

# a little about lots

THE DO-IT-YOURSELF BOOK ON  
IMPROVING VACANT LOTS AND NEIGHBORHOODS



COMPILED AND PUBLISHED BY  
THE PARK ASSOCIATION OF N.Y.C., INC.

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## A LITTLE ABOUT LOTS

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*Advisor to the Neighborhood Improvement Committee*

Our special thanks for contributions of information,  
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Department of Sanitation	Department of Commerce and Industrial Development
Police Department	Department of Parks
Department of Highways	Department of Water Supply, Gas & Electricity
Department of Buildings	
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and to all businessmen and public utility concerns listed  
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## Introduction. Towards A Better Lot, A Better Neighborhood . . .

This is *the* book on vacant lots.

After years of experience with community groups who are interested in bettering their neighborhoods, the Park Association of N.Y.C., Inc. has decided to put into print whatever we can which might make it possible for neighborhoods to help themselves.

The Park Association is non-profit and apolitical, New York City's oldest and largest organization concerned with public parks, recreation, open space and neighborhood improvement. We're a Before-and-After group. We like to see a "nothing" turned into a "something." We believe in do-it-yourself. It works.

We'll show you what can be done with vacant lots—City-owned or privately-owned—how to form a group, a few hints on how to raise money, how to clean up your neighborhood, how possibly to plant trees around you—all towards a better neighborhood.

This booklet was prepared by a group of volunteers who've been through reams of red tape in order to pave the way for a greener and happier New York. Because of periodic changes in the City agencies with whom you must deal from time to time, you'll find changes in our information. We'll try to keep informed for you.

New York City is a big city made up of a lot of little lots. We wish you success! A lot more can be done than you might think—both with lots and with people.

*Because of our name, we're often confused with the Park Department. We've worked with them but we're a private organization and not connected with the Department of Parks in any way.*

## Table of Contents

Introduction. Towards a Better Lot, a Better Neighborhood	i
Getting People Together To Help	1
How Do You Raise the Big Money?	7
A Little About a Lot's Problems (including Vandalism)	11
Keeping It Going (Maintenance)	14
How To Design Your Lot	16
Gardening	21
Things You Might Put in Your Lot	26
The Vacant Lot (How to Insure It, Rent It, Clean It Up)	31
What To Do About Lots With Unsafe Fencing or No Fencing At All	46
Night-lighting	49
Vacant Lot Timetable	52
Towards a Better and Cleaner Neighborhood (including Community Clean-Up Lot, Street Tree Planting and General Helpful Tips)	53
Conclusion	62

Edward Mitchell



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## Getting People Together to Help

Once you've spotted a vacant lot that looks like a possibility to you after reading this entire book, you must either form a group or join one that's already formed.

It's absolutely necessary for you to have an active and interested group ready to embark upon the vacant lot project, for the following reasons: (1) a group request to the City shows that you're serious, and (2) you're going to need the help of that group to maintain whatever you start.

*NOTE: If you happen to be the owner of a lot and you wish to improve your lot with your own funds, it's not necessary for you to form or join a group. Do follow all the other instructions in this book, though, especially those concerning public liability insurance.*

### TO ORGANIZE A BRAND NEW GROUP

Finding a group of people interested in community betterment is usually easier than you think. Just like you, many people would like to see that old lot down the street fixed up, but don't know how to go about it.

We suggest that you first find five or six community-minded people who are interested in the project.

To do this, you might visit the leaders of local churches, temples, etc. These people appreciate community projects and they know those most interested in the community.

You can also contact local Fire Stations, schools (PTA's or Parents' Associations or even the Principals), tenants' associations, political clubs, social clubs, mothers' playground groups.

The interested people you might get from any of the above groups will certainly give you good community representation. Invite these people to your house for coffee. (It's all

right to ask each person for a small donation to cover the expense of the coffee.)

At this time you can discuss what kind of lot you think your neighborhood needs. Each of you can chip in a few dollars to start the ball rolling. (See section on raising starter money, page 5.) This meeting is also a good time to dream up a name for yourselves. (See section on naming your group, page 5.)

What size group is the best? The biggest group is the best! Get hold of as many neighborhood people as you can. Here's one situation where too many cooks do not spoil the broth. You'll have something for everyone to do. Aside from appointing someone to be Chairman, President or Director of your group, you'll need a Secretary (the letter-writer) and a Treasurer (the one who has charge of money) and a number of committees: you can have a Design Committee, a Fund-Raising Committee (this could include a Party-Planning Committee), a Maintenance Committee and a committee to go out and contact all those who might eventually help your group. These are just a few of the many committees you'll want to have.

Keep everybody busy and interested. This is the *only* way a group survives.

Each of the original five or six people you've interested in the project can be assigned to bring in five or six more interested people. After that, if you still think that you don't have enough people, you can do your own advertising. Ask local shopkeepers if you may put up a notice in their windows.

Immediately after this meeting, your group should begin to fan out into the neighborhood and meet people. This means people who might be able either to help or contribute ideas. In addition to those listed above, it means local professional architects, student architects, artists, engineers, building contractors and electricians and people who work for them, carpenters and carpenters' helpers, construction

workers, mechanics, plumbers, professional handymen, superintendents of well-maintained buildings, lumberyard employees, florists, and hardware and paint stores. It could even mean someone who's ever worked on a farm.

Some of these people are your neighbors right now! Don't just make contact with them. Get to be *friends* with them. In the end, you'll need the help of most of them.

Tell them what you want to do. Make sure they understand that the project will benefit the whole *neighborhood*. Ask them if they might consider giving you a little help if you need it. And, most important, *show them this book*.

If languages other than English are also spoken in your neighborhood, make every effort to find people for your group who can speak them.

Persuading a lawyer to be a member of your group would be one of your most sensible and important moves. If you don't know a lawyer and there isn't one in your neighborhood to contact, you can write to your City Councilman, your State Assemblyman or your State Senator and ask if his office would introduce you to a lawyer in your neighborhood. These officials are very willing to try to help community groups. Remember to tell about your project and to enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Try a neighborhood political club for a lawyer!

You can also try the Administrative Office of the Legal Aid Society which is located at 11 Park Place, New York, N.Y. 10007. Enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Or you can write to Community Action for Legal Services, Inc., located at 80 William Street, New York, N.Y. 10038. They have affiliated neighborhood offices. Ask for the address of the office closest to you. Enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Most neighborhoods have Community Planning Boards and most Planning Boards have park and recreation committees. Having someone from your local Planning Board

as a member of your group would also be a wise idea. To find out the address and telephone number of the Board nearest you, you can call the office of your Borough President and ask to speak to the office of the Community Planning Board Director.

Manhattan:	566-4300
Bronx:	293-9000
Brooklyn:	643-2054
Queens:	268-5000
Richmond:	447-1000

A good way to meet active people is through the Police Community Relations Division. Write to them at 34½ East 12th Street, New York, N.Y. 10003. (Enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope.) They'll be glad to put you in touch with your own Police Precinct Community Council. These Councils are interested in community affairs, are extremely cooperative and helpful, and have meetings periodically with other active members of the community. They'll make sure that you have the chance to tell your story.

#### JOINING AN EXISTING GROUP

If there is an existing group in your neighborhood which has already shown that it's interested in and capable of neighborhood betterment of any kind, you might consider joining it. *Don't* consider joining a group that is devoted to a single interest, such as a political club or a tenants' association. Better use these people as contacts or invite them to join your group.

You must make sure that the group you choose likes your idea of acquiring and improving a vacant lot and that they understand just what's involved. The easiest way for them to understand is to ask their Chairman or Director to read this book!

If the group really wants to follow through on the vacant

lot idea, you and the group can still make friends with all the people and organizations we've already listed.

The good thing about joining a previously-formed neighborhood group is that it already knows how to operate as a group. Also, it usually has some operating funds and possibly a storefront office with a typewriter and stationery.

The only bad thing would be to join a group that only half-likes your idea. If you notice *any* lack of enthusiasm at your first meeting with this group, drop out immediately. You'll be better off forming your own.

#### Naming Your Group

Once you have a group of active, interested people rounded up, decide on a name for yourselves. It's especially important to have a group name when it comes to making an application to the City for something or even for receiving a donation. It's also important that your name indicate that you are a non-profit organization. Words such as "Council," "Association," "Group," and "Committee" usually indicate a non-profit status. Also, try to make your name reflect everyone in the area. The word "Neighborhood," for example, can cover almost any size area.

#### You'll Need Money to Start

How do you raise \$25.00 or \$30.00 just to buy starter supplies? Easy. Each member of the group chips in \$5.00 or so. This will buy you a rubber stamp with the group name and address, paper and envelopes to serve as stationery or receipt slips, postage stamps, poster paper for self-advertising, "magic markers" or crayons. You can borrow a typewriter from someone somewhere (try a neighborhood house of worship). If you can't, make sure that whoever writes letters for the group has beautifully CLEAR handwriting. Later on, you might need a mimeograph machine. Again, try your neigh-

borhood houses of worship. Or maybe a member of your group works in a school which is likely to have one.

Whatever you purchase from this starter money, it's a little that can do a lot.

See page 7 for suggestions on how to raise the big money!

