

An Interactive History **of Community** **Ownership** **at Park Street's** **Vacant Lots**



Introduction

There are two city-owned vacant lots on Park Street between Waldeck and Greenbrier Streets:



381 Park Street
is currently being
used as a
community space.

357 Park Street
holds a garage that
will soon be
torn down.

Both of these vacant lots were acquired by the City of Boston in the past few years. When an owner does not pay taxes on their property for a significant period of time, the city undertakes a foreclosure process and eventually acquires the lot.

Now that the city owns these vacant lots, it will explore future uses for these spaces. As a local nonprofit committed to housing justice and anti-displacement work, the Boston Neighborhood Community Land Trust (BNCLT) wants to make sure that the future of these vacant lots is shaped by, and for, the surrounding community.

This summer, BNCLT and Park Street residents have been working together to uncover and document the history of these vacant lots. We have been asking questions like: *What has happened here? Who has interacted with the vacant lots and why? What broader systems have shaped these spaces?*

We believe having conversations about these questions is an important first step toward envisioning the future of the vacant lots.

How did we research the vacant lot histories?

To research the histories of the vacant lots, we took three main approaches:

First, we interviewed three long-time residents of Park Street, and one former resident of Park Street. Each of these residents has memories of the vacant lots and their surroundings from their lived experience on the block.



Second, we explored online archives, including:

- Historic maps of the neighborhood
- Property records available at the Suffolk County Registry of Deeds website
- Historic newspaper articles by *The Boston Globe*



These archives gave us more exact details and dates about key moments in the history of the vacant lots and their surroundings. This is how we learned information like who owned properties and when.

Third, we read what other people have written about the history of Dorchester and the Greater Four Corners Area.



These sources helped us understand how the history of the vacant lots on Park Street is connected to the history of the surrounding neighborhood.

What have we learned so far?

Two ideas have stood out from the research so far:

- The speculative housing market and discriminatory land use practices have affected this street and its surrounding neighborhood, which has been home to low income people, people of color, and immigrants for decades. As a result of these systemic forces, this street has been subject to arson and foreclosure. Property owners, and their tenants, have been threatened with displacement. They have been pushed to give up land and housing, leaving vacant lots that have been largely inaccessible for Park Street neighbors.
- And yet, in the midst of these challenges, Park Street neighbors have taken ownership over the vacant lots and their surroundings, even when they do not own these spaces officially. This **community ownership** has taken many forms, including noticing, remembering, and taking care of the vacant lots and their surroundings.

Today, many residents of the Greater Four Corners Area are facing displacement threats because of the pressures of gentrification. These vacant lot histories illuminate that displacement threats are not unusual in this neighborhood. They also show that Park Street residents have a history of caring for the block and for their communities.

This booklet showcases the information that we gathered, but there is still so much more to share and learn. **As you read along, please add to, and reflect on, the history of the Park Street vacant lots and the neighborhood!**

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How to Use This Booklet

Step 1: On the next page, you will find two loose pieces of paper with questions.

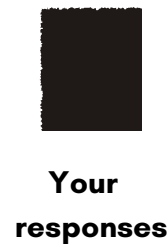
Step 2: As you read the booklet, write down responses to these questions.

If you would prefer to write responses using your smart phone, scan this QR code:



Step 3: When you are finished, pin your responses to the response board at 381 Park Street. If you respond using your smart phone, we will add your comments ourselves.

Step 4: Read what others have written!



**The response board
at 381 Park Street
(it's shaped like a house)**

Acknowledgments

The creation of this booklet was facilitated by the Boston Neighborhood Community Land Trust (BNCLT) with Tufts University student and Tisch Summer Fellow Louisa Winchell. It could not have been developed without three long-time Park Street neighbors, who have been living on the block for over 30 years, and one former resident of Park Street. These four individuals, who have chosen to remain anonymous, shared their stories of Park Street through interviews, and are quoted throughout. Many more Park Street neighbors have shared their memories and thoughts at community events held at 381 Park Street. These individuals have helped shaped the project in numerous ways.

This booklet was designed as part of the "Placing Park Street" public art project, which was developed with help from a grant from the New England Foundation for the Arts, and from artist John Ewing.

The BNCLT is a nonprofit that works to combat displacement and racial injustice by creating permanently affordable, community-controlled housing in the Boston area, with a specific geographic focus on Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan. As the owner of 349 Park Street, BNCLT is also a Park Street neighbor.

Sources

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be a part of their community. [...] The community I'm talking about [...] have a nice, tight community where in the fall [...] everybody comes out with stuff that they want to sell. [...]

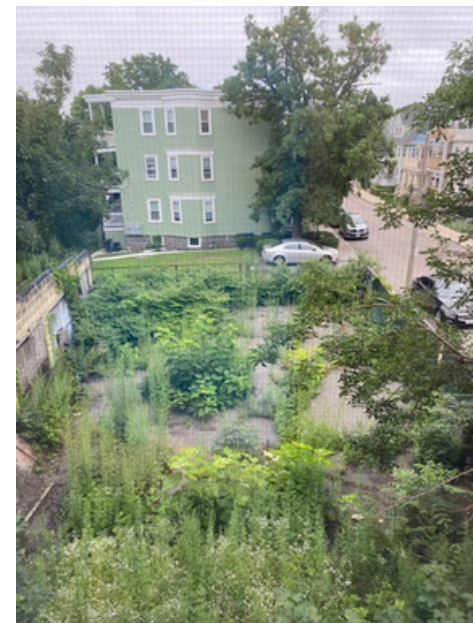
My hope is that [our] part of Park Street embraces that sense of community and does something like that, as well. Using the lot, maybe having a Halloween festival to get the kids to come up that way, you know. Maybe having our own festival up [here], because they do it down there."

- 5-year resident of Park Street

We hope this booklet and the response board at 381 Park Street offer a platform for Park Street residents to work together to collect the history of the vacant lots on Park Street, and begin to envision the future of these spaces.

Vacant Lot History #1: 357 (and 349) Park Street

A story of how discriminatory practices led to the foreclosure of a Park Street house and local garage, and residents organized with allies to form a Community Land Trust



349 and 357 Park Street are side-by-side properties that have been owned jointly throughout history. 349 Park Street is a triple-decker, and 357 Park Street is a garage that has been used by local mechanics for years.

In 2012, like many buildings throughout the neighborhood, 349 Park Street faced foreclosure, and its residents were threatened with displacement. In response, residents worked together with local housing justice organizations to prevent the foreclosure of the house, and to secure a new owner. Later that year, the Boston Neighborhood Community Land Trust (BNCLT, formerly the Coalition for Occupied Homes in Foreclosure) acquired 349 Park Street, which meant that residents were able to remain in their homes.

357 Park Street, in the meantime, went through its own foreclosure process, and was acquired by the City of Boston in 2019.¹

Today, 349 Park Street continues to be owned by BNCLT, which is governed by the organization's residents and local community members. 357 Park Street, however, is surrounded by a chain-linked fence and remains inaccessible for local residents. In the summer of 2022, the City plans to demolish the garage, as it looks toward new uses for this space.

As the garage is demolished and the City begins planning for the future of the lot, it is worth asking:

"Well, I don't think we have too much influence on the block, but people ask questions, we try to answer them, you know, give them some advice. But that's about it. [...] The block doesn't really come together like other blocks, as in the neighborhood to inquire as to what we would like to see happen."

- 35-year Park Street resident

"I don't even know anybody that I can relate to, to [address issues in the neighborhood...]. The only people that I could talk to is [my neighbor across the street], if he was here. And there was another guy down the street. He had been here for a long time. [...] Those people [around the curve] are leaving. They used to be people that I could talk to too, to get stuff done. They're leaving. [...] People that I knew that I was pretty close to, who are moving. And I hate that."

