



THE COMMUNITY LAND TRUST-

A Return to a Humane
System of Land Tenure

HOW DID THE IDEA OF LAND TRUSTEESHIP BEGIN?

Conventional histories don't tell us, but the idea of land "stewardship" or trusteeship is natural and fundamental and was expressed, one way or another, in early land-holding practices in many parts of the world. This is why we can say that our goal is to 'restore' the land trust idea.

For example, American Indian tradition holds that the land is our mother, who sustains all life. It was incomprehensible to the Indian that individuals could have exclusive possession of parts of the earth. The great Indian chief Tecumseh reacted with astonishment to the demands of white buyers: "Sell the country? --Why not sell the air, the clouds, the great sea?"

In New England, the town commons were originally large areas open to all members of the community for animal grazing and sometimes farming. Now, our town commons are much smaller and represent in only a token way our earlier tradition.

HOW WAS THE EARLY IDEA OF STEWARDSHIP LOST?

As long as there appeared to be no limit to available land, private ownership seemed justified as a practical response to actual historic forces. Ownership of the land one worked was an essential component of insuring access to it when this nation was founded. "But, as the US changed from an agricultural to an industrial economy, from a rural to an urban nation, the social significance of private land ownership became, to a large degree, a cover for extracting speculative profits from the pressures of urbanization." (Contini, "The American City, A Forecast", The Futurist 4:1, February 1972.)

Now the system of private ownership of land, which once led to high productivity and personal independence, has become a major source of economic and social inequity. Private ownership increasingly translates into corporate ownership. More people own private homes today, but the land is increasingly held in and controlled by relatively few hands. Land costs keep rising. Those prepared to use the land productively, who lack financial resources to pay inflated and speculative land prices are hardest hit.

The community land trust can overcome these problems. It creates an institutional alternative to existing practices of landholding, based on a more ethical distribution and use, that can enable a just relationship between the land and the people on it.

WHAT IS A COMMUNITY LAND TRUST?

A community land trust is a legal entity and a quasi-public body chartered to hold land in stewardship for present and future generations while protecting the legitimate use-rights of current residents on the land.

Both in concept and in practical operation, a CLT distinguishes between the land with its natural resources and the improvements by people thereon. The land is held in trust, not the improvements. Homes, stores, and industrial enterprises created by the residents are owned by them, either cooperatively or individually.

Land is held by a CLT in perpetuity--probably never to be sold. A trust leases the land to the users with the expectation of preserving or enhancing its long-range resource value. Leases are long-term and restricted to the users of the land; absentee control and subleasing are specifically prohibited. The residents have secure use-rights to the land and are free to control and build their own community through cooperative organizations or individual homesteads.

A CLT removes a major obstacle in the way of low-income people seeking access to land by eliminating the necessity of obtaining mortgages. Leasing land can also allow a young farmer (a potentially important CLT constituent) to invest his or her limited capital in machinery, land improvements and buildings.

A Community Land Trust may acquire land from older farmers near retirement, absentee owners, and others unable to husband their land or forests. It can then lease land back to others for use and settlement. Opportunities to share in the costs of productive utilization of the land can be created.

Economic development functions may be initiated through a companion community development corporation. Low income housing, community-based business, industry and agricultural development may all flow from the land trust.

WHO "RUNS" THE LAND TRUST?

General Membership composed of

1. Founding group
2. Concerned and informed people
3. Residents on the land (lessees)



Elects



Trustees or Directors from

1. General Membership
2. Local organization (Conservation groups, co-ops, regional planners, etc.)
3. Technical advisors (legal, financial, organizational)

WHERE DOES THE MONEY COME FROM?

Some land will be acquired for free or for less than market value through friends of the CLT. Conventional mortgages can be used as well as monies made available through revolving loan funds set up by the CLT. State monies soon to be made available for purchase of development rights may also be made available to land trusts. Other financial mechanisms such as sale of long-term debt instruments and municipal financing can also be used.

IS THERE A LAND TRUST IN THE PIONEER VALLEY?

Not yet! But a group of us have been studying together for 10 weeks and plan to call together a representative group to start one, probably summer '76. There are other land trusts in nearby Windham County, Vermont, and in Worcester County, Mass, plus a dozen or so in other states.

If you are interested in learning more--or in helping with the work--tear off the form below or write a letter and send to:

Valley Land Trust Group
586 West Street
Amherst, Mass 01002

or call: Karl Davies at 253-5385 (Amherst)
Randy Kehler at 772-0453 (South Deerfield)

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 I am interested in the Land Trust movement. Please notify me of general meetings.

I would like to join a new study/action group.

I am interested in leasing land from the Land Trust.

I would like to be notified of any action-oriented seminar dealing with the wider socio-political-economic picture ("macro-analysis"), which would include readings on food and land tenure.

I would like to talk with someone about putting land in trust.

Special interests, skills, resources:

Name:

Address:

Phone number: