



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**MAYOR LIGHTFOOT LAUNCHES VACANT LOT BEAUTIFICATION PILOT PROGRAM ON CITY'S SOUTH AND WEST SIDES**

*Grounds for Peace program to beautify 50 city-owned vacant lots, pilot provides employment, skill-oriented job training and development to men at highest risk of gun violence involvement*

Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot today joined Heartland Alliance's READI Chicago program and Urban Growers Collective to announce the launch of Grounds for Peace, the City's new vacant lot beautification pilot program designed to restore 50 city-owned residential vacant lots on Chicago's South and West sides. The pilot program will provide skill-oriented job training and development experience for 50 participants employed by READI Chicago, who will be trained to landscape, plant and provide maintenance for lots in North Lawndale, Woodlawn and Englewood.

"Today, we're bringing life and opportunities back into community spaces that have been left empty for decades," said Mayor Lightfoot. "Transforming our vacant lots into beautiful, open green spaces not only fosters safer streets and stronger communities but also contributes to a cleaner and healthier Chicago."

Inspired by successful programs in other cities with urban gun violence and large concentrations of vacant property, Grounds for Peace is designed to engage community members in reclaiming spaces that have contributed to violence. Research has found that improving the appearance of vacant lots through greening not only can reduce violent crime in the area but also has a positive impact on a wide range of other outcomes, including mental health and broader community wellness.

"The READI Chicago team is thrilled to be part of this exciting program, and we look forward to actively contributing to these beautification efforts to help make our neighborhoods safe and welcoming," said Eddie Bocanegra, Senior Director of READI Chicago. "It's experiences like this that engage READI Chicago participants in meaningful ways will help make a positive impact in our communities."

Grounds for Peace will leverage Heartland Alliance's innovative response to gun violence, READI (Rapid Employment and Development Initiative) Chicago, which is currently providing therapy, jobs and support services to over 500 men from communities that have been highly impacted by gun violence. Through Grounds for Peace, approximately 50 READI Chicago participants will have an opportunity to learn and practice new skills like



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landscaping, planting, and property maintenance in North Lawndale, Woodlawn and Englewood.

“This movement represents the kind of restorative justice and engagement opportunities that not only READI trainees, but the whole community can celebrate,” said Erika Allen, Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Urban Growers Collective. “Participants will acquire new ecological landscaping skills while giving to our neighbors verdant and hopeful spaces to reimagine our city’s motto – Urbs in Horto, or City in a Garden, on the block, as an equity building stepping stone.”

As part of the \$250,000 greening pilot, the City is partnering with Urban Growers Collective to provide substantive landscape training, supervision and expertise on urban land interventions.

"Lot-by-lot, we're restoring the vitality of our blocks by rejuvenating once-empty space with blossoming plants, grass and flowers," said Alderman Pat Dowell.

"For far too long, overgrown, empty lots have become a much too common sight throughout Chicago's south and west sides," said Alderman David Moore. "Through Grounds for Peace, our city will bloom with community gardens for the whole neighborhood to enjoy."

“Through collaborative efforts with READI, Urban Growers Collective and the City of Chicago, Grounds for Peace will be an initiative which ensures reinvestment into communities on the South and West Sides,” said Alderman Stephanie Coleman. “For far too long overgrown and empty lots have been far too common in parts of the City, like Englewood, North Lawndale and Woodlawn. The Grounds for Peace initiative will not only eliminate blight from vacant lands but restore the beauty to once-empty spaces with blooming plants, grass and flowers.”

The new pilot program also brings together an unprecedented partnership that includes the Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS), the Department of Planning and Development (DPD), the Department of Streets and Sanitation (DSS) and the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District (MWRD). Sites for the pilot year were selected based on proximity to violent crime and in communities with significant concentrations of City-owned vacant lots.

For more information and a map of all 50 city-owned Grounds for Peace lots, please visit <http://www.chicago.gov/GroundsForPeace>.

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