



# PUT VACANT **LAND** IN COMMUNITY **HANDS**

 PHILADELPHIA **COALITION** FOR  
THE **AFFORDABLE** COMMUNITIES

## LAND JUSTICE CAMPAIGN



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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## THE PROBLEM

- Philadelphia has a **housing and food affordability crisis**.
  - Affordable, accessible homes are becoming out of reach for most Philadelphians.
  - Community open space and gardens are quickly being lost to profit-driven development.
- In the past five years, only **one in three dispositions of City-owned land supported the development of affordable housing**. Just **one in ten went to a community garden** or public open space.
- The **City owns more than 5,000 parcels of surplus vacant land** and has **disposed of less than 700** of them in the last five years — at this rate, it will take 35 years for the City to dispose of its publicly-owned vacant land.
- Meanwhile, **housing markets are changing rapidly**, and with each piece of land lost to for-profit development, the City loses an opportunity to shore up affordability and community-serving uses.

## THE COSTS

### RESIDENTS CANNOT AFFORD TO MEET THEIR BASIC NEEDS.

- In Philadelphia **half of all renters and nearly one out of every three homeowners are cost burdened** — after paying their housing costs there's not enough left to cover other basic needs.
- Food insecurity is on the rise in Philadelphia; more than 300,000 residents — **almost one out of every five city residents** — **live in households that do not have enough to eat** over the course of a year.

### COMMUNITIES ARE BEING BROKEN APART.

- In North, West and South Philadelphia **displacement due to rising housing costs since 2000 has pushed out 32% of Black community residents**.
- **Community gardens and farms** that have been sources of affordable nutrition and places where people gather **are uprooted**.

## THE SOLUTION

- **City owned vacant land must be transferred to groups that will put the land back to use and ensure permanent affordability and community control.**
  - **PERMANENT AFFORDABILITY:** accessible and affordable homes, gardens, farms and community businesses need to be **protected from market forces in order to ensure affordability over the long term**, preserve our communities, and increase opportunities for all Philadelphians to thrive.
  - **COMMUNITY CONTROL:** Land and the housing or other buildings on the **land should be owned and controlled** through democratic structures and processes **by those who live, work or worship in that community**.



# THE TIME IS NOW:

**WE CALL ON CITY COUNCIL TO PASS LEGISLATION THAT PUTS VACANT LAND IN COMMUNITY HANDS!**

**Our City has a legacy of adopting policies that have damaged Black and Brown communities** especially in areas where families have limited economic resources. While the pandemic has changed the world for everyone, it has clearly compounded the structural injustice that too many poor, disabled, and working families experience.

The protests in response to ongoing police brutality including George Floyd's murder and the fatal shooting of Walter Wallace Jr. by police, coupled with the disproportionate effects of COVID-19 borne by communities of color, have intensified demands that **our City invest in communities to address past and ongoing injustice.**

**If we do not make more of our City's "surplus" land available for producing accessible, affordable housing and fresh, affordable food, putting that land into capable community hands, we will continue to advance the injustices of the past and fail to move our communities forward.**

## WHAT IS PCAC?

The Philadelphia Coalition for Affordable Communities (PCAC) is a coalition of community, disability, faith, labor and urban agriculture organizations that have joined together to pass laws that address the City's housing and food affordability crisis. Through our Land Justice Campaign, we are working together to keep our communities strong.

## WE NEED: COMMUNITY CONTROL AND PERMANENT AFFORDABILITY

The Philadelphia Coalition for Affordable Communities (PCAC) calls on Philadelphia's elected officials to adopt a progressive **policy that will prioritize the disposition of public land for permanent affordability to community-controlled entities** that will work cooperatively alongside community members to make decisions for the use of that land.

**We demand priority because public land is a limited resource, and public land should be used for public good.** Philadelphia cannot afford to squander the opportunity to invest in permanent affordability and in the ability of local communities to decide how land gets used to meet neighborhood needs.



**FOR MORE, GO TO:**

**[WWW.  
PHILLYAFFORDABLECOMMUNITIES  
.ORG](http://WWW.PHILLYAFFORDABLECOMMUNITIES.ORG)**

# PHILADELPHIA HAS A HOUSING AND FOOD AFFORDABILITY CRISIS

IN EVERY COUNCIL DISTRICT, **MORE HOUSEHOLDS ARE SPENDING MORE ON HOUSING THAN THEY CAN AFFORD,** COMPARING 2000 AND 2018.

**TABLE 1**

Change in Housing Cost Burden by City Council District

PHILADELPHIA CITY COUNCIL DISTRICT	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	CITYWIDE
CITY COUNCIL MEMBER	Squilla	Johnson	Gauthier	Jones	Clarke	Henon	Quiñones-Sánchez	Bass	Parker	O'Neill	
<b>RENTER HOUSEHOLDS</b>											
Cost-Burdened in 2000	39%	45%	47%	40%	40%	37%	42%	44%	43%	49%	<b>42%</b>
Cost-Burdened in 2018	44%	45%	52%	46%	48%	52%	59%	54%	57%	50%	<b>50%</b>
Percent Change	<b>+5%</b>	0%	<b>+5%</b>	<b>+6%</b>	<b>+8%</b>	<b>+15%</b>	<b>+17%</b>	<b>+10%</b>	<b>+14%</b>	<b>+1%</b>	<b>+8%</b>
<b>OWNER HOUSEHOLDS</b>											
Cost-Burdened in 2000	25%	27%	27%	24%	24%	22%	29%	25%	25%	20%	<b>25%</b>
Cost-Burdened in 2018	26%	29%	28%	27%	27%	27%	35%	30%	31%	26%	<b>28%</b>
Percent Change	<b>+1%</b>	<b>+2%</b>	<b>+1%</b>	<b>+3%</b>	<b>+3%</b>	<b>+5%</b>	<b>+6%</b>	<b>+5%</b>	<b>+6%</b>	<b>+6%</b>	<b>+3%</b>

Sources: US Census, 2000, American Community Survey 5-Year estimates, 2014-2018

With one in four Philadelphians (nearly 400,000 residents) living below the poverty line,<sup>1</sup> Philadelphia is the nation's poorest big city.<sup>2</sup> Too many Philadelphia residents cannot afford to meet their basic needs.

- **Half of all renters and nearly one in three homeowners are cost burdened**—after paying their housing costs there's not enough left to cover other necessary expenses such as food and transportation.<sup>3</sup>
- Food insecurity is on the rise in Philadelphia;<sup>4</sup> **one in five residents do not have enough to eat** some time during the course of a year (more than 300,000 residents). In North Philadelphia, one in three residents are food insecure.<sup>5</sup>

**Persistent poverty in our city means we have an urgent need for affordability.**

- **We need permanently affordable homes** to prevent displacement and to keep our beloved communities intact.
  - There are nearly twice as many low-income renter households as the number of housing units they can afford.<sup>6</sup>
- **We need access to affordable, nutritious food** so that our families can thrive.
  - The rate of childhood hunger in North Philadelphia has tripled in the last 10 years among working families.<sup>7</sup>
- Black and Brown residents experience these needs disproportionately, and **the COVID-19 pandemic has heightened disparities.**
  - Based on a poll by The Pew Charitable Trusts during Summer 2020, 28% of Philadelphians polled had trouble paying for food, and 24% had fallen behind in rent and mortgage payments.
  - 75% of Hispanic residents and 55% of Black residents surveyed reported struggling to pay their bills, buy food or medicine or access healthcare or childcare, compared to 33% of white residents.

# INCOME INEQUALITY IS A SERIOUS PROBLEM

While one in four Philadelphia residents struggle to meet their daily needs, the city has attracted an influx of wealthier residents who have driven up housing prices and fundamentally changed the real estate market in many neighborhoods across the city.

- **Housing prices have been on the rise throughout the city since 2000**, but in most areas, of the City, household incomes have fallen.
- **In gentrifying areas**, where wealthy residents have been moving in and causing housing prices to skyrocket – **the shrinking size of the Black population is evidence of the displacement that is breaking communities apart.**

**Affordable, accessible homes are fast becoming out of reach for too many Philadelphians.** Community open space and gardens are quickly being lost to profit-driven development. These changes send a message that our neighborhoods may not be ours for much longer.

**TABLE 2**

*Change in Income, Housing Costs, and Population over Time*

PHILADELPHIA CITY COUNCIL DISTRICT	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	CITYWIDE
CITY COUNCIL MEMBER	Squilla	Johnson	Gauthier	Jones	Clarke	Henon	Quiñones-Sánchez	Bass	Parker	O'Neill	
<b>CHANGE OVER TIME: 2000-2018</b>											
Median Income	33%	25%	-3%	-5%	16%	-10%	-10%	-17%	-22%	-10%	<b>-3%</b>
Median Rent	37%	29%	25%	15%	36%	21%	19%	16%	16%	11%	<b>21%</b>
Median House Value	173%	148%	58%	62%	254%	47%	45%	58%	42%	47%	<b>8%</b>
Black Population	<b>-7%</b>	<b>-4%</b>	<b>-12%</b>	11%	<b>-25%</b>	125%	33%	<b>-15%</b>	29%	150%	<b>2%</b>

*Sources: US Census, 2000, American Community Survey 5-Year estimates, 2014-2018*

PEOPLE ARE BEING  
**FORCED TO LEAVE**  
THEIR HOMES  
AND COMMUNITIES



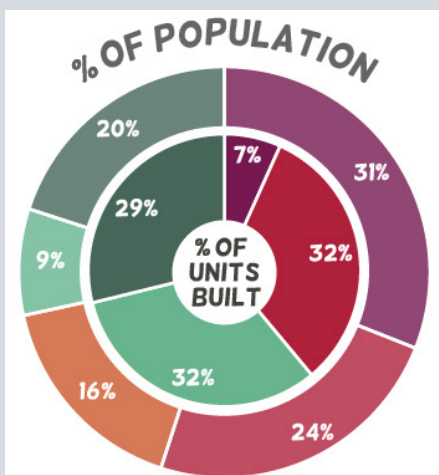
Photo by Rodney Atienza

# PERPETUATE DISPARITIES

IN THE PAST FIVE YEARS, **ONLY 7% OF NEW HOMES BUILT ON CITY-OWNED LAND WERE AFFORDABLE TO FAMILIES EARNING LESS THAN 30% OF AREA MEDIAN INCOME, THOUGH HOUSEHOLDS IN THIS INCOME BRACKET MAKE UP 31% OF THE CITY'S POPULATION.**

**FIGURE 1**

*Mismatch between Housing Built on City-Owned Vacant Land versus the Earning Power of the Population*



Affordable to households earning less than \$25K/Year (30% AMI)

Affordable to households earning \$25K-\$50K/Year (60% AMI)

Households earning \$50K-\$67K/Year (60%-80% AMI)

Workforce housing for households earning \$67K-\$100K/Year (80%-120% AMI)

Market rate for households earning over \$100K/Year

Sources: American Community Survey 5-Year estimates, 2014-2018; Draft 2019 Philadelphia Land Bank Strategic Plan; Meeting Minutes from Philadelphia Land Bank & Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority Board Meetings: FY17 through FY21 Q2

**1: Over the past five years, only one out of three publicly-owned vacant properties disposed of by the City went to the development of affordable housing. Just one in ten went to a community garden or public open space.<sup>8</sup>**

In the past five years, more than 1,000 new homes and apartments were developed on 400 City-owned vacant lots. Of these, less than 10% were affordable to the most vulnerable households. These low income households comprise about a third of Philadelphia’s population, and it is in this price range (families who earn 30% of the Area Median Income or \$28,900 for a family of four) where the City has a housing gap of 60,000 units.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, nearly one in three new housing units built on City-owned land were market rate developments, affordable to just 20% of the total population.

**2: The City receives federal resources and activists have fought for additional local resources that are spent on affordable housing projects, but the lasting impact of these investments is lost when requirements to maintain affordability end.** For most affordable developments, after 15 years there is no guarantee that these homes will be preserved as affordable. Instead, the City watches as owners sell the units/land to the highest bidder.

