Who Owns That Chicago Vacant Lot?

There are many vacant lots in Chicago. You block club, church or other neighborhood group may be able to convert a vacant lot into a positive asset that greens and beautifies your street. Here is a guide to identifying the property owner.

1. **Chicago City Owned Land Inventory.** This is a list of 15,000+ properties owned by the City of Chicago. The list includes PIN number, address, and square footage for each property. A City disclaimer states that the list may not be 100% accurate. Verify property ownership online. And one more caveat: the online records listed in the next two items sometimes are incomplete or missing for a property. Maybe your alderman’s office can help. You can also call 312-744-LAND (312-744-5263) to determine if a property is owned by the city.

2. Use the [CookViewer website](https://cookviewer.cookcountyil.gov/) to visually confirm PIN number, address and location of a lot.

3. Look up a PIN number in [Cook County Recorder of Deeds website](https://recorder.cookcountyil.gov/) to determine/verify the owner of a property. 1st Grantee of the most recently dated record for the property is the current owner. When the City of Chicago is the owner then the 1st Grantee is listed as ‘Chicago’. If the lot is not city-owned, for $2.50 you can download a deed document that lists the name and address of the property owner.

To request permission to use a city-owned lot, see the alderman. You may be required to provide: PIN number(s), garden organization board member names, bylaws, garden rules, garden design, $1 million liability insurance. At best, expect a three-year lease, possibly renewable, from the city. If the lot is privately owned, contact the owner and discuss terms of use.

See the NeighborSpace website for additional information about determining a site owner, and for assistance with long term preservation of a community garden site. (neighbor-space.org, Join Us > Application Process)