

# Urban Land Trusts:

*A Comparative Case Study Analysis*



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**Master in Community and Regional Planning Final Project**  
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## Executive Summary



**Figure E.1** Atlanta's Eastside trail, part of a larger interconnected trail network, <https://phys.org/news/2018-01-greenways-diverse-users.html>

Conservation land trusts, private nonprofit organizations that preserve open space for habitat, recreation, agriculture, or historic preservation, have traditionally operated in rural or suburban areas (Bird, 2012). Over the past 25 years, the focus of many land trusts has shifted to include urban areas. Their work includes affordable housing, urban farming, pocket parks, greenway trails, community development, and reforestation. As former Director of Community Conservation at the Land Trust Alliance wrote in 2014, "Today's conservation organizations are not your mother's land trusts" (Aldrich, 2014). ***This report explores key motivations for urban land trusts, as well as common urban partners and programs.***

With roughly 85% of the country's population living in cities with 50,000+ residents (urban areas), land trusts have a growing stake in making cities greener, more livable, and equitable. As land trusts continue to include human communities in their scope, urban areas become continuously hard to ignore. This report demonstrates the diversity of urban land trust ***motivations, partners, and programs.*** These elements serve as the building blocks for urban land trusts and play an important role in the decision-making process faced by land trusts considering expansion into urban areas. I reviewed academic literature, examined publications and social media of over 40 urban land trusts, and conducted an in-depth Case Study Analysis of four organizations:

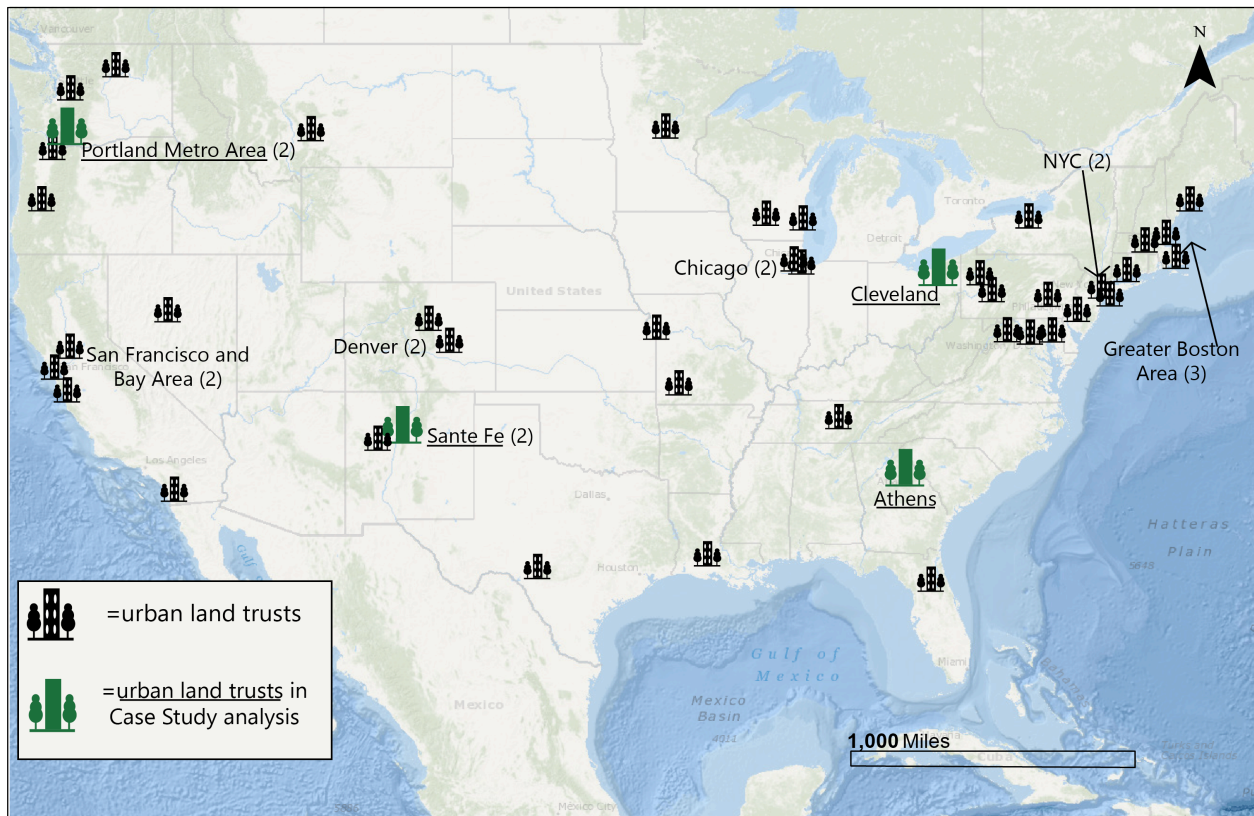
- Western Reserve Land Conservancy (OH)
- Athens Land Trust (GA)
- Columbia Land Trust (OR-WA)
- Santa Fe Land Conservancy (NM)

Although land trusts from Georgia to Oregon have increased their presence in cities, the motivations have been largely unexplored. The literature’s deficient exploration of urban land trust motivations and partnerships represents a gap worth exploring, especially as rural and suburban land trusts increasingly include urban areas in their focus. This report addresses these gaps and features multiple examples of urban land trust models unique to geographic and organizational context, *yet featuring important similarities*. As urban areas expand and land trust motivations change, this report provides a valuable resource, demonstrating the diversity of urban land trusts and offering a clearer picture of the internal decision-making process faced by organizations in this position.

### Urban Land Trust Motivations, Partners, and Programs:

Demonstrating the geographic extent of this phenomenon, I reviewed the publications, websites, and social media of over 40 land trusts with urban programs. As **Figure E.2** shows, there is a broad distribution of urban serving land trusts across the country, with a concentration around large urban areas like NYC, the Bay Area, Chicago, D.C., and others. I found fewer examples in the Great Plains, Rocky Mountains, and interior Pacific states due the scarcity of cities with populations over 50,000. The list of 40 organizations is not exhaustive; many *more urban land trusts exist*. See the **Appendix** for a complete list of organizations in this review. I chose four land trusts from this larger sample for my in-depth Case Study Analysis, highlighted on the map in green.

**Figure E.2** Distribution of Urban Land Trusts Featured in this Study, 2019



After analyzing strategic plans and interviewing staff from four urban land trusts (see Chapter Four: **Findings**), examining publications and websites from the 40+ urban land trusts featured in Figure E.2, and exploring the academic literature related to urban conservation, I found five common motivations for urban land trust work. Chapter Five: **Key Themes Analysis** discusses these motivations in detail, providing over a dozen additional examples from other urban land trusts across the country. The five most common motivations for urban land trusts are:

- **Catalytic leadership**
- **Repurposing vacant, blighted, or undeveloped urban lots/parcels.**
- **Improving the “health” of urban ecosystems and improving public health of urban communities**
- **Mitigating sprawl through growth management and smart growth**
- **Increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion in conservation programs**

These motivations are useful for other land trusts, illuminating the driving factors behind their peer organizations work in urban areas. City planners and policy makers can also benefit from this knowledge as land trusts increasingly expand into urban areas and inevitably encounter local governments during their work. Understanding what motivates land trusts to expand their programmatic and geographic focus to urban areas also has major implications for future research, which can further explore urban land trusts impacts and measures of success.

Urban land trusts partner with other organizations to see these motivations to fruition. These partnerships represent land trust’s most useful tool for implementing urban programs. Both their initial motivations and the preexisting organizational networks found in urban areas influence land trusts partnerships. Urban land trusts partner for technical, financial, and/or administrative assistance to expand their scope beyond traditional land trust activities. See Chapter Four: **Findings** for more information on the specific partners of the Case Study land trusts and see Chapter Five: **Key Themes Analysis** for a more detailed analysis of the relationship between motivations, partners, and programs. The most common urban land trust partners featured in my report include:

- **Local government agencies** (municipal, county, and regional)
  - Including parks and recreation, community development, natural resource conservation, stormwater, public health, mayoral, or agricultural and soil agencies and departments
- **Non-profit community and neighborhood organizations**
  - Including community development organizations, other land trusts, culturally specific non-profits, and “friends of groups”
- **Businesses**
  - Including local small businesses, health care providers, retirement homes, native plant nurseries, and more

Urban land trusts, informed by their initial motivations and powered by partnerships, engage in a variety of urban programs that often vary from the “traditional” land trust easement, acquisition, and restoration work. In **Figure E.3**, you can see the most prevalent urban programs offered by land trusts in this study, a mixture of more traditional conservation activities and of community or economic development strategies. Reflecting on the urban land trust trend, Executive Director of Neighborhood Gardens Trust (PA) observes, “*While the majority of conservation land trusts continue to be focused outside of cities, urban conservation land trusts are increasing in numbers. I really do see urban land trusts as a different sort of animal. They are very people oriented versus just land oriented*” (Bird, 2012). Urban land trusts offer both people and land-focused programs. Some urban land trusts engage in multiple urban programs at once, while others focus on one or two specific program areas.

**Figure E.3 Urban Programs Offered by 40+ Land Trusts Featured in this Study, 2019**

<b>Parks and open space</b>	88%
<b>Community engagement</b>	83%
<b>Education and youth</b>	75%
<b>Trails and greenways</b>	75%
<b>Community gardening and urban farming</b>	55%
<b>Forestry and green infrastructure</b>	40%
<b>Downtown/neighborhood/economic revitalization</b>	28%
<b>Land Banking</b>	23%
<b>Food security and access</b>	23%
<b>Affordable housing</b>	13%

*Source: Urban Land Trust Study, University of Oregon PPM, 2019*

### Relevance to Urban Planning:

*I noticed clear parallels between the motivations of urban land trusts in my study, and trends in the urban planning discipline.* Urban land trusts engage in growth management, smart growth, public health, urban design, community/economic development and regional planning related activities (Aldrich, 2014). Across the country, activities and programs generally associated with local government planning, parks, natural resource management, or land development agencies have been co-opted and adapted by land trusts operating in and around urban areas.

The connection between urban planners and land trusts has important implications for future partnerships and long-term regional conservation planning. Planners, land trust staff, and academics alike agree that non-profit conservation organizations and local land use planners don’t always coordinate cohesively and successfully (Gerber, 2012). As land trusts foray into urban areas and alter their traditional programming, urban municipal governments will increasingly encounter

them. This report provides numerous examples of successful partnerships between local governments and urban land trusts, especially in **Chapters Five** and **Six**.

Isaac Robb, Western Reserve Land Conservancy's Manager of Urban Projects, relayed that Ohio lacks strong and comprehensive local government coordination of land use planning, causing fracturing, competing priorities, and a lack of shared vision between conservation organizations and public agencies. As an Oregon native and a Cornell educated urban planner, Isaac knows what he is talking about when it comes to land use planning. WRLC's property inventories, demolition funding, land banking, and other revitalization programs seem to fill part of the role that a more robust land use system would play. The connection between planning and urban land trusts makes sense.

Now more than ever land trusts think about what makes urban areas livable and equitable rather than just thinking about preserving rural land, sharing this concern with many urban planners and policymakers. As Krisztian Varsa, Conservation Director for Athens Land Trust, told me, "Better cities equal better rural areas, and vice versa". As another urban land trust staff member with a formal background in urban planning, Krisztian takes smart growth/growth management, public health, and functioning urban spaces seriously, believing that all these factors connect back to ALT's conservation work.

Urban land trust motivations of *repurposing vacant blighted, or undeveloped urban lots/parcels, improving the "health" of urban ecosystems, improving public health of urban communities, and mitigating sprawl through growth management and smart growth*, relate especially well to trends in urban planning. Next, I include some relevant examples of urban land trusts programs that may have traditionally been associated with planning, urban design, land use policy, and architecture. See Chapter 6: **Key Themes Analysis** for more examples, broken down by motivation. These examples show an urban land trust taking on regional landscape level conservation programs that relate directly back to smart growth, public health, and repurposing, restoring, and greening small urban lots.

*Smart growth and growth management:*

- **Forterra** (WA), the largest land trust and community development organization in the Pacific Northwest, created the Landscape Conservation and Local Infrastructure Program. This program creates incentives for both land conservation and community development by combining a Transfer of Development Rights program with Tax Increment Financing, conserving farmland and habitat while generating funding for urban parks, sidewalks, bike infrastructure, and other amenities (Aldrich, 2014).
- **Santa Fe Conservation Trust** partners with **Commweal Conservancy** on the 13,000+ acre Galisteo Basin Preserve, a "conservation based community development" 15 miles outside Santa Fe. This area, at high risk of development from the expanding city, has roughly 12,000 acres of preserved habitat and room remaining for almost 400

housing units and accompanying infrastructure  
(<https://www.galisteobasinpreserve.com>).

*Public health:*

- **Waltham Land Trust** participates in the national "Outdoors Rx" program, which gives doctors and health care providers an opportunity to write "prescriptions" to encourage kids to spend more time outdoors. The trust partnered with Healthy Waltham to map six urban walking routes through local neighborhoods and alongside the Charles River for Outdoors Rx participants (Aldrich, 2014).
- **Western Reserve Land Conservancy's** "Reforest Our City" program took inspiration from President and CEO Rich Cochran's vision of creating healthier urban neighborhoods and environments through reforestation (<https://www.wrlandconservancy.org/whatwedo/reforest-our-city/>).

*Small vacant, undeveloped, or blighted urban lots:*

- **Heartland Conservation Alliance**, of Kansas City (MO), engages in a "Vacant Lots to Greenways" program, finding and connecting vacant lots to create a greenway along the local Blue River, providing accessible community greenspace and demonstrating successful green infrastructure and stormwater management.
- **Columbia Land Trust's** urban program, Backyard Habitat Certification, concentrates on properties less than one acre, making habitat restoration and improvement of the regional mosaic of small urban greenspaces a top priority. They argue that the remaining ecosystem fragments in the Portland region offer far more habitat, health, and environmental importance than their small size and developed state suggests (<https://backyardhabitats.org>).

## Common Challenges for Urban Land Trusts:

Case Study interviews touched on the challenges faced by urban land trusts, revealing some of the more common hurdles faced by these organizations. See **Chapter Five's** section "Common Challenges for Urban Land Trusts" for examples of how urban land trusts have successfully addressed these specific challenges.

Throughout interviews, land trust staff reported that urban programs would have occurred sooner or expanded faster with more **financial flexibility**. Expanding to include urban areas costs money in the form of staff time, equipment, office or meeting space, travel, materials, and more. These costs add up, and unsurprisingly present the largest hurdle for urban land trusts. Each of the four Case Study land trusts had to find creative and innovative ways to source funds or reduce costs of their urban programs. On the upside, Federal and state funding, particularly for affordable housing, local food, and community/economic development, is available for urban trusts. Urban land trusts have a variety of strategies to address this challenge (see Chapter Five).



**Internal resistance to urban programs**, another common challenge, varies wildly and depends on the original mission and scope of the land trust. Land trust staff, board members, volunteers, and partners don't always support their organization's shift to include urban areas, wary that the change will take resources from urban programs or contribute to mission drift. In some cases internal resistance and debate over urban programs can cause some staff and board members to leave. In other cases, the preexisting sustainability, public health, smart growth, and equity/diversity/inclusion goals embedded in the land trust mission long before expansion to cities makes that transition smoother. Internal resistance circles back to a discussion on scope and organizational capacity, a worry that urban programs could take resources away from other projects.

Some urban land trusts have also found that the perception of their conservation organizations in urban communities has not always been positive. ***Working in an underserved urban community can pose a challenge of external resistance to rurally based and primarily white organizations like land trusts.*** Seemingly urban land trusts face external resistance, distrust, and misunderstanding more often in cities with more racially and socioeconomically diverse neighborhoods. Historically, the conservation movement has not participated in much meaningful engagement of marginalized communities (Bonta et al., 2015). Land trusts have traditionally targeted white rural (often affluent) landowners, leading to socioeconomic disparities in land trusts partners, donor bases, and communities served, presenting serious environmental justice implications.

### Important Questions for Rural & Suburban Land Trusts:

The first step to implementing urban programs starts with engaging in an internal conversation. Based on the study of over 40 urban land trusts across the country, including a Case Study Analysis of four trusts, I present a framework for the internal conversation about urban programming. *These questions were inspired directly by the decision-making framework used by my Case Study land trusts.* These are questions I would ask myself if I worked for a land trust considering expansion into urban areas. I believe that answering questions like these with staff, volunteers, board members, and partners can help focus the process, encourage buy-in from the organization and partners at an early stage, ensure follow-up down the line, and help create a realistic and actionable strategy for implementing urban programs. Establishing motivations, potential partners, and desired programs plays an important role in this process.

#### **1. Do we have motivations for urban work?**

- Do our staff, volunteers, or board members have a vision for urban work?
- Do we have goals related to the following topics, and are they applicable to nearby urban areas?
  - Diversity, equity, and inclusion

- Growth management or smart growth
- Public health
- Redeveloping and restoring vacant, blighted, and undeveloped urban lots/parcels

**2. *Who are our potential urban partners? Do they share our motivations?***

- Do local city, county, or regional governments engage in urban programs relevant to our motivations? Do they provide technical or financial assistance as part of those programs?
- Does it make sense to partner with any of the following Federal programs for your urban work:
  - The federal HOME Program
  - SNAP
  - Community Development Block Grants program
- What community or neighborhood organizations work in nearby urban areas? Do any land trusts work in nearby urban areas?
- Do we partner with public agencies, non-profits, or businesses that engage in urban programs?

