

ST. LOUIS COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

CASE STATEMENT

March 2020



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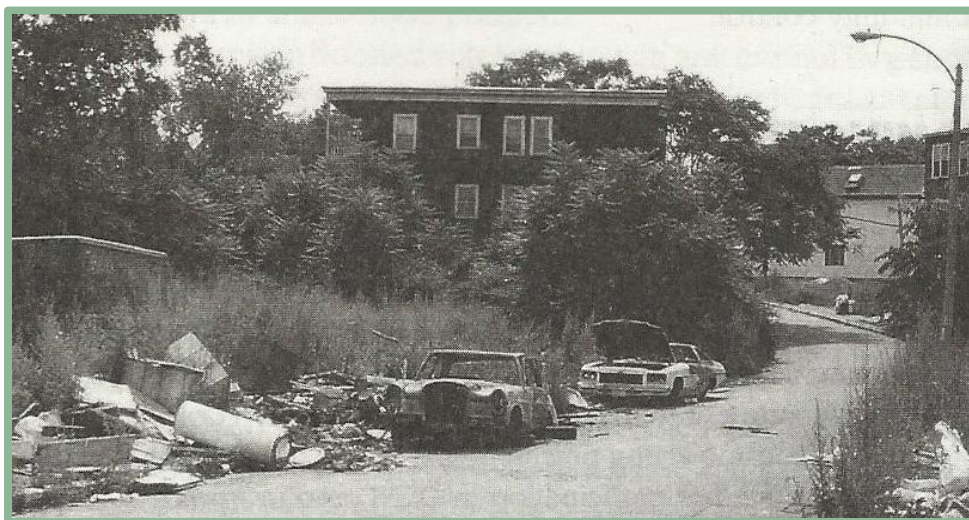
COMMUNITY LAND TRUST EXAMPLE

Dudley Street Neighbors, Boston

In the 1980s and 1990s Boston's Dudley Street Triangle had 1,300 vacant lots, significant problems with illegal dumping, and frequent arson fires.

Today, Dudley Street is a thriving neighborhood with businesses, a mix of rental and owned properties, parks, playgrounds, and community gardens. The Dudley Street residents who envisioned a safe, livable community that did not displace its residents are still right there. These residents, now joined by others who have since moved to the area, run the Dudley Street Neighbors Community Land Trust, one of the most successful and best-known community development initiatives in the United States.

As the St. Louis region works to address similar challenges with vacancy, housing, green spaces, and overall resources, leaders in the St. Louis region are looking at examples like Dudley Street as well as local recommendations (see page 10) to inform the development of a Community Land Trust as a tailored solution to meet these needs.



View of Winthrop Street from Dennis Street – an area now owned by Dudley Street Neighbors, Inc: 1986 (above) and 2018 (below)



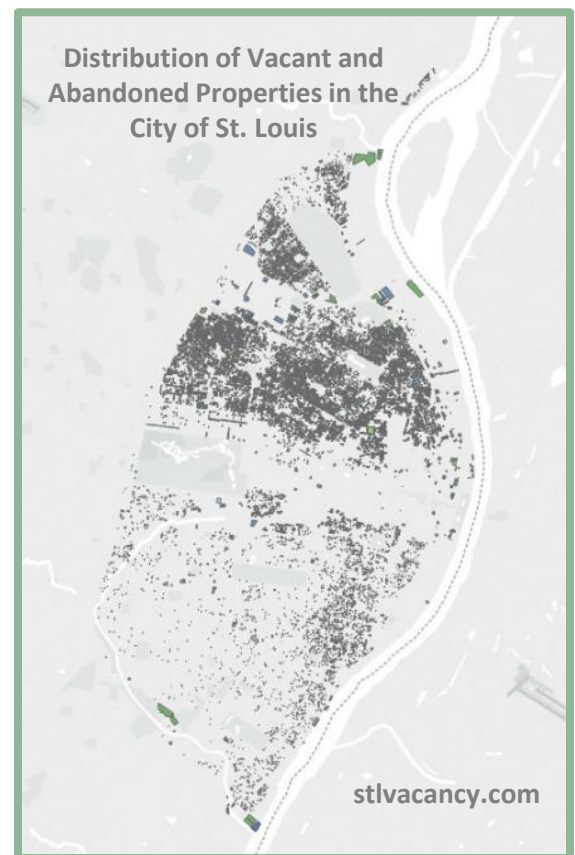
HOW DID WE GET HERE?

