

Community Land Trusts: Combining Scale and Community Control to Advance Mixed-Income Neighborhoods

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Community land trusts (CLTs) continue to gain ground as an innovative model for achieving permanently affordable housing through community control of the land placed in trust. Large-scale implementation of the CLT model can buffer the adverse effects of displacement through gentrification, by ensuring that a lasting stock of high-quality, affordable housing remains in place even when new investments create a market-driven increase in real estate values. When CLTs control a sufficient percentage of housing in areas that are high-cost or where housing costs are rising, the neighborhood can achieve mixed-income status. This has potential to enrich residents' lives across all income levels through diverse interconnectedness and opportunities for betterment.¹

However, research continues to reveal just how challenging it is for mixed-income communities to produce benefits for lower-income people of color. Too often, communities of color that experience new investments, accompanied by an influx of more affluent and often predominately white households, report that the changes work to the benefit of the higher-income white households and the detriment of lower-income households of color. Residents of color can experience social and cultural alienation and a loss of political influence, which are often expressed in sentiments such as, "This is no longer my neighborhood." The CLT model attempts to address both the perception and the reality of these shifts in power and culture by placing the residents of homes on the CLT's land in key leadership and decision making positions and by putting the needs of low-income residents at the center of the CLT's mission.

A major debate among CLT practitioners and advocates involves the tradeoffs and tensions between "going to scale" with the housing portfolio and enacting "community control." People on one side of this debate make the case that increasing the number of homes held in trust is necessary, both for CLTs' financial sustainability and for the production and preservation of mixed-income communities. The other side argues that ever-increasing scale may inevitably erode the community's and local residents' control in decision making—a vital part of the CLT governance model.

In this essay, we suggest that pitting the straw men of scale and community control against one another does the field more harm than good. Instead, we support a theory of change

¹ Robert J. Chaskin and Mark L. Joseph, *Integrating the Inner City: The Promise and Perils of Mixed-Income Public Housing Transformation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

that reconciles and balances the two goals in order to create more comprehensive CLT-based approaches that advance racial justice and inclusive community development. But first, we explain the CLT model and its challenges.

Affordable Housing in Mixed-Income Communities Done Differently: The CLT Model

Unfortunately, the majority of new affordable housing developed in urban areas follows an ill-fated pattern²: Public funds are invested to improve disinvested communities, address poor housing conditions, and create high-quality affordable housing options. Improvements to the affordable housing stock often spur additional private real estate investments within the same area. The neighborhood is considered to be “revitalizing”—an unmanaged process that may slowly or quickly turn into gentrification. Higher property values drive up rents and property taxes, which attracts higher-income households and more private investment. This begins to push out lower-income households. Additional displacement pressure often occurs as the affordability periods for the affordable housing stock start to expire and properties revert to market-rate.³ When that happens, residents of the affordable housing also get displaced.

Within this pattern there is a brief period—somewhere between revitalization and gentrification—when the community is mixed-income and, typically, more racially diverse. However, this period quickly wanes in the absence of stopgaps to prevent the pressure of displacement. Ultimately, the neighborhood may end up more segregated than it was before public investment hit the streets. CLTs provide a solution to this unanticipated consequence of development. Community land trusts are nonprofit corporations that steward community assets and provide permanently affordable housing for families and communities. CLTs acquire and secure land with a renewable ground lease (typically with a 99-year agreement) and ensure that all affordable housing on that land remains affordable in *perpetuity*. If CLTs can create a significant stock of affordable housing in neighborhoods, they act as bulwarks against gentrification and low-income resident displacement.

² There are many “colder” urban neighborhoods where this pattern does not take place, and revitalization stalls without attracting private investment.

³ Federal housing programs require that rehabbed or newly constructed housing must remain affordable anywhere from 5-30 years, which are insufficient periods to retain the affordable housing stock over the long-term.

CLTs and “community control.”

In his framework of displacement, Dan Immergluck defines *political displacement* as occurring when new residents belonging to racial and economic groups that have traditionally held more power move into a neighborhood and stifle the voice of long-time residents, which perpetuates economic and racial supremacy⁴. CLTs mitigate this type of displacement by placing current and future lower-income residents at the center of “community control” and decision making about neighborhood needs. Unlike most other nonprofits or community development corporations, the traditional CLT governance model operationalizes community control by being structured as a nonprofit, corporate-community membership organization whose members include all residents of CLT homes and other residents in the CLT service area. The members pay nominal annual dues and support the CLT’s mission. Members have decision-making authority over major decisions.

One-third of a traditional CLT’s board of directors is elected by and composed of residents living on the CLT’s land, and an equal portion is elected by and composed of members who reside within the CLT’s targeted “community” but do not live on the CLT’s land. This structure balances the interests of residents of different incomes, races, cultures, and backgrounds to ensure that the uses of CLT-owned land prioritizes the needs of all members.

