Lot(s) is an ongoing program working to turn vacant lots into community spaces authored by people in the neighborhood. Lot(s) involves residents, students and artists in an exploration and active use of knowledge imbedded within the community to create places that facilitate and commemorate local history while looking towards social and ecological goals of the future. These goals include empowering youth through their participation in designing of green spaces that beautify their neighborhoods, creating a sense of ownership among residents who participated in the design process and creating spaces for community and conversation. This collaboration between community members and artists in the creation of neighborhood spaces brings together local knowledge and a diverse resource base to address several of the desires and challenges concerning the creation of a neighborhood space. We are activating a network of overlapping interests in the same physical and ideological spaces by making connections between existing resources and organizations.

The Maypole Garden is the first project undertaken by the Lot(s) program, began in the spring of 2007. This community space is designed by youth enrolled in a vocational training/college preparation program in response to ongoing feedback from residents. Lot(s) seeks to empower residents through their role in designing community spaces and participating in hosting community events. Ongoing existence of community spaces is dependent on a sense of ownership and care instilled within those for whom the place was created.

The site for the Maypole Garden is located in East Garfield Park on Chicago’s west side. East Garfield Park is a unique neighborhood in Chicago. The neighborhood was decimated by arson, rioting and looting during 1968 in response to the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The neighborhood has not recovered from what happened in forty years ago. One in every three properties remains abandoned or is a vacant lot.

Lot(s) is requesting funding to successfully complete the Maypole Garden Project. Lot(s) is working to provide a transferable model by creating the Maypole Garden. In order to continue the process of making community-authored green spaces into the future it is essential to have a well-executed project as a model.

With the momentum and relationships developed, the funding is the final piece needed to create the garden. With funding the Lot(s) program will be able to accomplish construction and planting for the Maypole Garden Project, provide for its initial upkeep, (through the Maypole Block Club) and funding for classroom supplies for continuation of the Lot(s) college and vocational training program. Funding the vocational training program we will begin the community design process for another garden site in the neighborhood.

The Maypole Garden design includes:

- Community history project and mural
- Evergreen tree for Christmas celebration traditions in the neighborhood
- Iron fence to create community ownership
- Raised bed flower gardens
- Pathways made with permeable pavers for storm water management
- Maypole Block Club sign for announcements and news
- Storage for garden tools
Creating community authored spaces and empowering youth to design the world surrounding them. Lot(s) designs with ecological and social values. In making spaces that are specific to the place and people in which they are embedded, Lot(s) is using a design paradigm not solely driven by economics, but by social and ecological variables. This paradigm serves the needs and desires of the community and serves as a catalyst for relationship building.

The larger implications of community designed green spaces will be addressing how we design sustainable futures for the world. We have learned that overarching solutions globalization has provided have not answered, and perhaps worsened our deepest problems. If each situation and problem are specific to their locality, then the solutions must be attentive to this, each solution must come from the specific needs of people and places, from social and ecological concerns, from a deeper understanding of the place and origin of the problem. The collaboration of people working together to address these problems that are specific to their locale is a catalyst for social change, when we understand the influence we as people and communities can have on our direct environment. We must take responsibility for our surroundings, collectively as communities. We must make a better place for our children. With urban society being removed from nature we must create green space to foster ecological literacy and education in our communities and in our youth.