- In 2018 and 2019, the Housing Trust Fund invested \$28 million.
  - \$6.9 million went to preservation efforts resulting in over 3,900 Basic Systems repairs and 425 Adaptive Modifications that increase accessibility to keep people in their homes.
  - \$17.7 million went into roughly 470 new rental units and 300 units preserved through substantial rehabilitation at an average of \$50,000 in City resources per unit in new rental construction financed with Low Income Housing Tax Credits.<sup>10</sup>
- This boost in new affordable units is more than offset by the loss of an estimated 3,000 affordable rental units in the same time period.<sup>11</sup>

**3: New legislation incentivizes “workforce” housing that is unaffordable to more than 70% of Philadelphians.<sup>12</sup>** This new legislation allows market rate housing developers to develop on publicly owned land (which they may get for a discounted rate) as long as 50% of units are affordable to households earning 120% of Area Median Income (\$115,920 for family of four). The other 50% of units can be sold for as much as the market will bear.

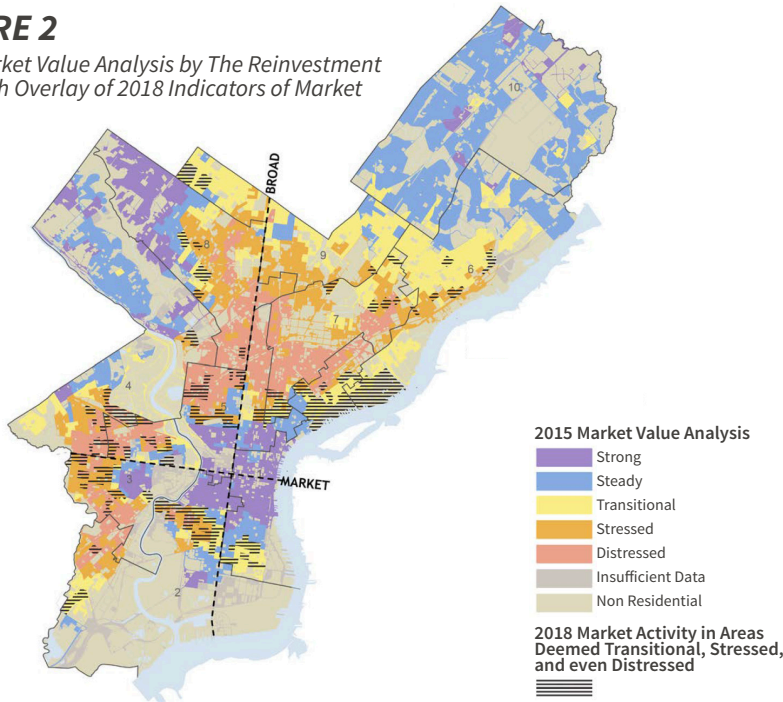
- Nine out of ten Philadelphians are excluded from accessing “workforce” housing.
- This legislation stands to drive up housing production that can benefit only 10% of Philadelphia households... and quickly. Because these developers have ready access to financing without many requirements, they can move faster than non-profit developers.

# MEANWHILE, THE MARKET IS MOVING FAST

## AT THE EXPENSE OF OUR COMMUNITIES

**FIGURE 2**

2015 Market Value Analysis by The Reinvestment Fund with Overlay of 2018 Indicators of Market Activity



ANALYSIS BY THE PHILADELPHIA LAND BANK SHOWS THAT SOME **NEIGHBORHOODS IN NORTH, SOUTH, AND WEST PHILADELPHIA FLIPPED FROM DISTRESSED REAL ESTATE MARKETS TO ACTIVELY GENTRIFYING MARKETS IN JUST FIVE YEARS, BETWEEN 2013 AND 2018.**

Source: Draft 2019 Philadelphia Land Bank Strategic Plan

The rapid pace of change highlights the role that public land should play in preserving a foothold for affordable community uses. City-owned vacant property is a limited resource that must be used as a continuing public good to serve Philadelphia’s most vulnerable residents. **And while the City owns more than 5,000 parcels of surplus vacant land, it has disposed of less than 700 of them in the last five years--at this rate, it will take 35 years for the City to dispose of its publicly-owned vacant land.**

Each piece of land that is lost to market rate development marks a squandered opportunity to invest in permanent affordability and in the ability of local communities to determine how land gets used to meet neighborhood needs.

Communities need more control over what is developed in their neighborhood.

- That means **time** to get organized, build support, and raise funds.
- That means **land** in community hands on which to build affordable, accessible housing and to grow nutritious food.

**TABLE 3**

Remaining Vacant Publicly-Owned Land by Council District

PHILADELPHIA CITY COUNCIL DISTRICT	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	CITYWIDE
<b>OPPORTUNITY: SURPLUS PUBLIC LAND</b>											
Publicly-Owned Vacant Properties	164	395	1,240	348	1,465	37	1,002	629	28	5	5,313
Percent Share of Publicly-Owned Vacant Property	3%	7%	23%	7%	28%	1%	19%	12%	1%	0%	

Source: Draft 2019 Philadelphia Land Bank Strategic Plan, current as of 12/31/18

# AS A CITY, WE ARE LOSING GROUND...

AND THAT COMES AT A COST

**TABLE 4**  
**HOW MUCH IS AFFORDABLE?**

30% of monthly household income is an affordable amount to spend on housing. That means:

IF YOUR ANNUAL INCOME IS:	MONTHLY HOUSING EXPENSES CAN BE:
\$10,000	\$250
\$15,000	\$375
\$20,000	\$500
\$25,000	\$625
\$30,000	\$750
\$35,000	\$875 <small>MEDIAN for Black / Brown households</small>
\$40,000	\$1,000
\$44,000	\$1,100 <small>2018 CITY MEDIAN half of folks should spend less</small>
\$50,000	\$1,250
\$60,000	\$1,500 <small>MEDIAN for white households in Philly</small>
\$75,000	\$1,875
\$100,000	\$2,500

**There is a mismatch between what people can afford to pay for housing and what is available.**

Federal poverty guidelines indicate that a family of three should be able to make ends meet earning \$21,720 per year. Federal guidelines on affordability suggest that a household should spend no more than 30% of its income on housing each month.

