

## **Resident and Community Engagement in Community Land Trusts**

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## **Abstract**

Community land trusts (CLTs) are gaining ground as a model that effectively creates community control of property for affordable housing and community development. Resident and community engagement are critical for CLTs to accomplish their objectives. Six well-established CLTs were investigated to understand their reasons and practices for engagement. These included: 1) fostering leadership, betterment, and improved quality of life among residents; 2) creating community control of land and neighborhoods, 3) building community, 4) promoting civic engagement, 5) ensuring resident-driven organizational decision-making and strategic planning, and 6) bolstering organizational sustainability.

Factors that affected resident and community engagement were also identified. Informants from the six CLTs reported that effective engagement needed to: 1) accommodate the lifecycle of residents, 2) address capacity constraints, 3) involve partners for efficacy and efficiency, and 4) attend to challenges relating to growth and geographic spread. Results indicated that the CLTs did not prioritize the same objectives for engagement, and their orientations towards engagement were significantly influenced by the broader temporal climate when the CLT was established as well as by the local socio-political environment in which the CLT must operate.

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# **Resident and Community Engagement in Community Land Trusts**

## **Introduction**

Community land trusts (CLTs) are gaining ground as a model that effectively creates community control of property used for affordable housing and community development. The governance and membership structures of the “classic” CLT model establishes stronger resident and community control of land than the traditional models of community development corporations (CDCs) or community housing development organizations (CHDOs). Beyond its organizational structure, CLTs are also recognized for their practice of stewardship, which ensures that their properties provides lasting benefits to the community and that residents are engaged and supported beyond sale or occupancy to promote positive outcomes.

However, there are significant variations among CLTs for enacting resident engagement and community control. Sometimes CLTs act in partnership and service to the community, whereby the broader community and residents of CLT properties are governing the organization and deeply engaged in the work of the organization. Sometimes, however, the CLT is used simply as a program or mechanism to retain affordability of property; consequently, “community control” is not much more than a symbolic message used by CLTs to explain their missions or intentions. Ultimately, the actualization of community control relies upon both the depth and breadth of resident and community participation and leadership within a CLT.

This paper explores the goals and practices used by six long-standing and reputable CLTs for resident and community engagement over their organizational development. Additionally, the paper explores the external and evolutionary factors that have affected their approaches and practices for engagement. The next sections will introduce the CLT model and explicate the elements of the “classic” CLT model that address resident and community engagement.

## **What the CLT Model Can Do**

CLTs are nonprofit organizations that provide lasting community assets for lower income families and communities who are marginalized by the market. CLTs develop rural or urban agriculture projects, commercial spaces that serve local communities, permanently affordable housing (e.g. rentals, cooperatives, and owner-occupied homes), and conserve land or urban green spaces. However, the heart of the CLT model—and its greatest innovation—is the provision of resale-restricted, owner-occupied homes that remain affordable in perpetuity.

CLTs retain ownership of land while lower income households purchase only the improvements (i.e. the home) at an affordable price. The CLT stewards the public’s investment in the property and supports the homeowners. In addition to reducing the cost of the home for the purchaser, support services may include pre-purchase and post-purchase education, home purchase or refinance loan review and approval, home repair support, and financial counseling for homeowners at-risk of default. Additionally, the steward monitors homeowners’ compliance with occupancy, use, maintenance, and resale-restrictions. In return, the homeowners agree to

sell their homes at resale-restricted prices to keep homes affordable for future generations of lower income buyers.

Undeniably, the CLT model enables lower income households to attain access to affordable homeownership that permits residential stability and wealth-building. One study of three large CLTs in Burlington, Vermont; Duluth, Minnesota; and Boulder, Colorado found that the buyers of CLT homes on average made 46-52% of the median family income, and homes were purchased for no more than 75% of the property's appraised value. When homeowners sold their homes, the study found that buyers were able to build wealth: The individualized rate of return ranged from 22-31%, which was significantly greater than if owners had had rented and invested their down payments in either the stock market or a 10-year Treasury bond. Furthermore, the homes remained affordable to homebuyers at approximately the same income levels over resales. When residents did move, 68-72% (depending upon the program) moved into market-rate, owner-occupied homes (Temkin, Theodos, and Price 2010).

The CLT model not only helps homeowners *attain* but *sustain* homeownership because of affordability provisions and stewardship services. At the end of 2010, another study of 96 CLTs across the country found that conventional homeowners were 10 times more likely to be in foreclosure proceedings (respectively 4.63% versus .46%) and 6.6 times more likely to be seriously delinquent than CLT homeowners (respectively 8.57% versus 1.30%) (Thaden 2011). The same trends were found in 2008 and 2009 (Thaden 2011; 2010). Hence, CLTs have prevented the costs of foreclosure and neighborhood disinvestment for lower income households, neighborhoods, and municipalities.

More broadly, permanently affordable housing provided by CLTs (e.g. rental, cooperative, and homeownership units) buffers the adverse impacts of gentrification by preserving the affordability of homes for lower income residents, generation after generation. The affordability is maintained even when local housing values escalate or the affordability periods required by federal funding sources expire. Consequently, CLTs create an avenue for lower income households to reside in and benefit from high-opportunity, asset-rich neighborhoods. And by rooting capital locally through a CLT's residential and non-residential community development efforts, those most at risk of marginalization from the ebbs and flow of private market capital are protected (DeFilippis 2004).

In effect, the CLT model offers a way to retain ownership of land that is stewarded by and for the community so that the "highest or best use" of property can remain community-defined, community-controlled, and adaptable to changing conditions. The next section explains the rationale behind the classic CLT model's components that pertain to resident and community engagement and reviews variations within the field.

### **"Classic" CLTs and Variations**

The "classic" CLT model prescribes critical elements for the organization's structure and accompanying bylaws, which are designed to keep the CLT in touch with—and aligned to—both the interests of residents and the community at large. First, the classic CLT maintains a membership, which includes renters, cooperative residents, and homeowners of the CLT's

properties (i.e. lessee members) and residents who live in the CLT's service area that elect to pay annual membership dues and demonstrate support for the CLT's mission (i.e. general members).

The membership is responsible for: 1) assessing membership dues, 2) approving the sale of land, 3) approving the establishment or alteration of the resale formula, which is the formula used to resale-restrict properties so homes remain affordable over time, 4) approving amendments to the certificate of incorporation or bylaws, 5) electing the board of directors, and 6) dissolving the corporation if needed. In summary, the membership holds the CLT accountable to its mission of preserving affordable community assets that are valuable to residents and the broader community for the common good (Swann 1978).

The board of directors for a classic CLT uses a "tripartite board" structure, which consists equally of: 1) lessee members, 2) general members, and 3) public members. Public members are typically representatives of government or public agencies that have a stake in community development and serving lower income people. Acting solely upon self-interest, lessee members protect the interest of lower income households (i.e. residential rights, stability, and affordability). For homeowners, these lessees protect the additional interest of building wealth from tenure. For general members, their interest is having the CLT provide high-quality, well-maintained community assets that stabilize, revitalize and sustain neighborhoods and serve the community's needs. For public representatives, their interest is having the CLT utilize public and private funding effectively and efficiently to provide affordable housing and community assets (i.e. preserving affordability and protecting public investment). Hence, the tripartite board structure balances the interests of various parties vested in the CLT.

However, some CLTs do not implement these components of the classic CLT model. According to a 2011 national survey of CLTs, only 42% out of 68 established CLTs had a membership, and the average size of memberships was 79 individuals (Thaden 2012). Approximately 25% of established CLTs reported no CLT residents on the board of directors. These variations may be partially explained by CLTs that are a program within a larger organization that has a pre-established board or those that have organizational cultures that do not prioritize resident and community participation or control.

While some CLTs are not adopting the classic CLT model, many CLTs incorporate an array of other governance structure, policies, or practices that result in resident and community engagement, leadership, betterment, or control. The literature on community control and resident engagement in CLTs has predominantly focused on the rationale and implementation of community membership and the tripartite board structure (e.g. Davis 2010; International Independence Institute 1972; National Community Land Trust Network 2011). However, some research—albeit scant—points to other engagement activities with residents, such as participatory planning for new development, community organizing initiatives, neighborhood events, community gardens, mini-grants for professional development, ongoing education classes, financial counseling, and review or support with capital improvements or home repairs (e.g. Ciardullo and Thaden 2013; Rosenberg and Yuen 2013; Thaden and Davis 2010; Thaden 2011). Little is known about the rationale or diversity of practices for resident or community engagement beyond the components of the classic CLT model. This study attends to this gap in the literature and additionally explores the factors that affect resident and community

engagement and community control in CLTs over the course of organizational development and growth.

### **Sample and Methods**

A purposive sample of seven persons representing six CLTs located in different parts of the continental USA with some variance in board structure and resident and community engagement participated in this study. All participants were directors or upper-level staffers in their respective CLTs. All in all, the participants were predominately women (six) and white (five), representing CLTs located in almost every region of the United States. Specifically, one CLT is located in the Midwest, while the others are located in the Northeast (two), Northwest (one), and South (two—one urban and one semi-rural). The average age of these CLTs is 21.5 years old, with the oldest and youngest being in existence for 30 years and 12 years, respectively.

Most importantly, the CLTs represented do not all abide by the classic CLT model. All of the organizations (six) participating in this study were membership based. All but Dudley Neighbors, Inc. have a tripartite board composition, reflecting the classic CLT model. However, two of these CLTs do not have their memberships elect the board of directors for the CLT. Proud Ground's membership does not play an active role in decision-making nor does it elect the board of directors. Dudley Neighbors, Inc. does not hold elections for its board of directors. This CLT is an entity of a larger membership-based community (parent) organization. Accordingly, the democratically elected governing board of the parent organization appoints six of its members (four are land trust lease-holders) to the nine-member CLT governing board.

Attempting to understand the challenges experienced and the practices enacted by CLTs to achieve and enhance resident engagement and citizen engagement, required the researchers to suspend their existing knowledge and obtain new and descriptive data from CLT practitioners working day-to-day in the field. To be sure, the ability of researchers to defer prevailing understandings and perceptions is essential to comprehending contemporary phenomenon (Creswell 2013). As a National Community Land Trust Network (NCLTN) staffer and NCLTN research collaborative members, it is necessary for these researchers to acknowledge these experiences and focus on data collected from participants in the study. Moreover, given the nature of staff-member relationship, only the non-staffer researcher collected and analyzed data from informants via a focus group and one-on-one interviews.

Approximately two weeks before the 2014 National CLT Conference on April 27-30, invitations were sent to CLTs who met inclusion criteria. Specifically, CLT executive directors and/or high-level staffers received an invitation via email and asked to participate in a focus group. The focus group took place at the conference and lasted for approximately one hour and 15 minutes. The semi-structured interview protocol consisted of the following two questions: How does resident and community engagement connect with CLT goals and practices? What happens to resident and community engagement as CLTs age, professionalize, and expand?

Within the two weeks that followed, one-on-one interviews occurred with the executive director or another high-level staffer whose CLT was represented at the focus group. Typically, these

one-on-one interviews happened by telephone. However, two interviews transpired face-to-face. In total, six one-on-one interviews were conducted, with each one lasting between 35 minutes to one hour. All interviews were audio taped except for one. For that one exception, the researcher relied totally on pen-and-paper note taking during the telephone interview. These one-on-one interviews followed a similar semi-structured interview protocol to that of the focus group. In addition, the one-on-one interviews captured more in-depth perspectives through probing on responses about the daily experiences pertaining to the specific CLT. The questions contained on the protocol include: What have been the challenges and successes your CLT has experienced around resident and community engagement? What has your CLT done to forms of engagement with age, professionalization, and expansion?

The data analysis entailed examining the contents of the written transcriptions from the focus group and one-on-one interviews. In fact, reading the written transcripts several times gave rise to significant words, phrases, and sentences concerning resident and community engagement. These words, phrases, and sentences fostered the formulation of meanings from which emerged common themes among participants (Creswell 2013). Subsequently, an in-depth description of the common trends is presented in the results that follow. Interviews and focus group data was additionally supplemented with secondary resources, including websites, portfolio data provided by NCLTN, and relevant documentaries, reports, and documents on the case study sites.