- 45-year resident of Park Street

"Up where we are [on] Park Street, at Halloween, we didn't get any kids. [The block] further down Park Street [...] got all the kids. [...] For those that like to do trick-or-treating, or give out candy, most of us up this way were sitting on our porches waiting for the kids to come. And as you look down, there was a parade of kids going up and down Melville. [...] That community came out with elaborate costumes, and they made a notice about, 'we got candy here.' And the cars and everything were going up and down. Even my own kids were like 'Ma, I don't know why you're sitting on the porch. You might as well go down there and give candy out. So myself, a next door neighbor [...] We all went down to that street, and stood there, and gave out the candy to

Some residents also make an effort to connect with and support their neighbors:

"So I used to go and sit and talk to [my neighbor]. She said 'Yeah, my grandson [...] was mad at me because I went into the train.' I said [...] 'Just let me know, I'll take you on the train.' And she said, 'you will?' I said 'yeah.' And she always offered me cookies, and you know, 'You want coffee?' [...]
So I used to go and sit and talk to her, because she was a little lonely old lady. [...] That's all your Karma, you know. You do good, you get good [...] That's how I look at it."

- **36-year resident of Park Street**

"I know [my neighbor] would do anything for me if I – if need be. [...] She called me an Uber, and the next day I asked her how much, and I paid her. [...] So I thought that was really nice."

- **36-year resident of Park Street**

At the same time, some residents express a sense of loss when people leave the neighborhood, a feeling of disconnection from their neighbors, and a hope for more community connectedness:

"So many people are coming in and out and buying a house. Some people just bought a house just to [...] have it for a couple of years and sell it to make a profit. I don't like that, but that's their business. I don't know what to do about it."

- **45-year resident of Park Street**

- What is the history of the garage lot at 357 Park Street?
- Why did the city acquire 357 Park Street?
- How can residents take ownership over the property and shape the future of the lot?

Conversations with longtime residents of Park Street helped answer some of these questions. Online city archives, secondary sources, and help from the Dorchester Historical Society and City staff also filled in some of the gaps.

Here's what we know so far:

1905- The properties at 349 and 357 Park Street have been connected for a long time. According to city records, 349 Park Street was constructed in 1905, and the 5-bay garage building next door at 357 Park Street was constructed in 1920.² By 1933, G. & B. O'Mair owned both buildings, along with the 3-bay garage in between, which had also been constructed by that time (and is now demolished).³



1971 In 1971, a new owner purchased the garage lot at 357 Park Street and 349 Park Street.⁴



Over the next 50 years, Park Street residents have various memories these buildings. These memories reveal the ways that 357 Park Street played a role in the lives of residents.

It was a place that intrigued neighbors and caught their attention, a place where people learned to drive and took care of their vehicles, and a place where people parked their cars. It was part of the neighborhood fabric on Park Street.

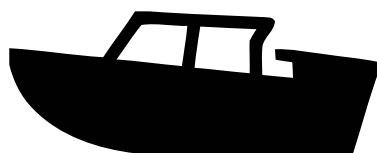
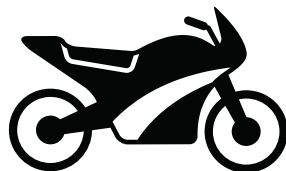
Residents remember:

"When I first moved over here [in the 1970s], there was a lot of guys on motorcycles. I call them hippies. [...] They was in [the garage lot at 357 Park Street] for a while."

- 45-year Park Street resident

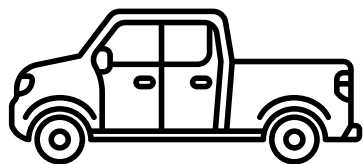
"There was a tractor trailer sitting in the lot, and something that looked like a boat, but wasn't a boat."

