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New Grounded in Philly online resource ecosystem will help more Philadelphians turn vacant lots into community spaces

A revamped online resource ecosystem launching April 11 will help Philadelphia residents access the information and support they need to turn abandoned vacant lots into community gardens and other open space.

Grounded in Philly, an initiative of the Public Interest Law Center’s Garden Justice Legal Initiative, is launching a new and improved website with the help of web design agency Key Medium. To celebrate the launch of the new site, Grounded in Philly will be hosting a launch party at One Art Community Center on Thursday, April 11th from 7:00pm to 9:00pm.

Redesigning Grounded in Philly

Grounded In Philly was created as a civic project in 2013 by the Garden Justice Legal Initiative to help Philadelphians find information about vacant land — in order to put it back in the hands of the community.

Since then, Philadelphians have used resources and information from the site to transform over 140 vacant lots, with over 300 participating community leaders and volunteers. More than 115,000 people have visited the site.

The Public Interest Law Center set out to upgrade Grounded in Philly in 2018. Though the site had been helpful to many in the urban agriculture community, it was difficult to navigate the information presented on the site without assistance. Tools for organizing were limited as well, as gardeners needed to express interest in the same lot to be connected.

The new Grounded in Philly website is a one-stop online resource ecosystem for the open space community in Philadelphia. The website guides visitors to the information they need for their particular circumstances, whether they want to start a garden, secure ownership of a garden parcel, or join an existing community garden. For example, a visitor to the website looking to start a garden will be directed to check whether the piece of land has associated debt, and what they should do if the lot is encumbered by a lien.

In addition, the site includes an online forum, The Grapevine, for community members to connect with one another, ask questions, and celebrate successes. This forum includes pages for each section of Philadelphia, so neighbors can organize around local vacant lots. View a beta version of the new site here: <https://grnd.keymedium productions/>.

Tackling food insecurity and disinvestment

Philadelphia has 40,000 vacant lots, and 300,000 Philadelphians face food insecurity. Community gardens and urban farms can serve as a source of fresh, local produce in neighborhoods that face disinvestment. These beautiful spaces have ripple effects in the surrounding community as well. Vacant lots that have been transformed correlate with lower rates of depression in surrounding blocks, according to a [University of Pennsylvania study](#) conducted in Philadelphia. Another local [study from Columbia University](#) found that improved lots also correlated to lower levels of crime.

“Gardens across the city are increasingly facing pressure from development and gentrification,” said Public Interest Law Center staff attorney Ebony Griffin, who leads their Garden Justice Legal Initiative. “Now more than ever, it’s vitally important that we give people easy access to the resources they need to hold on to existing spaces and start new ones. Making the information on Grounded in Philly more accessible is vital to the future of urban agriculture in Philadelphia.”

The revamped website promises to be a central hub for information and support for urban agriculture in Philadelphia. It includes information and data from city sources, like the vacancy indicators database, as well as links to support and resources from other city agencies and nonprofits.

“Our main goal when designing this new website was to create an online experience that leads to real change on the ground in Philadelphia,” said Ali Jaffar, CEO and Lead Developer of Key Medium. “Grounded in Philly has already had an impact, but with this launch, we hope to expand that impact and audience--the new site is easier to navigate, more interactive, and much more social. Go ahead and join the Grapevine forums, share, and message friends on the new social platform and digital resource ecosystem.”

About The Public Interest Law Center

The Public Interest Law Center uses high-impact legal strategies to advance the civil, social, and economic rights of communities in the Philadelphia region facing discrimination, inequality, and poverty. We use litigation, community education, advocacy, and organizing to secure their access to fundamental resources and services in the areas of public education, housing, health care, employment, environmental justice and voting. For more information visit www.pubintlaw.org or follow on Twitter @PubIntLawCtr.

About Key Medium and Coding for Causes

Founded in 2014, Key Medium is a premiere digital agency that creates beautiful, branded experiences for businesses, nonprofits, and government agencies. Key Medium has received praise for spearheading the growth of startup companies and lending affordable expertise and services to Philadelphia's workforce development board, charter schools and nonprofit organizations through the Coding for Causes program. For more about Key Medium, visit www.keymedium.com.

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