



COMMUNITY LAND TRUST IN THE SOUTHERN BERKSHIRES

What is a Community Land Trust?

The Community Land Trust (CLT) is a non-profit organization made up of members throughout the Southern Berkshire area. Anyone living in the area may join simply by paying a yearly \$10 membership fee. The central principle motivating the work of the CLT is that homes, barns, fences, gardens, and all things done with or on the land should be owned by individuals, but the land itself is a limited community resource that should be owned by the community as a whole. The CLT makes this community ownership of land possible.

The CLT's primary function is to buy or accept gifts of land and lease it back to members under a 99-year lease that is automatically renewable and inheritable. Through the 99-year land lease, the trust removes land from the speculative market and facilitates multiple uses such as affordable housing, agriculture, and open space preservation. Part of this process is to determine—in conjunction with land-use planners, local government, and the community at large—the most appropriate use or uses for a given parcel of land, be it a wildlife refuge, a group of houses, a managed woodlot, a commercial development, or vegetables grown for the local market. The functions of a CLT can include:

- To work with conservation land trusts to manage lease agreements on land that needs to be farmed in order to be conserved
- To negotiate and oversee lease agreements between farmers and individual landowners who would like to give farmers incentive to make long-term improvements to their land
- To manage leases for an appropriate number of affordable homes built adjacent to a parcel protected by a conservation land trust as part of its land-use plan
- To serve as a vehicle for organizing shopkeepers and other business people to buy their own buildings
- To undertake the land-use planning and multiple-use development of a parcel brought forward by a group of CLT members on behalf of future leaseholders, such as a co-housing community

Keeping Housing Affordable

Everyone in the Southern Berkshires is affected in some way by the inflated price of housing. Those who do not need a house have children, grandchildren, or neighbors who do. Those who rent have watched their monthly income evaporate as rents continue to increase. The CLT lease allows people to buy a house for what it is worth without having to buy the artificially inflated land that it sits on. The lease restricts the resale price of the home to the value of buildings and other improvements on the land. That is, the cost of rebuilding the same house again at the time of sale. This makes it affordable

for every subsequent buyer, not just the first one. No one buying that house will ever again have to pay for the inflated price of the land.

The same holds true for commercial land, which frequently is owned by interests outside of the community. Shopkeepers and producers of goods must live with the uncertainty of short-term agreements and rising rents. The 99-year CLT lease can make it easier for business people to buy their own buildings and remain secure in them, and it can keep those buildings affordable for the next business leaseholder. In sum, under the CLT lease, a leaseholder owns, buys, and sells the results of real work and not the results of the inflation in the price of land in the area. The inflated value of the land does not accrue to any individual but is held by the Community Land Trust, which belongs to the community.

Preserving Farmland

Farming can address the critical connections between ecology, economy, and community. It can provide fresh local food, protect habitat, prevent over-development and sprawl, and provide employment in rural areas. However, farmland faces the same pressure of rising land prices in our region – often leaving farmers, especially new farmers seeking land, unable to make a living.

As with affordable housing, the CLT can hold farmland and provide a 99-year renewable and inheritable lease to the farmers, while the farmers can own the buildings and any improvements they make to the land. The lease can also include a land use plan, ideally created in collaboration with the farmers, that specifies requirements for the intensity of farming, farm practices, and restrictions on areas intended for conservation. In this way, the CLT can keep small-scale, organic farming viable, allowing farmers to practice wise stewardship without having to force crops to pay off land debt.

Community Land Trust Holdings

The Community Land Trust in the Southern Berkshires currently holds three parcels of land. The first is a 10 acre parcel in the shadow of Jug End Mountain, which includes four residences and an apple orchard. The second is Forest Row, a residential community of 18 dwellings on 21 acres, much of which is undeveloped woodlands. The third is Indian Line Farm, an active organic farm of 17 acres, including sensitive wetland areas that are permanently preserved.

Join Us!

In sum, preventing land speculation, increasing local self-reliance, and encouraging full community participation are among the most critical means by which the Community Land Trust brings housing, farming and business costs down and makes land-use planning a community-based endeavor. We invite you to become a member of the Community Land Trust and to take an active role in designing the future landscape of the Southern Berkshires in all its many facets. Members join by paying a yearly \$10 membership fee. The business of the Land Trust is conducted by a Board of Directors elected by the membership. Members are encouraged to join or form committees to address particular issues of land use, including affordable housing, finding suitable land, land-use planning, financing, publicity, or attracting new members.

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