

# Interrupting Inequality Through Community Control of Land

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Our vision for [community control of land](#) rests on an understanding that poverty in the U.S. is transmitted partly through place. Our vision includes the use of land for the flourishing of all residents, not just those enabled by capital. Our hope is that community land trusts (CLTs) will prioritize land for and governance by lower-income individuals, both low-income wage earners and individuals who are excluded from the labor market and are otherwise hard-to-house.

However, our belief is that community in CLTs emerges not from the simple fact of membership, but from the relationships, cooperative efforts—and disputes—of those occupying and making decisions over the land. Community is a process, but also an inclusive ideal—a political project to be taken up, continually defended, redefined, and struggled over. Though, in our definition, all CLT residents and those living in the places where CLT property is held comprise the community, a deliberate effort must be made to give voice to residents who have been excluded from secure housing arrangements. These residents need not dictate all land-use decisions but should be continually consulted and given a meaningful forum to exercise decision-making power. When CLTs are inspired by a commitment to the inclusion of all marginalized residents in a given place (including through comradely challenging), then community control of land can serve to interrupt the reproduction of inequality and provide a basis for challenging the arrangements that produce the very conditions many CLTs are attempting to address.

For individual households, safe and affordable housing on community-controlled land brings stability and control to resident lives and opens up, moreover, educational and employment opportunities otherwise foreclosed. Community control of land can also—by stabilizing and rooting investment in place—alter neighborhood trajectories. For this potential to be actualized, the land brought under community control may work best if acquired for a geographically-defined community and with a certain spatial density. Yet, at the municipal level, a high

volume of scattered site CLT property can stabilize a socioeconomically diverse voting populace and city culture, as well as combat gentrification.

Interrupting the transmission of place-based inequality requires changing the composition of place. Inclusive and permanently affordable housing enables such demographic changes, allowing vulnerable populations to stay put and exercise, through their very occupation of land, a degree of control over place. Thus, while we support deep engagement of CLT staff and residents, we understand one of the goals of community control of land as simply allowing residents to be and to stay. Community mobilization efforts may wax and wane—requiring, as they do, intensive organizing—but community control of land ensures some permanence, some stability, some lasting potential for resistance.

Finally, we believe that projects which enable community control of land should promote different types of land uses. Interrupting inequality at the community level requires directing investment toward full neighborhoods, not just housing, and we should remain open to using land for small businesses, child care centers, parks, etc