#### *How to Write Your Requests*

Whether you have fancy printed stationery or just a rubber stamp with your group's name and address, make sure that all letters you send contain the group's name and address on the outgoing envelope, the letter itself and on the return envelope. Always enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Always state what your group is and does, what your request is, what the purpose of your request is.

Make sure that someone in your group can write a good letter—one that's polite, short and understandable.

You'll notice that we've listed no personal names with addresses. If your letter is directed to the Office of a Commissioner, say "Dear Mr. Commissioner." For anyone else, say "Dear Sir." Always ask whomever you're addressing if he will please forward your letter to the proper department.

We suggest that your first request or inquiry to any of the City agencies we list should be written. *This shows that you're serious.*

#### **How Do You Raise the Big Money?**

You'll definitely need money to insure the lot, rent it and maintain it. It's possible that you'll also have to pay for fencing or night-lighting. (After you've read the section of this book on the steps necessary to obtain a lot, you'll have a better idea about what this means.) And, although it's up to your imagination how you come by everything else, you're still going to need more money. Not *everything* will be donated and not *all* help asked for will be forthcoming.

We suggest that your first money-raising effort be for insurance, rent, maintenance, and fencing or night-lighting.

Here are two suggestions for raising money. If you know of other ways to do it, ones which you've tried and that have worked, please write to us and tell us about them.

#### **NEIGHBORHOOD PARTY**

This type of party is also called a "Street Fair," "Street Bazaar," or "Block Party" but because we're emphasizing the importance of involving the whole neighborhood, we're calling it a Neighborhood Party. You can hold one to raise your first money and, if you want, you can hold another one to celebrate the day your park "opens" to the public.

To hold your Party in the street, you'll need a street-closing permit from the Department of Commerce and Industrial Development. First choose a street on a block that is *not* one of the following: (1) an arterial street (this means a street that leads directly into traffic centers, into a tunnel, into another borough, etc.), (2) a bus route, or (3) a heavily traveled street or avenue.

Next, you must appear in person at the office of the Department of Commerce and Industrial Development, 415 Madison Avenue, Manhattan, to apply for a street-closing permit. Call ahead to check on the Department's hours (759-7770).

The Department will take down all the necessary information and, among other things, will ask you if you are planning to construct a platform in the street. It's our suggestion that you do not even consider building or erecting *anything*, much less a platform. To fulfill the requirements concerning platform building will cost you valuable time that could better be put towards the planning of your Party. Also, platforms are dangerous. Your kitchen tables, brought out into the street and decorated, will hold everything you need, and if you plan for someone to give a speech, a nearby stoop will do very nicely for elevation.

In a week to ten days you will be notified as to whether your application has been approved.

#### *Activities*

Your Neighborhood Party can combine a number of activities. You can have a "White Elephant Sale," a Plant Sale and/or a Raffle, among other things.

"*White Elephant Sale*": "White Elephants" are articles of clothing, furniture, etc. that you no longer need or use but that someone else might need or use. They're in your closets and basement right now! If the articles are in good condition, they *can* be sold. Hint: clean clothes that your children have outgrown are sure sales, always in demand.

Remember to keep your prices fair, always considering the age and condition of the articles to be sold. One of the reasons "White Elephant Sales" are so popular is that people are hoping to find something cheaper than they would elsewhere! Make good use of this fact.

Contact neighborhood store owners. Describe your project to them if you haven't already. Again, make sure they understand that the project is to benefit *everyone* in the neighborhood. Ask if there's some item in their stores they'd be willing to donate for the "White Elephant Sale," the Plant Sale or the Raffle.

*Plant Sale*: If you can obtain donations of plants for your sale, keep your prices low—remember, you obtained the plants free.

*Raffle or "Lottery"*: Raffles and lotteries are fun and if the items to be raffled off are attractive enough and there are plenty of them, people *will* buy tickets.

#### *Ideas on Food*

Your local grocer may be enthusiastic enough to supply food for the party, either free or at reduced cost.

You can try a local soft-drink distributor for a possible donation.

The women of your group can bake cookies, cakes and pies to sell.

If you think you'll make enough money on other parts of the Party (Raffle, Plant Sale, "White Elephant" Sale), and you just want to make sure that food will be available to the crowd, visit your local Police Precinct Station and ask for the Community Relations Officer. He'll make sure that hot-dog and ice cream vendors have permits for your street.

#### *Advertise Your Party To the Neighborhood*

You can do your own advertising by word of mouth and also by making posters that describe the Party. Ask local store owners if you may put up a poster in their windows.

#### *Indoor Party*

If you plan to hold a series of fund-raising events and some of them are to take place in the winter, here's where your local school, houses of worship or the owner of any large meeting hall can be of great service to you. Planned correctly, indoor fund-raising parties can be just as successful as those held outside.

## ANOTHER WAY TO RAISE MONEY

Savings banks are often interested in worthwhile community projects and sometimes are willing to help things along. Find out the name of the President of your neighborhood savings bank and write to him. Identify your group and tell him what you're trying to do. Ask if you may have an appointment to see him, *at his convenience*, to discuss your project further.

## A Little About a Lot's Problems

No lot is perfect. Below we've outlined some of the built-in problems that come with some lots—we're happy to say that nearly all of them are solvable!

We've found it a blessing to obtain a lot having two blank walls on either side. Does your lot have too many windows on either side that could be broken? Ask the landlord(s) of the building(s) if you may cover the windows with chicken-wire. If this isn't possible, you may have to plan your play area (basketball hoop and backboard, for example) in another part of the lot.

What about privacy? Can you afford to install opaque (non-see-through) fencing on either side of your lot (right and left) in order to keep privacy between the lot users and the first floor windows of the adjoining buildings?

What about the back of the lot? Unless it's a walk-through (a City block deep), you'll be adjoining either someone's back yard or a building. Can you afford to install opaque fencing? Along with protecting people's privacy, you protect yourself from possible damage.

### *A Problem That's Not Quickly Solved*

Is one of the adjoining buildings vacant with unboarded windows? This is not only a violation of the law, it's hazardous. We promise you that a lot with this type of problem is going to be a very long headache. Here's what happens. First, you must call or write the Department of Buildings in the borough where the building is located.

Indicate that you wish to report an unsafe, vacant building whose windows and/or doors are unsealed and that no guard is posted at the site. Give the street address of the building. Tell them that it adjoins the lot you're interested in.

The Department of Buildings will then investigate the

building. If they determine it to be hazardous and structurally unsound, they will attempt to locate the landlord or owner requesting that he remedy the situation. If the landlord or owner is unable to be located or refuses to comply with the law, the Department takes the case to court. The building can be demolished *only* by court order.

The court procedure may take months. In the meantime, you will be worrying about the safety of all who use the lot. It won't be easy to persuade us or an insurance company to give insurance on a lot of this kind!

#### ADDRESSES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF BUILDINGS IN YOUR BOROUGH

(Address your letter or call to the attention  
of the Borough Superintendent)

*Manhattan:* 20th Floor, Municipal Building, N.Y.C. 10007  
566-2384

*Bronx:* 1932 Arthur Avenue, Bronx, N.Y. 10457  
583-5520

*Brooklyn:* 8th Floor, Municipal Building,  
Brooklyn, N.Y. 11201  
643-7944

*Queens:* 120-55 Queens Boulevard,  
Kew Gardens, N.Y. 11424  
268-5000

*Richmond:* Borough Hall—Richmond Terrace, St. George,  
Staten Island, N.Y. 10301  
447-1000

#### Vandalism

Vandalism to your lot *will* happen. But the chances for its happening are much less if you have everyone in the neighborhood working on your project. Remember, no one deliberately vandalizes what belongs to him.

When it does happen, fix whatever's been damaged or try

something else instead. But do it fast. Quick action on damage will discourage further vandalism. So does the addition of night-lighting (see page 49).

Whatever happens, don't be too discouraged. If you spilled something on your rug, you wouldn't throw it out—you'd simply have it cleaned. Think of your lot the same way. It's a big open "room" that must be "housecleaned" constantly and the "furniture" repaired from time to time. Everyone's lot is vandalized at least once. You might think of it as your lot's "baptism"!

*Note: If you wish to insure property on your lot,  
such as benches, equipment, etc., against fire and  
other perils (such as vandalism) it will be necessary  
for you to arrange your own insurance. The Park  
Association has no facilities for insurance cover-  
age of this type.*

*See page 32 for what the Park Association can offer  
you in the way of insurance.*

## Keeping It Going

### Maintenance

The importance of maintenance can never be over-emphasized. Maintenance is more important than the lot's design. The questions to ask yourself are: can you afford it, and *who* will be responsible for it? These questions should be asked and answered long before anything is moved onto the lot, or your lot will have a life expectancy of exactly one month, if you're lucky.

Maintenance is just like housecleaning—it has to be done every day. The garbage and broken glass must be removed, the lot hosed down or swept, the sand or gravel raked, the trash container(s) placed at the edge of the lot's street side so that the Department of Sanitation can empty them easily.

Maintenance also includes any repair work that may have to be done from time to time.

The community at large cannot be expected *ever* to supply continuous *free* maintenance. Moreover, it's very natural that some members of the community will lose interest in the lot once it's been around for a time. If your lot is for small children, mothers will, of course, be in constant supervision but they cannot be expected to supply maintenance either.

