in a while with his machete to cut down some stuff” but was otherwise not involved in any maintenance (2013, interview).

The last problem respondents discussed was crime. Zautner believes that the safety risks around vacant land are more a perception than reality in many cases, particularly when compared to vacant buildings (2013, interview). There is crime on or related to vacant land, but it seems to be more transient than that associated with vacant buildings. Buildings provide shelter and cover, whereas lots often do not.

However, overgrowth often is linked to crime on vacant land, as it does provide cover for some activities. Landymore says, “[Lots] become havens for criminal activity, drug stashes. There's poor visibility, so whatever you think of happening there in areas like that, it did” (2013, interview). Garcia Mowbray describes her local vacant lot: “In between the two spaces there's a big dip that you can actually not see what's going there when you're at street level” (2013, interview). She wants to install lights in less-visible areas of the lot to counter this problem.
The Venable lot illustrates some of the types of criminal activities that a vacant lot may attract. Garcia Mowbray relates a recent incident, which underscores the relationship between overgrowth and criminal activity:

Just last week, I think, there were cop cars on our street [Venable] and my neighbor asked, “Officers, is everything okay?” And one of the officers shared with us that there had been a commercial robbery, we were just a block away from the commercial corridor [E 33rd], and about four blocks down there's a Rite-Aid and the perpetrator came north and was coming through or trying to hide in that space [the vacant lot]. Five cop cars and at least seven on foot in the greenspace. In summer, and now not so much, we really worked to clean some of the overgrown greenery along the fence where the church is because that was very dark, you could definitely hide in there and when it's in full bloom with the trees and bushes, there are places you just cannot see. It’s very dense. We had at one point, drug dealers stashing drugs at the end of the greenspace closer to the commercial corridor, there's a lot of escape routes that way, they'd use a cinderblock to hide their stash (Garcia Mowbray 2013, interview).

The lot also attracted squatters. Garcia Mowbray explains: “[A previous owner] let some homeless people take it over, whether that was consciously or unconsciously, it was really, really, really bad. It was trashed, there was urine, there was feces, there was all kinds of stuff” (2013, interview). Leahy also notes that squatters on vacant land are an issue that Council District 14, which includes Waverly, has had to confront (2014, interview).

Garcia Mowbray explains that a lot of the crime associated with vacant land is coming from within the community itself and not everyone is looking to battle the status quo:

Frankly, the problems that we're having stem from community members – from people who are a little bit older than me – who have drug addiction, alcohol addiction problems, and also mental health issues. So it's a very complex issue. I had a neighbor tell me, “This wasn't an issue until you brought it up,” and he wasn't saying that in terms of “thank you for bringing this up.” This is an issue now that you're talking about it (Garcia Mowbray 2013, interview).
Other examples of crime associated with vacant lots include property damage, illegal usage, and fighting. Ottoson-Deal says “I’ve seen stolen cars get dumped, I've seen stolen cars get set on fire, so there can be any range of negative things happening. People park on vacant lots and fix their cars, people gather on a vacant lot and get in a fight, so it could be anything” (2013, interview). Brindza comments that, in her area, “Sometimes people park on [lots] and try and turn them into a parking lot and once you get cold, rainy, snowy weather, they get all rutted up and they look bad, so lot of times people assume [it’s] been turned into a parking lot” (2013, interview). These issues are less threatening than drug stashes and squatters, but still cause anxiety for residents.

Conclusion

In summary, this chapter discusses stakeholders’ definitions of vacancy, how stakeholders view the mechanics behind the process of vacancy, what stakeholders view as the effects of vacant buildings (in the case of this thesis, houses), what stakeholders think should be done with vacant buildings, and what stakeholders see as the effects of vacant land on surrounding areas. Stakeholders saw the need for a standardized definition of vacancy, though their personal definitions varied. Some viewed vacancy expansively, while others defined it narrowly. Some made a point to see vacancy in a positive manner, while others did not. The reasons behind vacancy were generally the same in both cities, and included historical disinvestment and neglect, the financial and mortgage crises, the associated predatory lending and mortgage fraud, and systemic causes such as racism and poverty. Vacant structures cause or promote many problems, including risk of damage to
other buildings, public health hazards, crime ranging from scrapping to homicide, declining property values, loss of financial security, and social and psychological consequences for neighborhood residents. There are two options for managing vacant structures: rehabilitation or demolition. While stakeholders did note and agree with arguments for rehabilitation, all respondents noted that the reality of vacancy demands demolition. However, stakeholders identified obstacles to or concerns with demolition – securing enough funding, inequitable city distribution of resources, and resident relocation. Finally, dumping, overgrowth, and crime were the three major problems stakeholders indicated as problems vacant land causes in their neighborhoods.
Figure 12: City council districts in Baltimore as of 2013. Map from City of Baltimore (2014a), edited by author.
Community Statistical Areas (CSAs)
2010-Onward

Figure 13: Baltimore’s Community Statistical Areas. Waverly is located in the northwest of The Waverlies, and Oliver is located in the eastern part of the Greenmount East. Map from Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance (2010).
Figure 14: Cleveland’s council wards. From the Cleveland City Planning Commission (2014).
Figure 15: Cleveland’s neighborhoods. From the Cleveland City Planning Commission (2014).
Chapter 5: Recovering the Charm on the Chesapeake – A Baltimore Case Study

Vacant Land Reuse in Baltimore

Respondents in Baltimore identified a number of vacant land reuse strategies utilized in the city. Many of them fall under the category of community-managed open spaces (CMOS). Baltimore Green Space, a local land trust, defines CMOS as “community gardens, pocket parks, and other open spaces that are managed by residents that benefit their neighborhoods, Baltimore City, and the Chesapeake Bay” (2014). The term is most commonly used by governments and non-profit organizations in the Baltimore area. Aside from naming CMOS specifically, respondents also mentioned gardens, farms, orchards, parks, play areas, bike parks, sideyard expansions, and redevelopment as other important reuses in the city.

Landscape architect Mark Cameron highlights CMOS as the most common reuse in the city with examples including vegetable gardens, flower beds, and picnic areas (Cameron 2013, interview). The benefits of CMOS include local residents taking responsibility for the space and residents feeling that they do something “important and needed” (Cameron 2013, interview). Councilwoman Mary Pat Clarke agrees that CMOS are the most common reuse in the city and notes that her constituents’ first impulse when reusing a vacant space is “to create a greenspace of some kind, because a lot of the neighborhoods where we have vacant lots don't have a lot of greenspace or want more” (Clarke 2013, interview). Witt, a lawyer with the CLC, discusses how area residents often, in the beginning of a reuse or in lieu of a more intensive method, make lots “‘Clean and green’ […] planting flowers, putting up a fence, so that there's not as much dumping” (Witt 2014, interview).
Gardens are “clean and green” spaces, but they require more work to establish than a simple greened lot. Despite this, Clarke mentions that they are the “favored alternative for a vacant lot in Baltimore City” (Clarke 2014, interview). There is a long history of community gardening for food and leisure in Baltimore (“11 Little Flower Gardens Grace West Chase Street” 1965; Broening 1976; DiPaola 1982). Nayeli Garcia Mowbray says that, prior to neglectful ownership, the Venable lot had once been a community garden (2013, interview). This historical precedent may explain the popularity of this reuse in the city.

Farms are not as common as community gardens in Baltimore, but they are becoming more popular. The city is actively looking to lease larger tracts of land to for-profit farmers (Cameron 2014). Some farms begin as smaller gardens, and later grow with a committed volunteer base as well as room for expansion. One of the larger farms in the city, Whitelock Community Farm, located in the Reservoir Hill neighborhood, started in this manner. Ashe Smith, one of the founding members of the original garden, says that the farm phase of the project started when the garden expanded to an adjacent vacant lot. The organization is expanding again, to include another lot across the street (Smith 2013, interview). He says that a group does not necessarily need to include seasoned farmers to be successful:

The first year we planted corn and melons and pumpkins to make a statement. We had a general idea of what we were doing but we were learning as we were going. We have that green thumb aspect, but for something that large we just weren’t fully equipped. But we were able to get a lot of volunteers, board members, we had neighborhood events, we had volunteers shipped in from outside the community, like a university looking for a volunteer event. And then from there we started applying for grants […] that helped pay for our first hoop house (Smith 2013, interview).
Volunteers are essential for project upkeep and volunteer retention is very important, especially for initiatives with limited staffing. For example, while T6B has a strong, committed volunteer base, drawn to the program due to its veteran-led work, Dave Landymore (2013, interview) says that the group “could always be better [at retention].” Volunteers are attracted to well-run projects that have a strongly-defined mission and interesting cause. With respect to this and Whitelock Farm, Smith states:

Our mission for the farm has been bringing local, fresh, affordable food to a food desert, job creation, and neighborhood revitalization. So, fast forward three years to today, we're actually a pinnacle of sustainability in Baltimore City [and an example …] of what a community can do in such a small amount of space with just a vision. And food is something that we all can relate to. We all eat. We all have history with food. We all have different cultural backgrounds of what we eat on a constant basis or what our families eat – it's the whole idea of breaking bread (Smith 2013, interview).

Whitelock Farm’s success is a key factor in volunteer retention.

The farm sells food to the community through its farmstand, area farmers markets, and its mobile market program. The mobile market consists of a bicycle-drawn trailer that goes to local schools and nursing homes one morning a week. It sells produce to parents dropping their children off at school and to the elderly, two groups that may not be able to visit the farmstand or a farmers market due to time or mobility constraints (Smith 2013, interview). Reservoir Hill’s poverty rate is higher than the city’s average (Baltimore City Health Department 2011), but the farm accepts SNAP/EBT and WIC payments, and offers “bonus bucks” that effectively double recipients’ benefits as a way to combat this problem. In terms of job creation, the farm is largely a volunteer-based organization, but it has a full-time and a part-time farm manager, a few part-time
employees for the mobile market program, and hires contractors for construction work (Smith 2013, interview). Regarding neighborhood revitalization, Smith discusses the farm’s impact from his point of view as a resident of Reservoir Hill:

It's very obvious that the drug dealers are no longer on that corner and they have moved away. When you come home at night after work, no one's hanging out on the corners. It's very obvious that people work, and then they come home, they just enjoy themselves, and then they go to bed. There’s no more random loitering, you know your neighbors' names, faces. The farm is really instrumental in bringing the community together to fill a void that has existed for 20 years. And one woman, she said, “It is stuff like this that allows us to talk again.” It's very true... We've been very successful, we’ve had a lot of support, a lot of amazing opportunities that were just handed to us. People do feel more comfortable in their homes. Someone will come out and say, “What are you guys doing?” This is a person they've never spoken to before, so that alone is an amazing social aspect, an improvement of the community (Smith 2013, interview).

He also mentions that the presence of the farm spurred development of apartment buildings across the street. Figures 16 - 18 show some of the current site, the farmstand, and future expansion.
Figure 16: Whitelock Community Farm, summer 2014. A portable greenhouse called a hoophouse is visible in the background. These are used to lengthen the growing season. Photo: Whitelock Community Farm (2014).
Figure 17: A day at the farmstand, with a young volunteer advertising the variety of ways to pay. Photo: Whitelock Community Farm (2014b).

Figure 18: A view of the vacant lot across the street that Whitelock Farm is acquiring. Greening will be a notable improvement. Photo by author, January 2014.
The farm is close to having a self-sustaining income, a characteristic of a very successful land reuse initiative. Smith estimates that the farm has sold 7,000 pounds of food in the last year, which provides a large amount of the project’s funding (2013, interview). The further expansion across the street will allow the project to rely on produce sales and the occasional fundraiser, rather than grants.

Whitelock Farm is a member of the Baltimore Farm Alliance (BFA), a network of city farms that share equipment and resources. Witt explains how this group benefits its members: “They put all their stuff together and sell to restaurants and farmers markets; they share equipment and an EBT machine. People who are making honey, growing flowers – they're so small, it's so hard to make money doing this stuff” (Witt 2014, interview).

Not all agricultural land reuses in the city take part in this network. T6B is in the process of planting a farm in Oliver to support its food- and health-based initiatives. The area is a food desert and would benefit from a source of fresh produce. The organization already operates a farmstand in partnership with Gather Baltimore, an initiative that distributes fresh food donated by retail sources. T6B also run cooking demonstrations that teach residents how to prepare fresh produce (Landymore 2013, interview; Culbertson 2014, interview).

Farms often focus on vegetable production, with that of fruit often limited to fast-growing berry shrubs. Tree fruits and nuts require a commitment of years rather than months, so gardens and farms rarely plant them due to their slow return on investment and the possibility of a reuse no longer existing by the time the plants mature. However,
urban orchards have become more common in both the U.S. and the United Kingdom (Cardin 2013, interview). Aside from the possibility of food production, tree provides public health and environmental benefits. Nina Beth Cardin, founder and Executive Director of the Baltimore Orchard Project (BOP), discusses how orchard projects carve a new niche in the reuse landscape:

> What we are finding is that the urban farm people are about vegetables and shrubs and things like that. We're not really fitting urban farming, urban agriculture, nor are we fitting into the tree canopy, urban forestry, so we kind of fall right in between. The urban forestry, for example, likes those native trees, and especially big trees and urban agriculture likes stuff that will grow year to year (Cardin 2013, interview).

However, orchards have the same goal of every land reuse project: “Transform[ing] places that are vacant or potentially derelict into something that is an asset to the community” (Cardin 2013, interview).

The Parks and People Foundation, which aims to restore Baltimore neighborhoods and their natural resources, is also involved in planting fruit trees around the city. Smith (2013, interview), who is the Foundation’s Community Greening Coordinator, says that the organization is starting a fruit tree initiative to meet food needs and to support the city’s goal of 40% tree canopy coverage by 2036. Participants in the Reservoir Hill neighborhood, where a number of homes have large backyards with underutilized fruit-bearing trees, have an option to trade their surplus fruit at Whitelock’s farmstand for other produce, facilitated by Smith’s involvement in both organizations. This expands the selection at the farmstand and also strengthens the farm’s ties with the community. Smith (2013, interview) says this program increases the city’s tree canopy,
but like Cardin, notes that these trees are not always native species, raising an important biodiversity and climate change adaptation concern.

Greening does not necessarily include food production. The simple greening of vacant land has positive effects on public safety, public health, and property values (Branas et al. 2011; Heckert and Mennis 2012). Garcia Mowbray would like to see a garden in the Venable lot, but her main concerns are her child’s safety and neighborhood access, which a simple greening initiative would achieve:

My vision is to be able to be confident and feel safe enough to allow my child to run around and get neighborhood people together there, whether it's for a barbeque or just a gathering or to throw a football, and not have it be something where it attracts a whole lot of outside people. And that's because of the culmination of responses that I’ve received from other neighbors. I would love to see a meditation garden (Garcia Mowbray 2013, interview).

Garcia Mowbray has discussed possible reuses with her neighbors and while she may be spearheading the reuse process, other residents’ opinions are taken into account. She exhibits a better understanding of public participation guidelines than some official planning projects.

Another important aspect of simple greening is that it does not require constant upkeep. Lawns need to be mowed and gardens need to be weeded, but some spaces do not require as much care. Culbertson, from T6B, mentions that the organization has placed water barrels and planted trees in some vacant lots, passive initiatives that require some check-ups, but do not demand as much attention (Culbertson 2014, interview).

T6B has also built other greenspaces in Oliver, including one that serves as a play area. The Bethel Street Playscape is located on a vacant lot in the center of a block
formerly called “Murder Alley” (Ellin 2013). Figures 19 and 20 highlight some of the changes to the lot and its environs.

Figure 19: Graffiti from 2006 near the intersection of Oliver and Bethel Streets, close to the current location of the Bethel Street Playscape. A shot of this is featured in the opening credits of later seasons of The Wire, the HBO crime drama set in Baltimore. The city painted over the graffiti at some point soon after the photo was taken. Photo from Smith (2006).
Briony Hynson, whose involvement in the Bethel Street Playscape grew out of her work as a graduate student in the Social Design program at MICA, says that play is a human right recognized by the United Nations and lack of play has negative impacts on children’s mental and physical health and their social development. She explains the situation in some Baltimore neighborhoods:

Kids don't need a $400,000 structure to climb on, but they do need a safe space without needles sticking out of the ground and broken glass and they just want somewhere to play football… The city is littered with signs that say “No ballplay” because kids want to play ball in the street. The neighbors who don't have kids get grumpy because the cars get hit by balls, and then you end up with the cops called and they're having to discipline 11-year-olds for playing football, which is exactly what an 11-year-old should be doing. And one block over there's a vacant lot that the kids could be playing football in but they aren't because it’s not being
maintained to the point of being a safe, basic greenspace (Hynson 2014, interview).

Hynson says that Baltimore, because of its rowhomes, is well-positioned to build playspaces for neighborhood use compared to cities that have less dense housing structures. She describes Christopher Alexander’s (a prominent architectural theorist) argument for effective playspace design:

He did this analysis in terms of providing for play, if you want kids to have access to at least five other kids that are within one year of their age – he means if the average household population is 2.3 or 3.4 or whatever it is – in order to have a common space for kids to have those playmates you would need sixty-eight households to open onto one space. He writes that that's not realistic, but you look at a Baltimore city block and you count the perimeter houses without the interior and that's seventy-four or something (Hynson 2014, interview)...

Hynson also mentions that inspiration for the Bethel Street Playscape came from community gardens and farms’ reuse of vacant land and says that playscapes are “parallel projects” to community gardens, therefore fitting into an overarching reuse strategy (2014, interview). T6B is also building a bike park on another vacant lot in the neighborhood to complement their other recreational projects (Landymore 2013, interview). This comprehensive reuse effort amplifies the effects of the reuses and strengthens the neighborhood.

Two other reuses seen in Baltimore are sideyard expansions and redevelopment projects. Sideyard expansions are not very common in Baltimore, but the city has a policy that promotes this strategy (Sernovitz 2011; Witt 2014, interview). Cameron notes that the city is holding land in promising areas for future redevelopment, assembling large parcels for investors (2013, interview). There has also been action in redeveloping vacant buildings in the city. The previously-mentioned V2V program supports reuse of houses in
specific Baltimore neighborhoods. Tracey Barbour-Gillett, a program officer at the Abell Foundation – a grant-making and research organization in Baltimore – points to a project the foundation helped fund called Miller’s Court. This is a LEED-certified mixed-use apartment building marketed to Baltimore City schoolteachers. The goal of the project is to provide low-cost but high-quality housing in order to improve staff retention (Mullen 2013). Miller’s Court was built in an abandoned can factory and is an example of a redevelopment that not only creates a productive use but bolsters the area in other ways, in this case supporting the public school system.

Obstacles to Reuse

There are many obstacles confronting vacant land reuse projects in Baltimore. Respondents most often mentioned those dealing with the implementation of projects, such as residents unaware of the commitment projects require or issues in finding funding, and those regarding the external governance of the reuses, such as the possibility of the city taking control of the land or the problems arising from the sheer volume of vacant parcels.

BOP has run into a number of obstacles. Cardin says that successful orchard reuses require “people, property, and passion,” meaning that there are “the individuals who want to take this on, the security of the land, and the passion is that we really need to believe that they can and will be there year after year after year” (Cardin 2013, interview). While all reuse projects need at least some amount of oversight, projects like orchards that operate on longer timelines need more of a commitment before they are
successful. The BOP is not going to invest its time and limited funding on groups they feel will not persevere. Cardin (2013, interview) says, “We want to focus on areas where we're going to have success.”

The BOP is run on a mostly-volunteer basis, with one paid employee and a few contracted teaching positions for tree care workshops. Cardin does not believe the project is sustainable without additional funding, a problem multiple respondents in both cities discussed (Cardin 2014, interview). However, some of the organization’s trees are provided by the City of Baltimore, which offsets some cost. BOP and the city attempt to balance native tree offerings with popular ones, as well as taking into consideration the changing climate and its effects on some species. Currently, their tree offerings are apple, pear, cherry, fig, persimmon, and pawpaw, and the Project is looking at expanding into nut trees such as walnut and almond. Cardin says that the apple and pear are the most popular, but she “can't give away the persimmon and pawpaw. People just don't want them” (Cardin 2014, interview). Both persimmon and pawpaw are native to the U.S. and their presence could increase biodiversity and support an ecologically healthy city, but because their fruits are unfamiliar, many people are not interested in cultivating them.

Interestingly, considering the nature of urban soils, the BOP has not been impeded by physical factors like soil contamination. They test soil quality before planting, but have not found any problems so far. Additionally, Cardin reports that she has been informed that trees sequester heavy metals in their wood – a conclusion reached by Pulford and Watson (2003), among others – and, further, that this does not adversely affect the fruit. Due to this, orchards may provide auxiliary environmental services to
land reuse projects. However, soil contamination is a concern for vegetable production, as these plants do not benefit from the protection of xyloid tissue. To mitigate contamination concerns, a common issue for urban gardens, new soil must be brought in and safeguarded from contamination through the use of raised beds or other barriers (Landymore 2013, interview).

Smith has encountered similar obstacles through his work at both Parks and People and Whitelock Farm. With respect to trees, he says, “You talk to a group and they don't understand the work. People don’t realize how much you need to water a tree during the first years of its life” (Smith 2013, interview). Residents may have great ideas for vacant spaces, but many do not have the time to effectively pursue them.

Other obstacles Smith notes stem from the age and condition of the city’s infrastructure:

Sometimes when the homes are torn down the city just fills the hole with materials. We did a tree planting in one of the larger parks in the city, [we found] 200 old clam shells... General issues with poor soil, non-operating water meters, no access to water, general vandalism, it could be a couple kids just bored [or] someone that thinks you're going to improve the neighborhood and they don't want you to do that, someone stealing your produce because they just want it (Smith 2013, interview).

Vandalism is also a common problem. Hynson identifies one reason vandalism occurs – lack of community engagement:

Frequently a cautionary tale I would hear about building play sites in Baltimore would be, “Oh, they built this phenomenal playground at the Y on 33rd [Street] and then it was burnt down within two weeks.” It was this wooden playspace. To make sudden changes that are seen as [from] outside, sort of imposed, I don't think there's anything sustainable in it (Hynson 2014, interview). However, vandalism can also be perpetrated by those outside the neighborhood.
T6B rented equipment to clear debris from the playscape site, taking “dumpsters and dumpsters out” (Hynson 2014, interview). Hynson says, “Within a couple weeks, someone came out and dumped a ton of bricks right in the middle [of the site]” (Hynson 2014, interview). The general abuse of vacant lots also affects reuses as well, sometimes in a very costly way, as T6B had to rent equipment a second time and do the work over again.

Smith recalls two residents who were unhappy with the founding of Whitelock Farm. These people did not vandalize the farm, but it is easy to see how in cases where residents are angered, situations could spiral out of control. One resident Smith discusses participated in local politics for years and had been trying to convince the city to install an updated playground on the site. Smith says, “He was really upset that the city was allowing us to do this, but we physically had the energy and [urban gardening] was the trend and the city pretty much gave us a lot of permission to just go and do it” (2013, interview). The city would not need to take on additional costs for playground maintenance if a community group’s reuse project was on the land. Nevertheless, it is understandable that this long-time resident felt rejected by the city, removed from the planning process, and excluded by a “trend.” The other resident thought the people involved in the farm were not committed to the neighborhood and that within a year they would move on and abandon the project. She perceived the farmers to be outsiders and did not realize that they were neighborhood homeowners and renters. She brings up a legitimate concern, since projects that do not involve the community will most likely fail and historically have been the cause of further neighborhood problems (American
Planning Association 2000; Innes and Booher 2004; Fields 2009; S. Lee and Mohai 2012). Furthermore, inner-city neighborhoods may have experienced outsiders coming in with grandiose ideas of revitalization, only to have them never show up again after plans fall through (Wiland and Baroff 2006). However, this anecdote has a happy ending as the woman is now one of the farm’s best customers.

The case of Garcia Mowbray and the Venable lot illustrates another common problem with vacant land reuse: poor communication between stakeholders. This problem is less troublesome if the city owns the land, because despite the difficulty some groups find in interacting with bureaucratic institutions, the landowner is known and theoretically accessible. Regarding communication on the Venable lot, Garcia Mowbray says that it may not be physically able to support heavy construction, but nobody is certain of this:

I started doing a little more research about how's it zoned: Are people even allowed to build here? All those details about this greenspace because it's always, always been green. And then trying to understand, why does the city keep it zoned the way it is if it cannot be built upon? And I've heard different things from different neighbors, that there's some streams that run under it, that there's infrastructure issues, that there's no access to water (Garcia Mowbray 2013, interview).

The city has not quite been a helpful partner in this research, but they themselves may not have a definitive answer for Garcia Mowbray:

It's been actually very, very frustrating not being able to get anything formal in writing [from the city about zoning or building]... I finally got – when I say finally – I mean two weeks ago, I finally got the proper block lot numbers to be able to look it up in the property tax database. I think no one's ever taken it to that level to really investigate because it's – I wouldn't say [that] it’s never been an issue, but through the 80s and the 90s it wasn’t (Garica Mowbray 2013, interview).
The three owners of the lot during the time Garcia Mowbray has petitioned for a communal use know even less about it, as shown by their attempts to develop it. This contributes to the lot’s quick succession of owners. She explains:

> Time and time again, the people who buy it aren't familiar enough with it and when they come and they start to make their plans, it gets quashed for whatever reason – the market tanked, it's going to be exorbitantly expensive to bring the infrastructure to be able to have houses there… The [most recent] buyer is this man from New Jersey who doesn't know anything about the neighborhood and came in with grandiose ideas about developing. He wanted to initially build a church there, we were, “Absolutely not, there's a church right next to the space.” And I oppose any kind of building, unless you want to build a shed, put tools in it (Garcia Mowbray 2013, interview).

