



## An Overview of Project VITAL: Vacant lot Improvement to Transform Adolescent Lives

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# Background

People living near vacant lots and abandoned buildings exhibit poor health:

- Studies have shown that such spaces provoke fear, anxiety, and depression for nearby neighbors (Burt et al., 2021; Garven et al., 2012)

BUT....Greening vacant lots by removing trash, mowing, and enhancing them with landscaping or gardens has been shown to reduce crime and violence (Branas et al., 2018; Kondo et al, 2016), improve perceptions of neighborhood safety (Branas et al., 2018), and promote mental health (South et al, 2015, 2018).



› PARKS AND PEOPLE

Upton

# What about adolescents?

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- While most research to date has focused on adult residents, far less is known about the impact of greening on adolescents.
  - Even though adolescents spend more time in the areas surrounding their homes than adults, AND
  - Neighborhood research shows that adolescents have much different experiences and perceptions of neighborhood compared to adults
- Evidence on the impact of greenspace and adolescent health does show that:
  - Living next to greenspace improves adolescent development (Sprague et al., 2012)
  - Engaging in young people in greening activities improves employment opportunities (City of Atlanta, 2017)
  - Exposure is positively associated with emotional resilience, increased happiness, and lower incidences of psychiatric disorders especially among those who live in urban environments (Fleckney and Bentley, 2021)

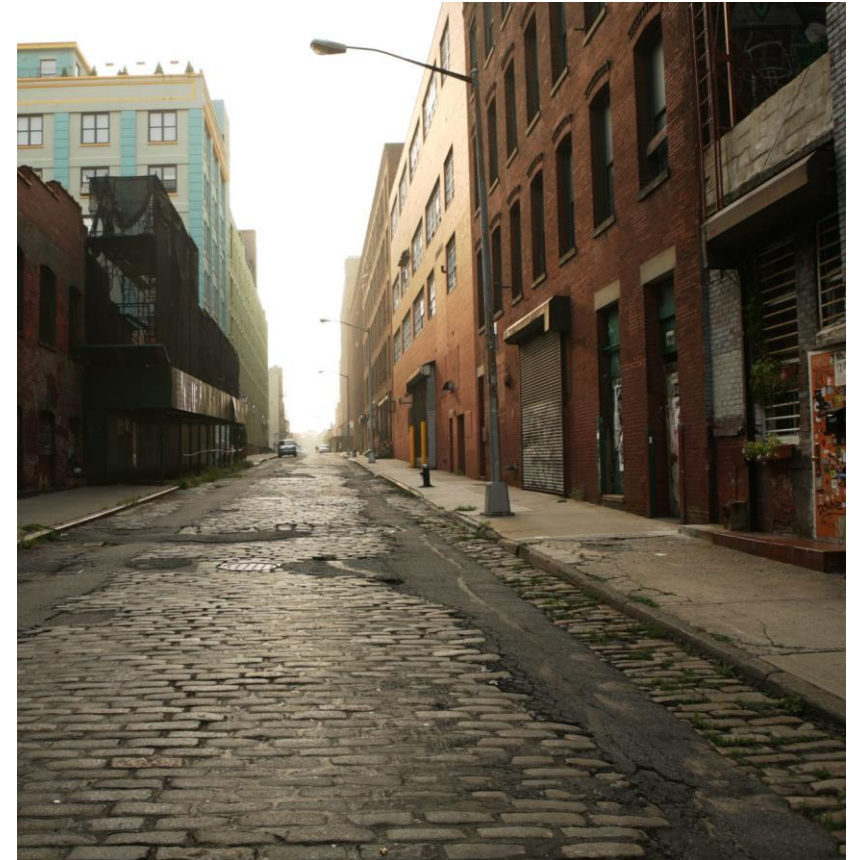




# Situation in Baltimore

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- Baltimore City has over 20,000 vacant lots and additional 17,000 abandoned buildings (Baltimore Green Network)
  - Approximately 900 vacant lots have been greened to date; but restoration is variable
    - Mowing and trash pick up
    - Community gardens
    - Raised flowerbeds and tree planting
    - Art murals
- The City and many other NGOs have a plan to 'clean and green' every vacant lot... and this provides us with a great opportunity to examine the impact of various restoration activities on the health of adolescent residents



# SCIBAR Award (Support for Creative Integrated Basic and Applied Research)

- Overall study goal: To determine whether vacant lot restoration strategies reduce health disparities among young people, including what types of restoration works best, for whom, and why.
- Short-term objectives:
  1. Build a sharable database containing key characteristics of restored and unrestored vacant lots;
  2. Conduct a mixed-methods longitudinal study on changes in adolescent health associated with exposure to vacant lot restoration
  3. Embed a cost-effectiveness study to determine the impact of different restoration programs on youth crime and violence; mental health; and food insecurity; and
  4. Develop and disseminate a blueprint for reducing adolescent health disparities through lot restoration strategies that can be adapted for different U.S. municipalities.