St. Louis has a long, rich, and complicated history. After reaching peak population of more than 800,000 in the 1950s, St. Louis has experienced a steady, slow outmigration, recording a population of just over 319,000 in the 2010 census. Most St. Louis residents are familiar with the circumstances that accelerated population loss in the mid-20th century: the decline of vital industrial and automotive industries; government subsidized highway construction, enabling easy commutes from suburban homes that were subsidized by FHA and other government programs after World War II; the development and later destruction of public housing projects such as Pruitt-Igoe; and ‘white flight’ from city neighborhoods, among other contributing factors. Housing values plummeted, resources for schools and public safety diminished, and problems with crime compounded. This exodus of residents and employment opportunities from the urban core, particularly from north St. Louis city, resulted in some of the nation’s highest concentrations of poverty and racial segregation¹.

These factors weakened the real estate market and, along with aging housing stock and harmful policies such as redlining and predatory investing, left the city with approximately 25,000 vacant properties – among the highest vacancy rates in the nation². The city owns 12,000 of these properties, charging the Land Reutilization Authority (LRA), the city’s land bank, with upkeep. As the “owner of last resort,” LRA’s primary purpose is to return the properties to the tax rolls. However, the budget as it stands cannot support the maintenance of 12,000 properties, at a cost of millions of dollars each year. The city’s capacity for upkeep is limited, and challenges with vacancy continue to mount – illegal dumping, decay, and safety issues on the properties themselves and in the neighborhoods where the concentration of vacancy is particularly high.

St. Louis’ vacancy problem isn’t just about vacant lots and empty buildings. Residents report that this disinvestment has led to diminished quality of life – they feel unsafe in their neighborhoods and unheard by the officials and institutions that allocate resources. Buildings and land left unattended for years translate to diminishing property values for occupied homes and a lack of economic activity that would help their neighborhoods and the residents thrive.

Historically, developers have focused investment on areas that are already thriving. Not only private investors, but federal policies, economic experts, and programs have focused resources on neighborhoods defined as at the economic “tipping point” – those that are struggling where investment can turn the tide – leaving more challenged neighborhoods without the investments that could improve their conditions. Long-time residents are rightly wary of economic development that can displace families and leave much-needed resources even farther out of reach but without sustained investment, residents recognize that their neighbors will continue to leave for areas with more resources.



¹From Wash U Feas . Study: Gordon, C. (2009). Mapping decline: St. Louis and the fate of the American city. University of Pennsylvania Press.

²Tyler Swehla et al., Kan State Univ., Dept of Landscape Architecture and Re'l & Cmty Planning, *Parcels and Peppers: Savory ideas for Addressing Vacancy in St. Louis xix*, 7 (Tyler Swehla ed., 2015).

A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

Residents around the country began to form Community Land Trusts - beginning in the 1960s and accelerating in the '80s and '90s - to prioritize community-led approaches to planning and development. It is an approach rooted in community organizing, coalition building, and community engagement to bring resources to historically marginalized communities. There is not one answer to address the complex challenge of vacancy in St. Louis – we recognize this complexity and the need for a multi-pronged approach to this issue, one that does not replicate the dynamics that created and perpetuate the inequities that drive the current vacancy crisis.

A Community Land Trust for St. Louis (“the Trust”) rethinks investment in the St. Louis region through a collaborative, community-based approach, creating a proactive model for establishing partnerships with residents for vacancy conversion, improving the resilience and sustainability of our communities. This includes focusing on safe, sustainable housing for current and future residents; commercial space to boost local economic activity; and, where construction is not feasible due to infrastructure issues, open spaces that increase biodiversity, improve the physical and mental health of residents, and boost quality of life. This will be unique in our city. St. Louis has never had a standalone 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to redeveloping vacant properties.

The Trust will build on creative green space developments already taking place at the neighborhood level and on current programming by the Green City Coalition (GCC). The Coalition is working in partnership with residents to develop 30 acres of land across the City of St. Louis. Since 2016, these groups have developed vibrant green space and development plans that bring resources to the region, determined and designed through an intensive community engagement process. Nearly 800 neighbors and dozens of partner organizations have participated to date. Looking forward, the Trust can continue to marshal the resources necessary for equitable development, using these green spaces as a starting point for future development hubs.

GREEN CITY COALITION

is a formal partnership between the City of St. Louis, St. Louis Development Corporation, Missouri Department of Conservation, and Metropolitan St. Louis Sewer District working collaboratively with member organizations and neighbors to convert vacant and abandoned properties to new community-owned green spaces that promote healthy, biodiverse, and resilient neighborhoods. GCC is not a stand-alone entity and is staffed by an inter-disciplinary and inter-organizational team.