Through their commitment to community control, CLTs foster engagement and interconnectedness among economically and racially diverse residents to enact the CLT’s mission and decide on the prioritized uses of land owned in perpetuity by the CLT. Many CLTs also actively engage the communities where they hold land in trust through community events, educational programming, and opportunities for civic engagement.

Fig. 1: FAST FACTS ABOUT CLTs

The first CLT, [New Communities, Inc.](#), was established in Albany, GA in 1969 by local civil rights leaders, to benefit African-American* farmers who desired to advance their racial justice agenda for economic empowerment by gaining collective control over farmland and housing.

As of the end of 2016, [Grounded Solutions Network](#) estimated that there are approximately 225 CLTs in 46 states and the District of Columbia. Of those, about 60 organizations are start-ups or have no housing units. Roughly 165 CLTs have homeownership units, totaling approximately 12,000 homes. Many CLTs also have affordable rental portfolios, estimated to include 25,000 rental units.

**Editor’s note: We have recommended that essay authors use the term African-American when they are referring specifically to descendants of enslaved people in the United States and the more inclusive term black when they are referring broadly to members of the African diaspora including African Americans, Caribbean Americans, and Africans. All references in this essay to African-American, white, or Asian populations refer to non-Hispanic/Latinx individuals unless otherwise noted.*

⁴ Dan Immergluck, personal communication, February 28, 2019

CLTs and homeownership.

Depending on what the community needs, CLTs can develop rural and urban agriculture projects, commercial spaces to serve local communities, affordable rental and cooperative housing projects, or conserve land or urban green spaces. To date, however, most CLTs have focused mainly on creating homes that remain permanently affordable and thus provide successful homeownership opportunities for generations of lower-income families. The importance of this focus cannot be understated. Redlining, predatory lending, and other barriers have made homeownership through the private housing market incredibly difficult for lower-income families and households of color to attain and sustain. One study found that the probability of sustaining homeownership for longer than five years by first-time homebuyers who were low-income or people of color was equal to a coin toss—and that was *before* the foreclosure crisis.⁵

By contrast, the approach used by CLTs, shared equity homeownership, invests public resources to reduce the home's initial price and then keeps the price affordable to all future homebuyers through resale restrictions. This gives the CLT a vested interest in the property and in the homeowner's success. Homes are not treated as risky and speculative investments; rather, home are stabilizing and transformational forces. In return, the homeowners agree to sell their homes at a resale-restricted and affordable price to another lower-income homebuyer in the future. This arrangement enables the resident to own a home and build some wealth and the CLT to preserve the public's investment in making homes permanently affordable for family after family.

Evidence of CLTs' Effectiveness

CLTs have demonstrated effectiveness in increasing racial diversity and affordability; stabilizing the average household income in their neighborhoods; and maintaining middle-class ratios, education levels, and owner-occupied housing rates. Researchers have found, for instance, that:

- Homeowners in CLTs across the country were 10 times less likely to be in foreclosure proceedings and eight times less likely to be seriously delinquent than homeowners across all incomes in the private market at the peak of the foreclosure.⁶ Unlike many of their private-market counterparts, these residents were not displaced from their homes or their neighborhoods.

⁵ Carolina Katz Reid, "Achieving the American dream? A longitudinal analysis of the homeownership experiences of low-income households," (CSD Working Paper 05-20, Center for Social Development, Washington University, St. Louis, MO, 2005).

⁶ Emily Thaden, "Stable Home Ownership in a Turbulent Economy: Delinquencies and Foreclosures Remain Low in Community Land Trusts," (Working Paper WP412ET1, Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, Cambridge, MA, 2011).

- Across 124 CLT neighborhoods in 15 states, community land trusts moderated the adverse effects of gentrification between 2000 and 2010 by increasing affordability, stabilizing housing prices, and reducing displacement, compared with similar non-CLT neighborhoods.⁷ Moreover, even when gentrification is not the threat, CLTs foster a mixed-income community that grants access to opportunity and creates a thriving neighborhood for residents with modest incomes.⁸
- In a study of 58 shared equity homeownership programs and 4,108 properties over the past three decades, shared-equity homes are: (1) serving low-income homebuyers and increasingly serving people of color, (2) providing affordable homes and mortgages, (3) ensuring homeownership is sustainable, (4) building wealth for families, (5) remaining permanently affordable to serve households of the same income levels over subsequent sales, and (6) retaining the public investment in affordable housing.⁹

These findings suggest that CLTs' affordable housing can withstand skyrocketing property values, land speculation, and the influx of higher-income households—making CLTs one of the best ways to stabilize neighborhoods, preserve affordability, and build community assets in neighborhoods.

If CLTs are delivering on their promises, then why aren't they proliferating? Lack of available funding is undoubtedly the biggest problem: Affordable housing requires that homes be subsidized to a below-market-rate price, and federal funds for rehabilitation and construction are not growing while costs are. In this article, however, we want to focus on another challenge that is more in our collective control to change: the false dichotomy of community control, as represented by the CLT approach, versus getting to scale.

Meet the Straw Men: "Community Control" versus "Scale"

In the debate over whether CLT practitioners and advocates should focus on community *or* scale, one side says that holding considerable land in trust, containing a large number of affordable homes, is antithetical to community control. The other side insists that the time needed to cultivate real community control is a barrier to achieving scale. Grassroots groups that focus solely on community control tend to minimize efforts to build the resource systems and infrastructure that CLTs need to develop and grow their impact (e.g., enabling public policies, a

⁷ Myungshik Choi, Shannon Van Zandt, and David Matarrita-Cascante, "Can community land trusts slow gentrification?," *Journal of Urban Affairs* 40, no. 3 (2018): 394-411.

⁸ Choi et al., "Can community land trusts slow gentrification?," 394-411.

⁹ Ruoniu Wang, Claire Cahen, Arthur Acolin, Rebecca J. Walter. "Tracking Growth and Evaluating Performance of Shared Equity Homeownership Programs During Housing Market Fluctuations," (Working Paper WP19RW1, Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, Cambridge, MA, 2019).

pipeline of real estate assets, and financing) because these activities are perceived as removed from the communities the groups are trying to serve. Conversely, groups that focus solely on scale tend to minimize community organizing and planning, resident empowerment, community ownership, and authentic place-based leadership of the CLT. The former approach fails to achieve the accumulation and development of enough land to foster mixed-income communities, and the latter approach fails to achieve enough resident empowerment and decision making to ensure that cultural and political displacement are prevented.

Two trends in current CLT development efforts exacerbate the debate. One is that more and more grassroots community groups are interested in bringing community land trusts to their communities. These grassroots efforts often are highly effective at organizing the community and garnering resident-driven plans for the CLT, but they rarely succeed in obtaining land and bringing development to fruition; when they do, it is often as a one-off small development, or the CLT ekes out a couple of homes per year. In these cases, the community organizers often misconstrue the CLT model as “operating outside of the market” or want their CLT to subvert capitalism. They don’t accept the fact that developers, government staff, and real estate and housing investors are vital partners for obtaining land, funding, and financing CLT community assets—just as they are for all affordable housing development—or they fear that scaling the CLT will mean sacrificing neighborhood-based decision making. Ironically, this stance can result in community residents losing the ability to control neighborhood land, and the disappointment and distrust that follows may (unjustly) be attached to the CLT concept rather than its implementation.

Another trend is that some CLTs are being successfully established as “programs” operated by nonprofit organizations. Sometimes these programs are adept at obtaining land and producing affordable housing, but they lack meaningful community control and resident authority because they are not governed by a corporate community membership and do not have community residents and leaseholders on their boards. Because the parent nonprofit has other lines of business and existing bylaws that compete for representative governance, community control of the CLT gets scant attention, or superficial community engagement is deemed sufficient. In the worst cases, a nonprofit takes the paternalistic or racist stance that facilitating authentic community control would hinder the pace of developing and scaling up the community land trust.

A Reconciled Approach: Scaling Up Community Control

We argue that scale is not the enemy of community control; nor is community and resident leadership the enemy of scaling up the number of permanently affordable homes. Without community buy-in and accountability, the resources and will to scale up will not persist, which in turn means that permanently affordable homes are unlikely to be created and preserved.

Land is power, and people united is power. Hence, we need to adopt a reconciled approach that advances both control of land at scale *and* democratic community decision making to achieve gains for residents, neighborhoods, cities, and society. Under a CLT approach that gives equal priority to community control and impact from scale, the systems and structures of land use policy and the housing finance and real estate industries may be fully utilized, so that communities can gain land in trust and hold CLTs accountable to their mission when scaled.

A reconciled approach holds the most promise for significantly impacting communities by holding racial and economic justice and integration at the heart of the CLT. Fundamentally, grassroots activists are best suited for community organizing and campaigning for political will, resources, and enabling policies that will support consistent and meaningful growth of the CLT's land holdings and affordable housing. Nonprofits that either are CLTs or have CLT programs should be doubling down on community control of land so it can be leveraged into community buy-in and leadership for advocacy, vital ingredients for reaching scale. Put differently, if lower-income residents and residents of color are in control of land, then the CLT can support the mobilization and empowerment of those residents and the broader community to demand land and resources from public and private entities and enable development to fulfill the needs of residents. The result can be mixed-income communities that not only survive through market pressures but thrive through diverse interconnectedness.

CLTs Realizing a Reconciled Approach: Three Examples

The three cases that follow profile CLTs developed at different points in time by diverse actors that have, or are working to adopt, approaches that concurrently prioritize community control and scaling up. [Dudley Neighbors](#) is the story of a *grassroots organizing effort* that created a CLT subsidiary to pursue land acquisition with community control, recognizing that residents needed to garner power and control over the fate of their neighborhood. [City of Lakes Community Land Trust](#) is the story of a *coalition* that formed and decided a city-wide CLT was needed, leading to the mobilization of communities across neighborhoods and, ultimately, formation of a new community around the CLT's mission and governance. In this example, a network of CLTs across the state, along with residents and community stakeholders, effectively foster resources. [Houston Community Land Trust](#) is the story of a *local government* that is bringing political will, land, and major financial resources to the table, ushering forward the CLT idea brought forward by community groups as a needed tool. It holds promise to be the fastest-growing CLT that develops community control across neighborhoods.

These cases illustrate how CLTs can use various reconciled approaches to advance both community control and the growth of land in trust. They also support that balancing these two priorities must be an ongoing, intentional endeavor.

Dudley Neighbors, Inc. and Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative.

Like so many other inner-city neighborhoods across the country, the Dudley and Roxbury neighborhood in the city of Boston experienced extreme disinvestment in the 1970s and early 1980s. What was once an almost entirely white neighborhood in 1950 experienced white flight to such an extreme that only 14 percent of the population remained white by 1990, and the neighborhood lost roughly 40 percent of its total population. The poverty and unemployment rates for residents was almost double that of Boston. Real estate development stopped in the neighborhood, while slumlords and speculative land owners moved in to make money from operating unsafe, substandard housing and holding land. Meanwhile, waste removal companies and private companies illegally used vacant parcels as their dumping grounds.

By the mid-1980s, residents had had enough.¹⁰ In 1984 they formed the [Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative](#) (DSNI), a community-based planning and organizing nonprofit, to reclaim their neighborhood. DSNI's mission is "to empower Dudley residents to organize, plan for, create and control a vibrant, diverse and high-quality neighborhood in collaboration with community partners."¹¹ Within the decade, Dudley residents had completed a comprehensive planning process to address the 1,300 parcels of abandoned land in the neighborhood. The City of Boston adopted their comprehensive plan, which included the creation of a community land trust called Dudley Neighbors, Inc. (DNI).

In an historic act of relinquishing control to an organized community, the city granted DNI the power of eminent domain for abandoned properties within the 62 acres of the Dudley Triangle. The community land trust hired staff, including neighborhood residents and people with experience in financing and development, and they began implementing the community's plan. Today, DNI holds more than 30 acres of formerly vacant and abandoned land in trust. This land now includes 227 affordable homes and over 10 more in the development pipeline—some shared-equity and some rentals—as well as commercial space, a commercial greenhouse, urban farm, gardens, parks, and playgrounds.

Neighborhood residents continue to control development activities in the Dudley neighborhood through the formal review and approval of all new projects and by the neighborhood initiative's governance structure. Thirty-two of the seats on the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative's 34-member board are up for election every two years, and neighborhood residents are educated on the elections and candidates before casting their ballots. Sixteen board seats are for representatives of the racial and ethnic groups that reside in Dudley, including blacks (4), Latinos (4), Cape Verdeans (4), and Caucasians (4), and three board seats are for youth representatives. The community land trust's board is composed of nine members,

¹⁰ Peter Medoff and Holly Sklar, *Streets of Hope: The Rise and Fall of an Urban Neighborhood*. (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1994); and *Holding Ground: The Rebirth of Dudley Street*, directed by Leah Mahan and Mark Lipman, (1996; Boston, MA: Holding Ground Productions.)

¹¹ Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, accessed August 26, 2019, <https://www.dsni.org/>.

of which two non-voting seats are held by state legislators. In order to prevent election fatigue, six of the nine voting members are appointed by the DSNI board, and four of those board members live or work on the land in trust. The remaining seats are appointments by the Neighborhood Council, city council member, and mayor.

Dudley Neighbors, Inc., was established to “realize a vision of development without displacement.”¹² DSNI leaders established the community land trust as a separate nonprofit subsidiary because they expected that, as the community organizing entity, DSNI would dissolve after resident leadership was cultivated, community planning was completed, and the land was acquired. They also wanted to ensure that the practical constraints of development being handled by DNI were addressed separately from the broad-based community visioning and planning process organized by DSNI. Ultimately, community members decided to continue with both entities as complimentary anchor institutions so that DSNI could foster youth and resident leadership development, raise funds, and facilitate training, organizing, and community-requested programs while DNI continued acquiring land, overseeing development, and stewarding a growing portfolio on behalf of the community.