**3. *What are our opportunities for urban work? Do we already engage in these kinds of programs in rural or suburban areas? What programs fit our motivations and potential partners?***

- Do we have opportunities to provide greenspace, trails, reforestation, green infrastructure, housing, gardens, or habitat restoration in vacant, blighted, or undeveloped urban lots? To expand, steward, or advocate for regional greenways/trail networks for recreation opportunities, multi-modal transportation, and habitat corridors? To improve ecosystem health in urban areas? To address public health in urban areas?
- Could we replicate any of our existing programs in nearby urban communities?

**4. *How do we address common challenges?*** (see Common Challenges for Urban Land Trusts)

**5. *Could we include realistic and actionable objectives, goals, or action items into the next iteration of your strategic plan or other organizationally guiding document? Do we want to?***

## Chapter One: Background and Rationale

Conservation land trusts preserve open space for habitat, recreation, agriculture and historic preservation using legal tools like conservation easements and in-fee acquisition. These private nonprofit organizations traditionally operate in rural and suburban areas (Daniels, 1998 & Bird, 2012). Over the past 25 years, the focus of many conservation land trusts has shifted to include urban areas, cities with 50,000 or more residents. Community land trusts (CLTs) use a similar land acquisition model as conservation land trusts to protect property for affordable housing development and have worked primarily in urban areas over the last 30 years (Meehan, 2014). In contrast to CLTs, urban conservation land trusts have a wide array of programs related to both conservation and community development, from gardening, agriculture, parks and trails, to housing, community outreach, and housing programs.

These organizations partner with local governments, community development organizations, community land trusts, and state agencies for this work. Urban land trusts, increasingly prevalent across the country, have developed into unique hybrid organizations, working simultaneously in conservation and community development. ***This report explores conservation land trust motivations for urban work, as well as common urban partners and programs.***

Motivations, partners, and programs serve as the building blocks for urban conservation land trusts. My research found that initial motivations directly influence partners and programs. Any rural or suburban-based land trusts considering work in urban areas can use these topics to help guide or inspire their decision-making process. This project seeks to provide land trusts with inspiration or motivation for their own internal discussion regarding urban programs, providing successful examples of a variety of urban land trusts around the country. Exploring urban land trust motivations can also help planners and policymakers better coordinate with land trusts in cities, especially since urban land trusts and city planners share many of the same goals. The most prevalent urban land trust motivations arising from this research include:

- **Catalytic leadership inspiring urban work**
- **Repurposing vacant, blighted, or undeveloped urban lots/parcels**
- **Improving the “health” of urban communities and ecosystems**
- **Mitigating sprawl through growth management and smart growth**
- **Increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion in conservation programs**

A pioneering example of urban land conservation took place in 2003 when the Madison Area Community Land Trust (a CLT), and the Urban Open Space Foundation (a conservation land trust) worked together to preserve a site in Madison, WI for both affordable housing *and* open space (Campbell, 2003). Madison Area Community Land Trust still leases the land for community garden use. This represented a unique but increasingly relevant partnership as land trusts alter their traditional programming to include urban work. Reflecting on this growing trend, the Executive Director of Philly’s

Neighborhood Garden observes in 2012, “While the majority of conservation land trusts continue to be focused outside of cities, urban conservation land trusts are increasing in number. I really do see urban land trusts as a different sort of animal. They are very people oriented versus just land oriented” (Bird, 2012; Aldrich, 2016).

A 2018 City Lab article, “Land Conservancies Enter Unfamiliar Territory: the City”, comments on the growing trend of urban conservation land trusts, providing current examples in Cleveland and Seattle. Many traditional rural land trusts across the country have begun to acknowledge that urban equity, land use, quality of life, food systems, and habitat relate directly to their conservation-focused missions. Even national organizations like the Conservation Fund and Land Trust Alliance have acknowledged this larger conversation about urban programs in their nationwide initiatives (Briechle, 2006). However, researchers, academics, and actual land trust staffs alike do not have a clear picture of urban land trust motivations. This project, inspired by conversations with conservation professionals, explores motivations and resulting partnerships and programs of the following four urban land trusts:

- **Western Reserve Land Conservancy (OH),**
- **Athens Land Trust (GA),**
- **Santa Fe Conservation Trust (NM), and**
- **Columbia Land Trust (OR/WA)**

The report presents profiles of these organizations, decision-making charts tracing an urban program from motivation to implementation, and an analysis of the most prevalent motivations, partners programs, and challenges. I also provide supporting examples from a review of 40+ urban land trusts around the country. Although land trusts from Georgia to Oregon have increased their presence in cities, the motivations have been largely unexplored. The literature’s deficient exploration of urban land trust motivations and partnerships represents a gap worth exploring, especially as rural and suburban land trusts increasingly include urban areas in their focus. This report addresses these gaps and features multiple examples of urban land trust models unique to geographic and organizational context, *yet featuring important similarities*. As urban areas expand and land trust motivations change, this report provides a valuable resource, demonstrating the diversity of urban land trusts and offering a clearer picture of the internal decision-making process faced by organizations in this position.

## Looking Forward:

### *Chapter Two: Urban Land Trusts in the Literature...*

- An examination of urban land trusts in academic peer-reviewed literature, pointing out the major gaps in the literature that this report ultimately seeks to address.

### ***Chapter Three: Project Methodology...***

- An explanation of the procedure for choosing four case study organizations as well as a summary of the strategic plan content analysis and interview process that makes up this case study analysis.

### ***Chapter Four: Findings...***

- A review of over 40 current urban land trusts, profiles of from four urban land trusts, and the strategic plan content analysis findings.

### ***Chapter Five: Key Themes Analysis...***

- A summary and analysis of key themes arising from the initial and in-depth case study analysis. Guiding questions for beginning the internal organizational discussion about expanding into urban programming.

## Chapter Two: Urban Land Trusts in the Literature



**Figure 2.1** Battery Urban Farm in New York City, a one acre farm that is the largest educational farm in Manhattan

<https://www.greenbiz.com/article/urban-farms-now-produce-15-worlds-food>

To demonstrate urban land trust's geographic extent and diversity of programming, I examined urban land trusts in peer-reviewed academic literature and explore land trust websites, social media, and self-publications (strategic plans, reports, blog posts, etc.). I looked at urban programming, urban areas in mission statements, publications or communications, staffing dedicated to urban programs, and urban partnerships.

The literature on land trust self-evaluation and goal setting suggests that most trusts focus rurally, not reflecting the real and growing trend of urban land trusts. According to the literature, most trusts use acres-conserved and dollars-spent as their primary metrics for success (Alexander & Hess, 2012), without considering other community impacts. A 2012 article on the organizational, economic, and political motivations behind land trust partnerships focuses on the rural U.K. without touching on urban organizations. Land trust missions often depend on the board of directors (Hodge & Adam, 2012), but most articles, like a 2016 report on perceptions of success among land trusts boards, also focus on rural organizations (Ruseva et al., 2016). ***Clearly the literature does not reflect the robust nationwide trend in urban land trusts.***

## Urban Land Trust Motivations in the Literature:

Each of the following *themes* cover topics in the academic literature related to the motivations of urban conservation land trusts. I found these themes through my review of academic research papers, exploration of urban land trust publications across the country, personal experience working with land trusts across the country, and interviews with land trust staff.

### A) *Smart Growth, Urban Sprawl, and Regional Planning*

As urban populations continue to increase, literature produced by or for conservation organizations allude to urban growth as a motivational factor for land trusts. Baltimore Green Space, the Conservation Fund, and McKenzie River Trust publications all acknowledge the growing relevance of conservation in cities as population demographics shift (Briechle, 2012; MRT 2018; Bird, 2012). Land trusts often cite the pressures of expanding suburban residential and commercial development as a motivation for conservation work (Daniels, 1998 & Bullinger, 2018). Many land trusts advocate for smart growth and regional planning, pioneering strategies like conservation developments; a strategy originally created by planning scholar and former Natural Lands Trust (PA) president Randell Arendt. A Conservation Fund study on affordable housing also acknowledges the role that land trusts play in managing sprawl and smart growth, referencing conservation developments and similar strategies. Conventional land trusts have used conservation to fight sprawl in the urban fringe, suburbs, and rural areas for decades, although that has started to change (Daniels, 1998).

Gerber's 2012 article, "The difficulty of integrating land trusts in land use planning" acknowledges the influence of conservation organizations in shaping regional land use policy (Gerber, 2012). A *Journal of Planning Literature* also emphasizes the importance of land trusts to smart growth and management of sprawl, but doesn't discuss urban land conservation (Daniels & Lapping, 2005). Other planning, environmental studies, and architecture papers on sprawl and smart growth, although extensive, *do not pay much attention to land trusts*. For example, Wu & Plantinga's 2003 article, "The influence of public open space on urban spatial structure" discusses the relationship between urban open space and sprawl, with no discussion of land trusts. Robinson et al.'s 2005 work on growth management, conservation, and sprawl in Seattle does not feature land trusts. Many other articles and research on growth management, sprawl, and regional planning exist, but make no mention urban land trusts.

### B) *Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) and Community Conservation*

The literature suggests that diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) have become increasingly relevant to land trusts as the "community conservation" movement has grown (Aldrich, 2016). Community conservation prioritizes human communities in land

trust work, rather than just land (Aldrich, 2016). For example, the McKenzie River Trust's (OR) 2018 Community Conservation Assessment noted that the trust has interest in engaging with communities they haven't worked closely with in the past, including Latino, tribal, urban working class, and college/university communities in the growing Eugene/Springfield metro area. The Land Trust Alliance has incorporated DEI throughout its community conservation related publications and initiatives as local groups like Athens Land Trust (GA) and Forterra (WA) have fully embraced DEI issue and incorporated them into their work. A Conservation Fund study on affordable housing also acknowledges the important role that trusts can play in championing diversity, equity, and inclusion (Briechle, 2012).

Once again, the academic literature on urban equity, justice, and diversity features little on land trusts. Wolch et al.'s 2014 study on urban green space, public health, and environmental justice discusses the lack of open spaces in minority and disadvantaged urban communities without discussion of land trusts. A 2018 study on "Inequities in the quality of urban park systems" touches on the same themes, and again makes scant reference of land trusts (Rigolon et al. 2018).

### C) *Urban Health*

The public health benefits of urban greenspace, community gardens, and accessible recreational opportunities are explored thoroughly in the literature. Rob Aldrich, Director of Community Conservation for the Land Trust Alliance, cited public health as a major area land trust work that often gets overlooked (Aldrich, 2014). Land trusts have increasingly sought to improve physical health of urban residents through recreation programs, health benefits associated with urban tree cover, function of urban ecosystems, access to healthy food, and quality of life.

Other literature addresses urban health without much discussion of land trusts. Ecologists and planners have long espoused the societal and environmental benefits of healthy functioning urban ecosystems (Bolund & Hunhammar 1999, Francis et al., 2011). Research has consistently shown that many urban areas also feature important habitat sites serving as stepping-stones, refuges, and corridors for plant and wildlife (Ignatieva et al., 2011). These habitat corridors in turn serve to benefit the physical and mental health of human beings, as well as providing much-needed resiliency to urban landscapes (especially in regard to stormwater and flood management).

A 2011 study on urban ecology and ecosystems explored the links between healthy functioning ecosystems and human mental and physical health benefits with no mention of urban land trusts (Douglas, 2011). Brown and Jameton (2000) focus on the public health benefits of urban agriculture, just briefly mentioning land trusts. Wolch et al. (2014) discuss the public health and environmental justice impacts of urban green spaces, with no focus on land trusts. Similarly, an Urban Institute article, "The Public Value of Urban Parks", discusses the public health benefits of urban open space, but doesn't mention land trusts. An exploration of land trust self-publications and social media from across the U.S. reveals that "health" plays a large role in urban land trust conservation. Although land trust's mission statements, strategic plans, programming,



social media campaigns, and websites express this theme, most literature does feature discussion of land trusts in this context.

#### D) *Small Urban Lots/Parcels*

Like many of these themes, most researchers have explored this topic without touching on the relationship to urban land trusts. Small urban parcels act as the site for a variety of urban land trust work, like an urban garden, a pocket park, or affordable housing development. Pincetl & Gearin (2005) acknowledge the importance of these spaces and “greening vacant lots” in their study of “The Reinvention of Public Green Space”. Research on urban gardens or community land trusts also acknowledges the potential of urban area’s mosaic of small unused or vacant lots (Eizenberg, 2011 and Broadway, 2009).

Garrity’s 2007 paper, “An Urban Conservation Strategy to Preserve Cuyahoga County’s Eco-Valued Landscapes”, advocates for a regional urban conservation strategy that targets small parcels less than 10 acres (Garrity, 2007). Ashleigh’s 2011 paper on urban conservation easements and parks highlights the importance of small lots for the provision of urban park infrastructure, but does not mention land trust work. Bird’s 2012 study on the urban land trust, Baltimore Green Space, emphasizes the importance of stewarding scattered small-scale open spaces in cities. The organization itself researches, preserves, and stewards small lots and small urban forest “patches” throughout Baltimore City. Small urban lots/parcels clearly represent an important topic that warrants further exploration, especially with regards to urban land conservation.

#### Urban Land Trust Partners in the Literature:

As land trusts begin to play a new role, they forge new partnerships with community land trusts (CLTs), urban farms, local governments, and other non-profits (Bird, 2012). The literature includes research on these individual partners, but rarely how these relationships form and why. One of the few examples of a comprehensive look at these partnerships comes from 2003 paper on collaboration between CLTs and conservation land trusts, “Community and conservation land trusts as unlikely partners? The case of Troy Gardens, Madison, Wisconsin.” Although the evolution and history of CLT’s in the U.S. has been thoroughly explored (Davis, 2014 & Towey, 2009) the partnerships between CLTs and conservation land trusts have been left out, barring a few exceptions. Political, social, and economic impacts on land trusts and their partners have also been researched, but again, principally in rural areas (Hodge & Adams, 2012).

#### Urban Land Trust Programs in the Literature:

Each of the following themes cover topics in the academic literature related to the programs pursued by urban conservation land trusts. I found these themes through my review academic research papers, exploration of urban land trust publications across

the country, personal experience working with land trusts across the country, and interviews with land trust staff.

#### *A) Community Gardens and Urban Farms*

Community gardens and urban farms receive attention in academic literature, more so than other major urban land conservation themes. Campbell and Salus (2003) address this topic in Wisconsin; Bird (2012) provides insight from Baltimore; Eizenberg (2011) from New York; and Garrity (2007) from Ohio. However, all of these studies focus on one specific instance of urban land trust activity without looking at a regional or citywide perspective. Geographic, comparative, and temporal diversity does not exist in the literature, and neither does an exploration of the connection between community gardens/urban farms and underlying urban land trust motivations.

#### *B) Open Space, Trails, Restoration, and Reforestation*

Social and physical scientists have explored the array of benefits provided by open space, trails, and forests in urban areas. The positive benefits of open space on urban spatial and social structure, as well as the value of the ecosystem services offered by urban green spaces are well understood in planning, sociology, medicine, and architecture (Wu & Plantinga, 2003, Krasney & Tidball, 2012, and Poon, 2018). Typically the literature focuses on municipal/public provision of green space, not on land trusts. Ashleigh (2011) focuses on the use of conservation easements for the establishment of urban parks, but largely ignores the role of land trusts.

Land trusts receive some minimal attention in the literature regarding this topic. Svedson & Campbell's 2008 article on the structure, function and network of the community-based urban land management provides insight on urban open space and parks, but only tangentially mentions land trusts. Garrity (2007) explores urban conservation strategies to preserve areas of urban Ohio, touching on work involving local land trusts, a rare example of urban land trust's acknowledged in academic literature. Bird's 2012 "Urban Conservation Land Trusts as an Alternative Model for Stewardship: A Case Study of Baltimore Green Space" also makes a compelling case for the land trust's unique ability to engage communities, conserve urban open space, and preserve urban forest canopies.

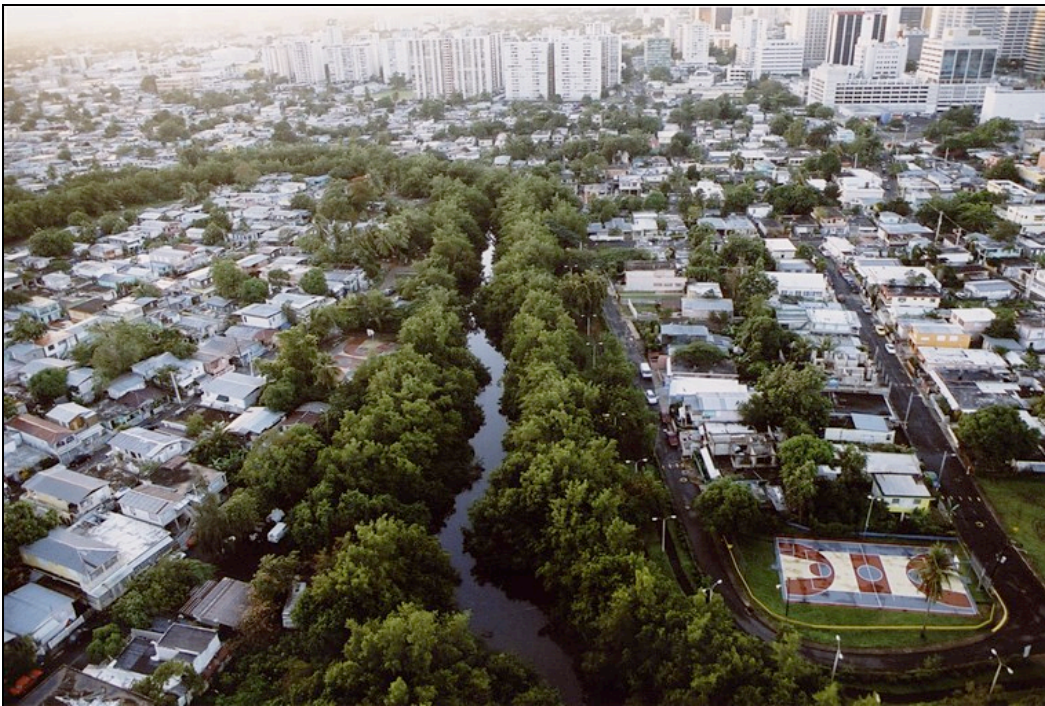
#### *C) Housing & Land Banking*

The president and CEO of the Greater Minnesota Housing Fund stated, "Open space can and should always figure into the planning of affordable housing." (Brieche, 2012). Many conservation trusts have realized the applicability of their model to affordable housing provision in cities, adding this to their programmatic arsenal. As a Conservation Fund study stated, "The inclusion of affordable housing can, as in the case of other forms of conservation development, generate new sources of funding to conserve land, while helping meet a public need." (Brieche, 2012). Although the link between

affordable housing and conservation has been explored since the early 1990s (Roseland, 1992), urban land trusts haven't always received attention in this research. The role of community land trusts in urban housing has obviously received more attention from planning, sociology, and policy academics (Meehan, 2014 & Towey, 2009). Even still, partnerships between conservation and community land trusts have not been substantially explored as part of this research.