**GREEN CITY COALITION
FOCUS NEIGHBORHOODS
& DEVELOPMENT SITES**



greencitycoalition.org

SCOPE OF COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

The Community Land Trust will be a stand-alone nonprofit organization with a board of directors and paid staff. Residents of impacted neighborhoods will represent at least sixty percent of the board, with the remaining members representing community organizations, local government, and regional leaders.

We intend to use a phased approach for implementation of the Land Trust, beginning in GCC's focus neighborhoods (Wells Goodfellow, Walnut Park, College Hill, and Baden) and expanding in reach and scope as we raise additional resources. The organization will work at the intersection of community needs and evidence-based decision making by focusing on several criteria to determine which neighborhoods to prioritize in its development work, including:

High concentrations of vacant and abandoned properties

Need for open spaces for stormwater absorption and community health

Need for new and infill housing and equitable economic development

Residents' interests and priorities

The Community Land Trust will work with residents to seek solutions to infrastructure challenges, and to convert vacant land and buildings in ways that improve the health and well-being of residents. We envision a partnership between residents, the Trust, and the City that recognizes residents' leadership and power to determine the fate of their neighborhoods. The Community Land Trust will act as a facilitator, connecting residents to City services, and land and property for ownership and development.



Cabbage Patch Community Garden, Wells Goodfellow

What is a green space?

The term 'green space' is used broadly to describe *intentional* open space for any combination of the following purposes:

Recreation

e.g. sports fields and parks

Food Production

e.g. community gardens and urban agriculture

Green Infrastructure

e.g. rain gardens and bioswales

Habitat / Ecosystem Preservation

e.g. prairies and pollinator gardens

SCOPE OF COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

continued

GREEN SPACES

Vacant land and buildings that are not optimal for construction or redevelopment are prime for conversion to high quality, community-owned green spaces. Numerous studies show the benefits of open space in improving health outcomes (e.g. asthma, diabetes, high blood pressure), increasing home values, and enhancing a sense of community while decreasing heat island effects and crime. Such projects can include creating gardens and parks, installing public art, or promoting food production in community gardens, and introducing native plants to improve biodiversity and aesthetics. Importantly, these green spaces also serve a practical function of absorbing stormwater, which in turn helps to eliminate flooding and sewage backups into occupied homes.

The reality is that much of the housing the city has lost will not be redeveloped in the neighborhoods most affected by vacancy. A key reason for this is the City's aging infrastructure, which was built over rivers and streams. As we work to understand how stormwater management issues affect development efforts in these neighborhoods, future efforts must be reasonable, thoughtful, and targeted to account for resident safety and infrastructure limitations.

HOUSING

The Trust will prioritize housing in its efforts in many ways: developing housing that's affordable, sustainable, and provides opportunities for both rental and homeownership; improving existing homes by partnering with owners on maintenance and upgrades; and ensuring that long-time residents can stay once economic activity and property values in their neighborhoods begin to increase.

The Trust will focus on partnering with and facilitating connections to nonprofit service providers; legal services and tenant advocacy; youth development and employment; and neighborhood associations and community development corporations. Robust collaborations like these help to ensure that development occurs without displacement and that housing options are equitable, accessible, and sustainable.

JOBS & LOCAL ECONOMY

The Trust intends to stimulate economic activity in the neighborhoods where it invests, with a particular focus on making these opportunities available to black residents and business owners. The development of green spaces will enable the creation of jobs to install and maintain those spaces. Demolition and development create a need for deconstruction and construction work. Commercial and residential development create opportunities for black developers, businesses, and aspiring entrepreneurs. The Trust will partner with residents to proactively identify specific needs to help communities thrive, such as grocery stores and other retail and financial institutions.

The Trust will grow and adopt initiatives incrementally as it builds capacity over time. A priority for the Trust in its early years will be land acquisition and partnering with the City of St. Louis and neighborhoods to determine the most advantageous ways to approach development. We anticipate The Trust will serve as an owner and a steward of the land it develops as part of its work, while serving as a facilitator for resident property ownership.