DSNI/DNI is an example of a community land trust that has kept resident control of land at the forefront without sacrificing scale in its land holdings. In fact, scaling the trust’s portfolio to enact residents’ vision was a primary driver of community organizing. When the long-standing Boston Mayor Tom Menino left office in 2014, DSNI and DNI advocated to ensure that eminent domain and political will for the community land trust remained intact during changes in city leadership and staff. Impressively, during the start of Mayor Martin J. Walsh’s first term, John Barros—a Dudley resident, former youth leader, and current executive director of DSNI—became the city’s chief of economic development.

Once deemed “undesirable” and “blighted,” the Dudley neighborhood now faces encroaching pressure from private development. Luckily, through the land trust the community continues to have the right to claim vacant land, and community control continues to grow larger and stronger. Dudley is now a mixed-income, racially diverse community that practices neighborly engagement and collective advocacy to attract resources, influence private real estate developers, maintain political will, and position long-time residents as the leaders and beneficiaries of community change. Because the community land trust ensures that there will always be homes for lower-income households, the neighborhood should remain economically and racially integrated.

City of Lakes Community Land Trust.

In many ways, Minneapolis is the quintessential midwestern city. In the 1950s, new highways and inexpensive mortgages lured the mostly white middle class to the suburbs. As that trend continued into the 1980s, the city’s population fell. During the same period, the Twin

¹² Dudley Neighbors, Inc., accessed August 26, 2019, <https://www.dudleynighbors.org/>.

Cities' racial diversity increased, as churches sponsored refugees and immigrants from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam in the 1970s; the former Soviet Union in the 1980s; and Somalia, Ethiopia, and Liberia in the 1990s. The people who remained in Minneapolis as the suburbs grew included a larger proportion of people of color, both because of diversification overall and due to redlining in the suburbs. Minneapolis' population began to grow again in the 1990s. The city's population is now double the 1950 total and approximately 60 percent white.¹³

As the Minneapolis housing market began to heat up in 2001, driven by the growth in population and the large proportion of households needing affordable housing, a coalition formed in South Minneapolis. Members included the [Powderhorn Residents Group](#), [Seward Redesign](#), [Powderhorn Park Neighborhood Association](#), and the [Lyndale Neighborhood Development Corporation](#). Through research and community meetings, coalition members realized that the entire city could benefit from a community land trust. They incorporated the City of Lakes Community Land Trust (CLCLT) in fall 2002.¹⁴

As a city-wide rather than neighborhood-based community land trust, CLCLT took a different approach to engaging residents and fostering community control. CLT staff conducted intensive education and outreach to neighborhood associations and community groups, presenting the land trust as an asset or tool residents could use if they felt pressure from outside development. As Executive Director Jeff Washburne said in a 2007 interview:

We've gone out and met with all of the Minneapolis neighborhood organizations. We went to their meetings and talked about the land trust, but didn't ask them to provide us with anything. We wanted them to see us as a community asset, but one that doesn't require any neighborhood resources. The only thing we asked of them was to think about the CLT model, particularly if there was potential for a housing development to be built in their neighborhood. Our message was, "If you and your neighbors feel that the development requires affordability—especially long-term affordability—then your neighborhood association should suggest that the developer come and talk to us." In more than one instance, neighborhood groups have told developers to talk to us before the groups would agree to move forward on a project.¹⁵

¹³ Greta Kaul, "Minneapolis is growing at its fastest rate since 1950," *MinnPost*, May 23, 2018, <https://www.minnpost.com/politics-policy/2018/05/minneapolis-growing-its-fastest-rate-1950/>. Minnesota State Demographic Center, "Minnesota Now, Then, When... An Overview of Demographic Change," August 28, 2019, https://mn.gov/admin/assets/2015-04-06-overview-MN-demographic-changes_tcm36-74549.pdf.

¹⁴ City of Lakes Community Land Trust, accessed August 28, 2019, <http://www.clclt.org/>.

¹⁵ Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, "A conversation with Jeff Washburne -- Director, City of Lakes Community Land Trust," accessed on August 28, 2019. https://www.minneapolisfed.org/publications/community-dividend/a-conversation-with-jeff-washburne-director-city-of-lakes-community-land-trust?sc_device=Default.