Regarding possible development for the land, she adds “I understand that because it's private land, the owner does have private owner rights. And I understand the position of the city is to protect owners as much as residents” (Garcia Mowbray 2013, interview). However, it is obvious that she is weary of owners who essentially force residents to care for their property but become angry if the residents want to use the space they maintain for a community purpose. Garcia Mowbray has expressed to the current owner that the community would be interested in purchasing the space, but he has sidestepped the request, saying he needs to have it appraised for “fair market value.” Since the property is not currently zoned as greenspace, nor is there a variance against development, assumedly the fair market value will be based on its “highest and best use” – in this case some sort of development that brings in tax revenue – and this would most likely price it out of the community’s fundraising ability (Maryland Code 2013).

Despite her communication troubles with city offices, Garcia Mowbray has a political ally in Clarke, her councilwoman. The city is currently formulating a new
zoning code, and land must be rezoned under the updated laws. Clarke, who is responsible for the rezoning plan in her district, says that she aims to zone the lot so the possibility of development is no longer a threat to the greenspace, which also makes sense when accounting for the likely infrastructural problems the lot has (Clarke 2014, interview). She says, “I'm zoning [the lot] something called R1-D. You have to have at least a half an acre per house you build there so we won't have this, ‘Maybe it could be rowhouses, maybe we could squeeze a church in’” (Clarke 2014, interview). She has previously needed to inform the current owner, the one who wanted to build a church on the lot, that his plans were not viable under the current zoning. A rezoning will end the confusion for present and future owners regarding the lot’s development potential.

Clarke also explains how negligent landowners cause nuisances. Regarding the current and previous owners of the Venable lot, she says, “The neighbors really want it to stay green. They maintain it, because none of these owners has ever really maintained it unless we really put the pressure on and then they come in to do a lot of work once a year and you don't see them again until you yell at them” (Clarke 2014, interview). Residents should not have to continuously petition the property owner to uphold their legal duty to maintain their property, nor should they have to appeal to the city to step in because the owner cannot be contacted.

If the owner cannot be found and the appropriate channels have been exhausted, a community group may take control of the lot. This process is called self-help nuisance abatement, which starts by locating the owner and informing them that their property will
be entered and the nuisance it causes abated by a certain date if they do not fix the problems. Witt explains:

Often the property owner died or moved away. A lot of times the property records haven't been updated, a lot of times when you send this letter [by Certified Mail] you get it back unopened. So then they can go ahead and kind of abate the nuisance, people have used this process to even start community gardens on privately-owned lots. I think it's totally fine if you're going to board up windows of a house or clean up trash. I think starting a community garden is crossing the line and might not be held up in court (Witt 2014, interview).

Witt also mentions that property owners can be hard to trace if they are listed as an LLC.

There are cases of negligent owners possessing properties under different LLCs to make them harder to discover (Witt 2014, interview).

Clarke discusses a past case of the self-help nuisance abatement strategy being used to create a garden:

Through due diligence, Miriam [Avins, later founder of Baltimore Green Space and community gardener] sent letters to the last known address of the owner, who knows if he was alive or not. The Housing Department advised us around that and she did it. And nothing came back and so it was okay for her to go on there and she didn't just go and throw a seed in the ground, she knew what the soil needed… Then all of a sudden this guy shows up and says he's representing the owner and they're going to build a house! On her community garden, this is years later. Your house burned down, you didn't do anything, we had to get it cleared out, we sent letters, nothing happened, no one answered, we got a garden, and we're going to keep it. So we created a ruckus, I don’t remember the details but he went away (Clarke 2014, interview).

The city can take total control of an abandoned property through foreclosure and condemnation to avoid this problem of “zombie” landowners, but Clarke says that Baltimore City does not want to own any more lots, so this power is often unexercised: “We've got enough. We're not going to go and take [them] through condemnation so that we can own it. We got them. So [the vacant properties] just lie in a limbo” (Clarke 2014,
Cameron, the landscape architect, agrees that widespread city-initiated foreclosure represents monetary and time costs that are untenable for the municipality. It is difficult to keep up with the costs resulting from the growing number of vacant properties, even when the city is only targeting certain areas for foreclosure, such as those where new housing development or stormwater management uses are feasible. He details the extent of the city’s difficulties:

We can begin to target the resources but that still takes time and it still leaves a lot of properties that [the city] does not own. But when you talk about a vacant lot, a vacant lot might be ten different properties. Those are all the challenges that we're facing when we're trying to look both strategically and comprehensively at the issue, as well as kind of operationally and tactically at the detail[ed] level (Cameron 2014, interview).

Aggressive condemnation is time-consuming and costly, as is the upkeep for all of the city’s newly-acquired lots. However, the process effectively assembles larger tracts of land for one owner to redevelop and eases the land reuse process for communities. If the city is willing to pay a property’s foreclosure costs, but unable or unwilling to take on those of upkeep, one possibility is passing ownership on to a land trust. Land trusts, which in this case are non-profit organizations, assume the costs, liabilities, and responsibilities for properties given to them. Clarke details the creation of the land trust in Baltimore, resulting from the garden established on a negligent landowner’s property:

The neighborhood wants the garden, but the neighborhood association doesn't want to own anything. Liability insurance? Nuh-uh. Miriam [Avins] loves the garden but she doesn't want it. Some people want to buy it for a sideyard and that's fine, bingo, that's part of the V2V program and they can get it for $500 and they can have the vacant lot next door. So what we needed was a trust fund or a holding organization that Miriam created. The city could foreclose, not take title, but pass that title right to [Baltimore] Green Space… And so there's a place to put it that will take it if you want to protect it from some dead landlord coming back to life (Clarke 2014, interview).
In Baltimore, community groups who have continuously used a lot for at least five years “may be eligible” to petition the city to pass ownership on to the land trust (Power in Dirt 2014). However, while land trusts are useful tools, they are useless to residents if the city does not cede vacant property. The city promotes reuses on its land through programs like Power in Dirt and Adopt-a-Lot, but only to a certain extent. Respondents discussed several conflicts arising between those participating in reuses and the city government, related to the city’s somewhat conflicting goals of building a greener, more sustainable city and pushing for redevelopment.

One such issue is the process of legislating the new zoning code. Witt (2014, interview) says that the city council has been “gutting it and changing everything” from the original sent by the Sustainability Office and Planning Department. A major point of contention, according to both Witt and Clarke, is whether or not CMOS, particularly in the case of those with agricultural purposes, should be a permitted or conditional use. If a use is permitted, no further permission from the city is needed, whereas if it is conditional, it requires a zoning board hearing and a fee of $250 (Witt 2014, interview). Witt argues that while the zoning board will allow many of these reuses, a designation of CMOS as a conditional use “add[s] another layer of regulation” that causes more complications in the reuse process. Clarke says that the CMOS distinction allows a variety of uses that residents may object to having near their homes, including goats, other farm animals, compost heaps, and farmstands, and that a CMOS use should have to go through the zoning board so residents have the chance to review them (Clarke 2014, interview).
Other problems residents and community groups face include navigating the city’s bureaucracy and communicating with city officials. Witt has seen these in her legal work with community groups, and she has aided many of them through the Adopt-a-Lot process to reuse city-owned vacant land. She says that the process used to be “really confusing and we had to help people through a lot of those cases,” but it is now “pretty streamlined” and community groups can often steer through it themselves (Witt 2014, interview). However, she does not believe that community groups necessarily understand the agreements in the program. She says:

> It’s just a license agreement and not a lease… The licenses that they give people for Adopt-A-Lots are just full of jargon and are not necessarily user-friendly. They were written by the city's attorney – the person didn't do anything wrong in the way they wrote it, but they don't explain it... I'm reducing it to the basics of what you're agreeing to because it can feel a little bit exploitative when you work on a lot for years and the city takes it away. That hasn't happened a lot so far because they're having a hard time selling the land but when things do start to pick up a bit [economically], I think it's going to happen more and more. And people are already a little bit upset about it, like having to pay for water. I'm taking care of your land for you and you're making me pay to do it (Witt 2014, interview).

Smith and Kurz (2003) and Kennedy (2008) highlight high-profile cases of garden reuse projects targeted for redevelopment by New York City and Los Angeles and how this engenders feelings of anger and betrayal from residents. Regardless of what the lot agreement states, if the city allows people to take ownership and put their time and money into a project, but is simply using residents’ efforts as a low-cost stopgap measure until a “better” use is found, it is going to cause problems. Witt says that the city is actively attempting to sell some lots in the Adopt-a-Lot program with current reuse projects and that “just because you've adopted a lot doesn't mean you have any right to it
beyond the thirty days cancellation notice” (2014, interview). Smith says, “Speaking very bluntly – ideas change, people move. If you don't take care of it, it's no longer yours” (2013, interview). Projects need to be interview protected by neighborhood residents if they do not want to see them demolished or developed over.

Groups against the continuation of a neighborhood project can be supported by the city and private investment. The neighborhoods in which these conflicts take place often have little political power (Smith and Kurtz 2003; Kennedy 2008). The redevelopment and rebranding of the low-income, high-vacancy Middle East neighborhood to a higher-income development named “Eager Park” highlights this situation in Baltimore (Gomez 2012; Kilar 2013). When asked about this topic, Witt says, “Community gardens being taken away by the city? In some neighborhoods I could see this happening” (Witt 2014, interview).

Witt recounts two cases of groups successfully defending against development of an agricultural reuse. She was involved in resolving a case regarding a BFA member, Boone Street Farm, located in the East Baltimore Midway neighborhood, directly north of Oliver. The farm is located on a quarter-acre parcel that sat empty for over a decade after a set of rowhouses was demolished, previous to the reuse’s founding (Baltimore Farm Alliance 2014). The site, part of the city’s Adopt-a-Lot program, was placed on the city’s for-sale list, which the CLC monitors for this very reason. Witt explains the situation:

It took a lot of work [to get it off the for sale list]. We really had to ask a lot of times and through a lot of different channels to get it taken off and it finally did, only because we noticed that it was for sale, and it finally did. I think the city really wants to collect these big chunks and sell them to the developers, it makes a
lot of financial sense, but it's hard because people are invested, and they have a lot of kids’ programs there. It's just two women, who have fulltime jobs, but they have done a lot of good stuff there and the people in the community really do care about it (Witt 2014, interview).

Reuse initiatives like this provide amenities that make the area more attractive to both residents and developers. Aside from growing healthy, fresh food in a disinvested urban area, Boone Street Farm has also provided the community with free garden space and a public area for events like block parties and workshops. They also hire students through local teen employment programs, partner with a nearby elementary school for extracurricular activities, and provide invaluable ecosystem services, such as lessening the urban heat island effect and stormwater runoff (Boone Street Farm 2013; Baltimore Farm Alliance 2014). Considering the amount of vacant land across the city – there are, as of July 2014, over 40 lots in the neighborhood on the city’s V2V sales website (Baltimore Housing 2014) – why was this parcel, used in a manner that benefits the community, targeted for development?

Another case Witt discusses is the Baltimore Free Farm. They were able to purchase their lot from the city when it was listed, but Witt says, “The reason they got that lot, in my opinion, is that they really raised a big hoopla about it in the papers because the city wanted to sell it to a developer” (2014, interview). She implies they may have purposefully aimed to have this sort of confrontation with the city, as they tend to garden on lots they do not necessarily have legal access to (Witt 2014, interview). They appear to be a collectivist anarchist group and their ethos may be influenced by guerilla gardening, which would support Witt’s implication (Baltimore Free Farm 2013).
However, many groups are unable to raise the money to pay for a lot, as previously illustrated by the Venable case. Witt says “[The city] would sell to community groups if they wanted to and if [the groups] had the money, I just don't think a lot of the groups have the money to be buying that land” (Witt 2014, interview).

Funding is another issue that many respondents noted. Much of the funding for reuse projects comes from grants, some of which are from community foundations such as the Abell Foundation. Barbour-Gillett works at the Abell Foundation and is also chair of the Baltimore Homeownership Preservation Coalition (BHPC), a group that works to prevent foreclosures. Due to this experience, she has seen the issue of funding as both a grantor and a grantee. In terms of her work with the Abell Foundation, she says that the staff supports groups requesting funds throughout the application process and helps them make plans that will be successful (Barbour-Gillett 2013, interview). Smith (2013, interview) mentions that Parks and People does this as well. However, by the time a group is going to a larger foundation like Abell, which has a statewide scope, they would most likely be familiar with the grant making process. While respondents did not note this as a problem in land reuse, Barbour-Gillett discusses how non-profit work can be affected by funders’ interests from her experience at BHPC:

We've kind of walked a fine line with some of the advocacy [that can be viewed as opposed to financial institutions], particularly since we have financial institutions as members so we've had to kind of walk between BHPC being the advocate versus informing members of opportunities to sign on this letter, testify here, we can put that info out but we don't necessarily go and do it (Barbour-Gillett 2013, interview).

Donor views and interests could be a possible problem for larger reuse projects or those that are in areas contested for development.
The city also offers funding avenues. However, the regulations place on these may be more difficult for groups, especially smaller ones, to adhere to. Hynson discusses how T6B tried to receive government funding for removing asphalt at the playscape site:

It’s in the city's best interest to get rid of these impervious surfaces… There are funds but there's a whole bureaucracy around how to get the funds. You have to apply for the program, get approved for the program, and then spend your own money, which could be $40,000, and then get reimbursed by the city. Most people doing this kind of work don't have that much money (Hynson 2014, interview).

She also notes that the city requires groups to use certain companies for the removal itself, and that while still expensive, it ended up being easier and overall cheaper for T6B to remove the asphalt without city aid. However, it must be said that T6B benefits from a sizeable volunteer and donor base that comes largely from outside the inner-city community it operates in, and therefore has access to a variety of connections, funding, and knowledge that smaller projects do not.

Effective communication with the city has also been a problem respondents from non-profits have noted in Baltimore. While Garcia Mowbray has experienced this as a resident, Witt has seen it from an organizational standpoint. She shares her impression of some city offices:

They're much less interested in working with gardens and farms. They won't answer your emails… They don't really care. We're kind of a thorn in their side. I don't mean to be but they made it pretty clear that they're not interested in working on it. They think that allowing people to adopt lots is good enough and they're doing people a favor by letting them adopt these lots (Witt 2014, interview).
Witt believes this attitude results from the clashing motives of the city’s administration, which have also been noted by the local press:

The Mayor’s [Stephanie Rawlings-Blake] kind of two minds on this thing. She wants the city to own less land. Obviously, she wants private citizens or entities to own it because then they’ll be paying property taxes on it. She is worried about cash flow issues, but out of the other side of her mouth she is talking about urban agriculture and food access and stuff and whenever there's a new farm or garden, she's there. She's got her shovel, and she's got her photo op and she's planting things, and you kind of have to choose what you care about. It was kind of funny with the Baltimore Free Farm, one of the things in the news about how one of their lots was being sold and she was at some other farm in another part of the city at their grand opening and some news reporter was like, “Isn't this kind of hypocritical?” She's kind of playing both sides and it shows in the city agencies. It's hard to get a straight answer (Witt 2014, interview).

Witt continues, saying that finding the correct contact to cut through the bureaucratic struggle is important: “You have to figure out who actually has the power to do what you want. We figured out that Miriam [Avins, Director of Baltimore Green Space] is the person who can get the city to do what she wants” (Witt 2014, interview). Knowing and connecting with the correct person or department is very valuable, but may not be possible for smaller groups. At least in the case of Baltimore, they have access to this power through the CLC.

Finally, interviewees discussed several other problems they have seen in the process of vacant land reuse. Landymore talks about the learning curve in planning reuse projects and how not being fully aware of it has slowed down T6B’s farm project: “It's taken us far too long to develop this farm that we're building… Kind of the downside to not having that streamlined process in place is maybe we could have been ready for a fall planting. Maybe we could already be providing a product. But you live and learn” (Landymore 2013, interview). However, he notes thatm initially, T6B had virtually no
neighborhood buy-in when the organization began its work, slowing the process down externally, rather than internally. This situation resolved itself once T6B committed to other projects in the community, and Landymore explains:

The community didn't really buy in until we stopped just picking up trash. When we were just picking up trash, there was no community buy-in because, I guess, when you do that you're kind of just highlighting something negative. You’re an outsider, and you're saying, “Man, this neighborhood is dirty as hell. We should clean it up.” That obviously rubs people the wrong way when they might be extremely proud of their neighborhood, they just don't have the time or the resources to do something about it (Landymore 2013, interview).

Witt notes the difficulties in having certain neighborhoods work collectively for solutions to their common problems. Baltimore has many neighborhoods, some with less than two hundred residents, some with more than nine thousand (City of Baltimore 2014b). Witt specifically mentions “tiny neighborhoods next to tiny neighborhoods” as having these issues, and Clarke says that it is very difficult to get some neighborhoods to work with others (Clarke 2014, interview; Witt 2014, interview). Smaller neighborhoods may remember inter-neighborhood problems longer than larger ones, since a handful of people out of two hundred holding a grudge have a stronger presence than a handful out of nine thousand. However, Witt (2014, interview) says that Baltimore is “a very organized city” and that most of the neighborhoods have some sort of community group that residents can take their concerns too, providing an informal level of governance – the problem lies in having these small units work together.

Witt also discusses the obstacle of keeping neighborhoods and community groups invested in legal issues. The CLC is involved in a lawsuit against a negligent property owner who has a number of nuisance properties. Laypeople often do not realize how long
legal proceedings take, Witt says, especially when the lawsuit in question is the first
litigated of its kind:

> It's hard to keep the community invested... There's a lot of paperwork, it moves slowly, [it’s] not always the number one way to deal with a vacant property that's an issue. If this case goes well we'll try to use it with other properties but we are learning that it's taking a lot of time. So it's best to kind of go after a landowner that has a lot of properties rather than one at a time because we just don't have the resources to do that (Witt 2014, interview).

Similarly and finally, Witt has found that reuse groups, such as farms and gardens, often do not fully understand the legal processes that formalize them and how this may affect their liability. Often they do not know the extent of their possible legal problems. She says:

> We're trying to work with [groups] to formalize their structure a little bit because it will help them in the long run. It's kind of hard – they are a little bit squirrely when it comes to formality and incorporation and bylaws and stuff that sounds formal but really doesn't have to be that big of a deal, but will be useful. It's hard because the way our organization is set up now is that clients come to us with their issues but sometimes we have to make them aware of what their issues are first. And we can't always convince them that what we think is a good idea for them is what they actually want to pursue. So that's what we're working on, “Hey, you should probably incorporate,” because that will help you liability wise, especially if you're selling to schools and restaurants, you should be careful about what that might mean (Witt 2014, interview).

Legitimization of these organizations is important for the reasons Witt discussed, but could also be helpful in dealing with the City of Baltimore and other governmental entities unfamiliar with how to work with smaller community organizations.

**Baltimore’s New Ways of Thinking**

Despite the many obstacles, Baltimore respondents have identified useful practices and improvements that they have seen in their time working with vacant land.
These involve changing how stakeholders view and approach solutions to the vacant land crisis, as well as easing the process of reuse. The evolution of ideas and practices alters the rules and norms defined by Mincey et al. (2013) and could be categorized as organizational change or cultural change.

Organizations in this sense refer to both governments and non-profits. In terms of Baltimore’s government the Offices of Planning and Sustainability have been switching to a new way of thinking about vacant land. Both Cameron (2013, interview) and Smith (2013, interview) see the new proposed zoning code as a progressive shift. Cameron makes no mention of the legislative clashes that Clarke and Witt discussed, saying that urban agriculture is a conditional use, whereas CMOS are a permitted use, however, he was interviewed several months before they were, suggesting that the discussion arose when the code was sent to council. This could point to the overall attitude of the legislature being set against certain, more radical alterations to the code, the Planning and Sustainability Offices not foreseeing implementation or definitional issues that the council has noticed, or a perhaps little of both. Cameron believes that the code is beneficial for urban agriculture reuses because it formalizes local laws on the topic, moving agriculture out of a legal gray area:

The department’s gone through a lengthy process to update the code. CMOS are a permitted use in any category except industrial, and urban agriculture is a conditional use in most of the categories, meaning it just has to go through another hoop. It outlines the definition of it, what's allowable. I think we're being forward thinking in that regard, it's not just [that] we're saying, “Oh, let's turn all this land into urban agriculture,” we're making that actually part of our legal document, the zoning code (Cameron 2014, interview).
Smith says that the Sustainability Office solicited input from established farms for the code. He also mentions that the previously flexible nature of the city regarding vacant land reuse projects was of major benefit to Baltimore finding its way to workable and acceptable agricultural regulations:

The city allowed people to do these new and innovative things without much concern, and we've been very fortunate with that within Baltimore City… If you were to try to do something like this in DC, it would be permit after permit after permit after permit. But what the city's doing is they're actually rewriting the code, the zoning laws, so they're doing it after the fact to get the farms working. So instead of doing it before, where we have to figure out the laws, we're doing it the opposite way. They're getting input from us, just for us to know what did work and what didn't work (Smith 2013, interview).

The leeway Baltimore has given some reuse projects is due to the large quantity of empty land in the city and the pressing need to find solutions. Washington, D.C., as Smith notes, is much more strict, likely because of the high demand for land due to the economic and development boom the capital seen has seen in the last decade (Lowrey 2013).

Baltimore is looking to its citizens to aid in the reuse process. An example of this is described by Cameron, who discusses a competition called Growing Green that the Sustainability Office, along with the Chesapeake Bay Trust, is holding to generate inventive ideas for vacant land reuse (Baltimore Office of Sustainability 2014). He explains the competition’s goal:

We're trying to use innovative, sustainable, and cost effective practices to do two things. One, to stabilize and hold land for future development, and then the second is to reuse vacant lots for a variety of greening purposes, including urban agricultures, stormwater management, CMOS, growing our urban forest, etc. That involves anything from policies developed in collaboration with planning [organizations] and trying to test things out on a smaller project scale (Cameron 2013, interview).
Design competitions are fairly common in sustainability circles (Goodier 2011), and this shows a level of commitment from Baltimore to foster new thinking.

Cameron also says that the city is looking at a large variety of reuse opportunities and emphasizes the need to be as flexible as possible:

There’s never going to be a silver bullet. You got to have a lot of arrows in your quiver. We recognize that we've got to do everything from – we've got opportunities with vacant land to create new public parks. We've got new opportunities to help us recreate our stormwater runoff, we've got opportunities for using it to grow food and increase local access to healthy food... We've got opportunities for neighborhoods to adopt a new space for what they're most interested in and feels best benefits their community (Cameron 2013, interview).

The city has diversified its approach out of necessity. While some aspects of reuses, such as new construction and soil remediation, will be expensive, the city wants to find the lowest-cost methods available to them, due to the amount of vacant land and budgeting considerations. Cameron says:

We’re looking at some temporary to permanent [reuses]. We're looking at small to large sizes. We're looking at $100,000 plus projects or taking a bag of daikon radish seed and sprinkling it on vacant land. We're also doing things like we've worked with [the Department of] Housing and community development organizations to improve the demolition specifications. We recognize that if we can at least have a better start from the ground up after we demolish houses, then we'll have not as much of a maintenance problem (Cameron 2013, interview).

Cameron also notes that every city’s case is different and each has to find its own way. There is no one-size-fits-all method to reuse vacant land. Organizations share ideas (see Chapter 7) and some ideas perform well across many cities, but each needs to be open to the unique possibilities that arise from local circumstances:

We hear it a lot, I imagine every city hears it a lot, “Oh, why don't you just turn all the land into farms?” We don't have the farmers who can do that. We can't just do that. “Detroit did this, Cleveland did this,” well, we're looking at all of those places and we're drawing from them [some] great ideas, but also ideas that we can
apply here. Because everyone's got different circumstances of vacant lots so we have to be able to translate that (Cameron 2013, interview).

The local legislature has also been proactive. Witt discusses a law in the Baltimore City Code called the Community Bill of Rights. The law was passed in 1996 with the intent of helping communities fight against negligent landowners. More recently, the law has been amended to be more straightforward:

Basically that law gives these non-profit groups [and] neighborhood associations the right to sue landowners who are not keeping up their properties. Usually that power would be held by the local government but Baltimore City is pretty overloaded with vacant properties and can't afford to go after each landowner, so it kind of gives some of that power to the communities if they want to use it. It can be pretty valuable. The way that the law was initially passed, [you] need signatures – 50% or more of the residents needed to be a member of the [community] groups, but in 2012 we passed an amendment that made the law so much easier to use (Witt 2014, interview).

The law has been around for eighteen years, which shows that negligent landlords have been a long-time issue. Longer-standing issues are affecting the current problems, but previous measures are also aiding reuse efforts.

Non-profits have also been utilizing new ways of thinking and changing their organizational rules and norms. Like the trend of urban farming, mentioned by Smith, and the trend of design competitions, mentioned by Cameron, non-profits are utilizing the momentum behind popular reuses as well. Cardin (2013, interview) mentions how BOP is “part of a movement” of both urban orchards and food security initiatives. Smith (2013, interview), from his perspective at Parks and People, discusses reuse trends: “Growing food is trendy… The biggest thing now is streetscaping and that's what I encourage. Streetscaping is when people just buy large pots and planters and they fill those with annual and perennials... There's not much environmental benefit but there is
the social benefit from that.” Projects like streetscaping – which do help with environmental, social, and economic concerns according to the Institute for Public Administration (2014) – offer great value for communities. Sustainability is often defined as having three components: environmental, social, and economic (Baltimore Office of Sustainability 2009). For cities with sustainability plans, like Baltimore, projects with a variety of benefits offer opportunities that the city and local organizations should support in any way possible.

