

Community Land Trusts



Reassembling Property,
Land, and Relations



Colonial capitalism requires the perverse transformation of life-sustaining relations into individual things that can be acquired and owned, bought and sold. An abundant, interconnected world is made into a warehouse of inert, scarce resources for human use. This alienating mode of life is at the center of climate catastrophe, sets the table for white supremacy, and upholds and naturalizes an ethic of accumulation as a necessary and valued pathway toward securing well-being.

As part of this dominant way of being, people are activated to work hard and compete against each other under conditions of (imagined) scarcity, selling their own labor for bare survival, or exploiting the labor of others to pursue never-ending desires.

Access to land—to grow things, make stuff, and simply live on—is determined by money, and all of the systems and structures that enable some individuals and groups to have more or less of it. Basic acts of living and belonging together, are thrust into a violent landscape of hierarchies and exclusions. Relational ways of being in the world that work outside of the visions and dreams of colonial capitalism are difficult to imagine and actualize.





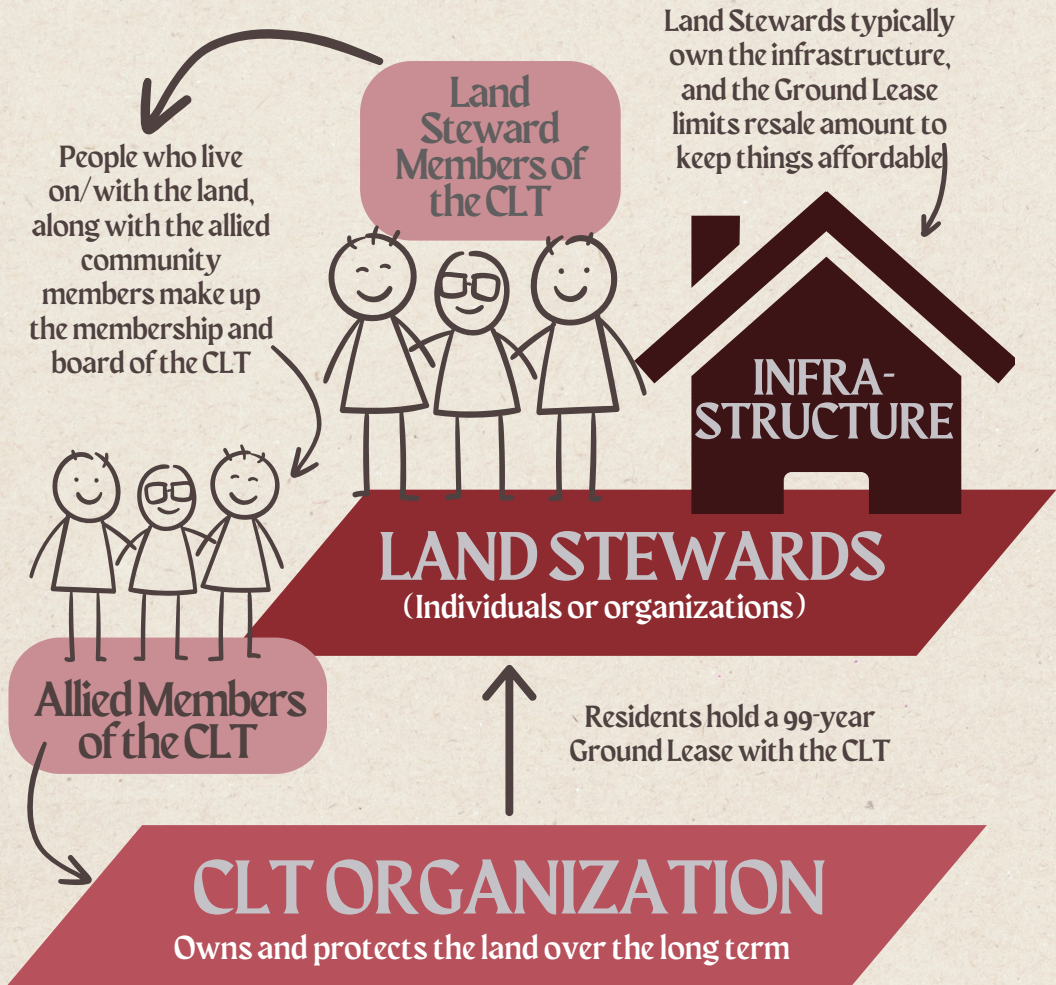
Community Land Trusts

are place-based projects to bring land into community care. CLTs —along with ecovillages, co-housing, cooperatives, intentional communities, and land-back efforts—are a strategy towards **decommodification**. A politics of decommodification seeks to re-work and re-weave relations of care between things. For CLTs, this means making land and housing accessible and it means caring for and restoring relationships with and between people and land.