- Using these federal guidelines, a family of three earning \$20,000 per year (or \$1,667 per month) could only afford to spend \$500 per month on rent.
- The median monthly rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Philadelphia is \$1,650,<sup>13</sup> leaving nothing left over for other basic needs.

IF YOUR HOUSEHOLD INCOME IS:	30% OF YOUR MONTHLY INCOME IS:	HOW MANY NEED HOUSING IN THIS RANGE?	ANOTHER WAY TO THINK ABOUT THIS:
\$8,000 <i>per year through Social Security Disability Insurance</i>	\$200	<b>77,000 Households</b> <i>earn less than \$10,000 per year</i>	<b>1 in 8 (13%)</b> <i>Philly households earn less than \$10,000 per year</i>
\$15,080 <i>per year from a full time minimum wage job</i>	\$377	<b>40,000 Households</b> <i>earn between \$10,000 and \$15,000 per year</i>	<b>1 in 5 (20%)</b> <i>Philly households earn less than \$15,000 per year</i>
\$21,720 <i>per year (poverty level for parent with two children)</i>	\$543	<b>37,400 Households</b> <i>earn between \$15,000 and \$20,000 per year</i>	<b>~1 in 4 (26%)</b> <i>Philly households earn less than \$20,000 per year</i>

**The affordability gap is growing.**

- In 2000, Philadelphia had an affordable housing gap of 50% for renter households earning less than the \$20,000 per year, meaning half of low-income households did not have an affordable option in Philadelphia.<sup>14</sup>
- In 2020, Philadelphia's affordable housing gap has grown to 60% for renter households earning less than \$20,000 per year.<sup>15</sup>

**Philadelphia is losing affordable units while gaining expensive units.**

- According to the City's Housing Action Plan, between 2008 and 2016:
  - Philadelphia lost 13,000 lower-cost apartments renting for \$800 or less (affordable to households earning roughly \$30,000 per year).
  - Philadelphia added 6,000 high-end apartments renting for \$2,000 or more (affordable to households earning at least \$80,000 per year – less than 10% of all households citywide).<sup>16</sup>



**The City is not doing enough to meet the need for affordable housing.**

The City’s Housing Action Plan sets a 10-year target of creating an additional 13,000 new affordable units, but only 4% of the units will be affordable at the level needed by nearly one-third of the City’s population – families that earn less than \$25,000. Given the existing 60,000-unit gap in affordable housing for households in that income bracket, at the target rate it will take 40 years to fully address the gap – and that’s if all the new units built are preserved as permanent affordable housing.



**TABLE 5**  
Housing Action Plan 10-Year Targets

HOUSING ACTION PLAN 10-YEAR TARGETS					
	Affordability Range	Income	New Units	Percent Share of New Units	Affordable to:
Homeless			2,500		
Affordable	30% AMI	\$0-\$25,000	1,400	4%	<b>31% of the population:</b> where the 60,000 unit affordable housing gap is concentrated
	50% AMI	\$25,000-\$42,000	4,200	12%	~20% of the population
	80% AMI	\$42,000-\$67,000	7,400	20%	~20% of the population
Workforce	120% AMI	\$67,000-\$100,000	6,000	16%	~10% of the population
Market Rate	>120% AMI	\$100,000+	15,000	41%	~20% of the population
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>36,500</b>		

- The Housing Trust Fund creates approximately 300 new affordable units per year, meeting just 23% of the annual target for new affordable housing production called for in the Housing Action Plan.
- In five years of active dispositions, the Land Bank provided land for 333 units of new housing. To date, only 14% of housing units built or planned for construction on land from the Philadelphia Land Bank are for households earning below 30% of Area Median Income (with incomes under \$25,000) though households in that income bracket comprise 31% of the population.<sup>17</sup>
- During that same timeframe, the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority provided land for 725 units of housing, only 3% of which were for households earning less than 30% of Area Median Income.<sup>18</sup>

Source: Housing for Equity: An Action Plan for Philadelphia

## COMMUNITIES ARE BEING BROKEN APART.

The loss of affordable apartments and homes – units that low-income households can afford – disproportionately affects people of color in Philadelphia, which means that low-income people of color are more vulnerable to displacement.<sup>19</sup>

In the gentrifying areas of North, West and South Philadelphia, displacement due to rising housing costs since 2000 has pushed out 32% of Black community residents.<sup>20</sup>

## AS COMMUNITIES, WE ARE LOSING GROUND AND THAT COMES AT A COST TOO

THE STATISTICS ABOUT  
DISPLACEMENT IN THIS  
REPORT AREN'T JUST  
NUMBERS.

ANGELITA ELLISON  
LIVED IT.

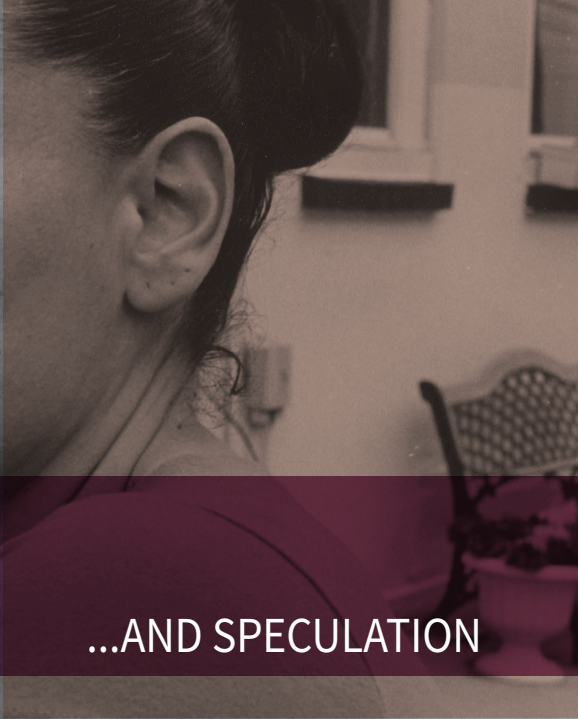
*Angelita was born and raised in South Philly. Starting in high school, she lived in a house that her mother inherited from her grandmother. Her son got to grow up in a house she spent a large part of her childhood in.*

