

The Halifax Affordable Housing Community Land Trust Initiative:

Project Brief

What is a Community Land Trust?

A community land trust (CLT) is a community-based non-profit organization that owns land and puts it to use for community benefit. The trust owns and manages this land outside the real estate market by holding and stewarding land and other public assets on behalf of community in perpetuity, thereby limiting inflationary pressures and related cost increases. Community land trusts often address issues of housing affordability, gentrification, social equity, food security, inclusion, resource conservation, and more.

Context

Like many communities across Canada, Halifax has struggled to maintain and grow quality, sustainable, affordable housing. With stagnant incomes, record high real estate and rental prices, limited housing supply, growing demand, and an under-developed non-profit sector that struggles to access capital funding, there is a growing population unable to find and keep affordable housing. Data suggests that the number of individuals living in a state of homelessness in Halifax has nearly doubled since 2018 (2022 Point in Time Count). In addition, upwards of 18,000 households across the municipality are severely challenged by housing insecurity (CMHC - Core Housing Need, 2016). Under current conditions these challenges will only continue to grow.



The Solution

One solution that can help address many of these issues at once is a community land trust. Community land trusts have existed for decades in the United States and United Kingdom and have proven to be a way to keep housing available and affordable for marginalized community members. They've also provided social enterprise opportunities and, in many cases, opportunities to build generational wealth for Black and Indigenous people who have missed these opportunities due to colonization.

Community land trusts are beginning to grow in popularity in Canada, and there are now several examples from across the country where CLTs are stewarding land and keeping housing costs lower for marginalized and low-income community members.

The Housing and Homelessness Partnership (HHP) identified Community Land Trusts as a priority area of work in 2019. In 2021 a group of partners, including HRM (mayor's office and HRM Planning), Housing Nova Scotia, Davis Pier Consulting, the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre, CLT 902, the Upper Hammonds Plains Strategic Initiatives Committee, and United Way Halifax applied for and received [CMHC grant funding](#) to carry this work forward.

Currently, we are in the process of deepening our research through consultations with CLT practitioners, holding introductory conversations with community groups and potential participants, and refining our strategic plan. By spring of 2023, our intention is to have designed a Halifax-appropriate CLT model and developed a comprehensive implementation plan based on an extensive community engagement process.

Project Timelines/Phasing



Project Objectives

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Broadly speaking, our goal is to establish a CLT that serves as a response to the systemic roots of housing insecurity, through the stewardship of a growing portfolio of safe, secure, and sustainable housing opportunities. However, the values of equity, diversity and inclusion are embedded in this project, making it unique for Halifax. We see tremendous potential in areas such as social and economic equity, community resilience, and non-profit sector development capacity, all of which will remain key priorities throughout the project.

To achieve these ends, we expect to use a number of established CLT strategies such as shared equity contracts, ground lease agreements with non-profit service providers, and representational governance models (see [Burlington Associates :: Home](#) for more information). The final design of the CLT will depend on the interests and the opportunities identified by community



consultation – especially those most marginalized. They will shape the CLT model, so it meets the specific needs of the neighbourhoods it serves. They will also help identify a suitable non-profit CLT operator, and many of the other partners that will be involved in building its success.

As mentioned, the CLT model has been researched by the HHP and has been recommended as a strategic opportunity by the Nova Scotia Affordable Housing Commission. Having reached the point of an acknowledged “housing crisis” by all governments, community groups and individuals, it is understood that Halifax needs a new and comprehensive means of addressing its affordable housing challenges. Through our work with Davis Pier, the HHP, and community we believe we have established the level of support required from key stakeholders to make a Halifax CLT a viable housing solution for generations to come.

If you are interested in learning more about how community land trusts could benefit your community or would like to discuss how you and/or your organization can take part in our CLT initiative, please feel free to reach out at anytime. We are eager to explore a wide variety of partnership possibilities (no commitments necessary) and are happy to answer any questions you might have on the subject.

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Community Land Trust (CLT) - Basics

CLT History

While the term “Community Land Trust” is relatively new, the fundamental concept is very old, and widespread. Related principles, such as community-led decision making, collective ownership, and inter-generational responsibility can be found in the Indigenous cultures of the Americas, pre-colonial Africa, India’s land reform movement, England’s “Garden Cities”, and Israel’s cooperative agricultural settlements, to name a few.

However, the modern community land trust model traces its roots to an organization called “New Communities Inc.” and the efforts of people like Ralph Borsodi, and Slater King (cousin of Martin Luther King Jr.) who worked with African American farmers in the rural south to gain ownership of agricultural lands to secure their livelihoods and build their homes in the late 1960’s.

Since that time, community land trusts have evolved and expanded into urban centres across the US, the UK, and Canada, often with the specific purpose of providing stable, affordable housing opportunities and limiting the negative impacts of gentrification.

What is a community land trust?

A community land trust (often called a CLT) acquires and holds land to be used for the benefit of community. The assets on that land – houses, apartments,

community gardens, buildings used for non-profits and social enterprises – are for community. The CLT removes those assets from the public marketplace.

People can purchase the house or rent the apartment. They can participate in the community garden or work for the non-profit or social enterprises within the buildings. But because the CLT holds the land beneath them and enters long-term lease agreements, those assets remain affordable for the homeowner or tenant in perpetuity. Even when the homeowner or tenant changes, that home will remain affordable for the next person.

How are Community Land Trusts created?

There are different models of community land trusts. Typically, they're governed by a non-profit operator, community members and like-minded community organizations. Together, they determine what the specific needs are for the neighbourhood or community they're in, and they decide how best to use the land. The non-profit operator takes care of the day-to-day operations of the trust.

Community Land Trusts are growing in popularity across North America, but they've been active in many parts of the United States and the United Kingdom for decades. These long-term CLTs offer evidence of the positive effects of removing housing from the traditional market and making it available to those who are marginalized or live in poverty.

How do they work?

Firstly, the CLT must acquire lands. They can be gifted from private landowners or donated to the trust by government, or lands can be purchased with donations, grants or other funding. In many jurisdictions, government will offer the right of

first refusal of available lands to the CLT. This means the CLT has the option to purchase land before it's available for public sale. This is important because it's difficult for CLTs or non-profits to always be in competition with for-profit developers for the same land. If there are buildings on the land, the community land trust can offer them for sale affordably (if it's a home), repurpose them for affordable housing, or rent them.

A land trust may also own commercial property, where a non-profit or social enterprise might operate. Because the land is meant for community, it can be used for other purposes too – like shared green space or a community garden.

Who buys or rents these units?

In general, people who need affordable housing buy or rent the units. The board members of the community land trust will decide whether the criteria used is purely financial or if there are other considerations. Some examples in other parts of Canada include accessible and affordable housing for people with disabilities and rental units for seniors living on a low income.

In some communities, the community land trust has prioritized the needs of Black and/or Indigenous community members. Often, they otherwise would not have access to home ownership. These CLTs value equity, diversity and inclusion and can offer a lot more than just a home. Because of colonialism, many Black and Indigenous communities across Canada have lost access to traditional or culturally significant lands. They've also missed out on the opportunity to build generational wealth. A CLT that prioritizes Black or Indigenous residents can rebuild or strengthen communities. It also allows homeowners to pass their homes on to family members or sell their home and buy on the public market. This gives the next generation the opportunity to own a home as well.

Why is a community land trust ideal for Halifax?

Firstly, we know that there is interest from several groups in Halifax in creating a community land trust. Secondly, there is a huge need for affordable housing in Halifax. The waitlists are long, and affordable units continue to disappear as many older units are renovated. Removing land from the public market will mean that the forces that inflate the cost of housing – like bidding wars, competition and speculation – are removed from the equation.

In addition, the non-profit housing sector in Halifax is relatively small for the size of the problem. They can't solve this issue alone. Currently, the provincial government is not interested in adding to social housing stock to the [housing continuum](#). A community land trust could help fill that gap. There is crown and HRM-owned land that could be made available to a CLT. There are also private landowners who would potentially like to donate their land back to community.



CLT Resources

For more information on the essential elements of Community Land Trusts, their history, and insight into how they can be adapted to the needs and interests of diverse communities, take a look at the following resources:

The City-CLT Partnership: Municipal Support for Community Land Trusts, by John Emmeus Davis and Rick Jacobus (2008) -

Chapter 1 – [10 characteristics of CLTS generally.pdf](#)

Full Report - [the-city-clt-partnership-full.pdf \(lincolninst.edu\)](#)

Burlington Associates in Community Development, LLC (website): [Burlington Associates :: Home](#)

Community Land Trust 101 - [Community Land Trusts 101 \(burlingtonassociates.com\)](#)

Roots of the CLT: Origins and Evolution of the Community Land Trust in the United States (a four-part video) - [Burlington Associates: Roots of the CLT](#)

Introduction to Community Land Trusts: A Quick Time Movie - [Community Land Trusts Introduction \(burlingtonassociates.com\)](#)