Hynson also discusses multifunctional reuses from a non-profit’s point of view. She asks what a project is doing for its area:

I guess that's the bottom line of all of our answers, is there a function? Providing something that's moving towards, maybe it's a health issue, a food issue, any of those, and something that has to do with the context, the people that live there, making it a functional part of the landscape... [To] change the space over to something that has utility and function for the neighbors and people there every single day and happen[s] to beautify it (Hynson 2014, interview).

Hynson also believes in a “phased approach” to reuses and having the flexibility to deal with any snags that may occur. She says, “I think that there's no sense to make a bunch of plans on a piece of paper,” in the sense that groups should not feel they must persist in their original vision if it is not effective (Hynson 2014, interview). She and Landymore relate how some of the playspace area was originally intended to be a flower garden, but residents informed them that it was not doing anything for the area’s most pressing problems (Hynson 2014, interview; Landymore 2014, interview).

Cultural shifts are occurring with organizational change, altering the context of the rules and norms that stakeholders operate under. An environmentally-conscious “green” movement has been gaining global momentum (Pak 2011). While much of it is
arguably not sustainable (see Appendix E for further discussion), its general ideas, centered in the concept of sustainability, affect American culture. An shift towards more sustainable choices can be noted at a variety of organizational levels (Backer and Clark 2008; Connell 2010; Page 2013). Part of this change is thinking about the city not as the antithesis of nature, but as an ecosystem, a significant departure from the traditional views of the past (Daniels 2009). Urban ecosystems obviously benefit from residents viewing the city in a more ecological light, and, in turn, these ecosystems benefit residents in many ways. The provision of ecosystem services has already been discussed in this thesis, but Smith explains his personal feelings of calm and security when exposed to his own personal piece of urban nature:

I have the most beautiful linden trees in the neighborhood. I feel so at ease coming home and just seeing the colors and seeing the shade, even though the trees are bare now, I know this is the most pleasant part of my community and it's right outside my door. And for me, I wouldn't live in my neighborhood if I didn't have that. I really wouldn't. Just because my neighborhood's a little bit more concerned in terms of the drug issues… One thing I like to tell people – I was working in my front yard, planting just whatever things I have left over, and when I saw that I had a praying mantis, I was like, “This is amazing. I now have an entire ecosystem in my front yard.” And I was just so happy to see her. And when I was just sitting down, enjoying my stoop, I heard crickets. It was so amazing to hear crickets in my front yard. I’m in a concrete area and there they are. And then the last thing that I saw was a squirrel walk up. I thought, “Oh my gosh, it's another mammal that's not a rat or a cat, it's a squirrel!” I rushed it up a tree like, “Make house!” I’ve never seen them on my block, I’ve seen them two blocks away where the area is a little more taken care of, but that's the reason I do this for other communities so they can experience that so they can feel at peace in their neighborhoods because sometimes they don't (Smith 2013, interview).

Chenoweth and Gobster (1990) and Kuo et al. (1998) provide evidence that lends credence to Smith’s anecdotal discussion, saying that nature benefits urban residents and fosters feelings of security and serenity.
Cardin also looks toward developing a more environmentally-aware culture, but she specifically focuses on how this would aid food deserts. She says,

“Right now we [BOP] glean the fruit, harvest the fruit, and distribute it, but the ideal is for neighborhoods to have some immediate access to the fruit. Hopefully there will end up being a culture of people understanding that fruit trees are part and parcel of urban environments” (Cardin 2013, interview).

Land that can be used for food production, be it for orchards, vegetable gardens, or chicken coops, is viewed as empty, vacant, and a detriment to American cities. Hynson points out the inherent absurdity of that idea: “Land should be an asset. Anywhere else in the world land is an asset. People know you can grow food on it, it's used. We just have these spaces that are no man's land. It makes no sense” (Hynson 2013, interview).

Changing this short-sighted thinking may necessitate a deeper attitude adjustment toward land, space, and ownership. The concept of public space has eroded in the U.S., with a visible shift in favor of quasi-public spaces (Low 2006). The best example of a quasi-public space is a mall, which has private security, its own rules against public speech, and limits on who may access the space. These limits may be active, through curfews on unaccompanied youth, or passive, through a location inaccessible by public transit. Malls represent a suburban idea of public space, and that idea’s pervasiveness in American culture should be criticized (Staeheli and Mitchell 2006; Davidson 2011). A shift to the past views of public space as being truly public may be necessary.

Hynson (2014, interview) also discusses how greened vacant spaces could provide economic opportunity for area residents. Hynson mentions a conversation with a USDA employee who said that she would like to see support for “cottage industries” for residents who may have to care for children or relatives and cannot work full-time. The
employee specifically mentions planting evergreen trees and making wreaths to sell at farmers markets around Christmas. Hynson (2014, interview) explains why she thinks this could work in Oliver:

Everyone’s got some kind of side hustle. Everyone’s got some kind of thing that they’re working on that is some sort of peripheral economy, not sort of an official nine to five. She [the USDA employee] was also talking about planting lavender so that people could make essential oils and grow flowers. It's not necessarily food, but there could be some sort of economic boost through some kind of small industry.

While informal economic growth is not exactly what the City of Baltimore means when it says it wants to promote economic development, income from legal activities within the informal sector would help underserved areas with high unemployment resulting from a lack of job opportunities in the area. The United States derives a markedly low percentage of its GDP from informal sector activity (Schneider, Buehn, and Montenegro 2010), so the efficacy of this idea may not stand in the face of the American economic climate.

Many people are not aware of the extent of usually urban problems despite their pervasiveness. Witt’s work at the CLC is not limited to vacant land and reuse projects; she also handles legal cases regarding problem bars and liquor stores, which many residents have raised concerns about with the city’s Liquor License Board (Baltimore City Health Department 2010). She says that some volunteer lawyers who do pro bono work at the CLC are surprised that this widespread problem exists:

Lawyers [living and working] in Downtown or Canton… They don't go outside of that and they don't see a lot of the stuff in the rest of the city ever and I'm getting a lot of questions like “What's a bad bar? Why do communities need help with liquor stores?” I can't believe I have to explain this to you, have you ever…? Just take a walk down North Avenue at night. It's so bizarre (Witt 2014, interview).
This ignorance is not limited to Baltimore or to lawyers. These problems are not evenly spread through the city, but instead are often clustered in low-income neighborhoods with little political power. This situation leads back to Pezzullo's (2011) idea of parts of the city not being considered actually of “the city,” and the resulting disregard of these areas’ problems, from vacant land to liquor store density.

However, sometimes an urban problem is well-documented. An example of this is Oliver, known to be an area with high crime rates. It also has a poverty rate near 50% (Wells 2013). These statistics do not give the neighborhood a good reputation, and many, especially those only exposed to the area through mainstream media, have negative views of it. Vacant land reuse can change perceptions of neighborhoods like these by improving residents’ lives and making the area more aesthetically pleasant, as long as outsiders are aware of what is happening. Landymore thinks that T6B has been part of the process of bettering Oliver’s reputation to outsiders, and says:

One of the things that I really enjoy about Operation Oliver is not only being able to hopefully physically transform the landscape but [that] there's a great deal of awareness-raising that we do as well. We've brought probably around the order of at least hundreds, maybe thousands of people – that might be a bit of a stretch – but we've brought people to the neighborhood who wouldn't dream of going there or sure as hell wouldn't get out of their car. There's that and I can only assume that the perception would be changed for the better in terms of the general public (Landymore 2014, interview).

The organization has also had a lot of media attention, which has exposed even more people to the process of making a disinvested, often-ignored neighborhood a happier place.
Conclusion

There are some noticeable areas where Baltimore’s organizations – both governmental and non-profit – could fine-tune and improve their practices regarding vacant land reuse. The city, which has some experience with broad public participation strategies through the creation of the Baltimore Sustainability Plan, could utilize more citizen input with respect to development and planning, particularly regarding vacant sites that provide neighborhood amenities. Public engagement, through better communication with non-profits and community groups, would be very beneficial to the vacant land reuse process. However, this may not be possible, as it would likely require all of the city offices to be on the same page regarding vacant land reuse. That does not seem to be an option taking into account the way the city has positioned – purposefully or accidentally – itself. As this does not currently appear to be a viable option, groups such as the CLC that have the appropriate contacts will still need to perform outreach and advocacy for smaller groups unable to overcome bureaucratic struggles.

The city could also make funds more accessible to smaller groups and less costly reuses. Perhaps this will happen with the Sustainability Office’s forward-thinking outlook toward finding less-expensive reuse strategies. An overhaul of the funding requirements does not seem to be too difficult a goal, especially if groups that have gone through the process are asked for input.

While Baltimore has valid reasons for not wanting to take title of more abandoned properties, the toxicity of vacant structures and land does not disappear because the government does not interact with it. The case CLC is currently litigating may provide
some inspiration for the city on this topic. While the proactive collection of vacant
property carried out by Cleveland and the Northeast Ohio area land banks, discussed in
the following chapter, may not be a great fit for Baltimore’s circumstances, I do wonder
why the city has made no moves to create a formal land bank. The V2V program has
some similarities, but with the success of land banking in cities with and without high
rates of vacancy, this seems to be a proven method of streamlining property reuse and
resale, especially for the redevelopment that the city is pushing. Maryland has passed
land bank legislation, so the issue here is not one of legality (Gray 2009).

There also seems to be little collaboration in Baltimore with the surrounding
communities and larger non-profits in the area. While Cameron did note that the city is
working with the Chesapeake Bay Trust on a design competition, this seems like an
obvious partnership to expand upon for reuse projects involving stormwater remediation.
Respondents said very little about working with neighboring municipalities on vacancy
issues. While these communities are not as affected by vacancy, the problem still exists
(WBAL 2012) and it would make sense to share resources. The political separation of
Baltimore City and County most likely plays a role.

The city, as well as public employers, could support volunteer days for their
employees, perhaps around national days of service or could push public schools to
partner with local projects to further boost community ties in the area. This would have
the benefit of raising awareness and could foster further solutions by exposing more
people to the issues. Another idea, which at least one CDC in Cleveland has implemented
with the court system, is adding vacant land maintenance projects be sites where
community service sentences may be served.

Non-profits would also benefit from raising awareness and from stronger public
education efforts. Like all work in this sector, their work would also be enhanced by
finding further sources of funding. For example, no respondents mentioned that the
Chesapeake Bay Trust has a grant program for stormwater projects. There is most likely
funding from other organizations that support grant-making applicable to vacant land
reuse projects, though it may require a bit more research to find. While non-profits in
Baltimore City are well-connected (see Chapter 7 for more discussion), they could extend
their networks and link to similar groups in other cities. Finally, non-profits would be
served by having a more integrated approach to land reuses that builds upon what is
already present in the neighborhood.
Chapter 6: Rebuilding “The Best Location in the Nation” – A Cleveland Case Study

Vacant Land Reuse in Cleveland

The land reuses in Cleveland are fairly similar to those in Baltimore. Interview respondents in Cleveland highlighted sideyard expansions and community gardens as the most common reuses in the city (Cummins 2013, interview; Weslian 2013, interview; Zautner 2013, interview). Other reuses include farms/market gardens, orchards, vineyards, other greening initiatives, green infrastructure, multipurpose paths, and redevelopment.

Sideyard expansions are more common in Cleveland than in Baltimore because Cleveland’s housing is predominately detached in form. Residents often request information about yard expansions. Marlane Weslian, at SVD, notes that “People are actually jumping on that opportunity to expand their yard” (2013, interview). She says city lots are usually 40 feet by 110 or 120 feet, which does not provide much yard space, especially if there is a garage on the property, and residents often use their expansion for a garden or a play area for children or pets (Weslian 2013, interview). Brian Cummins (2013, interview), whose ward includes the Clark-Fulton, Stockyard, Brooklyn Centre, and West Boulevard neighborhoods, says that yard expansions are an opportunity to bring properties up to code. The code was changed in the 1990s, so many properties were grandfathered in and have not been updated since. Cummins (2013, interview) explains, “If we sell you, very cheaply, a full or half lot, we're increasing your property values, [so] we feel that we can leverage some improvements… We're getting people to take out
aprons, reinstate curbs, reinstate tree lawns, and upgrade their chain link fencing to a picket or decorative fencing.”

When a half lot is sold it is often split between its neighbors and this can foster stronger ties between them (Zautner 2011). Not only does this put land back into taxpayer ownership, the requirement that a buyer’s property must adhere to the newer code further increases the owner’s property value and betters the aesthetics of the area. However, not everyone interested in adding a lot can afford to bring their property to code. The cost of a lot itself can range from $26 - $100, depending on its size and the land bank that holds it, so it is actually the least expensive part of an expansion (Cuyahoga County Land Bank 2013; Cleveland Division of Neighborhood Development 2014). Weslian says that SVD has been aiding residents who want to purchase a vacant lot but cannot afford the cost in order to move lots into private ownership (2013, interview).

While community gardens are a popular and common reuse, there is an upper limit to how many an area’s residents can support, whereas the only limits for sideyard expansions are available lots and willing homeowners. Cummins believes that community gardens are the second-best reuse for lots after sideyard expansions, but he says that his ward is “probably maxed out at this point” on them (2013, interview). Sasha Ottoson-Deal (2013, interview) of SCFBC, which operates in Cummins’ ward, mentions the presence of market gardens, as well as community gardens. Community gardens are essentially non-profits, and the produce is used by the participants themselves or donated to another non-profit. Market gardens are for-profit endeavors, defined in Cleveland’s zoning code as “an area of land managed and maintained by an individual or group of
individuals to grow and harvest… crop[s] ... to be sold for profit” (Lacroix 2010). This distinction is for legal use and not necessarily reflected in the names of the actual reuses, with the Urban Growth Farm and Old Husher’s Farm referenced by Zautner (2011) actually being market gardens. Cleveland has a specific zoning designation for community and market gardens, called the “Urban Garden District,” that “legislatively reserve[s] certain land for urban gardening” (Lacroix 2010, 236). This protection may help the city and residents avoid the conflicts seen in Baltimore regarding development of some garden sites.

The Cleveland Botanical Garden manages a market garden program called Green Corps, which hires local high school students to work at six farms situated on vacant land across the city. Green Corps sites sell both produce and value-added products through their farmstands, farmers markets, and local grocery stores. Student employees give outreach presentations about nutrition and health to local schools and daycares, are trained and educated in agriculture, environmental science, and leadership skills, and run workshops on gardening topics (Cleveland Botanical Garden 2014). I visited the Slavic Village Learning Farm, where two student employees gave me a tour and highlighted their favorite crops, including strawberries, corn, and zucchini. The farm is built on an abandoned car lot. Figure 21 shows the raised beds used to avoid contamination.
While the Cleveland zoning code supports some types of animal husbandry, including beekeeping and raising chickens, Ottoson-Deal notes that while larger animals like goats and pigs are technically allowed, their spacing requirements put them beyond the scope of most garden reuse projects (2013, interview). However, SCFBC “support[s] the idea of more farm animals and more agriculture in the city in general,” leading to a fun temporary use of land:
The wackiest thing that we did was a program where we rented four goats to mow the lots. And the main success of that was getting positive attention for the neighborhood and being kind of a neighborhood pride booster because it was just fun, but kind of drawing attention to the idea that we need to find creative solutions to the maintenance issue of vacant lots (Ottoson-Deal 2013, interview).

Aside from boosting neighborhood pride, something that may be low in an area with high vacancy, this sort of initiative could encourage residents to think about the possibilities of vacant land in new ways.

Gardens are not the only agricultural reuse found in Cleveland. Anita Brindza of Cudell Improvement Incorporated, a CDC serving the Cudell and Edgewater neighborhoods, discusses the founding of an orchard in her organization’s service area. The lot lacks direct access to Detroit Avenue, a major commercial thoroughfare, so it is not of much interest to commercial developers (Brindza 2013, interview). Brindza wanted to provide fresh fruit to local food banks, and the idea of an orchard was influenced by residents. She says, “One of the ways that we kind of get a leg up is that several of our board members are landscapers… they own a lot of equipment, so they were able to prepare the site” (Brindza 2013, interview). One resident, a groundskeeper at KSU, knew of a grant competition for orchards, which the CDC entered and won. They received a total of 60 trees – apple, plum, peach, and pear – and once the trees are able to produce fruit, the CDC will donate it to area food banks. Due to the size of the site, a resident was also able to start a market garden, and he sells his produce cheaply to local senior citizens, similar to the program at Whitelock Farm in Baltimore. Brindza says, “It's been a very successful endeavor for us, successful in terms of providing services for the community” (2013, interview).
Another orchard reuse in Cleveland, shown in Figure 22, located in the Brooklyn Centre neighborhood, is on land abandoned by a railway. The parcel overlooks the Cleveland Zoo and Big Creek, a tributary of the Cuyahoga River. Area residents, including Johanna Hamm, Executive Assistant for Cummins and Ward 14, thought the lot was a waste of possible greenspace. They worked with the ReImagining Cleveland program, funded by Neighborhood Progress Incorporated (NPI) and the City of Cleveland, to bring healthy food into the neighborhood and create greenspace (Neighborhood Progress Inc. 2011).
A last example of an agricultural reuse project is Chateau Hough, a vineyard. Vineyards as vacant land reuses are, to my knowledge, unique to Cleveland. Chateau Hough, named after the neighborhood where it is located, started in 2010. It was also funded by ReImagining Cleveland. It is one of the broader projects to come out of that initiative. Frank Ford, who worked at NPI, a community-based non-profit funding intermediary that spearheaded the ReImagining Cleveland project, describes Mansfield Frazier, the project leader of Chateau Hough as “Really charismatic... he is great. He’s a high point” (Ford 2013, interview). Frazier, an ex-convict, who is now a writer,
construction company owner, and community activist, established the vineyard with the intent of creating employment opportunities and fostering neighborhood pride (Smith 2010). Hough is best known for being the site of a race riot in the 1960s that left a quarter of its buildings burnt down, rather than its long and interesting history, which Frazier took into account in naming his project. During a talk at a TEDx event in Cleveland, he explained:

We named it Vineyards of Chateau Hough and people said, “Well why did you choose that name?” It’s a political name and here’s why – if we had named it Chateau Westlake or Chateau Solon nobody would have raised an eyebrow. We say Chateau Hough and people do a double-take. What we are saying is that the land we occupy in Hough is just valuable to us as the land people in Hunting Valley occupy (Frazier 2013).

For context, Westlake and Solon are outer ring, affluent, predominately white suburbs, and Hunting Valley is a village on the outskirts of the county with a mean household income of over $500,000 (Higley 2014).

Chateau Hough has attracted media attention and volunteers from across the county, presumably drawn by the uniqueness of the project and its outspoken founder. Frazier hires men from a local halfway house and the local community to do the project’s heavy work in order to create local jobs. Frazier is also building a biocellar – an underground greenhouse in the basement of the house formerly on the lot – to grow mushrooms (Chilcote 2013). His goal is to have a co-operative business that provides for the community (Frazier 2013). Despite the harsh winter of 2013-14 destroying most of Ohio’s grape crop, the vineyard bottled its first wines in 2014, due to its planting of cold-hardy grape varieties (Snook 2014). This inadvertently demonstrates the need for plants in any greening project to be able to adapt to climate change.
Non-agricultural greening is also a common land reuse in Cleveland. Pocket parks were mentioned by Ottoson-Deal and Noah Sutter, Vacant Land Manager at SVD (Ottoson-Deal 2013, interview; Sutter 2013, interview). According to Ottoson-Deal, two parks in the SCFBC service area were created and are maintained by a group called the Brooklyn Centre Naturalists. She describes this group as “people specifically interested in doing things in the neighborhood to work with native plants and urban habitat” and mentions that they are affiliated with the National Wildlife Federation, which has certified them to establish backyard habitats that promote biodiversity (Ottoson-Deal 2013, interview). These native plant parks are intended for passive uses, such as relaxing or walking, rather than active ones such as play.

However, playspaces are also a presence in Cleveland’s greening land reuses. Joel Wimbiscus, at LAND Studio, a planning and design non-profit that works around Northeast Ohio, discusses a project called ArtPlace: PlayScape in the North Collinwood neighborhood that he worked on for the local CDC. The project combines a play area, greenspace, and public art installations to create an interesting public area for a neighborhood branding itself as a revitalizing arts destination (Crea 2013). Wimbiscus (2013, interview) says:

We wanted something that was playful and durable and unique. If we're going to build a park we're not just going to build it and walk away, we have to make sure that there's someone who's going to maintain it and that it's built in a way that makes maintaining it easier. The [local] CDC asked us [to be involved]. We’ve done a lot of similar projects around the city. [It] rose out of a master plan that called for greenspace interventions around [the area]. We built it so, if you want to have a class, have a small class come for whatever reason, teacher can stay here, kids can sit on the small stone walls, [it] acts as a stage area. They were going to have a movie here, a small movie in the park, but there's been a
rainstorm. They see it as something they can use for small neighborhood gatherings.

Figure 23 shows a plan of the site and the features Wimbiscus mentions are visible.

Figure 24 shows some of the art installations.
Figure 23: The plan for the ArtPlace site. Several stormwater remediation elements – rain barrels, a bioswale, and trees – are included. Image from LAND Studio (2013).
Figure 24: A composite image of some of the murals on the adjacent CDC building and the Astroturf sculptures at the site. Images from LAND Studio (2013), composite by author.
Wildflower plantings are another reuse that creates greenspace. SVD has promoted this in high-vacancy areas of the neighborhood due to its low cost. Sutter mentions that the wildflowers used are native to Ohio, giving the reuse an environmental benefit in addition to the element of beautification (2013, interview). Weslian says of these projects:

We had some lots that were going to be orphan lots so we did wildflowers on [them] and everybody was like “Wow,” because wildflowers could be a good thing, but in a year and a half it could look like a weed lot where everybody would be like, “So those are wildflowers? Really?” We've identified which ones are the wildflowers and which ones are the weeds [and] we're maintaining those places (Weslian 2013, interview).

Lots in both Slavic Village and the SCFBC area have been used for green infrastructure (GI) and experimental purposes. GI is defined by the EPA as “us[ing] vegetation, soils, and natural processes to manage water and create healthier urban environments” and the agency has funded GI projects in Slavic Village (US EPA 2014). SVD has also worked with the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District (NEORSD) on demonstration stormwater management projects, such as rain gardens, to test for community buy-in previous to widespread implementation (Weslian 2013, interview). However, the longevity of and funding for these efforts is in question due to the recent legal struggles NEORSD has encountered in trying to enforce its stormwater tax, which will be argued in the Ohio Supreme Court later this year (Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District 2014). Some cities in the District’s coverage area sued, as they felt it was unfair for them to pay a fee for projects that may not directly benefit their city, despite the improvements to the water quality of Lake Erie and the major rivers in the area. Ohio’s 8th District Court of Appeals agreed that NEORSD was overstepping its bounds, ruling
that stormwater was not wastewater – a confusing decision (Ott 2013). Lilah Zautner, currently at the CCLB and formerly of NPI, says that stormwater remediation projects are more and more common on vacant land, driven by the increasing stringency of EPA water regulations (2013, interview).

Regarding experiments, Ottoson-Deal says an Ohio State student did a study in the neighborhood on phytoremediation, the plant-based removal of toxic materials from land and soil (2013, interview). Sutter comments that there are several weather stations that track both atmospheric conditions and soil water data on vacant land in Slavic Village (2013, interview).

Bike paths and trails may not be GI under the EPA’s definition, but they do augment the city’s infrastructure in a way that promotes sustainable transit and aids stormwater remediation. SVD is expanding upon the Morgana Run Trail, a rail-trail that joins the neighborhood to the Cleveland Metroparks’ Garfield Reservation and connects to various schools and other locations of interest in the area (Cleveland City Planning Commission 2014b). Weslian (2013, interview) explains the recent trail expansion and its incorporation of vacant land: “What we've done with the trail is we've continued to expand it so to create a greenway buffer so that it becomes more than just a 30 foot wide trail through the community and it becomes a place where people see it as a viable economic opportunity. That’s also been an opportunity for us to absorb some [vacant] land.” Tying vacant land to existing projects like the Morgana Run Trail is useful for two reasons. First, it expands upon the current project, resulting in more and greater benefits to the community. In this case, it beautifies the trail, brings nature into the city, and aids
in stormwater remediation. Second, appending more land onto a current project makes it less likely that it will fall back into a vacant state, as maintenance mechanisms are already in place.

Joel Wimbiscus also discusses trail projects in Cleveland. LAND Studio has been working on an initiative called the Lake Link Trail, a project that is intended to connect the current terminus of the Ohio and Erie Canal Towpath Trail, a major bike trail in Northeast Ohio, to Lake Erie. This project is being built on an abandoned railroad right-of-way and will also link public housing residents to more transit and amenities such as parks (Wimbiscus 2013, interview). LAND Studio is experienced with trail projects, as they were involved in the Morgana Run Trail’s initial construction and continued development (LAND Studio 2014). The organization is also involved in the conceptual planning of another bike trail, on neglected land next to the Regional Transit Authority’s (RTA) rapid transit line. Rotary International has been taking care of the land for over 30 years and would like to see it become a path connecting the west side to downtown and the Towpath Trail, increasing bike connectivity (the promotion of which is a stated goal in Cleveland’s Sustainability Plan) (City of Cleveland Office of Sustainability 2010; Wimbiscus 2013, interview). The proposed trail would also link to Cleveland’s EcoVillage, a sustainability-oriented neighborhood. Figure 25 shows a map of the project, which has recently been moving closer to construction (Litt 2014). Figure 26 is an idea of what the completed project may look like.
Figure 25: A map showing the proposed trail location and the points of interest near the trail. “Zone Rec” is the Michael Zone Recreation Center. Image scanned by author from documents provided by Joel Wimbiscus.
Redline Greenway

Figure 26: A mock-up of the proposed trail. Image scanned by author from documents provided by Joel Wimbiscus.
Redevelopment is the final reuse discussed by respondents in Cleveland. SVD has built new single-family homes and townhouses on vacant land adjacent to the Morgana Run Trail in a development aptly named Trailside (Weslian 2013, interview). The development is geared toward affordability and sustainability. It offers 15-year tax abatements, down payment assistance, and homes “meet or exceed Cleveland’s Green Energy standard” (Slavic Village Development 2014).

Cummins shares his idea for a housing redevelopment project that would take a somewhat different approach than Trailside’s:

We think the market's going to get stronger [so] we want to do kind of an overlay of a housing development. Think of a new development you'd see in a brochure in a suburb, but now lay that over an old neighborhood. Out of these twenty-five vacant lots we want to attract investors to build eight bungalows, ten smaller worker cottages, kind of an assembly of different styles of housing and actually plan it and attract investors (Cummins 2013, interview).

While Cummins compares this to a greenfield development in a suburb, bungalows and worker cottages are not usually associated with a contemporary suburban housing development. This sort of infill, if done in a way that reinforces the architectural feel and style of the area, supports the aesthetics of the area and keeps it cohesive.

Cummins also discusses using select vacant lots as parking:

If we can find some vacant properties on the east side of West 30th, we can aggregate them and include them for parking for businesses on West 25th. So we're trying to actually improve and strengthen our commercial areas by using residential vacant lots that are close to those areas. We're holding land to try and amass property for community expansion (Cummins 2013, interview).

There are no streets numbered 26–29 in the area he is discussing, so this parking is bordering on businesses on West 25th Street, a major thoroughfare. While adding extra off-street parking is not advancing sustainability goals such as promoting alternative
transportation or improving soil permeability, it is aiding local businesses and helping to provide the area with a more stable economic base. Another project in the neighborhood is streetscape improvement. While not necessarily a reuse, the beautification and maintenance of the edges of a lot “improve[s] the appearance of the sidewalk” (Ottoson-Deal 2013, interview), making it more pedestrian-friendly and attractive for prospective developers. Sutter mentions that these have been done in Slavic Village as well (2013, interview).

In conclusion, regarding the variety of vacant land reuse strategies in Cleveland, Weslian says, “I think at this point, everyone's like, ‘Throw it at the wall, if it works, that's great’” (2013, interview). This comment illustrates the drastic need for viable solutions for this land, but also the freedom for creativity with vacant land reuses.

Obstacles to Reuse

Respondents identify a number of obstacles that reuse initiatives must circumvent in Cleveland. Some apply to the physical reuse of the lot. Weslian notes that due to the past industrial use of many properties in her neighborhood there may be a need for soil remediation, and that residential properties may have lead in the soil from old paint (2013, interview). Phytoremediation is the burgeoning method of toxicity removal, and Salazar and Pignata (2014) outline a method for identifying native plants that also serve as remediators that may be of use to practitioners. If the dangerous materials are not removed from the soil, any agricultural reuse necessitates “lasagna gardening” or raised beds (Weslian 2013, interview). Sutter says that soil quality is an issue, not just in terms
of toxicity, but regarding the methods of demolition and the quality of infill materials (2013, interview). Weslian explains how this can affect yard expansions:

There's a distinction between topsoil and clean fill. Clean fill, in the city and the contractor's mind, could be a dump truck load of rocks, bricks, and dirt mixed in. So when that gets dumped into what used to be a house, and you want to give it to a neighbor as a yard expansion, and he goes out there with his little lawnmower, and whacks his lawnmower to heck because he just hit a brick, it's not the best (Weslian 2013, interview).

She also mentions attempts to persuade the city to uphold higher standards for demolished sites, since, due to their condition, many lots need expensive work put into them before they can be reused. She says:

Some of what we're doing, in a sense, is if we can take care of the land and heal it [so] that in fifteen years when someone else is here saying, “We've got these plots of land that we could reuse, we could maybe build a house here now because there's a need for it or we could expand it and do something else…” The land is left in a better condition than it was (Weslian 2013, interview).

Weslian also discusses problems that have arisen with sideyard expansions. Aside from the quality of the land residents are adding to their property, she mentions the cost of combining two parcels into one. While the cost of purchasing the extra property is low, the cost of legally combining the property into a single parcel can be much higher. She says:

If something happens to your property and, say, you pass away, it gets put into some sort of survivorship and court process, they might not know that that lot belongs to you too, that might end up in limbo, and that's happened... We encourage people to [combine lots]. The problem is in order to do that, you have to pay for a property survey. So this lot that you got for $100 is going to cost you $1,500 to do a survey and then do the combination. And that's a little hard for some people. In some cases, when we had Re-Imagining [Cleveland] money, we were doing that. We wanted to set a standard, to say, this is the best way to do it (Weslian 2013, interview).
ReImagining Cleveland was a program supported by NPI, the City of Cleveland, a number of grassroots groups, and local non-profits, founded in 2008 (Zautner 2011). It provided grants and technical assistance to selected applicants that wanted to start a reuse project. Zautner, who was the project’s manager when she was at NPI, says that the group knew they would run into problems and that, in fact, this was their goal so they could establish better strategies for future reuses (2013, interview). She discusses some of the obstacles the program encountered:

We ran into zoning, we ran into water permits, we ran into fence permits, we ran into soil contamination, we ran into all of those issues but what was important was that when we ran into them, there were people working to identify the problems and working to change the root of the problem, not just develop a loophole or something. So that as this happened, policies were actually changed, so that when other people see people and just want to do this by themselves, [but] they didn't have the full force of these larger organizations, [they] were able to do it… There wasn't a precedent for how to do it (Zautner 2013, interview).

Ottoson-Deal believes that the city’s policies have positively changed: “The city has gotten a lot better and made the process much easier so people can be officially allowed to use the property” (2013, interview). Terry Schwarz (2013, interview), Director of the CUDC, says that the city’s land bank – which is separate from the CCLB – has reinvented itself to become more “more strategic and much more rational.” She says:

The city developed what they call these “sustainable patterns of development.” And it's really intended to help guide the choices people make in terms of land bank lots. Every day the phone's ringing at city hall, somebody wants a land bank lot. In the past it's always been very political and probably somewhat arbitrary about what lots are saved in the land bank for redevelopment and what lots are made available to adjacent property owners and the like. I think that over the last few years, the land bank has been reorganized in ways that make it easier and more understandable for people to see, “Well, if I want this lot in my neighborhood, this is the process that I go through to make this happen” (Schwarz 2013, interview).
Zautner says that while ReImagining Cleveland was successful in many ways, and although the city has reformed its internal processes to become more forwarding-thinking regarding reuses, there is still room for improvement: “There's still a lot of work to be done, a lot of process and policy has been changed but there's still a lot of bureaucracy, there's still a curve there that's not fully gone yet” (Zautner 2013, interview).

Other respondents note a number of bureaucratic issues regarding the implementation of reuse projects. For example, Weslian says that the city has been supportive of land reuses but that no matter what, “pulling a permit, [it’s] like a poking your eye out kind of thing” (2013, interview). Brindza notes that the city land bank has five committees that a parcel must go through in order to be approved for sale or lease. This process is not necessarily difficult for residents, but it is time-consuming (Brindza 2013, interview). For reference, Westbrook explains the difference between the two land banks that operate within Cleveland, and how the organizations interact with the land reuse process:

The Cleveland Land Bank is rather passive. It receives properties already cleared of structures and it basically banks the land. County land banks are a relatively new animal in Ohio. It contrasts to the city [land bank] being more passive. The [Cuyahoga] County Land Bank has been much more active. They take parcels with structures, they are actively involved in demolition, they have intervention tools where [financial] banks that are wishing to unload properties, they can deposit those with the land bank along with the cost of demolition and the land bank will take it off their hands. It’s an active effort on their parts. They also are much quicker to turn them around (Westbrook 2013, interview).

Despite the work in modifying policy, Wimbiscus and LAND Studio have run into some difficulties from the city. In 2013, the group worked with a local artist to design and construct an installation in the reading garden at the Main Branch of the
Cleveland Public Library. The piece, called “Reading Nest,” was part of an annual program that places artistic work in the reading garden (LAND Studio 2014). Wimbiscus details the issues they met:

It's very frustrating. The Reading Nest at the Library – it's gotten so much national attention. We didn't need to get a permit for it, I don't think anyone thought we needed a permit for it, but the City Fire Department said, “Hey, where’s your permit?” So they told the Building and Housing Department and they send us a letter like, “Cease and desist,” like, “You must remove this by...” And it had gotten so much positive press as such a feel-good story. It's frustrating to see the bureaucrats approach something that is been such a positive and it's not as if it's a fire hazard. It’s not a problem at all. It’s just frustrating when people focus one just one little issue instead of seeing the benefit it has (Wimbiscus 2013, interview).

Figure 27 shows the Reading Nest project before it was taken down.
Figure 27: The Reading Nest at the Downtown Branch of the Cleveland Public Library. The installation was made of reclaimed wood and painted gold to reflect the griffin statues around the city’s civic buildings. Image from LAND Studio (2014).

Wimbiscus also says that groups unfamiliar with the reuse process may experience more difficulty than LAND Studio in navigating it. However, he does mention that some obstacles are in place for good reason:

I think probably it's [obstacles in the reuse process] maybe more of an issue than we think it is, just because we're so used to it and understand it and just now that that's part of the whole thing. There’s a reason why there's hurdles – maybe they shouldn’t be so high. There’s certain things you have to do. If it were a little too easy that'd probably create some ancillary problems (Wimbiscus 2013, interview).
A project overcoming its pre-establishment physical and bureaucratic barriers is only the first step—it still needs to be established. Zautner views ReImagining Cleveland as a primer for what sorts of reuses are easiest to place successfully:

I would say the parks were probably easier to implement than the gardens. Just because it was, pretty much, you draw out the design, you get the materials, you put them in, whereas the gardens, there's just a lot more detail to them. Like what kind of tomatoes, what kind of this, what kind of that, what kind of tools do you need? You're dealing a lot more with a lot of personal preferences (Zautner 2013, interview).

She also notes a variety of successes and failures, some of which were surprising to onlookers. The program leaders expected a “spectrum of success,” but Zautner reports that the majority of the reuses have been successful. She continues:

We had a couple projects, interestingly enough, that were really just failing. They were **failing**. And they kind of rose up and we had people from the neighborhood say, ‘There's a sign down the road and it's been abandoned and we've got some people who want to use it, and you've got all the tools and everything, can we just use it?’ And we were able to actually transition those projects into new groups that are proving really successful (Zautner 2013, interview).

She adds that some projects “felt [like they] were never going to get off the ground,” but now, three years after Reimaging Cleveland, she “drive[s] by and they are gorgeous” (Zautner 2013, interview). On the other hand, some that started well have fallen into disrepair. While she indicated that parks were easier to implement than gardens and, by proxy, other agricultural reuses, she says that gardens are the easier of the two to continually maintain:

I think one thing that I would note is that all and all the gardens, orchards, vineyards, have proven more successful than the parks. And I have this theory as to why, because I think it's that with the parks, people get really excited about building [them], they get excited to install it, make it beautiful and everybody gets big volunteer days but once it's there, it's like okay, they've got a park with some benches, in their neighborhood, are they that excited about taking care of it? Not
so much. Whereas a garden, it requires constant maintenance but every time you're working there, you're taking something from there. You're getting a tangible return, a reward (Zautner 2013, interview).

The problem of maintenance was often mentioned by respondents. For instance, Weslian reports that with many of the GI projects founded and funded by an outside agency, SVD is asked to provide upkeep. The CDC has partnered with Youth Opportunities Unlimited, an area non-profit that provides job training for disadvantaged youth, to create the ‘Green Team,’ which performs maintenance-related tasks in the community (Weslian 2013, interview).

Cummins notes that the city cannot be responsible for the upkeep of new parks created, even if they are on its land. He identifies the problem as such: “The city government doesn't do the best job of maintaining parks, so the issue of looking to do public parks with the government that doesn't necessarily excel at maintaining public spaces is a challenge” (Cummins 2013, interview). Another challenge he observes is regarding care of community gardens. His family has previously participated in one, and he says, regarding the maintenance aspect: “My wife and I were put on the weed list, meaning if you weren't maintaining your garden well enough, your names went on and they posted it, kind of like an old colonial time, public shaming… you didn't want to be on the weed list for long” (Cummins 2013, interview). He sees community gardens in his ward begin well, boom for a year or two, and then “they go fallow.” The problems lie in the continued execution of the project. Cummins (2013, interview) remarks that some maintenance solutions may also apply to biodiversity issues as well: “[Our research] began to lead to some low-mow, low-growth species that we could plant. We found out
that's there's really nothing native to Ohio that really serves that. We want to try to utilize native plants, so that's been a very big problem.”

Ottoson-Deal notes the same problems regarding reuse maintenance. Some specifics she identifies include the original project founders weakening, due to one moving away or some sort of neighborhood feud, and a population becoming more transient due to absentee landlords and demolitions, which leads residents to be less involved in their community (Ottoson-Deal 2013, interview). Areas with a high percentage of renters are less likely to participate in greening programs, as renters do not have the strong tie of property ownership to the neighborhood and do not benefit from increased property values that result from greening (Perkins, Heynen, and Wilson 2004). Ottoson-Deal also sees difficulties in cultivating a steady volunteer base, and highlights the problems arising when projects are started by those outside the communities they are located in:

It can also be an issue if an outside group comes in to do a project because they don't have the daily interaction with the site so there’s this confusion over who's really responsible. If they did a project but don’t actually live near it, how are they taking care of it? We like to have people who live right there engaged in that project so they can help keep an eye on it because it should really be theirs (Ottoson-Deal 2013, interview).

As stated previously, neighborhood input and buy-in is essential for the success of any sort of project. Cummins would like to see a better method of planning greenspaces locally, specifically one that promotes pocket parks surrounded by homeowners. He explains:

It would actually have some tree canopy, some underbrush, with lighting and maybe only one fourth the area is actually planted sod or grass. I can imagine a grouping of five or ten households close to that, that would be willing to adopt the
park and cut that small quarter area of grass, and potentially rake and help maintain [it] as a community (Cummins 2013, interview).

Perhaps this kind of initiative could arise through a block club and be enforced through some type of deed restriction on the properties whose owners have agreed to the plan.

Wesliian also stresses the importance of community input. She says, “It's important for us check it so that the community's wishes and needs are always at the forefront” (2013, interview). Sutter also emphasizes this point and speaks about listening to any ideas residents have:

I think there's an acknowledgement that Philadelphia, Youngstown, Cleveland, Toledo, Detroit, Flint, Grand Rapids, all the Rust Belt cities share in this similar situation [and] narrative that's created the vacant land. There's some things that we all can do – community gardens or wildflowers or things like that – but sometimes you get a neighbor who’s like, “I want to put a sculpture up” or “I want to do this” and I think that if you can find those special projects and those partnerships to go with it and make it part of your neighborhood, don't be afraid to do those projects (Sutter 2013, interview).

Sometimes it is a process in and of itself to figure out what residents want to do. Cummins discusses the case of a resident from El Salvador who, due to language issues, development staff thought wanted to start a small garden on vacant land. Once Cummins, who is fluent in Spanish, spoke to him in person, he realized that this man wanted to and “had the capacity to potentially farm on something as big as a ten parcel area.” The councilman says, “I think a lot of it has to do with actually proactively putting out a call for those larger uses and when people are asking for uses really teasing out what [are] your capabilities” (Cummins 2013, interview).

Some respondents raised the issue of funding. While citizens performing reuses can have difficulty identifying funding sources, the city’s very strong CDC structure has
been of great help in linking residents to resources. The knowledge produced from the ReImagining project has also been of use, with estimated project costs and lists of resources that summarizes the practices the project uncovered (Zautner 2011).

Ottoson-Deal mentions that non-profit organizations working with land reuse could always use more money. She says specifically of the limits of idea-sharing in the non-profit world, “If you're working for a non-profit that doesn't have a lot of money for a travel budget, it's hard to get [to conferences]... It would be great if everybody in the Rust Belt would go on a tour and look at all the projects going on but I’m not sure where the money would come from” (Ottoson-Deal 2013, interview)

Another issue linked to funding is the cost of demolition. There are still thousands of vacant structures that need to be torn down before the land can be reused. Ford says that Congress members from Rust Belt states have been pushing for increased federal funding for demolitions:

The money for demolitions, that's the problem. We’ve got to raise new money, there are two or three separate bills in Congress now, [Representative Dan] Kildee [Flint, Michigan, instrumental in forming the nation’s first land bank in Genesee County, Michigan], [Senator Rob] Portman [of Ohio], [Representative Marcia] Fudge [of Ohio, whose district includes part of Cleveland] have also introduced bills to propose federal funding for money for demolition (Ford 2013, interview).

Development is another obstacle for some reuses, though this is not as prevalent a problem as it is in Baltimore. Weslian reviews two cases. The first is regarding a California woman who was looking for a three-acre site on which to start an urban farm. While there is a lot of vacant land in Slavic Village, it is spread out and not necessarily in contiguous parcels. Weslian says that that SVD was unable to help this woman secure a plot, that three acres of adjacent lots would be at a premium, and SVD would prefer to
see development occurring on a parcel of that size (Weslian 2013, interview). Detroit has many urban farms of that size and larger (Martinez 2014), but the comparatively healthier market conditions in Cleveland have limited the size of its agricultural reuses. While this woman may not have been influenced by Detroit’s much-publicized farms, one thing is clear: just because a reuse works in one city or even one neighborhood, it does not mean that it works everywhere.

Secondly, SVD has also had to deny a sideyard expansion to a resident who requested one. Weslian explains:

There’s a company down the street, they’re expanding and in order to keep this company that's employing 300 people, they need to do some expansions because a lot of these little manufacturing companies [are] landlocked now… In order to continue to be viable and competitive they need to expand, bring in a new piece of equipment, build something onto the shop. And so we'll have to say to the neighborhood, well that’s going to be part of Presrite’s [local forging firm] new development, so we're not going to be able to do a yard expansion with you on that (Weslian 2013, interview).

Cleveland’s CDCs, due to their high levels of neighborhood involvement, are able to guide residents to reuse vacant land not of interest to businesses and developers. This layer of governance is missing in Baltimore, and it appears to reduce the possibility of conflict regarding reuses on city-owned land. However, it remains to be seen if this will continue when there is a higher demand for development in Cleveland.

Residents and organizations interested in reusing a lot may be bewildered by the array of possible projects and find themselves delayed by the process of figuring out what to do. According to Weslian, “There's just so many things you can do with them. Also [it] depends on the size of your city, where you're at with the thinking about are you growing, are you shrinking, and there's that whole conversation” (2013, interview). However, some
reuses that may seem great in theory do not work in practice. Ottoson-Deal says that the idea of housing homeless people in refurbished vacant homes has been mentioned: “I've heard people throw the ideas around, how can we have homeless people but all these vacant houses, why does our society work this way? It's very strange that we can have empty housing and houseless people” (2013, interview). Despite the good intentions behind that sort of idea, there are so many complications that it is not feasible on a large scale, at least in today’s political arena (Erickson 2012). Bob Jakimowicz, Planning and Development Advisor for the City of Cleveland, discusses the questions the city and other entities ask regularly themselves regarding land reuse:

What can be done depends on the context… What will the market support? We can wish new housing and all those things we want but if in fact all those conditions which create housing opportunities don't meet a critical threshold, it's just not going to happen. Can we still plan for the future if that happens? Yes, we can, but we also have to be realistic. And putting that into context, what real resources do we have to work with? How much money do we have in the public sector? How much is the private sector willing to put in? It’s an ongoing process of re-evaluation, classifying, and leveraging what the best possible opportunities at the given time given our resources (Jakimowicz 2013, interview).

All cities working with vacant land reuse initiatives are asking themselves these same questions. Baltimore and Cleveland, especially the latter due to its still-declining population, are also searching for new economic paths. Ford asks of Cleveland, “What going to be the economic driver for this city in the next twenty years? What’s sort of emerging [currently] is biotech. We’ve got this lake, what about wind generating power” (2013, interview)?
The struggle to untangle predatory lending practices is another obstacle in the way of demolition and land reuse. Westbrook says, “It's like a masquerade to try to find out what the true facts are” in finding the ownership of some properties. He explains:

As bad as the structure looks, the legal condition of the property is probably far worse. Where you have a bank-initiated foreclosure, [they] tell somebody they're initiating foreclosure, the people say, “Well that's embarrassing, I’m going to get out of here” and they walk away, and then bank never even forecloses. We have a huge problem with bank walkaways (Westbrook 2013, interview).

Bank walkaways, where the financial institution informs the owner they are foreclosing, but never actually do, create “zombie” properties that no one claims ownership of.

After structures are demolished and vacant lots are created, they may not be reused due to the sheer volume of available land. While the spatial distribution of lots is generally scattered in the areas respondents operate in, Weslian notes that “every once in a while we've got a couple streets that are like ‘whoa’ – vacant lot, vacant lot, vacant lot, house, vacant lot, vacant lot, house, vacant lot, vacant lot, vacant lot, vacant lot, vacant house, house, vacant lot, vacant lot” (2013, interview). SVD does not have the resources to reuse every single vacant lot and focuses on “catalytic projects,” so some areas do not get as much attention from organizations, even at the neighborhood level.

Another problem is the attitude towards some greenspace reuses. Ottoson-Deal notes some skepticism from residents regarding gardens, partially stemming from the fact that they would rather see houses built (2013, interview). Zautner sees stronger protestations:

Definitely objections [to reuse projects], specifically to gardens. There are people that don't agree that you should have farms in the urban areas. We have other projects that are native plants, so they look different than parks. There were definitely objections that people had to these kind of things, [that they] should not
be happening in a city environment. That is a common complaint (Zaunter 2013, interview).

While Feygina (2013) discusses a number of systemic and historical reasons why urban nature is rejected by many residents, Tortorello (2011) notes that some residents enjoy living around spaces like gardens. These residents may come from rural or agricultural backgrounds, often arriving in a city after migration from the American South or immigration from Latin American or Sub-Saharan countries. As seen in the case of the Salvadoran man mentioned previously by Cummins, these residents may have uncommon (at least for a U.S. urban area) skills that are advantageous to a reuse’s success. However, residents may be accepting of more cultivated reuses like gardens, but not of native plantings, which to city dwellers with a limited knowledge of and exposure to uncultivated nature often look messy and unkempt.

The city’s attitudes towards reuses and finding more creative solutions to some problems present obstacles as well. Cummins says, “It takes time to change the mentality and culture of city workers and departments. It’s not changing fast enough for my liking” (2013, interview). He has a specific example of an initiative that he feels is straightforward and would aid both vacant land reuses and Cleveland’s sustainability goals, but that the city simply does not appear to be interested in doing:

The city stopped doing leaf pickup… Frankly the composting is a big opportunity and also a need... The thing that we pushed the city to do – but they didn’t do it – is you’ve got an active list of community gardens across the city. Email and write to those community gardens to volunteer to be composting sites. And just broadcast to the population. Put it in your mailer, because we do water and electric utility billings, put it in and tell people that, “Hey, go to the website, here's a list of composting facilities in your city. Take your leaves there.” So we need to be much more nimble and creative in finding localized solutions. I don't
see as much open-mindedness and creativity when it comes to executing these things (Cummins 2013, interview).

The city has reformed its policies regarding vacant land reuse to expedite and better the process, allowing strategies for reuse to become much easier for residents, non-profits, and even other aspects of the government to implement. However, there is opportunity for improvement regarding attitudes and policies germane to land reuse. Westbrook says he has seen improvement in bureaucratic attitudes, but agrees with Cummins in believing more change is needed:

Here at the city we're a rusty, old, crotchety bureaucracy. You know, we used to have inspectors go out with clipboards and look at the peeling paint on houses and when we gave them handheld computers they threw them away because they didn't want to work with them. And that's kind of not the present day condition, but that's a set of behaviors that we dealt with not too long ago (Westbrook 2013, interview).

Cummins notes that this is not just limited to the rank-and-file employees. He says that it is a “challenge to push collaboration” within city offices and the city council itself. He explains:

If you've got cultures of organizations and governments and entities that are not used to collaborating, how do you begin to get that going? To some degree there's a bit of a lack of leadership in some of the higher-level positions to really identify those opportunities and make them work. I'll even be self-critical on the council – we've been so focused on our immediate ward. I think we can all be self-critical about that and maybe try to reorient ourselves (Cummins 2013, interview).

There is also the need to rethink how the U.S. views its public spaces, as discussed in the previous chapter. Cummins, who worked for the Peace Corps before his involvement in community development, noticed the difference in how public space was treated and developed during his time in the Caribbean and Eastern Europe. He says:
I think that outside of the U.S., most major cities or even minor cities have a tradition of utilization of public space [at rates] much higher than what the U.S. does, just because of our land use and zoning laws… Within a quarter mile you would probably have at least two pocket parks of just space that people could go and congregate and meet each other. A lot of mothers and babies in strollers, just to go to a park and see each other. Dog parks were another thing I saw abroad, and I don't think we have enough of those either. I get it, it all gets to maintenance though. You do crushed limestone or pea gravel, in the case of a dog park or something like that, but you've got to get the buy-in from those residents to make sure it gets maintained (Cummins 2013, interview).