## **Results**

This section will first present vignettes of the six CLTs to provide portraits of their histories, organizational characteristics, and highlights of resident and community engagement practices. Next, the objectives and ensuing activities for resident and community engagement identified during the interviews and focus group are reviewed. Lastly, the factors affecting resident and community engagement are presented.

### **Vignettes**

#### Athens Land Trust

Although the origin of the CLT movement in the USA can be traced to rural African-American Southwest Georgia, few CLTs exist in the smaller semi-rural places of the South. In 1994, the Athens Land Trust was established in consolidated city-county Athens-Clark County, Georgia. Located in the northeast portion of the state, and with a population of 115,452, Athens-Clark County is the sixth largest city in Georgia (U.S. Census Bureau 2014). Also, it holds the distinction of having the smallest geographic boundaries of any county in the state. Since the founding of ALT, in 1994, its mission has remained “to promote the quality of life through the integration of community and the natural environment by preserving land, creating energy-efficient and affordable housing, and revitalizing neighborhoods” (Athens Land Trust ND).

The organization’s portfolio consists of 121 rental units, 35 homeownership units, and over 11,000 acres of conserved land. Athens Land Trust also manages 16 community gardens and 3 urban farms. It has 19 staffers. The organization is governed by a tripartite board. Its membership

has approximately 35 residents and 250 general members. Much of Athens Land Trust's efforts for the enhancement of stewardship place an emphasis on engaging the prospective as well as the existing homeowners. For example, in addition to homeowners holding seats on the board of directors, others make up the homeowner committee. Some of the responsibilities of this committee entail reviewing plans for rehabilitation and new construction, and approving building materials as well as location of the units. Renters receive encouragement to become involved in the apartment complexes' resident association. For those renters desiring to purchase a house, Athens Land Trust offers homeownership classes.

Another source of significant engagement has been urban agriculture. One component of ALT's urban agriculture efforts in particular, the Young Urban Farmer Program, seeks to develop job skills, offer leadership training, and create intergenerational linkages. Furthermore, through this partnership with Classic City High School and Clark County School District, students receive a pay check from working in the urban farm established by Athens Last Trust and obtain a work history that could result in future employment opportunities.

Typical of most semi-rural places, the number of organizations working on quality of life concerns is small. As such, acknowledgement must be given to Athens Land Trust for successfully fostering a high level of resident engagement and community control in an environment with so few opportunities for partnerships. In addition to achieving the intentions of the CLT movement primarily alone, Athens Land Trust's predominately white staff has realized some progress gaining the confidence of the predominately African American community. After almost two decades of encouraging resident involvement and stewardship, perceptions are changing because of the sincerity, dependability and commitment to improving the quality of life through community control in Athens' lower-income black neighborhoods.

### Champlain Housing Trust

The Champlain Housing Trust originated during a period of progressive response to steep rises in housing speculation and losses to some of the most cherished and valued public spaces in Burlington, Vermont. In 1984, City Council along with then mayor (and now U.S. Senator) Bernie Sanders awarded a \$200,000 seed grant for the establishment of Burlington Land Trust. With public resources and support from community organizations and tenant activists, Burlington Land Trust concentrated on meeting the sustainable homeownership needs of the municipality. At the same time, Lake Champlain Housing Corporation was founded to stimulate the production of affordable rental properties in the areas surrounding Burlington. These two organizations merged in 2006 to form the membership-based Champlain Housing Trust. Serving a three-county region in addition to the city of Burlington, Champlain Housing Trust ensures perpetual affordability and community ownership as a means of meeting the housing and community development needs in the area.

Champlain Housing Trust's portfolio includes 2,218 rental units, 530 homeownership units, and 33 commercial spaces. The organization has 85 staff members; the homeownership program has four staff members. Broader resident and community engagement staff includes a Director of Community Relations, a Coop and Community Organizer, and a Communications and Marketing Coordinator. Never straying away from its progressive roots in coalition building and citizen

engagement, CHT maintains a tripartite board structure and has a membership of approximately 5,000 individuals. Residents are encouraged to involve themselves in numerous CLT committees, and information is made readily available about activities and meetings that promote community building and social justice causes at the local, regional, and national levels. Over their 30-year existence, several Champlain Housing Trust members have been elected to Burlington's city council.

The work of Champlain Housing Trust towards more just and sustainable communities has not gone unnoticed the world over. It received the 2008 World Habitat Award from the United Nations for its efforts at making housing perpetually affordable. Today, Champlain Housing Trust fulfills stewardship over housing units of various types, including apartments, cooperatives, condominiums, duplexes and single-detached homes; for both owner and renter occupancy. Its commercial spaces are leased to address needed community services, including a day care, senior center, food pantry, and restaurants.

### City of Lakes Community Land Trust

The initial impetus for perpetual housing affordability and community control of the land derived from a collaboration of three community-based organizations seeking to improve and sustain neighborhoods on the south side of the city. The collaboration morphed into the Minneapolis Community Land Trust Initiative, which determined that the entire city could benefit from the CLT model. Thus, the Minneapolis Community Land Trust Initiative created the City of Lakes Community Land Trust in 2002.

City of Lakes CLT has four staff members and a portfolio of approximately 150 homes. Governed by a tripartite board and maintaining a membership of approximately 225 individuals, City of Lakes CLT advances building community by facilitating sustainable homeownership. The emphasis on community building makes more prominent the role of stewardship throughout the process of ensuring perpetual affordable homeownership. Put another way, "if we help homeowners buy a home, we help them keep the home" (City of Lakes Community Land Trust 2012).

More than just rhetoric, City of Lakes CLT takes a homeowner-centric approach to engagement and operationalizing the above statement in accordance with a multi-point plan that guides daily operations. City of Lakes CLT provides pre-purchase and buyer education classes in addition to workshops pertaining to preparing a will and a trust. One of three staffers holds the position of Community and Home Engagement Manager; with responsibilities including providing post-purchase support, coordinating trainings and events, and creating peer-to-peer interactions among homeowners. She also coordinates the homeowner committee, which is endowed with a lot of decision-making power for requests that come from homeowners. Along with homeowner and leadership development trainings, City of Lakes CLT values homeowner input and holds at least six "fun" activities per year. Sometimes, events are a mix of business and pleasure. For instance, the most recent City of Lakes CLT annual meeting took place at a bowling alley.