### Summary:

The vast array of literature explores each of the aforementioned themes individually, without connecting them to the larger growing trend of urban land trusts. The literature does not reflect the growing trend of urban land trusts clearly demonstrated during the initial stages of research, where I identified 40 urban serving land trusts. Without a comparative study of land trust motivations for urban work, motivations that influence land trust expansion into urban areas will remain unexplored. Nothing in the academic literature traces a land trust from its initial motivation for urban work to the implementation of urban programming. This report seeks to fill that role.



**Figure 2.2** Martín Peña Channel, an urban riparian greenway, Puerto Rico, 2016, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/puerto-rico-community-land-trust-awarded-un-world-habitat-award-n528031>

## Chapter Three: Project Methodology

### Case Study Selection:

I use a case study framework to explore urban land trust motivations. Each case study focuses on an individual land trust and comprises two parts: **content analysis** of land trust strategic plans, and **interviews** of land trust staff. In the first phase of research, I identified 40 land trusts that engage in urban areas, demonstrating the geographic extent of this phenomenon and the extensive variety of programs offered. I used that list of 40 to narrow down to four (4) specific case study organizations. The definition of urban used here comes from the U.S. Census Bureau, which categorizes Urbanized Areas (UAs) *as cities with at least 50,000 people* (Ratcliffe, 2016). In order for a land trust to qualify for the Case Study Analysis, it met the following criteria:

1. The trust must have *originally included non-urban areas as their (sole, main, or partial) focus*. They did not start in an exclusively urban area and/or have not always included urban areas in their focus.
2. The land trust *currently operates* in an urbanized area as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau (city with 50,000+ residents).
3. *The land trust must have organizational guiding documents (such as strategic plans) available to the public or willing to make them available to the project.*
4. *At least one member of the land trust staff must be willing to engage in an interview process about organizational motivations for expanding into urban areas.*

The initial study of 40 organizations played an integral role in identifying land trusts for the Case Study Analysis. The organizations featured in the case study also reflect the geographic and programmatic diversity demonstrated by the review of those 40 land trusts. I identified the following four trusts for my case study:

- **Western Reserve Land Conservancy (OH),**
- **Athens Land Trust (GA),**
- **Santa Fe Conservation Trust (NM), and**
- **Columbia Land Trust (OR/WA)**

This report presents a profile of each land trust in **Chapter Four**, including information on its background and history, strategic plan content analysis findings, and findings from staff interviews (including motivations for urban work, programs, partners, challenges, opportunities, and aspirations). These land trusts cover a wide geographic area and engage in programs ranging from affordable housing and urban gardens to ecological restoration and trail building.

## Strategic Plan Content Analysis:

After identifying four main case study organizations, I conducted a Content Analysis of these land trust's strategic plans. A content analysis, a research method that examines documents or other communications for key words and phrases, can reveal useful patterns and trends in language. This analysis coded the documents for words and phrases related to urban land trust motivations, urban partners, and urban programs, coding first for the **occurrence** of this language, and second for the **significance** of this language.

The analysis revealed the programs that case study organizations prioritize, helping interviews focus on motivations and partners, the themes I found harder to glean from strategic plans. The first level of analysis examined the **occurrence** of key words and phrases throughout strategic plans. These key words and phrases include: "partner/s" or "collaborator/s"; "urban"; "people" or "human"; "community" (or "communities"); "diversity", "equity", and/or "inclusion"; "community garden/ing" or "urban farm(ing)"; "forestry" or "green infrastructure"; "affordable housing" or "land banking"; "urban trails" and/or "greenways"; "urban parks" and/or "greenspaces"; "education" or "youth"; "community engagement"; "downtown", "urban" or "neighborhood revitalization"; and "food security" and/or "food access", receiving a score of 1 or 0 based on the presence or absence of the key word/phrase. I chose these words and phrases based on the relevant academic literature regarding urban land trusts, attempting to reflect the range of urban conservation themes.

However, because plan lengths and writing styles differ dramatically, this report required a second level of analysis to examine the **significance** of key themes, not just their presence. This report consolidated the key words and phrases from the Level One analysis into eleven urban conservation themes. This report measured the significance of urban conservation themes in strategic plans using the four following scores:

- **Not mentioned (0):** not mentioned at all in document
- **Minor element of plan (1):** plan makes a reference to this element, but not as a part of a main goal, objective, or action item
- **Significant element (2):** plan makes multiple references to this element, and it is part of a larger goal, objective, or action item
- **Vitally significant element of plan (3):** goals, guiding principles, objective, or action items dedicated to this element and/or part of mission statement

This analysis helped reveal the comparative breadth or narrowness of the urban programming pursued by case study land trusts and revealed important information used later on in the interview process.

## Case Study Interviews:

After analyzing the strategic plans, I identified staff members from each of the four case study organizations for phone interviews, contacting between January-March, and conducted interviews in February-March of 2019. Interviews focused on organizational motivations behind urban work. These interviews inform the story of the land trust's involvement in urban areas, tracing it from initial motivation to current projects and programs. These conversations typically lasted between 45 minutes and 1.5 hours. I asked each of the four interviewees about when their organization first started working in urban areas, what factors initially motivated that work, internal resistance to the shift to urban areas, the most important partners, biggest challenges associated with urban work, biggest opportunities associated with urban work and aspirations for future urban programs.

In the next chapter, I use the interview results and strategic plan content analysis to create profiles for the four profiles of urban serving land trusts, Western Reserve Land Conservancy, Athens Land Trust, Columbia Land Trust, and Santa Fe Conservation Trust. This offers a useful comparative tool to examine urban land trust models.



**Figure 3.1,** Students participating in the Columbia Land Trust Backyard Habitat Certification Program, <https://www.columbialandtrust.org/metro-and-cleveland-high-school-get-backyard-habitat-certified/>

## Chapter Four: Findings

This chapter presents an overview of current trends in urban land trust programs and partners, referencing my review of over 40 organizations. I also used this review to pick four Case Study land trusts, presented in this chapter in four profiles. The staff interviews and Strategic Plan content analysis informed each of the following profiles. These profiles present a short description of context, background, motivations, urban partners, and finally, resulting urban programs. Find additional Case Study Findings, Urban Land Trust Challenges, Opportunities, and Aspirations, in the **Appendices** (page 65).

The following profiles also feature decision tree charts to demonstrate the important decision-making elements behind an individual urban program pursued by these land trusts. The charts trace one urban program for each trust from its initial motivation to its implementation. In general, these profiles offer a comparative resource for land trusts interested in examples of successful urban land trust programming. This report does not endorse one model, set of motivations, or program over another, instead arguing that these all represent viable alternatives.

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Page 25	Current Urban Land Trust Programs and Partners
Page 27	Western Reserve Land Conservancy Profile
Page 31	Athens Land Trust Profile
Page 35	Columbia Land Trust Profile
Page 39	Santa Fe Conservation Trust Profile
Page 43	Strategic Plan Content Analysis Results

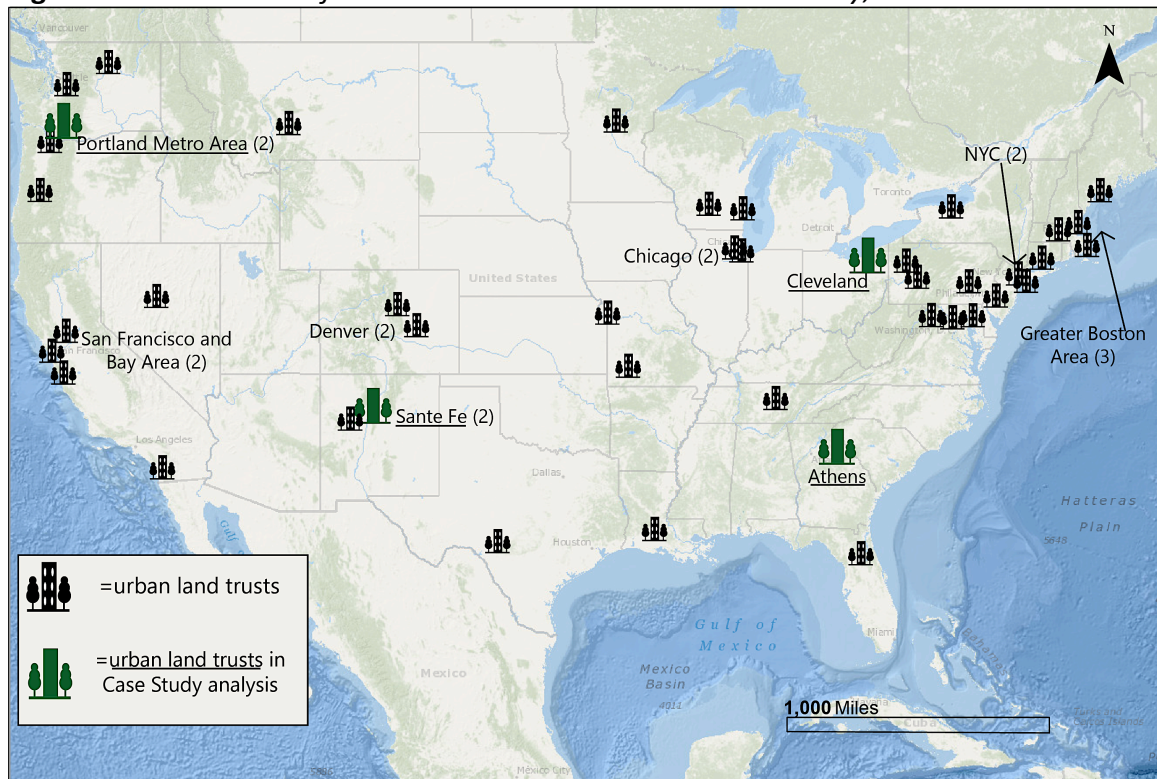
## Current Urban Land Trust Programs and Partners:

To get a clearer picture of the urban land trust phenomena in the U.S., I examined the publications, social media, and websites of 40+ land trusts. They range from volunteer-only organizations to large full time staffs over 50, and serve urban areas from Maine to California. They all offer at least one urban program. Interesting metrics from this review include:

- **Sixty-five percent (65%) of the land trusts include urban areas in their missions**
- **Fifty percent (50%) have staff dedicated to urban programs**
- **Forty percent (40%) serve only urban areas, while 60% serve both urban and other areas.**

Some conservation land trusts self-identify as “urban”, while others pursue a more regional scope, serving rural, suburban, and urban areas simultaneously. **Figure 4.1** shows the locations of urban land trusts in this study, with clusters around major urban regions like the Bay Area, New York, Chicago, Boston, D.C., and Denver. My search yielded fewer examples in the Great Plains, Rocky Mountains, and interior Pacific due the scarcity of major cities. The list is not exhaustive; *more urban land trusts exist*. For a list of the urban land trusts featured in this map, see the **Appendix**.

**Figure 4.1** Distribution of Urban Land Trusts Featured in this Study, 2019





**Figure 4.2** shows the prevalence of urban programs offered by land trusts in this study. I found that urban land trusts engage in a mixture of traditional conservation programs, like open space preservation and trail and greenway stewardship, and less traditional economic and community development programs, like land banking, community engagement, and community gardening.

**Figure 4.2** *Urban Programs Offered Land Trusts Featured in this Study, 2019 (n=44)*

<b>Parks and open space</b>	88%
<b>Community engagement</b>	83%
<b>Education and youth</b>	75%
<b>Trails and greenways</b>	75%
<b>Community gardening and urban farming</b>	55%
<b>Forestry and green infrastructure</b>	40%
<b>Economic revitalization</b>	28%
<b>Land Banking</b>	23%
<b>Food security and access</b>	23%
<b>Affordable housing</b>	13%
<i>Source: Urban Land Trust Study, University of Oregon PPPM, 2019</i>	

This review of prevalent urban land trust programs plays an important role in the analysis of Urban Land Trust Case Study Themes, in **Chapter 5**, allowing me to cite current examples of other trusts from around the country. The most common partner organizations of the 40+ urban serving land trusts in this review include:

1. Local government agencies or departments (on the municipal, county, and regional level)
2. Other non-profit organizations (land trusts, community development corporations, and more)
3. Private businesses

This cursory review of current urban land trusts provides insight for my in-depth Case Study analysis of four organizations. I also have the opportunity to reference these urban land trusts as examples when analyzing the Key Themes from my Case Study Analysis in **Chapter 5**.

## Western Reserve Land Conservancy (WRLC) Profile:

*FOUNDED:* 2006

*URBAN AREA SERVED:* Cleveland, OH

*STAFF MEMBER INTERVIEWED:* Isaac Robb, Manager of Urban Projects

*LEARN MORE AT:* <https://www.wrlandconservancy.org/>

### *BACKGROUND AND HISTORY:*

Western Reserve Land Conservancy formed in 2006 from a merger of eight land trusts in northeast Ohio. The largest land trust merger in U.S. history, it amplified the organization's capacity to preserve land throughout an eight-county region. Rich Cochran, the president of Chagrin River Land Conservancy when it merged, became President and CEO of WRLC. WRLC launched their urban office, the Thriving Communities Institute, in 2011. It has developed a variety of urban revitalization programs under the leadership of Jim Rokakis, former County Treasurer and a pioneer of Ohio's county land banking system. By 2013 the trust committed to integrating urban work into their mission and operations. Today, the WRLC staff of 45 engages in programs from the Pennsylvania border west to Sandusky, and south to Akron, preserving over 40,000 acres. Their urban programs focus on Cleveland, including reforestation and neighborhood revitalization. WRLC staff and partners, including Thriving Communities director Jim Rokakis, were integral in establishing Ohio's county land banking system. Thousands of structures in Cleveland require demolition, so vacant lots provide a large opportunity for land trusts and community development organizations. They work closely with Cleveland Metro Parks and local community development corporations. WRLC faces unique challenges in Cleveland, at the heart of the Rust Belt. Cleveland faced population decline and slow economic growth over the last half-century due to the diminishing manufacturing sector. It felt the effects of the 2008 Recession tremendously. Nonetheless, WRLC has persevered, working with their partners to help foster healthier urban environments and neighborhoods.

### *MOTIVATIONS:*

WRLC's motivations for urban work, informed by the interview and strategic plan content analysis, follow in a non-hierarchical order:

- ***Working to make urban communities and environments healthier.*** Initially a desire of President and CEO Rich Cochran's, this sentiment became imbedded in the WRLC's urban work.
- ***Catalytic staff.*** Leaders who spark motivation for urban work, President Rich Cochran and Thriving Communities Director Jim Rokakis, inspire WRLC's urban mission. Jim's background in county land banking and Rich's vision for healthy urban ecosystems and communities inspired the trust's urban vision.

- ***Making job of rural conservation easier.*** Conservation of rural areas, often a response to rapid suburban sprawl, arguably becomes easier if denser urban areas absorb that growth. Making cities a more aesthetically attractive and environmentally healthy destination for residential development reduces sprawl.
- ***Developing small blighted urban parcels.*** Cleveland is dotted with vacant and undeveloped parcels. WRLC seeks to take advantage of this opportunity to use vacant spaces for urban greening and neighborhood revitalization.
- ***Serving disadvantaged and underrepresented communities.*** Racially and economically underrepresented communities play a major role in Cleveland's urban fabric. WRLC sees their work as an opportunity to serve these disadvantaged communities.

#### URBAN PARTNERS:

- ***County Land Banks.*** WRLC has helped establish county land banks throughout the state, now working with them on urban revitalization projects in Cleveland and other cities.
- ***Cleveland Tree Coalition.*** A group of nonprofit organizations, city, county, and state agencies, and local universities collaborates in a reforestation program to implement the "Cleveland Tree Plan".
- ***Community Development Corporations.*** Cleveland's over 40 CDCs plays a big role in neighborhood level work in the city. The trust relies on CDCs to do a lot of the on-the-ground tree planting work. The perception of WRLC as an "outsider" in some neighborhoods dictates their partnerships and reliance on neighborhood organizations.
- ***Local district "metro" (municipal) parks agencies.*** Municipal parks agencies, (Metro Parks Agencies in Ohio) work with WRLC for rural and urban programs. Cleveland MetroParks plays a huge role in aiding WRLC reforestation and conservation efforts on the ground.
- ***Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency.*** Cleveland's regional MPO concerned with transportation and environmental planning is an important partner.
- ***Clean Ohio.*** This program funds for open space, farmland preservation, trail development, brownfield restoration, and habitat conservation.
- ***Ohio Public Works Commission.*** Natural Resource Assistance Councils review and score applications for public works funding for parks, cities, and nonprofits.
- ***Holden Forests and Gardens.*** WRLC provides tree stewardship training in partnership with this nonprofit garden and arboretum.