Don't forget about winter maintenance. Remember, children *do* play outside on winter days—and what better place to build a snowman or put a community Christmas Tree than in your lot? Perhaps you can have the lot checked once a week for broken glass and garbage. During the winter months, you'll also have to arrange for storage of good-weather-only equipment.

*Whatever money you raise for your lot, we feel that half of it should go toward maintenance in the very beginning and more should be raised from time to time just to maintain the maintenance fund.*

### Suggestions

Is there a youth group in your neighborhood who, for some extra "pocket money" per week, would be willing to clean up, water, etc.? Your local houses of worship would know of youth groups. So would the principals of local schools. (Remember, young people will need some sort of supervision, no matter how well-intentioned they may be.) Are there janitors in the neighborhood who would like to supplement their income a little? And don't forget the elderly who often have nothing to do but are still able and to whom a little bit of extra money might mean a lot.

## How To Design Your Lot

If you've found a lot and want to rent it, first you'll have to decide what you're going to do with it.

This is our first design suggestion: whatever you want to do with your lot, start small. Keep it simple. Do *only* what your group can afford. And if that means your lot's first year sees it only cleaned and insured, you've still done a lot for your lot!

If you start off by pretending you're an interior decorator, you're on your way to design success. A decorator always does the walls and floors of a room first, so do your lot's "walls" and "floors" first, too. Everything else that goes into the lot ("furniture") can be changed or reworked around the "floor" and "walls" later. In other words, your lot is a big, open "room."

Don't feel that you have to use every square foot of your lot to get maximum enjoyment from it. Very often you can get more from a lot by not using part of it. For one thing, lighting and maintenance are easier.

### *What Kind of Lot Do You Want?*

Are there many children and teenagers in your neighborhood who need a place to play? Are there elderly people who need a place to sit? If you want plants, do you have water nearby and enough sunshine?

We call a lot for very little children a "Tot Lot." It usually includes a sandbox. A "Teen Lot" is just for teenagers and usually includes a basketball-playing area. A "Sitting Lot" is for everyone but it especially benefits young mothers and the elderly. A planted area can be included in this lot. (A very special type of lot, meant only for the temporary collection of heavy household litter, is called a "Community Clean-Up Lot." We discuss this in a different section, page 53.)

No matter what size your lot is, we suggest that you never try to include all three types of lot in one. The very young and the very old go well together ("Tot Lot" and "Sitting Lot") but teenagers need a place of their own. You'll have to decide what type of lot your neighborhood needs and wants the most.

Remember that if there is a public park nearby, teenagers are big enough to be encouraged to play there. If there isn't a public park within reasonable traveling distance and your teenagers are desperate for a "hangout" of their own, by all means design a lot for them!

### SITTING LOT, GARDEN AND TOT LOT COMBINED

Here's our suggestion for a simple, basic design in two parts.

1. Your planting area should be near the street side of the lot so that watering will be easier. Putting a low fence around the plot will discourage wandering by both dogs and people. (For information on gardening, see page 21.)

2. Your sitting area should be near the front of the lot, too. Just for an example, you might put your garden to the right and your sitting area to the left and divide the two parts by a path. (Your path can be brick or it could be just dirt marked on either side by a row of bricks.) A sandbox for tots could be placed near the sitting area so that mothers can watch their children comfortably. (See page 22 for brick paths; page 27 for sandboxes.)

### *Teen Lot*

What really makes a Teen Lot different from other lots is the addition of a basketball area. It's obvious that with balls bouncing around and a lot of game noise, you're not going to be able to have a garden or a sitting area in this lot at the same time.

In any case, put your play area to the rear of the lot. This lessens the chance of balls being knocked out into the street and/or a passerby being hit by a flying ball. Keep remembering that, among other things, a lot has to be *safe* to be a success.

#### Paving

Your play area can be paved, if you wish, and especially if you plan to have a Teen Lot with a basketball area. But paving *is* expensive. We prefer a 2-inch layer of asphalt to all other types of paving, but if you want to investigate all types, look in the "Yellow Pages" Directory under "Paving Contractors," "Mason Contractors," "Flagstone" and "Stone-Natural." Or, if you've made friends with a building contractor, an engineer or an architect, he may be able to help you.

#### IMPORTANT

If you know for certain that you'll have enough money to do paving this year or next, you'd be wise to leave your lot absolutely vacant until then, or, at least keep whatever you do put in *portable*. Paving trucks have to drive right into the lot and their wheels, obviously, are going to crush anything in the way.

However, if you still want to do something with your lot in the meantime, such as a garden, remember that plants can be transplanted.

Also, it would be a good idea not to brick-pave your front path just yet as a big truck would crush that, too.

#### An "Impossible" Lot

If you get a lot that's nothing but a huge mound of earth, it's easiest to leave it that way. Obviously, basketball-playing is out, but if you clean the lot thoroughly of all broken glass

and rubbish, your children are going to have the time of their lives playing on their own private "mountain"!

*Whatever you design, keep it safe and practical.*

#### WALLS

##### "PAINT A GARDEN"

If you're unable to have a garden this year, let neighborhood children "paint a garden" on the wall of one of the adjoining buildings. Remember to get the landlord's permission—it's our experience that they rarely object.

"Paint A Garden" was one of our most successful projects! And it's certainly one way to get the whole *neighborhood* involved in the lot. The painted garden doesn't have to cover the entire length of the wall nor does it have to go up the wall very high.

##### "PAINT A ROOM"

In keeping with the idea of treating your lot as a big, open "room," neighborhood children might paint "furniture" and "pictures" on the walls of your lot. Or they might take to the idea of modern, geometric figures. Whatever idea the neighborhood in general likes the most is what you should choose.

You might convince your local paint store to donate paint and brushes or at least to give you a very good buy. The results of this type of project are usually beautiful. Your children's imagination will go far towards improving your lot.

##### DISGUIISING THE WALLS WITHOUT PAINT

Boston Ivy will climb up brick walls surprisingly fast. You might ask the landlord's permission and you can use the existing soil provided that you enrich it. (See the section on gardening, page 21.) From whomever you get your Boston Ivy, ask how deep in the soil it should be planted.

## THOUGHTS

Whatever you do with a vacant lot in the way of improvement, don't feel that it has to be "splendid." The simplest cleared area with something growing, with people talking, with children playing is infinitely better than a forlorn, unusable catchall. If your lot is for children, pretend for a moment that you're a child again. Remember? Children already have the greatest playground in the world—their imaginations.

Actual expenditures should be kept to a minimum. This lot is for you, not the cover of a national magazine. Use home-grown talent whenever possible. Use *your* imagination, too. We've seen a vacant lot that was simply cleared (except for one asphalted area where children have painted floor games), where adults bring wooden crates and folding chairs to sit on, cards and transistors to play and newspapers to read. It's not a "pretty" lot . . . but it's a happy one.

If you get a lot that's rubble-strewn but that has grass growing all over it, just tear out all the rubble and leave it a grass-strewn lot. You don't know how lucky you are! Here's where your children's imagination comes in.

Make your lot appear well-loved. It often brings out the person in people. Make the lot reflect *everyone* in the community. A lot doesn't necessarily have to be physically attractive to be an attraction.

## Gardening

### *Size of Garden*

Your garden should start at the front of the lot and move backwards. It can go as far back as you want—just make sure that it's small enough for you to keep it under control.

Naturally, you'll place your garden on the side of the lot that receives the most sun during the day. But if for some reason your garden area simply can't be placed where there's enough sun, don't despair. There are plenty of flowers and plants which grow only in shady places.

### *Soil*

Do use the existing soil. Although it probably looks as though a potato wouldn't root in it, it's easy enough to enrich what you've got. You'll need three items: peat moss, a good all-purpose fertilizer and garden lime. Try your local florist or look under "Nurserymen" in the "Yellow Pages" Directory. From whomever you get these supplies, ask how much of each of the three to use in your soil.

### *Tools*

Before you begin to enrich the soil you have, you've got to dig it up and take the lumpiness out of it. (You must also take all broken glass out—do this while wearing gloves!)

You'll need the following tools: a sharp-ended shovel (not a blunt-ended coal shovel), a gardening fork, a trowel and a watering can. If your soil is really hard-packed and the sharp-ended shovel does no good, you'll need a *pick*.

To get these tools, try your local hardware store or the Garden Departments of large discount department stores.

### *Low Fencing*

To discourage wandering dogs and people, a low fence should completely surround your garden. You can try your

local florist or the Garden Departments of the large discount department stores. Or, you can try to make your own by stretching chicken-wire around wooden stakes.

#### Paths

To separate your garden area from other activity areas, you'll probably want to have a path. Remember, if you plan to have any paving done this year or next, leave your path plain—in other words, as hard-packed dirt. The paving trucks would crush a brick path and you'd have to do it all over again later.

If you know that your path is to be fairly permanent, then we do suggest making a brick one. Bricks can be found all over. Your lot may have been covered with them when you leased it. Or there may be other lots around with available bricks. Have the neighborhood put their hands on all the bricks they can find. You could make it a real drive—advertise your appeal in store windows, spread the word around.