While the cost of maintenance is a strong deterrent, funding for public space has been subject to cuts at all levels of government (Baur, Tynon, and Gómez 2013; Weil 2014). Without a reversal of public spaces’ devaluation, funding problems will persist, particularly in cities struggling with tight budgets. However, Westbrook says that the city should be planning on land reuse creating new and better public spaces:

We're now in a mode where the ability to envision and shape and sort of predict what the future may hold and learn something from the past, from past mistakes, and decide to be more intentional about land use and I think inevitably there's going to be more public use of land. I’d say by and large, the conversion of a vacant lot into private use would still be the desirable goal but we ought to also be very prepared to have less conventional treatments and more kind of communal ownership as well (Westbrook 2013, interview).

Westbrook also discusses how the reality of Cleveland’s situation – not just the vacant land problem, but the population loss issue – was willfully ignored by some regional stakeholders. A slow reaction to the problem and the continuation of business as usual has set the region behind as a whole, particularly regarding economic policy (Moretti 2012). He explains:

It's also a huge policy and attitudinal, sort of sociological, shift for urban areas like Cleveland. Not too long ago the business association for Cleveland was The Greater Cleveland Growth Association. Cleveland itself has not grown for forty years, the region for about thirty years… It's about trying to develop new policy and new analysis based on facts and on real conditions, but without an old-style
mindset. That has been very difficult because Cleveland was first hit by the globalization of the manufacturing base, where you’d have old industrial properties. No one really took responsibility for remediating that abandonment (Westbrook 2013, interview).

Cleveland was already at great disadvantage before the vacant land problem was exacerbated by the housing crash. The city, probably only second to Detroit in the national consciousness, is often seen as a failure – the “Mistake on the Lake” (Phillip 2014). While a counter-narrative of Cleveland as a rising “hip” location is on the rise (McGraw 2014a) and the city is seeing increasing niche recognition for its sustainability efforts (Zautner 2013, interview), the city undeniably is viewed in a negative light on the national stage. Westbrook (2013, interview) believes this pulls focus away from the housing, vacancy, and population crises: “It's physical blight but social and economic blight as well. It’s viewed as a stigma. There’s jokes about Detroit as though people would intentionally do this to their own community. There’s jokes about Cleveland, [but] it's probably the greatest social, political, and economic crisis of our time.”

The Rust Belt is not seen as a place of importance, nor are the residents – particularly those stuck in the most vacant and disinvested neighborhoods of these cities – who are viewed dismissively as residents of “flyover states” (Wolfson 2014). This attitude is also illustrated by the fetishization of decay discussed in Appendix E, where vacancy is treated as an artistic motif completely detached from the lived experiences of citizens of these cities. Westbrook continues, pointing out two double standards, the first being how crises are treated depending on the region of the U.S. they occur in, and the second being how natural disasters are viewed versus economic and social ones:
This is why Detroit is the brunt of jokes and political bashing now. Granted, people don't understand underlying causes and we don’t have good resources to identify it. When a hurricane comes or [there’s] a forest fire in the Southwest nobody ever says, “Well, why in the hell did people build those houses there? Why did they build their house in that low-lying swampland in Florida?” But in the Rust Belt, they act like people are stupid or ran industry out or decided to gut office buildings (Westbrook 2013, interview)...

While these attitudes are ingrained in the national consciousness and may seem of little consequence to those holding them, overcoming the disadvantages they pose constitutes a huge task for advocates and representatives at the federal level..

New Ways of Thinking

As this chapter illustrates, Cleveland has already improved its management and policymaking regarding reuses. Ottoson-Deal notes that, previously, people would just reuse parcels without asking the city, but since it has now become fairly simple to gain permission, residents usually go through the appropriate channels (2013, interview). Cleveland has also improved the background processes related to vacant land that citizens may not directly interact with, but which make stakeholders’ strategies more straightforward to implement. Schwarz (2013, interview) says, “The [Cleveland] Planning Commission has been really a leader nationally in creating new kinds of zoning and land use tools that will enable some of these land uses and some of these vacant land practices to become part of the urban fabric.”

The zoning code that includes specifics for urban agriculture provides an example (Lacroix 2010). Schwarz (2013, interview) also points to the Cleveland Land Bank, the CCLB, and the city’s willingness to claim ownership of abandoned lots as driving the
creation of “bold choices” for land reuse and development. She explains how extensive land ownership gives the city an advantage that others do not enjoy:

In Cleveland we have at least one of the highest percentages of properties in the public domain. The city of Cleveland has had a land bank since the 1970s, and then Cuyahoga County established a land bank a few years ago. There are over 10,000 vacant lots in the city land bank. The thing that makes Cleveland different is the extent to which there is site control. That’s not to say that we always know what to do with these vacant properties and the city has enormous carrying costs. That's the thing that distinguishes us, by having so much property in the public domain, it's easier, you have better opportunities to plan for the future, because you can say we're going to set aside this land for future infill development, we can distribute this land to any private owner who wants to expand their own property. There's a lot of comprehensive planning decisions that could happen to site control. It’s hard to plan for property that other people own but if it is all in the public domain you can make some bold choices (Schwarz 2013, interview).

Despite the many obstacles to land reuse and slow reaction to the region’s changing economic reality, the city has been forward-thinking on the topic of land and housing.

According to Ford, this is exemplified by the Cleveland Municipal Housing Court’s long-presiding judge, Raymond Pianka:

Our housing court is one of the best in the country. It's not just one of the best because the way it was set up enables it to be that, but luckily – and maybe luck is part of this – the judge who was elected fifteen-some years ago is extraordinary. He's a former CDC executive director, former city councilman, he's not like most judges. He tends to think out of the box and do really creative things. On one hand he is very gentle and understanding, but he gets some company from Utah, he's going to fine them millions of dollars. Think twice if you want to come into this jurisdiction and muck around and break our laws. He's been very effective in that (Ford 2013, interview).

Another unique advantage Cleveland possesses – that also may be partially due to luck – is its data system, created in partnership with Case Western Reserve University (CWRU). This system, named NEOCANDO, helps stakeholders identify problems and tailor solutions to neighborhoods. Ford says, aside from Philadelphia and Los Angeles,
“There’s almost no other city that has a data system like this.” He shares that other cities he has worked with do not know basic information such as their rates of foreclosure – crucial for intervention in the process (Ford 2013, interview).

Respondents also discuss solutions that increase the efficacy of land reuses arising from changed ways of thinking. Schwarz, like some respondents in Baltimore, says that reuses should be planned as multifunctional. She explains: “We don't have enough money to turn every vacant lot into a farm, but what if those farms are also infiltrating storm water and also reducing people's energy bills and protecting people from adverse impacts of climate change” (Schwarz 2013, interview). Cummins (2013, interview) agrees, and mentions how experimentation and continuous improvement are the keys to success: “We’ve just got to continue to be very creative in figuring out community resources and collaboration. We’re always going to be open-minded to what more can we do. We’ve got to be experimental and learn from those experiments and continue to improve what we're doing.”

Ottoson-Deal (2013) says that SCFBC partners with the justice system, serving as an organization where people sentenced community service may work. The people assigned to the group often work on maintaining reuse projects. Projects may also benefit by following the lead of Chateau Hough and work with halfway houses and convict release programs, serving an additional community purpose aside from land reuse. However, the administrators of such an undertaking require a more specialized skill set than needed for general volunteer management, but there are interesting possibilities in solving several seemingly-distinct problems at once.
Cummins believes that more city-initiated outreach efforts need to be focused on universities, government agencies, and area non-profits. He says,

“I think we need to kind of rethink our priorities. You build from your assets. What programs and entities and organizations that you currently have existing that could collaborate better and doing more work? That’s the partnership with the SWD, that should be a no-brainer, but we haven't done it” (Cummins 2013, interview).

Several respondents note that, while negative attitudes towards Cleveland do cause problems, they are becoming less widespread. Zautner points out that in certain circles, “Cleveland [is] becoming known as this very progressive place in terms of urban agriculture” (2013, interview). Schwarz discusses how the temporary reuse projects CUDC has done changed outsider perceptions of urban neighborhoods. She describes her favorite reuse project:

The project we did a few years ago for the Detroit-Superior Bridge [a major thoroughfare from the west side of the city to Downtown, also a federally-recognized historical landmark], we had such a tiny budget that we weren't sure if anybody would show up but we threw the doors open to the Bridge after crafting this public space environment, and 8000 people showed up. And we didn't survey all 8000 but I’ll tell you that it wasn't just the people of the immediate neighborhood but a huge number of people, who were just curious about the structure (Schwarz 2013, interview).

CUDC placed interactive stations throughout the lower level of the bridge, an area not usually open to the public. These involved a games lounge, artwork, and a bike path (Schwarz and Jurca 2009). While the unused portion of the bridge is not vacant land in the traditional sense, it is an unused space and these sorts of unique and interesting projects draw attention to the problems and may kick-start other relevant ideas.

The CUDC looks to reinvent contemporary planning practices. Other respondents identify the need for reinvention due to the current economic, social, and environmental
situation. Sutter, at SVD, says that building housing, how vacant land was reused in the past, is no longer an option, but that parks and gardens, the easiest reuses, are not possible on every lot (2013, interview). Weslian, like other respondents, notes the need for creativity and change in putting theory into practice. She says:

I think that there's always been a little sort of that tension with people coming out of school and being neighborhood planners and not having the real experience of door knocking and working with community people and learning, in some cases, some very good theories and things. But the practicality of them when you hit the street is sometimes a little different than what you see. And you have to really be open to that as a planning entity. I think that the planners, a lot of the younger ones, still, we still see some of that same tension, but a lot more I think are more open to that kind of thing because I think we're sort of just reinventing right now (Weslian 2013, interview).

Weslian highlights the strengths of the Slavic Village neighborhood and points out that the sprawl mentality of planning had led to a culture that values artificial (sub)urban neighborhoods, not real ones:

No one’s expecting you to bring all the retail here, because people have begun to understand how retail works, but our commercial strip here is the main street and a lot of it went through that Main Street Certification with the National Trust. And instead you’ve got people creating fake main streets like Crocker Park and Legacy [Village, both “lifestyle center”/open air malls in outer-ring, upscale Cleveland suburbs] and everyone's converting to these outdoor malls and they're bringing housing to them, and it's like, “Hello, we're still here.” And this is a great venue, it's a walkable, livable community, and it's a little frustrating at times. We've just built another ramp to a Cleveland Clinic facility off of I-90 [in another upscale Cleveland suburb], so we're still doing the sprawl dance, instead of looking at what's really here, the infrastructure that's here, and the fact that Cleveland, a lot of people are still working in the city of Cleveland, and that's really where the majority of the monied jobs are (Weslian 2013, interview).

While neighborhoods are suffering from continual population loss to the suburbs, outlying counties, and different metropolitan areas, young professionals are looking for
more authentic urban experiences and are beginning to repopulate certain areas (Smith 2012).

Sutter notes how planning has changed throughout history and foresees the field adapting to the current realities. He also mentions that the levels of vacancy have allowed reuses that benefit the community that would not have been possible in the past:

I think what Marlane [Weslian] highlighted with using an example of a Main Street and then a Crocker Park, I think that's an example that shows that city planning has been an experiment ever since castles and walls were built around them and the peasants were on the outside and then the walls were on the outside of that and with the context and changing time the strategies adjust. And here there's a recognized need to address the vacant land that we have… We can't neglect it, and I don't think anybody thought that there would be this many community gardens or urban farms going up in Cleveland if this sort of vacant, if this housing crisis didn't happen (Sutter 2013, interview).

Finally, respondents discuss how changes to the economic system – particularly banking – would be of great benefit to vacant land reuse. Weslian feels that these institutions need to take responsibility for their role in this problem. She says, “Clearly there's a need for – and I'm going to editorialize here – the banks who helped create this situation, the mortgage companies, the bad lenders, and the government, people need to step in and provide more resources” (Weslian 2013, interview).

Ford remarks that only one mortgage servicer, Ocwen, has been working extensively with homeowners who are underwater. Underwater means that the mortgage amount is more than the house is now worth and this condition often results in foreclosure. He explains Ocwen’s strategy:

If the current market value of the home is $60,000, they will write the loan for 95% of the market value, which gets written off in a staged three-year program. They don't want to give this benefit to a homeowner who just leaves the home. They've come to the conclusion that to empty out the home, do the foreclosure,
now [they] end up with a vacant house [that] is going to be worth $5,000, at least getting $55,000 in value is better (Ford 2013, interview).

He adds that this is “not mainstream thinking” in the banking industry, but says the federal or state government could “induce [this] kind of thinking” via legislation. He explains an idea to stop banks from creating “zombie properties”:

Saying to the banks if you want to foreclose in our state, upon filing the foreclosure you have to post a $10,000 bond. You get that money back if you take title to the house and if it doesn't go vacant and abandoned. The banks would have to ask themselves a question, leading to a business judgment having to be made which is do we want to proceed with filing the foreclosure and paying the legal fees, and maybe we end up with a house that's worthless, we should evaluate the context (Ford 2013, interview).

Overall, he advocates for shifting the financial burden of demolition and maintenance onto the banks foreclosing and then ignoring their properties rather than cities and taxpayers.

There are already measures in place to oversee banks, but there are some deficiencies in the law. Jakimowicz discusses the Community Reinvestment Act, which is supposed to regulate unfair banking practices targeting low-income areas:

[The banks] have reporting requirements. The problem is there's no teeth in the law, there's nothing that really comes back and tells the bank that they're not getting the job done and fines them to make it hurt. Those problems are tied into the whole nature of how our economy works, any private concern [is] looking for short term gains as opposed to long term gains (Jakimowicz 2013, interview).

Changing the capitalist ideals under which the U.S. economy operates is a problem those who campaign for everything from education investment to climate change mitigation strategies have run across, so any progress made here will be a struggle. Jakimowicz continues, saying that a European model of 40-year bond financing for public projects “changes the return on the investment numbers.” This makes farther-reaching projects,
like the sort that would allow for more widespread demolition or more integrated land
reuse initiatives, “more feasible.” He also says, “Those are concepts to explore, changing
the paradigm for how we do things here. It's under the normal parameters for return on
investment; we have a lot of handicaps on return on the market. So that paradigm has to
change for us” (Jakimowicz 2013, interview).

Conclusion

Ford gives a succinct summary of the current situation in Cleveland:

I think what has made Cleveland somewhat unique is not just the extent of the
problem but that we've had some very creative people, we've had some resources,
we've come up with innovations like the data system, housing court, that have
actually been great tools. We feel like we've got a lot of problems with the 16,000
vacant houses, but things would have been a lot worse if we weren't doing all the
things we were doing (Ford 2013, interview).

Cleveland has developed some innovative land reuse strategies. However, there are still
several things that could be improved upon in the city.

First, while the local CDCs and non-profits are extensively networked (see
discussion in Chapter 7), there is an obvious opportunity for more teamwork and
resource pooling within Cleveland’s government and in strengthening relationships with
regional agencies like the NEOSRD. There are also networking opportunities with
smaller community groups that have goals compatible with the environmental and social
benefits of land reuse, but that may not be directly involved in the process of land reuse
itself, such as environmental charities or the halfway houses mentioned previously. This
should be a fairly straightforward process, since it would simply require building upon
already-existing networks.
Land reuse projects would be easier for residents and CDCs to implement if the city improved its demolition specifications. However, any improvement would probably require more demolition funding, which is already limited. The City of Cleveland is well-aware of this issue and has been working to raise funds on its own, as well as campaigning for increased state and federal aid, but the extent of this problem is greater than most realize.

The bureaucratic processes around land reuse have been amended for the better, but non-profits and government agencies should continue to fine-tune them. The city should also look into easily-implemented initiatives that will simultaneously support land reuses and sustainability goals, such as the compost program Cummins suggests. This mirrors the multi-functionality respondents highlight as being an effective practice for reuse initiatives as is cost-effective and simultaneously deals with several problems.

Finally, all stakeholders need to work to improve maintenance of existing and future reuse projects. This appears to be the major obstacle holding current reuses back. Perhaps organizations could coordinate with local schools in developing volunteer programs that would also increase a reuse program’s community value. Larger organizations could work with area post-secondary institutions. This could take the shape of developing service-learning courses or working with student groups that perform acts of volunteerism.
Chapter 7: Governance Networks and Envisioned Futures – Supporting Cities’ Strengths

Governance Networks and Interorganizational Relationships

Relationships among stakeholders are immensely important to the success of vacant land reuse projects. These networks are a form of governance and signal a change to the institutional rules, norms, and strategies that guide stakeholders’ decision-making processes. These relationships involve all branches and levels of government, public institutions such as schools, formalized non-profits, more informal community organizations, and private groups such as developers and the media. They can consist of organizations in the same city, or those between cities, regions, or even countries, though in the case of most governance and idea-sharing structures, inter-city contact is within the Rust Belt region or nearby cities.

All respondents noted, to some extent, the importance of building relationships with other organizations. The more stakeholders supporting a project, the more likely it is to succeed. Networking is especially critical for projects aspiring to create social change. For example, community gardens that aim to not only green vacant land, but provide free or low-cost fresh foods in a food desert, benefit from connections to food pantries and other gardens. Nina Beth Cardin, at the Baltimore Orchard Project, wants to see “food forests” throughout the city of Baltimore. These would allow for residents to pick fruit if they are hungry. She says: “Our task is to be partners with a lot of folks. We think that's the best way to get this done. And really, it's the only way to get a culture shift in and
that's what we really need” (Cardin 2013, interview). Joel Wimbiscus, at LAND Studio, offers a longer explanation of his organization’s commitment to fostering relationships:

We're kind of the group that gets things done. We advocate for projects, we fundraise, and what we do is we try to bring people together. If you're going to get any of these projects done you have to get a coalition of various types of groups, a coalition that everyone believes in or else it's not going to get done and it's not going to be the best project overall because it's not for everyone. That's what we're good at is sort of getting projects done and seeing what can be done, getting people in the same room [convening] together so they can talk. It sounds very basic; people just don't necessarily know to talk to these people or those people. And so we're sort of [the] convener and also fundraiser and advocate (Wimbiscus 2013, interview).

One type of organization relationship stakeholders discussed was governmental. These arose with every level of government, but were most common at the local level. This is because the effects of a specific lot are limited to its neighborhood and lots are under city governments’ purview. However, the extent of vacancy has led to some intervention from higher levels of government.

The federal government has contributed funding to vacant land and demolition programs. Cleveland City Councilman Jay Westbrook believes that the federal money earmarked for demolition and housing crisis recovery programs could have been increased and that the bulk of the aid went to the entities responsible for the crisis. Since these entities are now stable, the issue is often overlooked at the federal level. He explains, “If you look at how dramatic the mortgage meltdown was, the banking bailout, what a huge controversial action it was… The federal government has not really been up to snuff in having policies and resources and interventions in communities. They aided the banks. The banks have recovered” (Westbrook 2013, interview).
Cities have not recovered. However, Westbrook (2013, interview) concedes that federal aid “could be better, [but] it's not totally neglectful.” Bob Jakimowicz, at the Cleveland City Planning Office, notes that HUD’s Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program provided funding and that Cleveland received a total $25 million from federal sources to help with demolition. While this seems like a lot of money, Westbrook estimates that the city spent $10 million of its own funds – which, again, are very limited from years of population decline and community disinvestment – the State of Ohio contributed $18 million, and there is still approximately $50 million of work on just demolition to be done (Ford 2013, interview; Westbrook 2013, interview). Cleveland Councilman Brian Cummins notes that the federal funds came from both emergency money President Obama granted and federal settlements with some financial institutions (2013, interview). Lilah Zautner, of CCLB and formerly of NPI, adds that some of the money for the ReImagining Cleveland project initially came from federal funding funneled through the city government (2013, interview) and Marlane Weslian, at SVD, says her organization received money from the U.S. EPA for stormwater remediation projects (2013, interview).

Not every organization welcomes federal funding. LAND Studio, according to Wimbiscus, received funding from HUD’s Neighborhood Stabilization Program 2, which aids communities affected by foreclosure (U.S. HUD 2014). However, he says, “We try to avoid [government funding]. We’re doing all we can to build this without any government funds. It just slows things down so much and it's just not easy to work with” (Wimbiscus 2013, interview). Westbrook has also come across some of the delays
associated with federal funds. Removing blight from neighborhoods stabilizes the area and slows, if not stops, decline but, Westbrook says, the federal government has wanted more study to be done on the topic before they continue to fund some blight intervention programs (2013, interview).

Cleveland, due to the severity of the foreclosure crisis, petitioned for and received more federal aid than Baltimore, where no respondents mentioned federal money. Cleveland’s city government reached out to all possible sources in the aftermath of the housing crisis, which explains the formation of stakeholders’ federal relationships.

States are also involved in vacant land reuse from a legislative and monetary standpoint. In Baltimore, respondents did not note much input from the state of Maryland. Mark Cameron, at the Baltimore Office of Sustainability, says that the state “is not really involved” (2013, interview), whereas Tracey Barbour-Gillett at the Abell Foundation and BHPC says that the state has provided funding for BHPC’s anti-foreclosure initiatives (2013, interview). My impression is that the state is not involved in helping municipal governments. However, this observation is based on limited data, since many Baltimore respondents did not mention anything about the state in one way or the other.

Ohio’s current state government is not particularly responsive to the needs of urban areas – a problem because the largely-urban issue of vacant land is in need of progressive solutions. The Plain Dealer Editorial Board, not one to take a progressive stance, has noted some of Governor John Kasich’s anti-urban positions (2014). Jon Husted, a self-described conservative Republican, and Kasich’s Secretary of State, has
not necessarily challenged his party’s extreme gerrymandering tactics, but admits that
districting in Ohio is fundamentally flawed (Husted 2014). While I would not that Ohio’s
cities are completed disenfranchises, the current districting fractures the power of their
largely-liberal populations. Jakimowicz (2013, interview) notes the struggles Cleveland
and other Ohio Rust Belt cities – Toledo, Akron, Youngstown, Canton, and to some
extent, Cincinnati – have experienced in convincing the state legislature to support laws
benefiting vacant land reuse and neighborhood stabilization. He says the legislature,
which has Republican majorities in both houses, is against outlawing toxic title practices
that create zombie properties (Jakimowicz 2013, interview). In 2009, the state legislature
would not act on land banking legislation when vacancy was simply an urban problem,
despite the fact that Ohio’s ten largest cities suffer from some sort of vacant property
issue, as illustrated by Table 2. Jakimowicz explains:

We had to go down to the state level and get legislative approval for changes in
the Ohio Revised Code (ORC). That was a difficult argument to bring around
certain elements of the Ohio Legislature to understand. It was only until we
started to show them the [rising] foreclosure percentages in even rural counties.
We demonstrated to them high percentages of foreclosure. They finally
recognized that there’s a problem and amended the ORC to put in the correct
legislation and create these county land banks (2013, interview).

Westbrook adds, “We have an imperfect federal and state government, [which] are kind
of disengaged and have to be fussed at and rattled” (2013. interview).
Table 2: The amount of vacant property in the ten largest cities in Ohio. Sixteen total Ohio counties, including all listed below, have county land banks. As previously discussed, many cities have no method of counting vacant properties and their estimates may be made under a variety of limitations and definitions. This is meant to illustrate that vacancy is a statewide issue in Ohio, not to provide a definitive count. Population data from United States Census Bureau (2012).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Population (2010)</th>
<th>Amount of Vacant Property</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Columbus</td>
<td>787,033</td>
<td>&quot;More than 6,000 vacant properties&quot; in the city</td>
<td>WCMH (2014)</td>
<td>Franklin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleveland</td>
<td>396,815</td>
<td>Cleveland has an estimated 15,000 vacant buildings, along with 3,300 acres of vacant land</td>
<td>City of Cleveland Office of Sustainability (2010)</td>
<td>Cuyahoga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cincinnati</td>
<td>296,943</td>
<td>2,482 buildings &quot;deemed unsafe&quot; and up for demolition</td>
<td>City of Cincinnati (2014)</td>
<td>Hamilton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toledo</td>
<td>287,208</td>
<td>&quot;Over 21,000 vacant properties&quot; in city</td>
<td>Kirkland-Morgan (2013)</td>
<td>Lucas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akron</td>
<td>199,110</td>
<td>2,300 vacant houses</td>
<td>Jones (2012)</td>
<td>Lucas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dayton</td>
<td>141,527</td>
<td>6,108 &quot;vacant sites&quot; in Montgomery County</td>
<td>Smith and Hulsey (2012)</td>
<td>Montgomery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parma</td>
<td>81,601</td>
<td>&quot;About 600 vacant and/or foreclosed homes&quot; in city</td>
<td>Sandrick (2012)</td>
<td>Cuyahoga (Cleveland Metropolitan Area)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canton</td>
<td>73,007</td>
<td>City has 143 condemned properties, 4,054 vacant houses, and 3,311 vacant lots</td>
<td>Monsewicz (2012)</td>
<td>Stark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youngstown</td>
<td>66,982</td>
<td>City has 3,246 vacant structures and 23,831 vacant parcels</td>
<td>Mahoning Valley Organizing Collaborative (2011)</td>
<td>Mahoning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorain</td>
<td>64,097</td>
<td>City has 1,498 vacant structures and 4,629 vacant parcels</td>
<td>Western Reserve Land Conservancy (2013)</td>
<td>Lorain (Cleveland Metropolitan Area)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
However, some laws in the ORC have been very useful in their current capacities. Frank Ford, formerly of NPI and now at the Thriving Communities Institute at WRLC, discusses the role of a law regarding receivership that was passed in 1984:

[The law is] a public nuisance statute which enables cities or nonprofit organizations to go to court to ask to be appointed a receiver of vacant and abandoned property. I litigated the first test case in 1985. From 1985 to 2005, the use of the statue was pretty much the same – there's a vacant house we're going to renovate, we get appointed receiver, the money we put into it becomes a first lien, we foreclose on the lien, we get title, we sell it to a homeowner. In the same statute there's a provision that says you don't have to ask for a receiver, you simply get the house declared a public nuisance, and you get a court order that the owner has to tear it down at their expense. It’s an injunction against them. In 2008, we started talking about this. Deutsche Bank owns 800 homes in Cleveland, Wells Fargo owns 600, you could go on down the list. That's a lot of vacant homes and they were not taking care of them. What if we sued Deutsche Bank and Wells Fargo and went after that entire inventory? We just want a court order in finding it a public nuisance and ordering them to take care of it on their dime. We had never gone after multiple properties. It took about five years to wrap up [the] lawsuit. We ended up naming nine mortgage servicers and adding that to the Deutsche case. We got some pretty good agreements from all the servicers where they agreed to donate properties to the county land bank and write a check for up to $10,000 for the demolition (Ford 2013, interview).