Implementing the desires of engaged homeowners has enabled City of Lakes CLT to build community, and deliver educational and family activities that many households could otherwise

not afford to attend. This CLT believes caring for physical assets cannot occur deprived of building human capital and community, as increasing impact and sustaining quality of life improvements is achieved through engagement and stewardship.

### Dudley Neighbors, Inc.

The founding of Dudley Neighbors, Inc. can be directly linked to resident engagement for community control of the land that straddles a portion of Boston's Roxbury and North Dorchester neighborhoods. In 1984, resident mobilization and organizing around issues of arson, disinvestment and displacement, and illegal dumping led to the establishment of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI). The history and process undertaken by DSNI, a neighborhood-membership based organization, of gaining eminent domain authority in the Dudley Triangle is well documented (Medoff and Sklar 1994). Furthermore, DSNI chose to remain a membership-based organization that carried out community organizing, but understood the importance of maintaining community control of the land and its physical development and use. Subsequently, in 1998, DSNI launched Dudley Neighbors Inc., a community land trust, to guarantee long-term community stewardship of the Dudley Triangle.

The organization owns or manages 77 rental units, 50 coop units, and 96 homeownership units. It additionally maintains two commercial spaces and a community greenhouse, garden, farm, and orchard. Dudley Neighbors Inc. has less than a handful of staffers. DNI is not governed by a tripartite board. The governance structure of Dudley Neighbors Inc. is interlocked with that of its parent—DSNI. As a membership-based organization that holds elections for the 35-member board of directors every two years, DSNI decided not to institutionalize a similar election process for Dudley Neighbors Inc. that might cause election fatigue among community residents. Alternatively, in order to safeguard resident engagement and community control, the DSNI board of directors appoints six of the nine-member Dudley Neighbors Inc. governing board. Of these selections, four are land trust homeowners. The remaining three seats reserve appointments to be made by the Roxbury Neighborhood Council, district city councilperson, and Boston mayor.

This year, Dudley Neighbors Inc. will commemorate 25 years of stewardship and community organizing. Its principal success has been resident engagement that remained focused on creating and implementing a vision for approximately 34 of 62 acres of land in the Dudley Triangle. Gaining community control of the land as well as sustaining significant direct participation in decision making for two-and-one-half decades helps to explain its impact.

Moving forward, Dudley Neighbors Inc. desires to become even more proactive in meeting and sustaining community aspirations through engagement. Recently, Dudley Neighbors Inc. created the Fair Chance for Family Success Initiative. The intent of the initiative is to partner with renter households living on the land trust to build assets and incomes that will meet their housing, education, and career goals. Residents living in some of the same rental complexes have been hired by Dudley Neighbors Inc. to lead the outreach efforts. Through this initiative, Dudley Neighbors Inc. hopes to build relationships with a new generation of households who will realize the added value of engagement and strive for a deeper focus on stewardship.

## Durham Community Land Trustees

Gaining control of a community eyesore and rehabilitating it in a manner desirable to neighborhood use can serve as an important symbol in neighborhood transformation. Such a symbol exemplifies how to successfully undertake neighborhood change and allows for sharing a vision with others of what neighborhood transformation can be. West End residents of Durham, North Carolina understood this process upon acquiring an abandoned and dilapidated house that they then rehabbed into a high-quality home that would remain affordable in perpetuity. In 1987, these actions led to the establishment of Durham Community Land Trustees.

Durham CLT's portfolio includes 144 rental units, 60 homeownership units, three commercial spaces and one community garden. The organization has six staff members. In order to ensure community control continues, Durham CLT has a tripartite board structure and has 175 members. Like many other CLTs, Durham CLT offers a periodic newsletter to members and the community at-large. In addition, Durham CLT announces opportunities for community engagement and other activities via their website, through direct emails to members and word of mouth. Its success at fostering an engaged membership in this historically black community, particularly around housing, infrastructure, services and beautification projects, has continued as neighborhood residents have become more racially diverse.

Currently, Durham CLT works in six different neighborhoods in the city, primary targeting the West End, Burch Avenue and Lyon Park. As Durham CLT acts as a faithful steward now and for generations to come, identifying allies and working in partnership with other organizations seeking to revitalize the area has become a way of life. Durham CLT partners with Habit for Humanity through the West End Collaborative and has received support for additional community-driven quality of life improvements from erstwhile entities including the City of Durham, the Duke-Durham Partnership, the North Carolina Community Development Initiative, and NeighborWorks America.

## Proud Ground

A high degree of citizen involvement in determining solutions that would mitigate the harming effects of the 1990s affordable housing crisis served as the catalyst leading to the establishment of Proud Ground. For many Portlanders, the gap between the housing prices and household incomes widened at a significant rate, thereby, placing homeownership out of reach. At the same time, gentrification resulted in the displacement of long-term residents living in the core neighborhoods of the city. Both community members and government officials were in agreement that something had to be done and decided to follow the example of a local CDC that successfully implemented the CLT model in its primary target area. As a result of this concurrence, in 1998, Proud Ground was founded to assist individuals citywide achieve and successfully sustain first-time homeownership.

Today, Proud Ground promotes homeownership not only in the city of Portland but also in Gresham and Washington counties. Its portfolio has over 220 homeownership units, which is stewarded by seven staff members. Notably, Proud Ground has a wait list of 360 individuals

interested in home purchase through the CLT. While Proud Ground has a tripartite board composition and membership, the membership does not elect the board of directors.

Living in the greater Portland area extends opportunities and accessibility for engagement in numerous activities and social justice causes. Accordingly, Proud Ground places an emphasis on encouraging resident engagement in activities that enhance stewardship. For instance, it invites members to establish individual development accounts that permit savings for future home renovations. Also, it encourages communication between new and longer-term homeowners in order to foster knowledge transfer about home maintenance and neighborliness. Proud Ground partners with several organizations and city and county governments to sustain households in neighborhoods (some for generations) threatened by displacement due to gentrification. The largest CLT in the Northwest, it sustains a large portfolio of good to excellent quality housing. Proud Ground is committed to continuing the important work of promoting homeownership and stewardship that will benefit existing residents and the generations to come.