#### URBAN PROGRAMS:

- ***Urban reforestation.*** The Reforest Our City Program collaborates with other nonprofits, municipal agencies, community development corporations, and residents, to replant Cleveland's dwindling tree canopy. This program includes

the “Sherwick Tree Steward Training” for residents and a grant-funding program for groups intending to plant trees in the city.

- **Land banking.** This tool has become important to the statewide effort to stabilize cities and give counties the ability to acquire a distressed or blighted property, hold it, clean the title, and prepare it for another use (from greenspace to housing). Because of land banking advocates like Jim Rokakis, Thriving Communities has become the go-to program for counties wanting to form a land bank. WRLC works with Cuyahoga Land Bank and others to secure vacant properties in Ohio’s cities to reduce crime, halt sinking neighboring home values, and reduce public services costs.
- **Urban parks and greenways.** In an effort to protect greenspace in urban areas, WRLC works with cities, suburbs, and local park agencies to create greenways, trails, and parks in densely populated areas.
- **Property Inventories.** Using the GIS and planning knowledge of staff, the trust works with the city of Cleveland and neighborhood groups to survey parcels and give policy makers information required for important planning decisions. They produce a property inventory report called *Cleveland Neighborhoods by the Numbers*.
- **Demolition funding.** The trust works with federal, state, and local officials and community groups to secure funds to demolish vacant buildings on urban lots.



**Figure 4.3** Property Survey in Cleveland planned and supported by WRLC, 2019  
<http://www.freshwatercleveland.com/breaking-ground/LandConservancy040119.aspx>



Western Reserve  
Land Conservancy  
land • people • community

## Reforest Our City Program

### Motivations



- Catalytic leadership
- A vision for improving health of urban communities and ecosystems and,
- Using vacant, blighted, or undeveloped urban lots for reforestation



### Partners



- Cleveland MetroParks
- Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordination Agency
- Cuyahoga Land Bank
- Community Development Corporations
- Cleveland Tree Coalition
- Holden Forests and Gardens



### Program



- Tree inventories
- Staff urban forester for technical assistance
- Sherwick Tree Steward Training
- Tools and equipment
- Financial assistance

## Athens Land Trust (ALT) Profile:

**FOUNDED:** 1994

**URBAN AREA SERVED:** Athens, GA

**STAFF MEMBER INTERVIEWED:** Krisztian Varsa, Conservation Director

**LEARN MORE AT:** <https://athenslandtrust.org/>

### **BACKGROUND AND HISTORY:**

Founded in 1994 by Skipper StipeMaas and Nancy Stangle Athens Land Trust (ALT) has grown into a unique hybrid of conservation and community land trust. The founders met while working on a single-family neighborhood development outside the city of Athens, Georgia. During that project, they noticed the dichotomy of protecting both open spaces and affordable housing. Believing both issues necessitate a holistic approach, they created one of the few organizations that acts as both a conservation and community land trust. They coalesced around an issue: building healthy communities. The trust didn't have an urban centered mission at first. A volunteer based organization from 1994-2000, ALT supported sustainable development as a form of smart growth. The original leadership took inspiration from the "New Urbanism" movement and pursued conservation subdivisions in rural and suburban areas. In the early 2000s, ALT purchased greenspace with lot for affordable housing in the urban area of the 115,452-person Athens-Clarke consolidated city-county, less than 2 hours east of Atlanta. Staff started to realize affordable greenspace and affordable housing in the suburbs faced challenging transportation options, lack of community amenities, and un-affordable housing costs. They began to look at urban need for housing, food access, and greenspace. As the health of preexisting communities took precedent over conservation sub-divisions, the trust worked more in Athens, particularly in the historically black Westbroad Neighborhood. Its staff of 29 now engages in affordable housing, conservation, agricultural preservation, community gardening/agriculture, credit and financial assistance, education, and more.

### **MOTIVATIONS:**

- **Smart growth.** The founders took inspiration from the "New Urbanism" movement and engaged in conservation subdivisions and greenfield development in suburban areas. Now, ALT focuses on creating better cities in an attempt to mitigate sprawl in rural areas. As the Atlanta metro area expands, ALT seeks to buffer the smaller urban area of Athens from Atlanta's sprawl.
- **Urban need for sustainable and affordable housing and local food.** After working on projects in rural and suburban areas, ALT turned towards the city in the mid-2000s. With inspiration from both the community and conservation land trust models, ALT prioritized the pillars of housing and sustainability. They identified permanently affordable housing and local food access as key issues.

- ***Building healthy communities and neighborhoods.*** The health of ecological and human communities in Athens became a motivator as ALT grew in the late '90s and 2000s. This stemmed from a perceived connection between public health, food, land, and housing, and a desire to support these systems holistically.
- ***Serving people of color.*** ALT collaborates with, serves, and empowers the historically black neighborhoods in Athens. ALT also stewards agricultural land, enabling people of color to own farmland as an effort to fight against and unravel some of the historic discrimination against black farmers.
- ***Supporting farms and farmers.*** Agricultural economies in and around Athens motivate ALT's work. The trust connects urban residents to their food, preserves farmland as landowners retire, fosters a new generation of African American farmers, and buffers Athens from Atlanta sprawl.

#### PARTNERS:

- ***Municipal and County government.*** ALT partners with the city-county government in both technical and financial capacities. For example, ALT disburses federal funds distributed to Athens-Clarke County through the ***Community Development Block Grants Program***, investing in credit counseling, and affordable housing.
- ***The HOME Program (Home Investment Partnerships Program).*** Created as part of the 1990 National Affordable Housing Act, it allots funding for owner-rehabilitation, rental-rehabilitation, and home-ownership projects. Public agencies and non-profits apply to the local jurisdictions for these funds.
- ***Clarke County School District (CCSD).*** ALT works with the school district to implement programs like the Young Urban Farmers, Young Urban Builders, and Young Conservation Stewards.
- ***State of Georgia.*** ALT works with the Georgia Departments of Community Affairs, Department of Natural Resources, Georgia SNAP, and University of Georgia Extension on community development, conservation, and agricultural preservation projects.
- ***FoodCorps.*** Participants serve with ALT, working with Clarke County school district classes on local food, gardening, and nutrition programs.

#### URBAN PROGRAMS:

- ***Urban agriculture and community gardening.*** ALT has established a network of 12 community gardens and two urban farms, supporting sustainable food systems, promoting health, and strengthening the local economy. The trust's half-acre West Broad Market Garden is sited at an old elementary school in the historically African-American Westbroad neighborhood. The garden offers weekly Community Supported Agriculture programs and a produce stand.

- **Education and outreach.** Young Urban Farmers, a learning and work-based program for high school students teaches agriculture, gardening, culinary, and entrepreneurial skills. The program has engaged over 200 high school students since 2013. ALT also runs the Young Urban Builders and Young Conservation Stewards programs. These pay hourly and offer hands-on skill building and leadership development. ALT also expands school gardens and the use of local produce in school meals. The trust sponsors The Food to Schools Program, where FoodCorps participants engage students.
- **Affordable housing.** ALT increases the supply of permanently affordable, high quality, and sustainable housing. ALT provides 53 single-family homes and 126 rental units, has aided 49 families become first time homeowners, provides homes for 16 other families to lease purchase, rents 6 affordable apartments, and provides housing for 370 low-income individuals at another apartment site. The trust also provides homebuyer education and financial literacy education.
- **Neighborhood revitalization.** ALT works in historically African American neighborhoods in Athens to preserve cultural heritage and traditional land use, including renovating historical homes.
- **Conservation.** The land trust protects over 17,000 acres through easement and acquisition, including neighborhood and urban open space.



**Figure 4.4** Young Urban Farmers program participants in Athens, <https://www.landtrustalliance.org/news/growing-force>





## Affordable Housing Program

### Motivations



- Catalytic leadership instilling a focus on sustainable affordable housing and greenspace development
- Smart growth practices inspired by New Urbanism
- Serving historically black neighborhoods

### Partners



- Athens-Clarke Consolidated City-County Government
- Community Development Block Grant
- HOME Investment Partnership Program
- State of Georgia Department of Community Affairs

### Program



- Develops, rents, leases, and sells affordable housing units
- Supports first time homeowners with credit and homebuyers counseling, and financial literacy education

## Columbia Land Trust (CLT) Profile:

*FOUNDED:* 1990

*URBAN AREAS SERVED:* Portland-Vancouver, OR/WA

*STAFF MEMBER INTERVIEWED:* Susie Peterson, Backyard Habitat Certification Manager

*LEARN MORE AT:* <https://www.columbialandtrust.org/>

### *BACKGROUND AND HISTORY:*

Columbia Land Trust preserves habitat and recreation land across the Lower Columbia River's five ecological regions, in both Washington and Oregon. It operated initially in the greater Vancouver, WA area (across the river from Portland). Their first projects centered around tributaries of the Columbia, the Washougal and East Fork Lewis Rivers. CLT expanded into Oregon in 1996. Today, the trust uses science-based and community-driven strategies to conserve over 30,000 acres in the Columbia River watershed, from Astoria, OR, at the river mouth to the Pacific to the Dalles, hundreds of miles upstream in the Columbia River Gorge.

The trust's Backyard Habitat Certification Program (BHCP) began with a group of homeowners living in southwest Portland. BHCP became what it is today thanks to an early leader, advocate, and program manager, Gaylen Beatty. Fighting invasive species and restoring habitat on their small urban lots, the landowners realized the importance for community engagement and coordination. They founded the West Willamette Restoration Foundation in 2006 and provided landowners with information, assistance, and signage to recognize restoration achievements. They restored one-acre or smaller parcels. Their effort caught attention of other conservation groups and local government agencies. In 2009, local land trust Three Rivers Land Conservancy and the Portland Audubon Society began co-managing the program. Gaylen Beatty, a Three Rivers and later Columbia Land Trust employee (after the organizations merged in 2010), served as the first project manager, playing an instrumental role in the expansion of this program. In 2011 BHCP expanded into the Portland suburb of Lake Oswego and in 2016 expanded into two other cities, Gresham and Fairview. In 2017, CLT integrated half of Clackamas County, southeast of Portland, into the BHCP. In 2018, the program continued into the second half of the county. In 2019, the program will expand in Washington County, another area of suburbs, small cities, and rural land to southwest of Portland, and Clark County (across the river in Washington State where CLT began).

### *MOTIVATIONS:*

- ***Health of urban habitats.*** The Portland metro region sits at unique ecological area, the confluence of two major rivers. Historically important and threatened habitat like wetlands and oak savannas used to dominate this area. It's an important "stop over" in the Pacific Flyway migration route for thousands of birds. CLT believes that urban areas have important habitat values, and supports

conservation actions taken across entire landscapes, not just in rural or wild areas.

- **Growth Management/Smart Growth.** With almost 2.4 million residents in the metropolitan area, the 25<sup>th</sup> largest in the U.S., CLT has dedicated work to preserving threatened habitat on the urban edges and in urban cores, improving access to greenspace for habitat and recreation.
- **Habitat restoration on small urban parcels.** Improving habitat on small urban parcels throughout the metro area motivates CLT's urban work. The Backyard Habitat Program enrolls and certifies thousands of small (less than 1 acre) parcels, from residential backyards to public school grounds and Metro Park's properties. CLT understands the cumulative impact of habitat enhancement throughout the mosaic of landscapes in the Portland region.
- **Engaging urban communities.** Backyard habitat begins community-wide conversations on what it means to restore and conserve land. This spreads awareness, increases potential donors, and inspires new volunteers and members.
- **Community conservation, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).** Equity, diversity, and inclusion have always been part of CLT's mission. Working with local tribes has shaped CLT's relationship to these themes. CLT also recognizes that their work in urban areas may affect home values and increase gentrification. CLT also works to address the socioeconomic disparities in their audience, program participants, donors, and partners. As funders like Metro and Meyer Memorial Trust tie DEI into grant funding requirements, this becomes increasingly relevant.

#### PARTNERS:

- **Portland Metro.** This Metropolitan Planning Organization, the largest and most impactful in the country, works with cities, nonprofits, and businesses throughout the region on transportation, parks, and land use. CLT receives financial and technical assistance from Metro.
- **Soil and Watershed Conservation Districts (SWCDs).** Oregon has 45 SWCDs, a Department of Agriculture program that protects soil and water quality through restoration and other programs. CLT receives funding and technical support from East Multnomah, Clackamas, and Tualatin SWCDs, including classes, workshops, and programming to support BHCP participants.
- **Other local government agencies.** CLT works with municipal and county government agencies from environmental services and natural resource programs to stormwater agencies and parks departments. They partner for outreach, technical assistance, funding, and landowner education.
- **Program participants.** BHCP participants range from homeowners to public schools and the Metro Parks agency.
- **Audubon Society of Portland.** CLT administers Backyard Habitat with the Audubon Society.

- **Local non-profit community and neighborhood organizations.** These organizations play a role in outreach and engagement work. The trust focuses on fostering deep relationships, earning trust over time. CLT has learned the importance of long-term relationships with these partners. They partner with culturally diverse community organizations like Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO) and neighborhood conservation organizations like Baltimore Forest Friends.

**PROGRAMS:**

- **Backyard Habitat Certification Program (BHCP).** This urban program has over 3,600 participants and 5,000 properties enrolled, affecting 1,300 acres in the Portland metro area. Participants have planted almost 75,000 native trees and shrubs. The aggregate habitat value of these small-scale restoration projects is immeasurable, improving both quality of life and habitat.
- **Community Engagement.** BHCP opens doors for community engagement. For example, CLT and Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon engaged in community conversations in Southeast Portland’s Jade District. This culturally thriving neighborhood lacks greenspace. Hearing resident’s priorities of clean air and a new park, CLT implemented a project at a local school, providing staff time and plants for native plantings.
- **Urban parks and greenspaces:** CLT preserves and stewards, properties throughout the Portland area for recreation, habitat protection, and restoration.



**Figure 4.5** BHCP Manager Susie Peterson certifies the first backyard habitat in the City of Milwaukie, OR, <https://news.pamplinmedia.com/cr/26-features/352700-232161-milwaukie-sprouts-first-certified-backyard-habitat>



## Backyard Habitat Certification Program

### Motivations



- Catalytic leadership by the West Willamette Restoration Foundation and by former Program Director Gaylen Beatty
- Improving health and function of urban habitats in the face of Portland's rapid development

### Partners



- Audobon Society of Portland
- Portland Metro Parks Agency
- Community and neighborhood organizations
- Soil and Watershed Conservation Districts
- City and county governments

### Program



- Habitat restoration on small urban parcels, with over 3,000 participants enrolled on thousands of acres
- BHCP has expanded out of Portland into surrounding Washington, Clackamas, and (soon) Clark Counties

## Santa Fe Conservation Trust (SFCT) Profile:

*FOUNDED:* 1993

*URBAN AREA SERVED:* Santa Fe, NM

*STAFF MEMBER INTERVIEWED:* Melissa Pardeahnton Houser, Land Program Manager

*LEARN MORE AT:* <https://sfct.org/>

### *BACKGROUND AND HISTORY:*

A small group interested in conserving northern New Mexico's natural landscapes and stewarding local trail networks founded The Santa Fe Conservation Trust (SFCT). The organization flourished under the leadership of board members Dale Ball, Stewart Udall, and Bill Johnson. They became fierce advocates for the area's trails and open spaces. In 1993, a peak overlooking Santa Fe faced development; an illegal road had been constructed across its face. Although SFCT raised thousands of dollars to restore the illegal road it ultimately took Federal intervention to resolve this dispute. In 1994, former Secretary of the Interior, Stewart Udall, joined the board to help, staying on for nine years and becoming one of the organization's most influential leaders. SFCT continues to focus on the preservation of natural and cultural sites, advocating for clean water, protecting habitat, defending scenic views, and providing accessible recreation opportunities. By 2018, after years of preserving property through easements, working with local government to expand a 75-mile trail network, and engaging in a variety of events and community programs, SFCT had preserved almost 40,000 acres. SFCT's trails and greenways programs provide opportunities for the community to have a direct connection to nature, recreational opportunities, and multimodal transportation options. In 1997, the trust worked with the State and County to purchase a 12-mile easement along a nearby railway to create a multiuse Rail Trail. SFCT also holds trail contracts with the city for the stewardship and maintenance of 50+ miles of trails. Today, hundreds of volunteers aid SFCT's staff in maintaining these networks. The trust offers hikes, field trips, community bike rides, and urban walks to promote and expand equitable and inclusive access to the trail system, including programs with local schools. It also holds conservation easements and in-fee properties in and around Santa Fe.

### *MOTIVATIONS:*

- ***Stewarding urban trail networks.*** Since its inception, SFCT has tried to increase multi-modal connectivity and access to greenspace for recreation opportunities through trail maintenance and advocacy. Their community engagement, health, and recreation programs relate to the cities' trail network, encouraging residents to use these opportunities. Most trails in Santa Fe can be traced back to a SFCT staff member, board member, or volunteer.
- ***Community conservation and diversity, equity, and inclusion.*** The desire to expose people to the city's trail network, especially to those who otherwise

don't have access, informs SFCT's urban work. Since participating in a Land Trust Alliance stakeholder workshop on community conservation in the mid-2000s, SFCT has incorporated community conservation into their programs. Trail work transitioned naturally into community engagement. Santa Fe's affluent neighborhoods have better access to greenspaces/trails so SFCT works to expand trail access for elderly, young, working-class, native, and Hispanic communities.

