**Title of the Project:** Community Partnerships: Greening Vacant Lots for Pittsburgh’s Sustainable Neighborhood Revitalization

**Client:**
The City of Pittsburgh/Urban Redevelopment Authority/Shade Tree Commission

The City of Pittsburgh and URA manage the City’s vacant lots. Currently, these lots are community eyesores and not realizing their full potential. The City is the largest municipality in Western PA and the three organizations above are all part of the public sector. The URA is an authority within the city of Pittsburgh and is the region’s second largest landholder after the City. The Shade Tree Commission is a publicly appointed body (by the Mayor) that advises the city on street “greening” initiatives and manages the city’s urban forests and tree canopies.

**Issue Definition:**
There are thousands of vacant lots in the city limits, many owned by city entities. Many are contiguous and assembled in parcels – but others are singular, the missing “teeth” on neighborhood streets. Some properties are part of redevelopment plans, but many are not. These blighted, vacant properties are traditionally negative forces on the communities in which they are found - but they present an opportunity for growth, partnerships and economic and community development. In addition, the city has a concurrent cost feasibility problem concerning buying and raising street trees for “greening” initiatives. 5-year old trees, typically the age and size tree desired for street plantings are prohibitively expensive for a city chronically broke. If the city could somehow grow these trees themselves, it would be far more feasible for street “greening” strategies. Some of the least desirable lots for development may be suitable for orchards and community gardens maintained through partnerships between the community, city, and nonprofit organizations. By working in concert with community groups, educational institutions, and public entities, this project has the potential to provide financial returns to the City while providing sustainable community space, workforce training and employment opportunities, and environmental awareness. These lots will produce trees that will help the city “green” inexpensively and also provide opportunities for community gardens and gathering space.

**Scope of Work:**

1) Data Collection - All vacant properties in the city must be categorized by size, soil type, and development plan; pricing figures for trees, supplies, maintenance, and implementation must be found and verified through multiple contractors and sources; every stakeholder in the “greening” process, city community development process, and within each selected neighborhood must be identified; the systems that currently govern forestry, public works, and community development need to be assembled and categorized.

2) Data Analysis - Vacant property data must analyzed through a system of matrices and cost valuations to determine what plots of land are appropriate for different identified activities, (community gardens, orchards, or out of the scope of the project); all cost figures for different activities will be compared through management science tools to arrive at the optimum cost effective strategies to meet our goals; a critique of the current systems will be assessed, offering alternative strategies and systems for the ongoing maintenance and implementation of street tree and community garden programs.

3) Relationship building - partnerships will be identified and created with the help of clients and assembled experts; relationships will be created to ensure that the project is feasible past the evaluation period; public participation will be a critical piece of the community garden planning process and implementation.
**Expected Deliverable:** A “green book” to guide a new system of developing vacant lots as orchards and community gardens that provide the city with low-cost street planting trees and provide the community with garden space, educational opportunities, and possible employment - volunteer and paid. The book will describe the data collected, its analysis, its conclusions, and its programmatic and policy recommendations.

**Skills Required:** The project will build upon many skills learned during the time spent at Heinz.

Quantitative: Statistical analysis and data collection learned through *Empirical Methods* classes; data organization learned in *Data Analysis*; project management and optimization models learned through *Management Science*; Financing and development skills learned through *Financial Analysis and Urban Development*; economic analysis and identifying appropriate quantitative resources learned in the capstone course *Urban and Regional Economic Development*.

Qualitative: Community development tools learned through *Sustainable Community Development*; Public speaking skills and writing skills for professional presentation learned through *Public Speaking* and *Professional Writing*; environmental awareness learned through *Cities, Environment, and Technology*.

**Advisory Board:**

- Bernie Lynch - City of Pittsburgh Mayor’s Office, Grants and Development, Weed and Seed
- Alice Enz - Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy
- Jerry Paytas - Center for Economic Development
- Aggie Brose - Bloomfield Garfield Corporation
- Maelene Myers - East Liberty Development, Inc.
- Hazelwood Initiative
- Pittsburgh Forestry Department
- Mardi Isler - Pittsburgh Shade Tree Commission
- Bill Peduto - Pittsburgh City Council

**Possible Team Members:**

- *Lori Gaido*  
  Vivien Luk
- *Chris Koch*  
  Sam Franklin
- *Nathan Wildfire*  
  Lance Chimka
- Jon Fegley  
  Jessica Mooney

* denotes most interest