City of Lakes CLT has a 15-person board composed of one-third lessees and one-third community members. Approximately 350 community members across Minneapolis, along with the residents living on land in trust, form the corporate community membership.¹⁶ By the end of 2018, the CLCLT had 272 homeownership units and four rental units maintained as permanently affordable in the trust and was on track to have about 40 more homes for sale. The proportion of CLCLT homeowners who are persons of color has reached 53 percent, relative to only 24 percent of all homeowners in Minneapolis.¹⁷ CLCLT leaders hope to acquire more land and create as many permanently affordable homes as possible before Minneapolis becomes a runaway market like some other cities, rendering it prohibitively expensive to create mixed-income communities. They plan to rehabilitate or construct homes in neighborhoods that have not experienced major “warming” yet as well as working in areas that have already gentrified. The latter is harder because it costs more, but the CLT is strategically tracking tax foreclosure sales and has a program that allows prospective homeowners to find homes in the market and bring them into the CLT.

As the CLT’s portfolio and number of residents increased and their relationships in the broader community has grown, a community of residents, stakeholders, and supporters formed around the CLT and helps to drive its success. Residents have testified in public, at budget hearings, and to their city council to ensure that resources are maintained for affordable housing and directed to shared equity homeownership. Residents and community members show up when mobilized by the CLT for advocacy, and they open their homes and share their stories with policymakers and prospective funders of the CLT. As importantly, City of Lakes CLT joins with other CLTs across the state to promote partnerships and resources through their state housing finance agency, [Minnesota Housing](#), which provides subsidies to CLTs through competitive grantmaking and mortgages for CLT homebuyers.

Now community members are calling upon the CLT for two new endeavors. One involves acquiring or creating commercial developments to be held in trust. Pressure is mounting on Minneapolis’ light-rail corridors and nodes, so council members and their constituents are asking the CLT to secure land for businesses needed by the community or to help preserve commercial spaces so that small-business owners are not displaced. The hope is that the CLT can stem the tides of both economic and cultural displacement, but it has yet to be seen if the city will come up with needed financial resources for this endeavor. Second, tenant advocacy groups have asked the CLT to explore the creation and preservation of limited equity cooperatives (LECs) on land held in trust. This will not only prevent displacement of existing residents but also ensure that the land is forever dedicated to affordable housing, while the buildings will be directly governed by the LEC residents.

¹⁶ City of Lakes Community Land Trust, “2018 Annual Report,” accessed on August 28, 2019, http://www.clclt.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Final-Annual-Report_10232018.pdf.

¹⁷ Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, “A conversation with Jeff Washburne,” 2019.

CLT Director Washburne sees the community requests as evidence of success. “When we started this work, racial equity and displacement were not being talked about, so we couldn’t really lead with that kind of message,” he observes. “Sixteen years later, we lead with the importance of community control of land for racial justice and mixed-income communities. I think we’re at a turning point where we have clout with funders and can work the systems for community control. So, we want more grassroots groups telling us where to go and what to do. We want them to drive, and we’ll be the horsepower.”¹⁸

City of Houston and the Houston Community Land Trust.

As community land trusts have gained attention as a tool to buffer gentrification while providing stable, permanently affordable homeownership and rental opportunities, a growing number of municipalities are the lead in launching CLTs. One such place is Houston, TX. Nonprofit organizations and neighborhood groups, such as [Row House Community Development Corporation](#) and [Emancipation Economic Development Council](#), began exploring the CLT concept in 2015 as a way to address mounting concerns over realized and anticipated increases in housing values and gentrification in predominantly black neighborhoods. Residents of Third Ward, for instance, saw housing values climb 176% from 2000 to 2013; more recently, high-end development came with a \$34 million redevelopment of Emancipation Park.¹⁹ Listening to residents and community leaders, the city worked with Grounded Solutions Network to begin exploration and planning for a community land trust.²⁰

And then on August 24, 2017, Hurricane Harvey hit, and the city moved into crisis mode. Well over a year later, Houston—along with the other areas affected in Texas—was still waiting to receive \$5 billion in Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) funds. As noted in the *New York Times*, communities of color were disproportionately affected and hurting from the storm’s impact; as Mayor Sylvester Turner stated, “There are thousands of families who live in low-income communities who already were operating at the margins before Harvey, and the storm pushed them down even further.”²¹

Despite the disaster, the city resumed working with Grounded Solutions Network in 2018 to develop a community land trust. The [Housing and Community Development Department](#) realized that the CLT might be a critical tool during rebuilding to serve lower-income families and communities of color who were displaced or had their neighborhoods destroyed by the storm, and to help bring racial equity and economic integration to rebuild Houston neighborhoods. They worked to align other local resources, policies, and tools with the future

¹⁸ Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, “A conversation with Jeff Washburne,” 2019.

¹⁹ Leah Binkovitz, “In Houston, A Radical Approach to Affordable Housing,” *Urban Edge Blog*, June 6, 2018, <https://kinder.rice.edu/2018/06/06/houston-radical-approach-affordable-housing>.

