

## SUMMARY OF RESEARCH ON COMMUNITY LAND TRUSTS (CLTs)

In recent days, I've been researching community land trusts (CLTs) as a method for communities to collectively own and control land. Collective ownership of the land allows the community, rather than private interests, to determine how the land will be utilized to serve the community's needs. CLTs are well-tested and proven tools for preserving community control and affordability.

**Community Land Trust Model.** A CLT is a nonprofit organization governed by a board of community members, including CLT residents and public representatives, that acquires and stewards land in trust for the permanent benefit of the community. These *community-held assets* remain affordable for generations and can be put to a variety of uses, including homeownership, rental housing, locations for small businesses, cultural institutions, and more.

The primary way CLTs secure affordability over time is to separate ownership of the land from the buildings (which can be for housing, commercial space for small businesses and nonprofits, etc.) atop the land. Under the CLT model, a single subsidy—generally from various sources of public and philanthropic capital—is needed to support the CLT's initial purchase of the property on behalf of a specific community. The CLT then owns the land in perpetuity (forever).

The CLT takes title to the land and issues a low-cost (typically under \$100), long-term (typically for 99 years) land lease back to the owner(s) of the buildings that incorporates a covenant to keep home and retail/office prices within the community permanently affordable. One of the most important ways of keeping home and retail/office prices affordable is the imposing restrictions on the resale of property on the land. For more information, see [www.investopedia.com/community-land-trust-5206374#toc-how-community-land-trusts-work](http://www.investopedia.com/community-land-trust-5206374#toc-how-community-land-trusts-work).

# Community Land Trusts

How does a community land trust work?

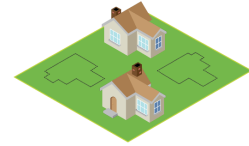
Various sources of public and philanthropic capital...

- Private donors
- Federal housing subsidies
- City-owned property
- Community foundations
- Anchor institutions

...are used by community land trusts...

CLT

...to acquire homes in a geographic focus area.

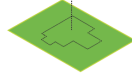


Community land trusts tweak the normal process of homebuying...

A new resident buys their house outright...



...but leases the land underneath from the CLT.



They pay an annual fee to the CLT to support its operations...

CLT

...and the CLT retains permanent ownership of the land.

### Why CLTs Matter

Although the first community land trust in the US was started in rural Georgia in 1970 by civil rights leaders to help poor black farmers, today, the majority of the country's nearly 250 community land trusts are today located in urban areas.

CLTs create affordable housing while still allowing low-income residents to build equity as homeowners. Moreover, because the CLT retains ownership of the underlying land, this housing remains permanently affordable, even as the original beneficiaries of an affordable home price sell and move on. This long-term, continuing benefit makes CLTs an especially efficient use of affordable housing subsidies.

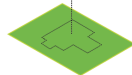
By locking in permanent access to affordable housing, CLTs can play an important role in countering the market-driven displacement associated with gentrification. And by stewarding neighborhood land for the public good, not speculative profit, CLTs have played an equally important role in stabilizing communities by preventing unnecessary foreclosures.

...to make housing permanently affordable.

Current resident sells their house at a price set by the CLT, earning a portion of the increase in value of their home...



CLT  
...while the CLT retains the land.



A new resident buys the house at a price that's been kept affordable...



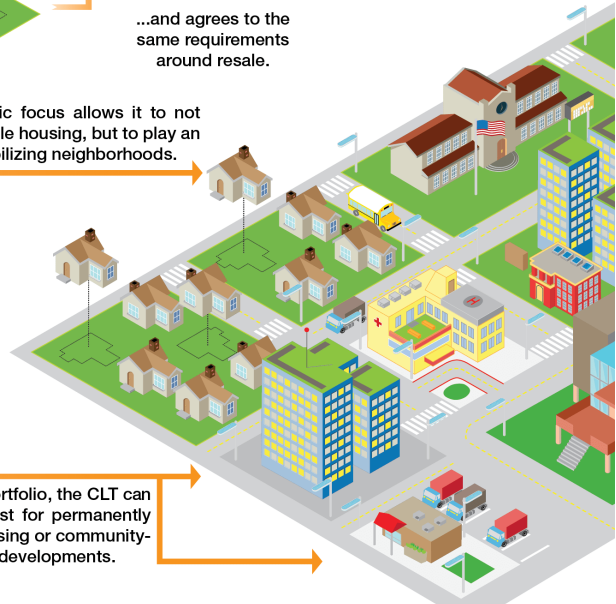
...and agrees to the same requirements around resale.

CLTs are typically governed by:



CLT

The CLT's geographic focus allows it to not only provide affordable housing, but to play an important role in stabilizing neighborhoods.



As it diversifies its portfolio, the CLT can also own land in trust for permanently affordable rental housing or community-focused commercial developments.

For more information on Community Land Trusts, see: [community-wealth.org/clts](http://community-wealth.org/clts)  
Designed by Benjamin Yi



**Douglass Community Land Trust in DC.** In 2019, a CLT named after Frederick Douglass—the Douglass CLT—was incorporated in Washington, D.C., as an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit membership organization to provide permanent affordability for current and future generations of DC homebuyers, renters, local business owners, and others.

The Douglass CLT was a key recommendation of the 11th Street Bridge Park’s Equitable Development Plan—developed via 200+ resident meetings to outline strategies to ensure local residents can stay and thrive in place. Membership in the organization is open to anyone who has an affiliation with DC and believes in the organization’s mission (<https://douglassclt.org>).

The Douglass CLT partners with Ward 8-based nonprofit Building Bridges Across the River and exists under the umbrella of City First Homes (<https://www.guidestar.org/profile/26-2335395>). Its funders include the DC Department of Housing and Community Development, JP Morgan Chase, the Greater Washington Community Foundation, the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, Enterprise Community Partners, Citibank, and others (<https://douglassclt.org/#News>).

Although the Douglass CLT initially focused east of the Anacostia River, Douglass CLT members hold 219 permanently affordable housing units in trust for each other across six wards of the city, including 65 rental units and 154 units in various ownership structures (limited equity cooperatives, condominium units, and single-family homes).

Southwest DC resident Coy McKinney, who represents the grassroots organization SW DC Action, serves on the board of the Douglass CLT ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZAVe32ie-U&t=138s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZAVe32ie-U&t=138s)). Currently, McKinney and others are urging the DC government to transfer ownership of land at 1101 Half St. SW to the SW chapter of the Douglass CLT instead of selling it to a private developer. <https://douglassclt.org/first-a-park-then-a-citywide-land-trust-in-d-c-2/> The site in mind, 1101 Half St. SW, is currently a firetruck repair shop that is slated to move to a different location soon. Under the District’s [newly](#)

[updated](#) Comprehensive Plan, the land-use designation of the land has changed to allow for residential and commercial development.