



Tackling Vacancy Through Art and Homeownership

ST. LOUIS ART PLACE INITIATIVE

Wedged between Chippewa Street and Cherokee Street, the Gravois Park neighborhood is lined with historic architecture and buzzing with energy. Kids zip through the park on their bikes, neighbors tend to the community garden, and front porches hum with laughter. But only steps away, vacant homes and overgrown grass tell another story—a story of disinvestment and untapped opportunity.

The St. Louis Art Place Initiative (API) launched in 2019 as a direct response to the Gravois-Jefferson Historic Neighborhoods Plan, which called for more affordable housing for artists and the better use of vacant land. Rooted in community voice and strong collaboration, API uses a straightforward approach: renovate vacant homes into affordable, for-sale housing for artists to root in their neighborhoods and, in return, bring creativity to community life.

“Part of what is special here in St. Louis is really leaning into being an art city,” said API Co-Director Jennifer Allen. “There’s a role for that in reducing vacancy.”

Community connection is hardbaked into API’s mission and their application process. By prioritizing artists who are connected to the neighborhood, homes are filled not only with creativity, but also with residents who are more likely to invest back into the community—showing up at cleanups, supporting neighbors, and taking part in decision-making. This neighborhood-first model ensures that API is building relationships and trust.

“People want to have a say in the vacancy around them. Not just that it gets developed, but how it gets developed,” said API Co-Director Kaveh Razani. “They want to participate in shaping the spaces in their neighborhoods.”

“People want to have a say in the vacancy around them. Not just that it gets developed, but how it gets developed.” - Kaveh Razani

API’s efforts are already tangible. As of summer 2025, two homes have been sold to local artists, six more to be completed by the end of the year, and another five are slated for completion in spring 2026. Additional projects are also on the horizon: Art Makes Neighbors is a public art project that will be launched in 2026, enabling artist-homebuyers to lead a community art project alongside residents. In partnership with Dutchtown South Community Corporation, residents are creating a cultural asset community land trust to preserve green and art spaces. The goal is to maintain long-term affordability, stability, and community wealth—all while celebrating the creativity and vibrancy of the neighborhood.

“In everything we do, we’re tapping into the arts and lifting that up,” said Allen. “That’s transformative for people’s practices, businesses, and livelihoods.”

In a city with staggering vacancy, API is showing what’s possible when the arts are harnessed to answer a community’s call for investment. It’s not just about transforming vacant homes. It’s about neighbors and artists working together to shape the future of their community.

Learn more at www.stlartplace.org



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



(Clockwise, left to right): St. Louis Art Place Initiative Co-Directors and supporters during a house tour with partner Habitat for Humanity; two API homes currently under rehabilitation and slated for completion in early 2026; one of API's first artist town hall meetings; and an API home completed in Fall 2025. Photos courtesy of St. Louis Art Place Initiative.