*Unfortunately, after 18 years in that house, it was a challenge to do all the maintenance the house needed. Angelita recalled, “we could only afford patch jobs and band-aid fixes. First it was a leak over the back door in the kitchen. The leak led the door to warp and get drafty. Then a pipe broke behind the sink. The water from the leak and the broken pipe led to mold. Then our heater broke and it got so cold that a pipe burst. We applied for Basic Systems Repair and were turned down because by that point the work that needed to be done on our house was too expensive. Eventually it made the most sense to just wall off the kitchen and move the appliances we needed into the dining room.”*

*Her mom kept getting offers to sell to market rate developers that wanted to flip the house. At that point it became clear to Angelita that she needed to start looking for other places to live. “I had previously been looking at housing prices because I shared a room with my son and wanted a place where he could have his own room. The situation with the house made the search more urgent. I had a good job and some savings, but when I started seriously looking for apartments in South Philly, I couldn’t find anything that was at a price I could afford. There were a few that I could have really stretched for, but I knew it would put me into that ‘cost-burdened’ statistic. I would have poured so much of my paycheck into housing. I knew that wasn’t the right choice for me and my son so we left South Philly. I had considered leaving South Philly before, but that was not the way I wanted to go. Not chased out by housing prices.”*

*Recently Angelita went back to her old neighborhood and saw what the house looks like now. It’s been totally renovated and they added a third floor.*

**“ THE WHOLE BLOCK LOOKS DIFFERENT.  
OUR HOUSE IS NOT THE ONLY NEW HOUSE  
ON THE BLOCK, AND THERE’S ABOUT TO BE MORE.”**



## GARDENS AND FARMS ARE BEING **LOST TO DEVELOPMENT**

## ...AND SPECULATION

Philadelphia has over 400 active community gardens and farms across the city. These growing spaces span more than 500 parcels or pieces of land.<sup>21</sup> More often than not, growers do not own the land on which they garden and farm – land that was vacant and abandoned before they reclaimed it and put it back to use. Sometimes, that land is publicly-owned.

These community gardens are sources of affordable nutrition in our neighborhoods, but they are also important places where community members come together to grow food and spend time with neighbors.

- 70% of gardens or farms are in neighborhoods where more than 1 in 5 people live in poverty.<sup>22</sup>
- Two out of three gardens are in high poverty communities of color, where Black and Brown residents make up more than half of the population.<sup>23</sup>

As market pressure builds, community gardens are being uprooted and replaced by new market-rate development.

- According to the Philadelphia Garden Data Collaborative, at least 20 gardens and farms have been demolished and lost to development in recent years.<sup>24</sup>
- Across the city, one in three community gardens and farms are in areas experiencing the highest intensity of new construction.<sup>25</sup>
- The Neighborhood Gardens Trust estimates that over 200 gardens lack land security and are at risk for redevelopment.<sup>26</sup>

Meanwhile, in the past five years, the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority has disposed of 50 properties for garden preservation. The Philadelphia Land Bank has only transferred 11 parcels for community garden preservation so far.<sup>27</sup> That's one out of every 20 Land Bank property dispositions (or 6%) when the Land Bank's charge says that 13% of dispositions are supposed to be for garden preservation or expansion.<sup>28</sup> As of FY19, the Land Bank had acquired 17 properties for garden preservation that have yet to be transferred to the people stewarding the land.

**We are being displaced.** Until the land is secure in community hands, the threat of displacement remains.



ESTABLISHED ON PRIVATELY-OWNED VACANT LAND IN SOUTH KENSINGTON IN 1988, **LA FINQUITA, "THE LITTLE FARM,"** WAS LOST TO DEVELOPMENT PRESSURE IN 2018.

Source: *WHYY.org*,  
Historic photo courtesy of Jessica Noon



ONCE THE LAND IS GONE,  
WE CAN'T GET IT BACK...



**BUT IT'S NOT TOO LATE  
TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

**The City owns over 6,000 parcels of vacant land across Philadelphia, over 5,000 of which are deemed surplus – the City has no use for this land.** Some of this land is empty and overgrown, jeopardizing neighbors' safety and quality of life. Some of this land has been reclaimed by community members and is bringing new life to the neighborhood through revitalized open spaces and the production of nutritious food.

According to the Philadelphia Land Bank's Strategic Plan, about half of the City's vacant properties are in "established or emerging" areas – neighborhoods where the real estate market is already strong or gentrifying. The other half of City-owned vacant properties are in areas where the real estate market is less strong – places where disinvestment continues.<sup>29</sup> **In reality, all of these properties are valuable when it comes to preserving affordability and investing in communities.**

The fact is, the City owns just one in seven vacant properties citywide. Of the 42,000 vacant properties in our city, more than 35,000 are owned by private entities and can be bought and sold in the private market for maximum dollar.

**The remaining City-owned vacant properties represent an opportunity to amplify the impact of this limited – and shrinking – resource by:**

- Preserving beloved community farms and gardens
- Preventing the loss of existing affordable homes
- Protecting people and communities at risk of displacement
- Producing accessible, affordable housing that will remain affordable

**When the City sells a property for market rate development, it marks a long-term loss of the opportunity to preserve and create affordable community uses.**



## COMMUNITY. JOY. GIVING. THERAPY. PRIDE. ORGANIC VEGETABLES.

*Those are just some of the words the Board of Directors of the Mantua Urban Peace Garden used when talking about what their community garden adds to the neighborhood. Nidhi Krishen describes her experience in the garden as “a feeling of possibility. Land is the foundation on which you can build so much...food, community, economic empowerment.”*

*The Mantua Urban Peace Garden sits at 37th and Brown Streets. They have 50 plots that are used by residents of the neighborhood, seven of which are reserved for growing food to share with the community. In 2019, they gave out 1,000 pounds of organic vegetables in a neighborhood that is otherwise a food desert. In addition to being a resource and gathering space for the community, the Peace Garden is also a land justice success story.*

*Amidst the ever-increasing pressures of profit-driven development (particularly from Penn and Drexel’s expanding footprint) Brenda Lewis, president of the Peace Garden’s board of directors, and the Board hopes the garden will be there for years to come. They have partnered with a local organization that is accountable to the community, Mount Vernon Manor Community Development Corporation (MVM CDC). MVM CDC holds a renewing year-long lease for the garden and is now in the process of buying the garden, so they can protect it.*