The state of Ohio has also been involved in funding vacant land programs. As previously mentioned, Ohio gave the City of Cleveland $18 million for demolition purposes. Weslian says that SVD received $3 million in grants to remediate polluted sites from the Clean Ohio Fund, which is administered by the state (2013, interview).

Local-level governments such as counties and cities have been the most involved in vacant land reuse. Ford states, “I think I'm comfortable saying Cuyahoga County probably leads the rest of the state on several different approaches. One would be land banking, the second would be vacant land reuse, the third would be stabilization, blight removal” (Ford 2013, interview). Obviously Cleveland, as the largest city in the county,
is experiencing the most problems and taking the lead on this issue, but other municipalities and the county itself are also playing an important role. Cummins (2013, interview) notes that the Cuyahoga County Mayors and City Managers Association is “very strong” and that the County Land Bank and Western Reserve Land Conservancy are “establishing best practices” on the topic in the area. Ford expects the CCLB to have “a huge impact on the reuse of vacant land” and ranks the organization very highly, saying “there might only be two other land banks that are close to where we're at” (Ford 2013, interview).

City governments are the most involved in vacant land reuse processes. Jakimowicz underlines the proactive measures Cleveland took in assuaging its vacancy problem:

We also responded looking at our own limitations in the city. We put some money towards it but we saw that we would have a funding problem at the state level and at the federal level. That was part of the reason why the city helped support the development of our county land bank so we could use county resources. We've been very responsible in saying, “We know we're going to have difficulty in getting future cooperation in getting funding from the state and federal governments, so we've taken on the responsibility of raising funding” (Jakimowicz 2013, interview).

Westbrook highlights the various ways the city council and administration interact on vacancy issue. He notes that there are several council committees dedicated to on this topic and underscores the fact that various city departments are involved in them (Westbrook 2013, interview). Several council members, as well as Ford, sit on the Vacant and Abandoned Property Action Council (VAPAC), which area cities, non-profits, foundations, and universities participate in to collaborate and share ideas (Ford 2013, interview).
Zautner says that the city was very involved with the ReImagining Cleveland program, as most of the land used was city-owned. The city also helped develop a leasing strategy and choose which projects were funded (Zautner 2013, interview). Anita Brindza, at Cudell Improvement Incorporated, says that her CDC has a “wonderful” working relationship with both the City of Cleveland and the bordering suburb of Lakewood. She describes her organization’s method of working with city government:

One of the things that we pride ourselves on is that when we are in a relationship with somebody there has to be trust. The way you build trust is that everyone has to feel like they're fully informed and that we don't move forward unless everybody is ready... And as long as we observe that, we find that we don't have any issues at all. In our partnerships we have not encountered any hostility or bad feelings whatsoever because we maintain confidentially if we need to and we make sure everybody's comfortable before anybody talks to the media or before anybody asks for anything in particular. Everybody has to be on board and feel comfortable in that before we do it (Brindza 2013, interview).

Cleveland’s design organizations take differing views towards directly working with local governments. Terry Schwarz of the CUDC says, “Our clients are all government agencies or non-profits… Communities come to us and they have their projects, the problems, the challenges” (2013, interview). However, LAND Studio focuses more on non-profits and completes some projects with outside developers and artists. Wimbiscus discusses LAND Studio’s work on the Red Line Trail, specifically that with the RTA (Regional Transit Authority), a regional government body they work with because of a partnership with Rotary International:

[The RTA is] not worried about having the best end result, they're worried about, ‘Oh is that going to increase our liability insurance.’ We do research about trails all over the country, about other precedents, about safety issues and how people have tackled them, as well as raising funds to help a design firm do the basic alignment and estimates and build a case about why this can be a first class amenity, how it can link into neighborhoods and how this can also convince the
RTA that it would be a benefit to them. If this even gets built, which I think it will, the RTA will look great (Wimbiscus 2013, interview).

It appears that LAND Studio’s government work arises only from their connections with area non-profits, especially when taking their avoidance of government funding into consideration. On the other hand, the CUDC has stronger ties to local government because of its mission as the public outreach arm of a public university.

In Baltimore, Cameron says that no council members are involved in city working group that tackles vacant land issues. He clarifies that this group, called “Growing Green” is “operations” so legislature members are not included (Cameron 2013, interview). This is in contrast to Cleveland’s committees, which include bureaucratic offices, elected officials, and other relevant organizations. Cameron says he has not had much experience working with the council and usually only works with other city agencies (2013, interview). Dave Landymore at T6B says that his organization does not have “very much direct activity with the [city] representatives” (2013, interview).

However, Nayeli Garcia Mowbray, the Waverly resident who lives near a problem lot, has been very connected with Councilwoman Mary Pat Clarke. Garcia Mowbray (2013, interview) has also been in contact with the community liaison at the City Council President’s office and with her local police district regarding the Venable lot. Her greater involvement with the city is probably due to her more individual mission that lacks the resources of those more closely affiliated with established organizations. Her position as a concerned resident and local constituent may also serve to strengthen her ties with the city. In comparison, when T6B (which was started by outsiders to the neighborhood) began, it struggled with a lack of government buy-in, along with indifference from
neighborhood residents. Landymore, who now lives in Oliver but did not when he joined T6B, says:

And that same thing applies to city government or the police when you, as an outsider, jump in with both feet and start going about your work, there's finger pointing involved. When you do that you're highlighting the shortcomings of different entities. When you talk about revitalizing a community you're highlighting a lack of vitality in the community. Egos get bruised (Landymore 2013, interview).

However, contacts within the city bureaucracy eventually did aid T6B’s work. For example, an employee of Baltimore Parks and Recreation directed Sparky, the jungle gym dinosaur who lives at the Playscape, away from the dump and into the organization’s hands when the equipment was retired (Hynson 2014, interview). Figure 28 shows the dinosaur, repainted and cleaned up, in his present home.
Briony Hynson of T6B says, “We need the city a lot, I’ve come to understand. I’ve come to understand what someone said – the most you can hope is for the city to not get in the way” (2014, interview). Wimbiscus, in Cleveland, might agree.

City agencies have also aided vacant land reuse efforts. Hynson says that the NDC has an “amicable” relationship with the city and that some of her organization’s funding comes from the Department of Housing (2014, interview). Both Garcia Mowbray (2013, interview) and Ashe Smith (2013, interview), the latter at Parks and People, have worked with TreeBaltimore, one of the city’s greening organizations, in identifying “junk” trees and in running tree-related programs.
There are also many relationships within the city government itself, some briefly mentioned above. Cameron works with a long list of city agencies that are largely involved in the Growing Green group, including Housing, Community Development, Public Works, TreeBaltimore, Planning, the Sustainability Office, Transportation, and the Baltimore Development Corporation (which, despite its name, is a “quasi-public economic development agency” and not a CDC). He says of the Sustainability Office, “We're doing a lot of work outside of just the vacant land. We’re trying to use [the land] as a way to bring some of these other efforts together” (Cameron 2013, interview).

Since both cities’ sustainability plans mention vacant land as an “action area,” the sustainability offices should be proactively involved in supporting vacant land reuse initiatives, especially those providing environmental and social services to their neighborhoods. Cardin notes that BOP has worked with the Baltimore Sustainability Office (2013, interview). Smith says that the Office has sent policy recommendations to the Mayor on topics such as urban farm policy and wants “to continue preserving land for farming and gardening” and “make sure that people's work and sweat equity are maintained and respected” (2013, interview). However, Becky Witt, at the CLC, views the Office’s work as being more theory than practice, partially because the efforts of the Office conflict with other city departments. She says:

They're all very positive... The Office of Sustainability is about food access, [the] sustainability plan – when you get done talking to them you think, “Oh okay, Baltimore City really cares about this.” Then when you go to housing which has V2V and they're the ones with all the power over all the land that Baltimore City owns, they're much less interested in working with [reuses] (Witt 2014, interview).
She also mentions that the city comes up with “great plans” but that “they don't have the money to actually do it. [They] get stuck. It's not being put into place; it's not being put into practice” (Witt 2014, interview). Funding is an issue at nearly every level of vacant land reuse.

Similar problems with sustainability planning and the organizations meant to promote it also exist in Cleveland. Cummins (2013, interview) says that while the city’s sustainability office has been useful, “I just don't think that they have enough staff to do the kind of work that I’d like to see be done. They rely heavily on volunteer-led committees, some perform better than others.” This suggests a lack of funding and/or support at higher city levels. Weslian says that SVD has been a part of the sustainability plan’s work in Cleveland (2013, interview). However, she raises some concerns regarding the gentrification that may occur as sustainability indicators, such as walkability, the availability of local foods, and the construction of bicycle infrastructure, improve:

One of the things that we've tried to focus on is that this is a neighborhood where people are biking, half out of necessity, so it's not a place where you're just doing recreational biking for exercising. Clearly, we're trying to present ourselves as a neighborhood where you can live well affordably. There's a lot of neighborhoods in the city, once they sort of takeoff, then it becomes difficult for people to continue to live there. Here we have a very diverse population. We're very close to – black and white – very close together, there's a lot of people willing to work to maintain that diversity and have a certain self-sufficiency on learning new opportunities, how to do things in a way that's more sustainable (Weslian 2013, interview).

While Cleveland is a “low-gentrification” city (Hartley 2013), that does not mean care should not be taken to ensure an equitable environment remains in place. Piiparinen (2013) argues that gentrification in the Rust Belt differs from the usual definition of the
term. According to him, in the case of Cleveland and similar cities, gentrification refers to skewing investment towards certain, more profitable demographics such as migratory, higher-income, “creatively-classed” whites instead of the long-term, low-income minority residents of the city. He says this causes “the gap between the haves and have-nots [to] grow and the geographic disparities [to] begin to cement social inequities into the city’s fabric” (Piiparinen 2013b). The Cleveland metropolitan area is one of the most economically segregated in the country (Sandy 2014) and also ranks high in indicators of racial segregation (Logan and Stults 2011). Logan and Stults (2011) also note that Baltimore has fairly high indicators for racial segregation as well, so both the Ohio and the Maryland cities should examine their patterns of possible gentrification. While the major, more immediate problem is tending to the huge quantities of vacant land, the effects of land reuse on current systemic issues must be taken into consideration.

Schwarz (2013) takes a more positive outlook regarding the sustainability plan, as it has dovetailed with the CUDC’s work, and notes that her organization is part of the Sustainable Cleveland 2019 process. She explains, “Whenever we take on the Neighborhood Plan [for an area], we look at questions of the neighborhood within the context of these larger frameworks [such as the sustainability plan]” (Schwarz 2013).

Both cities have a number of higher learning institutions with resources that can be put to use to help with reuse processes. This is a mutually beneficial course of action. Strom notes, “The institutional health of an urban university is inextricably bound to the health of its surrounding community. Universities are therefore motivated to work toward the improvement of their neighborhoods” (2005, 116). The vacancy problem can also
provide interesting, hands-on research and volunteer opportunities for students and faculty.

The major universities and colleges in Baltimore include Coppin State University, JHU, Loyola University Maryland, MICA, Morgan State University (MSU), University of Baltimore, and the University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB). Goucher College, the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC), and Towson University are not within city limits, but are nearby. In Cleveland, CSU, which has a nationally-ranked College of Urban Affairs, and CWRU are within the city. KSU, located about 45 minutes southeast, has research and policy interests in the city, as does Ohio State University (OSU) and its county extension program. In both cities, post-secondary institutions have been involved in vacant land issues, though respondents do discuss ways this can be improved.

Research is an important role universities take in vacant land reuse. Cameron mentions a soil scientist at UMBC, Stu Schwarz (affiliated with the BES), who has been researching how to increase the stormwater infiltration capacity of soil on vacant land. Cameron explains:

He came to us and said in agricultural fields they're planting daikon radish as a cover crop and it's breaking up at least the upper part of the soil and [he] wondered if that could be a low-intensity way of improving infiltration in vacant land. We worked a partnership out with a local nonprofit that had a lease for urban agriculture but aren't ready to do anything yet. [There’s] 4000 square feet that they distributed seed on the ground, they did a little bit of soil prep with forage grass, clover, and oat, and he and his students are going to be studying it through the winter, spring, and see what happens. If it seems like it might be promising we might try this on other lots. So we're trying to do these projects to learn how we can then begin to replicate them (Cameron 2013, interview).
These types of projects not only present interesting opportunities for researchers but aid in the development of best practices for city government and other organizations. In Cleveland, Ottoson-Deal mentions a student from OSU also working on soil remediation practices (2013, interview).

Hynson (2014, interview) mentions that students in the Social Design program at MICA work directly with area non-profits on a number of projects. While these may not always be about vacant land, some, such as the Bethel Street Playscape, they interact with the issue indirectly. Barbour-Gillett notes that UMB provides information to BHPC through its Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance, a data system that is useful but does not appear to be as detailed or collaborative as NEOCANDO (2013, interview). She notes that JHU, Loyola, and MSU “aren't necessarily at the table in the same way” that UMB is regarding BHPC. While she thinks these institutions could benefit from working more with foreclosure prevention, she says that they do have their own strategies for improving conditions in their individual locales (Barbour-Gillett 2013, interview). She also mentions that the Abell Foundation supports an award for urban policy research at JHU. Cardin says the BOPC has previously worked with JHU and is planning on finding ways to work with MICA and other schools to boost the organization’s capacity. Finally, Parks and People has, with the help of the University of Maryland Extension, developed the Community Greening Resource Network, which offers workshops and resources to farms and gardens (Smith 2013, interview).

Moving on to Cleveland, Jakimovicz describes the relationships between the city and its two major educational institutions:
It’s an operative relationship, a mutual respect. We're very lucky that CSU has a great urban studies program, top academic experts on policy issues there. They’ve always been engaged, they're not in ivory towers, so to speak. We provide a wonderful data laboratory for them in terms of what's going on. And with CWRU’s engagement of the Mandel School [of the Applied Social Sciences, home of NEOCANDO] which [previously] was just developing their databases for social service organizations, they recognized the need to expand their data capacity which they’ve fully embraced. It’s a good cooperative working relationship and we both benefit by that greatly (Jakimowicz 2013, interview).

Zautner says that CSU, CWRU, KSU, and the OSU Extension were very involved in the ReImagining Cleveland project. She explains:

They were engaged in the work from the beginning in different ways. OSU Extension – they were one of our main partners in implementing projects, CSU developed our website and did a lot of promotion and history projects around the ReImagining group. CWRU we worked with NEOCANDO. They were very involved. The biggest involvement would be KSU with the CUDC – they did all the layout and graphics for the pattern book, and did a lot of mapping and whatnot (Zautner 2013, interview).

Lastly, the CUDC is a public outreach and graduate study arm of KSU (Schwarz 2013, interview).

Some respondents in Baltimore noted that university students volunteer for land reuse initiatives. However, levels of volunteerism have been declining in recent years (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2014), which means that outreach to students, who often have free time or service learning requirements, may become increasingly important.

Landymore discusses T6B’s volunteer retention strategy:

We do our best to engage with local university student groups, just reaching out and trying to create relationships and hopefully when people come out the first time they have a good experience and keep coming back. As a strategy, that's taken off pretty well. Just recently, two years ago when we started, there was a girl who was from a student group and she went into a grad program and became the leader of the grad student organization and emailed us to organize a volunteer day for that group (Landymore 2013, interview).
Smith, through his experience at Whitelock Farm, has also worked with college volunteers. He says:

MICA is Reservoir Hill's neighbor. They started an art class that focused on inspiration from their urban environments. And through that, half of their class volunteered at the farm. They have continued to be supportive, they have helped with a lot of our designs for flyers, for fundraisers, and Allison, our farm manager, was originally part of that class. In terms of the school being more regular, MICA's students continue to come back (Smith 2013, interview).

Hynson (2014, interview) also sees many college students and recent graduates of design programs volunteering at the NDC, providing pro bono services.

However, not every respondent believes the universities are putting enough effort into collaboratively solving the problems in their communities. Westbrook, who was interviewed with Jakimowicz, partially disagrees with his colleague’s assessment of university involvement. He says:

We have an excellent data system with NEOCANDO [from CWRU] and an excellent College of Urban Affairs [from CSU]. In my opinion, they could be more involved. They get contracts and they get requests for an engagement and they're very capable and they're engaged but this is the foremost crisis of our time. They could step up a little more. [Maybe] an institute or something, where the students could flow through, be engaged, the faculty and staff could manage and oversee them so those of us at the field level aren't going to have to educate a student every time they come, you could build some added capacity there (Westbrook 2013, interview).

Ottoson-Deal points out that the attitudes of post-secondary institutions and their students may not be helpful in some cases. She says, "Sometimes when a school gets involved, a university school, it's not necessarily that useful because they're just looking at it as an academic exercise, and they’re not necessarily experts in getting neighbors involved” (Ottoson-Deal 2013, interview). However, she advocates for primary and secondary schools to be involved in projects in their neighborhoods, stating, “I think if grade
schools and high schools get involved that's more positive because they're local stakeholders. That's a way for them to get more involved in the community and they're already physically there” (Ottoson-Deal 2013, interview). Creating involved local stakeholders at a young age has several benefits. They become more involved in their communities, more aware of the problems that they face, and more able to search for solutions. Environmental education programs, which may be implemented using common land reuses like community gardens or other greenspaces, “can help produce motivated students, high-performance life-long learners, effective future workers and problem solvers, thoughtful community leaders, and people who care about the people, creatures, and places that surround them” (National Education and Environmental Partnership 2002).

Primary and secondary schools in Baltimore are also involved in vacant land reuse programs. Smith (2013, interview) says that the Reservoir Hill Council has a Healthy Food Coordinator that “bridges the gap between the school [John Yeager Howard Elementary] and the farm.” Landymore says that college volunteers are more common for T6B than ones from high schools. College students volunteer in groups, whereas high school-aged ones come individually and are often in need of service hours (Landymore 2013, interview).

Non-profits and other community-based groups are very involved in vacant land reuse projects, as evidenced by many of this study’s respondents. Foundations in both cities administer financial and programmatic support. In Baltimore, the Abell Foundation, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the Baltimore Community Foundation provide
grants for some vacant land reuse projects (Barbour-Gillett 2013, interview). Barbour-Gillett says that the Abell Foundation works to fund projects that meet both current and future community needs, and that vacant land reuse projects often fall into this category. She explains:

The issues evolve over time, at one time the housing market in the city was depressed and so we were looking for ways to jump start or spur our investment, and now with the downturn we're looking for ways to support people who got caught up in this crazy housing market, support neighborhoods that are being decimated. We're always kind of trying to think ahead about what's the next [economic] trend (Barbour-Gillett 2013, interview).

In Cleveland, the Cleveland Foundation and the Gund Foundation provide similar funding (Schwarz 2013, interview; Weslian 2013, interview; Wimbiscus 2013, interview). Wimbiscus also mentions that area foundations come to LAND Studio with possible projects. He says:

We’re not knocking on doors, generally people know who we are and I’d say that projects build on themselves. It's more people see what we've done and say, “We think LAND Studio can get it done.” We get asked by foundations to work with groups, like the Gund Foundation, the Cleveland Foundation, [they] think we can help out so they approach us (Wimbiscus 2013, interview).

Funding intermediaries, both national and local, also aid groups in finding money and technical support. NPI and NeighborWorks America have helped groups in both cities (Barbour-Gillett 2013, interview; Weslian 2013, interview).

CDCs are extremely involved in vacant land reuse and are constantly interacting with residents. While there are CDCs in Baltimore, Cleveland’s are notably well-organized. Jakimowicz (2013, interview) goes as far as saying that the Cleveland CDCs are the best in country. Weslian says that the CDC network has been a huge boon to community development, including reuse projects:
Cleveland is actually looked at as one of the leaders in the CDC industry because in a lot of parts of the U.S., there's no CDC network in a town… So the places where the CDC networks are very strong, especially in more urbanized areas with large populations, have been really the most successful. It’s been a model that's really worked for Cleveland and the cities like [it] that have the strong CDC network but it's not everywhere. And it took a while to recognize that [and] it makes a difference (Weslian 2013, interview).

Zautner says that the collective experience of non-profit networks in Cleveland, including that of the CDCs, has also been very important in building relationships and sharing resources:

There's always room for more improvement in collaboration but in comparison to other cities we have probably one of the strongest networks of public-private-government partnerships that I’ve ever seen. Nobody does anything alone here. We also have a history of it. We have non-profits that are serving every community in the city, we've been around since the ‘70s and ‘80s, and there's been this history of collaboration for twenty years, thirty years, so when it comes to check into a new problem, like vacant land, that infrastructure, the network, it's already there. Everybody already knows each other. They know how to work together so when you decide to tackle a new issue, whether it’s housing or vacant land or water or whatever, you save a lot of time because those relationships are already there (Zautner 2013, interview).

Cummins notes that the CDCs have the capacity to organize in both the greater neighborhood and in more focused areas. He says:

When we started in 2010, we had approximately eight local block club organizations. Three years later we have over thirty. Ten years ago we probably had ten or so community gardens, we have over twenty now. In just the past three years we've really ramped up the community engagement component (Cummins 2013, interview).

However, there is room for improvement in the CDCs’ work. Ottoson-Deal (2013, interview) says that some groups could strive to be more connected. Westbrook agrees:

Some [CDCs] are highly engaged, some of them are out to lunch. There should be no room for out to lunch when you're in the biggest crisis of your time. That is where my impatience comes in with things like that. If we had a major epidemic and you said, “You better go over to that hospital, because those other two here
don't know we're having an epidemic,” that'd be pretty bad (Westbrook 2013, interview).

However, Westbrook (2013, interview) tempers his comments, noting: “The CDCs are the frontline of response and detection. We do have this excellent array of tools and resources and I’d say Cleveland has a much more dynamic public sector response than I believe is the case in Detroit. I think most people have noticed and identified that.”

There is less mention of CDCs from Baltimore respondents, though some do coordinate with them. Garcia Mowbray has worked with the Greater Homewood Community Corporation and says, “They've been really instrumental in helping us with various neighborhood issues” (2013, interview). Cameron (2013 interview) mentions working with neighborhood CDCs while setting up the Sustainability Office’s pilot land reuse projects.

Other formalized non-profits are important partners in vacant land reuse. In Baltimore, Cardin says that BOP works with shelters, soup kitchens, and food banks and pantries to distribute their fruit (2013, interview). Garcia Mowbray has gone to the CLC for advice, and intends to work with the NDC and Baltimore Green Space if she secures the Venable lot for neighborhood use (2013, interview). Many of the participants in BHPC are local non-profits. The Abell Foundation has provided funding to the CLC and Baltimore Green Space (Barbour-Gillett 2013m interview). The CLC also works with Baltimore Green Space, as does Parks and People (Smith 2013, interview; Witt 2013, interview). Landymore discusses his organizations’ intra-city connections:

We have relationships with plenty of other non-profits in the area and some join us for volunteer days. Perhaps others have programs that are a good fit or complement to the programs we have going on so we can help them get a foot in
the door in Oliver. We don't really have an answer for everything so we meet people all the time and do our best to figure out how to either amplify whatever good they might be doing or making connections with other community leaders or whatever it may be (Landymore 2013, interview).

Landymore (2014, interview) and Hynson (2014, interview) also specifically mention the Baltimore Tool Bank as a useful partner. The Tool Bank provides low-cost equipment rentals to member groups and helped T6B save some of the expense of rentals from for-profit companies.

Witt notes that networking within the non-profit community has helped the CLC offer more extensive services. She explains:

We try to build up our network a lot. A lot of groups know who we are. I get referrals from Baltimore Green Space, from Parks and People, from Blue Water Baltimore, more environmental groups. Sometimes with community organizers, they think they can deal with an issue that has a legal component that could benefit from some legal advice. They don't always refer when they really should. We refer people out too (Witt 2013, interview).

In Cleveland, the most notable examples of non-CDC non-profit networks are those of the design organizations. Both the CUDC and LAND Studio work extensively with nonprofits in their projects, a prominent example of this being LAND Studio and Rotary teaming up on the Red Line Trail project (Schwarz 2013, interview; Wimbiscus 2013, interview).