- Park Street resident



"[One resident] used to drive a big red truck. And he would back it up and pull in."

- 5-year Park Street resident



They have worked together to address a series of car break-ins:

"I got to know my neighbors on each side of us [...] And we were able to come together, especially when one guy came up Park Street and just broke into everybody's cars. And broke everybody's windows. [...] My son was up, and was watching the guy as he broke into his car, and was hanging with his feet out. And my son ran downstairs, and [the person] got on his bike and just sped away. And so we were able to talk to people and find out how many cars. And it was over ten cars that he vandalized, all up Park Street. [...] We were able to talk to a lot of people and say 'look, this is the dude, this is what he looks like, he was on a bike.' [...] I feel like we were able to unite for a cause."

- 5-year resident of Park Street

They have used their homes to support family members:

"When I bought [my house] [...] I wanted my kids to grow up around their family. [...] We're a pretty [...] close family, so that's why we always try to help each other out. When I bought the house, I had several cousins stay with me for a little while. My older brother did the same thing too. My uncle helped him out, and he helped me out, and a lot of my other brothers and sisters and cousins out. And then it was my turn, so I took a turn, helping a lot of them out."

- 45-year resident of Park Street

Resident Reflections

Reflections from Park Street residents on their experiences and hopes for the future of Park Street

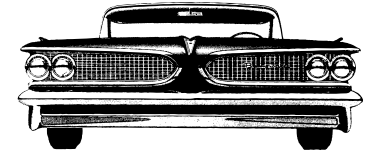
As residents work together to envision the future of the vacant lots, there are a few additional thoughts and stories residents have shared that are worth considering.

Residents on this street have a history of stewarding the block and caring for each other.

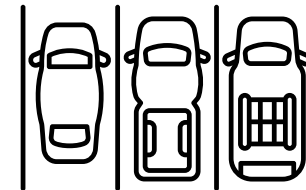
Residents have organized a Neighborhood Watch:

"We tried to do a neighborhood watch, and what they wanted was - if you see somebody walking down the street that you don't know, and then you call the next person next door or down the hill or wherever, and let them know that there's a guy I don't know and he's coming down your way. But that guy is kin to somebody down there, somebody's brother that's visiting or something like that. And so, that got to be a problem. [...] The goal was just to look after everybody, and look after each other."
- 45-year resident of Park Street

"[There were] two old fashioned cars in there. Very old, old cars. When I peaked in there, there was two cars. [...] And the garage [...] had [...] tools and stuff."
- 5-year resident of Park Street



"[There was] a driving school. I don't know if one of the apartments was the office or what. But the sign was there: [...] 'Driving School.' And my sister in law that lived on Greenbrier Street [...] told me 'Oh, I did driving school [there].' I said, 'you did?'"
- 36-year resident of Park Street



Some Park Street residents also rented out parking spaces in the driveway at 349 Park Street. This was an important feature of the block, as parking options here are extremely limited. Residents have emphasized:

"On Park Street, [which only has street parking on one side,] the parking is horrible. It's really, really horrible" - especially when it snows "during the winter."
- Two Park Street residents

February 2012 In February of 2012, a few blocks away, a local resident was living on Greenbrier Street in an apartment that had no heat or hot water. She needed a new apartment, and wanted it to be close by, close to the bus stops her kids used to get to school.

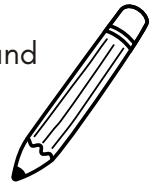
One day, there was a real estate agent walking through the neighborhood. He approached her and said, "do you need an apartment?"

She said, "yes, I do," and he brought her to 349 Park Street, the triple-decker that stood next to the garage lot at 357 Park Street. "It was perfect," the resident remembers, because it was "just around the corner" from her kids' bus stops. She moved in, and felt some relief. "I got us into a nice, decent place," she remembers, "and we had a nice good sleep."