- **Public health.** The trust's programs take root in a desire to promote the health of Santa Feans. SFCT's trail programs bring recreational experiences to children, the elderly, and underserved communities. They bring kids to local trails, instilling an interest in healthy recreation. SFCT also encourages elderly residents to utilize trails by holding urban group-walking events.
- **Relationship with city.** The trust works closely with the City of Santa Fe. SFCT has a contract with the city for stewarding dozens of miles of trails.
- **Small urban parcels.** Urban easements, pocket parks, and other greenspaces provide opportunities for educational events, habitat conservation, and recreation, offering an opportunity to showcase conservation programs to city residents.

#### URBAN PARTNERS:

- **Health providers, retirement homes, clinics, and the medical community in general.** These groups are SFCT's most responsive and enthusiastic urban partners. The trust gains sponsors through connections to the medical community. Due to a combination of Santa Fe's large retirement aged community and SFCT's focus on health, these groups have become natural partners.
- **County and city government.** SFCT works closely with the city and county governments, primarily on conservation easements and trails. For example, the trust currently serves as "Trail Volunteer Coordinator" for the Santa Fe and contracts with the city to manage 50+ miles of trails.
- **U.S. Forest Service.** Many of the trails SFCT manages or stewards connect to Forest Service lands.
- **Volunteers.** SFCT boasts a network of over 200 volunteers who aid trail maintenance and stewardship, as well as event preparation and facilitation.
- **Other local and national conservation organizations.** SFCT partners with conservation organizations for land acquisitions, conservation easements, and trails, including the national Trust for Public Land and the local Arroyo Hondo Land Trust and Commonweal Conservancy.

#### URBAN PROGRAMS:

- **Urban Trail Stewardship, Maintenance, and Advocacy.** SFCT has helped develop over 75 miles of trails in and around Santa Fe, connecting the city to trails in the foothills of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains.

- **Trail Alliance of Santa Fe** serves as the volunteer arm of SFCT, maintaining, stewarding, and promoting trails in and outside Santa Fe. They sponsor and lead trail workdays throughout the year.
- **Passport to Trails (PTP)**. This program engages schools from the south side of town, a more socioeconomically depressed area, and brings them to trails on the greener and more affluent east side. Transportation acts as large barrier for these children to access Santa Fe’s renowned greenspace. PTP brings 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade classes to four different trails over two years, giving kids an opportunity to complete a “passport”. As of 2018, PTP has engaged over 2,000 participants!
- **Vámonos**. This urban group-walking program facilitated by SFCT draws hundreds of participants. Launched in 2018, its popularity has inspired 24 in-town walks and 5 hikes outside town throughout 2019. These events utilize SFCT volunteers, cost nothing, and feature interesting Santa Feans as a draw (the mayor, local doctors, artists, etc). The senior citizen walks have been the best attended.
- **Grand Unified Santa Fe Trail Organization** program includes 31 partners developing an integrated multimodal loop of soft surface trails around Santa Fe that connect city, county, and Forest Service land. The initiative, using community participation, endeavors to connect this trail system through the entire metropolitan area by 2020.
- **Greenspace for public recreation and habitat in and around Santa Fe**. SFCT owns, stewards, or monitors hundreds of acres of open space in and around Santa Fe. Some of these properties are open to the public and connect to other properties via the trail network. In total, SFCT has preserved over 90 properties, totaling almost 40,000 acres. These range from the 10,000 to 2-acre easements.



**Figure 4.6**, As SFCT celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> birthday, local brewery sold a special fundraiser beer called “Boneshaker”, <https://www.sfreporter.com/news/2014/09/23/a-helping-and-hopping-hand/>





*Santa Fe Conservation Trust*

## Passport to Trails (PTP) and Vámonos Programs

### Motivations



- Catalytic leadership by early board members
- Community conservation, equity, diversity, and inclusion
- Public health and access to recreational opportunities



### Partners



- City of Santa Fe
- State and county agencies
- Local public school district
- Medical and health care providers
- Large network of volunteers



### Program



- The PTP program brings 4th & 5th graders to four trail opportunities. It has engaged over 2000 students!
- The Vámonos program hosts group urban walks. 2019 will feature 24 walks and 5 hikes

## Strategic Plan Content Analysis Results:

A content analysis examines documents or other communications for key words and phrases, revealing patterns and trends in language. My analysis codes the Case Study land trust's strategic plans for words and phrases related to urban land trust motivations, partners, and programs, coding first for the **occurrence** of this language, and second for the **significance** of this language. The analysis reveals the programs that these land trusts prioritize, allowing interviews to focus on motivations and partners.

The first level of analysis examines the **occurrence** of key words and phrases throughout strategic plans, including “partner(s)” or “collaborator(s)”; “urban”; “people” or “human”; “community/communities”; “diversity”, “equity”, and/or “inclusion”; “community garden/ing” or “urban farm/ing”; “forestry” or “green infrastructure”; “affordable housing” or “land banking”; “urban trails” and/or “greenways”; “urban parks” and/or “greenspaces”; “education” or “youth”; “community engagement”; “downtown”, “urban” or “neighborhood revitalization”; and “food security/access”. I chose these words and phrases based on the relevant academic literature and conversations with conservation professionals.

*Land trusts with higher scores after this first round of analysis engage in a wider variety of urban programs.* For example, Athens Land Trust's plan has 12/14 of the key words and phrases, whereas Santa Fe Conservation Trust (SFCT) has 6/14. This reflects the breadth or diversity of programming, not the quality. SFCT focuses their urban programs on trails/greenways. Athens Land Trust engages in community gardening, urban agriculture, education and youth programs, affordable housing, neighborhood revitalization, and conservation, a much wider scope.

Looking at the presence of key words and phrases paints a simplistic picture. For example, an organization like Western Reserve Land Conservancy (WRLC) actually engages in more urban programming than the first level of analysis suggests. WRLC's plan almost ties for last in occurrence of key words/phrases. When examined for urban conservation theme **significance**, however, the plan features three “significant” and “vitally significant” urban conservation plan elements and five more “minor” elements, the second most. **Figure 4.1** shows the distribution of significant urban conservation themes in strategic plans from the four Case Study land trusts. I measure the significance of urban conservation themes using four metrics:

- **Not mentioned (0)**: not mentioned at all in document,
- **Minor element of plan (1)**: plan makes a reference to this element, but not as a part of a main goal, objective, or action item,
- **Significant element (2)**: plan makes multiple references to this element, and it is part of a larger goal, objective, or action item, and,
- **Vitally significant element of plan (3)**: goals, guiding principles, objective, or action items dedicated to this element.

Athens Land Trust's 2015-2020 Strategic Plan features a wide variety of significant or vitally significant urban conservation themes (8/11) out of the four Case Study land trusts. As shown in **Figure 4.7**, ALT's Strategic Plan features community gardening/urban agriculture, affordable housing, urban parks/greenspace, and neighborhood revitalization as "vitally significant" elements, meaning the plan dedicated multiple goals, guiding principles, objectives, or action items to these themes. Of the four case study organizations, ALT engages in the widest variety of urban programs, reflected in this content analysis. Western Reserve Land Conservancy's (WRLC) plan features three "significant" and "vitally significant" urban conservation plan elements and five more "minor" elements, the second most. As seen in **Figure 4.7**, urban forestry, DEI/urban justice, and neighborhood revitalization were significant or vitally significant elements of the WRLC strategic plan. The interview unsurprisingly confirmed the importance of urban forestry, DEI, and neighborhood revitalization to WRLC's urban programming.

Santa Fe Conservation Trust (SFCT) and Columbia Land Trust (CLT) also had three "significant" and "vitally significant" themes present in their plans, but fewer minor elements. Review of CLT's 25-Year *Fearless Conservation Agenda* reveals urban parks/greenspace and diversity, equity, and inclusion as the plan's "vitally significant" urban conservation themes. Collaboration/urban partnerships and three other themes make up "minor elements" of the *Conservation Agenda*. Because CLT has such a wide geographic and programmatic scope, serving a massive area of the Lower Columbia River, the typical urban conservation themes don't necessarily shine through the *Agenda*. Although Columbia Land Trust has robust urban programming, the plan dedicates just one of 12 pages to urban work. This testifies to their sheer geographic breadth, not lack of urban programs. The interview with CLT staff member revealed more information about their urban programs than exposed by the strategic plan.

The content analysis of SFCT's 2018-2021 Strategic Plan supports interview findings regarding the emphasis on urban trails, the plan's "vitally significant" urban conservation theme. Seen in **Figure 4.7**, diversity, equity, and inclusion, and community engagement/public outreach also play "significant" roles in the plan. These themes reflect the variety of community events and programs as well as the trust's interest in community conservation. Although the plan confirms that SFCT has very targeted and specific urban programming, it does not reflect the high quality and quantity of these urban programs.

The number of "vitally significant" and "significant" themes correlates with the breadth of urban programming (more themes in these categories, the wider the breadth of urban programs, whereas generally lower scores, in either assessment, point to a narrower scope of urban work). Athens Land Trust has the highest occurrence of key words and phrases highest number of "significant" and "vitally significant" urban conservation plan elements. Western Reserve has the second most "significant" urban conservation plan elements, Columbia Land Trust has the third, and Santa Fe Conservation Trust has fourth. This order mirrors the breadth and diversity of these organizations' urban programs, going from wider to narrower scope, not a reflection of quality or quantity of work.

**Figure 4.7 Strategic Plan Content Analyses: Significance of Urban Conservation Themes**

<b>Urban Conservation Theme Categories</b>	Not mentioned or insignificant (0)	Minor element of plan (1)	Significant element (2)	Vitally significant element (3)
Collaboration, urban partnerships		<b>WRLC, SFCT, CLT</b>	<b>ALT</b>	
Community gardening, urban farming,	<b>WRLC, SFCT, CLT</b>			<b>ALT</b>
Diversity, equity and, inclusion			<b>ALT, SFCT</b>	<b>WRLC, CLT</b>
Affordable housing, land banking	<b>SFCT, CLT</b>	<b>WRLC</b>		<b>ALT</b>
Urban forestry, green infrastructure	<b>ALT, SFCT</b>	<b>CLT</b>		<b>WRLC</b>
Urban trails and greenways	<b>ALT</b>	<b>WRLC, CLT</b>		<b>SFCT</b>
Urban parks and greenspace	<b>SFCT</b>	<b>WRLC</b>		<b>ALT, CLT</b>
Education, youth, school programs	<b>WRLC, SFCT, CLT</b>	<b>ALT</b>		
Food access/security, sustainable food	<b>WRLC, SFCT, CLT</b>		<b>ALT</b>	
Community engagement, outreach		<b>WRLC, CLT</b>	<b>ALT, SFCT</b>	
Urban or neighborhood revitalization, economic development	<b>SFCT, CLT</b>		<b>WRLC</b>	<b>ALT</b>

**Summary:**

The Case Study Analysis revealed a variety of interesting themes. The next chapter synthesizes these themes and provides supporting examples from the group of 40+ land trusts featured in the Literature Review. I examine trends related to *catalytic leadership; the health of urban communities; small urban parcels and lots; diversity, equity, and inclusion; and urban conservation as a growth management and smart growth tool*. These five themes appeared repeatedly in my case study analyses and review of land trusts.

## Chapter Five: Key Themes Analysis

*This chapter discusses the five most common motivations, the importance of urban partnerships, and shared challenges of Western Reserve Land Conservancy, Athens Land Trust, Columbia Land Trust, and Santa Fe Land Conservancy, citing examples from over a dozen other urban land trusts to confirm the relevance of these motivations. In the **Appendix**, I present a table featuring all the urban land trusts examples referenced in this report, including information on their programs. The land trusts featured in this chapter originate from my review of over 40 urban land trusts, found in **Chapter Four**.*

### Catalytic Leadership:

In each of the interviews with Case Study land trust staff, I heard about catalytic leadership inspiring motivation for urban work. *A small of group of influential leaders (generally board members or staff) inspired many of the urban land trust programs I studied.* These catalytic leaders had visions for urban land trust work, inspiring an array of resulting partnerships and programs. Often founders, early supporters, original participants, or initial program managers, these catalytic leaders worked for years, sometimes decades, to influence their land trusts to pursue, support, or expand urban programs and partnerships.

**Western Reserve Land Conservancy** President and CEO Rich Cochran and the trust's Thriving Communities Director, Jim Rokakis, inspired the WRLC's urban reforestation, land banking, property inventory, and revitalization efforts in Cleveland. Jim Rokakis came to WRLC with a background as County Treasurer and advocate for Ohio's county land banking system. These leaders have inspired and informed WRLC's urban programs since their inception in 2011.

Skipper StipeMaas and Nancy Stangle, founders of **Athens Land Trust**, inspired the trust's focus on sustainable, equitable housing and land conservation. They steered ALT towards the unique hybrid community and conservation land trust. Meeting each other as part of a residential development project, the two noticed the dichotomy of affordable housing and greenspace preservation. The trust went on to spearhead a wide range of urban programs dedicated to both equity and sustainability, pursuing the creation of housing for low- and middle-income families, revitalizing and preserving historically black neighborhoods, and educating the next generation of farmers and conservationists. Nancy Stangle still serves as the Board Treasurer for ALT (Athens Land Trust, 2019). Skipper StipeMaas, a community and economic development attorney, currently serves as Director of the non-profit Georgia Center for Heirs Property Law Center (GA Heirs Property Law, 2019).

Early founding board members and leaders Dale Ball, Stewart Udall (former Secretary of the Interior for Presidents Kennedy and Johnson), and Bill Johnson, play a similar role in development of **Santa Fe Conservation Trust**. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, they shaped the organization's trajectory in and around Santa Fe, close

relationships with local government, and stewardship of trail networks. Udall used his influence and acumen to help launch SFCT and battle against rapid development of the foothills outside Santa Fe. Bill Johnson served as the first head of the trust's trails committee, which became the organization's premier urban program. Dale Ball facilitated the preservation of thousands of acres of natural and agricultural landscape and played an instrumental role in the creation of the regional Rail Trail. The Dale Ball Trails network and the annual Stewart Udall Legacy Dinner bear the names of these important leaders.



**Figure 5.1** Trail sign for the extensive Dale Ball Trails network, connecting Santa Fe to the surrounding foothills, <https://sfct.org/posting-dale-ball-signage-september-october-2016/>

The Backyard Habitat Certification Program (BHCP), *Columbia Land Trust's* premier urban program, also takes inspiration from a small founding group of influential leaders. A small neighborhood organization, the West Willamette Restoration Foundation, and an original participant turned first program manager, Gaylen Beatty, played integral roles in the development of this program. It began with a small group of homeowners living near Marquam Nature Park in Portland, fighting invasive species and restoring habitat on their small urban residential lots. They began to realize the importance of community engagement, education, and coordination to effectively address these issues, founding the West Willamette Restoration Foundation. The group provided landowners with information, assistance, and signs to recognize project achievements, existing from 2006-2009 and primarily working on one-acre or less parcels.

Gaylen Beatty, one of the program's original participants in Portland, started managing the program 2009 when the Portland suburbs based Three Rivers Conservancy and the Portland Audubon Society began their stewardship of the Backyard Habitat Certification Program. When Columbia Land Trust acquired Three Rivers, Gaylen continued to manage the program for CLT. She was integral to the early success of BHCP and its wide expansion throughout the Portland-Vancouver region. Now working for Metro's Parks and Nature Department, Gaylen has connected with the BHCP once again, certifying a new "habitat patch" on the large Metro campus in northeast Portland (Columbia Land Trust, 2019). She even works with other parents to enroll and certify the grounds of her daughter's high school, going full circle from original program participant to its first program manager, back now again as a participant.

California's **Big Sur Land Trust** (BSLT) also takes inspiration from an influential leader for its urban programs. Having conserved 25,000+ acres around Monterey County in primarily affluent communities, the trust began exploring work in the diverse 150,000-person city of Salinas (Bonta et al., 2015). After attending a Center for Whole Communities retreat in Vermont, BSLT head Bill Leahy asked the Center to lead a retreat in California for the trust to communicate with local leaders about how the organization could serve the region's diverse population (Aldrich, 2016). They left the retreat recognizing that BSLT had a duty to do more than just conserve land, and could holistically improve quality of life in the whole region. Under Bill Leahy's leadership the trust expanded into Salinas in 2007, focusing on green infrastructure projects that simultaneously mitigate flood risk, restore habitat, link trail networks, and provide much needed park space in a city with a low park space to resident ratio (Aldrich, 2016). Even now, after Leahy's tenure leading BSLT, his legacy lives on through the trust's programs throughout Salinas.

### Small Urban Parcels/Lots:

*Many land trusts specifically identify small urban parcels/lots as an important part of their overall urban conservation strategy, recognizing the multi-purpose potential for these urban spaces.* From replacing vacant or blighted properties with greenspace and affordable housing to restoring habitat on small residential lots, small urban parcels/lots inspire a wide range of partnerships and programs. In urban areas, conservation organizations face broader definitions of what constitutes "open space" than in rural areas (Bird, 2012). Organizations pursue urban gardens, pocket parks, greenway trails, and event spaces in the plethora of vacant lots in urban areas, no matter how small. Land trusts share this interest in small urban parcels with city planners. This theme relates intimately to land use, in-fill development, urban design, placemaking, and economic/community development, issues in the realm of urban planners.