Community groups that are not necessarily formal non-profits also have a substantial role in land reuse projects. Cardin (2013, interview) says that BOP has ties with local farms and food trucks, which Smith (2013, interview) also mentions in the case of Whitelock Farm. Cardin (2013, interview) additionally discusses a partnership with an orchard outside of the city: “There’s an abandoned orchard out in Baltimore County,
someone gave us the pear part of the orchard, and gave us the hundred pear trees, so we're working reclaim to that because it was abandoned for fifteen years and they're in need of love to produce again.”

Similarly, Smith says that Whitelock Farm works extensively with other members of the BFA. Local youth groups have also supported the farm. Smith (2013, interview) explains:

There's youth opportunities in the neighborhood. There's New Lens, a youth between ages of fourteen and twenty-two group that’s focused on videography. They did our first Kickstarter for us. So that's an opportunity for teenagers. There's a variety of churches, their youth groups help us sometimes, some volunteers.

Churches and other religious organizations are also involved in vacant land reuses. Cardin (2013, interview) and Landymore (2013, interview) intend to or currently employ churches as distribution points for produce. Landymore (2013, interview) says, “The idea is that the church leaders would have an idea of who would lack proper [food] access currently.” Churches have also provided volunteers for reuse projects in Cleveland. Sutter says that congregations from as far away as Kentucky have come to Slavic Village to volunteer (2013, interview). The neighborhood may have been an attractive site for volunteers due to the reporting of it as the epicenter of the mortgage and vacancy crises (Aalbers 2009), but Sutter (2013, interview) also mentions that this was through “sister church” relationships between congregations. However, some churches have stayed uninvolved in the problems in their own backyards – Garcia Mowbray has tried to contact the church next to the Venable lot but they have not been willing to connect with her (2013, interview).
Public-private partnerships have also been useful in the redevelopment of vacant land. The previously-mentioned partnership that redeveloped Baltimore’s Mideast neighborhood is a main example of this, but respondents discuss others. Clarke (2014, interview) mentions a local real estate company, Seawall, which, with the city’s blessing, is involved in the redevelopment of large vacant buildings. Landymore (2013, interview) says that T6B’s work has ended up being complementary to that of home developers in Oliver. In Cleveland, Cummins (2013, interview) mentions methods of neighborhood stabilization and redevelopment that involve public-private partnerships and Weslian (2013, interview) discusses how SVD has aided private investors in land assembly.

Large corporations do not tend to be involved in land reuses. However, non-profit groups with a unique selling point may be able to find corporate sponsors. Landymore notes that T6B hosts volunteers from corporations and that “our majority contributor at this point is the corporate giving wing of a local business” (2013, interview). Corporations may not be willing to fund vacant land reuse projects but these projects are not necessarily in search of corporate funders, as their funding may result in conflicts of interest for some community-based organizations (Pachter et al. 2007). However corporations are a funding source that some groups may wish to investigate, especially if a component of their program represents “good PR” for a company. T6B’s case is probably helped because most people feel good about supporting veterans’ groups.

Several respondents note that the media – both public and private – could be better utilized regarding vacant land reuse projects. Despite this, some groups have reasons for wanting to stay out of its attention. Wimbiscus (2013, interview) explains
LAND Studio’s view of this topic: “Our boss will work to keep us out of the newspapers because we do better if other people are taking the credit because we know that they’ll come back and they'll see the benefit that we have. So we're not trying to be the champion organization. That's how we think in the end we'll make an impact.” However, many organizations would benefit from greater publicity, which can draw donations or volunteers to their projects. While the private media is not necessarily going to discuss initiative such as BOP on its front page or as its lead story, these projects are of public interest and merit some coverage. A number of newspaper articles are sources in this thesis, but more are from blogs focused on urban planning, sustainability, and city revitalization – specialized sources of which the public is largely unaware. Miller and Pollak (2013) note that 79% of those polled desired greater environmental news coverage, and that only an average of 1.24% of headlines on thirty national media outlets were on environmental topics. Stories on vacant land reuses – particularly those on larger projects with a city-wide or unique scope – often are environmental in character, a source of local interest, and media’s consumers would like to see them.

Public media has been more responsive to land reuse stories. Cummins notes how using the public TV station in Cleveland has helped the organizations in his ward spread their best practices across the city:

We've collaborated with television stations, through those broadcasts we were asked to come to other neighborhoods to speak to them about public-private partnership issues, working with block clubs, identifying priorities. We have our public TV station [PBS affiliate]. I've probably not used that well enough. There’s just too much work to be done. Sometimes we need to step away a little bit, step above what we're doing, and make sure that we're trying to share those best practices (Cummins 2013, interview).
There are other public media outlets, such as radio stations, that could also be targeted as ways to raise awareness.

Inter-city relationships are also of help to organizations. While intra-city relationships are more common, since they are easier to form, and are helpful for finding local funding, technical support, and collaborative partners, inter-city relationships are more geared toward idea-sharing and the dissemination of best practices. Regarding intercity relationships, Jakimowicz believes that Cleveland is very aware of the national and regional trends in vacant land reuse and says, “We feel pretty comfortable, like there's not much going on out there that we haven't done or tried or thought about” (2013, interview). He also notes that city representatives attend conferences on relevant topics and adds, “When we go to these national conventions, we're the ones putting on the seminars. Baltimore’s another community that's on the upper part of the curve” (Jakimowicz 2013, interview). Westbrook (2013, interview) says that idea-sharing and collaboration among cities “takes initiative on [their] part.” Some cities are more likely than others to attend these conferences and be active participants.

Cameron describes Baltimore’s inter-city resource-sharing as informal:

We collect a lot of information about what people are doing elsewhere. I've been to Philadelphia, their clean and green program. Trading information with Flint, Michigan, [they’re] piloting a community care program of finding to community groups to clean and mow some lots... We've looked at what Youngstown has done, what Detroit’s done. I've talked to some people in Cleveland as part of their neighbor care program. I think we informally talk, do our research. When that research seems promising, we follow up and at least make telephone contacts with people to learn more about what they're doing (Cameron 2013, interview).

Regional and national networks of non-profits appear to be more commonly utilized than inter-governmental ones. However, some non-profit organizations doing
work with vacant land, such the CLC and LAND Studio, are unique and have no obvious networks to join. Witt (2013, interview) says “A lot of cities don't have organizations like us.” She admits that she does not know as much about cities in the Great Lakes region, but on the East Coast she mentions organizations similar to the CLC such as the Public Interest Law Center in Philadelphia, which has a small program named the Garden Justice Initiative, and 596 Acres in New York City, with lawyers on staff. However, they do not have the same scope as the CLC (Witt 2013, interview). Wimbiscus says that LAND Studio has not collaborated with groups in other cities, but does watch urban design trends. He says:

We're so used to looking at what's going on in other cities to learn from other cities, I never really considered has anyone looked at us? Maybe if I looked I'd find something. We’ve met with a lot of people in a lot of places who have said that's a really cool idea! We’ve never really followed up to see. It's so hard to explain who we are and what we do, we're a very unique organization (Wimbiscus 2013, interview).

Other organizations have established inter-city connections with their obvious partners. Schwarz says that the CUDC cooperates with other design centers and has shared best practices with Detroit and Pittsburgh. She also notes that Philadelphia is on the “leading edge” of GI and that Cleveland has learned how to support their efforts in “connecting the dots between hydrology and vacancy” from them (Schwarz 2013, interview). There is a national conference for NDCs, and while the Maryland organization has not participated, Hynson (2013, interview) says she has “started this year to reach out to some of the other organizations to see how we could help each other.”
At first glance, T6B does not seem to be an organization that has national partners, and it does not regarding vacant land use. However, Landymore names two groups – Team Rubicon, which “unites the skills and experiences of military veterans with first responders to rapidly deploy emergency response teams” on a national level (Team Rubicon 2014), and The Mission Continues, a national fellowship program that aids veterans in service – that utilize a similar service model. He notes that it is a small community but that “There’s a number of informal networks” (Landymore 2013, interview).

Also in Baltimore, Parks and People networks with similar organizations. Smith (2013, interview) explains:

We have been part of a number of things on a citywide and multicity platform. One's called the Urban Ecological Collaborative, it's a resource and idea-sharing group all the way down the East Coast. There's one division in Pittsburgh, Washington DC, Richmond, all the way up past Connecticut. [We have] monthly conference calls – Alliance for Community Trees, it's a non-profit that we're part of. Grant funding, resource sharing, we're involved as much as we can. Everything that we do outside the city is to benefit the city.

The organization also participates in the LTER BES study, connecting with and aiding academic researchers.

BHPC is also part of networks in the same manner as Parks and People. Barbour-Gillett (2013, interview) says that there is a similar coalition in Prince George’s County, a Maryland county bordering Washington, D.C., as well as one in the District itself. She discusses their networking efforts:

The DC group, we met with their director. She came up and talked about some of the work that they were doing maybe a year and a half or so ago. We’ve been down to the Prince George’s group, just talking about how we structure our coalition and how we do fundraising. There is some fairly regular connection and
networking that happens. We also see them at statewide events as well (Barbour-Gillett 2013, interview).

She also notes the inter-city networks that the Abell Foundation takes part in, saying:

We do some of those conferences, we do meet other folks that are working up to more issues, like the Funders’ Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities, there are a bunch of groups that have these national conferences and workshops on different topics, so we do meet and connect with different people. Neighborhood Funders Group is another that we've gone to conferences or participated in meetings with; there are networks out there of like-minded foundation-types that do meet. We’ve seen people from Cleveland as well (Barbour-Gillett 2013, interview).

Land banking takes advantage of extensive inter-city networking as well. Zautner (2013, interview) says, “In the land banking world there's a ton of communication” and that organizations such as the Thriving Communities Institute in Cleveland promote these relationships. She believes that the resource sharing in land banking is stronger than that in the field of vacant land reuse. She says of land reuse, “We can share ideas and we share best practices and we have conferences, but when you get down it, doing this work in neighborhoods is very grassroots. The bottom line is that you're doing it in a very specific place with very specific partners” (Zaunter 2013, interview).

However, regarding the ReImagining Cleveland project, Zautner (2013, interview) notes influence from other inter-city sources, as well as international attention:

[It was] all kind of founded on the Philly Green model, the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, it really started this. I think when they came into Cleveland, it took on a life of its own. But Philadelphia Green, I think they definitely go down as the big first kind of leader in this kind of work... Thirty groups came through who were international groups to try to understand what ReImagining was and how to put projects in their respective communities. [They were] from Japan, Australia, not just Europe.
Schwarz (2013, interview) says that the CUDC is also involved in international conversations. She explains:

We’ve been part of the shrinking cities conversation internationally since 2006 or 2007 when there was a big exhibition at Berlin that came here to Cleveland. Particularly on the temporary reuse side [we] have been very inspired and also collaborative with European designers, particularly from Germany [the country’s population is declining; many cities in the eastern part of the country have experienced population losses], so the whole idea of short term interventions as a way of managing vacancy but also triggering development is something that took shape in Berlin probably 10 - 15 years ago so a lot of that work inspired some of the things we did here.

Finally, CDCs form another inter-city network. Brindza (2013, interview) says that Cudell Improvement Inc. has provided technical assistance to other CDCs in the state through the Ohio CDC Association. Ottoson-Deal says that some Clevelanders have gone on site visits to other cities and that “Looking to other examples is always good inspiration” (2013, interview). Weslian says that SVD has participated in a number of conferences around the region and is very in tune with the latest research. She says, “You've got different entities, the Brookings Institute, the Urban Land Institute, they're doing a lot of this research. They're creating white papers, we're all reading that stuff to see what somebody else is doing because god forbid somebody be doing something cooler than us” (Weslian 2013, interview). Based on this comment and an earlier one from Westbrook, it seems as though there is an element of friendly competition within Cleveland regarding who has the most innovative land reuse.
Envisioned Futures

Stakeholders from both cities have shared the futures they envision for vacant land. These represent the best-case scenarios for organizations – namely, if they had more funding or control of land. Stakeholders also identify their best practices that, even without greater funds and more control, may help them attain some of their land reuse goals. Some respondents’ ideal futures envision more environmentally-sustainable methods of land reuses, some focus on the social and economic aspects of vacant land reuse, and others take a more balanced approach. The need for innovative solutions and community input into reuse processes is also stressed, yet again, by stakeholders.

Beginning in Baltimore, Cardin focuses on the economic and social benefits of orchards and fruit trees. She explains her vision for the city:

I would like to see fruit trees within two blocks of where everybody lives so that nobody would be able to go out and not pass on their daily walks and not pass some fruit growing in their neighborhood… Those are just anchors for the growing of food, and we want to put that in every neighborhood and my ideal would be every two blocks. Fruit should not be a privilege and fresh fruit shouldn't be a privilege, it should be there. When you're impoverished and you have land and you can grow your own food, your experience of poverty is different than when you're living on the eighth floor of a Section 8 building, so we want people to have access to that and if that means food forests every other block, chances are you've got a community that is taking care of that. And that'll be good for all sorts of challenges (Cardin 2013, interview).

Cardin points out two problems that plague many disinvested urban areas: food security and accessibility. If fresh fruit were available for picking within walking distance of everyone’s home in these areas, food insecurity would be at least slightly lower.

Hunger is linked to many development issues in children, some of which are discussed by Kleinman et al.:
Children from families that report multiple experiences of food insufficiency and hunger are more likely to show behavioral, emotional, and academic problems on a standardized measure of psychosocial dysfunction than children from the same low-income communities whose families do not report experiences of hunger (1998, 1).

Hunger also affects adults in a variety of ways, and most who struggle with food insecurity also struggle with eating a healthy diet (McMillan 2012). The distribution of grocery stores offering healthy options, let alone affordable and healthy ones, is not equitable in the U.S. Often, those without access to private transportation and without time and money to use public transit (if it even exists) are left to purchase food at local gas stations, convenience stores, and fast food franchises. These outlets generally do not offer many healthy options. Shannon (2014) discusses how the current neoliberal outlook towards food deserts “pathologizes” these spaces:

The identification of certain neighborhoods as food deserts may thus identify the symptoms of a dysfunctional food system and patterns of economic and racial segregation, but do little to shed light on the more geographically expansive processes that cause them. The result is to place the blame (in multiple senses of the term) in poor neighborhoods, rather than in policies and actors which shape both urban development and food systems (258).

He argues, “Funding to improve food access flows not to community members themselves but in most cases to retailers, who become purveyors of food assistance through their low-priced goods and their provision of jobs for the community” (Shannon 2014, 259). The retailing middlemen, who reap much of the benefit, do not exist in Cardin’s envisioning, as she sees the orchards as a community resource, overseen by community groups like churches. Access to these orchards will increase the availability of healthy food options in an equitable fashion, at least when the trees are in season.
The major best practice Cardin discusses is ensuring that the community groups and members involved in an orchard are committed to the cause (2013, interview). The initial outreach to organizations such as schools and churches also allows easy access to fruit by children and members.

Smith also believes trees are an important part of the city’s future and that vacant land reuse is a great opportunity to enhance the city’s tree canopy. However, compared to Cardin, he takes a more environmentally-based approached to greening. He discusses what he would like to do if he had the necessary funding and control: “[If] there's any disturbance of the soil and of the trees, we'll work to replant them. There's a lot of land that's sitting empty, and I'd love just to plant all the pine trees that I could because they're the ones that help the most with the greenhouse gases” (Smith 2013, interview). Trees also provide ecosystem services other than carbon sequestration. These include supporting biodiversity, providing shade, ameliorating the effects of the urban heat island, and improving water quality.

Smith’s (2013, interview) tree-based best practices center on ensuring the trees are given the best chance for survival. They consist of starting with small projects, having multiple people involved, giving groups a “dose of reality” so they do not take on too much, and providing free trees.

Cameron notes that ecosystem services are vital to the functioning of the city and, if he had unlimited resources, he would establish new open spaces in the city, especially those that are able to “clean and filter” water (2013, interview). However, his outlook has an economic inclination as well. He says, “I don't want to pretend that all of this land is
going to be left as some kind of green open space. I don't think that that's of benefit for our city. We need new development, we need new housing” (Cameron 2013, interview).

Regarding best practices, Cameron (2013, interview) says:

I would create some clearinghouse where all of the studies that people like you are doing on vacant land and can be kept and made available. You’re probably the twelfth person in the year who's contacted me about a study that they're doing and I think that this is great but it also worries me that I think we have a lot of right minds that are doing the same thing but from different places.

There are two organizations that function as data clearinghouses of sorts. The Metropolitan Institute at Virginia Tech runs the Vacant Property Research Initiative, but as of August 2014, their bibliographies are not accessible (Vacant Property Research Initiative 2014). The Center for Community Progress has over one hundred reports on vacant properties, but does not seem to seek out dissertations and theses or academic articles regarding vacant land, and so is not a complete archive (Center for Community Progress 2014).

Witt would like to see Baltimore find a new economic direction because she believes that is the only way for repopulation to occur. She explains:

We have a shrunken population for a reason. That a lot of our industrial jobs went away and in order to really fill up all the vacant properties with people we'd have to bring the jobs back in some way that we haven't really figured out how to do yet… I would focus a lot on finding a new thing that Baltimore can do that's not Bethlehem Steel and I think that is what some of the city people are doing (Witt 2014, interview).

However, she sees two issues with this approach – namely that some parts of the city are currently ignored by the government and that a return to Baltimore’s former population is not a feasible goal. She says that if she had the funding and ability:
I would make the same kind of financing and land availability work for all the neighborhoods equally and try to work on [creating] jobs because it’s hard. Certain neighborhoods are empty because there's nowhere for people to work. What are you supposed to do with that land? What are you supposed to do with those houses if people can't afford to live there? Even if you make it really cheap, they still can't afford to live there because they don't have a job. I know that's very small scale. I think that Baltimore has been trying to get back to where we were in the 1950s, trying to bring people back, and that's great. I totally appreciate that, but it might be a better start to embrace the fact that our population is now lower and kind of providing for people who already live here than trying to figure out ways to drag more people inside the city limits. I think when you focus on attracting people so much it kind of works to the detriment of people who are already here, which is frustrating (Witt 2014, interview).

Her best practices involve further involving community members into the city’s planning processes.

T6B members discuss a number of projects they would like to see in Oliver.

Hynson says that she wants to promote play and its social benefits:

I'd like to see playable space built into community gardens, into not just having these static equipment-based playspaces but having tetherballs on every corner. These really simple things. Right now it's just schools and some parks and other than that it's no ball play and no fun anywhere. The kids are still there. I think it's good for adults too (Hynson 2014, interview).

Landymore (2013, interview) discusses his vision for the neighborhood, focusing on social and economic concerns:

What I'm most excited about what we're doing currently is our farm project. The potential for our community, especially if we're able to replicate the project in other areas of the neighborhood, the potential for the neighborhood to address its concerns in terms of food security from within, that's really cool, I think. It’s very cool for kids to be involved and it’s kind of a no-fly zone in terms of illicit activity. Anything really that brings activity or productivity or can be resourceful. [It’s] most important to provide a social service to the community. There’s corners where tree canopy would be great, but those are kind of the write-off areas. That's a secondary or tertiary option when we look somewhere.
Culberston, a T6B volunteer, and Hynson discuss two best practices they feel are part of T6B’s success. Culberston (2014, interview) says that “the diversity of the projects helps the momentum of other[s]” because volunteers attracted to one type of project may eventually tire of it and want to switch to another. This way, volunteers are retained, helping the organization do more. Hynson (2014, interview) notes that acceptance of all the area children has been integral to the playscape’s success. The children enjoy the space and use it for play, rather than the streets. The playscape provides a safe space for them, and since it is open to all, including children that may not have an involved guardian who can sign them up for an afterschool program, the presence of the playscape is very important. Hynson (2014, interview) elaborates: “Kids are sort of out in the neighborhood roaming around and being kids and so having a space that they know is dedicated to them and they're not going to be told to get out of is important. The fact that there's the lowest possible barrier of entry is what's really important.” Figure 29 shows the playscape’s rules, part of the effort to make it open to children.
Making clear the playground’s dedication to being and intent as a safe space for children, may seem too obvious a best practice. However, it deserves mention, because according to Landymore (2014, interview): “It’s funny how many times somebody – in the course of building the building the playscape, we'd be out there and someone from the neighborhood walks out says, ‘You better be careful kids are going to play on that.’”

Landymore continues, saying, “The kids really are in the driver's seat, they were the whole way through the playscape [construction], which is why I think it's an incredible success” (2014, interview) This positioning of the local children as stakeholders in the project had a positive effect on T6B’s work. Landymore (2014, interview) further explains:
When we started building a playground for the kids, that's when the buy-in really occurred. Because there's engagement in that, engagement with parents, with people who live in the houses on the perimeter of the playscape. Their kids are out there swinging a shovel or whatever it may be. There’s ownership evolving from that. Some neighbors got extremely involved, some took it as an opportunity to steal our tools when we weren't looking.

Involving the area’s children and completing a project for them won over many in the community, increasing the reuse’s longevity.

Respondents in Cleveland also shared a number of visions for vacant land, running the same gamut of environmental, social, and economic concerns. Weslian, for example, includes elements of all three aspects in her wishes for her neighborhood:

[That] everybody has access to a community garden that they could walk to, because not everybody wants to grow vegetables in their backyard or has the space, and also that there is greenspace available for people, and that there's pocket parks here and there for people to enjoy, people to sit at and that there's also opportunity for the urban market person who wants to actually sell produce at one of the farmer's markets (Weslian 2013, interview).

This demonstrates a very balanced envisioning of the future. Greenspace provides environmental services, communal spaces such as parks and gardens encourage social cohesion, and market gardens provide income. Weslian (2013, interview) says that the SVD’s identification of “where the next key investments are going to be” for the purpose of assembling and holding land has been conducive in attracting economic development. She does not specifically label it a best practice, but I believe the organization’s ability to assemble land while directing land reuses to where they are most useful and able to thrive is something other groups may want to emulate.

Cummins’ outlook is much like Weslian’s. He points out that community gardens are an important reuse, as are pocket parks and other greenspaces. However, he pushes
for yard expansions and redevelopment, which aids cities economically, but he places more caveats on development than other respondents, encouraging it to integrate with the existing neighborhood (Cummins 2013, interview). Ottoson-Deal, who works largely in the same area as Cummins, expresses similar views. In terms of bettering the area’s economic and social conditions, she discusses a simple method, sidewalk improvements:

[Philadelphia’s Green Program] did a lot of vacant land stabilization just by putting up a very simple split rail fence around the perimeter and then keeping the property mowed and maybe planting a couple things, something along front or a couple trees in the lot to show that's its cared for instead of a bunch of grass that never gets mowed (Ottoson-Deal 2013, interview).

She says that that is the easiest (pseudo-)reuse to implement. This could be considered a best practice for land that needs to quickly be secured in order to become more attractive for redevelopment. While these improvements may not seem to have great social benefit, the fact that someone is taking care of the land sends a message to residents that this area is of worth and it could dispel anxieties regarding abandoned land.

Ottoson-Deal (2013, interview) says that the “ideal” for environmentally-focused reuses is an aesthetically-pleasing, low-maintenance native planting. However, while this would be a preferred strategy for the CDC, it has not been easy to implement. She explains:

Instead of putting this poor quality fill dirt and compacting it with giant machines and then planting grass seed, if we could do something a little more environmentally aware, put down better quality soil, not compact it, and put down some sort of low-growing native grasses or clover, wildflowers, something that looked reasonably attractive and it got mowed twice a summer, would be fine instead of being three feet tall. [Then] less maintenance [is] needed for the city, and it would be more attractive than a field of weedy grasses that don't even grow well because the soil is so compacted and so poor [of] quality that nothing really wants to grow anyways, so you end up with a weed patch (Ottoson-Deal 2013, interview).
Aside from requiring less maintenance, native plants offer a number of benefits, including providing habitat and food for wildlife, impeding erosion, and protecting water quality (Dorner 2002). However, maintenance is one of Ottoson-Deal’s major concerns. She explains:

I think there could be situations where it would be better not to do a project than to do a project that is weak and might not exist in two years, and will go back to looking bad because it fuels the perception that putting gardens on vacant lots is a waste of time or is not helpful. So if you're going to do a project on a vacant lot it needs to be well thought out. We've also had a couple instances where we were approached by people who had great ideas for vacant lots and the idea never came to fruition. I think a lot of people have ideas but they don't have either the people power or money or the technical understanding to actually carry out the project… [You’ve] got to have a little bit of money and a lot of volunteers, and you've got to have a maintenance plan for the next ten years if you want it to be part of the neighborhood (Ottoson-Deal 2013, interview).

Brindza also voices concerns regarding maintenance. She wishes that the city would take better care of its lots:

I think that the best practices for vacant land would be for the city to have a uniform policy about how they treat vacant land in terms of maintaining it and how they secure [it] – don't just drive these ugly bollards into the ground by the sidewalk – try to figure out something that's a little more aesthetically pleasing… and then maintain it, cut the grass, sweep the sidewalks, on the regular basis (Brindza 2013, interview).

She adds, “As far as best practices, I [also] think designing some way to secure that land that fits the neighborhood” (Brindza 2013, interview). Social and economic benefits would arise from this sort of aesthetic improvement, but Brindza’s main focus in her neighborhood envisioning is on the area’s residents. She says that they are “the best idea generators” and if money were not an issue, she would give them more control in this process:
I think that the neighbors have the best ideas about what can be done with the vacant lot on their street. In each case it's different. On some streets they'd want to reforest it, they'd want to say let's grow trees there and then the city can use the trees for street trees. Some would say let's put in blueberry or blackberry bushes. Some would say let's plant an orchard. Some would say could we turn it into a park for the kids, because in this day and age nobody wants to let their kids walk two blocks over, it could be the nicest park in the world, but if you don’t go with your kids, your kids aren't safe (Brindza 2013, interview).

