

## In a Place With Few Parks, A Push to Claim a Corner

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B U S H W I C K



# In a Place With Few Parks, A Push to Claim a Corner

Two months ago the vacant lot at Grove Street and Myrtle Avenue was anything but empty. After an intense summerlong campaign to remove two junk cars, a pool table, a wrecked boat and dozens of rats, the vacant lot is now just that. But residents want something more: a park.

With only 25.2 acres for parks and recreation, Community District 4, which includes Bushwick, has the second-highest number of children per acre of park space in the city. Armed with such data, Grove Street Tenants Together, a block association, and Make the Road by Walking, a community organization, are pushing the city to expand park space.

"We want something nice to look at," Carmen Aber, 48, said. "We are worthy of that." She has lived on Grove Street for 25 years and watches her granddaughter, 10, play in the street.

Parks Commissioner Henry J. Stern agreed, saying, "Bushwick is definitely an underserved area," and that the city should look for other spots to turn into parks there. But he added that the city has put in a 2.6-

acre park this year and is to open a one-third-acre park this fall.

However, turning the Grove Street lot into a park may take time, because it is privately owned. The owner, Chong Hak Choi, moved to Korea four years ago, said a person who took Mr. Choi's calls and described himself as a former business associate. The associate said he thought that Mr. Choi had abandoned the lot. The Grove Street group said \$80,000 in taxes are owed on the lot.

Mr. Stern, who knew nothing about the spot, said that in cases of private lots with unpaid taxes, community groups should press city officials to sue to gain ownership.

But the residents have made progress. On July 9, the day after residents marched on his office, Councilman Martin Malav-DiIn signed a pledge to clean and fence the lot. In August, the Department of Sanitation hauled off the junk cars; on Sept. 3, city workers installed highway barriers around the site. The residents removed the rest of the garbage on Sept. 18.

But they express fear that if they

cannot put a real fence around the site, more garbage will be dumped there. City law allows the Department of Transportation to fence vacant lots if owners refuse to do so. Officials of Make the Road said the group can pay for the fence, but

needs the city's permission to do so. "It was so hard to get it cleaned up and they have already started throwing bottles in there," said Maria Molina, lead organizer of the tenant group. "We need a fence."

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