Melissa Houser of **Santa Fe Conservation Trust** (SFCT) advocates for investment in small urban easements. Small lots in Santa Fe are used for pocket parks, habitat islands, sites for educational events, and more. They showcase conservation programs to city residents. She argues that these small properties have cumulative aesthetic and habitat benefit, although acknowledges that some people, even in the conservation world, find these small easements pointless. As the organization focuses on preserving large rural properties, staff face internal and external challenges raising awareness and support for the protection of small urban properties.

Isaac Robb of **Western Reserve Land Conservancy** (WRLC) calls this conundrum the "puzzle of owning small parcels in cities", voicing concern over encumbering areas for potential housing, gardening, or public space with strict conservation easements. WRLC faces a massive opportunity in this regard because the Cleveland area features thousands of vacant, blighted, and undeveloped properties. WRLC works with Cleveland MetroParks and local Community Development Organizations to reforest the city's

urban canopy, fund demolition of blighted buildings, and create detailed property inventories in these small urban spaces.

**Athens Land Trust** also recognizes the importance of the small vacant or undeveloped lots, especially for use in community agriculture and affordable housing projects. They have effectively used properties less than one acre for urban farming and other projects, as well as renovating and revitalizing small properties in historic African American neighborhoods. Krisztian Varsa, ALT's Conservation Manager, mentioned aspirations for utilizing the patchwork of small urban properties to restore an urban creek that routinely floods and building a multimodal greenway trail.

**Columbia Land Trust's** premier urban program, Backyard Habitat Certification, concentrates on properties less than one acre, making habitat restoration and improvement of the regional mosaic of small urban greenspaces a top priority. They argue that the remaining ecosystem fragments in the Portland region offer far more habitat, health, and environmental importance than their small size and developed state suggest (Rudd et. al. 2002).



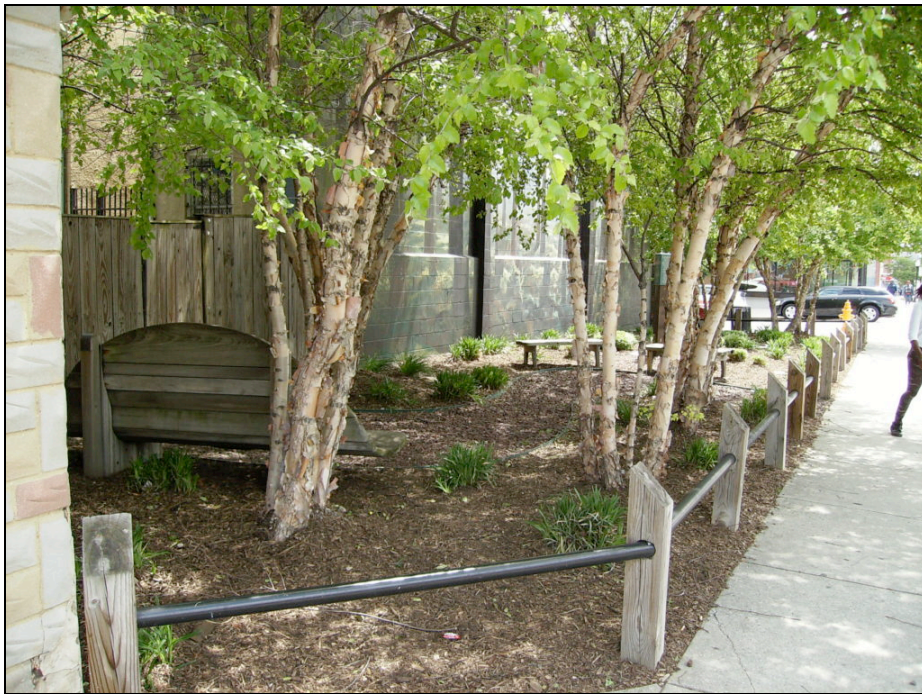
**Figure 5.1** Vacant urban lot in Albany, New York, 2017, <https://www.timesunion.com/local/article/Vacant-lots-in-Albany-going-for-100-11190332.php>

A variety of other land trusts across the country also target small urban parcels, recognizing their importance to urban conservation. Maryland's **Baltimore Greenspace** preserves small urban spaces to increase the city's ability to adapt to climate change, as well as provide greenspace opportunities to residents (Bird, 2012). The trust documents and preserves small "forest patches" throughout the city and facilitates the transformation of small blighted lots into greenspace or urban gardens. Kansas City's (MO) **Heartland Conservation Alliance** engages in a "Vacant Lots to Greenways"



program, finding and connecting vacant lots to create a greenway along the local Blue River. The alliance wants to provide accessible community greenspace and simultaneously demonstrate successful green infrastructure and stormwater management.

**Oregon Sustainable Agriculture Land Trust's** Portland-based project, *Urban Farm Collective*, transforms vacant urban lots into spaces for community gardens and agriculture, supporting sustainable food systems, healthy local food sources, and permanently preserved sites for urban neighborhood agriculture (OSALT, 2019). Volunteers help out at garden sites in exchange for “barter bucks” and use those to acquire fresh produce at a weekly barter market. When the Collective grows more food than needed, it donates the rest to fight hunger in the Portland area.



**Figure 5.2** Revitalized vacant lot in Baltimore, <https://naturesacred.org/even-small-urban-green-space-can-lower-depression-rates-new-research-confirms/>

**Reverend Linnette C. Williamson Memorial Park Association**, a rare inner-city land trust, acquires small parcels for community gardens, pocket parks, and playgrounds to improve the quality of life for children, families, and residents of Central Harlem (The Rev. Linnette C. Williamson Memorial Park Association Inc., 2019). Since their inception in 1965, the trust has secured neighborhood access to greenspaces, opportunities to garden (as a cultural tradition and a healthy recreational activity), community-gathering spaces, and recreational opportunities for kids.

**The Land Trust for Louisiana** recently partnered with the City of New Orleans Sewerage and Water Board to transform a vacant lot into a green infrastructure demonstration site. The property serves as a life-science site for a local school and features two bio-swales of native plants. They envision transforming blighted properties

in New Orleans into sites for stormwater management, community greenspace, and habitat, hoping that empty urban lots get included in the “growing list of permanently protected and stewarded Louisiana lands” (Land Trust for Louisiana, 2019).

Small vacant or undeveloped parcels serve as some of urban area’s last remaining opportunities for greenspaces, community gardening, affordable housing, stormwater management, educational opportunities and more. A 2007 paper, “An Urban Conservation Strategy to Preserve Cuyahoga County’s Eco-Valued Landscapes”, advocates for a regional urban conservation strategy that targets small parcels less than 10 acres (Garrity, 2007). Clearly small urban parcels play an integral motivational role for many urban serving land trusts and the proving ground for their programs. *These properties provide land trust’s an impetus and an opportunity to engage in urban areas.*

### Health of Urban Communities and Ecosystems:

*Urban land trusts work to expand recreational opportunities and greenspace access in the name of public health, and restore damaged urban habitat to support healthy functioning ecosystems.* The Land Trust Alliance’s calls public health a “sector-specific land trust success” that falls outside traditional land conservation programs (Aldrich, 2014). All four case study organizations cite “health” of urban communities and ecosystems as a motivational factor. Some argue that fostering “healthier” urban communities actually makes conserving rural land easier and that urban areas play a large role in the health and functioning of larger regional landscapes. They also argue that damaged urban ecosystems have a relationship to human health (which is supported in the academic literature). Urban planners, ostensibly concerned with the “health, safety, and well-being” of communities, share this motivation for public health. Local government officials and planners use similar tools as urban land trusts to meet this goal, working to increase access to recreational opportunities and support the functioning of urban ecosystems.

This broad goal of healthy cities and urban communities comes up repeatedly in the interviews, land trust publications, and the literature. But “health” means something different to everyone. ***Santa Fe Conservation Trust***, for example, uses their programming to promote healthy, active lifestyles through use of the cities robust trail network. They identify health as a motivator for their recreational programs, and in in this context mean the physical and mental health of Santa Feans. SFCT also works closely with local health care providers and retirement communities to promote their trail recreation programs. SFCT endeavors to provide all residents of Santa Fe, especially underserved communities, access to healthy recreational opportunities.

***Ozark Greenways***, a trust operating in Springfield, Missouri, also provides, stewards, and creates trails for both recreation and public health (Ozark Greenways, 2019). Their linear urban parks and connected greenways provide opportunities for transportation, walking, running, or cycling, strengthening community health. The Boston area’s ***Waltham Land Trust*** participates in the national "Outdoors Rx" program, which gives doctors and other health care providers an opportunity to write “prescriptions” to encourage kids to spend more time playing outdoors. The trust

partnered with Healthy Waltham to map six urban walking routes through local neighborhoods and alongside the Charles River for Outdoors Rx participants (Aldrich, 2014).

Alternatively, **Columbia Land Trust** focuses on maintaining, increasing, and fostering the health of urban ecosystems through their Backyard Habitat Certification Program, which provides assistance to landowners restoring native habitat all over the Portland area. CLT works to protect the health and function of fractured urban habitat. Many other land trusts use language about healthy and functioning ecosystems in their mission statements and publications regarding conservation work. For example, **Chelan-Douglas Land Trust** works to maintain the health of ecosystems in and around the urban area of Wenatchee-East Wenatchee, Washington. They believe that human health is interdependent with local ecosystem health, and preserve thousands of acres in rural, suburban, urban areas throughout North Central Washington via conservation easement and acquisition (Chelan-Douglas Land Trust, 2019).



**Figure 5.3** Western Reserve Land Conservancy partners plant trees in Cleveland, OH  
<https://geauganews.com/toast-plant-adopt-and-celebrate-trees-during-a-series-of-arbor-day-events-hosted-by-the-western-reserve-land-conservancy/>

**Western Reserve Land Conservancy** (WRLC) and **Athens Land Trust** (ALT) combine outlooks on “health”, working to simultaneously improve urban human and ecosystem health. WRLC President Rich Cochran’s aspiration to make urban communities and environments healthier has been embedded into the trust’s urban reforestation and revitalization programs.

**Athens Land Trust** provides access to healthy locally grown food, permanently affordable housing, and accessible greenspace. Both trusts perceive a clear connection between the health of urban communities and health and functioning of urban

ecosystems, food systems, and neighborhoods, supporting these systems holistically with vast array of programming.

Similarly, **LandPaths** works in and around the diverse city of Santa Clara, CA to advocate for public health through recreation programs. Their “In Our Own Backyard” Program exposes school students from underserved districts to natural areas, encouraging healthy recreation habits and a love of nature. LandPath’s “Farming for Health” program at their Bayer Farm Neighborhood Park & Gardens also provides opportunities for community members for access to healthy locally grown food.

Maine’s **Portland Trails** organization engages in trail building advocacy and stewardship, conservation, placemaking, conservation, active transportation, and “school grounds greening” (reminiscent of Columbia Land Trust’s Backyard Habitat Program) (Portland Trails, 2019). Portland Trails self-identifies as an urban land trust, serving the half-million person Portland MSA (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). They believe that protecting land and providing trails serves an integral role in community health, arguing that not only plants and animals need corridors connecting intact ecosystems but that human residents also benefit via cleaner air and water, protection of local pollinators, and increased access to recreational opportunities.



**Figure 5.4** Larkspur Trail, a multimodal greenway trail in Bend, OR  
<https://www.commuteoptions.org/urban-trails-provide-important-opportunities-for-active-transportation/>

Working to make urban communities more healthy and restoring healthy urban habitat meshes seamlessly with the work of these land trusts. The land trust staff I spoke with all referenced “health” as a motivator for urban work without prompting. Research supports their suspicions that urban greenspaces and conservation have a strong relationship with public health (Wolch et. al, 2014 & Douglas, 2012). Planners,

conservationists, and academics alike have turned attention to the relationship between healthy functioning urban ecosystems and human health, biodiversity, and resiliency in the face of Climate Change (Ignatieva et al, 2011). *Planners and land trusts will have an increasingly relevant role in public health as our urban communities continue to grow.*

### Growth Management and Smart Growth:

*All four of the case study land trusts identified their urban work as, at least in part, a response to rapid growth or an effort to mitigate suburban sprawl by encouraging smart development.* Urban and suburban development in the Cleveland, Athens-Atlanta, Portland-Vancouver, and Santa Fe metropolitan areas has steadily increased in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and my four case study organizations used a mixture of traditional and non-traditional methods to help manage this growth. Rural and suburban land trusts have long used their conservation tools, from easements and acquisition to advocacy, to oppose rapid urban or suburban development. My work and research from national groups like the Land Trust Alliance indicates that these issues motivate urban serving land trusts as well (Aldrich, 2014). Fascinatingly, urban planners seemingly once again share this motivation for growth management or smart growth. Urban land trusts and urban planners use different strategies, but seem to support the same outcomes of livable, green cities, reduced suburban sprawl, and minimal rural development (Daniels, 1998).

Rapid growth presents both a challenge and an opportunity. For example, **Athens Land Trust** staff cited the impending expansion of Atlanta as an opportunity to galvanize communities and organizations for both rural and urban conservation. ALT has always worked to foster sustainable development and smart growth, initially with New Urbanism inspired conservation sub-development projects and later on with their affordable housing and neighborhood revitalization programs. They also work with landowners to preserve farmland in Athens-Clarke County to maintain a buffer of rural communities between encroaching Atlanta development.

Other land trusts have a history with conservation development and other smart growth tools. **Santa Fe Conservation Trust** partners with **Commweal Conservancy** on the 13,000+ acre Galisteo Basin Preserve, a “conservation based community development” 15 miles outside Santa Fe, a great example of a smart growth project spearheaded by land trusts. This area, at high risk of development from the expanding city, has roughly 12,000 acres of preserved habitat and room remaining for almost 400 housing units and accompanying infrastructure.



**Figure 5.5** Rendering of sustainable housing development,  
<https://www.mhworkshop.co.uk/projects/houses/community-land-trust/>

***The Trustees of the Reservation***, the oldest land trust in the U.S., supports conservation, stewardship, agricultural preservation, community gardening, and advocacy programs across Massachusetts. The trust is part of the Boston Waterfront Initiative, a group of public agencies, nonprofits, and businesses leading the preservation and revitalization of the Boston Harbor front to create more open spaces, protected cultural sites, functioning ecosystems, and a resilient waterfront in the face of sea level rise (Harder, 2019). This initiative, a combination of sustainable community development, historic preservation, and habitat restoration, serves as an interesting example of urban land trust work inspired by smart growth and urban design principles (Harder, 2019).

***Green Spaces Alliance of South Texas*** conserves land, provides environmental education, and sponsors urban community gardening in San Antonio in the face of rapid population growth and development (Green Spaces Alliance of South TX, 2019) Their work takes inspiration from the growing need to preserve land, water, and agriculture in one of the country's fastest growing metropolitan areas. ***Colorado Open Lands*** conserves agricultural and natural landscapes throughout Colorado, including in and around the rapidly developing Denver. For example, they hold a conservation easement permanently protecting the Five Fridges Farm, located just a few miles outside downtown Denver in the City of Wheat Ridge (Rosen, 2018).

***Forterra*** (WA), an innovative land trust, engages in affordable housing, transit-oriented development, community development, conservation, habitat restoration, and more. Forterra, the largest land trust and community development organization in the Pacific Northwest, created the Landscape Conservation and Local Infrastructure Program, which became state law in 2011. The program creates incentives for both land conservation and community development by combining a Transfer of Development Rights program with Tax Increment Financing to conserve farmland and habitat while

simultaneously funding urban parks, sidewalks, bike infrastructure, and other amenities (Aldrich, 2014). Forterra bridges the gap between land conservancy and community development organization, preserving thousands of acres of habitat and farmland while simultaneously engaging in Transit Oriented Development, regional planning, and affordable housing development (Forterra, 2019).



**Figure 5.6,** Multimodal path through mixed use development, Bloomington, IN  
<https://www.visitbloomington.com/blog/post/urban-trails/>

### Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion/Community Conservation:

*Providing services to disadvantaged and underrepresented communities, from people of color and low-income families, to the elderly and very young, motivates urban land trust work.* The recent rise of “Community conservation” (fundamentally people based conservation) has contributed to a nationwide conversation about diversity, equity, and inclusion in conservation (Aldrich, 2016). As the Land Trust Alliance and other national organizations push community conservation, local trusts have incorporated those themes into their mission and programs. All four of the land trusts in my Case Study Analysis reference national and regional trends in community conservation as a motivation for urban programs. Cleveland, Athens, Santa Fe, and Portland are incredibly diverse cities, and land trust staff representatives all relayed their organization’s desire to expand their programs to more racially, socioeconomically, and geographically diverse audiences.

Krisztian Varsa, Conservation Director at **Athens Land Trust**, referred to his trust’s work as “*Overcoming systems of oppression by making fair, healthy, green, and equitable communities.*” Historically, there has not been a lot of engagement of marginalized communities by conservation organizations (Bonta et al., 2015). Land

trusts have traditionally targeted white rural (often affluent) landowners, leading to socioeconomic disparities in land trusts partners, donor bases, and communities served, presenting serious environmental justice implications. However, that's starting to change. Staff from **Santa Fe Conservation Trust** and **Columbia Land Trust** expressed their interest in increasing the diversity of landowners engaging in their respective programs. For example, Columbia Land Trust wants to increase partnerships with community development, neighborhood, and culturally specific organizations to both expand their audience and begin to offset potential impacts of gentrification causes by their Backyard Habitat Certification Program (BHCP). They acknowledge that many participants for BHCP come from socioeconomically affluent backgrounds, and endeavor to increase the diversity of program participants as they expand.