²⁰ Grounded Solutions Network, “Community Land Trust Business Plan,” accessed on August 28, 2019, <https://www.houstontx.gov/council/committees/housing/20170201/community-land-trust.pdf>.

²¹ Manny Fernandez, “A Year After Hurricane Harvey, Houston’s Poorest Neighborhoods Are Slowest to Recover,” *New York Times*, September 3, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/03/us/hurricane-harvey-houston.html>.

CLT. This effort included using the [Houston Land Bank](#) to usher properties over to the community land trust and planning to bring multimillion-dollar funding to CLT development through [Tax Increment Reinvestment Zones](#). After working with Grounded Solutions and other consultants to build out the framework and business model, the city then created a new nonprofit organization, the Houston Community Land Trust.

City leaders realized that the CLT could not be a governmental entity; rather, it had to be an independently governed nonprofit and advocate on behalf of the communities where it works to ensure the CLT is sustainable beyond political changes. In partnership with community stakeholders, city staff held community events to inform and gather input from community members and stakeholders. Over the course of a year, the board of directors was recruited, the first two staff were hired, and the CLT has broken ground on its first three homes. Leaders expect to add over 50 homes by the end of 2019 while staff and board members continue to convene public education events, conduct outreach to resident groups, and build relationships with leaders in the neighborhoods where the CLT will work.

The Houston CLT is positioned to be the fastest-growing CLT in the nation due to the enabling policies, resources, and city support. However, the CLT will have a daunting task of building resident leadership and community control as it grows and works in different neighborhoods across Houston. Similar to City of Lakes CLT, the intent is to partner with community organizations and neighborhood groups, offering a tool that communities can deploy to build high-quality, affordable housing that will last in disinvested or disaster-hit areas and in areas facing gentrification and displacement pressures. Over time, the CLT plans to create a corporate community membership and adopt a new board structure (once they have residents), ensuring resident leadership and representation from the various neighborhoods where they hold land in trust. The CLT also plans to organize and mobilize communities to ensure that the resources and political will for community control of land in trust creates a mixed-income, racially integrated Houston that lasts long into the future.

Lessons Learned

Whether they are building homes in recovering, revitalizing, gentrifying, or high-opportunity areas, all of the CLTs profiled here have created or are fostering the creation and preservation of mixed-income communities in which households not only have a *place* but also a *say* over the fate of their neighborhood(s). What can we learn from these examples about using a reconciled approach?

Community engagement and control will manifest differently due to varying context.

Because of the differences in how each CLT was established, “community” is defined differently and, therefore, “community control” is manifested differently—at least in part—in each example. Part of the difference lies in how residents and other members of the community

interact with the community land trust. For Dudley Neighborhood Initiative, residents of the neighborhood (lessees and non-lessees of the CLT) are literally walking by or on the land held in trust every day. They are organized by the parent nonprofit, DSNI, to direct land disposition strategies, and residents of CLT properties have meaningful board representation. For City of Lakes, residents of CLT properties have formed a new community around the organization, representing various neighborhoods where they live in the CLT's membership, governance, and advocacy. Place-based communities call upon City of Lakes CLT to influence neighborhood development and, if they are members, approve of CLT developments. For Houston, the nonprofit CLT has just been born, so there are no residents on land held in trust yet. But community members are being informed and engaged so the CLT can form a board with resident representation and neighborhood groups can influence the CLT's development. In time, all three CLTs arguably will have meaningful community engagement and accountability to residents on land held in trust and in the broader community.

Regardless of context, larger land holdings translate to increased community control.

Focusing solely on governance and authority misses a critical component of “community control” that comes to light if we answer, “How much of the community *geographically* do community members and residents control?” Under the mission and obligations of a CLT, meaningful land holdings allot residents and community members more power. For instance, DSNI and DNI serve a small geography, but they are a force to be reckoned with for private development efforts that attempt to come into their neighborhood. City of Lakes CLT does not have the same levels of local political and financial support, and it could be due their larger service area even though they have a slightly larger and faster-growing portfolio than DNI. Meanwhile, if the Houston CLT grows at the clip expected, the CLT's residents and community membership have the potential to organize and influence private development as well as local policy and resources (if the political will fades in the future). Larger land holdings mean that the community controls more—both in terms of community development and political capital.

Community organizing groups and CLTs should maximize their distinctive roles.

A lesson learned from both DSNI and DNI as separate entities—and City of Lakes CLT now partnering with tenant advocacy groups—is that community organizing and the CLT are effective complements. Remember, CLTs are nonprofits that have made a *permanent* commitment to stewarding land for the community, so they must be perceived as reliable, productive, and effective to policymakers and funders. Grassroots community groups can do more confrontational organizing, running short-term campaigns that use direct tactics to apply political pressure for funding and policies. Consequently, grassroots community organizing groups are more often going to be better off if they remain the steadfast advocates for a CLT rather than trying to become a nonprofit CLT doing development. We believe grassroots groups will get further in their goals if they find a nonprofit partner with the capacity to house the CLT and steward the land under community control.

