



Greenspace Conversion Reduces Vacancy and Supports Community

GREEN CITY COALITION

Green City Coalition is rooted in long-term community partnerships and the idea that vacant land can be an asset—not a liability—when it’s intentionally managed. Much of their effort in the College Hill neighborhood centers on Peace Park, a large greenspace anchored by the historic Grand Avenue Water Tower. These “vacant” properties have been used by the community for decades, originally under the leadership of the late civil rights activist, minister, and community organizer Otis Woodard. From his home, which used to stand in Peace Park, and later a sharing shed which was built in its place, Woodard served those in need by distributing food and clothing and providing a safe and welcoming space. He named this land “Peace Park” to declare it as a place of refuge.

After Woodard’s passing in 2015, neighborhood residents were inspired to carry forward the vision of Peace Park. Working with Health Equity for All, they set out to address health disparities in College Hill by reimagining Peace Park as a place to promote community wellness, provide neighborhood beauty, and extend Woodard’s values of peace and sharing. Residents worked with community partners to co-design and collectively fundraise to realize an updated vision for the park.

Green City Coalition joined the team of Peace Park enthusiasts in 2019, serving as a connector to bring institutional partners to the table and align resources with resident-led priorities. Peace Park partners have included the Land Reutilization Authority, the Metropolitan Sewer District, the Planning and Urban Development Agency,

the Forestry Division, the Missouri Department of Conservation, Washington University in St. Louis, The Nature Conservancy, Arbolope Studio, and more. This network approach allows place-based groups to access technical expertise, maintenance support, and funding streams that would otherwise be out of reach.

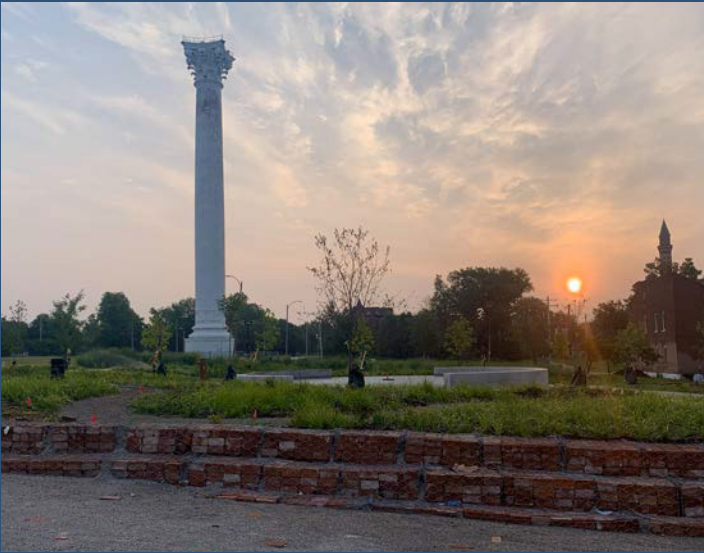
Several neighborhood organizations have been able to expand or strengthen their work because of these partnerships. Jubilee Christian Development Corporation, for example, operates workforce development programs that now include a lawn care and maintenance contract for Peace Park and other GCC-managed sites. GCC’s Green Stewards Program provides resident stipends for weekly maintenance work—putting dollars directly into neighbors’ pockets while ensuring the greenspaces stay cared for.

Together, these efforts create a kind of neighborhood-scale synergy: converting vacant property, supporting residents with paid stewardship roles, building local organizational capacity, and preventing further abandonment. In College Hill, where vacancy has been entrenched for generations, this coordinated approach offers a practical and community-rooted path forward.

Learn more at www.greencitycoalition.org/peacepark

 [Download the *From Policy to Progress* Report](#)

Source: *From Policy to Progress: A Ten-Year Strategy to Reduce Vacancy in the City of St. Louis* (2025)



Left side: Peace Park in College Hill. Right side: Pocket prairies in Wells Goodfellow.
Photos courtesy of Green City Coalition

Source: From Policy to Progress: A Ten-Year Strategy to Reduce Vacancy in the City of St. Louis (2025)