

## Urban Land Access

# City Guides

This is a great opportunity to dig into how to find and access farmland in cities. The city guides focus on a few cities in Michigan to give you a model to collaboratively create land access guides for local area.

## KEY TERMS

### **Land access:**

Practical ways farmers get land.

### **Urban Land Banks:**

Land Banks manage vacant land, homes and buildings in cities. Land banks often connect urban farmers and gardeners with land at a reasonable cost, collaborate with community organizations, governments, and urban farms to offer resources and assistance. But Land Banks can be a challenge! Often they enforce regulations on plant height or favor developers interest.

### **Land Funds:**

A fund to acquire and manage land for conservation, community development, etc. Funds are typically led by governments, nonprofits, individuals, or other stakeholders.

### **BIPOC Farmer Land Funds:**

Land funds to support land access for farmers of color, often focused on Black, Indigenous or refugee land access.

## SUPPLIES NEEDED

- Blue, green and yellow push pins
- A corkboard with a city map (or map of the region participants are from)
- Print out handouts with blank city guides
- Print out extra blank city guides for each group or region



## How do you do this?

- In small groups look through the City Guides and resource list. Focus on YOUR city and write notes that are helpful to:
  - find vacant lots
  - get land through the Land bank
  - complete a change of use form to allow farming on a city lot
  - connect with water
  - find and understand city rules and regulations for urban farms
- Each group presents their info to the whole group
- Then have the groups go back and create their own City Guide or add to an existing one depending on the location of the training.



## CITY GUIDES: DETROIT

### KEEP GROWING DETROIT'S QUICK GUIDE TO PURCHASING LAND FOR URBAN AGRICULTURE



# 1

#### CHOOSING A SITE

When choosing a place for your garden there are many things to consider including

- Soil type and quality (consider [a test!](#))
- Available sunlight
- Water access
- History of dumping
- How the neighbors are using it (parking, football games, parties etc)
- Zoning (residential properties are easier to permit, more on this later!)



# 3

#### IDENTIFYING OWNERSHIP

The following sites are great resources to identify who owns the land currently. They will also give information like the measurements of the lot, parcel ID, zoning and last sale price.

- [Regrid](#)
- [Detroit Parcel Viewer](#)
- [Wayne County Tax Assessor](#)



# 5

#### CLOSING ON YOUR LAND

Patience is a virtue! After applying for your property and receiving a confirmation number via email (keep this!), you may need to wait up to 4-6 months for the land bank to review your materials and approve the purchase. There can be all sorts of hurdles in the way (see page two). You can use your confirmation number to check on your status and check in periodically with your DLBA program manager. When your project is approved you will receive a purchase agreement to sign and be asked for a deposit for the property. Soon after the DLBA will schedule a closing and you will pay the final amount. Please note that DLBA usually issues reconveyance deeds. This means that you will likely have a reporting schedule and need to get permitted for your site. If you do not follow these steps the deed can be revoked!



# 2

#### TALK TO THE COMMUNITY

Don't skip this step! Neighbors can be a gardens best advocate or worst nightmare! It will be the people living right around the garden who can provide eyes and ears on the site when you are not there. They are also in a position to complain to the city about things they don't like on your site which could result in a ticketing. The Land Bank may also reach out to them when you apply to purchase. Neighbors should be informed about what is happening and their voices should be heard. Ideally their participation is welcome in the planning and implementation of your project.



# 4

#### APPLYING FOR OWNERSHIP

The process of applying for ownership will vary depending on who owns the site. This guide will focus on property owned by the Detroit Land Bank Authority (DLBA) as they are the primary owner of vacant land in the city. If a different entity owns your site reach out to KGD for support! The DLBA currently has 4 paths to ownership for gardeners.



- [Side lots](#)- lot must be adjacent (or touching) property you own and occupy. These lots sale for \$100. Enter your address at the link above to apply.
- [Neighborhood Lots](#) - lot must be within 500ft of property you own and occupy. You may purchase up to 2 of these lots per year. Neighborhood lots sale for \$250. Enter your address at the link above to apply.
- [Projects Portal](#)- click this link to apply for lots that do not meet side lot or neighborhood lot criteria. You will need a [plot plan](#), budget and proof of funds to apply
- [Marketed Properties](#) - click this link and navigate to land based projects for properties that are being sold as bundles by the DLBA



## CITY GUIDES: DETROIT

# 6

### REPORTING & COMPLIANCE

If you purchased as a neighborhood lot or through the projects portal you will need to report to the DLBA on the progress of your garden project. Be sure to make a note in your calendar to remind you of your reporting schedule. If something in your project changes or is delayed be sure to communicate with your DLBA project manager!



# Don't QUIT

# 7

### GARDEN PERMIT

To be fully in compliance with the city you need pull a permit to change the land use from residential to agriculture. This is done by filing a building permit with the Buildings, Safety Engineering & Environmental Department (BSEED). You can [file electronically](#). Here is a guide on the [change of use process](#) for urban gardens. Note if you purchase as a sidelot you DO NOT need to file a building permit for your garden.



### COMMON ISSUES THAT CAN ARISE IN YOUR PURCHASE PROCESS AND WHAT TO DO!

- **Demolition lien on the property**- These have an expiration date, wait it out!
- **DLBA gives adjacent neighbors notification and first right of refusal**- This can take some time. Stay patient and talk with neighbors so they know your plans.
- **Commercially zoned lot**- Steer clear if possible! Requires a special land use hearing for gardens which additional takes time and money. If you still want to proceed before to get soil testing that tests for all MI 10 heavy metals.
- **Your paperwork get rejected**. DLBA will contact you to discuss changes that needs to be made. Something in your plot plan may require special permission or you don't have proper proof of funds for your project idea.
- **You get stuck gathering paperwork you need to apply**- KGD can help!
- **You miss email or communication from the Land Bank**- Stay on it!
- **Lack of timely communication from DLBA**- Stay persistent, don't give up, try another contact.
- **Title problems**- DLBA runs a preliminary search, if something is fishy in search (chain custody broken or undiscoverable) they will suggest you get title insurance.
- **Project Hold Areas/ Land Review Areas**- Some land is unavailable due to planned development in the area. Be careful about investing too much in land you may never be able to own. Create a low investment project or choose new site see map of [land review areas](#).







## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES: DETROIT, HIGHLAND PARK**

Online guides for purchasing Urban land for agriculture.

Keep Growing Detroit

info@keepgrowingdetroit.org or visit our website:

[www.keepgrowingdetroit.org](http://www.keepgrowingdetroit.org)

[Land Access & Policy – Keep Growing](#)

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/61ddad815f23d9286ca6ab1c/t/6266f91986dffd7e48afa177/1650915610780/Guide+to+Purchasing+Land+for+Urban+Ag.pdf>

[Detroit \(detroitagriculture.net\)](http://detroitagriculture.net)

[Land Based Projects | City of Detroit \(detroitmi.gov\)](#)

[Packet\\_2\\_REV EGD JUN2020.pdf \(detroitmi.gov\)](#)

[Zoning Classifications\\_1.pdf \(detroitmi.gov\)](#)

[Getting land in Detroit and information on Zoning](#)

[Offer-to-Purchase-Application.aspx \(highlandparkmi.gov\)](#)



## CITY GUIDES: LANSING



## CITY GUIDES: BATTLE CREEK





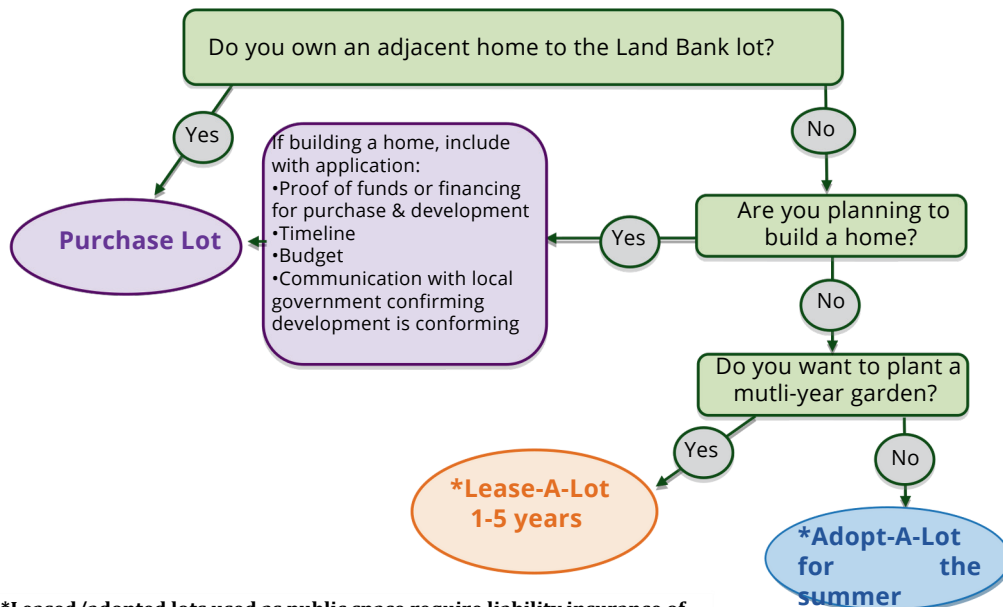
## CITY GUIDES: FLINT



The Land Bank has **lots available** in Genesee County. Whether you are looking to expand your yard, beautify your neighborhood, mow the lot down the street, or need more room to grow your own food, the Land Bank is dedicated to making its **lots available** for your care and use. If you are interested in using and caring for a Land Bank lot please see the diagram below to determine which option is best for you and your

Which option is best for me?

### AVAILABLE LOT





# How to fill out a City Guide

## How to fill out a city guide

### Find Land

1. Look at your neighborhood. Where do you would want to farm? Ask the owners about it!
2. Tell friends, neighbors, urban farmers & everyone you know that you want land to farm. Ask for suggestions and support.
3. **Search online for:**
  - Land Banks, city listings of vacant lots or realtors
  - Churches, schools, parks, universities, hospitals, neighborhood centers, nature centers, food banks, companies with land-to-garden-or-farm

### Assess Land

- Talk to neighbors to see if they want a farm or garden here
- Develop friendships
- Assess the soil
  - Test for lead
- Look at water drainage & see if the site floods
- Learn history of native peoples, redlining, etc.

### Decide to lease or purchase

1. Consider leasing, purchasing or partner with landowner (see info at right)
2. Consider what you want
3. Consider what is best for your farm or garden goals
4. What can you afford?

### Option 1 (Purchase?)

- Steps to buy through an individual or through a realtor:
1. Make offers, review counter-offers to negotiate price
  2. Set a closing date to sign paperwork and receive deed
- Steps to buy through a land bank:
1. Vary by land banks, but should be CLEAR & WRITTEN

### Option 2 (Lease?)

- Steps
1. Discuss your goals with landowner
  2. Write down agreements for payment, appearance of land, water use, term of lease, etc.
  3. Discuss how to resolve disagreements

### Option 2: Partner options

- Brainstorm landowners to partner with
- Discuss mission and goals with landowner
- Write down agreements about money and shared grants, appearance of land, water use, term of partnership, etc.
- Discuss how to resolve disagreements

## Applying for your land & getting started

### Site Plan

- Draw map and label:
  - garden beds, fields, planting areas, raised beds
  - water lines, frost-free hydrants, irrigation, etc.
  - hoophouses, transplant space, compost, etc.
  - wash/pack, storage sheds, buildings, etc.
  - Community spaces, grass, picnic tables, etc.
- How you will serve the community, maintain lot for beauty, sell produce or offer employment opportunities?
- What questions do you have? Who can you ask?
- Should I remove these trees?
- What can I do with this

### Special Use Permit

- Are any permits needed?
  - Search the city website for "garden", "farm", "special use permit", "chickens", "hoophouse" and other terms
  - Reach out to organizations for urban farmers, community gardens and the land bank to see what regulations to follow:
    - Mowing height requirements
    - Building permits
    - Examples if needed
  - What are the steps?

### Accessing Water

- Connection process & cost
  - Accessing water through neighboring homes or businesses with a hose and water meter to pay them fairly
  - City Water Department – city water connection process
  - Wabash boxes
  - Fire hydrant connections or Fire Dept. filling 325 gallon water totes
  - Discounts for absorbing rainfall, using rain catchment or not using sewer
  - Contact info for the water dept. or plumbers

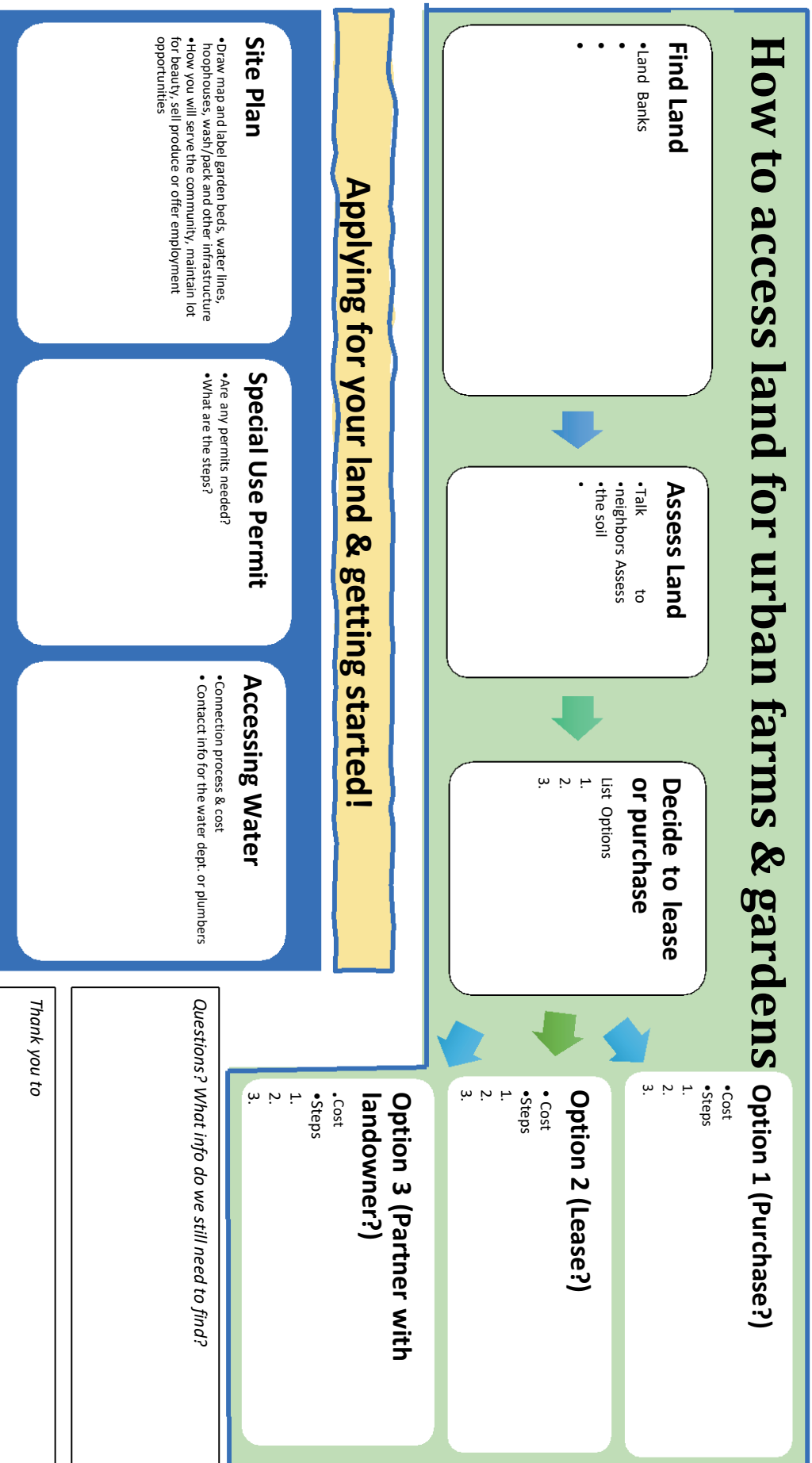
Questions? What info do we still need to find?

Thank you to





## 4. City Guide for \_\_\_\_\_





## **What does it mean for my farm or future farm?**

This section is for understanding and discussing the observations with a fellow farmer or educator.

- Do you know how to find listings of available vacant lots in your city?
- Does your city or land bank have a process for how to lease or buy vacant lots or side lots adjacent to your home? Is the price for vacant lots known?
- What kind of farm or educational garden do you plan to start once you access land?
- Do you already have vacant lots chosen that you are seeking to access?
- What barriers to accessing land do you expect?