### **Objectives and Practices**

Six purposes and objectives for conducting resident and community engagement emerged from the qualitative data, which are presented below. These objectives are by no means mutually exclusive; in fact, informants described how conducting engagement activities often advanced multiple objectives. While no informant explicitly refuted any of the following reasons for engaging residents and community members, the CLTs prioritized objectives for engagement differently. Hence, significant variation existed among the CLTs for enacting resident and community engagement. Generally, each CLT's practices and activities tended to align with its primary reasons for conducting engagement.

#### Fostering Leadership, Betterment, and Improved Quality of Life Among Residents

All of the informants endorsed that resident leadership was critically important for their CLT. All informants had CLT homeowners (and in some cases renters) serving on their board of directors. Many had residents on other organizational or programmatic committees as well. For instance, Champlain Housing Trust, Dudley Neighbors Inc., and City of Lakes CLT provide leadership development and training for new residents who are elected to their boards of directors.

Beyond leadership roles within the CLT, all of the CLTs prioritize advancing the economic development of homeowners. Engagement with homeowners was critical to enable sustainable homeownership. Commonly referred to as "stewardship," these CLTs provide homebuyer education, loan review and approval, home repair support, and financial counseling. For instance, Proud Ground provides individual development accounts to help homeowners effectively save for future home repairs. Athens Land Trust and DSNI offer employment opportunities for youth (these are not exclusively for residents of homes in the land trust). These prevalent forms of resident engagement promote wealth-building and prevent foreclosures.

Some CLTs prioritize advancing the human and economic development of residents beyond the provision of affordable housing. For instance, City of Lakes CLT has provided grants from their Opportunity Fund, which offered homeowners, spouses, partners, or dependents financial

support to advance personal goals that may result in asset or wealth creation for their households (however, the fund does not currently have financial support). These mini-grants were used for trainings, professional conferences, school books, tuition, and business development (Thaden 2012).

All of the CLTs reported some resident engagement activities to enable the health and quality of life of residents. For example, Durham CLT has formed healthcare-related partnerships to improve treatment for some residents with Sickle Cell disease. Athens Land Trust has developed an extensive urban agricultural initiative to provide access to healthy foods in food deserts (Rosenberg and Yuen 2013).

### Creating Community Control of Land and Neighborhoods

While all of the CLTs utilize ground leases and maintain missions to serve the community through the provision of land and community assets, the CLTs—at varying degrees—also formalize the broader participation of the community within their governance structure and bylaws for decision-making. A couple of the CLTs that prioritize neighborhood control of land and community decision-making serve only one or a small number of neighborhoods (e.g. Dudley Neighbors Inc. and Durham CLT). As the Dudley Neighbors Inc.’s staff member stated, “We’re not thinking about going out to 20 different neighborhoods in Boston, we’re thinking about our neighborhood”. Informants from these CLTs explained that community control of land with deep community engagement is more effective by being “very neighborhood based...and [having] residents plan the units.” Both of these CLTs have rich histories of “taking back the neighborhood” and have worked to transform the outcomes of neighborhood residents beyond the provision of affordable housing. For instance, DSNI has had a significant impact on commercial development, job creation, and youth programs and training (and much more).

Alternatively, Champlain Housing Trust, the largest CLT in the U.S., also has the largest community membership with approximately 5,000 individuals. Champlain Housing Trust abides by the “classic” CLT model, whereby its membership is engaged in important decision-making about the disposition of properties. In select neighborhoods, this CLT has conducted significant community revitalization in order to develop needed community resources and assets. For instance, it has partnered with social service organizations to develop affordable commercial spaces for senior centers, food pantries, legal services, and more (Rosenberg and Yuen 2013).

### Building Community

Some informants indicated that “building community” for the sake of community was an objective of resident and community engagement. However, CLTs had different orientations to these community-building efforts. In some instances, the goal is to promote “community” among CLT stakeholders. One example was the annual meeting held in a bowling alley by the City of Lakes CLT. In other instances, the goal is to promote community within the neighborhood or city. Durham CLT, for instance, has multiple community events each year (e.g. parades, block parties, community garden development). Athens Land Trust has urban agricultural projects that “increases intergenerational interaction”, whereby high school students and many older residents

grow and sell produce together. Proud Ground encourages new and long-term homeowners to build relationships and transfer knowledge about home maintenance and neighborliness.

### Promoting Civic Engagement

Some CLTs emphasized the importance of civic engagement as an outcome of resident and community engagement. Some residents who took on important leadership roles in their CLT also did so in their local communities. For instance, in the late 1990s four of fourteen city council members were residents of Champlain Housing Trust. The first youth representative on the board of directors of the DSNI (the parent of Dudley Neighbors, Inc.) became the organization's executive director, campaigned to be Mayor of Boston, and currently serves as the city's Director of Economic Development. A Durham CLT member received the North Carolina Governor's Award for Volunteer Service and several Proud Ground homeowners are actively involved in the Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN) initiative. These examples substantiate that engagement on CLT boards, committees, and sponsored activities translate into residents operating as effective change agents beyond the CLT.

### Ensuring Resident-Driven Organizational Decision-Making and Strategic Planning

Some informants emphasized the importance of residents driving the organization's strategic plan and decision-making. Residents do not refer solely to those living in CLT properties, but also include all of the residents within the CLT's service area. As one informant stated, "Anybody in the community can participate." Some informants stressed the importance of community membership in order to ensure that the organization continued to act in service and be responsive to the broader community. CLTs with active community memberships hold annual meetings of members. All informants agreed that organizational accountability relied upon CLT staff and board members conducting ongoing and broader engagement with community members and partners in order to gather information and feedback to inform strategic planning. All of the CLTs had residents of the land trust and broader community representation on their board of directors for "helping to determine our strategic direction."