The path will probably start at the gate to your lot and move straight in. If the area to be laid with bricks is bumpy and uneven, you'll have to dig it up with pick and shovel and smooth it out. (If you're friendly with a building contractor, carpenter, architect or engineer, he can help you do this or he might lend you a Level and show you how it works.)

Once the area to be filled with bricks is entirely even, dig a square hole as wide and long as you need and as deep as a brick placed on its edge or its flat side, whichever you prefer. As you put the bricks in, jam them together so that they fit tightly. (If the bricks are lumpy with old cement, you'll have to chip them clean first.)

It's our experience that laying a path with bricks is fun! You can set them in all sorts of patterns. They can even be painted if you want.

#### FOOTPATHS THROUGH THE GARDEN

Follow the same procedure if you want a smaller and narrower brick path through the garden itself. A path might make it easier when you're watering.

#### Watering

Plants go into shock when they're first put into the ground! Water them well when you first plant them and once a day every day after that for two weeks. Then you should water them once every two to three days.

Early mornings or in the evening is the best time to water.

#### Grass

You *can* try grassing an area of your lot, if you wish. It's fun for people to walk on in bare feet but we must warn you not to be too disappointed when the grass disappears from too much trampling in a few weeks!

#### Bulbs, Seeds and Plants—What To Put in Your Garden

Whatever you plant in your garden, count on the fact that some of it will get pulled up or picked. If your garden is happy with flowers, remember that people love flowers and *someone* will be unable to resist the temptation to pick some. This is why we suggest planting enough of whatever you're going to plant so that you won't miss what's taken.

#### BULBS

Bulbs are good and sturdy and despite the atmospheric conditions in this City, they'll keep coming up for a few years without any re-planting.

Bulbs get planted in the fall, before mid-October or, if you're desperate, at least before the ground freezes. They must be completely buried in the soil, with their *pointed side up*.

Here are some sample planting depths. For Daffodils, dig a hole that's six to eight inches deep. Put the bulb, with its pointed side *up*, in the bottom of the hole. Fill in the hole completely with soil. (Remember, one bulb to each hole!) Water them well. Tulips and Hyacinths get planted four to six inches deep and Crocus should be planted only three inches deep.

Large bulbs, such as Daffodil, Tulip and Hyacinth, should be planted six inches apart. Little bulbs, like Crocus, get planted three inches apart.

#### SEEDS

In New York City, seeds should be planted in early May. (Always read the planting instructions on the back of the seed packet!) For a great deal of fun, don't forget Sunflowers. They grow to be very tall, they're amusing to watch and they'll provide a real smile for your garden.

If you have any special problems with your garden, you can write to either of the following for advice (enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope):

School Gardens Program  
Board of Education  
131 Livingston Street  
Brooklyn, N.Y. 11201

Community Gardens Committee  
Park Association of New York City, Inc.  
15 Gramercy Park  
New York, N.Y. 10003

Information regarding the availability and planting of *bulbs* can be obtained from (enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope):

Netherlands Flower-Bulb Institute  
29 Broadway  
New York, N.Y. 10006

Information regarding the availability and planting of *seeds* can be obtained from (enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope):

Office of the Horticulturist  
F. W. Woolworth Company  
233 Broadway  
New York, N.Y. 10007

The Garden Departments of large discount department stores have some of the best values in plants and shrubs. Visit a store to see what they offer, then write a letter to the Manager of the Gardening Department of that store (enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope). Tell him about your project. Ask him how your group might get the best possible buy on plants and shrubs. You can also approach your local florist this way.

## Things You Might Put in Your Lot

Following are some of our suggestions for what might go into your lot. Some we've tried and some we've seen done in other lots. We do have a word of warning here: don't put anything in your lot that can't be removed later at little or no cost. Portable things will be your best bet.

### Sitting Ideas

1. Wooden boxes: be sure that any nails sticking out are hammered in or removed and, if the box is especially rough and splintery, sandpaper it.

2. Folding chairs that you bring with you and take home at night.

3. Barrels: these make good "chairs." Nails are frequently packed in wooden or aluminum barrels, so we suggest that you try a local construction company. Although it's unlikely that a hardware store or lumberyard would have empty barrels, you *could* try them.

4. From time to time, Con Edison has wooden cable spools available. A big one is good for a table and little ones serve as chairs. If they are available when you write, Con Edison is very gracious about letting you have some and *may* be able to deliver them for you. Write to (enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope): Community Relations, Con Edison, 4 Irving Place, New York, N.Y. 10003.

5. A heavy, wooden, outdoor-treated picnic table with benches attached could serve as your whole sitting area. Visit the Summer Furniture Departments of large discount department stores to see what they have available. If you find something your group likes and can afford, ask if there's a way that the table could be attached to the ground.

Then write (enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope) to the Manager of the Summer Furniture Department of the store you've visited and describe your project. Ask him how

your group might obtain the best possible buy. You could also approach a local furniture store this way.

### Play Stacks

Regular-size rubber car tires make good playthings—safe, too! Four or five of them will do nicely; your children can invent their own games with them. For information regarding the availability of rubber tires, write to (enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope):

Public Relations Department  
UniRoyal, Inc.  
1230 Avenue of the Americas  
New York, N.Y. 10020

Warning: rubber tires can be very tempting to people looking for spare auto parts. Take the tires in at night or cut them in such a way that they're unusable as car tires.

### Ideas on Sandboxes

#### DO-IT-YOURSELF

A huge tractor tire or large truck tire will make you a fine "sandbox." Line it with a good plastic shower curtain and fill it with sand. Children can sit on the edge of the tire. Several of these tires grouped together will be fun! Each tire "sandbox" can serve one or two children.

To solve the water drainage problem, cover the tires each night with a waterproofed material, such as another heavy shower curtain or a tarpaulin. This will also discourage cats.

To get these large tires, try a local construction company, a filling station or a tire dealer. (Please do not write to Uni-Royal for the large tires as they don't have them.)

#### PURCHASE

Investigate the Playground Equipment Department of the large discount department stores to see what they have

in the way of portable sandboxes. Then write (enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope) to the Manager of the Playground Equipment Department of the store you've visited and describe your project. Ask him how your group might obtain the best possible buy.

Again, you'll have to cover the sandbox at night and on rainy days. Use a good shower curtain or tarpaulin.

To get sand, look in the "Yellow Pages" Directory under "Sand and Gravel," or perhaps someone in the building profession can help you.

#### *Cinder Blocks*

Cinder blocks serve many purposes. They can be used as a low side wall, as dividers to separate a sitting area from a playing area or in the garden area. They make good planters when they're turned so that the holes face up. You can fill the holes with enriched soil and plant small things, like Crocus and Boston Ivy.

Look in the "Yellow Pages" Directory under "Concrete Block and Shapes." We found one company that as of this printing, sells 8 inch by 8 inch by 18 inches cinder blocks for \$.30 apiece. Smaller size blocks are \$.20 apiece. You must pick them up yourself. (Or your friendly building contractor or carpenter may be able to find you cinder blocks.)

#### *Ideas on Basketball Equipment*

If your lot is to be for teens and age-groups close to them, we'd suggest that you supply a basketball hoop and backboard for them. Because basketball is such a popular sport with people this age, your basketball equipment will be in almost constant use. That's why we hope you'll get the best equipment you can afford—it's cheaper than having to replace it every three months.

Make sure that the windows (if any) of any adjoining buildings are adequately guarded, though. Ask the landlord

of the building if you may cover the windows with a stretch of chicken-wire. (If the original street side fence on your lot was the unsafe chicken-wire and wood type and you saved it, you're all set.)

#### **TO PURCHASE THE EQUIPMENT**

If you buy a commercial backboard, hoop and net, you may expect to pay anywhere from \$20.00 to \$30.00, even at the large discount department stores. Balls run anywhere from \$5.00 to \$15.00.

First try your local sporting goods store for either a donation or perhaps a reduced price. Or visit the Sporting Goods Department of the large discount department stores to see what they have and for how much. Find out from a salesman just how you'd attach a commercial backboard to a brick wall.

Then write a letter to the Manager of the Sporting Goods Department of the store you've visited. Tell him about your project and ask him how your group can obtain the best possible buy. (Watch the newspapers, too—sometimes the large discount department stores have special Sales on sporting goods equipment.)

Another suggestion is to try your local Mayor's Urban Action Task Force. *Sometimes* the Task Force has funds available for this sort of thing. To find out the address of the office nearest you, call 566-6122. This is the number for the main office of the Task Force.

Remember that your backboard will have to be attached to a wall of an adjoining building. If you can't get permission from the landlord to do this, you'll have to look into the possibility of buying a sturdy pole on which the backboard would hang.

#### **DO-IT-YOURSELF**

If you want to do-it-yourself, you *must* have a wall to attach a backboard to, and, of course, the landlord's permis-

sion. It's our experience that trying to construct a pole for the backboard to hang on is too risky for you to do yourself.

In this case, you'd have to purchase only the basketball hoop-and-net and the ball. Make sure the hoop comes with attachment brackets.

Here's where being friends with a local carpenter, building contractor and hardware store will come in handy. At a local lumberyard, have a backboard cut from plywood or Masonite. Official size backboards are 54 inches wide and 35 inches high.

Bolt the hoop to the backboard. The board is then hammered directly into the brick wall of the building with special "brick nails." You'll have to decide how high from the ground to attach the backboard.

Remember that smaller children like basketball, too. Do you have the space for and could you afford two hoops?

A do-it-yourself basketball set-up will probably not last as long as a commercial set-up. But if you can't afford commercial equipment this year, you might just try doing it yourself until you *can* afford the commercial stuff.

#### WHAT YOU MUST PUT IN YOUR LOT

##### *A Trash Basket*

We've already given you rules and suggestions for maintaining your lot. But one way that the neighborhood can help maintain the lot themselves is for you to supply a trash basket. If you're friends with your local hardware store, you might receive one as a donation or at reduced cost.

The basket must be placed as close to the gate of the lot as possible. Write to the Office of Community Services, Department of Sanitation, 125 Worth Street, New York, N.Y. 10013. (Enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope.) Ask them when the Department of Sanitation's pickup hours are and will they pick up your trash? You can also ask them what *kind* of trash basket they suggest that you purchase.

## The Vacant Lot

### *Letter of Inquiry*

You've found a vacant lot. Most likely it's filled with garbage, broken glass and two old mattresses. Visions come into your head—this could be a park!

How do you discover whether the lot is City-owned or privately-owned?

*Write to (enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope):*

Department of Real Estate  
Office of the Commissioner  
2 Lafayette Street  
New York, N.Y. 10007

In your letter, you must show that you are a non-profit organization (your group name and stationery will usually indicate this) and the letter must be signed by a spokesman for your group (President, Director, Chairman, etc.).

#### SAY IN YOUR LETTER:

1. You're interested in renting the lot in order to improve it for neighborhood use, and you'd like to know whether it's City-owned or privately-owned. (To identify the lot, give the numbers of the buildings to the right and left of the lot and, of course, the street name or number.)
2. Ask if there is a "hold" on the lot—in other words, does the City have other plans for it? You can also request a copy of the Public Auction Catalog. You may find that the lot you're eyeing is up for sale, in which case you may be able to buy it for less than you think! (However, we have never purchased one.)
3. Ask for the lot and block numbers of the lot.
4. Ask for the exact size of the lot as it appears on the Department's books.
5. Indicate that you understand insurance coverage is

necessary in order to rent the lot and that if the lot is both City-owned and available to you for rental, you will immediately obtain the coverage. (By the way, if it does turn out that the lot is City-owned and available to you, your letter of inquiry will "hold" the lot for you temporarily to give you time to get insurance.)

#### *Insurance*

Once you discover whether the lot is City-owned or privately-owned and available to your organization for rental, your next thought should be of insurance.

*Before you do anything else*, it is most important for your group to arrange for public liability insurance to protect your group from third party liability (in the event a member of the public brings suit against your group for injuries sustained on your lot).

The Park Association offers a master vest pocket park-vacant lot public liability insurance policy. The cost to a group is approximately \$55.00 per year per lot. (This cost includes a small handling charge to cover our administrative expenses.) On page 34 is a list of requirements which we have found to be the most reasonable to date. If your group can fulfill these requirements, the group will in all probability be insured.

Write to us at 15 Gramercy Park, New York, N.Y. 10003 (enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope), giving both the block and lot numbers and the size of the lot. Include a brief description of what the lot is to be used for, what the lot's present condition is, exactly what kind of organization you are and the telephone number of a spokesman for your group. In addition, tell us who owns the lot.

**IMPORTANT:** *Any City-owned or privately-owned lot leased to a private group, to be improved by that group, must be covered by this or a similar policy. This is for your own protection.*

Please follow our instructions concerning public liability insurance *exactly*. All of it is for both your protection and ours. The same rules and cost apply for City-owned and privately-owned vacant lots.

*NOTE: If you wish to insure property in your lot, such as benches, equipment, etc., against fire or other perils (such as vandalism) it will be necessary for you to arrange your own insurance. The Park Association has no facilities for insurance coverage of this type.*

Just a few years ago, public liability insurance for vacant lot parks was extremely costly and difficult to obtain. Marsh and McLennan, Inc., our insurance brokers, were able to negotiate a master vest pocket park-vacant lot public liability policy with the Aetna Casualty & Surety Company, as both organizations felt that our work was in the nature of public service. In other words, we were given the responsibility for acting as "guardians" of everyone insured through us.

This insurance is intended for *non-profit* groups only. Any non-profit group may take advantage of this coverage if the group can satisfy our requirements. We hope that no group will ever force us to cancel its policy. We also hope that no group's neglect will ever make the Aetna Casualty & Surety Company regret their having extended a helping hand to the people of New York City and us.

It is most important that your lot be kept in a safe and orderly condition. If you do not comply with all the requirements listed on page 34, and if you permit the lot to deteriorate, you will jeopardize your and everyone else's insurance.

## Conditions for Vest Pocket Park-Vacant Lot Insurance

1. All parts of the Vest Pocket Park or Lot must be visible from the street.
2. The Vest Pocket Park or Lot can be unfenced, if it is lit at night and contains no moving equipment. Otherwise, the Vest Pocket Park or Lot must be enclosed by a see-through fence.
3. No moving equipment is permitted unless the Vest Pocket Park or Lot can be fenced, locked and supervision is provided while the Vest Pocket Park or Lot is open. All large equipment must be firmly grounded. No equipment over seven (7) feet high will be permitted without special approval.
4. Broken equipment must be replaced immediately; dirt, sand and gravel should be raked four (4) times a week; sand should be replaced once a year.
5. Reports on the maintenance of the Park or Lot must be sent to the Park Association in January, April, July and October. If the Park or Lot is kept open during the summer months, reports are to be submitted on the 1st and 15th of each month, July through September.
6. Cancellation of the policy will be necessary if the above conditions are not met.

## Stop Here for a Moment

Now that you've read our insurance requirements, you realize that concerning fencing and night-lighting, you have a choice.

1. You can light the lot at night and not have a fence  
**OR**
2. You can fence the lot and not light the lot at night  
**HOWEVER**

If you plan to have any moving equipment on the lot, you have no choice. You *must* fence the lot.

Fences on City-owned lots generally come in two basic types: Cyclone—which is heavy metal see-through fencing on poles—or chicken-wire on wood poles. Fencing on privately-owned lots could be anything. The lot might not even have a fence.

If the lot you want to rent and insure has a good, safe see-through fence right now (Cyclone, for example), then you're in luck. Read on.

If the lot does have a fence but it's the unsafe type (chicken-wire and wood, for example) or if the lot does not have *any* fence to begin with, you must decide *before you do anything else* whether you want to install new *fencing* or whether you want *night-lighting* instead. You must also decide whether you plan on having any moving equipment.

*Hint:* If it helps your decision any, we think fences that get locked at night are a good thing. They make a vacant lot safer and easier to maintain. If you get a fence now, night-lighting can always be put in later.

*Hint:* Moving equipment is expensive, not very portable and children tire of it after a while.

*If you need fencing or if you need night-lighting to satisfy*

the insurance requirements, please know that all work connected with either of them must be completed *before* we or any insurance company will agree to cover your lot.

For information on what to do about lots with either unsafe fencing or no fencing at all, see page 46.

For information on night-lighting, see page 49.

Following are two sections, one concerning lots that turn out to be City-owned, the second concerning lots that are privately-owned. Whichever your lot turns out to be, read both sections before you do *anything*. The sections concerning fencing and night-lighting are especially important insurance-wise.

## City-Owned Lot

### *Rental*

If the lot turns out to be City-owned and once you know you have the correct insurance coverage for the first year, your group may lease the lot from the City for approximately \$12.00 per year.

You must remember that the City can take the lot back at any time should it be necessary, but in all likelihood you'll have been told at the beginning by the Department of Real Estate how long you may keep it. In any case, you will receive at least 30 days' notice.

To lease the lot, write to the Department of Real Estate, Office of the Commissioner, 2 Lafayette Street, New York, N.Y. 10007 (enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope). Indicate that your group now has insurance coverage and would like to rent the lot, and give both block and lot numbers. (Remember that your original letter of inquiry has put a temporary "hold" on the lot for your group.) Do *not* send a check for the first year's rent at this time. Wait for the Department's reply.

### *The Fence*

By now you have your signed copy of the lease and a receipt for the first year's rent. Now you're ready for real action and the first step involves the fence on the street side of the lot. Please remember that even though you do have insurance and the lot is rented, it's not a wise idea to open your

lot to the public yet. There's still work to be done to make it safe!

City fencing generally comes in two basic types: Cyclone—which is heavy metal see-through fencing on poles—or chicken-wire on wood poles.

Cyclone fencing is excellent for your purposes but will most likely lack a gate. Write to the Department of Real Estate, Office of the Commissioner (enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope) and ask if you have the Department's permission to convert one of the fence's existing panels into a gate. This will be at your expense, of course, but will be well worth it in the end. You can also look under "Fence" in the "Yellow Pages" Directory. A friendly building contractor (or someone who works for him), a carpenter, a construction worker or a professional handyman might be able to help you, too.

Inquire about a lock at the same time. Your local hardware store might be willing to donate one.

#### *Clean-Up*

Sometimes, if you're lucky, your lot will have a minimal accumulation of debris, the type that regulation garbage cans can easily accommodate. If so, your group can simply stage a Clean-Up Day.

Usually, however, the accumulation is bulk, and large sweepers, containers and trucks will be needed. Write to the Office of Community Services, Department of Sanitation, 125 Worth Street, New York, N.Y. 10013. (Enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope.)

This Office conducts community clean-ups all over the City, from Wednesdays through Saturdays, and needs four weeks' notice. The clean-up is a joint one, with your group and the Office planning the date and the division of work.

*Note:* save any bricks you find. Later on, they'll make beautiful paths for you!

*NOTE: Remember, a lot in the City is usually considered by both the Department of Real Estate and insurance companies to be the size of one torn-down brownstone, or approximately 25 feet by 100 feet. If the lot is much larger than this, it's most probable that insurance rates and rentals will be higher—for either City- or privately-owned lots.*

## Summary of Steps For City-Owned Lots

1. Letter of inquiry to Department of Real Estate—you are assured that the lot is City-owned and available to your group.
2. If the lot has no fence, get one made or install night-lighting. If the lot does have a fence but it's the unsafe type, leave it there anyway *until* you've obtained insurance and signed the lease.
3. Get insurance.
4. Sign the lease to rent the lot. Keep lot closed to the public until you're ready to clean up.
5. Take care of the fence—get a new one made, if necessary, or make a gate for the existing one.
6. Clean up the lot. Let public in for cleaning it only—no playing yet.
7. Plans and group are ready. Work starts the minute the lot is insured, rented, cleaned and *safe*.
8. Open the lot to the public.

## Privately-Owned Lot

If the Department of Real Estate has replied to your letter of inquiry telling you that the particular lot you're interested in is privately-owned, you'll have to do some legwork. Private owners are not listed with the City Department of Real Estate. You must get the name and address of the owner, the block and lot numbers and the size of the lot yourself.

### *First Find the Block & Lot Numbers and the Size of the Lot*

Visit (don't write) your borough's Department of Real Property Assessment. To identify the lot, give the house numbers on each side of the lot, and the street name or number. The Department will supply you with the lot's block and lot numbers and its exact size, at no charge.

*Offices of the Department of Real Property Assessment in Your Borough:*

*Manhattan:* Municipal Building

(Northeast corner of City Hall Park)

*Bronx:* Bergen Building at Tremont and Arthur Avenues

*Brooklyn:* Municipal Building at Joralemon and Court Streets

*Queens:* 120-55 Queens Boulevard, Kew Gardens

*Richmond:* 350 St. Marks Place, St. George

### *Finding the Owner of the Lot*

Now that you know the lot and block numbers, visit (again, don't write) your borough's Office of the City Register. Ask to be shown the latest copy of the City Register which lists the owners of all real estate in the City. There will be a small charge. (\$2.00 if the present owner took possession of the lot within the past year—more if it goes further back.)

*Offices of the City Register in Your Borough:*

*Manhattan:* 31 Chambers Street

*Bronx:* 851 Grand Concourse

*Brooklyn:* Supreme Court Building, 360 Adams Street

*Queens:* 161-04 Jamaica Avenue, Jamaica

*Richmond:* County Courthouse (County Clerk's Office),  
18 Richmond Terrace, St. George

*Contact the Owner by Mail or Phone*

Many private lot owners would like to have their property improved and sometimes will donate it to a well-formed, good-purpose organization. If not, they will probably rent it at reasonable cost. Remember, any improvement you plan for the lot will increase its face value. Have a good idea when you contact the owner of what your lot is to look like and what it will do.

Show him our insurance requirements. Be sure that you both understand them.

*Insurance*

Read our insurance requirements on page 34. The same rules and cost apply as for City-owned lots. You must insure before signing the lease.

**STOP HERE FOR A MOMENT**

Now that you've read our insurance requirements, you realize that concerning fencing and night-lighting, you have a choice.

1. You can light the lot at night and not have a fence

OR

2. You can fence the lot and not light the lot at night

**HOWEVER:**

If you plan to have any moving equipment on the lot, you have no choice. You *must* fence the lot.

The existing fencing on privately-owned lots could be any type, or the lot might not even have a fence.

If the lot you want to rent and insure has a good, safe, see-through fence right now (Cyclone, for example), you're in luck. Read on.

If the lot does have a fence but it's the unsafe type (chicken-wire and wood, for example) or if the lot does not have *any* fence to begin with, you must decide *before you do anything else* whether you want to install new *fencing* or whether you want *night-lighting* instead. You must also decide whether you plan on having any moving equipment.

Hint: If it helps your decision any, we think fences that get locked at night are a good thing. They make a vacant lot safer and easier to maintain. If you get a fence now, night-lighting can always be put in later.

Hint: Moving equipment is expensive, not very portable and children tire of it after a while.

If you need fencing or if you need night-lighting to satisfy the insurance requirements, please know that all work connected with either of them must be completed *before* we or any insurance company will agree to cover your lot.

For information on what to do about lots with either unsafe fencing or no fencing at all, see page 46.

For information on night-lighting, see page 49.

*Rental*

Now you have your insurance coverage for the first year. Obviously, your group and the owner will have worked out the yearly rental cost on a personal basis. If you have a lawyer as a member of the group, he can give you advice on any lease the owner may ask you to sign.

### *The Fence*

By now you have your signed copy of the lease from the owner and a receipt for the first year's rent. Now you're ready for real action and the first step involves the fence on the street side of the lot. Please remember that even though you do have insurance and the lot is rented, it's not a wise idea to open your lot to the public yet. There's still work to be done to make it safe!

If the lot has a good, safe, see-through fence right now, make sure that it has a gate. If it doesn't have a gate and you want to make one from one of the fence panels, first inquire at your local hardware store for someone to do the job. You can also look under "Fence" in the "Yellow Pages" Directory. A friendly building contractor (or someone who works for one), a carpenter, a construction worker or a professional handyman might be able to help you, too.

At the same time, inquire about a lock for the gate. Your local hardware store might be willing to donate one.

### *Clean-Up*

To have the lot cleaned when the job is beyond your physical means, write to the Office of Community Services, Department of Sanitation, 125 Worth Street, New York, N.Y. 10013. Enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope. This Office conducts community clean-ups all over the City, from Wednesdays through Saturdays, and needs four weeks' notice. The clean-up is a joint one, with your group and the Office planning the date and the division of work.

Suggestion: Save any bricks you find. Later on, they'll make beautiful paths for you!

*NOTE: Remember, a lot in the City is usually considered by both the Department of Real Estate and insurance companies to be the size of one torn-down brownstone, or approximately 25 feet by 100 feet. If the lot is much larger than this, it's most probable that insurance rates and rentals be higher—for either City- or privately-owned lots.*

### **Summary of Steps For Privately-Owned Lots**

You've received a reply from the Department of Real Estate stating that this particular lot is privately-owned:

1. Visit your borough's Department of Real Property Assessment to obtain block and lot numbers and the lot's size. No charge.
2. Visit your borough's Office of the City Register to obtain the present owner's name and address. Small charge.
3. Contact the owner by mail or phone. Show him our insurance requirements. Be sure you both understand them.
4. If the lot has no fence, get one made or install night-lighting. If the lot does have a fence but it's the unsafe type, leave it there anyway *until* you've obtained insurance and signed the lease.
5. Get insurance.
6. Sign the lease to rent the lot. Keep lot closed to the public until you're ready to clean up.
7. Take care of the fence—get a new one made, if necessary, or make a gate for the existing one.
8. Clean up the lot. Let public in for cleaning it only—no playing yet.
9. Plans and group are ready. Works starts the minute the lot is insured, rented, cleaned and *safe*.
10. Open the lot to the public.

## What to Do About Lots With Unsafe Fencing or No Fencing at All

If the lot's existing street-side fence is unsafe, **LEAVE THE FENCE THERE ANYWAY**. As long as it's a fence it will help you to be insured. Once you're insured, sign the lease to rent the lot. *Then* have the fence removed and a new one installed immediately.

Before you can have an old fence removed, you must make sure that a new fence will be ready the same day the old one goes out!

### *Having a New Fence Made for Either City-Owned or Privately-Owned Lots*

Here's where having a good relationship with a building contractor (or someone who works for one), a carpenter, a construction worker or a professional handyman would be a good idea.

One of these people may be able to locate a fence for you at reduced cost or perhaps as a donation. Or, one of them might be able to help you build one yourselves!

If not, look under "Fence" in the "Yellow Pages" Directory. Try to find a manufacturer near your neighborhood. This way you can suggest that a salesman come to take a look at the lot first to decide on the right see-through fence for your needs.

If your lot is privately-owned, maybe the owner himself would be interested in contributing a good, working see-through fence!

It would be a wise idea to have a fence with a section which could be removed from time to time. For example, someday your group might decide that you could afford to pave your lot. A paving truck is very wide and the usual

fence gate would not be wide enough to accommodate the truck.

Just a suggestion: *locked* fence gates are safer than unlocked ones. If you decide to lock the gate at night, someone in your group must be assigned this responsibility and stick to it!

### FENCE REMOVAL AND NEW FENCE INSTALLATION

#### *City-Owned Lots*

When you know the new fence is ready for installation, then write to the Department of Real Estate, Office of the Commissioner, 2 Lafayette Street, N.Y. 10007. (Enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope.) Ask for their permission for you to remove the chicken-wire and wood fence.

When you have the Department's permission, remove the old fence and have the new one installed the same day! Note: Roll up the chicken wire and save it. You'll probably need it for other things later.

#### *Privately-Owned Lots*

If your lot is privately-owned, the fence may be unsafe or no fence may be there in the first place.

*If the lot has an unsafe fence:* Again, leave the fence there until you've got insurance and have rented the lot. When you know the new fence is ready for installation, inquire first whether the owner is willing to remove the old fence. If not, you just might be able to do the job yourself. (Ask the owner if he wants the old fence.)

If you *can* remove the fence yourself, ask the Department of Sanitation, 125 Worth Street, New York, N.Y. 10013, for the location of your nearest dump. (Enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope.)

If you *can't* do the moving yourself, ask the Department

of Sanitation for a list of bulk pick-up days in your borough. You can then coincide a Fence-Moving Day with that.

Remember, the old fence goes out the same day the new fence comes in!

*If the lot has no fence:* If there is no fence to begin with, you must work out an arrangement with the owner whereby he allows you to erect a see-through fence on his lot *before* you obtain insurance and sign the lease. If you have a lawyer as a member of your group, he may be able to advise you here. Of course, let him read this book.

## Night-Lighting For Both City-Owned and Privately-Owned Lots

Following are two sets of instructions, one of which might apply to your group's particular circumstances.

If you need night-lighting to qualify for insurance, either set of instructions can and *must* be carried out before you get your insurance.

### FOR A LOT LEASED FROM THE CITY WITH STREETLAMP DIRECTLY ADJACENT TO THE LOT

No attachments—such as extra lights—can be made to a City lamp-post unless you have a permit from a City agency indicating that the lot to be lit *is owned by the City and is for public use*.

Write to the Department of Real Estate, Office of the Commissioner, 2 Lafayette Street, New York, N.Y. 10007. Tell them that you're requesting a night-lighting attachment to the adjacent streetlamp for your City-owned lot, give your lot and block numbers and indicate that the lot is to be used for the public. Ask that they please forward your request for the night-lighting attachment to your borough's Office of the Chief Engineer, Department of Water Supply, Gas & Electricity. If you send a stamped, self-addressed envelope, you can ask that a copy of Real Estate's request to the Chief Engineer's Office be sent to you.

These Departments do their best but often cannot meet the demand. If this is the case, then the following section will apply to you.

### FOR A PRIVATELY-OWNED LOT AND LOTS WITH NO ADJACENT STREETLAMPS (OR IF THERE IS NO LIGHTING AVAILABLE FROM THE CITY FOR YOUR CITY-LEASED LOT)

Permission must be obtained from the landlord of one of the two buildings adjacent to your lot to attach your light

to his wall. Con Edison can arrange to bypass the landlord's meter and conceivably work out a flat yearly rate for your group, depending on proposed wattage and hours.

If the landlord agrees to this, write to the Community Relations Division of Con Edison (4 Irving Place, New York, N.Y. 10003) for recommendations on local licensed electrical contractors. Indicate your purpose. (Enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope.)

You must pay for both the light and its use. We recommend the purchase of a floodlight with a timer—this way your light automatically turns on at dusk and shuts itself off at dawn.

#### *"Party" Lighting for Your Lot*

The type of lighting we've described so far is safety lighting. Usually, a single floodlight won't give you enough light if, for example, you want to have a party in the lot one evening or a dance every Saturday night in the summer.

*NOTE: The insurance company does not require that you have this extra lighting for "party" nights—we say that for your own safety you should have it.*

What you need for this is a string of lights that stretch between the buildings surrounding your lot. Because you don't want anyone in the lot to run into the lights, remember that you'll have to string them up very high—for example, back and forth between the second or third floors of the buildings on either side of your lot or, if there's only one building to work with, string them along its wall.

To string up your cord, you must obtain permission from one or two people, depending on how many buildings you're working with. In one building there may be a person who would allow you to hook up your extension cord to his outlet for just the evening. In the second building, you'll have

to get the permission of the landlord to attach your cord to his building's wall or fire escape. (Or there may be a friendly tenant who would allow you to attach the cord to his window grating.)

At the end of the evening, remove the cord and store it away.

Having the local hardware store or electrician as a friend will come in handy here. You'll need a very long (measure your distance first) and heavy *outdoor-type* extension cord with sockets for many lightbulbs. The hardware store or electrician can make this up for you and can also tell you how many bulbs you'll need.

## Vacant Lot Timetable

If you want a vacant lot ready for use by summer (this means insured, rented, clean and safe), start work the fall before (or the summer, if you can).

### DURING THAT FALL

1. Find a possible lot—make very sure that any of its built-in problems will be solvable.
  2. Form your group or join up with an existing one willing to work on your proposed project. Ask around in the neighborhood—what kind of lot would the neighborhood want, what kind do they think they need?
  3. Hold the first meeting of your group. Decide right then and there what kind of lot you want. Decide on a possible design. Remember, keep it simple! You don't know how much money you'll be able to raise. At this meeting, everyone should contribute a few dollars to start things off.
  4. Make friends with those people who would like to help your group. This means neighborhood store owners, fire stations, building contractors, a lawyer—all the people we've listed on pages 1-4.
  5. Write your first letter(s) of inquiry and get the answers you need.
  6. Get going on fund-raising projects!
- By late fall or early winter, you should be ready to insure the lot and rent it. Do not plan to "open" the lot to the public until it's completely ready for safe use.
- By spring, you should be ready to work. Our hope is that you'll have more people than you need to do the work. Get everybody involved. Then the lot belongs to everyone and everyone protects it.
- By early summer, you'll know how much money you have for equipment and maintenance. If you need more money, this is the time to do a big neighborhood fund-raising party.

## Towards a Better and Cleaner Neighborhood

Big things begin small. If you're interested in a better and cleaner neighborhood, here are some of our suggestions for how to go about it. (Do remember, though, that a neighborhood must *want* to be cleaner before you're going to get anything accomplished.)

### A CLEANER NEIGHBORHOOD

#### *Community Clean-Up Lot*

A Community Clean-Up Lot is a lot meant only for the temporary collection of heavy household litter, not for playing or sitting. The point of the lot is to serve as a temporary "hiding place" for large, bulky items (such as thrown-out furniture) that the Department of Sanitation cannot immediately remove from the street. It is *not* a lot for regular small kitchen garbage. Through your group, the community must be told many times over what this lot is for. They must *want* it.

The lot needs to be well-maintained and well-disguised. Our insurance regulations require that the fence be see-through but you can certainly disguise the contents of the lot by planting Boston Ivy along the inside of the fence. This type of ivy grows very quickly. (See the Gardening section on page 21.) Or you may have opaque panels at intervals to disguise the lot's contents.

The gate should be very wide, at least 10 feet, so that the Sanitation trucks can back into the lot.

The lot must be *locked* when not open. It can be open only a few hours per day and on certain days of the week. This means that someone must be given some extra "pocket money" to unlock and lock it at the right times. The Department of Sanitation (Office of Community Services, 125 Worth Street, New York, N.Y. 10013) is quite willing to make pickup arrangements with your group.

A lot of this type works best, we feel, in a neighborhood which is just beginning to show the signs of neglect and the community doesn't like what's happening. For this project you need people who are strong in *both* body and interest.

We've already tried a Community Clean-Up lot as an experiment, but it didn't work in the particular area we chose. Here's what happened.

We took our idea to the Department of Sanitation who loved it. They agreed to make pickups on certain days at certain hours, and they did what they promised. We fenced our lot, installed a gate and a heavy lock and distributed flyers to the community that told them what the lot was for and the hours and days it would be open. Finally, the Department of Sanitation helped us to make up a huge sign that we placed in front of the lot. The sign also told what the lot was for and the hours and days it would be open.

Eventually, the lock on the gate was broken three times, the split-wood fence was first torn down, then, after we replaced it, burned down. The lettering on the sign was scraped off. At that point we cancelled our lease on the lot and stopped the insurance.

The neighborhood group with whom we were working insisted we would have had success in time. We couldn't wait. We were afraid of losing our master vest pocket park-vacant lot insurance coverage.

However, this was just *our* experience in a particularly difficult area. If you want to try it, first ask yourself the following questions:

1. Would a project like this be *good* for your neighborhood and would it be welcomed? (Are your sidewalks and streets loaded with bulky items?)
2. Would people in your neighborhood put the large bulk trash in the right place at the right time if they were clearly told where and when to put it?

Compared to other types of lots, this one is relatively inexpensive. You'll need money to insure it, rent it, fence it, lock and maintain it. Most of your money will eventually go towards maintenance—someone to lock, unlock and supervise the correct use of the lot.

We don't have to tell you that every vacant lot cannot be a park or a garden. New York City has so many garbage-filled lots that there's obviously a need for a place to put this extra rubbish. A Community Clean-Up Lot is the controlled and attractive way to do it.