COMMUNITY LAND TRUSTS

CLTs work by taking land out of the speculative market and away from individual ownership, placing it into a community-held trust that can then begin to **decommodify** relationships between land and people. Anything built on top of the land in trust—housing, buildings for commercial use, or other infrastructure—is kept affordable through a ground lease or other mechanism that expresses community-level regulations, values, and aspirations.




New Communities Inc, often called the original model for CLTs, emerged through the civil rights movement in the United States in the 1960s as a response to property accumulation and racist exclusions from land.




Today, there are over **600** CLTs worldwide and over **300** in the United States alone.

Much of the recent activity and discussion around CLTs in organizing circles, among policymakers, and in academia has been in relation to the skyrocketing costs of housing; CLTs are most commonly discussed as a means of securing affordable housing for oppressed and front-line communities. And with good reason.



According to the National Coalition of Low-Income Housing Coalition, **not a single state** has enough affordable housing to meet the needs of low-income renters.* And, accounting for inflation, millennials pay **almost twice** as much for homes as their boomer parents**.

On average, Black renters spend **significantly more** of their income on housing than their white counterparts and the gap between Black and white homeownership continues to widen.



The transformative promise of CLTs includes and goes beyond housing access and equality. Fundamentally, CLTs provide a means for communities to **build power and to make creative decisions** about how land and livelihoods are understood, related to, and practiced beyond commodifying market logics.

* nlihc.org/gap

** Brannon, Home Prices vs. Inflation: Why Homes Are Unaffordable in 2024, 2024



DUDLEY STREET NEIGHBORHOOD INITIATIVE

One of the more celebrated examples of a Community Land Trust is the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI) and the land trust proper, Dudley Neighbors Inc. (DNI), located in Boston's Dudley neighborhood—a predominantly working-class community of color. DSNI was formed in 1984 out of an organizing effort by Dudley residents to reclaim and recreate a vibrant, affordable neighborhood.



DSNI's early organizing efforts to build community power included mobilizing eminent domain authority to buy up vacant land, placing it in a trust and under community control.



Today, DNI holds 32 acres of land with parks, a greenhouse, urban farms, and 226 affordable housing units. DSNI is continuing to work towards strengthening relationships and cultivating well-being through the land trust, in the neighborhood, with networks and movements. For example, DSNI is an active member of the Greater Boston Community Land Trust Network and collaborates with urban planners to explore how **“its organizing, planning, and land ownership can support commercial development that can produce good jobs and locally-owned businesses”***

*Loh, Upham's Corner Action Research, 2019



COOPERATION JACKSON

Cooperation Jackson (CJ) is a project for working-class liberation and Black autonomy in Jackson, Mississippi. Born out of organizing efforts of the New Afrikan People's Organization and The Malcolm X Grassroots Movement in the 2000's, CJ advances economic democracy and community power through the development of a solidarity economy ecosystem that includes worker-owned and democratically managed institutions, community production, community gardens and various mutual aid efforts.

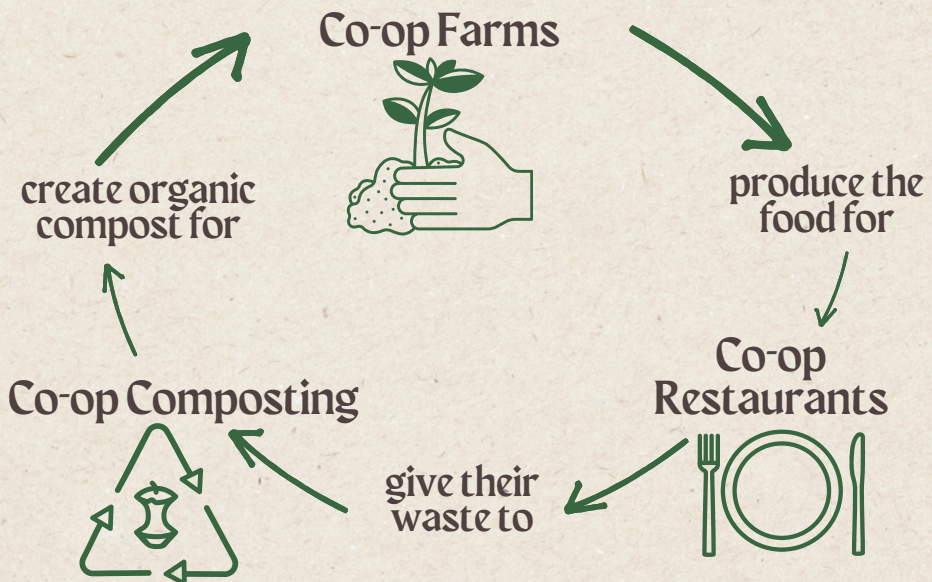


Cooperation Jackson adopts a Fight and Build approach that organizes the Black working class to fight against, resist, and ameliorate the impacts of white supremacy and capital accumulation and to build new conditions of possibility for cooperative and regenerative relations. *"In effect, what we are aiming to do is develop a new transformative culture."**

* Akuno, Build and Fight the Program and Strategy of Cooperation Jackson, 2023

Central to this work is CJ's Community Land Trust. The CLT plays a crucial role in fighting gentrification by bringing land targeted for corporate development into community control.