### Bolstering Organizational Sustainability

Some CLTs emphasized that a critical purpose of resident and community engagement was to enable the sustainability of the CLT. Organizational sustainability included the ongoing development of resident and community leaders to internally govern the CLT, as well as external advocacy and the cultivation of public support and resources. As one informant stated, "We've got to engage residents continuously because as soon as we stop, the city will be like, oh well, there's no one else interested so, we're going to come back with *our* plans." For example, over Champlain Housing Trust's thirty year history, many of the gains initially made in support of the CLT's mission—such as inclusionary zoning, city and state trust funds, and broad policies on investing public resources in permanently affordable housing—have been attacked by private property interests. These enabling policies would be eliminated without the ongoing education and engagement of lessee and community members, which has resulted in strong support for community control of land for social equity.

Another prominent example of community engagement that supports the mission of the organization is the ongoing community organizing and advocacy of DSNI to promote the organization's ability to garner resources for the community. The development and growth of Dudley Neighbors Inc. was founded upon community advocacy to obtain the power of eminent domain in the Dudley Triangle. A more recent example is the work of City of Lakes CLT and Durham CLT who have both been working in coalition to advocate for permanently affordable housing and equitable transit oriented development as their cities plan mass public transit systems. Resident and community stakeholders of these CLTs have played critical roles in public education and political advocacy to sustain and grow their CLTs.

### **Factors Affecting Resident and Community Engagement Practices**

Reviewing and coding transcripts and notes resulted in the identification of four prominent factors that have affected the resident and community engagement practices of these CLTs over time. These factors and the relevant experiences of CLTs are presented below.

#### Lifecycles of Engagement

As informants of older CLTs reflected on their organizational development and histories of resident and community engagement, they noted that residents also develop and age. At different junctures in life, engagement among residents can be easier or more challenging. First-time younger homeowners frequently gain increasing familial and work-related responsibilities. Older residents sometimes have more free time during retirement but also face challenges related to aging. Additionally, residents who have intensively engaged in the CLT or other community-related work can experience burn out. One informant described the cycle as “going through a process of getting very involved...and then saying to heck with this either because they got burned out or some issue [like child rearing] and now we're seeing them coming back...saying: hey what's up, we want to get involved; or I have a son, can he get involved in a summer program or that kind of thing.”

The CLTs found that they needed to tend to the “life cycle of engagement” of residents, tailoring engagement opportunities to the demographics and personal circumstances of residents. As one informant noted, for older residents, Dudley Neighbors Inc. seeks to “identify some service agency, which is their way of saying [to the resident], How can we help? How can we help you age in place?” Athens Land Trust has found it effective to foster intergenerational engagement through its community farming and produce stands. An informant from Champlain Housing Trust emphasized the importance of expressing gratitude to resident and community leaders and creating opportunities for public recognition to ensure engagement feels valued.

#### Organizational Capacity

Informants emphasized the importance of adequate staffing resources needed to carryout engagement and to increase the scale and impact of the CLT. In fact, informants believed engagement to be very important to portfolio growth, and coveted to spur a higher degree of stewardship. Once CLTs have a sufficient amount of homeownership units, ground lease fees can help to offset the costs of some staffing for stewardship. Nevertheless, CLT s articulated

limitations in capacity in order to provide the desired level of stewardship and support to residents. Ground lease fees are not enough to provide broad and deep resident and community engagement.

All of the CLTs reported that finding additional dedicated resources for engagement was more challenging than identifying funding for portfolio growth. Portfolio growth has a physical dimension that often gets quantified and monetized; “In fact, you count the amount of time you spend on putting deals together and moving projects forward.” Many federal or public funding sources for affordable housing will either compensate nonprofits for development or for administration of development. However, few public funding programs will compensate nonprofits for their time and effort conducting resident and community engagement (which directly or indirectly enlarge CLT portfolios and improve outcomes through stewardship).

Only half of the larger and more established CLTs that comprised the sample had at least one dedicated staff person for resident and community engagement (Champlain Housing Trust, City of Lakes CLT, and Dudley Neighbors Inc.). One informant mentioned her specific responsibilities as Engagement Manager were “to fully engage with all of the homeowners as well as going out to engage the community.” Another chimed in that, “we recently hired [a stewardship manager] whose job is outreach, and she is reaching out to communities and making sure we are sharing information. It has got a similar focus [to yours], which is, just go out and talk to people and get them engaged.”

Most of the other informants, however, did not have a staffer dedicated solely to engagement. These CLTs find themselves “running around trying to do everything” and compensate for the lack of capacity by having “each one of our [staffers] having to do all of those things.” As one informant explained, you have to “make decisions about how you’re spending your time;” hence, organizational management, portfolio management and growth, and community engagement compete for staff time. Furthermore, there is a heavier reliance on board members to participate in encouraging resident and community engagement while staff attends to the CLT portfolio. One informant stated “I’m doing community projects. So, a lot of it is left up to my board of directors.” Another put it this way: “Engagement with all residents and the community is going to happen. And, we engage the board. It requires all of us.”

One informant indicated “to really, really, build engagement takes a lot of time. Like hand-holding. Yeah, and sort of bringing everybody up to the same level of understanding about making the decisions.” Upon reflection, informants acknowledged that, as their CLT gained more experience, they also gained capacity and strategy to conduct effective resident and community engagement. In reference to her CLT and local context, one informant asked, “If someone had time to spare and they wanted to be involved, what would we really encourage them to do?” Her point was that in order to have real engagement, one must truly understand “what is centric to [the individual resident’s or the community’s] engagement.”

Reflexive practices of engagement resulted in some CLTs supporting engagement activities that place greater emphasis on involvement beyond the CLT towards broader regional or national social justice concerns. As mentioned previously, advocating for enabling public policies that support equitable community development and the right to housing, ultimately, supported the

outcomes and impact of some CLTs (especially CLTs located in more politically progressive climates). Hence, some CLTs were concerned about achieving and sustaining capacity for inviting, linking, or sharing information with residents to engage in activities of their choosing (not those prescribed by CLT staff).

### Partnerships

Informants emphasized the important role of partnerships in helping to foster engagement and advancing the CLT's mission and impact. Informants recognized that "we just cannot do it all" and there were long-term benefits of involving other players (with different expertise and tools) in community change. Also, creating partnerships allows for mutual learning to take place and further expands awareness about the CLT movement.

Several CLTs had development partners, as some CLTs do not do development. As one informant stated, "we help run the planning processes, but we end up partnering with CDCs or private developers or whoever to build it; and so, that takes some of that tension away." The tension was the competing priorities of conducting development (especially with public funding sources) and conducting broad-based engagement for community control of land.

In addition to partnerships with developers, "There are some partnerships with the city and with the county." For instance, Champlain Housing Trust increases its portfolio by partnering with the local government on its inclusionary housing program. City of Lakes CLT has a strong relationship with its state housing finance agency, which provides funding and mortgage financing to enable portfolio growth.

Lastly, as reviewed above, all of the CLTs have partnerships with other nonprofits or community institutions that promote reaching their objectives for resident and community engagement. These partnerships enable access to valuable services for residents, such as HUD-approved housing counseling, spaces or management for urban agriculture projects, or healthcare-related resources. Furthermore, these partnerships can, at least in part, reduce the need for CLT staff to "do everything."

### Scale and Scope

Mutual agreement existed among informants that the larger the CLT scale, the more impressed funders tend to be. However, CLT scale—bifurcated into organizational and geographical dimensions—was perceived to interact most with engagement.

Organizationally, the size of the CLT can be a mixed bag, "Because when you hit a certain scale you sometimes get...some extra funding or extra support; but then, it gets tight again until you get to the next level." According to one informant, "We're being expected to deliver more, but they're not investing in what we need in order to be able to deliver...Fund positions"! Trying to fulfill the CLT's mission and daily operations within the context of a size-staff mismatch is a daunting task that results in missed opportunities to advance outcomes or impact. At least one informant lamented, "The fact is, we're so busy that we're missing some of the opportunities with funders." Another informant, from Proud Ground, expressed with distress, "We've got 360

people sitting on our wait list and those families deserve a chance at this too. We're only so big and can only do so much." When staff capacity is limited, difficult decisions have to be made about whether to invest in stewardship and engagement or portfolio growth.

The geographic scale in which a CLT operates may also make a difference. Informants, the majority of whom represented CLTs working at the citywide level, seemed to agree that a smaller geographic area allows the CLT to focus on less-varied community interests and to take a more intensive place-based approach for concentrating limited resources. Additionally, existing social capital and neighborhood networks within "organic" communities can be tapped into and leveraged differently than "constructed" communities developed across larger service areas by a CLT. There appeared to be consensus that the mindset changes when thinking about working at the scale of the city or region versus at the neighborhood level.

Working at a citywide geographic scale, which consisted of at least 20 neighborhoods and 83 different neighborhood organizations, an informant shared that the director of City of Lakes CLT "was very intentional about going out to each of the neighborhood organizations" and explaining the intentions of the CLT and listening to concerns. As a result, some of the organizations became partners and "financially invested in the program for people who bought in [their] neighborhoods." Staff continues to meet with and update all the organizations on a periodic basis regarding CLT activity in the neighborhoods. Another informant explained that Durham CLT works in six neighborhoods, some of which are not contiguous, and "each neighborhood is so different." Although some of these neighborhoods sustain a stronger community fabric than others, "the first thing we try to do is to plug the new tenant or homeowner into the existing circuit in that neighborhood." Where the neighborhood associations are weak, she has worked to strengthen them by offering support and identifying residents who could provide leadership. Alternatively, the level of effort expended by a neighborhood-based CLT in supporting engagement does not need to be so expansive.

## **Discussion**

Based upon interviews, focus groups, and secondary research on six well-established and relative large CLTs, this paper addresses the perceived outcomes and influences of resident and community engagement, the time and considerations necessary to carry it out; and how partnerships and scale contribute to successful attainment of CLTs' missions and objectives. This study found that engagement was uniformly noted as integral for stewardship to attain positive outcomes and for portfolio growth to advance impact.

However, to date, literature on resident and community engagement in CLTs has predominantly focused on the importance of: 1) a community membership to enable community control of land and organizational accountability, and 2) the tripartite board structure to balance the interests of lessees, the broader community, and the public. In terms of building and maintaining a community membership, more often than not, staffers noted a disparity between the CLT's aspirations and the reality on the ground. Perhaps unsurprisingly, "general members" of the CLTs were frequently modest in number and few were highly engaged. Hence, CLTs did not appear to operationalize "community control of land" solely by the bylaws or constitution of a

membership. If meaningful community control was actualized, additional resident and community engagement activities to supplement corporate membership appeared necessary.

Ultimately, these informants highlighted the importance of resident and community engagement beyond organizational governance. They identified a broad array of reasons for why their CLTs engage residents of their properties as well as the residents of the broader community. Most salient were three additional purposes for resident and community engagement: 1) to enable the human development and improve quality of life among residents, 2) to foster civic engagement within the community at large, and 3) to create socio-political will that would enable the sustainability and growth of the CLT.

Delving deeper into the complexities of engagement, informants provided insight into, not only how and which choices were made for engagement practices, but why particular strategies for enhanced engagement became prioritized. In essence, resident and community engagement practices of these CLTs come down to a matter of “time and place.” For all of the CLTs in the study, the broader *temporal climate* and the *local socio-political environment influenced engagement*.

### **Temporal Climate Influences Engagement**

The legacy and evolution of resident and community involvement within the CLTs studied supports that the timing of establishment significantly matters to their ongoing orientation and practices of engagement. Older CLTs—established through the 1980s (Champlain Housing Trust, Dudley Neighbors Inc. and Durham CLT)—appeared to be rooted in the history of the civil rights era and originated in a climate of social movements and community activism from the grass roots. Carrying into the present, the orientation of these CLTs for resident and community engagement leaned towards structural change to transform land tenure arrangements towards justice. Hence, they tended to prioritize resident and community engagement activities that focused on community control of land and neighborhoods, resident leadership, civic engagement, and cultivation of socio-political will for the CLT.

