
[City wants to offer vacant Englewood lots for a dollar](#)

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It's been done in Gary. Now it's time for the South Side of Chicago.

In a plan approved by the Chicago Plan Commission Thursday, homeowners and nonprofits in Englewood will be able to buy city-owned vacant lots for \$1.

In Gary, the program offers vacant homes owned by the city. In Chicago, the hope is to use more than 5,000 vacant lots for something other than litter.

The city, under former Mayor Richard M. Daley, has done this many times. In 2009, the city sold about 80 South Side parcels at a dollar each to be used for single-family homes, as well as five acres of vacant parcels on the Far South Side to a developer.

The city Department of Planning & Development's ultimate goal this time would be to sell off vacant lots within a 13-square-mile planning area. That includes lots in West Englewood, Washington Park and Woodlawn, as well as parts of the New City, Fuller Park and Greater Grand Crossing neighborhoods.

The lots were acquired by the city through property tax and demolition liens dating to the 1960s.

Asiaha Butler, president and co-founder of the Resident Association of Greater Englewood, wants to see more than 2,300 vacant lots in Englewood, and 1,354 in West Englewood, used for good.

A survey of residents brought forth a variety of ideas, she said.

"Some people said they would like to install public art. Some people said they were looking for more of a community garden, or a place where young people can be in the area," Butler said. "I've heard dog park. And some people if they're very ambitious, they may even build on that lot. You never know."

Butler and her organization have been involved in planning the lot program — part of the Green Healthy Neighborhoods plan — for more than a year, and a meeting in Englewood Tuesday about the lots brought out more than 100 people.

"I think it's a lot of people who are looking at a community like Englewood and West Englewood and other communities and the vacant properties and snatching up the land for their personal investor use — certainly not investing in the neighborhood," Butler said. "I do think having people take part in some of the land ownership, within their block, and for other folks to be involved...it will get them that sense of ownership [and] spark some creative ideas, some beautiful ideas."

On the 6100 block of South Wood Street, neighbors already have created a community garden on a vacant lot. Butler said a neighbor is leasing the space, and with the program, they can apply to buy it.

Applicants interested in applying for a lot must own property on the same block; be current on property taxes; and have no financial debt to the city, such as water bills and parking tickets. Applications will be available for 30 days on the city's website at cityofchicago.org/dpd and applicants must submit a letter of support from their alderman. They also must list what the property would be used for.

In a statement, Mayor Emanuel said the program will give community stakeholders an expedited way to buy vacant land.

"It's designed to move vacant properties out of the city's hands and into private ownership," Emanuel said. "People can use the land to expand the yards around their homes, to create gardens on their block, or for beautification, housing, or for other purposes."

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