This fits with Zautner’s (2013, interview) earlier point that vacant land reuse happens “in a very specific place” – residents are best-positioned to identify the neighborhood’s needs.

Schwarz highlights the need for land stabilization as well. Stabilization leads to redevelopment and she discusses how to ready areas for this process:

There's some areas of the city where the potential for development is huge. It's not imminent, it may be a few years, but there's places in the city that are ripe for reinvestment, so the priority for those places is to protect them from being used. I love community gardens and such, but if we have some really good development sites, I don't want to see them chopped up and used for other purposes… So that's the economic question, priorities of those vacant sites is to set them aside, to hold on to them, and if possible, to apply some land stabilization strategies so that when potential investors see these properties, they don't think, “Wow, crazy, poorly-maintained city,” they see properties that are ready go (Schwarz 2013, interview).

She stresses ecological concerns as well. She explains:

I think the number one priority needs to be this kind of question of water quality. The extent to which we take the Great Lakes for granted is really, really troubling. You know, can we make an intentional way of thinking about vacant land in kind of a system that can both protect and also begin to restore the conditions in our creeks, streams, rivers, and ultimately then in the lake where they all discharge into (Schwarz 2013, interview)?

This line of thinking becomes ever more important in light of the recent water quality crisis in the western part of Lake Erie (Lee 2014).
Zautner also takes an environmentally-aware stance on reuse. She essentially envisions nature taking over largely-abandoned parts of the city:

I think the one thing that I would like to see is more areas where there are larger areas of vacancy… [The areas] are allowed to just simply return to wooded, natural environments. So areas where there is little to no development potential, where there are larger tracts of land, just simply to allowing them to turn back into woods. I would love to see that. Those are areas that will not have to be so maintained and places that in the future if development does come back it's simple enough to clear those properties for [it]. But I think with our declining population – it would be great if we could put community gardens on every corner, parks on every corner, and all of those things – but the bottom line is that with the current population that's just a lot to maintain. And so while I would like to see more people get on the bandwagon and applying to participate in those kinds of [reuses] there's also a great value in allowing lands to turn into their natural environment (Zautner 2013, interview).

While unmitigated natural growth is a very low-cost option, is it likely to be allowed on a widespread level? Residents in these areas often despise unmaintained growth (Tortorello 2011) and these areas are not completely depopulated.

Wimbiscus agrees with Zautner that there is currently great opportunity for establishing greenspaces in large tracts due to depopulation. He says:

Possibilities on the east side for green corridors, larger greenspaces… We're not going to be seeing an influx of thousands of residents [in that area]. Especially considering how much tree canopy we've lost, how much in stormwater issues we have, in order to repurpose those parcels in a way that improves ecological function, environment, recreation, and how that all works for the immediate sub areas of their neighborhoods. Figuring out that, I think that would be the best way. I think sort of going back to nature a little bit on the east side (Wimbiscus 2013, interview).

He adds that it is important to have the community’s involvement, saying “Every vacant lot is different. It’s surrounded by a different group of people, a different group of circumstances, so what its future purpose [is] could be very different.”
Summary

In summary, stakeholders report that many intra-city governance and idea-sharing networks are immensely helpful to vacant land reuse projects. The major intra-city networks that could be improved involve post-secondary educational institutions and their roles in revitalizing their communities. Less-discussed by respondents was the role of grade schools, but I believe further outreach and relationship-building with these institutions would aid land reuse and sustainability, as well as help educate the future’s urban decision-makers. However, according to my respondents, most intra-city networks appear to be operating at full capacity, only growing with the addition of new organizations and reuses.

Nevertheless, inter-city networks could definitely be improved, most easily with more commitment and funding from relevant cities and organizations. While not all strategies are applicable to every city, more resource-sharing would be useful, regardless of its level of formality. A simple solution – organizations partnering with similar organizations in other cities – is not being taken advantage of in all cases that is could be beneficial. If organizations wish to operate to their full capacities, they will try to foster these needed connections.

Stakeholder envisioning presents a number of interesting ideas, best practices, and goals for vacant land reuse. Respondents who worked in a governmental capacity tended to take a more economic view towards reuse, whereas those working in a more theoretical manner focused more on progressive environmental ideas. These differences
are important to take into account for neighborhood- and especially city-wide planning purposes and in ensuring that a variety of stakeholders’ ideas are accounted for.
Chapter 8: Conclusion

Baltimore and Cleveland face similar problems as shrinking post-industrial American cities. They have no choice but to find a balance in supporting and retaining their current populations while working to attract new residents, something Baltimore has been more successful than Cleveland in accomplishing. However, even if population loss is stemmed or reversed, these cities must accept that their populations will not be restored to their former peaks. Of utmost importance is seeking and building new economic avenues to replace manufacturing and other industrial trade, but there are not any methods that guarantee success in this endeavor (Moretti 2012). These cities have adopted new planning methods – a commendable start in creating a solution for vacant land – and should maintain these while furthering their sustainability practices. These will bolster current and future land reuses, and while land reuse in and of itself is not a complete solution, it does promote an equitable social and ecological environment (Pallagst 2007; Schilling and Logan 2008). Land reuse not only makes neighborhoods more livable for current residents, but future ones as well.

Regarding the support of residents, cities must improve upon and continue to utilize public participation methods in the planning and reuse process. It is clear from my respondents’ comments that local residents must be stakeholders to ensure the success of a land reuse initiative – meaning some form of grassroots participation. Projects operating under grassroots governance seem to be making the most visible progress in reusing vacant land, as illustrated by groups such as The 6th Branch, The Baltimore Orchard Project, and a variety of CDCs and design non-profits in Cleveland (though
limited funding hampers many grassroots-based organizations). While top-down governance is necessary in some cases, cities may wish to look at the example of ReImagining Cleveland, where the local government, a number of organizations, and groups of citizens held open communication throughout the planning process, forming a sort of mixed governance network that funded residents’ projects and devised civic mechanisms to aid the reuse process. Cities could partner with schools, churches, community associations, and other local institutions to increase citizen and grassroots organizations’ participation in land reuse, and partnerships with these groups would help governments be more receptive to residents’ needs and wishes.

It is also important to continue developing creative and unique land reuses. Community gardens and sideyard expansions are effective interventions, but they cannot be implemented in every situation. These two reuses are considered best practices in Cleveland, but because land reuse is so contextual that best practices may not be exported wholesale between cities or even neighborhoods. For example, sideyard expansions are not a best practice in Baltimore, as the majority of the housing is attached and single units cannot easily be demolished. Best practices in supporting vacant land reuse, such as the NEOCANDO data system discussed by Frank Ford or the existence of a watchdog organization like the Community Law Center, are more flexible in adapting to other cities’ needs, and are therefore more likely to be useful when shared among cities.

Regarding land reuses initiatives, the focus should move to innovative projects that support their neighborhoods in multiple ways. The Chateau Hough vineyard in Cleveland is an excellent example of this. While the reuse’s main focus is
socioeconomic, providing employment and fostering the neighborhood’s self-esteem, it
also provides some environmental benefits through greening and fostering the local food
system.

Both cities – meaning their governments and their non-profit organizations – have
developed practical methods for and in support of land reuse, such as the changes to their
zoning codes which promote greening. In Baltimore, T6B works impressively to directly
serve Oliver, and has carved a funding niche, a strong volunteer base, and a compelling
vision for land reuse and neighborhood revitalization. While this sort of organization
would not be easy to replicate (nor, perhaps, would it be feasible out of the context it
developed in) it illustrates the value of wide public appeal and a strong mission.
Baltimore Green Space, the local land trust, has been an integral part of protecting reuses
in a city where they repeatedly need such protection, and provides a valuable model for
other cities, even those without much land to reuse. Finally, groups like the CLC are
essential in aiding community organizations and less-experienced non-profits through the
confusing process of navigating city bureaucracy.

In Cleveland, the ReImagining project has been invaluable in building the
foundation for land reuse in the city and beyond. It was indispensable in not only
identifying where the city needed to ease and improve its policies and where non-profits
needed to increase their assistance to community groups, but also in providing ideas,
budgets, and guidance for future reuses – information applicable outside of the city. This
project should be emulated. The strong CDC presence in Cleveland has also been helpful
to the land reuse process. While this was built over time, having a well-networked
organization in each neighborhood was important in steering residents and the city away from possible conflict and in advocating for residents’ wishes. Finally, Cleveland’s expansive control of vacant land, stemming from the city and county land banks and the city’s willingness to take on parcels, has streamlined reuse and diminished the problems posed by vacant structures.

Despite the useful practices uncovered and progress made, there is room for improvement in both cities. While residents have the option of self-help nuisance abatement, these situations could be intervened in before they reach the critical point where abatement becomes necessary. Stronger penalties against absentee landowners and harmful banking practices would be of great use in these situations, but these may be difficult, if not impossible, to pass into law at higher levels of government. More funding for cleaning up both vacant structures and vacant land is necessary, but making vacancy stand out amongst other urban problems, let alone the endless issues seen at the federal level, is a formidable obstacle for stakeholders. However, as the vacancy problem lingers – and others, such as population loss, urban blight, and poverty, continue – it would be helpful if state and federal governments took care to direct money toward shrinking cities to aid them in anti-vacancy efforts.

Vacant land reuse presents a great opportunity for city sustainability offices to promote their plans’ goals. Both the Baltimore and Cleveland sustainability plans note that vacant land is a possibility for sustainable redevelopment, but neither go into much detail (Baltimore Office of Sustainability 2009; City of Cleveland Office of Sustainability 2010). Respondents in both cities discussed frustrations with city governments, including
their respective sustainability offices, and felt that these plans seem like good ideas, but are not being implemented to their full potential, at least regarding vacancy issues. Sustainability offices do have plans with far-reaching, broad goals, as well as limited funding and staff, so it is understandable that vacant land reuse is not a top priority. However both cities’ sustainability offices would be well-served by further promoting land reuse and fostering connections with grassroots groups, as these initiatives support their objectives.

Cost-effective maintenance strategies for both vacant properties and reused lots are a pressing need in Cleveland, and to a lesser extent in Baltimore. The scale of the issue coupled with cities’ limited budgets make maintenance difficult, but it is essential to the continued success of reuses and the mitigation of vacant properties’ harmful effects on surrounding properties. This represents an opportunity for governments and academics to work together. These groups have been collaborating in the search for cost-effective strategies, as shown by the variety of studies in both cities, but more stakeholders need to be involved in maintenance. Reuse projects often simply need a day of heavy work (Ottoson-Deal 2013, interview) – cities and companies could mandate volunteer hours for employees and promote land reuse projects as an option, schools, at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels, could add it to their curricula, and more effort could be made to promote community input. The court system could offer community service at certain vacant land reuse sites in lieu of fines or jail, particularly for crimes such as illegal dumping or vandalism. Perhaps this is controversial, but an extreme example is outlined by Dissell (2014): a man who flipped over 200 houses in the Cleveland area, particularly
in Slavic Village, where illegal real estate activity decimated the neighborhood, was, in part, sentenced to 3,000 hours of community service with SVD, including upkeep of community gardens on former sites of houses like those he tried to fraudulently sell and let lay vacant.

Another problem seen in both cities was the possibility of development on reused sites, which dissuades reuse projects – why would a resident want to participate in something that the city is likely to raze? This issue was much more prevalent in Baltimore, possibly due to the work of Cleveland’s CDCs in directing reuses away from as well as the city’s economic situation hindering possible redevelopment. Baltimore needs to find some way to alleviate the concerns of residents who put a great deal of time, energy, and money into their projects, since the city currently does not respond well, if at all, to them. While the goal for vacant land is usually redevelopment of some sort, it is of utmost importance to protect reuses that are performing important ecosystem services and providing residents with a variety of amenities, especially when those are aiding the city in reaching its sustainability goals.

Most intra-city networks are operating at capacity, though the involvement of higher education institutions and some city government communication processes could be increased. Encouraging the continuing development of these networks is very important due to the assistance they provide organizations in the land reuse process. Inter-city networks have much more room for improvement. A clearinghouse, as suggested by Mark Cameron (2013, interview), run by either an academic or government institution, would be useful to practitioners and would have aided this research, though
possibly making it less informative. While there are a number of mechanisms in place already, consisting mostly of conferences of organizations with similar goals, extending inter-city networks would also assist in the transmission of useful practices between sites.

While the problems facing funding, maintenance, and permeance of vacant land reuses constitute substantial hurdles for residents, organizations, and cities looking to reuse sites, the situation has been improving as more strategies and practices are tested and found useful. Hopefully vacancy will be a non-issue in the future, but in the meantime, the practitioners working on the problems are making great strides in finding equitable and sustainable solutions.
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Appendix A: Alphabetical List of Interview Respondents

Cleveland

Anita Brindza: Executive Director of Cudell Improvement Inc., a CDC serving the Cudell and Edgewater neighborhoods. (http://www.cudell.com/)

Brian Cummins: Cleveland City Councilman for Ward 14, which includes the Clark-Fulton, Stockyard, Brooklyn Centre, and West Boulevard neighborhoods. (http://www.clevelandcitycouncil.org/ward-14/)

Frank Ford: Former Senior Vice President for Research and Development at Neighborhood Progress Inc., a community development funding intermediary with a focus on Cleveland. Currently Senior Policy Advisor at the Thriving Communities Institute, a project of the Western Reserve Land Conservancy. (http://www.npi-cle.org/ and http://www.thrivingcommunitiesinstitute.org/)

Bob Jakimowicz: Planning and Development Advisor for the City of Cleveland.

Sasha Ottoson-Deal: Development Specialist at the Stockyard, Clark-Fulton and Brooklyn Centre Community Development Office, a branch of the Detroit Shoreway Community Development Organization. (http://www.dscdo.org/scfbc.aspx)

Terry Schwarz: Director of Kent State University’s Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative, which houses KSU’s urban design graduate program and their College of College of Architecture and Environmental Design public service activities. (http://www.cudc.kent.edu/)

Noah Sutter: Then Vacant Land Manager at Slavic Village Development, a CDC serving the North and South Broadways neighborhoods in Cleveland. (http://slavicvillage.org/)

Marlane Weslian: Neighborhood Development Officer at Slavic Village Development and longtime resident of Slavic Village / South Broadway. (http://slavicvillage.org/)

Jay Westbrook: Long-serving, since-retired Cleveland City Councilman for Ward 16, which includes the Cudell, Edgewater, and West Boulevard neighborhoods.

Joel Wimbiscus: Project Manager at LAND Studio, a design and planning non-profit focused on community-based projects dealing with diverse topics such as sustainable planning, public art, and collaborative approaches to community stabilization. (http://www.land-studio.org/)
Lilah Zautner: Former Sustainability Manager at Neighborhood Progress Inc., current Manager of Special Projects and Land Reuse at the Cuyahoga County Land Bank. (http://cuyahogalandbank.org/)

**Baltimore**

Tracey Barbour-Gillett: Program Officer in Community Development at the Abell Foundation. Vice Chair of the Baltimore Homeownership Preservation Coalition, a group of over 50 non-profit, governmental, and professional associations preventing and mitigating the effects of foreclosure. (http://www.abell.org/ and http://www.preservehomeownership.org/)

Mark Cameron: Landscape Architect at the Baltimore Office of Sustainability (www.baltimoresustainability.org).

Nina Beth Cardin: Founder of the Baltimore Orchard Project, a mostly volunteer-based initiative to “grow, glean and give away fresh, healthy, local fruit to those in need in the neighborhoods of Baltimore.” She is also an ordained rabbi and the director of the Baltimore Jewish Environmental Network. (http://www.baltimoreorchard.org/)

Mary Pat Clarke: Councilwoman for District 14 which includes a variety of neighborhoods such as Charles Village, Coldstream-Homestead-Montebello, Hampden, Remington, and Waverly. (http://www.baltimorecitycouncil.com/district14/)

Nick Culbertson: Volunteer with the 6th Branch (now Executive Board Co-Chair), veteran, and MD candidate at Johns Hopkins.

Nayeli Garcia Mowbray: Native of the Waverly neighborhood. Board member of the Waverly Improvement Association. (http://waverlyimprovement.org/)

Briony Hysnon: Deputy Director of the Prince George’s County Office of the Neighborhood Design Center, a non-profit that provides pro-bono design and planning services. A graduate of the Social Design program at MICA, she designed and worked with the 6th Branch on the Bethel Street Playscape project. (http://www.mica.edu/Programs_of_Study/Graduate_Programs/Social_Design_(MA)/Briony_Hynson_12.html)

Dave Landymore: Executive Director of the 6th Branch. (http://www.the6thbranch.org/)

Cindy Leahy: Council Assistant for District 14. President of the Keswick Improvement Association and the Chair of the North Baltimore Neighborhood Coalition.

Ashe Smith: Community Greening Coordinator at Parks and People, a community foundation that works to improve the quality of life in Baltimore City. A founder of
Whitelock Community Farm, located on a formerly vacant lot in the Reservoir Hill neighborhood. (http://www.parksandpeople.org/ and http://whitelockfarm.org/)

Becky Witt: Staff Attorney at Community Law Center, an organization providing legal services for area non-profits. (http://communitylaw.org/).
Appendix B: Example Interview Protocol

How does your work relate to vacant lots? (ask to explain job + work + area they work in)
How would you define a vacant lot?

What are the causes of vacant lots in this neighborhood?
What problems have they caused (crime? Poverty? Cleanliness? Outsider attitudes?
People leaving the area – do you know where they move to?)
How much do these problems affect your neighborhood? Any different than other neighborhoods in the city? Any specific, unique lots causing issues?

What strategies have people used to reuse lots around here? Was there a common one?
Who is spearheading the reuse?
What have been the results?
Others involved in reuse / funding the reuse? How did they get involved? Are schools (both grade and college) involved?
To your knowledge, does the city’s sustainability plan play into this?

Any issues regarding… access to land? Soil? Water? the law (permits, etc)? funding?
Project upkeep (i.e. having enough volunteers, funding)?

Other cities / neighborhoods doing like projects? Any motivation /ideas taken from them?
Is there a mechanism for sharing results? Resource sharing?

Does reusing vacant land change the perceptions of the neighborhood?

Is there value in keeping extant properties on the land? Demolishing?
Is there a way to speed the demolishing process for problem properties?

What strategies easiest/simplest/etc to implement? Hardest? Why?

What do you feel are best practices in vacant lot remediation [in your neighborhood]?
What would you like to see more of? If you had all the needed funding, what would you want to do?

If you are involved in more projects in the future, would you do anything differently? /
What have you learned from these reuses?
Appendix C: IRB Approval

A determination has been made that the following research study is exempt from IRB review because it involves:

Category 2. research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior

Project Title: Polishing the Rust Belt: Best Practices for Vacant Lot Remediation

Primary Investigator: Jillian Lee Prusa

Co-Investigator(s):

Advisor: Geoffrey Buckley

Department: Geography

Jo Ellen Sharow, MPA
Office of Research Compliance

5-9-13

This proposal (polices, if any) were developed and were described in your application for review. Any additional or modifications to the project will be approved as an amendment prior to implementation.
Appendix D: A Note on “Rust Belt”

The term “Rust Belt” is ill-defined and subject to much debate. In 1984, during a speech to Cleveland steelworkers, Walter Mondale referred to the Midwest during the Reagan era as a “Rust Bowl,” playing off of the Depression’s “Dust Bowl” (Mcclelland 2013). “Rust Bowl” was changed to “Rust Belt” in the resulting media discourse so it would match the other colloquial “Belt” areas of the U.S., such as the Bible Belt. While no one would argue that a city like Detroit is not part of the Rust Belt, the inclusion of other cities in this regions varies from source to source since it is not a particularly accurate term (Cummings et al. 2005). For example, Pallagst (2007) does not use St. Louis in her analysis of shrinking cities because of its limited population loss during the four years she researched, whereas for Schilling and Logan (2008), the city’s high vacancy rates merit its inclusion in their study of the Rust Belt’s shrinking cities.

Some see the term as offensive. Understandably, people who lost their jobs in the catastrophic factory closures of the 1970s and 1980s may reject it (McClelland 2013). Others do not like the image the term portrays. No one wants to be viscerally reminded of a drastic economic and social downturn. However, younger generations, who did not witness the slumping fortunes of these cities but, instead, were born into the situation, are more open to the term. It can be used as a source of pride as well as a way of accepting the failure of these cities to adapt to a changing economic climate and move beyond it (Piiparinen 2013c; Renn 2013).

However, there is a problematic discourse evolving next to “Rust Belt” as a neutral or positive concept, as seen in the proliferation of “ruin porn” photography and young, trendy tourists visiting Detroit to gawk at the decay and then go home (Binelli 2012; McClelland 2013). Leary (2013) critiques these developments:

So much ruin photography and ruin film aestheticizes poverty without inquiring of its origins, dramatizes spaces but never seeks out the people that inhabit and transform them, and romanticizes isolated acts of resistance without acknowledging the massive political and social forces aligned against the real transformation, and not just stubborn survival, of the city. The fetishization of ruin and decay is disrespectful to the people who still live in these cities, who are generally poor and of color. Ruins “represent lives of poverty, unemployment, and abandonment” (Schmitt 2013) and care should be taken – especially by those who are choosing to use post-industrial landscapes that they are “borrowing” from the locals for their own means – to not view them as some sort of exotic location but as a space that people call home.

In some publications, “Rust Belt cities” has been replaced with “legacy cities” (Mallach and Brachman 2013). This makes sense from a civic point of view as boosters do not want their city to be associated with connotations of decay, failure, and uselessness. My interview respondents used both “Rust Belt” and “legacy cities” to describe the region, and though I did not specifically ask questions regarding which term they preferred, there were some definite opinions on both phrases. However, I feel “legacy cities” is a buzzword that camouflages the problems these cities face. It is suppressing the realities of residents who live in disinvested neighborhoods where
abandonment and vacancy are the norm. “Rust Belt” is far more evocative and effective in conveying the truth of these situations. I understand that, despite its extensive use in the literature, “Rust Belt” is not well-defined and I also understand the misgivings some have towards the term’s connotations. However, I will be using “Rust Belt” to refer to older American industrial cities that were adversely affected by the deindustrialization of the American economy throughout this thesis. I include both Cleveland and Baltimore in this category due to the high population and industrial job losses they experienced. While I am in a privileged position relative to many people who deal with the vacancy issues discussed in this study, I am not ignorant of the fact that abandoned spaces present a series of problems that reflect the struggles of inner-city populations, and that these are problems that require solutions other than the return of steel mills and auto factories.
Appendix E: On Sustainability

Another issue with sustainability planning is the idea of sustainability itself. As previously mentioned, there are a variety of definitions of sustainability. Some researchers see “opportunity in the ambiguity” of the term (Winnick 2013). However, this ambiguity is what allows it to be co-opted by companies in industries like oil and mining that want to be seen as “green” (Benson and Kirsch 2009). McManus (1996, 53) says the term “appeals to a wide range of interests” and “enables various groups to interpret the term to support their agendas and it pastes over potential conflicts between environment and economy.” Social justice is often overlooked in these interpretations of the concept, as is the “inter-generational equity” that one would think is the impetus for conservation and sustainability initiatives (McManus 1996). Others ask why the idea of sustainability is not critiquing the systems that brought the (Western) world to the point where we must scramble for some sort of sustainable way to live. For example, Lorr (2012, 25) states:

Urban sustainability in the North American context is underdefined, underoperationalized, and undertheorized. Urban sustainability is likely to look more like a brand name for greening cities than to look like a substantive comprehensive plan to solve or analytical tool to critique urban development… Urban sustainability in the context of North American cities is likely to continue at the surface level of addressing environmental problems, especially if it remains solely a planning and “greening” buzzword.

Marcuse (1998) sums this line of thought up quite nicely by titling his paper “Sustainability is not enough.”

Marcuse (1998) also examines the hegemonic origins of the idea of sustainability. Sustainability can be generally taken to promote some sort of “better environment,” but its definition can vary by race and class. Often, in the United States, greening initiatives take place in higher-income areas of cities, or in those areas with residents that have the money and/or political power to campaign for such initiatives (Lorr 2012). The environmental movement as a whole – aside from certain sections of the environmental justice movement – suffers from this problem as well, as it tends to lack economic, racial, and gender diversity (Begos 2013). The discourse around sustainability could easily become more diverse and equitable. If effort is made to include marginalized groups – who sometimes have a precedent of practices that today are deemed “sustainable” – and their input, the issue of diversity in sustainability would not be as open to question.

Because of the ambiguity around “sustainability,” it may be useful to develop a better-defined term. The literature refers to “resilience” and to a lesser extent, “adaptability” as alternatives (Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative 2008; Ling, Hanna, and Dale 2009; Ernstson et al. 2010; Ahern 2011). Resilience is seen as a more dynamic state than sustainability, as explained by Cascio (2009):

As we look ahead, we need to strive for an environment, and a civilization, able to handle unexpected changes without threatening to collapse. Such a world would be more than simply sustainable; it would be regenerative and diverse, relying on
the capacity not only to absorb shocks like the popped housing bubble or rising sea levels, but to evolve with them. In a word, it would be resilient. Whatever the word, term, or definition used, the extent of the “sustainability” in any specific case must be examined in order for the true aim of a plan or initiative to come to light.