Second generation CLTs in this study—established during the 1990-2000s (Athens Land Trust, Proud Ground, and City of Lakes CLT)—emerged during an era when neoliberalism had taken hold of the country. The ethos of the times was characterized by economic liberalism, privatization, devolution, individualism, and self-sufficiency. In response, CDCs and other nonprofits professionalized and accommodated the need to run “like a business” in order to survive or thrive (Stoecker 1997, Yin 1998, Stoutland 1999, Lowe 2008). As expected, second generation CLTs position themselves more as expert collaborators with measurable outcomes than community organizers endorsing resistance. Carrying into the present, their orientation may be characterized as running “against the tides” of rampant individualism, “self-sufficient” bootstrapping, and entrepreneurial homeownership. They counter hegemonic homeownership narratives and the forces of private market capital by tending to prioritize resident and community engagement activities that enable increasing impact, building community, and transforming the intergenerational outcomes of families through human and economic development. Unlike their predecessors, they are less likely to “take to the streets” or lead

confrontational (or controversial) resident and community engagement activities that may alienate partners, block access to funding sources, or hinder scale.

CLTs should be cognizant of their history and the broader socio-political climate that helped to shape their approaches for engagement. Temporal climates change, and CLTs must deliberately decide whether they want to or need to change with them in order to reach their objectives, conduct effective engagement, and advance their impact.

### **Local Socio-Political Environment Influences Engagement**

Trends in the orientation and approaches for resident and community engagement used by the CLTs studied support that CLTs are affected by the broader temporal climate; however, they are also affected by the local context in which they operate. While a CLT's rationale and aims for resident and community engagement are important, its engagement practices are influenced in large part by the local socio-political environment. Hence, CLTs—as with other community-based organizations—must strategically and practically operate within the local climate in order to advance their missions and sustain their organizations.

Weir (1999) set forth a typology of local socio-political environments in which community-based organizations must function that entail the following three classifications: *elite-dominated*, *patronage-backed* and *inclusive-driven* places. While not every locality or community-based organization discretely fits into this typology, it is helpful to identify and deliberate upon the political constraints and environmental threats that may influence a CLT's orientation and strategies for engagement. Also, it is helpful to recognize their subsequent effects on developing community control of land and neighborhoods as well as advancing scale and impact to transform the outcomes of households and communities.

Elite-dominated places lack a rich history of community organizing and engagement and have few mechanisms for connecting community-based organizations to power. As a result, the likelihood for CLTs to remain small because of few channels for effective independent participation outside of the power structure is high. CLTs may opt to form and operate in coalition with local groups to minimize potential backlash to social justice efforts. They may also try to increase capacity by partnering with non-local groups. However, external collaborations could breed distrust among other community-based organizations and residents. Also, it could increase the efforts of the local political establishment to minimize CLTs engagement and impact because of the potential threat of neighborhood mobilization, opposition leadership, and community ownership of land. To provide an example from the study, Athens Land Trust appears to be operating with this type of local environment.

Patronage-back places have more substantive traditions of community organizing and engagement than elite-dominated jurisdictions. However, in patronage-backed places, community-based organizations must resist falling under the control of local politicians who often maintain authority or influence over the dissemination of much needed resources. Under this structure, it would not be uncommon for politicians to offer CLTs resources that would direct engagement towards activities nonthreatening (and beneficial) to neighborhood and

political elites. In this study, Proud Ground was assessed as operating predominantly within this type of environment.

Inclusive-driven places present community-based organizations opportunities to exercise power autonomously of the political establishment. What is more, the political establishment in inclusive-driven places views the community-based sector as valuable and constructive allies. As a consequence, CLTs engaged within this political environment participate in influential networks and gain access to public and private resources with a relative consistency than the experiences of those working inside elite-dominated and patronage-backed structures. Champlain Housing Trust provides an example of a CLT working within this type of local environment.

In the end, the engagement strategies used by a CLT must take into account their specific socio-political environment. As this study supports, there is not a one-size-fits-all approach for developing effective engagement and a thriving CLT. The challenge for each CLT is to find the “right” balance between pushing for practical *and* meaningful change within their local socio-political environment while not overly compromising the CLT’s objectives or its likelihood for sustainability and growth.

## **Conclusion**

As a part of the larger social justice movement, the CLT model advances perpetual affordability of housing, land ownership, and control for the common good. This study found that resident and community engagement was critical for CLTs to act as effective stewards of community-controlled land, support the positive outcomes of residents, and advance their impact in neighborhoods or larger localities.

An array of purposes and practices for engaging residents and community members were identified that extend beyond balancing stakeholder’s interests and establishing community decision-making within the CLT’s governance structure (the dominant purposes identified in the literature on CLTs to date). Factors affecting engagement practices were also identified. CLT staffers reported that effective engagement needed to: 1) be tailored to the lifecycle of residents, 2) address capacity constraints, 3) involve partners for efficacy and efficiency, and 4) attend to challenges relating to growth and geographic spread.

While an array of objectives for engagement was identified by informants, the six CLTs did not have the same priorities for engagement or incorporate all objectives equally into practice. Hence, they tended to have different orientations towards engagement, which were significantly influenced by the broader temporal climate at the time each CLT was established as well as the local socio-political environment under which each CLT operates. External influences of both time and place imply that there is not one regime of resident and community engagement that may be effective across new and old CLTs in various localities.

That being said, it appeared that CLTs who enacted multi-faceted engagement to encompass all of the reasons identified for engagement may be less at risk of becoming purely technocratic. In light of socio-political constraints, it is particularly important that CLTs strategically,

deliberately, and practically plan their goals and approaches for resident and community engagement to, ultimately, advance social justice and structural change.

Due to the design and small sample size of this study, the results cannot be generalized. Future research should explore factors affecting resident and community engagement in CLTs more broadly and address which engagement practices most significantly contribute to various outcomes in CLTs, such as community control of land, resident outcomes, and scale. Specifically, this study found that some CLTs have corporate memberships that elect the board of directors and others have community memberships with very limited rights. The relationships between membership structure, engagement, and community control of land need further exploration.

In order for CLTs to be able to comprehensively implement their resident and community engagement plans, funding must be made available. The authors recommend that public policies should be formulated to provide financial incentives for stewardship and engagement, and foundations should invest in CLTs to conduct the engagement activities necessary to improve the impact and outcomes of CLTs that advance social change.

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