**Athens Land Trust** works for underserved communities of color and low to moderate income families, providing affordable housing opportunities, credit and finance counseling and assistance, access to local healthy food, and educational programming. They also support increasing agricultural land ownership for people of color in Georgia. Despite misconceptions amongst some community members and confusion about the trusts and the work they do, these organizations have continued to forge partnerships with diverse cultural, economic, and racial groups in urban areas. Although coming into urban communities as a perceived outsider sometimes generates suspicion or conflict, these trusts have carefully cultivated partnerships with community organizations and neighborhood residents to increase trust.



**Figure 5.7** FoodCorps member serving with Athens Land Trust and a local high school student, 2016, <https://www.onlineathens.com/article/20160412/NEWS/304129957?template=ampart>

**Forterra** (WA), a hybrid land trust and community development organization, preserves and restores thousands of acres of natural and agricultural land, and also works with vulnerable communities in the state's rapidly growing Seattle region. In



Tukwila, a few miles from the bustling Sea-Tac Airport, Forterra engages in a project to develop affordable housing and mixed-use development in an old motel. Partnering with the nearby Abu Bakr Islamic Community Center, this project will ultimately serve the local Somali immigrant community (Bullinger, 2018). Forterra engages in projects like these across the heavily developed Puget Sound area, working to protect and provide permanently affordable housing in diverse communities as prices soar.

**The Reverend Linnette C. Williamson Memorial Park Association** protects and manages open space, bringing together Harlem’s increasingly diverse racial, economic, and cultural community. It protects greenspace amenities in inner-city communities, areas typically disenfranchised from parks infrastructure, community gardening, and public gathering spaces (Wolch, 2014). The trust’s mission states, “We strengthen ties between residents of all races, ages, incomes and religion...” (The Rev. Linnette C. Williamson Memorial Park Association, Inc., 2019). The trust got its name from the Harlem community leader, Jamaican-born Reverend Linnette Williamson, who worked with the community, city officials, and university affiliates to create the first pocket park in the U.S over 50 years ago. The trust restored and saved the park from development in the 1990s. It now owns this pocket park, and several others, encouraging the public to recreate, garden, attend summer programs, and host public events or community meetings.

California’s **Big Sur Land Trust (BSLT)**, recognizing the lack of greenspace, outdoor education, and recreation opportunities offered to the majority Hispanic city of Salinas, acquired the Marks Ranch property in their effort to expand their services more equitably. The 816-acre property is located just outside a city with abnormally low access to park space (Bonta et al., 2015). For much of its 30-year history, the trust had conserved coastal Monterey County, in and around affluent communities. They recognized a gap in conservation programs offered inland to more diverse and less affluent communities (Aldrich, 2016). Marks Ranch, purchased in 2007, marked the beginning in a series of BSLT programs in Salinas. The trust currently works with city residents, community groups, and the city government to collaboratively “co-create” a new park at another BSLT property at the city center (BSLT, 2019). The park would serve an area desperately in need of more greenspace as a site of community gathering for the Hispanic community, flood control, habitat restoration, and water quality improvement.

**Sogorea Te’ Land Trust**, an indigenous women-led urban land trust in California’s East Bay area, advocates for a justice-oriented version of land conservation. They envision acquiring and reclaiming urban parcels throughout the Bay Area in traditional Chochenyo and Ohlone territory, acknowledging and working against the legacy of colonialism, imperialism, and genocide (Sogorea’ Te Land Trust, 2019). The trust also advocates for the “Shuumi Land Tax”. This voluntary annual financial contribution from non-Indigenous property owners on traditional Chochenyo and Ohlone territory would fund the trust’s land preservation work, the establishment of a cemetery for reburied stolen ancestral remains, and the support of new urban community gardens and community centers (Sogorea’ Te Land Trust, 2019).

Community conservation, DEI work, and urban land trusts go hand in hand. As land trusts fight against a history of racism, inequity, and injustice associated with conservation, urban areas play an important role. *Facing a legacy of unequal distribution of conservation benefits, many trusts, from Central California to Harlem, have gone out of their way to instill diversity, equity, and inclusion into their work.*

### Urban Partnerships:

*Urban land trusts overwhelmingly partner with city, county, regional, and state governments.* Trusts in my 40-organization review and Case Study analysis also partner with other nonprofit organizations (community development corporations, conservation organizations, health groups, etc.), the Federal government, businesses, and schools. The Case Study analysis provides especially successful examples of partnerships between local governments and land trusts in urban areas. These examples can be useful for local government planners and policy makers, especially as urban areas grow and land trusts increasingly expand their focus. As pointed out in the previous sections, local governments and urban planners have a lot of the same motivations as urban land trusts, especially in regards to public health, functioning urban ecosystems, infill-development, place making, community development, growth management, and smart growth.

Urban land trust partnerships reflect their primary motivations, but also reflect the preexisting network/power structure of the urban organizations in their service areas. Other organizations and agencies that already exist and work in urban areas can dictate the role of urban land trusts. Existing community and neighborhood organizations help inform community perceptions towards other outside non-profit organizations. For example, the prevalence of community development corporations (CDCs) in Cleveland (as well as the strong municipal parks department) dictates the role that ***Western Reserve Land Conservancy*** plays in Cleveland. Neighborhood distrust and unfamiliarity of an outside group shapes the relationship between WRLC and community organizations. Conservation organizations don't have a great reputation in urban communities (Bonta et al., 2015), but even if they did, Cleveland's neighborhoods have a preexisting strong bond with CDCs (and to a lesser extent), Cleveland MetroParks. WRLC utilizes these bonds. Because of these preexisting community bonds and the mild, yet very real, community distrust/unfamiliarity, the conservancy relies on CDCs and Cleveland MetroParks to do a lot of the groundwork funded and planned by WRLC. For example, CDCs, neighborhood organizations, or MetroParks representatives often physically plant the trees as part of WRLC's "Reforest Our City Program".

I heard from Isaac Robb, WRLC's Manager of Urban Projects, that Ohio lacks strong and comprehensive local government control of land use planning, causing fracturing, competing priorities, and a lack of shared vision between conservation organizations and public agencies. As an Oregon native and a Cornell educated urban planner, Isaac knows what he is talking about when it comes to land use planning. WRLC's property inventories, demolition funding, land banking, and other programs might fill the role that a more robust land planning system would play, another

interesting example of preexisting networks and structures shaping urban land trust work.

**Athens Land Trust**, on the other hand, plays the role of de-facto community land trust, community development organization, urban farm, and land trust in Athens-Clarke County, filling a void that does not exist in Cleveland. As the area's largest and oldest housing, sustainability, and equity-focused organization, lacking the robust network of CDCs found in Cleveland, ALT plays a very different role than Western Reserve Land Conservancy. For example, ALT does more work on the ground than WRLC, engaging community members in historically black neighborhoods, owning, leasing, and renting affordable housing, managing urban farms, offering youth programs, and providing credit, finance, and homeowner's assistance. These programs are informed by ALT's motivations (smart growth, equitable housing, and healthy neighborhoods), but also by the presence (or lack) of other organizations. If Athens had a robust network of community development corporations like Cleveland, they might not play the role of hybrid conservation and community land trust.

The Portland metro area has a vibrant scene of community development and neighborhood organizations. Portland also has a variety of urban agriculture and community gardening organizations, like the Urban Farm Collective. The area also has well-funded parks and recreation agencies, both regionally and municipally. The mixture of existing public and nonprofit entities dictates **Columbia Land Trust's** work. Although CLT conserves urban greenspaces and trails, much of this work takes place in more rural areas. Regional and municipal parks departments manage the vast majority of public greenspace in the area, community and neighborhood organizations tackle housing and food access, and urban farms and gardens grow healthy local produce. This means that Columbia Land Trust's biggest opportunities lie in small-scale urban habitat restoration and community outreach, not large-scale greenspace, urban agriculture, or affordable housing programs. Other organizations already provide those programs. The trust's focus on small private properties and restoring the health of urban habitats reflects

both this reality and the trust's underlying motivations for urban work.



**Figure 5.7** Backyard Habitat Certification achievement sign, <https://www.milwaukieoregon.gov/events/backyard-habitat-certification-landscape-directory-training>

**Santa Fe Conservation Trust** made close relationships with the city and county early on. Projects like the preservation of Atalaya Peak and development of the Rail Trail helped cement the trust's role. SFCT has served as the city's trail stewardship and outreach organization for over a decade. The area's vast

interconnected trail network has created this necessity to partner with city, county, and US Forest Service officials to maintain, steward, and promote these trails. Today, the wide variety of medical providers and high number retirement communities also influences SFCT's role. These networks have influenced urban group-walking programs. Santa Fe's many Hispanic-majority neighborhoods and school districts, often located further from greenspace and trail opportunities than the affluent white-majority neighborhoods, providing yet another opportunity for SFCT to work as the city's trails and recreation promoter in partnership with city government, public schools, health providers, and retirement communities.

These examples suggest that existing organizations, networks, and power structures in urban areas dictate the role that urban land trusts end up playing. They fill a needed niche, opportunities not already pursued by other organizations. They partner with existing organizations, gaining community credibility and expanding reach. These examples help demonstrate the importance of beginning a focused internal conversation that lays out *motivations* and takes stock of all possible *partners*, *programs*, and *challenges* when pursuing land trust work in urban areas.

### Common Challenges for Urban Land Trusts:

Case Study interviews touched on the challenges faced by urban land trusts, revealing some of the more common hurdles faced by these organizations. See the **Appendices** for specific challenges faced by each land trust. The three most common challenges are:

1. Financial limitations
2. Internal resistance
3. External resistance

Throughout interviews, land trust staff reported that urban programs would have occurred sooner or expanded faster with more *financial flexibility*. Expanding to include urban areas costs money in the form of staff time, equipment, office or meeting space, travel, materials, and more. These costs add up, and unsurprisingly present the largest hurdle for urban land trusts. Each of the four Case Study land trusts had to find creative and innovative ways to source funds or reduce costs of their urban programs. On the upside, Federal and state funding, particularly for affordable housing, local food, and community/economic development, is available for urban trusts. For example, **Athens Land Trust** receives Community Development Block Grant funding, support from the Federal HOME Homeowners Investment program, and USDA's SNAP for some of its affordable housing, credit and finance counseling, and local food programs. Without these and other funding sources, ALT's impact in the Athens areas would understandably be financially limited. Land trusts can also test out programs in urban areas at a low cost, rolling them out slowly and in geographically limited areas. For example, **Columbia Land Trust's** Backyard Habitat Certification Program started on a very small neighborhood scale and has expanded to four counties over the last 10 years.

**Santa Fe Conservation Trust** keeps the costs of their large and widespread trail stewardship, events, and outreach down by relying heavily on their dedicated network of volunteers. Volunteers help steward the dozens of miles of trails that the trust contracts with the city to maintain, and also staff public events like the *Vámanos* urban group walks. This reduces SFCT’s staffing costs and has enabled them to expand urban programs like *Vámanos*.

**Internal resistance to urban programs**, another major hurdle, varies wildly and depends on the original mission and scope of the land trust. Land trust staff, board members, volunteers, and partners don’t always support their organization’s shift to include urban areas, wary that the change will take resources from urban programs or contribute to mission drift. In some cases, internal resistance and debate over urban programs can cause some staff and board members to leave. In other cases, sustainability, public health, smart growth, and EDI goals embedded in the land trust mission long before expansion to cities makes the transition smoother.

Internal resistance circles back to a discussion of scope and organizational capacity, a worry that urban programs could take resources away from other projects. **Santa Fe Conservation Trust** mitigates the challenge of sharing resources between rural and urban programs with its large and active volunteer network. However, they are not immune from internal debates. Melissa Houser, SFCT’s Land Program Manager,



mentioned the challenge that comes with small urban conservation easements. The value of these small projects generates debate. Many view this kind of work as pointless. Mellissa Houser, however, emphasized her belief that even two acres or less can make a *huge difference* in urban areas. In the 1990s, the trust acquired a variety of small urban easements but has since shifted their conservation focus to larger rural tracts over time. Unsurprisingly small urban easements receive less funding than large rural properties, since donors, partners, and agencies can’t easily see the impact of these projects.

**Figure 4.8** Santa Fe Conservation Trust volunteers helping on a project, <https://sfct.org/>

A merger of 8 traditional rural and suburban land trusts created the **Western Reserve Land Conservancy**. From 2006 to 2011, the trust primarily engaged in typical land trust programs (like land conservation and restoration). When their Thriving Communities office opened in 2011 and urban programming begun in earnest, some long time staff and board members had doubts. In the end, the trust figured out how to balance urban and rural work, but lost some staff and board members on the way. On the other hand, when **Athens Land Trust** expanded into their affordable housing, urban

farming, and neighborhood revitalization programs, they faced limited internal resistance. Staff member Krisztian Varsa wondered if this lack of internal resistance had to do with the trust's early housing and sustainability focus, which it easily transferred to urban areas. **Columbia Land Trust** also faced minimal internal resistance as it expanded its urban programs, owing this to the robust funding of their premier urban program, Backyard Habitat Certification.

Another internal challenge comes from the definition of scope, which changes depending on whom you talk to within the organization. For example, scope for the housing and urban agriculture advocates at Athens Land Trust includes historically black neighborhoods in Athens. The scope of conservation and agricultural preservation staff is the entire state of Georgia. This has implications for allocation of resources, the root of many internal debates.

Some urban land trusts have also found negative perceptions of conservation organizations in urban communities. ***Working in an underserved urban community can pose challenges to rurally-based and primarily white organizations like land trusts.*** For example, **Athens Land Trust** faced misunderstanding and misconceptions from community members and potential partner organizations as they delved into affordable housing and urban programs. The trust has been accused of hoarding local resources like housing and land and criticized for not letting homeowners own their own property. They've been called "sharecroppers" and accused of taking advantage of community members. This requires education and outreach to push back against misconceptions. Some organizations, which could have been partners, perceived ALT as a competitor for financial resources and community support. Some groups did not consider ALT a true community development organization, feeling wary about forging partnerships. ALT has grown and expanded their mission while other community development organizations have waned and struggled. Although the outside perception of resource competition with other organizations never totally subsided, it does not currently impact ALT significantly.

**Western Reserve Land Conservancy** also faces some challenges with external resistance. The implications of race in Cleveland still have a real impact on nonprofit work, and WRLC can also be seen as an "outsider" in many neighborhoods. This dictates some of their urban work and makes partnerships with community development organizations so important. Lack of financial resources from governmental partners, Cleveland's low median household income, low adult literacy and education rates, high crime, and distrust of "outsiders", represent pernicious social factors that bring big challenges to urban work, what Isaac Robb of WRLC called the "Psyche of a place hurt". Partnering with community and neighborhood organizations beings to assuage this issue.

Interestingly, **Santa Fe Conservation Trust** and **Columbia Land Trust** faced less external resistance than the other two Case Study land trusts. Although Santa Fe and Portland are both diverse cities, Athens and Cleveland have arguably experienced more profound socioeconomic turmoil throughout their history, perhaps presenting a bigger divide between urban and suburban/rural communities. In response to this challenge, some urban land trusts have brought in staff, volunteers, board members, and partners

with experience in diversity, equity, inclusion, environmental justice and community conservation. Generally, these investments, along with investments of time and dialogue with community members, has resulted in greater trust and understanding over time. Although the challenges of financial flexibility, internal resistance, and external resistance appeared the most common, further research could illuminate other prevalent hurdles and address solutions to these challenges in more detail.

### Recommendations for Further Research:

As land trusts continue to save land, promote public health, support sustainable food systems, provide permanently affordable housing, expand programs to underserved communities, and advocate for smart growth, more research must explore the unique urban land trust model. Although this report, a snapshot of specific motivations, partners, and programs, reveals the sheer variety of urban land trust possibilities, it merely scratches the surface. Examining themes from my research in a larger sample size would likely yield a more comprehensive look at urban land trusts. Researchers with more capacity could interview staff from dozens of land trusts. This project acts as a snap shot, providing potential motivation and inspiration to others. A more conclusive information gathering effort could reveal the true size and scope of the urban land trust phenomena demonstrated in this research.

An entire project could dedicate itself to exploring the extent to which motivations for urban conservation influence partnerships and/or programs. Although some relationship between these factors clearly exists, it's difficult to classify the direct relationship between motivations, partners, and programs. Land trust partnerships present a fascinating subject of study for a researcher with a larger capacity for interviews and content analysis. Interviews revealed the motivations for urban land trust work more so than any other form of inquiry, so I only got a clear picture of these motivations from the four Case Study Analysis organizations. Interviewing representatives from dozens of organizations could pave the way for a groundbreaking study on urban land trust motivations and their impact on partnerships/programming.

Another fascinating avenue for urban land trust research could explore the variety of technical and financial assistance available to these organizations, serving as another resource for land trusts considering expanding their programming to include urban areas. Another project could catalogue all existing urban serving land trusts in the United States, rather than taking a sampling like my project. Further research could also begin to measure the impact of urban land trusts using greenspace to resident ratios, public health, housing affordability, local food access, trail networks, or other metrics. This information could help land trusts develop effective programming and partnerships tailored to their initial motivations for urban work. As land trusts continue to foray into urban areas, this kind of research can hopefully provide more useful insight, assistance, and data.

## Appendices

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## Urban Land Trusts Featured in This Report

LAND TRUST	LOCATION	URBAN PROGRAMS
Alachua Conservation Trust	Central Florida	Urban greenways and greenspaces, community engagement, education/youth, Women in the Woods Internship
Arlington Land Trust	Arlington, MA	Urban greenways, trails, parks, and greenspace
Athens Land Trust	Athens, GA	Affordable housing, community gardening, urban ag., greenspace, neighborhood revitalization, education, credit and financial assistance
Baltimore Green Space	Baltimore, MD	Greenspace, forest stewardship, outreach and education
Big Sur Land Trust	Monterrey County, California	Greenspace and trails, outreach, education, land conservation
Brooklyn Queens Land Trust	New York, NY	CIRCLE Initiative, Neighborhood Coalitions Project, community gardening, land banking, education/youth programs, community engagement, food access, community and economic development
Chelan-Douglas Land Trust	North Central WA	Conservation and agricultural easements, parks and trails
Colorado Open Lands	Colorado	Conservation and agricultural easements, parks and trails, restoration, smart growth planning
Columbia Land Trust	Columbia River Watershed, OR & WA	Backyard Habitat Certification Program, greenspaces and trails, community outreach
Commonweal Conservancy	Santa Fe, New Mexico	Land conservation, conservation development

Forterra	Western and Central WA	Affordable housing, land banking, urban trails, urban parks, community engagement, education and youth, community development, advocacy
Friends of the Riverfront	Pittsburgh, PA	Urban parks/greenspaces, trails, greenways, restoration, education/youth, community and economic development
Gallatin Valley Land Trust	Montana	Greenspaces, greenways (Main Street to Mountains), community and economic development
Genesee Land Trust	Rochester, NY	Urban parks and greenspace, trails, education, community development, Landscaper Apprentice Program
Green Spaces Alliance	South TX	Trails, parks, conservation, community gardens, outreach and education
Greenways for Nashville	Nashville, TN	Urban parks/greenspaces, trails, greenways, restoration
Heartland Conservation Alliance	Kansa City, Missouri	"Vacant Land to Greenways", urban greenspace and trails, outreach and engagement
Land Trust for Louisiana	Louisiana	Stormwater management and greenspace provision, conservation, parks and trails, New Orleans Land Bridge
Landpaths	Sonoma County, CA	Conservation, recreation programs, youth programs, outreach, neighborhood parks, In Our Own Backyard Program
Madison Area Community Land Trust	Madison, WI	Community gardening, affordable housing, land banking, education, community engagement
Natural Lands	Eastern PA	Greenspaces/green infrastructure, education, community engagement, conservation development, Growing Greener: Conservation by Design
Neighbor Space	Chicago, IL	Community gardening, education/youth, community engagement, food

		security/access
Neighborhood Gardens Trust	Philadelphia, PA	Community gardening, community engagement
NeighborSpace of Baltimore County, Inc.	Baltimore Co., MD	Community gardening, green infrastructure/urban forestry, greenspace, greenways, education
Nevada Land Trust	Nevada	Urban greenspaces, restoration, conservation easements
New Haven Land Trust	New Haven, CT	Community gardening, urban trails, greenspaces/parks, education and youth programs, community engagement,
Openlands	Chicago, IL	Community gardening/urban ag., green infrastructure and forestry, greenspaces, greenways, education/youth, regional planning, advocacy, community engagement
Oregon Sustainable Agriculture Land Trust	Portland, OR	Urban Farm Collective, Barter Market, community gardening/urban ag., land banking, urban greenspace, food security/access
Ozark Greenways Inc.	Springfield, Missouri	Trails and parks, recreation programs, On Street Bicycle Routes
Portland Trails	Portland, ME	Trails, linear parks/greenspaces, recreation programs, alternative transportation, and community events
River Revitalization Foundation	Milwaukie, WI	Urban greenways and greenspaces, restoration, community engagement, community and economic development, education/youth, "Earn and Learn", Service Learners, group work days
San Diego River Park Foundation	San Diego, CA	Urban greenways, green infrastructure, restoration, community engagement, urban parks and greenspaces, The San Diego River Discovery Center, Heritage Center, community and economic development, education/youth
Santa Fe Conservation Trust	Northern New Mexico	Greenspace, trail stewardship, outreach programs (Passport to Trails, Vámonos, GUSTO), conservation development

Sogorea Te Land Trust	Bay Area, CA	Shuumi Land Tax, indigenous land conservation easements
The Nature Conservancy	Nationwide	Urban greenspaces, community gardening, trails/greenways, green infrastructure, education, community engagement, conservation development, community development, advocacy/planning
The Rev. Linnette C. Williamson Memorial Park Association, Inc.	New York, NY	Pocket parks, community gardens, community gathering spaces
Trustees of the Reservation	Massachusetts	Waterfront park development, land acquisition and stewardship, urban parks and trails, community gardening, advocacy,
Twin Cities Agricultural Land Trust	Minneapolis, MN	Community gardening, land banking, education, community engagement, food security/access
Urban Ecosystem Restorations	D.C. and MD	"Eco-Functioning Spaces" Restoration, green infrastructure, urban greenspace, urban greenways
Urban Land Conservancy	Denver, CO	Affordable housing, land banking, urban trails, urban parks, community engagement, community and economic development, Transit Oriented Development
Waltham Land Trust	Waltham, Massachusetts	Outdoor Rx Program, urban walks, land conservation, local conservation advocacy, open space inventory
Western Pennsylvania Conservancy	Western PA	Treevitalize, community gardening/agriculture, urban greenspaces, urban greenways, education/youth, Ecological Assessments
Western Reserve Land Conservancy	Northeast OH	Reforestation, urban greenspaces and greenways, land banking, property inventories, demolition funding, community and economic development, community outreach

## Case Study Land Trust Challenges, Opportunities, and Aspirations:

### **Western Reserve Land Conservancy**

#### CHALLENGES AND INTERNAL RESISTANCE TO URBAN PROGRAMS:

WRLC faces challenges typical to nonprofits operating in socioeconomically depressed areas. ***Lack of financial resources from governmental partners, Cleveland's low median household income, low adult literacy and education rates, high crime, and distrust of "outsiders", represent pernicious social factors that bring big challenges to urban work.*** The challenge of the "Psyche of a place hurt". The implications of race in Cleveland still have a real impact on nonprofit work, and WRLC can be seen as an "outsider" in many neighborhoods. This dictates some of WRLC's urban work and makes partnerships with CDCs so important. ***In general, coordinating regional land use and conservation with local government also poses challenges.*** Ohio lacks strong and comprehensive local government control of land use planning, causing fracturing, competing priorities, and a lack of shared vision between conservation organizations and public agencies.

***The trust faced internal resistance to its urban work initially, causing some to leave the organization, board members included, as urban work sometimes portrayed at odds with traditional land conservation.*** This resistance fizzled out over time. However, urban work is fundamentally different than rural conservation— including financial, partnership, and stewardship factors. Communication throughout the geographically disparate organization, and between the stewardship and management staff sometimes causes difficulty. Different employees still view urban projects differently. For example, most WRLC staff lives outside the city of Cleveland, and disconnect between rural areas and the urban core itself has always been part of the issue. The organization has numerous field offices, with Cleveland's Thriving Communities office home to 8 of the 45 person staff. This is all to say that persistent internal competition for resources and time will never completely go away, but does not cause major inter-organizational conflict at this time.

#### OPPORTUNITIES AND ASPIRATIONS FOR FUTURE URBAN PROGRAMS:

##### Opportunities

- ***Reforestation.*** Cleveland stands to benefit tremendously from reforestation. The city has a very low existing canopy and large numbers of undeveloped or vacant (sometimes brownfield) sites, as well as a willing coalition of community organizations and public agencies.
- ***Trail and greenway connections.*** Major opportunities to invest in trail and greenway infrastructure in and around Cleveland.
- ***Ohio's geographic, economic, and cultural diversity.*** The state has three major, and very different, population centers (Cleveland, Columbus, and Cincinnati) presenting a variety of opportunities for urban work.

## Aspirations

- **Urban access to open space and Lake Erie waterfront.** WRLC could engage in projects that expand access to arguably the cities' most important natural resource area, Lake Erie.
- **Figure out the “puzzle” of owning small parcels in cities.** Cleveland has a plethora of abandoned, vacant, and undeveloped small parcels and lots. WRLC is developing strategies to tap into this valuable aspect with a variety of frameworks.
- **Strategic affordable housing development.**
- **Partnering with other land trusts and cities in Ohio to approach to land use planning.**

## **Athens Land Trust**

### CHALLENGES AND INTERNAL RESISTANCE TO URBAN PROGRAMS:

Like Western Reserve Land Conservancy, **ALT sometimes faces pushback from community members and organizations that perceive ALT as an outsider.** The trust has been accused of taking up local resources, not letting homeowners own their land or property rights, and buying up housing. They have been called “sharecroppers”, accused of taking advantage of community members. This requires constant education effort to push back against misconceptions. People sometimes misunderstand what the organization really does, since their mission and programming covers so many issues.

Other community development organizations have operated in the Athens area, and their relationship with ALT has not always been smooth. **Some organizations, which could have been partners, have perceived ALT as a competitor for financial resources and community support.** Some local organizations have not considered ALT a true community development organization, feeling wary about forging partnerships. ALT has grown and expanded their mission while other community development organizations have waned and struggled. Although the perception of competition for resources with other organizations never totally subsides, it currently doesn't impact ALT significantly. **Another broad challenge comes from the internal or external definition of “community”.** The definition of “community” changes depending on whom you talk to within the organization. To the housing and community agriculture advocates at ALT, community means Westbroad and other neighborhoods in Athens. To the conservation and agricultural preservation staff, it means the entire state of Georgia. This has implications for organizational scope and allocation of resources. **ALT did not experience significant internal resistance to the expansion of urban programming.** Because affordable housing was considered an original major pillar of the organization, the shift to focus on Athens and the Westbroad neighborhood for housing, community agriculture, and education came naturally.

## OPPORTUNITIES AND ASPIRATIONS:

### Opportunities

- ***Proximity to Atlanta.*** The Atlanta region's rapid development has helped root the idea of preserving fair healthy communities in local organizations and municipalities. According to Krisztian, the encroaching development drives work better and faster. The opportunity lies in the perceived need to do this kind of work.
- ***Farmland surrounding Athens exchanging hands.*** As the average farmer hits retirement age, the next generation needs to ascend. ALT seeks to ensure these lands don't go away, a massive opportunity to fight back against the historical loss of African American owned farmland in Georgia.

### Aspirations

- ***Provide green infrastructure for communities.*** One example includes restoring an urban creek that routinely floods and building an alternative transportation greenway trail alongside it.
- ***Renovate facility.*** ALT's facilities in the city sit on the site of a now defunct historically black elementary school (also the site of the West Broad Market Garden).
- ***Acquire and preserve farmland throughout GA.*** Driven by the belief that functioning local food systems, healthy soils, and a vibrant agricultural economy affect everyone, ALT argues that urban areas benefit from immediately adjacent healthy farm economies. Opportunities to pursue this aspiration lie in:
  - Georgia Farmlink Program
  - Young Conservation Stewards and Young Urban Farmers programs
  - Changes in the federal Farm Bill that make cost sharing for farmland protection easier, giving ALT more leeway to split costs of land preservation 50/50 with landowners
- ***Expand existing urban programs, grow the two urban farms in Athens, and expand the network of community gardens.***

## **Columbia Land Trust**

### CHALLENGES AND INTERNAL RESISTANCE TO URBAN PROGRAMS:

Unlike many land trusts, CLT's urban programs don't face major funding challenges. Metro, county, municipal, and state governments serve as robust financial partners. The self-sufficient Backyard Habitat program survives off of grants and contracts. The biggest challenge actually arises from reaching communities that don't consider themselves part of the conservation conversation. Many urban communities see land trust's messaging and assume its not meant for them. This leads to misconceptions about program, like that food cultivation isn't allowed on enrolled parcels. Therefore CLT's messaging plan needs to adequately describe the complexity of

the program. Although they face no shortage of BHCP participants, CLT faces difficulties enrolling participants from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. The trust did not experience any internal resistance regarding urban programs, now or historically, likely stemming back to the fact that the organization has worked in and around urban areas since its inception.

#### *OPPORTUNITIES AND ASPIRATIONS FOR FUTURE URBAN PROGRAMS:*

##### Opportunities

- ***Regional conservation networks.*** The Intertwine Alliance is a coalition of over 150 public, private and nonprofit organizations that work to “integrate nature more deeply into the Portland-Vancouver metropolitan region.” As a member of the alliance, CLT sees potential in this community of conservation partners fostering robust partnerships and conservation strategies.
- ***Partnering with Community Land Trusts-*** Portland has a vibrant network of affordable housing nonprofits and community land trusts, providing a great opportunity for further partnerships to support low income housing provision and perhaps even integrate BHCP.
- ***Working with city parks departments on “native-scaping” programs and Backyard Habitat Certification Program.*** Portland Metro Parks employee, former director of BHCP at Three Rivers Conservancy and Columbia Land Trust, has worked closely to implement BHC on Metro owned parks. A lot of potential lies in expanding the Backyard Habitat program onto more public parks and properties.

##### Aspirations

- ***More capacity to engage a wider array of participants in the Backyard Habitat Certification Program.*** Many participants come from socioeconomically prosperous neighborhoods. Obviously a lot of people do not or cannot own their own home, often from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. Many communities have not engaged in the traditional conservation process in the U.S., valuing greenspace but without the means to advocate at the city and regional level. With more capacity to engage neighborhoods throughout the region, BHCP could grow even more. Partnering more with culturally specific partners like APANO and engaging in more community engagement like the project in the Jade District will play a huge role in the future.

#### ***Santa Fe Conservation Trust***

#### *CHALLENGES AND INTERNAL RESISTANCE TO URBAN PROGRAMS:*

Like many organizations, ***funding*** represents SFCT’s biggest barrier for urban work. This ebbs and flows depending on grants, state programs, and donations. Another challenge comes with ***small urban conservation easements***. The value of these small projects generates debate. Many view this kind of work as pointless. Some staff,



specifically Land Program Manager Mellissa Houser, emphasize that even 2 acres or less can make a *huge difference* in an urban area. They arguably have an important visual impact, providing splashes of green amongst the concrete and adobe. Small urban conservation easements also have habitat and recreation value, especially when adjacent to other greenspace. In the 1990s, the trust acquired a variety of small urban easements but has shifted their focus to larger rural tracts over time. Unsurprisingly small urban easements receive less funding than large rural properties, since donors, partners, and agencies can't easily see the impact of these projects. ***Melissa noted that landowners involved in easement agreements with SFCT come from a Caucasian, and often affluent, background.*** Although many of the trust's programs engage diverse audiences, these communities are not represented in the trust's land conservation work outside the city. The trust did not face any real internal resistance as urban programs like Passport to Trails and Vámonos expanded. Like other urban land trusts, the real concern came from a question of organizational capacity, a worry that urban programs could take resources away from other projects. SFCT navigates that conflict and in some ways mitigates it with its large and active volunteer network.

#### OPPORTUNITIES AND ASPIRATIONS FOR FUTURE URBAN PROGRAMS:

##### Opportunities

- ***Network of urban greenspace in Santa Fe.*** There are over 78 developed parks, featuring 12 community farms, as well as county open space, nearby Forest Service land, and other open spaces. This presents a plethora of opportunities for more trail connections, conservation projects, and engagement efforts.
- ***Increasing public outreach.*** This includes new social media accounts for the trust, increasing frequency of community events, investing in fliers and posters, and increasing word of mouth. Although many SFCT staff and partners already speak Spanish, increasing the bi-lingual staff will aide in this effort.

##### Aspirations

- ***Purchase small fee properties in and around the city to add greenspace, habitat, and recreational opportunities.*** Small urban parcels, pocket parks, and other small greenspaces provide opportunities for educational events, habitat conservation, and recreation. As Melissa noted, you can't take people to most conservation easements, so it these urban spaces present a large opportunity to showcase SFCT's conservation programs to city residents.
- ***Increasing diversity of landowners engaged in conservation easements.*** Currently, almost all of the landowners SFCT engages with come from a Caucasian background. Because of hard cultural conversations, prevalence of Anglo board members/staff, suspicions about easements from history of government backed Anglo seizure of lands across the West, costs, and lack of conventional shared conservation ethics contributes to this challenge.

## Useful Links and Resources:

These informative sources provide some background on urban land trusts, DEI and conservation, backyard habitat, affordable housing and urban farmland.

- Community conservation:  
<https://www.landtrustalliance.org/news/more-conservation-more-people>
- Community conservation:  
<http://wholecommunities.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/CWCLandConservation2013.pdf>
- Conservation and diversity:  
<https://naaee.org/eepr/resources/diversity-and-conservation-movement>
- Comparative study of urban land trust models:  
[http://web.mit.edu/nature/projects\\_12/pdfs/LandTrustsPaper.pdf](http://web.mit.edu/nature/projects_12/pdfs/LandTrustsPaper.pdf)
- Backyard habitat:  
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1046/j.1526-100X.2002.02041.x>
- Farmland access in urban areas:  
<http://landforgood.org/wp-content/uploads/LFG-Farmland-Access-in-Urban-Settings-Guide.pdf>
- Conservation and Affordable Housing:  
<https://www.conservationfund.org/images/resources/Conservation-Based-Affordable-Housing-Study-all-9-06-lo-res.pdf>
- Land Trust Alliance Government Partner Membership:  
[www.landtrustalliance.org/join/government-partner](http://www.landtrustalliance.org/join/government-partner)
- Landscape Conservation and Local Infrastructure Program:  
[www.forterra.org/what\\_we\\_do/build\\_community/lclip](http://www.forterra.org/what_we_do/build_community/lclip)

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