The CLT anchors a place-based plan for an eco-village with affordable housing, renewable energy, regenerative agriculture, and interconnected cooperative institutions that produce for community needs, cultivate interdependence, and build power.





COOPERATION VERMONT

Cooperation Vermont (CV) begins from a position of radical acceptance: the climate catastrophe is upon us and capitalist systems of production and distribution that have brought us to the brink, are now at a breaking point. Intentionally established in Vermont's particular bioregion that is projected to be relatively resilient in the coming years and decades, CV is preparing for ongoing liberatory movement work through cultivating autonomous communities with regenerative and democratic economies.



CV's Community Land Trust works to **decommodify** land through community stewardship and serves as a relational base for cooperative businesses, community food production, and equitable and affordable housing.



As part of their mission, CV builds deep relationships with community members through mutual-aid efforts and organizes with other efforts throughout the state.

In 2021, CV purchased and brought the Marshfield General Store into the CLT, transitioning it into a profitable worker-owned cooperative with affordable apartments and emergency housing units.

Other projects include a 10-acre organic farm as part of the Elder Landshare Project through which community elders bring land into the CLT.





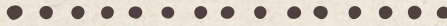
LAND IN COMMON

Land in Common, (LC) is a nonprofit on Wabanaki territory, in what is colonially known as Greene, Maine. Since 2008, LC has been organizing around land justice through “education, movement building, and collective forms of land holding and land redistribution.”*



LC understands commodified land as the material base of white supremacy. LC seeks to transform this relationship by relating to land as a member of their community, not as a commodity. This practice refuses a separation of nature from home and from work, as conventional conservation initiatives have always done. Instead, LC facilitates meaningful land access for Indigenous and other excluded and front-line communities to engage in deep relationships and create livelihoods with the land.

LC's CLT includes a multi-racial, multi-generational affordable housing cooperative; three worker-owned farm businesses; a Latinx-led community mutual aid farm, and around 200 acres of wild land.



The CLT is primarily designed to promote Indigenous sovereignty and the flourishing of Wabanaki communities. By removing the land from the speculative market, LC communicates that settlers do not own the land, and enables Indigenous stewardship and shared decision-making over what happens on those lands. In addition, a portion of the CLT's annual Land Payment goes directly to Wabanaki communities in support of their self-determination efforts.



"This is what it means for us to be a community land trust: we build community with each other and with the land, and trust is what grows from this shared effort."

Assembling Relations

CLTs are gaining traction with variant interests, are connecting with each other, and are being mobilized by and through transformative initiatives and movements.



For example, Cooperation Jackson and Cooperation Vermont are members of the Peoples Network for Land and Liberation, (PNLL) a coalition of six place-based organizations intending to decommodify and restore right relationship with land.* The PNLL includes the Wellspring Cooperative, a solidarity economy initiative in Springfield, Massachusetts that is co-organizing the Lower Valley Community Land Trust in Western, MA, a project that is leveraging a CLT to help cultivate a solidarity economy ecosystem that might include regenerative agriculture, cooperative housing and businesses, community production, and so on.

CLTs can be understood as place-based, world-making projects. CLTs respond to violence, inequalities, and exclusions, and also help enable ways of becoming human that reject and transcend the logics, beliefs, and values of capitalist modernity. CLTs are one vehicle for communities to make and remake their own conditions of life.

* <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/65a2231d95d641e9b1586063894ca09f>

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Groups Mentioned and Other CLT Resources

- Center For New Economies - centerforneweconomies.org/apply/community-land-trust-program/toolkit-legal-documents/
- Community Movement Builders - communitymovementbuilders.org
- Cooperation Jackson - cooperationjackson.org
- Cooperation Vermont - www.cooperationvermont.org
- Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative - www.dsni.org
- Global Village - www.globalvillagefarms.org
- International Center For Community Land Trusts - cltweb.org
- Land in Common - www.landincommon.org
- National Low Income Housing Coalition - nlihc.org/gap
- New Communities - www.newcommunitiesinc.com
- Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust - nefoclandtrust.org/
- Sogorea Te' Land Trust - sogoreate-landtrust.org/
- The People's Network For Land and Liberation - storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/65a2231d95d641e9b1586063894ca09f
- The Guild - www.theguild.community/
- Wellspring Co-op - wellspringcoop.org



BSE is an assemblage of teaching and learning projects aimed at advancing conditions from which communities can make and remake their own conditions of life.

Check us out on Instagram
@Building_Solidarity_Economies

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