If your group thinks this kind of lot is a good idea (we do!), write a letter to the Office of Community Services, Department of Sanitation, 125 Worth Street, New York, N.Y. 10013. Enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope. You should know that the Department of Sanitation is still interested in this type of project and is even working on new designs for special garbage containers for it.

We'll be trying another Community Clean-Up Lot in a different neighborhood. If you have ideas as a result of your experience, please let us know, as we'll be sending out supplements on this matter from time to time.

*No children are ever allowed to play in this lot.  
Your children are not garbage.*

#### *General Neighborhood Clean-Up*

If you don't believe that a Community Clean-Up Lot will work in your neighborhood, you can still try to have a cleaner neighborhood.

Write to the Office of Community Services, Department of Sanitation, 125 Worth Street, New York, N.Y. 10013. (Enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope.) This office conducts community clean-ups all over the City from Wednesdays through Saturdays and needs four weeks' notice. The clean-up is a joint one, with your group and the Office planning the date and division of work.

## Citizens Committee to Keep New York City Clean

One way of helping to *keep* your neighborhood clean is to distribute picture brochures to everybody. Write to Citizens Committee to Keep New York City Clean, Inc., 51 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010, and request the following 3 brochures: "Your Sidewalk is Showing," "Sanitation Code" and "You Can Move To a Cleaner Block Without Leaving Home." The Citizens Committee can send any amount of brochures that you need and there is no charge.

### Abandoned Cars

So many cars are abandoned in New York City every year that the Police Department and the Department of Sanitation simply cannot spot every one.

If there's a car on your street that's obviously been abandoned (car is stripped of tires, chrome, motor, seats, license plate, etc.), do call your local police precinct station and report the car's location. Not only will you be helping your City, but your street is going to look a heck of a lot better, too! And if you, yourself, want to get rid of an unwanted car, you can take it to any borough garage of the Department of Sanitation or you can ask them to come pick it up at any curb you desire:

Manhattan (East)	289-1800
(West)	265-7550
Bronx	299-5600
Brooklyn	643-4960
Queens (East)	899-6262
(West)	446-1040
Richmond	447-1000

## A BETTER NEIGHBORHOOD

### Street Problems

If the surfacing of your street is filled with damages (potholes, etc.), you *can* call WO 4-2110. But we suggest that you write to:

Department of Highways  
Public Referrals Unit  
Room 818  
40 Worth Street  
New York, N.Y. 10013

Enclosed stamped, self-addressed envelope. When reporting the potholes, give the most exact location of the damaged area that you can using street name and house numbers.

If curbs are damaged, write to (don't call) the Department of Highways at the address given above. Enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope.

If sidewalks are damaged: sidewalk damage is really the responsibility of the owner whose property the sidewalk fronts. If you can't locate the property owner or get him to fix the sidewalk, write to the Department of Highways (enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope) at the address given above. Give the exact location of the damaged part of the sidewalk, using street name and house number. The Department will then try to locate the owner. If they cannot get the owner to act within a reasonable length of time, they will do an emergency repair to the sidewalk and charge it to the owner.

If a streetlight is out, call Broadway Maintenance at ST 6-3700. It's as simple as that! If you're calling at night or on Sundays and holidays, use this number instead: ST 4-4717.

If you have any kind of questions about agencies other than those of the City (for example, the utility companies), write to the agencys' Public Relations Department. Very often you'll receive heartening responses.

If your children are suffering from the heat in the summer and no public swimming pool is nearby, take heart. You can turn a fire hydrant into a summer sprinkler. Have a spokesman for your group go to the local Police Precinct station and ask for the Community Relations officer. He'll lend you a cap that fits on the hydrant and turns it into a sprinkler. Whoever signs for the cap is responsible for it. Watch it carefully!

If you're fed up because it seems nobody in your neighborhood is interested in doing something about its condition, you might try this suggestion. Sometimes, a whole neighborhood can be inspired by what happens to just one or two buildings. Your group might begin by improving your own buildings. The "improvements" can be nothing more than your windows being decorated by ivy- and geranium-filled windowboxes. If you contact your local florist with a group order, he might be persuaded to give you a reduced price.

Keep your sense of humor. If your windowboxing effort inspires nothing more than a passing glance from the community, don't be crushed. At least you've accomplished your very own neighborhood improvement and you can certainly be proud of that!

#### *Street Trees and How They Get There*

Planting street trees is not easy but it can be done. If you're interested in going ahead after you read the following, please be ready to be extremely patient.

#### TO HAVE ONE STREET TREE PLANTED

Write to the Borough Director's Office of the Park Department in your borough. (Enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope.) Indicate that you want to plant a tree in your area. You will be sent a form to fill out and asked to describe the proposed location for your tree. This form will also recommend nurseries that are prepared to plant trees in your bor-

ough, the types of trees recommended and the approximate prices. (The prices for planting trees will vary considerably from borough to borough; it depends also on the species of the tree. The average cost per tree in Manhattan, for example, is \$150.00. In other boroughs, though, it's usually much cheaper.)

The Department of Parks must then approve the location, but you are responsible for making sure that the tree's roots will not interfere with any underground utility lines. This means lines for water, gas, electricity and sewer pipes.

#### TO HAVE MORE THAN ONE STREET TREE PLANTED

##### 1. *Matching Street Tree Program*

Under this program, the City will match the number of trees your group agrees to plant on a 2 to 3 ratio. For example, for every 4 trees your group agrees to plant, the City will plant 6 trees; for every 6 trees, they'll plant 9 trees; for every 8 trees, 12.

Obviously, you'll need to raise a great deal of money to be able to afford your share of the trees. In addition, you'll need to generate a lot of enthusiasm for the idea since the Park Department prefers that at least 10 trees be planted per block.

Any group interested in this plan must realize that the City Budget annually sets aside a certain amount of money for street tree planting. How much money is set aside depends, of course, on how good or bad a year it's been for the City money-wise. This money becomes available every July 1st which is the beginning of the City's fiscal year. At this time, the Park Department begins its planning for street trees and the money is soon gone.

This means that your group must make application quite some time before July 1st of each year, preferably the fall before. Ordinarily, a group requesting to participate in the Matching Street Tree Program by July 1st of one year could

expect to have the trees planted by the City in the fall of the following year.

If you're interested in the Program, write to the Borough Director's Office of the Park Department in your borough. (Enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope.)

Note: Any tree planted through the Department of Parks is guaranteed for one year. Should a tree die within that year, it will be replaced. However, the tree will not be replaced if it dies due to vandalism. This applies to both single tree plantings and the Matching Tree Program.

After one year, any street tree planted through the Department of Parks belongs to the City and becomes its responsibility. Citizens are encouraged to continue watering and weeding and the Department of Parks will repair serious disease and storm damage to the tree. They will also spray and prune. This applies to both single tree plantings and the Matching Tree Program.

*Offices of the Park Department in Your Borough:*

*Manhattan:* Borough Director  
Department of Parks  
The Arsenal  
830 Fifth Avenue  
New York, N.Y. 10021

*Bronx:* Borough Director  
Department of Parks  
Bronx Park East & Birchall Avenue  
Bronx Park  
Bronx, N.Y. 10462

*Brooklyn:* Borough Director  
Department of Parks  
Litchfield Mansion  
Prospect Park West & 5th Street  
Prospect Park  
Brooklyn, N.Y. 11215

*Queens:* Borough Director  
Department of Parks  
The Overlook  
Union Turnpike & Park Lane  
Forest Park  
Kew Gardens, N.Y. 11415

*Richmond:* Borough Director  
Department of Parks  
Field House  
1150 Clove Road  
Clove Lakes Park  
West New Brighton  
Staten Island, N.Y. 10301

**ANOTHER WAY TO HAVE MORE THAN ONE STREET TREE PLANTED**

**2. *Salute to the Seasons Fund for a More Beautiful New York, Inc.***

If your group is considering planting five or more street trees, you can also arrange these plantings through the Salute to the Seasons Fund for a More Beautiful New York, Inc. The Fund works with the Department of Parks and, for the price of the trees, (approximately \$140 per tree in Manhattan) will handle the details of permit application, surveying (underground utility checks), permits and planting. Paving blocks are included.

For a small extra charge, they will supply surrounding underplanting and tree guards. By doing your planting through the Fund, the money you spend is considered a contribution towards beautification and is tax-deductible. In addition, there is no sales tax.

Write to (enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope):

Salute to the Seasons Fund for a More Beautiful New York, Inc.  
101 Park Avenue  
New York, N.Y. 10017

## Conclusion

Give everything you do a good try! If it doesn't work, try something else. And if you find out something we don't know, please write us about it. We're always interested.

We have only information to give you, but we think that "A Little About Lots" will be gift enough to start you on the path towards a better lot . . . and a better neighborhood. As far as we know, and as of this printing, it's the only book of its kind in the City.

We'll be sending you additional information from time to time. If you receive this book as a gift from someone or from some other private source, write us so that we can put you on the list to receive supplemental pages for "A Little About Lots." (Please make it very clear that it's the "Little About Lots" mailing list you want to be put on. We've got many other lists!)

We wish you successful lots—and lots of success in anything you try, even if you can do only a little to make your neighborhood better.

New York belongs to each of us. Let's make it a lovelier place to live.

*When you get a supplemental page, just press it into the correct place in the green binder with your fingernail.*

## Notes