CLTs and their stakeholders should adopt “inside-outside” advocacy strategies for enabling policies and obtaining revenue.

Unfortunately, efforts to build enabling policies and obtain dedicated revenue for CLTs are not happening across many of the localities that would benefit from CLTs. In the absence, scale remains modest (even in the case studies). Using a reconciled approach, CLTs should adopt an “inside-outside” advocacy strategy whereby residents, community members, and advocates organize campaigns for policies and funding from outside of government, while the staff and board of the CLT lead or participate in coalitions to set strategic policy goals, coordinate stakeholders, and partner with policymakers inside government. Organized communities can push policymakers and government leaders to prioritize resources for the CLT (and to require permanent affordability when resources are deployed) and to pass enabling legislation for equitable land use and mixed-income community development. Hence, CLTs should celebrate—even cultivate—the role of residents and community members as mobilizers, organizers, and advocates. Ultimately, CLTs will not proliferate if they are simply competing against other affordable housing nonprofits for scarce existing resources. Instead, they need to mobilize communities to build an infrastructure that reliably produces land in trust and a greater number of permanently affordable homes.

Implications for Action

Adopting a reconciled approach that values both community control and meaningful land in trust will maximize creating or maintaining mixed-income communities by community land trusts. We call upon the field to never forget that land is power *and* people united is power. Below are recommendations for how to advance both.

Implications for Policy

- As CLTs are developing or pursuing sustainability, dedicated funding sources and enabling policies should be developed in tandem, which requires educating policymakers and elected officials on CLTs. This may include establishing local sources and policies (see below), as well as prioritizing permanent affordability for competitive federal funding programs, such as HOME or the Community Development Block Grant Program.
- CLTs and their stakeholders need to analyze which enabling policies and funding sources are most practical in their local and state political contexts. For instance, in places with local housing trust funds, the CLT and its stakeholders could work to ensure that the fund requires or prioritizes lasting affordability. For places using tax increment financing, CLTs and stakeholders should advocate for ensuring that a portion of homes created with Tax Increment Financing funds are permanently

affordable and stewarded by the CLT. Community land trusts and stakeholders also should advocate for new and existing land banks to provide a pipeline of discounted or donated land. Lastly, CLTs and advocates should promote inclusionary housing policies that require affordable homes to be placed in trust.

Implications for Research and Evaluation

- Research on variations in organizational structures, governance structures, community memberships, and resident and community leadership and engagement activities should examine the impact on “community control” and growth.
- Further research on housing in community land trusts should examine whether it buffers the adverse effects of gentrification as well as creates and maintains mixed-income communities.
- Researchers should assess the economic feasibility of a rent-to-shared equity homeownership fund. The field must pursue innovative financing strategies that minimize the reliance on subsidies to expand the affordable housing produced by CLTs, such as the Vancouver Community Land Trust (see companion essay by Penny Gurstein). Although in its nascent conceptual stage, Grounded Solutions Network hopes to explore the feasibility of a fund that would pursue single-family acquisitions in relatively low-cost markets that are on the cusp of gentrification and facing displacement pressures. The homes would be rehabbed and rented to families with a local CLT as the responsible “landlord.” In three to 10 years, when the value of homes in the private market has appreciated, the rented homes would be converted into shared-equity homes held by the CLT. After debt is repaid in the conversion, the appreciation effectively provides the subsidy to cover the difference between the market-rate value of the home and the discounted purchase price that a lower-income family can afford. If a fund like this proves feasible, it could substantially generate homes on land in trust that are community controlled and result in mixed-income neighborhoods.

Implications for Development and Investment

- CLTs need to prioritize community participation and leadership in the disposition strategies for land in trust, and they must partner with grassroots groups to garner the necessary resources for the community’s development vision to come to fruition.
- CLTs also need to maintain partnerships and collaboration with government offices, political officials, funders, and financial institutions for their ongoing sustainability.
- The field needs to shift from reliance on public funds to program-related investments and private financing by creating unique fund structures to advance scale, such as (1)

acquisition funds and (2) single-family rent-to-shared equity homeownership funds (see above).

Implications for Residents and Community Members

- Residents and community members of the CLT should join the corporate community membership, assume leadership positions, and engage in land disposition decisions whenever possible.
- Residents and community members should advocate for the CLT to build political will, secure financial resources, and pass enabling policies that will increase community-controlled land and developments.

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