

## What is an Urban Community Land Trust?<sup>1</sup>

### *NOPI Cornell Neighborhood Ecology Team Primer #3*

#### *Background*

Having studied examples from across the United States, our team proposes that ACORN consider establishing an urban community land trust first within the Upper Ninth Ward study area and eventually in other New Orleans neighborhoods and elsewhere as well. Sound neighborhood-building must consider both equity and ecology. Therefore, we propose a blended land trust model that incorporates perpetually affordable housing with community-controlled green space designed to enhance both food security and disaster resistance. We call the model we are proposing an urban community land trust because it blends features of the Trust for Public Land's (TPL) up-and-coming urban land trust community gardening model and the Institute for Community Economics' (ICE) thirty-year-old affordable housing community land trust model. Both models are thriving across the country. Our research suggests that New Orleans and ACORN may be the place and the organization to combine the two to maximum effect.

#### *Blending Housing and Open Space*

The major similarity of trusts for affordable housing and for gardens is that the land is set aside permanently by means of an easement for a particular, public-spirited use and it is owned and stewarded by a third sector organization. In the case of a community land trust, the organization takes title to the land and preserves or builds

the residential units. The units themselves may be sold, but the land itself is leased for a long term but remains in the portfolio of the community land trust. Typically, units must be owner-occupied and, when sold, all proceeds beyond a certain dollar amount return to the community land trust. In this way, community land trusts provide the public benefits of affordable housing and accessible homeownership without the risks to the community typically associated with real estate speculation. With a green space land trust, the organization may hold easement rights only while the title to the property itself remains with the original landowner, who is now restricted in using the land by the terms of the easement.

#### *Key Points*

- *Land held in community member owned and controlled trusts for permanent housing affordability*
- *Some lots with urban conservation easements: community gardens*
- *ACORN and/or partners can blend housing and garden land trust models to rebuild with care and without gentrification*

Thus far, the major difference between the two models has been the actual use that land is permanently set aside for. In the case of an urban land trust, vacant lots that have been converted into community gardens are permanently protected as gardens even when real estate markets heat up enough to otherwise convert lots into private residential or commercial buildings. In many U.S. cities, urban land trusts have become particularly popular of late as building booms spread into neighborhoods all but left for dead during the urban fiscal

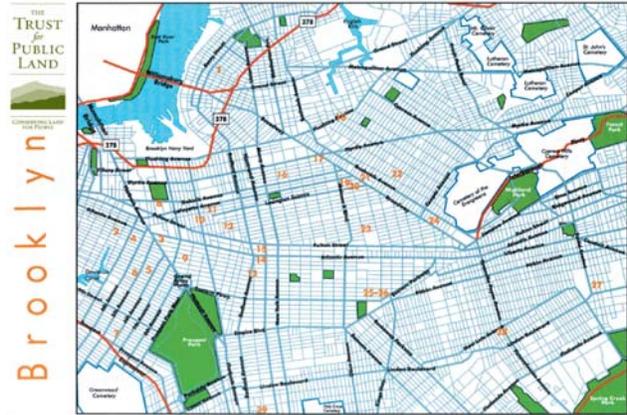
<sup>1</sup> Pearlstein, Daniel, Cornell University, Dept. of City and Regional Planning New Orleans Planning Initiative Workshop CRP 679; A Product of "Mobilizing the Community to Integrate Ecology, Open Space Resources, and Disaster Resistance in a Post-Katrina 9th Ward."

crises of the 1970s. Urban land trusts are a vital tool for keeping neighborhoods ecologically healthy and food secure as property values rise.

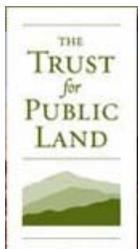
*For the 9<sup>th</sup> Ward...*

The Upper Ninth Ward Urban Community Land Trust is a natural outgrowth of and reorganization for the current ACORN Housing program. Post-Katrina, ACORN could purchase previously blighted and adjudicated parcels as well as lots on which owners are choosing not to return and rebuild. Working with the local organization Parkway Partners and national groups including TPL and ICE, ACORN and the new land trust can set aside some plots for gardens and convert others into green-built, disaster-resistant, permanently affordable housing units. Given the urgency of affordable housing availability and the pressure for urban greening motivated by elite organizations like the Urban Land Institute and the Bring New Orleans Back Commission, an urban community land trust that accounts for both equity and ecology can be the keystone of an Upper Ninth Ward revitalized and improved for its long-time residents.

**Community Garden Land Trust Program**



*Example of an Urban Community Garden Land Trust*



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