*Brenda and the Board aren’t worried about the land being sold to the highest bidder. They’re making plans for the future: more accessible raised beds for seniors in the neighborhood, improved irrigation, and a greenhouse so the garden can run all year long and grow its own seedlings. Having a sense of security that the land will remain in community hands means Brenda and the rest of the board can dream big about the garden’s future and feel confident about any investments.*



**“LAND IS A FOUNDATION ON WHICH YOU CAN BUILD SO MUCH... FOOD, COMMUNITY, ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT.”**

# WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

# GAINING GROUND IS WHAT WE NEED... PUT LAND IN COMMUNITY HANDS

City owned vacant land must be transferred to groups that will reactivate the land with community-sustaining uses while ensuring **PERMANENT AFFORDABILITY**, land security, and **COMMUNITY CONTROL**.

Photo by Harvey Finkle

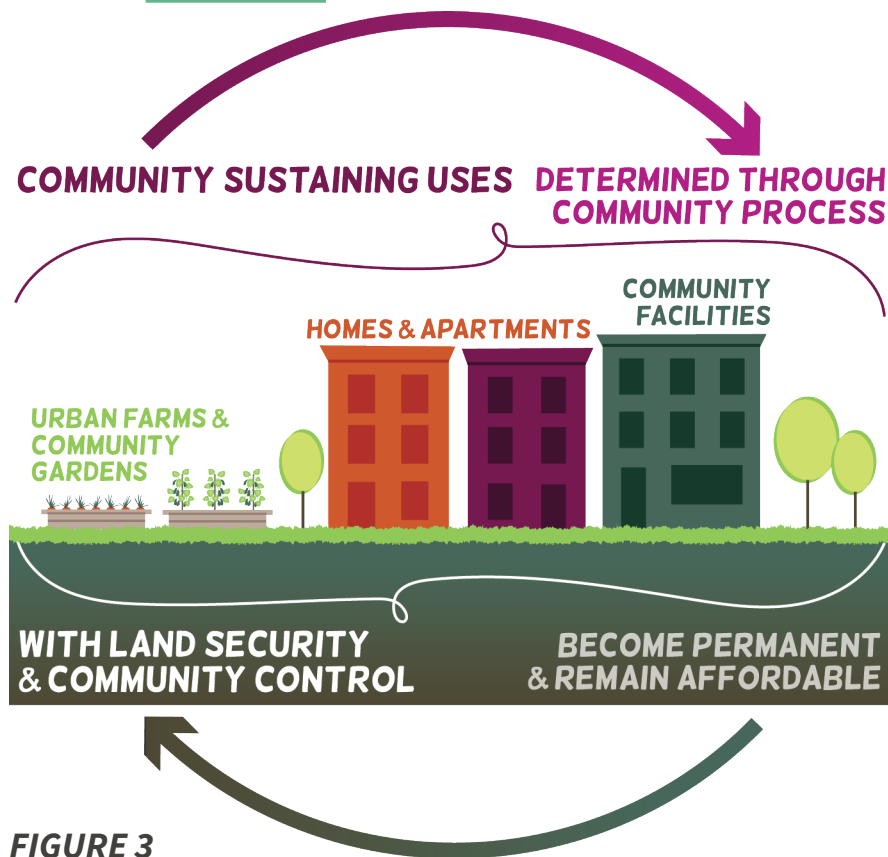
## PERMANENT AFFORDABILITY:

accessible & affordable homes, gardens, farms and community businesses need to be protected from market forces in order to ensure affordability over the long term, preserve our communities, and increase opportunities for all Philadelphians to thrive.

## COMMUNITY CONTROL:

land and the housing or other buildings on the land should be owned and controlled through democratic structures by those who live, work or worship in that community.

## WHAT IS OUR VISION?



**FIGURE 3**

Our Vision for a Different System that Prioritizes Permanent Affordability and Community Control



# SOME DEFINITIONS AND A SOLUTION

## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY PERMANENT AFFORDABILITY?

Homes, community gardens, and community buildings that are rented or sold for an affordable price now and into the future (for at least 99 years, with an option to renew)

## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY LAND SECURITY?

The ability to remain on land without threat of displacement, either through ownership or a very long-term lease; land security allows people's relationships to the land to deepen, encourages community participation in caring for the land, and justifies public investment

## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY COMMUNITY CONTROL?

Democratic structures and processes through which community members have a voice in making decisions about what happens in their neighborhood

## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY COMMUNITY-SUSTAINING USES?

- **Homes and apartments** that sell or rent for prices that remain affordable to low- and moderate-income households who were able to occupy the building initially; permanent affordability prevents displacement.
- **Urban farms and community gardens** where growers produce food for community members and community residents have access to plots; land security prevents displacement.
- **Community facilities** such as senior centers, daycare centers, and other businesses or organizations whose goods and services meet basic community needs; community oversight and control ensures that facilities are responsive to the community.

## WHAT IS A COMMUNITY LAND TRUST?

*Community Land Trusts (CLTs) are one way to achieve permanent, accessible affordability, land security, and community control in our neighborhoods.*

*CLTs are community-based nonprofit organizations that are committed to ensuring that land is cared for and that housing and other buildings and uses upon that land remain permanently affordable.*

# HOW DO COMMUNITY LAND TRUSTS WORK?

TO SEE WHAT A  
COMMUNITY LAND TRUST  
CAN ACCOMPLISH,  
CHECK OUT:



**Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI)** empowers residents to organize, plan for, create and control a vibrant, diverse and high-quality neighborhood in collaboration with community partners.

Its **Dudley Neighbors Inc.** community land trust (CLT) protects over 30 acres of community-controlled land in Boston's Roxbury and North Dorchester neighborhoods. The CLT stewards, for community use:

- 98 permanently affordable homes
- Urban farm sites
- Parks and open space
- Commercial properties for use by local small businesses, nonprofit organizations, and affordable rental housing providers



[WWW.DSNI.ORG](http://WWW.DSNI.ORG)

AND

[WWW.DUDLEYNEIGHBORS.ORG](http://WWW.DUDLEYNEIGHBORS.ORG)

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**Community Land Trusts (CLTs) own land**, and they control and care for their land over the long term.