SCOPE OF COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

continued

Green Spaces for Healthy Neighborhoods

Up until the early 1900s, several streams that fed into the Mississippi River flowed through the City of St. Louis. All but a portion of River des Peres have since been converted to sewer tunnels that transport and treat home wastewater and stormwater in a combined drainage system on its way to the river. During storm events, these combined sewer systems can be overwhelmed, causing overflows that directly impact residents through basement backups and street flooding. Green spaces allow stormwater to be absorbed directly into the ground and water tables, allowing more space for home wastewater, thus reducing backups and flooding. With projected increases in both structural development and the severity of storm events due to climate change, maintaining green spaces that absorb water will be crucial for ensuring healthy and resilient neighborhoods.

The conversion of 7 acres of vacant and abandoned properties to the Wells Goodfellow Neighborhood Green Space reduced illegal dumping by 82% from 2017 to 2019.



Green Spaces for Healthy Neighbors

Green spaces improve environmental health while providing physical and mental health benefits to residents. North St. Louis City neighbors are disproportionately impacted by poor property conditions, lower quality outdoor spaces, and several correlated health conditions including heart disease, lead poisoning and asthma¹. Well-maintained green spaces can alleviate these impacts by reducing illegal dumping and violent crime, improving air quality and lowering temperatures, and providing safe spaces for community gatherings and recreation.

¹Information taken from Environmental Racism in St. Louis and Assessing Park Equity in St. Louis, Missouri reports.

RESIDENTS at the CENTER of EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT

The Community Land Trust will be designed to bring resources to communities that position residents to determine the future of their own neighborhoods. As the Trust amplifies residents' voices and facilitates connections to resources for development, a critical value will be to ensure that efforts do not replicate the dynamics that have resulted in decades of inequality. The Community Land Trust will put this value in action in the following ways:

Ensure residents have a meaningful stake in decision-making:

The Land Trust's board will include at least 60% representation by residents of neighborhoods most affected by vacancy in the region. The day-to-day work of the organization will include working with existing community development corporations and neighborhood associations and will build on historic and existing neighborhood plans and values.

Support for organizing efforts:

The St. Louis region has an abundance of organizations working on community development, organizing, and resident support. In the same way that GCC has worked to connect residents to existing resources, the Trust will partner with anchor institutions and local government, ensuring residents have access to available resources and support that elevate resident and community leadership.

Proactively guard against displacement:

Community improvements can attract attention and investment, which can be beneficial to residents. At the same time, equitable development must ensure that existing residents continue to be the beneficiaries of these improvements and are not pushed out of their homes due to rising housing prices or retail developments that might benefit the community broadly, while disadvantaging residents. The Land Trust will maintain a commitment to maintaining affordability in the areas where it works and advancing policies and practices that prioritize keeping people in their homes.

PROPOSED BUDGET: OVERVIEW

The chart below demonstrates the specific investments that the Community Land Trust will make in its first five years of operations and what impact that investment will have. Over time, the staff and board will work together to grow the initial investment of \$650,000 in the Land Trust's annual operating budget to nearly \$1.2 million by the end of its fifth year in existence.

Year	Staff	Operating Budget	Focus	Impact
1	4 Full-Time Employees (FTE): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Executive Director Engagement Coordinator Program Coordinator Administrative Coordinator 	\$650,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acquisition of vacant and abandoned properties Board & staff development 501(c)(3) and development of governance and structure Continued development and maintenance of Green City Coalition project sites and programs Identification of GCC programs to transition to Land Trust Identification of institutional and individual funders for future support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced burden of vacant properties to LRA and City departments Improved property conditions and quality of life in high-vacancy neighborhoods Partnership/agreements with community partnerships, nonprofits
2	4 FTE: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Executive Director Engagement Coordinator Program Coordinator Administrative Coordinator 	\$690,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued land acquisition and land use agreements Board development Transition of select programs from GCC partners to the Trust Continued green space maintenance Identification of future priority locations Engagement of stakeholders for development and housing Fund development 	<i>All of the above, in addition to:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased funding and sustainability for the Community Land Trust's efforts Jobs creation: land management
3	5 FTE: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Executive Director Development Director Engagement Coordinator Program Coordinator Administrative Coordinator 	\$850,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued land acquisition and land use agreements Board Development Property and program maintenance Fund development Expansion to additional neighborhoods Research and planning for housing development 	<i>All of the above, in addition to:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional interest and buy-in in addressing vacancy
4	5 FTE: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Executive Director Development Director Engagement Coordinator Program Coordinator Administrative Coordinator 	\$970,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued land acquisition and land use agreements Property and program maintenance Fund development Implementation of structural development plans 	<i>All of the above, in addition to:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased funding and sustainability for the Community Land Trust's efforts St. Louis County neighborhood identified for partnership Jobs creation: construction and small business
5	6 FTE: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Executive Director Development Director Engagement Coordinator Housing Specialist Program Coordinator Administrative Coordinator 	\$1,195,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued land acquisition and land use agreements Property and program maintenance Fund development Implementation of structural development plans 	<i>All of the above, in addition to:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Benchmarks for affordable housing identified