# Longitudinal study

## Adolescent Survey:

- 3 main health outcomes: violence; mental health, and food insecurity
- Data will be collected among approximately 600 adolescents aged 14-19 years

## In-depth interviews:

- Approximately 21-24 adolescents aged 14-19 years who live next to restored vacant lots (with varying levels of quality) will be interviewed to gather perceptions of impact of restored vacant lots

## Observations :

- Restored lots within 2 blocks of survey sample will be observed to identify type of greening and quality



# A few scenes from survey launch:

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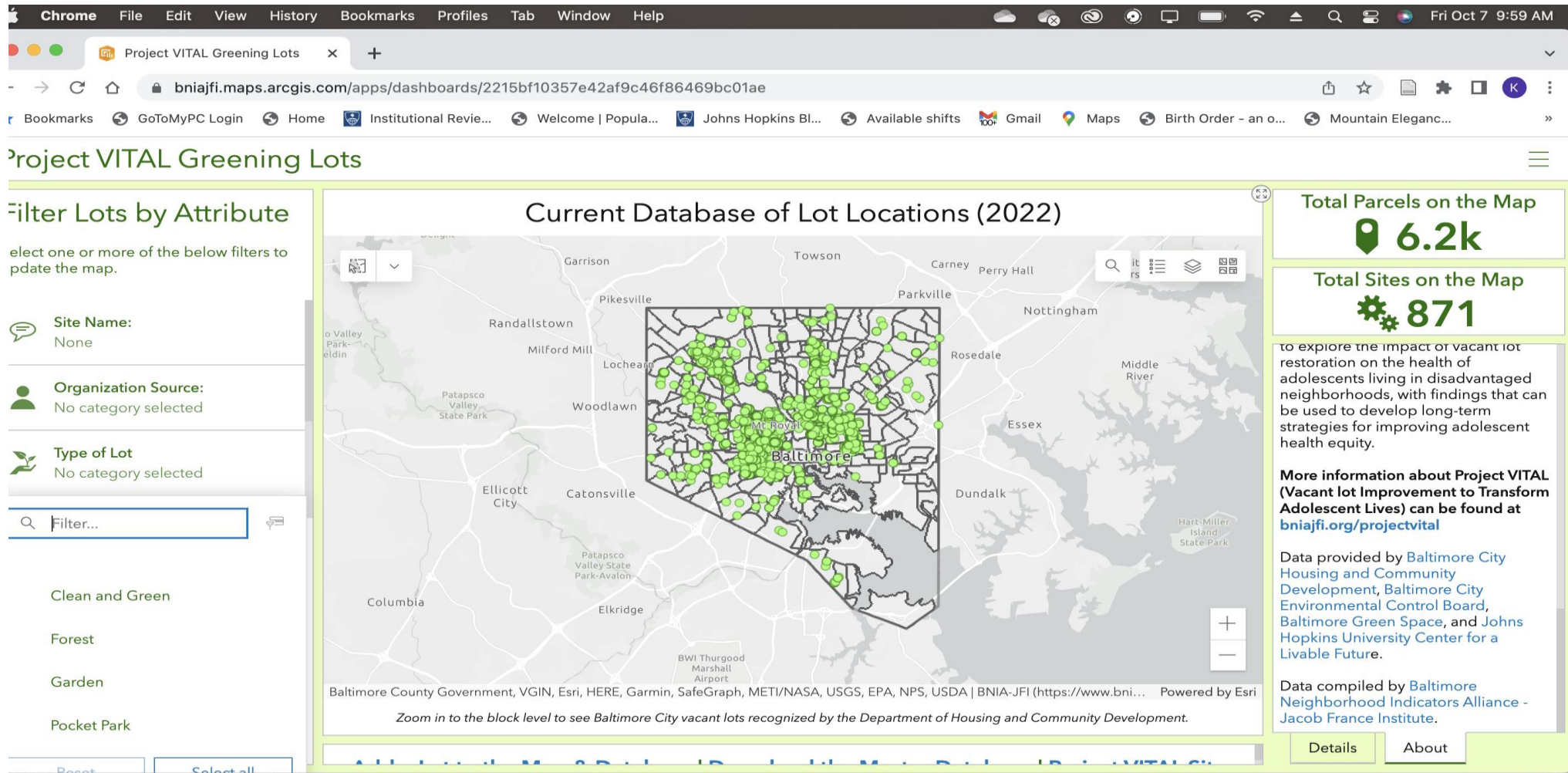


# Our Team

- A multi-sectoral collaboration of individuals and organizations including:
  - **Researchers** across four different departments in JHSPH, University of Maryland, Baltimore Neighborhood Indicator Alliance at University of Baltimore, as well as the U.S.D.A Forest Service
  - **State and local agencies**, including the Baltimore Office of Sustainability, DPW, and the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development, and
  - **Community-based organizations**, including Baltimore Green Space, Parks and People Foundation, Civic Works, and National Recreation and Parks Association



# Database to date





THANK YOU!!