**CLTs lease their land to groups that want to build affordable, accessible housing, create community facilities or small businesses, farm the land, or provide other community-serving uses.** Renters, homeowners, business owners, farmers and gardeners, and other caretakers use the land and own/occupy buildings on the land.

**Because the CLT owns the land, the land trust can offer lower prices.** Homeowners, business owners, or farmers get long-term renewable land leases, typically for terms of 99 years, that allow them to occupy the land underneath the home, business or community garden.

**When homeowners or business owners decide to move on, they must resell their home or place of business to another low- or moderate-income buyer for an affordable price.** The ground lease enables the owner to receive a fair return on their investment if they decide to sell, while preserving the affordability of the property so that the benefit of lower prices passes from one family or business to the next.

**COMMUNITY MEMBERS  
OWN BUILDINGS & USES  
ON THE LAND**

**RESIDENTS, SMALL BUSINESSES,  
FARMERS & GARDNERS,  
ORGANIZATIONS**



**FIGURE 4** Relationship between People, Land, and the Community Land Trust





# HOW WOULD COMMUNITY LAND TRUSTS WORK AS LAND JUSTICE PARTNERS IN PHILADELPHIA?

UP TO 5 YEARS

- 1 CLT/PARTNER APPLIES FOR LAND
- 2 CITY REVIEWS & EVALUATES APPLICATION
- 3 CITY COUNCIL APPROVES 5-YEAR LEASE
- 4 COMMUNITY PROCESS LED BY CLT / PARTNER
- 5 CITY REVIEWS & APPROVES PLAN FOR LAND DEVELOPMENT
- 6 CITY COUNCIL APPROVES PLAN FOR LAND DEVELOPMENT
- 7 TRANSFER OF LAND AT NOMINAL COST
- 8 CLT/PARTNER MOVES FORWARD TO IMPLEMENT PLAN

The Community Land Trust and/or partner organization submits an application for land documenting its capacity to support a community process and and its commitment to permanent affordability.

The City reviews application and evaluates if the CLT / partner organization has the capacity to insure and maintain the land. If City Council approves, a five-year lease is granted.

- The CLT / partner organization must commit to insure and maintain the land during this period
- The CLT / partner organization must use this time to complete a community process to determine the best feasible use for the land and then raise the necessary funds to implement the development or land stewardship plan for the property

*NOTE: Communities or groups that do not want to establish a CLT or do not have the capacity to start one can partner with existing or newly created CLTs established to hold the land over the long-term.*

By the end of the five-year lease period, the City transfers the land for a nominal cost to the organization that will ultimately hold and/or develop the land, provided that the CLT / partner organizations have: 1) developed a vision for the land, 2) obtained community buy-in, 3) raised the funds necessary for implementation, and 4) won City Council approval.

The CLT / partner organizations must then carry out the approved plan within the compliance period set by the City and will hold the property in perpetuity, entering into long-term (99-year) ground leases with occupants, including growers, homeowners, developers of affordable rental apartments, business owners, or other community stakeholders.

## WHO GUIDES DECISION-MAKING FOR COMMUNITY LAND TRUSTS?

Community Land Trusts are usually **place-based** – tied to a particular neighborhood – or **citywide**. They can **take in land for multiple uses** as with the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI) in Boston **or for a singular type of use**, as with the Neighborhood Gardens Trust (NGT) in Philadelphia.

Most often, CLTs are run by a board of directors that includes:

- People who live on or use the land held by the land trust
- People who reside within its target community, and
- People with specialized expertise such as architects, bankers, government officials, funders, and representatives from community organizations.

**Together, these leaders determine how the land held by the land trust is used and how the land trust makes decisions for and with the community.**



# A CALL TO ACTION

**WE CALL ON CITY COUNCIL TO PASS LEGISLATION THAT PUTS VACANT LAND IN COMMUNITY HANDS TODAY TO BUILD A JUST TOMORROW.**

Time is ticking, real estate markets are moving, and public land is a limited resource that must be used for public good.

**Philadelphia cannot afford to squander its opportunity to:**

- **Create permanent affordability** which keeps communities intact
- **Invest in the capacity of communities to decide how land in their neighborhoods should be used** to meet local needs.

**THESE OPPORTUNITIES ARE DEPENDENT ON LAND.**

## WHAT CAN WE ACCOMPLISH?

**By prioritizing community-serving uses and making time for an open community process:**

- We can level the playing field for community organizations who have been losing land to market-rate developers
- We can grant communities land security and time to build consensus and raise funds for the community-serving, affordable developments that will keep communities intact

**By committing to permanent affordability:**

- We can ensure that investments of public resources in affordable housing will benefit individuals and communities for generations to come
- We can preserve affordable homes that exist today and prevent future losses of affordable housing developments to market rate redevelopment

**By preserving gardens and providing land security for growing spaces:**

- We can not only increase access to affordable, nutritious food but strengthen community ties and promote healing and well-being

**By choosing to invest in communities and community-driven solutions:**

- We can take a necessary step toward correcting a legacy of land policies that benefit for-profit development over Philadelphia citizens – particularly Black and Brown residents living in low-income and gentrifying communities

# WITH LAND, WE CAN!



## END NOTES

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- 2 Inga Saffron, “Philadelphia didn’t become America’s poorest big city by chance. Here’s how we fix it.” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. 13 October 2020.
- 3 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2014-2018.
- 4 Alfred Lubrano, “Report: Hunger in Philadelphia increases 22%.” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. 12 November 2018.
- 5 Alfred Lubrano, “An urban farm feeding the poorest part of Philly fights to stay alive and growing.” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. 24 November 2020.
- 6 Octavia Howell. *The State of Housing Affordability in Philadelphia*, page 17. The Pew Charitable Trusts. September 2020.
- 7 “Councilwoman Blondell Reynolds Brown Hosts Hearing Examining Child Hunger in Philadelphia.” News by PHL Council. 8 March 2019.
- 8 Review of property dispositions by the Philadelphia Land Bank and Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority (including the Vacant Property Review Committee) from FY17 through FY21, Quarter 2.
- 9 Howell, page 18.
- 10 *Philadelphia Housing Trust Fund Annual Report, Fiscal Years 2018-2019*, pages 5 and 7.
- 11 *Housing for Equity: An Action Plan for Philadelphia*, 2018, page 4.
- 12 City of Philadelphia Bill No. 190606-AA
- 13 Michaelle Bond, “One-bedroom rents in Philadelphia are up nearly 10% since last year.” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. 3 March 2020.
- 14 Affordable Housing Gap research by Dr. Amy Hillier, 2013.
- 15 Howell, page 18.
- 16 *Housing for Equity: An Action Plan for Philadelphia*, 2018, page 4.
- 17 *Philadelphia Land Bank Strategic Plan*, 2019, page 32, plus Land Bank Board meeting minutes, January 2019-June 2020.
- 18 Analysis of Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority Board meeting minutes, FY17-FY21 Q2.
- 19 James A. Crowder Jr. *The Case for Housing Justice in Philadelphia*, page 15. Policy Link. September 2020. [https://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/pl\\_report\\_phila-housing\\_092520\\_a.pdf](https://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/pl_report_phila-housing_092520_a.pdf)
- 20 US Census 2000, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2014-2018.
- 21 Catalina Jaramillo, “Three maps tell the story of urban farming in Philly right now.” WHYY. 15 January 2020.
- 22 *Philadelphia’s Urban Agriculture Plan: Growing from the Root*. Public Meeting 1. 3 December 2019.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Catalina Jaramillo, “Three maps tell the story of urban farming in Philly right now.” WHYY. 15 January 2020.
- 26 Jen Kinney, “How one urban farm was lost: La Finquita’s finale.” WHYY. 4 June 2018.
- 27 *Philadelphia Land Bank Strategic Plan*, 2019, page 32, plus Land Bank Board meeting minutes, January 2019-June 2020.
- 28 *Land Bank Strategic Plan*, page 59.
- 29 *Land Bank Strategic Plan*, page 19.

The **Philadelphia Coalition for Affordable Communities (PCAC)** calls on Philadelphia’s elected officials to adopt a progressive policy that will **prioritize the disposition of public land for permanent affordability to community-controlled organizations** that will make decisions about the use of that land together with community members.

A policy that commits to putting public land in community hands for uses that are affordable and responsive to community needs over the long-term will require:

- **From the City:** an allowance of *time* for:
  - A robust community process to determine the best, feasible use for the land before the City transfers the land to the organization that will ultimately hold and/or develop the land
  - Raising the necessary funds to implement the development or land stewardship plan for the property
- **From the community:** a proven *ability* to:
  - Organize and facilitate an equitable community process open to all neighbors and community stakeholders to develop a plan for the land
  - Insure and maintain the property while the community process unfolds and until the City transfers ownership of the land to community hands

**City Council must pass legislation that prioritizes permanent affordability for community-sustaining uses, selected and implemented through community-controlled processes.**

We demand that City Council update the Vacant and Surplus Properties section of the Philadelphia Code (Public Property chapter 16-400) to give communities priority in the disposition of public land and time they need to ensure that the reuse of public land best serves local residents over the long-term.

# TAKE A STAND FOR COMMUNITY-OWNED LAND!

## THE PHILADELPHIA COALITION FOR THE AFFORDABLE COMMUNITIES

INVITES YOU TO  
JOIN OUR COALITION AND JOIN OUR CAMPAIGN

The **Philadelphia Coalition For Affordable Communities (PCAC)** is a coalition of community, disability, faith, labor, and urban agriculture organizations that have joined together to pass laws that address the City's housing and food affordability crises.

Through our **Land Justice Campaign**, we are working to keep our communities strong.

### CURRENT COALITION MEMBERS:

- 15 Now Philly!
- 215 People's Alliance
- ACT UP Philadelphia
- Advocates for the West Fairhill Community
- AFSCME District Council 47
- All That Philly Jazz
- Applied Mechanics
- Aquinas Center Youth Voices
- Arab American CDC
- Caucus of Working Educators
- CCP Faculty and Staff Federation
- Center City Organized for Responsible Development
- Circle of Hope
- Community Legal Services
- Dignity Housing
- Disabled In Action
- East Park Revitalization Alliance
- Farm to City
- Firm Hope Baptist Church
- Friends Rehabilitation Program
- Habitat for Humanity of Philadelphia
- Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania
- Impact Services Corporation
- Kensington Renewal
- LandHealth Institute
- Liberty Resources
- Life Center Association
- Logan Orchard and Market (LOAM)
- Lutheran Settlement House
- Mariposa Food Co-op
- Maypop Collective for Climate and Economic Justice
- Mental Health Partnerships
- Mount Vernon Manor CDC
- My Place Germantown
- New Jerusalem Laura
- New Kensington CDC
- Norris Square Community Alliance
- PennFuture
- Pennsylvania Association of Staff Nurses and Allied Professionals (PASNAP)
- People's Emergency Center
- Philadelphia Area Cooperative Alliance
- Philadelphia Jobs with Justice
- Philadelphia Orchard Project
- Philly Tenants Union
- Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign
- Reclaim Philadelphia
- Regional Housing Legal Services
- Resource Generation
- Save Smith School Committee
- SEIU 32 BJ
- SEIU Healthcare Pennsylvania
- Self-Determination Housing Project of Pennsylvania
- Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ)
- Simple Homes
- The Simple Way
- Snyderville CDC
- Southwest CDC
- Spatial Justice Lab
- Sunrise Movement
- Tenants Union Rights Network (TURN)
- UNITE HERE Local 274
- United Communities of Southeast Philadelphia
- United Food and Commercial Workers
- United Home Care Workers of Pennsylvania
- Universal Communities
- Viola Street Residents Association
- Women's Community Revitalization Project
- Working Families Partnership
- Youth United for Change

### FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO GET INVOLVED:

Find us at [www.phillyaffordablecommunities.org](http://www.phillyaffordablecommunities.org)

Contact Nora Lichtash: [nlichtash@wcrpphila.org](mailto:nlichtash@wcrpphila.org)