May 2012 Four months later, however, the resident learned that the house was being foreclosed and would soon be sold at auction. She was at risk of losing her home. She started to do some research to find help. She connected with two organizations: City Life/Vida Urbana, and the Coalition for Occupied Homes in Foreclosure (COHIF) – which later renamed and restructured to become the Boston Neighborhood Community Land Trust (BNCLT).

Help add to, and reflect on, this history!

Please answer the response questions and pin them to the response board at 381 Park Street:



1. What do you remember about the Park Street vacant lots and surrounding neighborhood?
2. What do you hope for the future of the Park Street vacant lots and surrounding neighborhood?

To answer using a smartphone, scan here:



"I think it's really nice to bring all the people together. Because I met people that I don't know lived on the street."
- **36-year resident of Park Street**

"The events [at the vacant lot] is a good thing. [...] Because it brings some of the neighborhood who haven't been coming together to be able to sit and talk and have a conversation and have fun and have a little fellowship together. As I said fellowship means more than one person. Fellowship means talking and understanding each other, and where we coming from, and where we would like to see what's happening in the neighborhood."
- **35-year resident of Park Street**



2022 Today, the Boston Neighborhood Community Land Trust (BNCLT) is continuing to work with neighbors to activate 381 Park Street, and envision potential future uses.

The resident remembers:

"So I said 'I gotta do something.' So I went, and I started looking for help. And I saw an advertisement for City Life/Vida Urbana. And they help with people staying in their homes and stuff like that. So me, [the downstairs neighbor, the owner,] and my boyfriend — we all went down to City Life [for the] Tuesday night meeting. And explained to them what happened [...] It was the most amazing thing. I was scared to death. I had to talk in front of a whole room full of people. [...] And they vowed they would fight with us. [...] To hear them say that they would fight with us was the most calming and soothing feeling I've ever felt."

June 2012 When 349 Park Street was being sold at auction, City Life/Vida Urbana organized a rally to stop the auction. The resident remembers:

"City Life vowing to help us was able to stop the auction. Because they were the ones that showed up. And I stayed home for this. Because I just couldn't believe it. All these people showed up outside of 349 Park Street with bullhorns and clipboards. And they were really auctioning the house. And these other people came, all the cars [...] And I was like, 'this is interesting.' [...] I saw] them say 'stop' [...] And next thing you know, everybody left."



August 2012 In August of 2012, COHIF (now BNCLT) was able to acquire 349 Park Street with help from an investor. The building was no longer at risk of foreclosure, and residents of 349 Park Street could stay in their homes. The resident remembered:

"There was this organization called COHIF – Coalition for Occupied Homes in Foreclosure [now BNCLT] – that already knew about [...] 349 Park Street. Knew about all the foreclosed housing that was happening on Greenbrier, Claybourne, all these other streets in the area."

At the time, the resident reflects, foreclosures were happening throughout the neighborhood:

"Well when we lived on Greenbrier Street, there was [...] a family that lived next door to us. And all of a sudden they were having all these issues. I mean the place was beautiful, and everything [...] They kept it up and everything like that. And next thing we knew, there was a 'for sale' sign on that building and they sold it. And then across the street from us there was another house, and all of a sudden the tenants were moving out, and they sold that one. And so I was like, 'wow this is going on.' And when we lived on Greenbrier Street, my own landlord, he was being approached by the banks. And he had several letters on his door too. So there was something going on at that time, 2012, in that neighborhood. Everybody was either losing their homes, and a whole bunch of people were moving. I remember that. [We] did too – we moved."