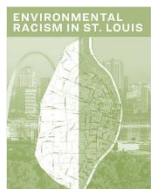
GUIDING DOCUMENTS



Resilient St. Louis

City of St. Louis Office of the Mayor (2019)

“Resilience Value: Enhancing community green space will provide a variety of environmental and social benefits— including reducing stormwater runoff, minimizing heat island effect, and creating community gathering spaces. Enhanced community green space will also ensure that communities are empowered to control the future of their neighborhoods.”



Environmental Racism in St. Louis

Washington University in St. Louis: Interdisciplinary Environmental Clinic (2019)

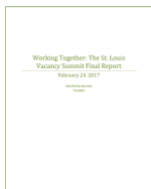
“Creative new approaches are required. The disparities highlighted in this report call for ensuring that all St. Louisans, not only the most privileged, have safe, affordable, and energy-efficient housing; and neighborhood-based revitalization efforts that include addressing vacant properties and illegal dumping, directed by and for the benefit of local residents rather than the profit motive.”



Land Trust Feasibility Study

Washington University in St. Louis – Environmental Studies Department (2018)

“Economic development considerations should be paired with urban greening early in the process. Land trusts in cities surveyed for this report often created community economic development plans along with targeted plans for urban greening. A committee with expertise in community economic development can help inform efforts to create green job training programs or related work by the land trust.”



Vacancy Collaborative Summit

Vacancy Collaborative (2018)

Anti-Displacement and Neighborhood Planning Priority: “Create a land trust system to bring vacant parcels back into private system.”



A Plan to Reduce Vacant Lots and Buildings

City of St. Louis Office of the Mayor (2018)

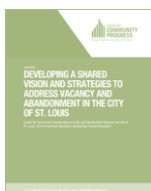
Strategy under “Develop Alternative Stabilization, Demolition and Maintenance Practices.”



St. Louis Land Bank Assessment

Asakura Robinson (2017)

“Promote and facilitate alternative land uses and greening: identify a subset of LRA lots that are eligible for long-term greening uses and institute a long-term greening program; ... continue to provide LRA land at reduced or no cost for community-based and non-profit greening uses...”



Developing a Shared Vision and Strategies to Address Vacancy and Abandonment in the City of St. Louis

Center for Community Progress (2016)

“Transfer 20% of existing LRA inventory to new ownership each year for the next five years; ...increase the total acreage of green space in the City by 50%; ...increase total assessed values by 25%”

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Who will run the land trust?

Current partners and the Steering Committee are working to define a sustainable structure and funding model to ensure long-term success, however staff will be hired by the future Board of Directors (with a minimum 60% representation from high-vacancy neighborhoods). It is the intention of the Steering Committee to define the requirements for local representation, hiring practices, anti-discrimination policies, and guiding principles to ensure that future staff represent and reflect land trust communities.

What makes this different from the LRA?

The City's land bank (Land Reutilization Authority – LRA) was founded in 1971 as the first City-initiated land bank to be developed within the United States. As property abandonment increased alongside limited demand for redevelopment, the LRA became the owner-of-last-resort. When a property has moved through the Sheriff's Tax Sale and receives no bids, the LRA becomes the default owner. It is then the mission of the land bank to find new owners and return these properties to a tax-generating state.

In contrast to these functions, a Community Land Trust strategically assembles properties for redevelopment guided by residents needs and priorities. As a non-profit entity, the emphasis is on generating benefits to residents and the City (e.g. improved property conditions, increased property values, job creation, anti-displacement advocacy) as opposed to tax generation.

How can this effort prevent resident displacement?

Displacement occurs at both ends of the community development spectrum - disinvestment and reinvestment. On one end, residents can be forced to move due to poor housing conditions, struggling education systems and a weak local economy, the prevalence of crime, and an inability to access funding for home purchase and repair. On the other end, reinvestment can lead to displacement due to rising rents and property taxes and a decreased sense of neighborhood ownership.

The Trust can help to prevent displacement on both ends of this spectrum - by reducing the negative impacts of disinvestment, while implementing reinvestment with legal tools and policies aligned to ensure that development occurs without displacement.

