



Garden REtreat Statement

A 2000 survey of 70 cities conducted by the Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy found that, "on average, fifteen percent of a city's land was deemed vacant." While much of these tracts of land are ripe for reuse, they often remain undeveloped. Undeveloped and unused land easily becomes magnets for illegal dumping or nuisance crimes and quickly brings down property values, fostering further neglect. Not only does this create blight within city centers, it also upsets members of the community.

While vacant land has the potential to serve as a social or economic asset for a city, there are multiple factors which can cause land to remain vacant. Often there is no system in place for cities to even know how much abandoned property exists, where it is located, or the condition of the land. Even when that information exists, cities often do not know how to deal with problems such as land conditions that can hinder or limit development, an "undesirable" location, or land that has simply been vacant for "too long".

Grand and costly architectural gestures - casinos, ballparks, corporate headquarters - that fail to resuscitate a city are even worse because they lead to disappointment and discouragement within communities. Many question: "Why bother?" Even when individuals take action, such as starting a community clean-up program, success is often limited. City bureaucracy and confusion in ownership can make it impossible for anything to be built or revitalized in these spaces. Though tidy, the lots remain empty.

"Garden REtreat" answers the question: What does an overlooked and ignored urban lot, after years of abandonment and neglect, become when the space itself uses the resources found within to create restoration and renewal?

Located in what was previously a thriving city center, but long ago abandoned and neglected, the once-vacant land has restored itself using only the resources it found within the lot. Over time, the materials left in the space combined with the additional items that were dumped and discarded there, and together they slowly reinvented themselves. Organic and natural-looking forms born from man-made and unnatural materials emerge creating a beautiful urban garden that has a life of its own.

The process of transformation is a gradual evolution as the materials slowly assert their will. They are reborn into shapes and forms that are natural to the materials themselves but are organic in look and feel. Rising from the ruins, these new forms come together bringing order and renewal to this previously undesirable space.

"Garden REtreat" gives us the opportunity to see the potential for what a neglected space can become when left to its own devices. It allows us to come away with a better understanding of the potential for reuse. It inspires us to think differently about what we see as no longer useful and helps us discover ways to reuse the things we already have.

Kitty Gordon
April 2010