"I never really paid that much attention to the lot, to be honest with you, until we started paying attention to it. And I said 'Oh yeah.' It didn't stand out to me as 'they should do something with it,' or 'it's horrible.' I just didn't pay that much attention to it, I guess."
- **5-year resident of Park Street**

"I don't think I ever noticed that lot until we started going there. [...] But then when I started walking up the hill, I noticed the lot [...] And I said 'wow, that's a nice looking lot. It's little but it's a lot, you know.' And then my husband met [BNCLT's community organizer] [...] He kept going, 'you should go, you should go.' Now he likes to be there too."
- **36-year resident of Park Street**



After the 1 year period, the city begins to explore new owners and uses for the property. The City went through this process with 381 Park Street, and now owns the lot.¹

2021- Present In July 2021, the Boston Neighborhood Community Land Trust (BNCLT) obtained a City license to activate the vacant lot at 381 Park Street for community use.



BNCLT had been connected to Park Street since 2012, when it acquired 349 Park Street as a way to protect the property and its tenants from foreclosure (see Vacant Lot History #1 for details).⁷ BNCLT's mission is to combat displacement and foster community control in the Dorchester, Mattapan, and Roxbury neighborhoods.

In partnership with neighbors, BNCLT built a community garden at 381 Park Street. Since then, BNCLT and Park Street residents have hosted a variety of neighborhood events here, including a garden building and lot envisioning event, a Halloween party, a stage building event, and several community potlucks. Today, the lot has two garden beds, a stage, a picnic table, a grill, and a little free library. This booklet, along with the response board, are the newest additions to the lot.

Now, even more Park Street residents have started to notice, enjoy, take care of, and take ownership over the vacant lot at 381 Park Street. Different residents have reflected on the vacant lot activation:

What was the 2008 foreclosure crisis?

The 2008 foreclosure crisis produced a wave of foreclosures in the Greater Four Corners Area, where Park Street is located.⁵ One of the main causes of the crisis was the deregulation of banks.

Banks were supposed to make sure that homebuyers would be able to pay off their mortgages, but during the George W. Bush administration, the federal government did not properly regulate banks. In the early 2000s, banks would give homebuyers mortgages even if they could not pay them off. Banks would then sell those mortgages to other banks and investors as a way of making money.

For a time, house prices were going up, which allowed homebuyers AND banks to make money.

But in 2008, house prices started going down, and mortgage interest rates started going up. Many people were unable to pay off their mortgages. Banks and homeowners lost a huge amount of money.

The federal government helped banks recover their lost profits. Many homeowners, however, faced foreclosure and lost their homes.⁶

What was the Coalition for Occupied Homes in Foreclosure (COHIF, which is now BNCLT)?

COHIF (now BNCLT) was created by a coalition of organizations in Boston as a response to the foreclosure crisis in 2008. COHIF wanted to find solutions to allow residents (including owners and tenants) of foreclosed properties to stay in their homes. In 2012, COHIF (now BNCLT) launched the Greater Four Corners Pilot Project. In this project, COHIF, partners, and 200 tenants campaigned and identified potential properties in Four Corners to acquire. By 2014, COHIF had successfully acquired four properties (11 homes), including 349 Park Street. COHIF renamed and restructured to become the Boston Neighborhood Community Land Trust in 2019, to fully embrace community governance and ownership.⁷

The exact set of reasons why 349 Park Street went into foreclosure are not clear. What we do know is that 349 Park Street was one of many houses in the Greater Four Corners Area that went into foreclosure during this period. This neighborhood, which had a high percentage of people of color and low-income households, also had a disproportionately high rate of foreclosure compared with the City of Boston at large.⁵

In 2008, Dorchester had the highest foreclosure rate in the city and the fourth highest rate statewide. Foreclosures in Dorchester were highly concentrated in the Greater Four Corners Area.⁵

And still, nearby residents noticed and took care of the lots. They removed the trash people had dumped. They shoveled the sidewalk in front of the lot when it snowed. And they asked the city to take responsibility. The same resident continues:

"We [fought] the city to come and clean up the lot, because the lot had a lot of glass and the bushes like this tall. And they had to come several times. I think I paid some person twice to clean it up."

- 35-year resident of Park Street

Residents discussed the vacant lot at the local Neighborhood Association meeting, and organized to get a fence installed.

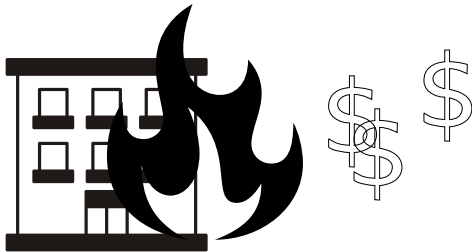
2017 In 2017, the City of Boston acquired the vacant lot at 381 Park Street.¹

Why did the city acquire 381 Park Street?

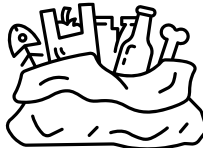
If a property owner does not pay taxes on their property for a long period of time, the City of Boston notifies the owner or the owner's heirs and begins a land court process. If a property owner comes forward during this process to pay their taxes, the city withdraws the case and the owner may keep their property. If a property owner does not come forward, the city will seek a "final judgment of foreclosure" from the land court, after which the city takes possession of the property. After that, the former property owner has an additional year to pay their back taxes and take the property back.

We don't know the exact set of reasons that the house at 381 Park Street burned down. But we do know that it was one of many houses to burn in this neighborhood during this time period.

And different sources suggest that in some cases, burning houses was more profitable than maintaining houses inhabited by residents for real estate owners and banks.¹²⁻¹³



2000s Once 381 Park Street became a vacant lot, it remained inaccessible for many potential owners, who would have had to pay off the unpaid taxes of the previous owner. One resident recalls:



"Nothing really is going on with [the] lot. [...] We had a lot of people, bringing their trash, people bringing in their dogs [...] When the dog[s] poop, that's like lobster to the rats."

- 35-year resident of Park Street



After City Life/Vida Urbana prevented 349 Park Street from being sold at auction, the Park Street resident explained:

"COHIF [now BNCLT] stepped in and bought the house. Through a series of investors. So it would take it out of foreclosure and we could stay there. And they were doing the same to [...] three other homes."

Meanwhile, the garage lot at 357 Park Street continued to be owned by the former owner of 349 Park Street.

2019 In 2019, the City of Boston acquired the garage lot at 357 Park Street. Around that time, the remaining vehicles in the lot were removed. The city is planning to demolish the garage building in the summer of 2022.

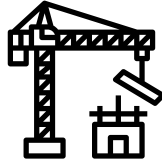


Why did the city acquire 357 Park Street?

If a property owner does not pay taxes on their property for a long period of time, the City of Boston notifies the owner or the owner's heirs and begins a land court process. If a property owner comes forward during this process to pay their taxes, the city withdraws the case and the owner may keep their property. If a property owner does not come forward, the city will seek a "final judgment of foreclosure" from the land court, after which the city takes possession of the property. After that, the former property owner has an additional year to pay their back taxes and take the property back. After the 1 year period, the city begins to explore new owners

and uses for the property. The City went through this process with 357 Park Street, and now owns the lot.¹

2022 Today, the Boston Neighborhood Community Land Trust (BNCLT) — the organization that was once COHIF — is looking at the 357 Park Street garage lot, and working with neighbors to envision potential future uses. These potential uses include community-controlled affordable housing, green space, and public art.



Help add to, and reflect on, this history!

Please answer the response questions and pin them to the response board at 381 Park Street:



1. What do you remember about the Park Street vacant lots and surrounding neighborhood?
2. What do you hope for the future of the Park Street vacant lots and surrounding neighborhood?

To answer using a smartphone, scan here:



Why were there so many fires in Fields Corner?

From the 1950s to the 1980s, there were many building fires throughout Dorchester and Roxbury, leaving many vacant lots. Some sources trace these fires to government, banking, and real estate policies and practices. These policies and practices led to disinvestment, foreclosure, abandonment, vacancy, and declining property values in Dorchester and Roxbury. At the same time, they incentivized arson as a way for real estate owners and banks to recover the value of their properties and even make a profit.

Here's an example:

During the 20th century, redlining was a common practice among banks. Redlining was the process by which banks denied loans for property ownership in neighborhoods with residents of color, while maximizing profits in white suburban neighborhoods.

Redlining caused businesses to close, property values to decline, landlords to stop repairs and abandon buildings, mortgages to go unpaid, and banks to foreclose on homes.

Arson became a way for real estate owners and banks to recover their lost profits. When a building burned, real estate owners and banks could receive payment for lost property value from insurance companies, or tax write-offs on their losses.¹²⁻¹³

Each owes Boston \$1000 or more in taxes

OWNER	LOCATION	1977
Barrett, James R., Trst., 33 Whitman St.....		3,406
Barry, Anna E., 381 Park St.....		1,896
Becker, Morris L. et al. 30 Burt St.....		1,225

1983 Seven years later, on 1/26/1984, *The Boston Globe* reported that two fires had taken place at 381 Park Street. One fire on 5/13/1983 was identified as having a “suspicious” cause, and its damage was valued at \$1,000. Another fire on 6/26/1983 was identified as having an “incendiary” cause, and its damage was valued at \$20,000.¹¹



Fires In and near Fields Corner In 1983			
Overall there were 50 building fires with a total loss of \$607,525			
Key to causes			
00-undetermined			
11-incendiary			
21-suspicious			
381-383 Park St.	6/26	11	\$20,000
381-383 Park St.	5/13	21	\$1,000

Fires were common in the neighborhood at this time. *The Boston Globe* article emphasized that 50 building fires had taken place in 1983 in Fields Corner, and valued the loss of property at \$607,525.

Vacant Lot History #2: 381 Park Street

A story of how discriminatory practices led to a fire and a vacant lot, and local residents took ownership over the space



In the 2000s, a couple of Park Street residents discussed acquiring the vacant lot at 381 Park Street. But when they talked about it with the City of Boston, they were told that there were many unpaid taxes on the property, which they would have to pay off.

One resident hoped to turn the lot into a parking lot, to address the lack of parking options on the street. The resident remembered:

"One person tell you one thing, and then [the] next thing, and then they said to us that the taxes on the thing – we have to get in touch with the owner. And then they called it the abandoned property [...] And the taxes had to be paid off, and all of that."
- 35-year resident of Park Street

Ultimately, paying off the taxes was too expensive, and negotiating with the city was too complicated and confusing. The residents did not end up acquiring the vacant lot.

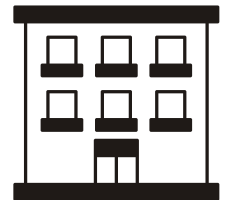
The residents' experience raised the questions:

- Why were there so many unpaid taxes on the property?
- Why was there a vacant lot here in the first place?
- How could residents take ownership over the property and shape the future of the lot?

As with Vacant Lot History #1, we have turned to conversations with residents, and other longtime neighbors, to explore the story of this vacant lot. Online city archives, secondary sources, and help from the Dorchester Historical Society and City staff also filled in some of the gaps.

Here's what we know so far:

1904-1918 Over a hundred years ago, between 1904 and 1918, a house was built at 381 Park Street. By 1918 it was owned by someone named Jos. Rugo, who also owned 377 Park Street next door.³



1924 In 1924, a certificate identified Patrick Feeney and Honora Feeney as the owners of 381 Park Street.⁸



1953 Almost thirty years after that, in 1953, a certificate identified Patrick Feeney, Joseph Patrick Feeney, Anna E. Barry, Mary E. Osborne, and John Stanton Feeney as the owners of 381 Park Street.⁹

Anna E. Barry continued to own the property for the next several decades.

1977 On 6/28/1977, *The Boston Globe* published a list of property owners who owed the city over \$1000 in taxes. Anna E. Barry, the owner of 381 Park Street, was one of the people listed.¹⁰