

THE FRANKLIN- HAMPSHIRE COMMUNITY LAND TRUST



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. More people own private homes today, but the land is increasingly held and controlled by relatively few hands and land costs keep rising. Those prepared to use the land productively, but who lack financial resources to pay inflated and speculative land prices, are hardest hit.

Land in Franklin and Hampshire counties was to a large extent once farmland--in recent years much of this has been lost to development. Between 1950 and 1969, 58% of the farmland in the lower Pioneer Valley was lost to other uses. There has been considerable loss of local and regional self-reliance; 85% of the food consumed in Massachusetts is now imported from out of state, and food costs are 6 to 8% above the national average.

Farmland is not all that is being lost; the entire integrity of the land has been affected. Land's highest value has become its market value price, rather than what it can produce through labor upon it. Land is increasingly inaccessible to people who would like to use it in a variety of productive, ecologically sound ways.

The concern for land use and land availability grows out of a broad perception of the problems of this region, for the use of land affects all aspects of society. Traditional means to combat problems of inappropriate land use, such as purchase of development rights or zoning, do not go far enough in their response to the problems. The community land trust (CLT) restores the concept of land stewardship or trusteeship. It creates an institutional alternative to existing practices of landholding based on a more ethical pattern of distribution and use.

THE COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

The 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 residents on the land.

Land is held by a CLT in perpetuity--probably never to be sold. The CLT provides access through leaseholds for persons wishing to live on the land and put it to productive and sound use. Leases are long-term and restricted to the users of the land; absentee control and subleasing are specifically prohibited.

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.

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; homes, stores, and industrial enterprises created by the residents are owned by them, either cooperatively or individually.

A CLT may acquire land from older farmers near retirement, absentee owners, or others wishing to remove their lands from the pressures of the marketplace. It can then lease them back to others and/or to the original occupants for settlement and use. Opportunities to share in the costs of productive utilization of the land can be created.

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. Cooperative and individual homestead, agricultural and forest development, low-income housing, and community-based business and industry may all grow from the land trust.

In the formation of a CLT, there are many important questions that must be decided. Will the trust be more concerned with land for agricultural production or land for conservation, residential or commercial use? Could land acquired by the CLT ever be sold for the acquisition of other "more useful" lands? How much effort should be put into outreach and educational programs? Will the trust attempt to foster the development of independent new communities or will it leave this to individual members? These are just some of the many issues; often it is a question of priorities rather than a simple yes or no answer.

THE HISTORY OF OUR LAND TRUST GROUP

At the end of 1975, a group of people from Franklin and Hampshire counties met to begin the process of the formation of a community land trust in this area. In early February 1976, those concerned began meeting as a ten-week study/action seminar to study the history and problems of land use, and possible solutions to these problems. Topics included the philosophy of land, the place of land in the larger economy, existing patterns of land use and methods of planning, land reform movements in the U.S. and elsewhere, and the history and models of the CLT.

The incorporating group was formed in early April 1976. Since that time, members have worked toward legal incorporation and the writing of by-laws. Emphasis has been given to a participatory group process, with the intention of building the principles of an open, democratic process into the structure of the CLT.

Educational outreach is another important component of the incorporating group's activities. New study/action seminars are forming, which interested members of the community are invited to join. The trust will keep the wider community informed of its progress, through periodic general meetings and the local news media.

Across the land, many CLTs have been started. Nearby are the Abnaki Regional Land Trust in Windham County, Vermont, the Maine Community Land Trust, plus a dozen or so in other states.

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

Valley Land Trust Group
586 West Street
Amherst, Mass 01002

Or call: Betsy Cornwoman 774-3087 (Greenfield)
Karl Davies 253-5385 (Amherst)

SUGGESTED READINGS: The Community Land Trust, Robert Swann et al., International Independence Institute, West Road, Box 183, Ashby, Mass 01431; Maine Land Advocate (Maine Community Land Trust Newspaper), P.O. Box 653, Bangor, Maine 04401. See also Progress and Poverty, Henry George, 1940; The People's Land, Peter Barnes, ed., 1975; Who Owns The Land, Peter Barnes and Larry Casalino.

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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 talk with someone about putting land in trust.

Special interests, skills, resources:

Name:

Address:

Phone number: