

Analyzing Conservation Land Management Models to Stabilize Detroit's Vacancy

A Professional Decision Report Prepared for:

Dara O'Byrne, Land Use Convener

Detroit Future City

Prepared by:

Claudie Mabry

M.S. Candidate, Urban Policy Analysis and Management

Milano The New School for International Affairs, Management and Urban Policy

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Executive Summary

Detroit has 20 square miles of vacant land, and a significantly high number of low-vacancy neighborhoods. With the city looking to improve conditions, Detroit Future City provides the analysis for a future open space network. Innovation Ecological is an initiative to transform vacant land across the city into green open spaces incorporating blue and green infrastructure. This initiative needs to identify a model that will provide for the ownership and maintenance of redeveloped land in perpetuity. This report aims to identify models applicable to Detroit's context in order to provide recommendations on which will strengthen Innovation Ecological.

Research Methodology

The research within this report took a multi-faceted approach in order to comprehend the mechanics of vacant land management and conservation. A thorough literature review was completed to understand the conservation movement throughout American cities, and it provided context on the role it plays upon vacant land. Interviews were conducted with experts from the around the United States who are associated with three distinct land management models. Additionally, a thorough data review identified the structures and operations of each model analyzed. Finally, six case studies were highlighted to provide insight on elements that can inspire Detroit's future model.

Findings

Research findings demonstrate that Detroit can learn some lessons from comparable case studies. Models implemented in other cities have seen success in the form of open green spaces attainable through reliable vacant land management. Redeveloped land has improved local property tax rolls and property values, promoted wellness and reduced crime rates within communities. It has proven to be a viable option for putting vacant land to an aesthetic and productive reuse. It also has proved that the process of maintaining green spaces can provide job opportunities for local residents and can openly invites volunteers. Certain models can provide legal tools that are used to conserve land in order to transform blight into an asset.

Criteria Considerations

This report provides three evaluative criteria that should be strongly considered when Detroit Future City takes this initiative into the next phase. Transparency emphasizes the importance of the model to coincide with the opinions and agendas of political stakeholders as well as the greater public. Resources emphasize the importance of the model maximizing its external partnerships to obtain funding, advocacy, policy and capacity building for its operations. Finally, stewardship highlights the baseline procedures recommended for maintaining open green spaces in perpetuity.

Proposals

Two proposals were provided based off of existing models implemented in other cities. The first proposal suggests that Detroit Future City investigate a land trust at the regional

or state level that would sufficiently carry out Innovation Ecological. The second proposal suggests that a consortium of regional land trusts collaborate to take on the initiative. Additionally, a consideration suggests that collaboration between the land bank and a land trust can provide stewardship for vacant residential parcels throughout Detroit.

Analysis and Recommendation

The proposals are analyzed with specific baselines provided for each criterion. After an analysis on how each criterion plays a role on each proposal, it is recommended that an existing consortium strengthen internal operations to drive out the baseline operations of Innovation Ecological. A consortium has to ability to capitalize on its combined resources to provide thorough and frequent stewardship and community outreach. It can obtain transparency from stakeholders, and maximize already existing resources collaboratively. This will help strengthen their existing partnerships and obtain new ones. It has the ability to provide its diverse experiences into the procedures of Innovation Ecological in perpetuity in order to launch Detroit's land conservation.

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Section 1: Introduction

Detroit's Crisis

Detroit, Michigan (located in Wayne County) is 142.64 square miles in size with 379,570 properties owned by 217,284 different owners.¹ In 1950, Detroit had an average of 21 residents per acre, or 5.7 occupied housing units per acre. Today, Detroit has lost 61% percent of its total population. The average in 1950 dropped to just 8 residents per acre, or just 3 occupied housing units per acre in 2010. Vacant land accounts for 20 square miles of the city's footprint with nearly 80,000 total vacant residential structures. Decades of vacancy in Detroit can account for urban sprawl, white flight, tax foreclosure, abandonment, arson, community disinvestment and losses in economic opportunity resulting in ultimate blight. In addition to residential properties, the city has 36% of its total commercial parcels vacant and 22% of its industrial land vacant.²



Figure 1: Statistics of Underutilized Land in Detroit

Blight has resulted in haphazard environments for remaining residents with predominately low soil and air quality in the city. Additionally, Detroit is disproportionate with some communities completely disconnected from secure infrastructure systems and public safety.³ With a footprint dramatically larger than its population, it becomes costly for public agencies to service the entire city. Detroit also falls well below national average of park space within proximity to residential areas. For existing parks maintenance is limited, and in many cases non-existent.⁴

Blight Removal

All things considered, abundant land provides the path for transformation into productive, innovative and long-term typologies to meet the needs of Detroit's landscape today. In order to provide for future generations, policy makers and urban planners must expand today's city.

¹ *Detroit: Why Don't We Own This?* Loveland Technologies. <http://whydontweownthis.com>

² *2012 Detroit Strategic Framework Plan*. Detroit Future City, 2013: 98.

³ *Ibid*, 99.

⁴ Interview with Dara O'Byrne, Land Use Convener, Detroit Future City, 13 Feb 2014.

Under a new Mayor and new visionaries, Detroit is undergoing blight-removal initiatives. This includes the \$1.5 Million funded Motor City Mapping Task Force. They are responsible for providing the most updated data on vacant lots and structures within Detroit's footprint by utilizing technology applications and Geographic Information Systems. The final analysis will provide evidence into the total cost to demolish all inhabitable structures.⁵ Another initiative is the Neighborhood Stabilization Program undergone by the Detroit Land Bank Authority (DLBA). With \$52.3 Million from the Hardest Hit Fund provided to address tax foreclosures, this funding will go directly towards demolition costs.⁶ Additionally, in a city where more than half of the existing vacant structures are publicly owned by different entities, DLBA is on a mission to consolidate public titles, to then transfer them to private entities or auction them off for productive reuses.^{7 8} Unanimously approved by the Detroit City Council, DLBA is on scheduled to have 16,000 publicly owned residential properties transferred to them.⁹ Finally, a major initiative with widespread support is Detroit Future City (DFC).

Detroit Future City

DFC (originally called Detroit Works Project) is the comprehensive roadmap for a project launched by the Detroit Planning and Development Department in 2010. The steering committee spent three consecutive years engaging with Detroiters as well as state and national policy and planning experts. The final product was the completion of the Strategic Framework in late 2012. It incorporates innovative ideas and visions for the transformation of the city from over 10,000 Detroiters. The final Framework includes projected 10, 20 and 50-year visions, strategies and recommendations within the following six planning elements:

1. Economic Growth
2. Land Use
3. City Systems
4. Neighborhoods
5. Land and Building Assets
6. Civic Capacity

The Framework is aspirational, actionable and accountable.¹⁰ It is designed for advocacy groups, businesses, community development corporations (CDCs), faith-based communities, institutions, foundations, and residents. Upon completion of the Framework, DFC organized its implementation team and established an office, which has become a

⁵ *Video Shows Motor City Mapping's \$1.5 Million Effort to Document Detroit Blight.* MLive.com: http://www.mlive.com/business/detroit/index.ssf/2014/02/video_shows_motor_city_mapping.html

⁶ According to the transfer agreement, total funds must be spent by April 2015 otherwise they must be returned to the federal government.

⁷ *Hardest Hit Fund.* Detroit Land Bank Authority: <http://detroitlandbank.org>

⁸ Public parcels primarily held by Michigan Fast Track Land Bank Authority, Wayne County Treasurer, and the City of Detroit. Based on interview with Dara O'Byrne, Land Use Convener, Detroit Future City, 13 Feb 2014.

⁹ Guillen, Joe. "Detroit Council OKs Transfer of 16,000 Properties to City's Land Bank." Detroit Free Press. 15 April 2014. <http://www.freep.com/article/20140415/NEWS01/304150108/Detroit-land-bank-homes>

¹⁰ *2012 Detroit Strategic Framework Plan.* Detroit Future City, 2013: 15.

site for brainstorming and executing goals entailed within the Framework. DFC is currently collaborating with the Office of Mayor Michael Duggan to prepare updates for the City of Detroit Master Plan of Policies. The policies stated within the Framework provide the local government with recommendations for the most appropriate ordinances. Policies hope to incorporate productive and sustainable land typologies intended to meet the city’s future demographics, by providing for a smaller population and a larger economy.

Innovation Ecological

Innovation Ecological is a long-term green infrastructure land use plan within the Strategic Framework’s Land Use Element. It is intended to transform vacant land into a major asset by incorporating green infrastructure. Innovation Ecological proposes to redevelop contiguous vacant land throughout the city, and repurpose it for a citywide open green space network. These parcels are frequent within residential areas of high vacancy and low market demand, where the largest need is. The design of these open green spaces will be in the form of carbon forests, marshes, meadows, and passive recreation. They will support a variety of animal and plant life. A portion of these spaces will be devoted to blue infrastructure for a citywide storm water management system to reduce flooding.

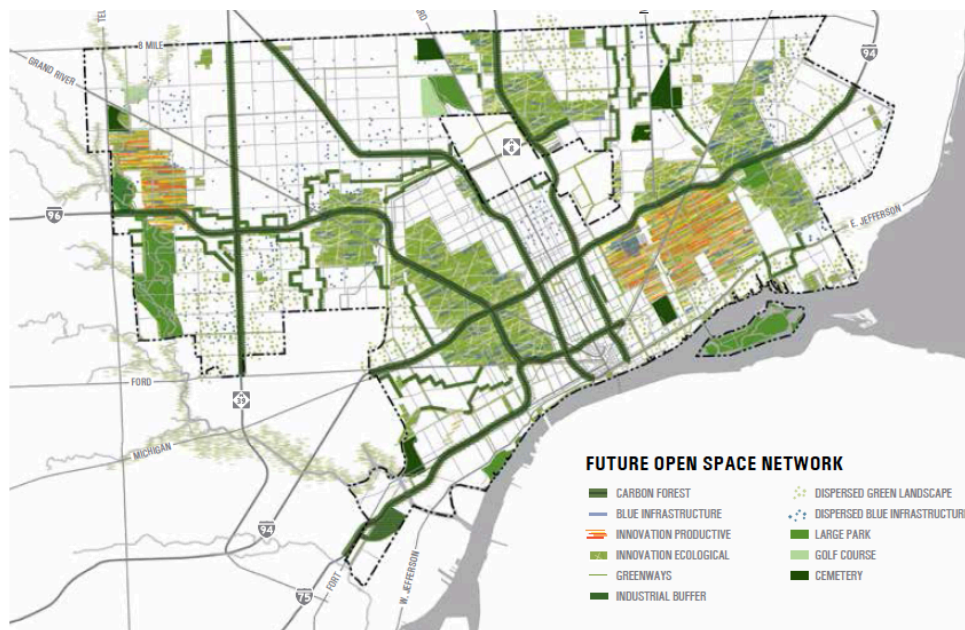


Figure 2: Proposed Future Open Space Network for Detroit

The ultimate goal of Innovation Ecological is to maximize public gain by promoting a healthier, safer and aesthetically pleasing city. It is imperative to reestablish as much taxation as possible for Detroit, and Innovation Ecological is a good way of putting vacant land to a use that will allow for it to be a vital land storage mechanism.¹¹

¹¹ Interview with Dean Hay, Director of Green Infrastructure, The Greening of Detroit, 20 March 2014.

Innovation Ecological will also be linked to other Framework elements. This initiative will be implemented with the help of the Greening of Detroit, a non-profit organization that paves the pathway for improving Detroit's ecosystems. They hold significant experience in land phytoremediation. Additionally, the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department may be able to provide maintenance for storm water retention ponds once a system is established.¹²

Section 2: Central Policy Issue

Innovation Ecological can be successful if a long-term landowner and maintenance plan is established. Whereas the Department of City Planning and Development and adjacent agencies simply do not have the resources to meet the goals of the initiative, a different model must be investigated. The central policy issue is therefore framed as the following: *What is the most appropriate conservation land management model for Detroit to utilize in order to stabilize widespread vacant land?*

Green infrastructure is in the mindset of policy makers and is a high priority for Detroiters. DFC civic engagement surveys administered resulted in Detroiters specifying that parks, greenways, recreation centers and gardens are top assets within their communities, and Innovative Ecological can help provide to meet this demand.¹³ It can provide Detroit with significant annual maintenance cost savings by levying the burden off of the local government. It can also better provide systematic performance improvements upon the public sector with time and resources saved.

Cities across the United States are using the land trust model for acquiring and preserving land for conservation missions. Land trusts provide the tools required to own and steward land in perpetuity for both public and private land. They help to provide redeveloped spaces with systematic maintenance. Additionally, other models aside from land trusts exist, and it is necessary to understand these different models thoroughly.

Today, vacant land management is crucial for cities. As Detroit may be the iconic face of blight, blight is trending throughout urban America especially throughout the rust-belt region, where post-industrial cities have been unable to grasp onto their historic economic stability. Policy experts from around the United States are closely linked to Detroit's future open space network and are collaborating and informing Detroit stakeholders on best practices. This provides for Detroit's future role as an applicable case study for other cities battling with high vacancy rates and low marketability. Detroit's abundant vacant land provides the opportunity for a new sustainable city like none other in the world.

Already, there have been monumental achievements for Detroit. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has awarded the city with the Great Lakes Shoreline Cities Green Infrastructure Grant in the amount of \$1 Million. This grant will assist in efforts to implement green and blue infrastructure to transform vacant land in Detroit's Eastside

¹² Interview with Dara O'Byrne, Land Use Convener, Detroit Future City, 13 Feb 2014.

¹³ *2012 Detroit Strategic Framework Plan*. Detroit Future City, 2013: 145.

with coordination from the community. Implementation is scheduled to begin this summer.¹⁴

Section 3: Research Methods

The research of this report took a multifaceted approach. A literature review was conducted. This was in order to understand the context in which urban conservation land management is best utilized and the principles behind it. The literature review circulates around the topics of conservation funding in the United States and funding for open space initiatives, urban green infrastructure and storm water management and introduces the land trust model. A series of interviews were conducted with individuals and organizations from across the United States to solicit opinions and expertise on strategic vacant land management. A data review was compiled which provides a thorough analysis of three different models that are utilized in cities: land trusts, conservation land trusts, and land banks. Finally, case studies were selected based on the success of their model. The research to follow was synthesized in order to evaluate the criteria considerations and proposals.

Literature Review

The history of land conservation in the United States dates back to 1964 when the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act passed. This provided federal funding which was annually available to revolutionize the availability of parks and open space. Geographically, open space fits into larger ecosystems, watersheds and landscapes in conjunction with urban growth patterns. State and property taxes and local revenue are allocated for local land conservation efforts. In many cases, voters approve to acquire green land within their jurisdiction's voting polls.¹⁵

Today, there is a significant demand for open space funding. Since the 1960's, as land development accelerated, government funding to acquire open space has decreased. Grassroots and non-profit organizations have saved thousands of acres as a response to this decline. The land trust scope turned national in the 1990's.¹⁶ The urban conservation shift examines three spatial scales: site, regional and landscape. Site-scale strategies can inform landscape-scale planning, while providing site-scale green benefits.¹⁷ Land conservation also targets multi-regions. An example of this can be found in the Minneapolis-Saint Paul region: "...the seven county scope assures that the individual projects contribute to the existing local and regional park systems as elements of a regional network of green spaces and natural functioning ecosystems."¹⁸

¹⁴ *Great Lakes Shoreline Cities Green Infrastructure Project – Near East Side*. Detroit Future City, 2014.

¹⁵ McQueen, Mike, and Edward McMahon. *Land Conservation Financing*. The Conservation Fund, 2003: 3-15.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Allen, William L., III. *A Green Infrastructure Framework for Vacant and Underutilized Urban Lands*. The Conservation Fund, 2014: 43.

¹⁸ McQueen, Mike, and Edward McMahon. *Land Conservation Financing*. The Conservation Fund, 2003: 169.

Initially, green infrastructure was intended for landscape-scale development in growing communities, but it can also drive policy for shrinking communities. Green infrastructure engages people by focusing on both conservation and development, and is beginning to become government priority. Within some jurisdictions, green infrastructure is being financed through bond agreements, real estate transfer taxes, development fees or direct budgetary line items.¹⁹ Green infrastructure is becoming integrated within city and county Master Plans such as in Montgomery County, Maryland where the County Planning Board and the Montgomery County Council have approved an open space program.²⁰

Green infrastructure is guided by seven principles:

1. Green infrastructure should function as the framework for conservation and development
2. Designing and planning green infrastructure before development is key
3. Linkage is key: it should make connections between green infrastructure initiatives and other activities within and beyond the community
4. Green infrastructure functions across multiple jurisdictions, at different scales: the project scale, the regional scale and the landscape scale. It is important to work with all levels of government and private landowners at various scales to plan and implement green infrastructure
5. Green infrastructure is grounded in sound science and land use planning theories and practices
6. Green infrastructure is a critical public investment. It is key to document and promote the benefits of green infrastructure
7. Green infrastructure involves diverse stakeholders. It should engage key partners and the general public²¹

In regards to creating urban green infrastructure on vacant and underutilized land in cities, operational framework components look like the following:

1. Analyze the landscape and regional context for site-scale implementation
2. Engage the community with long-term vision and short-term opportunities
3. Identify the typology of potential green infrastructure activities
4. Craft implementation project selection criteria
5. Optimize the project investment portfolio²²

Land holding strategies across stakeholders can provide more time to assess suitability for development and the specific green implementation plan for vacant land and properties.²³ Additionally, urban green infrastructure has demonstrated cost reductions in storm water management. As urban areas experience changing demographics, flood problems are intensifying. Through targeted land conservation, future flood trends can

¹⁹ Ibid, 152.

²⁰ Ibid, 174.

²¹ Ibid, 156-163.

²² Allen, William L., III. *A Green Infrastructure Framework for Vacant and Underutilized Urban Lands*. The Conservation Fund, 2014: 43.

²³ Ibid, 46.

reduce.²⁴ Revenue generation for green infrastructure in urban vacant land includes the following: increases in property taxes from improved neighborhood conditions, reductions in combined sewer overflow compliance costs and reductions in gray infrastructure maintenance costs.²⁵

Interviews

16 individuals were interviewed in order to determine the best applicable model for vacant land management in Detroit that supports a strong ownership and maintenance structure. Interviewees were selected based on their experience within the urban land trust context across the United States and Michigan, based on their involvement on policies around Detroit's future land use, and based on their expertise on the financial and operational structures that must be in place for models to be successful.

A land use expert from the Center for Community Progress was interviewed. Key individuals at the following land trusts were interviewed: The Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy, Forterra, the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society and the Western Reserve Land Conservancy. Network organizations interviewed include The Nature Conservancy (Michigan), The Conservation Fund, The Land Trust Alliance and the Heart of the Lakes Center for Land Conservation Policy. Land banks interviewed include DLBA and the Genesee County Land Bank Authority. The National Community Land Trust Network was interviewed. Bridging Communities, a non-profit organization in Detroit was also interviewed. A philanthropic foundation interviewed was the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan who provides for green initiatives in Detroit. The Greening of Detroit was interviewed in order to understand the impact of implementing Innovation Ecological. Finally, a state representative was interviewed to understand the political feasibility of urban development in Detroit. Data to follow will incorporate insights acquired from interviews. To see a summary of interview notes, refer to Appendix D.

Data Review

Land Trusts

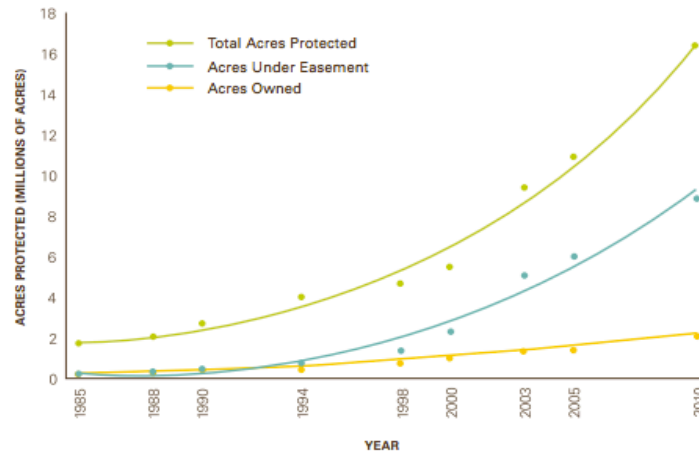
Land trusts are 501(c) 3 organizations that actively work to conserve land by undertaking or assisting in land management through conservation easement acquisition, or in negotiating long-term lease agreements. In 1950, there were 53 land trusts at the local and regional scale. In 2003, that number increased to more than 1,500 with over 5 million acres acquired nationally.²⁶ Historically, land trusts have set their own ecological priorities while acquiring land in rural communities. Today, there are a growing number of land trusts working in urban areas to increase conservation through community development. Natural systems support urban infrastructure networks, and land trusts have made an incredible impact in low-income neighborhoods.

²⁴ McQueen, Mike, and Edward McMahon. *Land Conservation Financing*. The Conservation Fund, 2003: 170-171.

²⁵ Ibid, 49.

²⁶ Morris, Ashleigh G. *Conservation Easements and Urban Parks: From Private to Public Use*. Natural Resources Journal, 2011, Vol. 51: 364.

Private Land Conservation by State and Local Land Trusts



For state and local land trusts, acres protected by conservation easements account for 55% of all land conserved, while 13% of total land saved is owned by land trusts.

Figure 3: Statistics of Private Land Conservation by State and Local Land Trusts

Land trusts have four different objectives:

1. Acquire land on behalf of community groups and support these groups
2. Own land on behalf of an existing network of open spaces
3. Actively develop new sites with community input
4. Protecting a specific site²⁷

Along with ownership, land trusts are responsible for the maintenance (stewardship) of land in perpetuity. This means that not only are they responsible for maintaining the landscape, but they are also required to pick up garbage for example.²⁸ Recommended stewardship should occur seasonally at minimum. Stewardship can include inspecting site boundaries, inspecting trails and parking areas, inspecting habitats and removing damaged or hazardous materials.²⁹ Site stewards are often volunteers or local residents located in close proximity to the site selected through a competitive bidding process. Thorough workshops and trainings are required for site stewards in order to understand site-specific characteristics and potential hazards to inspect. Land trusts may opt for year-round site monitoring (aerial and on the ground) if they are proven to be cost effective. This should be enforced under the land stewardship director or contracted agency.³⁰

²⁷ Bird, Caroline. *Urban Conservation Land Trusts as an Alternative Model for Stewardship: A Case Study of Baltimore Green Space*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2012: 6.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Brown, Hugh and Andrew Pitz. *Caring for Land Trust Properties*. Land Trust Alliance, 2008: 314.

³⁰ Ibid, 296.

As 501(c) 3 organizations, annual revenue for land trusts comes from donor contributions, membership dues, local, state and federal grants, tax revenue and investment income. Their annual expenditures are allocated for stewardship, education, land protection, membership, fundraising, administration and transfer of lands.³¹ Land trusts must be concerned with potential partnerships. They help support outreach, fundraising, drives policy, strengthens advocacy and provides capacity building. Building relationships between trusts and the community provides the path for these partnerships through the formation of new allies and supporters for further investment. Land trusts also need to be concerned with local economic futures when acquiring land. Many projects are connected to local initiatives and assets. Even the smallest parcel can have a major impact, and successful land conservation leads to additional transactions for trusts.³²

Land trusts are governed by a board of directors and can have up to 18 board members. Often, trustees are members of the communities in which projects are implemented. This is in order to understand the community’s needs and values through a local resident serving as a liaison. Directors can be political officials, policy experts or community board members for example.³³

Positions at land trusts include: problem solver, connector (connecting the trust to community values) facilitator, convener, communicator, steward, political adviser and resource leverager (head fundraiser and grant writer).³⁴ One consideration for trusts is that land transactions could take up to years in some cases beyond some stewardship contracts. Therefore, ongoing community engagement is crucial.³⁵ Land trust redevelopment improves the physical, social and economic conditions of space. Most importantly, it can provide access to beautiful spaces that can offer educational and passive recreational activities, as well as programs and events for the public to engage in.

People Who Fuel the Land Trust Community

	STATE AND LOCAL	NATIONAL	2010 TOTAL
Staff and Contractors (full-time and part-time)	7,001	5,360	12,361
Board members	15,277	383	15,660
Volunteers	136,196	210,832	347,028
Members/financial supporters	1,183,673	3,802,420	4,986,093

Figure 4: People Who Fuel the Land Trust Community, State, Local and National in 2010

³¹ Financial Summary from *Year 2013 in Review*. Michigan Land Association, 2013: 21.

³² *Ibid*, 7.

³³ Interview with Ole Amundsen, Land Conservation Loan Program Manager and Strategic Conservation Program Manager, The Conservation Fund, 7 March 2014.

³⁴ *Land Conservancies as Community Builders: Practitioners Guide*. Heart of the Lakes: 4-5.

³⁵ *Ibid*.

Since land trusts are required to uphold ownership and maintenance of land in perpetuity, they may come across financial risks in the long run. The perpetuity nature should be a trusts' first consideration before land is transferred and finalized within an agreement. Sometimes, trusts are newly created and highly underfunded which create weak operations. In recent years, the Land Trust Alliance has created a nationwide insurance program to help trusts if they are faced with financial instability.³⁶ This insurance policy is designed as a conservation easement defense insurance, which can help cover legal costs. There are other creative ways trusts can earn revenue from open space to match stewardship costs. This can include transferring a section of the land for a community farm or garden.

When applicable, land trusts may receive a fixed amount from a grant or the local government in the form of a tax zone where tax revenue is automatically sent for an initiative and for implementation. Land trusts are exempt from property and land taxes as long as they file for these exemptions. Sometimes, trusts may voluntarily make payments in lieu of taxes.³⁷ For a summary on land trusts, refer to Appendix A. For a list of land trust responsibilities in year 1 of operations, refer to Appendix B.

Conservation Easements

As introduced above, conservation easements are a voluntary conservation tool for land trusts to acquire privately owned land for conservation. It is a mechanism that can forever protect and preserve land. Easements are designed as a deed. Conservation easements can ease local tax rolls and help maintain a strong property tax base.³⁸ Local governments are benefiting from this tool for urban revitalization efforts.

Conservation easements are extraordinarily flexible, fair and can be amended if the grantor and grantee agree upon the proposed changes.^{39 40} The land trust creates the deed in the same format as a real estate contract. Landowners who provide land to a trust are qualified to receive a federal income tax deduction and/or deduction in local real estate taxes based on the value of the easement (only applicable for land, not structures).⁴¹ Whereas public access is required for publicly owned land, privately owned land does not require public access since its still considered private property after the easement. Trusts strive to work out agreements with landowners in which their land can provide public access to a degree.

The land trust is responsible to check-up on the landowner to confirm that they are abiding by the easement in perpetuity. Conservation easements can sometimes be

³⁶ Morris, Ashleigh G. *Conservation Easements and Urban Parks: From Private to Public Use*. Natural Resources Journal, 2011, Vol. 51: 365-368.

³⁷ Interview with Rob Aldrich, Director of Community Conservation, Land Trust Alliance, 19 March 2014.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Morris, Ashleigh G. *Conservation Easements and Urban Parks: From Private to Public Use*. Natural Resources Journal, 2011, Vol. 51: 364.

⁴⁰ It is important to consider that an amendment may not coincide with the initial purpose of the easement. They do however provide the opportunity for easements to adapt over time.

⁴¹ Morris, Ashleigh G. *Conservation Easements and Urban Parks: From Private to Public Use*. Natural Resources Journal, 2011, Vol. 51: 364.

difficult for trusts to implement depending on the context. At times, land trusts may find it too costly to purchase vacant land. Land may have inactive titles, which can impede on the conservation easement process.⁴² In some cases, acquisition is difficult in that it may require short-term arrangements for the eviction of households residing on land designated for conservation.⁴³ For a draft conservation easement, refer to Appendix C.

Community Land Trusts

Community lands trusts (CLTs) are 501(c) 3 organizations that acquire and manage land on behalf on a community. They protect the affordability, condition and use of structures on public and private land. Tax responsibilities can vary from one jurisdiction to another, but as a baseline. CLTs are not liable for local property taxes. Rather the structure owners within a CLT project are held accountable. CLTs are however responsible to pay local taxes on the market value of the land with that amount assessed based on the original purchase price.⁴⁴ Today, there are over 240 CLTs actively working across the United States.⁴⁵ Similar to land trusts, they are governed by a board of directors.

CLTs are guided by seven core principles:

1. Perpetual affordability
2. Community health, cohesion and diversity
3. Community stewardship of land
4. Sustainability
5. Representative governance
6. Resident and community empowerment
7. Openness to a variety of organizational structures⁴⁶

Land trusts and CLTs use similar tools but for different purposes. As stated above, land trusts acquire land through public partnerships and conservation easements to provide open space, whereas community land trusts focus on increasing homeownership, affordability and preservation.⁴⁷ However, research provided demonstrates that the land trust model offers a powerful mix of flexibility and permanence to urban open space management for CLTs. It suggests that increased collaboration between land trusts and CLTs can help increase equity within a community. Additionally, it provides a more explicit approach towards supporting natural processes that can help meet the goals of both models while simultaneously increasing engagement.⁴⁸ In cases where market rate costs of land exceed revenue generated from urban green spaces, there is a higher risk of

⁴² Interview with Bob Grossman, Executive Director, Pennsylvania Horticultural Society. 13 March 2014.

⁴³ Bird, Caroline. *Urban Conservation Land Trusts as an Alternative Model for Stewardship: A Case Study of Baltimore Green Space*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2012: 3.

⁴⁴ *Property Taxes and Community Land Trusts*. Burlington Associates in Community Development, LLC.

⁴⁵ Interview with Marcus Presley, Senior Policy Associate, National Community Land Trust Network, 10 March 2014.

⁴⁶ *Who We Are*. National Community Land Trust Network: <http://cltnetwork.org/who-we-are>

⁴⁷ *Types of Land Trusts*. Land Trust Alliance: <http://www.landtrustalliance.org/land-trusts/types-of-land-trusts>

⁴⁸ Bird, Caroline. *Urban Conservation Land Trusts as an Alternative Model for Stewardship: A Case Study of Baltimore Green Space*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2012: 21.

land insecurity.⁴⁹ The biggest role for CLTs within this field is to secure and provide programmatic support to the land. In the case of agriculture this also includes direct production.⁵⁰

Securing Land

Securing the land can be done through conservation easements, deed restrictions, ground leases or fee simple ownership. All four of these options provide land security in the long run. Long-term leasing can provide generational perspectives for land stewardship. These sites can vary from abandoned parcels to contaminated brownfields. They equally share pros and cons:

- Conservation easements in the case of CLTs are often used as a tax-planning tool. It is a successful model for ensuring that land is conserved in perpetuity. However, whereas it secures the physical land, it does not protect the perpetuity of the users on site⁵¹
- Deed restrictions are deeds that regulate restrictions on parcels. They provide strict policies on the land use for a particular site. It helps to ensure green use, but it can also be restrictive for other factors such as public access⁵²
- Within ground lease agreements, CLTs own land, and lease it to an external entity to manage, or vice versa. Leases can range in time, and they can be renewable. Local governments are also able to enforce ground leases to CLTs. Ground leases are another method of low-cost ownership and management, but may come across expensive transaction costs⁵³
- Fee simple ownership helps insulate land from price speculation forces. The CLT often holds leases to community organizations such as CDCs that desire land. There is low financial risk, as the group that holds the lease does not have property tax obligations. However, there is a high cost in land initially⁵⁴

Programmatic Support

Programmatic support relates to the maintenance of the land that a CLT owns. It provides additional support beyond the easement of the ownership model and the land use. It provides technical assistance, educational tools and waste management for example. These support systems can receive major funding from donors and grants similar to land trusts. Most importantly, these sites are provided for the community in perpetuity.⁵⁵ For a summary on CLTs, refer to Appendix A.

Land Banks

⁴⁹ Rosenberg, Greg and Jeffrey Yuen. *Beyond Housing: Urban Agriculture and Community Land Trusts*. National Community Land Trust Network, 19 April 2013: 8.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 11.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 34.

⁵² *Ibid*, 32.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 30.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 27.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 40.

A land bank is a public authority (or non-profit) that is created to efficiently and successfully manage and develop vacant, abandoned and tax foreclosed properties. Land banks can be funded through tax surcharges, grants or bonds.⁵⁶ Land banks provide tools that ensure properties are being redeveloped, meeting long-term interests of the community. Over 75 municipalities across the United States have land banks or land banking initiatives.⁵⁷ Staff members are elected for public leadership rather than a board of directors.⁵⁸ Land banks assemble parcels of vacant land and redevelop them for residential, recreational, commercial or industrial use. Banks transfer vacant properties to responsible landowners and hold properties tax-free.⁵⁹ Sometimes, land banks work with community leaders to determine productive reuses. Their operations may require changing legislation such as: local zoning ordinances, state land use statues, single-mission ordinances or building and construction permits.

Land bank responsibilities include land assembly, open space designation, brownfield redevelopment and the enhancement of existing and new developments. Or more specifically:

- Elimination of the harms cause by vacant, abandoned or foreclosed properties
- Elimination of the barriers to returning properties to productive use
- Conveying of properties to new owners for productive use
- Holding properties for future uses⁶⁰

Land banks work fiscally in the short-term and provide long-term policy. Two driving principles for land banks include:

1. Market Substitution: time and community care can substitute for robust market conditions to create value
2. Community Care Principle: ecosystem services achieved by local community engagement in caring for landscapes can create enduring value⁶¹

Successful land banking provides public safety, housing affordability, strengthened municipal finance, improved schools and environmental benefits.⁶² It helps redefine property tax revenue for cities that have been declined due to declining property values as a result of vacancy and abandonment. Properties managed by land banks return property taxes generated to the local tax roll also known as a tax recapture tool.⁶³ Similar to land trusts and CLTs, land banks may seek additional grant funding. In other cases, revenue is obtained through foreclosure auctions.⁶⁴ The community care principle is established

⁵⁶ Alexander, Frank S. *Land Banks and Land Banking*. Center for Community Progress, 2011: 102.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 9.

⁵⁸ *Land Banking: Transforming Abandoned and Problem Properties into Opportunities for Productive Re-Use*. Center for Community Progress.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Alexander, Frank S. *Land Banks and Land Banking*. Center for Community Progress, 2011: 58.

⁶¹ Nassauer, Joan I., and Rebekah VanWieren. *Vacant Property Now and Tomorrow*. Genesee Institute, 2008: 8-9.

⁶² DeWitt, Jessica. *Land Banks*. University of Michigan: <http://www.umich.edu/~econdev/landbank>

⁶³ Alexander, Frank S. *Land Banks and Land Banking*. Center for Community Progress, 2011: 49.

⁶⁴ Interview with Christina Kelly, Director of Planning and Neighborhood Revitalization, Genesee County Land Bank Authority, 21 March 2014.

through stewardship and allows for different methods of maintenance. Similar to land trusts, banks can contract with volunteers and community groups to steward land. Sometimes, an established land trust may be provided with land banking responsibilities if they have the leverage to rehabilitate parcels on a large-scale. This is dependent on whether or not the land banking initiative has a conservation mission. For a summary on land banks, refer to Appendix A.

Case Studies

Land Trust: Cleveland, Ohio

Cleveland (located in Cuyahoga County) has a successful vacant land management model implemented across neighborhoods that can see up to 80% vacancy rates. With more than 10,000 vacant properties in the city and an additional 18,000 slated for demolition, Cleveland's conservation agenda is now tied to zoning ordinances and is in the mind of policy makers for productive reuse. The Western Reserve Land Conservancy (WRLC) founded in 2006 was the largest merger of land trusts in United States history. 8 local land trusts joined to set stronger regional priorities for conserving urban land. WRLC partnered with the Cuyahoga County Land Reutilization Corporation (also known as the Cuyahoga County Land Bank). WRLC holds a total of 500 conservation easements across 40,000 acres in the region. WRLC also works with CDC's throughout Cleveland to better engage with the community.⁶⁵

WRLC launched the Thriving Communities Institute in 2011, which focuses on vacant land redevelopment throughout Cleveland. The institutes' initiative *From Vacancy to Vitality: Creating Healthy Ecosystems from Barren Lands* paves the way for open green spaces in the city. They work aside the land bank to acquire primarily privately owned vacant properties, to then simultaneously clear parcels and perform remediation in order to provide safety and stabilization in the interim.⁶⁶ The land bank owns these titles, and WRLC's Stewardship Conservancy Department performs stewardship until a new landowner can be determined. When the soil is revived, WRLC engages with locals to develop efforts for economic development around the space. Once these ideas are generated, the land conservancy and the land bank utilize new and existing long-term partnerships. Results are in the form of new greenways, trails, community farms, gardens, orchards and public art installations.⁶⁷ Additionally, property values in proximity to redeveloped land have improved.⁶⁸ WRLC is currently redeveloping a 25-acre landfill in Cleveland that will create open green space and provide a connection to an existing regional trail.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Interview with Sarah Ryzner, Director of Projects at the Thriving Communities Institute, Western Reserve Land Conservancy, 14 April 2014.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ *A Creative Path Forward*. Western Reserve Land Conservancy: <http://www.thrivingcommunitiesinstitute.org/about-creative-path.html>

⁶⁸ Interview with Rob Aldrich, Director of Community Conservation, Land Trust Alliance, 19 March 2014.

⁶⁹ Interview with Sarah Ryzner, Director of Projects at the Thriving Communities Institute, Western Reserve Land Conservancy, 14 April 2014.

In addition to WRLC, local institutions provide policy and research for vacant land management in Cleveland. The Cleveland Urban Design Collective at Kent State University provides four steps for carrying out successful community land reuse:

1. Identify vacant land in a neighborhood that you are interested in, then research and analyze that site in the context of your regional ecosystem
2. Host a vision session with the immediate community
3. Hold a follow-up meeting to plan all the details of the project
4. Carry out the plan and keep neighbors involved throughout the process⁷⁰

The Urban Design Collective has provided the most affordable financial framework for implementing street edge improvements, pocket parks and storm water retention ponds on vacant residential streets, especially on lots that would have not seen development otherwise. These developments also engage community networks for stewardship.

Whereas Cleveland and Detroit share many differences, when it comes to vacancy they both address identical issues. Both cities are faced with overwhelming numbers of vacancy rates and demolition. Land trusts are active within the Southeast Michigan area, but are unable to meet the capacity of working within Detroit. A merger similar to that of WRLC may be able to enforce stronger policy, while providing stronger partnerships required for Innovation Ecological to succeed. A land trust could collaborate with DLBA once properties have been demolished. Finally, resources from Wayne State University and other local institutions can sponsor research in order to provide evidence into the precise costs for implementing Innovation Ecological, such as Kent State provides for Cleveland. DFC can contact WRLC and other stakeholders in Cleveland to understand strategic processes. Additionally, WRLC is less likely to put conservation easements on smaller urban parcels, because it can be very expensive, and that can become problematic for Detroit when working to conserve private land.

Land Trust: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Philadelphia has a successful vacant land management model. Philadelphia was victim to widespread blight with 40,000 unmanaged vacant acres. For decades, neighborhoods were destabilized, property values were depressed, the environment was contaminated and communities were in danger. Since the late 1990's, Pennsylvania Horticultural Society (PHS) has partnered with the Neighborhood Garden Trust to establish the Philadelphia *LandCare Program* (under contract with the Philadelphia Office of Housing and Community Development), who also sponsors the *Clean and Green Lots* initiative. Their organizational process includes:

- City government and trust collaboration
- Funding from the city
- Targeting neighborhoods
- Strategic site selection
- Interim treatment

⁷⁰ *Reimagining Cleveland: Vacant Land Re-Use Pattern Book*. Kent State University's Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative, April 2009: 32.

- Pre-development
- Economic landscape design
- Maintenance⁷¹

Since its inception, the LandCare Program has acquired 8,000 parcels of vacant land now regularly managed by PHS.⁷² All privately owned parcels were acquired through conservation easements implemented by the Neighborhood Garden Trust (three-quarters of the total vacant land, or approximately 6,000 parcels in the city). All publicly owned parcels are owned by the City of Philadelphia and PHS leases land from appropriate agencies for stewardship (one-quarter of vacant land, or approximately 2,000 parcels in the city).⁷³ 6,000 of the 8,000 parcels are now stabilized. Stabilization is defined as being cleared and cleaned, graded, planted with turf and trees and lined with fence in order to define the landscape access points. Stewardship is bi-monthly between the months of April and October. This includes site cleanup (removal of trash and debris) and mowing. If necessary, this also includes repairs and the removal or replacements of fences, trees and turf.

Community engagement and workforce can be found through the LandCare Program's *Community LandCare* initiative. There are a number of entities that provide stewardship including private contactors, CDCs, civic organizations and social services. Stewards are selected through a competitive bidding process to clean the acquired lots that have yet to be stabilized (remaining 2,000 lots). Over 100 residents within communities are employed for this initiative.⁷⁴ This year alone, the LandCare Program has these 2,000 parcels maintained by 14 community groups. PHS monitors maintenance quality and regularly hosts workshops for stewards to engage in to better understand team management and equipment safety. Because of strong engagement and measurable results, the city of Philadelphia supports the LandCare Program. This has maximized resources for PHS.

The LandCare Program takes an *edge* approach, which is defined as targeting green development in communities located on the edge of active real estate markets. Within an edge approach, investments in affluent areas with successful open green spaces further stimulate investment for disinvested areas. The LandCare Program does not result in gentrification, but rather stabilization with increased equity.⁷⁵ The LandCare Program is scientific in that research conducted by the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania shows that redeveloped lots raise property values of adjacent structures by 37% (with a gain of \$35,000 per affected households), reduces crime including gun

⁷¹ Grossman, Bob. Pennsylvania Horticultural Society. *Identifying Opportunity and Facilitating Transformation. Turning Vacant Land into Community Resources: Sharing Best Practices from Urban Transformation Facilitators Around the World*. The New School, New York. 23 April 2014. Conference hosted by 596 Acres.

⁷² *Narrative: Philadelphia Land Care Program*. Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, March 2012.

⁷³ Interview with Bob Grossman, Executive Director, Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, 13 March 2014.

⁷⁴ *Narrative: Philadelphia Land Care Program*. Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, March 2012.

⁷⁵ Interview with Bob Grossman, Executive Director, Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, 13 March 2014.

assaults, improves wellness and increases investment with an overall improved tax base.⁷⁶

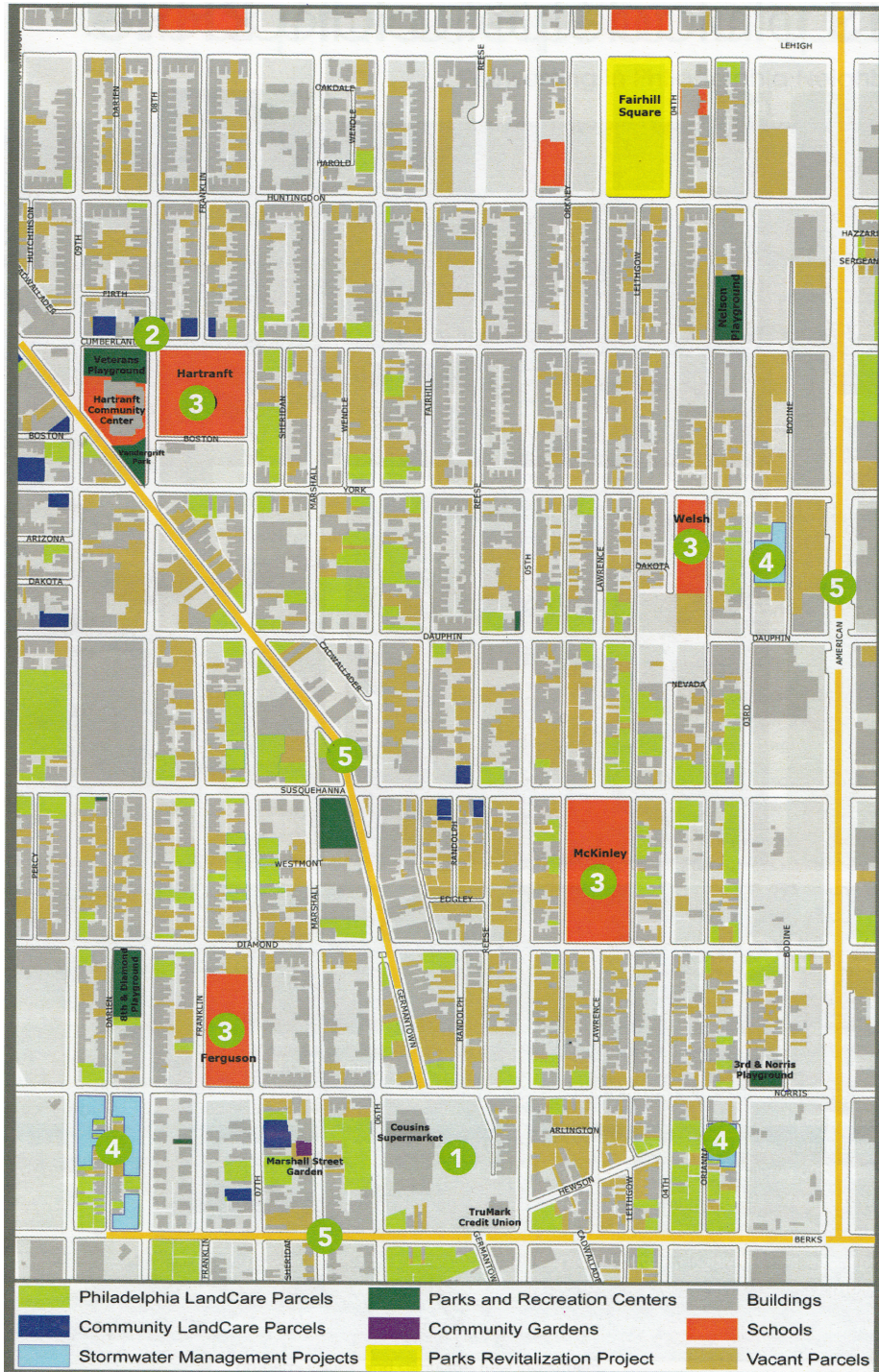


Figure 5: Philadelphia LandCare Program: Community Partnership Site (1), Community LandCare site (2), Safer Environment for Children site (3), Stormwater Management site (4) and Greening Gateway site (5)

⁷⁶ Narrative: Philadelphia Land Care Program. Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, March 2012.

Detroit can learn lessons from Philadelphia. Operation wise, Philadelphia provides an excellent case study into the process of maintaining land from implementation and beyond. It is highly suggestible that Detroit utilizes an edge implementation similar to Philadelphia, and work within spaces that see stronger investment than others. Once this structure has been in place, additional vacant areas can see investment based on its success. Contracting out for stewardship is key for Detroit. It can help provide jobs in neighborhoods with high unemployment rates. In this aspect, Detroit may be able to provide more job opportunities than Philadelphia accounting for the differences of scale. These stewards should engage in capacity building. Where Detroit and Philadelphia differ is in the position of the local government. PHS receives budgetary funding from the City of Philadelphia and the local government enforces PHS' competitive bidding process. This is not feasible for Detroit in the short-term.



Figure 6: Before and After of a Redeveloped Vacant Lot in Philadelphia through the LandCare Program

Land Trust: Seattle, Washington

Forterra is a land trust that focuses on conserving ecosystems throughout Washington State. They are funded by public grants and landowner willingness.⁷⁷ In 2005, in partnership with other conservation groups, Forterra launched the *Cascade Agenda*, which was a series of community meetings to set Washington's conservation priorities for the next 100 years. They approach their framework in the short, mid and long-term. As a network that provides capacity building for land trusts throughout the region as well as support for local governments, Forterra can identify projects that range from the parcel scale to entire townships.

In Seattle (located in Kings County), they approach vacant lot stabilization primarily in immigrant and underserved communities. Projects can be found in the form of community farms, gardens and storm water retention systems. The community engages in stewardship, and Forterra provides public education. Because of their influence, Forterra is considered the conservation land bank for Seattle, since the city has no municipal land bank.⁷⁸ Forterra enforces localized tools at the regional scale for both public and private land. According to the *Cascade Agenda*, the ultimate goal is to connect every urban

⁷⁷Interview with Liz Johnston, Director of Conservation Transactions, Forterra, 14 March 2014.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

community to open green space within an eighth to a half-mile radius.⁷⁹ The primary funding for this initiative will come from the private sector, shifting the financial burden away from the public sector.

In regards to stewardship, Forterra is keen on fixing the mistakes of past generations in order to recreate self-sustaining ecosystems to reduce costs. Every project maintains its own financial resources unique from the next.⁸⁰ Kings County, Washington State's most urbanized county, has a dynamic agricultural zoning ordinance. They have been able to conserve 90,000 public acres of forest thanks to the Hancock Timber Resource Group, a global leader in ownership and management of forests. They purchased the land from the County. This was in response to a booming market that welcomed this back in 2004.⁸¹ At the time of purchase, this sale hoped to prove to Washington residents that it is important to seize conservation opportunities sooner than later.

Philosophies for Detroit and Seattle correlate. According to the DFC Framework, Detroiters want to be in close proximity to open green space in the future similar to the requests in the Cascade Agenda. Both cities have vast amounts of publicly owned land versus privately owned, which will not require as many conservation easements compared to government transfers. Detroit aspires for a green zoning ordinance and can learn from Seattle on how that shapes and defines the future of land regulations and development. They also share the same target approach, and have established underserved communities as a beneficiary. Localized regional planning is successful for Seattle and key for Detroit. Unfortunately, the utilization of a timber resource group who functions as a manager may not be as feasible for Detroit as it was for Seattle. Environmentally, this would only work for the management of carbon forests planned and not solely open space. Additionally, whereas a resource group established Seattle as a prime target, and purchased timber from Forterra, no land model is currently in place for Detroit, therefore no foundation to provide for a resource group. This option may be something for Detroit to look towards in the long-term.

Community Land Trust: Athens, Georgia

Many CLTs focus their operations around affordable housing as the central mission.⁸² However, the Athens Land Trust (ALT) is a dual-mission organization that operates to provide both affordable housing and land conservation; both of these missions compliment one another. This dual-mission was born out of a lack of green space along with new housing developments constructed. Since 2009, ALT has developed 31 community gardens in Athens. Their operations have been effective and have met the needs of the local community.⁸³

Since ALT's inception, 11,528 privately owned acres have been preserved through conservation easements implemented by ALT within the region. State tax credits have

⁷⁹ *The Cascade Agenda: 100 Years Forward*. Forterra, 2005: 16.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 19.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 21.

⁸² Interview with Marcus Presley, Senior Policy Associate, National Community Land Trust Network, 10 March 2014.

⁸³ Interview with Rob Aldrich, Director of Community Conservation, Land Trust Alliance, 19 March 2014.

been provided to private landowners in return. ALT's grant and donor funding permits them to implement easements and carry out stewardship in perpetuity with the help of local landowners and communities in which they serve.⁸⁴ These acres range in scale, location and diversity of habitat. Areas conserved include river frontages, working agricultural land and passive recreational spaces. Additionally, these spaces are designed to connect with existing ecosystems and other protected lands that are managed by other trusts in the region. Athens is a small city that is beginning to see real-estate pressures from developers. ALT is promoting the need for additional open green space within their target communities.

Whereas Athens and Detroit do not compare in demographics, ALT should be highlighted for being a model that focuses on green infrastructure. The biggest aspect of the Athens model is green connectivity to existing and proposed corridors. Similarly, DFC has carefully proposed this within their Strategic Framework. However, both cities differ in that Athens is made up of primarily privately owned parcels compared to Detroit. While an aspiring model for the long-term, Detroit unfortunately does not have a CLT network in place today. Provided, ALT can still demonstrate long-term ideologies for the future of community organizations in Detroit and their leverage.

Community Land Trust: Providence, Rhode Island

One CLT operates strictly on a green and agriculture mission excluding affordable housing from its model. The Southside Community Land Trust located in Providence, Rhode Island was founded in 1981. They provide food security, education, growing tools and support for communities. In the 1980s, Providence had a large inventory of vacant and abandoned land. Southside began their operations by purchasing a large vacant lot to provide the neighborhood with open space for food production. Local residents and volunteers then became involved and helped develop the base farm that stands today. Fee simple ownership has been Southside's tenure arrangement for securing this land.

Southside is funded through donations, grants and revenue through agricultural sales, and have partnered with the local and state government. They have since expanded and acquired an additional 5.5 acres of vacant land throughout the city and have developed them as gardens and farms. These sites are primarily located in disadvantaged neighborhoods with a history of food insecurity. The benefits of Southside are highly measurable: communities have seen increased access to open space and healthy food with income from produce sales.

Southside has a model that can guide Detroit's landscape since affordable housing is not as pressing of a priority compared to land blight. A challenge that Southside has experienced that can advise Detroit's future CLT network is difficulty with project financing. Grants and donations support land acquisition, development, capital improvements and education. It is important for Detroit to understand that local financial efforts may have to regionalize to avoid financial insecurity in the long-term.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ *Land Conservation*. Athens Land Trust: <http://www.athenslandtrust.org/land-conservation>

⁸⁵ Rosenberg, Greg, and Jeffrey Yuen. *Beyond Housing: National CLT Network Non-Residential Project Directory*. National Community Land Trust Network, 2013: 9.

Land Bank: Flint, Michigan

The Genesee County Land Bank Authority owns 10,000 public properties throughout the county with most of them located in Flint. They manage demolitions, renovations, community-based care, brownfield redevelopment, greening demonstration projects, vacant lot reuse, natural area preservation and flexible land reuses through a variety of different lease agreements. Their properties are held for a period in order to revive and return them to the market. Whereas they are not a conservation entity and rather focus their attention on tax-foreclosed properties, they have the ability to create open green spaces. The land bank launched the *Clean and Green Program* in 2004, which operates to stabilize concentrated clusters of vacant residential lots held by the bank.⁸⁶

The Clean and Green Program increases local partnerships and receives strong activism from the community in order to preserve open green space in perpetuity since the land bank cannot implement conservation easements themselves. This helps to decrease the risk of development within these spaces since Flint does not have a green zoning ordinance. The land bank engages with communities by enforcing different types of stewardship through contracts and volunteers. Each group involved in stewardship receives a stipend of \$3,000 every 25 lots they maintain from the land bank. In 2013, 46 community groups participated in the Clean and Green Program and 1,360 lots were maintained every three weeks. Additionally, the Clean and Green Program promotes youth engagement.⁸⁷ The EPA admires the work completed through the Clean and Green Program, and in the past has provided grants for brownfield remediation in Flint.

An example of a successful open green space project was the completion of a former brownfield in Flint. A local non-profit organization approached the land bank notifying them of their interest in the site. EPA provided a grant in the amount of \$200,000 to cover remediation. The land bank owns this site and the non-profit provides maintenance funded through the Clean and Green Program. Today the site is home to a wetland and it is expected to stay this way in perpetuity thanks to strong local advocacy.⁸⁸

DLBA are close allies with the Genesee County Land Bank. They share similar demographics and characteristics in regards to vacancy and foreclosure. Genesee County Land Bank is one of the most successful land banking models in the United States and can provide lessons for future operations at DLBA. As stated earlier, Genesee County is unable to provide for a conservation mission. This is in part due to their operational funding primarily streaming from foreclosure auction earnings, and these funds do not meet conservation investments required.⁸⁹ Therefore, it is imperative for the bank to work within their financial means in order to provide a baseline mechanism for land stewardship and account for additional grants made available to them. This provides evidence for DLBA's future endeavors. DLBA similar to the Genesee County Land Bank will not provide a conservation mission in the short-term, because of foreclosure

⁸⁶ *Clean & Green*. Genesee County Land Bank: http://www.thelandbank.org/clean_green_prog.asp

⁸⁷ *Clean & Green Program Description*. Genesee County Land Bank: http://www.thelandbank.org/downloads/program_description_2014_1.pdf

⁸⁸ Interview with Christina Kelly, Director of Planning and Neighborhood Revitalization, Genesee County Land Bank Authority, 21 March 2014.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*.

priorities. Additionally, DLBA is more overwhelmed than the Genesee Land Bank based on the magnitude of vacant land. However, similar to the Genesee County Land Bank it is important for DLBA to understand the non-profit sector and their interest in productive reuses of public land.

Vacant Land Management Models In Detroit's Context

Land Trusts

There are 43 active land trusts throughout Michigan that have conserved 161,819 acres with about half of those under easements.⁹⁰ Land trusts in Detroit have not been as active as some have hoped they would be. Land trusts located in the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) region have steered away from conducting projects in Detroit because of a clash of conservation missions mixed with insecure finance. Some trusts in Wayne County may not realize the conservation value of urban vacant land, nor can they handle remediating long-time soil contamination. They believe that vacant land should be stabilized. However, they believe it can be stabilized through methods other than conservation. Some believe that vacant land redevelopment and conservation should have different sets of criteria. Additionally, some land trusts have made the assumption that carrying out stewardship in Detroit will come at significantly high cost to their agency accounting for the level of maintenance required.⁹¹ Innovation Ecological is a unique initiative, and understanding Detroit's mass blight ignites the reality of how much land truly needs remediation and frequent care for the initiative to succeed. This brings stress upon the model that will be in charge of ultimately managing it.

Community Land Trust

The CLT model provides strategies for ownership and partnerships with the community. As stated earlier, there are currently no CLTs in Detroit but rather one CDC located in Southwest Detroit called Bridging Communities that is on the verge of transformation. Recently, they have networked with the National Community Land Trust Network to explore this transformation further. Bridging Communities focuses on developing affordable housing. In some cases, they are able to build small greenways and pocket parks within close proximity to affordable housing. Bridging Communities develops primarily on private land. CDCs provide leverage within communities today, but hold a developmental hindrance to conservation since they are unable to implement conservation easements.⁹² The lack of a CLT network in Detroit does not neglect the fact that it may be necessary for the future.

Land Bank

⁹⁰ Chang, Katie. *2010 National Land Trust Census Report: A Look at Voluntary Land Conservation in America*. Ed. Rob Aldrich and Christina Soto: Land Trust Alliance, 2011:17.

⁹¹ Interview with Jill Lewis, Executive Director, Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy, 12 March 2014.

⁹² Interview with Paul Krystyniak, Housing Department Project Manager, Bridging Communities, 12 March 2014.

Michigan has the most progressive land banking system in the United States. In 2004, the Michigan Fast Track Land Bank Legislation was passed which provided the right for the state as well as local and county jurisdictions to create their own land banks. Michigan, banks are able to clear blighted properties by cleaning up liens and clearing titles, holding and auctioning properties tax-exempt during the interim, creating a 5-year 50% percent tax capture on properties and providing public notice to abusive property owners.⁹³ DLBA was at a standstill until recently, and the Michigan Fast Track Land Bank acquired Detroit property in the interim. Today, the State is prepared to transfer 13,000 public properties to DLBA in addition to the 16,000 approved for transfer by the Detroit City Council.⁹⁴ Two-thirds of the earnings from DLBA auctions will go directly towards operations and one-third to the local government.⁹⁵ Most of DLBA's inventory is residential especially in those lower density areas. DLBA admires DFC's Innovation Ecological and its potential cost savings. However, they do understand it is a long road ahead and understand the distinct challenge of rolling out a citywide open green space network.⁹⁶

Section 4: Criteria Considerations

Three evaluative criteria have been established and provide considerations in order to inform DFC with the most significant factors that should be considered regardless of the model chosen. In lieu of measurements, considerations will be evaluated with the proposals to follow. Based on the research conducted, the following criteria have proved to be important in order to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the chosen model. They are listed in chronological order of importance:

1. Transparency
2. Resources
3. Stewardship

Though it was not considered within the evaluative criteria, perpetuity in land use must be guaranteed. Whereas by mission and operation specific models are managers of conserved land in perpetuity, this could be jeopardized when it comes to managing privately owned land. As mentioned earlier, public access is not mandatory on private land. Additionally, conservation easements have the risk of being abused by the landowner (the grantor) of the deed. Whereas this may not have a major impact on Innovation Ecological that intends to conserve primarily publicly owned parcels, the model must be prepared to face this fiscally and operationally.

⁹³ DeWitt, Jessica. *Land Banks*. University of Michigan: <http://www.umich.edu/~econdev/landbank>

⁹⁴ Interview with Alan Mallach, Senior Fellow, Center for Community Progress, 13 March 2014.

⁹⁵ Guillen, Joe. *Detroit Council OKs Transfer of 16,000 Properties to City's Land Bank*. Detroit Free Press. 15 April 2014. <http://www.freep.com/article/20140415/NEWS01/304150108/Detroit-land-bank-homes>

⁹⁶ Interview with Mike Brady, Detroit Land Bank Authority, 25 March 2014.

Transparency

This criterion emphasizes the importance for the chosen model to maximize transparency implying that transparency is met through communication, openness and buy-in. Transparency is two-tiered: political and community transparency. Political stakeholders should understand the social and economic value of investing in Innovation Ecological, and the general public must understand these values as well.

Political Transparency:

For the first time in nearly 100 years, Detroiters voted for their city council members based on the geographic districts they represent. Prior to the last municipal election, the 9 city council members that represent each district were voted at the city-scale rather than by district. This contributed to a lack of transparency between the Mayor and the City Council when it came to urban development. With the passing of the Detroit City Charter, which took effect in 2012, 7 council members were elected by district and 2 elected citywide.⁹⁷

Additionally, Detroit's Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr is confident of Detroit's rebound from bankruptcy.⁹⁸ When he is expected to exit his position later this year, it is assumed that Mayor Duggan will receive Detroit's first balanced budget in decades. When Duggan resumes fiscal operations, the new Charter is expected to help provide more efficient direction between Duggan's administration and the City Council.⁹⁹ With more localized policy, planning is anticipated to be better target the unique problems of every individual neighborhood regardless of density. This is favored over citywide policy, which has historically contributed to disproportionate policies.

Whereas neither public offices are able to make fiscal decisions in the interim, it is believed that the Mayor and the City Council are transparent and collaborative across long-term priorities and transparent with proposed initiatives such as those included in DFC's Strategic Framework.¹⁰⁰ This is positive news for Innovation Ecological.

⁹⁷ *Detroit City Council Districts*. Data Driven Detroit. 2013. <http://datadrivendetroit.org/projects/city-council-elections-by-district>

⁹⁸ Helms, Matt. *One Year Later: Kevyn Orr Confident of Detroit Rebound from Bankruptcy*. Detroit Free Press, 24 Mar. 2014. <http://www.freep.com/article/20140323/OPINION05/303230134/Detroit-emergency-manager-Kevyn-Orr-bankruptcy>

⁹⁹ The City Council will remain the final vote for all public affairs.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Rudy Serra, Democrat for State Representative, 6 May 2014.

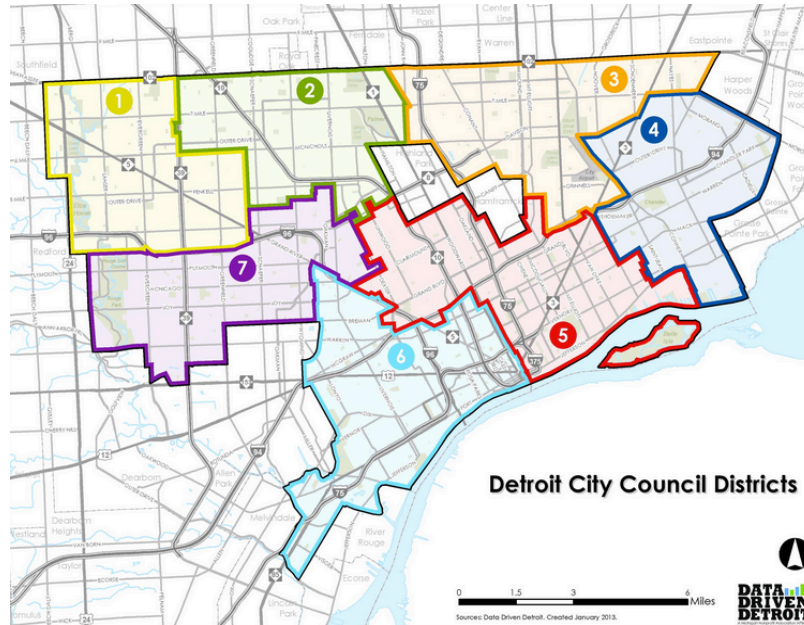


Figure 7: Detroit City Council Districts

Considerations:

- The City Council and Mayor Michael Duggan must immediately provide new policies into Detroit’s land immediately upon the Emergency Manager’s departure
- Innovation Ecological should be examined by each district of the City Council and this will require consistent contact between each district council member and the model
- All political stakeholders should carefully measure the short-term success of the roll out of Innovation Ecological in order to estimate long-term improvements
- There will be strong pressure from Detroiters for the local government to stabilize blight in the short-term. The Council districts as well as the Mayor should prepare for public hearings alongside the selected model and DFC’s implementation team

Community Transparency:

In the past, there has been mixed opinions from the public based on agricultural policy, and the role it play on race in Detroit. Additionally, there has been opposition from the public on certain urban developments with the fears of potential gentrification, exclusion and further divide. On the other hand, Detroit’s growing community garden network has provided economic stability and measurable impacts in some of Detroit’s most blighted neighborhoods.¹⁰¹ Therefore the model selected must provide reassurance, open-communication, trust and obtain community buy-in prior to implementing the initiative.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

Evidence must be provided that productive land reuses for green networks increase engagement, promote inclusivity and promote a stronger sense of community entitlement.

Considerations:

- Innovation Ecological should coincide its values with the values of each community in which it is implemented. To achieve this, the model should engage with local CDC's in every neighborhood where Innovation Ecological is implemented, regardless of density
- Innovation Ecological should be inviting and encouraging in design, methodology and outreach. It should motivate Detroiters to get involved, volunteer and enjoy
- The model should depend on CDC's representing local residents to provide suggestions for improvements and ideas
- The model should work with CDC's to hire local individuals and groups as contracted stewards
- The model should strive for public access for each private parcel acquired and prepare for initial opposition from private landowners

Resources

This criterion emphasizes the importance for the chosen model to maximize its resources. Resources are required for Innovation Ecological and are anticipated to strengthen throughout time. Resources are defined as fiscal support and operational support. This criterion is two-tiered: the first tier includes long-term funding and additional grants. The second tier focuses on capacity building.

Long-term funding:

Long-term funding is crucial for the success and growth of Innovation Ecological. Whereas certain models are built to facilitate revenue through membership fees and donations, all models proposed should engage in partnerships from different sectors including the public, private, non-profit, institutional and philanthropic. Engaging with acquired partners can provide additional finance for land remediation, stewardship operations and trainings and targeted improvements.¹⁰²

Considerations:

- At least two different long-term partnerships are expected to be able to address the different steps required in order to fiscally strengthen Innovation Ecological in perpetuity. It can also provide the model with a sufficient baseline revenue stream in order to solicit additional investment as a response to strong financial security¹⁰³
- A model's strong leveraging staff can facilitate long-term funding, i.e., grant writers

¹⁰² Examples of key partners: EPA, Bureau of Land Management, Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan, The Land Trust Alliance and The Conservation Fund.

¹⁰³ Based on insights from interview with Tom Woiwode, Director of GreenWays Initiative, Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan, 20 March 2014.

- The model should be able to increase its memberships and donations while utilizing an edge treatment to obtain attraction

Capacity building:

Capacity building is key for the success of the model. Through acquired partners, different networks and organizations can support the model by facilitating advocacy for the model. They help drive stronger policy for Innovation Ecological, can help provide periodic research and training opportunities for staff and contracted workers, and can provide expertise into soliciting volunteers. Monthly visits from volunteers to specific spaces are ideal for opportunities such as park cleanup and public education offerings.

Consideration:

- The model will have a stronger ability to maximize its internal capacity if they are connected to a network organization such as the Land Trust Alliance

Stewardship

Stewardship is defined here as the management of the environment through conservation and sustainable practices. Based on data provided, the chosen model should provide seasonal stewardship at minimum. Stewardship should include the care of ecological infrastructure, i.e. upkeep of tress, grass, plants and vegetation. It must also include upkeep of the grounds including trails and passageways. The physical infrastructure should be maintained should they be designed as fences to create boundaries. It is recommended that each site feature aerial and ground level systems to inspect conditions of spaces off-site. Contracted stewards should engage in seasonal stewardship training programs in order to best provide and evaluate each unique parcel.

Considerations:

- The model should be able to provide for a minimum of seasonal maintenance of the physical and ecological infrastructure. As specified earlier, monthly engagement opportunities can invite volunteers to get involved
- The model should be able to financially take advantage of off-site maintenance inspection using Geographic Information Systems and aerial imagery¹⁰⁴
- The model should be capable to administer seasonal stewardship trainings for contracted stewards
- It is recommended that each contracted group provide stewardship within their immediate district in order to reduce costs for travel, gasoline, etc.

Section 5: Proposals and Analysis

¹⁰⁴ Budgetary allocation can finance for on-site cameras. Should especially be implemented in larger contingent parcels. Conversations with SEMCOG may provide the best policy for this.

Although the CLT model was highlighted throughout this report, it was not incorporated into any of the proposals. Though they use successful tools and are able to implement open green space with or in lieu of affordable housing, it was not considered since a CLT network does not yet exist in Detroit. However, the CLT model can shed some light into Detroit's urban development in the future. Additionally, the status quo was not analyzed within this report, as the local government is no longer able to maintain widespread vacancy.

Proposal 1: Regional or State Land Trust

This proposal recommends that one land trust own and maintain Innovation Ecological. This can be designated from a regional land trust or a statewide land trust. State level is recommended in order to provide stronger advocacy from an already established trust, yet still be able to coincide with the local needs of the initiative. Currently, the Michigan Land Association is the largest land trust in the state and has protected 170 natural sanctuaries in the SEMCOG region. There is also the Nature Conservancy (Michigan) who has become interested in approaching land conservation in Detroit once an appropriate plan is in place for them to do so.¹⁰⁵ Communication with the Heart of the Lakes Center for Land Conservation Policy may be able to provide recommendations for an applicable trust. It is recommended that this proposal provide an annual competitive bidding process in order to hire community groups for stewardship. Some trusts have stewardship departments that are appropriate staff to facilitate stewardship hiring. The land trust is recommended to already have a pre-existing relationship with either the Land Trust Alliance or the Conservation Fund.

Analysis

Transparency:

Political: The land trust may come across initial hurdles unless they have proven themselves to already be an established trusts with a handful of successful projects. Because Innovation Ecological works mostly with publicly owned land, they must obtain trust and present themselves to the City Council and the Mayor. They need the capacity to work with thousands of transferred parcels. The trust should prepare to attend public meetings between political and community stakeholders for a period of time. Based on the traditional nature of the work land trusts do and a smaller number of them operating in urban areas, this may become an overwhelming task for a single entity to utilize, especially one that has never operated in this context.

Community: A land trust must have at least one CDC in each district of the City Council that they are able to partner with for Innovation Ecological. This should coincide with their mission of tying trust operations to community affairs. However, a single land trust may find this task overwhelming. A land trust may be trained to complete this work in

¹⁰⁵ Based on interview with Rich Tuzinsky, Director of Land Protection, The Nature Conservancy (Michigan), 18 March 2014.

one district but not all 9 initially. This is another consideration for the initiatives implementation.

Resources:

Long-term funding: Many land trusts in Michigan are connected to the Conservation Fund, and the Fund has a growing interest in learning more about the options for Detroit. The Conservation Fund provides loans. The Fund can be a partner that fiscally supports Innovation Ecological. Additionally, Heart of the Lakes provides local assistance across Michigan for conservation. Therefore, this model goes have the opportunity to obtain long-term funding. These networks are also able to facilitate a relationship between federal providers and a trust such as the EPA. Whereas this has not been standard in the past, the connection between conservation and Detroit is expected to strengthen. As stated in the introduction, the EPA is already addressing Detroit's vacant land. Additionally, a trust is assumed to have a grant writer on staff.

Capacity building: Many land trusts are connected to the Land Trust Alliance to build their internal capacity and strengthen operations. Whereas a land trust is able to strengthen the roles of their staffers, it may be difficult to strengthen specific operational policies due to the fact that Innovation Ecological is an undertaking that does not compare to any other urban project in regards to scale. Additionally, it may take patience for one entity to solicit and convince Detroiters of the value of volunteering for the initiative in the short-term. The model has a stronger chance of successfully building their internal capacity once a successful pilot of the initiative can be evaluated.

Stewardship:

Whereas a land trust provides stewardship in perpetuity, one entity may not be able to address the scale of Innovation Ecological considering the number of annual contracts that would have to be efficiently managed. Detroit is large in geography and it may become costly and inefficient for one entity to provide its operations across a citywide scale. Whereas PHS's LandCare Program successfully administrated 14 contracts, these were assisted by the city, which is not applicable in Detroit's context. It would take a massive effort for a single entity to establish trust with each CDC to provide for stewardship. Additionally, a single land trust does have the ability to provide off-site management as long as their operational budgets allocate for this.

Proposal 2: Consortium of Regional Land Trusts

This proposal recommends a Consortium of existing regional land trusts. SEMIWILD is an existing collaboration of 9 land trusts throughout the SEMCOG region that work to protect and preserve open space, green corridors and other natural areas. SEMIWILD trusts are primarily funded by donations as well as and partnerships with Foundations. They also network with local institutions and provide outpost positions for institutions that plan to lead as *Ambassadors*.¹⁰⁶ This is a great tool, because it supports the fact that local players have a stake in the land and are becoming conservation-driven.

¹⁰⁶ SEMIWILD. <http://www.semiwild.org>

6 of the 9 trusts within SEMIWILD provide for Wayne County alone.¹⁰⁷ As stated earlier in the research, these land trusts as individual entities have been unable to provide for conservation efforts in Detroit. Now, with Innovation Ecological as a valid proposal for providing a better land use typology, DFC can begin to engage in a discussion with SEMIWILD to address the internal capacity required for them to provide for the initiative. If all 9 trusts combine operations and streamline missions, they can begin to acquire publicly owned parcels through transfers and privately owned parcels through easements. Land would be owned and maintained by the SEMIWILD consortium in perpetuity. It is assumed that all 9 land trusts enforce stewardship through volunteer efforts. To provide jobs, this proposal suggests that the Consortium hire stewards through a competitive bidding process. To strengthen the operations and capacity of the Consortium in order to address the magnitude of initiative, additional partners will need to be locked in.

A strong consideration for DFC is to expect mixed opinions from trusts within SEMIWILD. Some of these trusts have never even considered working within Detroit's city limits. It will be important to prepare and present the opportunities for investments, and benefits of the initiative for each land trust that can additionally help increase engagement across the SEMCOG region as a whole.

Analysis

Transparency:

Political: Because of Mayor Duggan's focus on new and productive land uses, the transparency between Duggan and the City Council and the proven evidence into the success of green infrastructure for cities, SEMWILD is assumed to be able attain political transparency. This includes transparent relationships with political stakeholders similar to the assumed level of transparency held with each individual trust and their local jurisdictions. It is important for SEMIWILD with the assistance of DFC, to prepare to advocate, and guarantee the inclusivity and economic opportunities of Innovation Ecological to the City Council.

Community: Trusts within the SEMIWILD collaboration already have their own degrees and mechanisms for community engagement. Many open green spaces and local land policies are tied to community priorities and provide the public with the opportunity to participate. Using the existing engagement tools that each individual trust provides can initiate a streamlined systematic plan for engaging Detroiters to utilize the full benefits of Innovation Ecological. It is key that SEMIWILD frequently conducts outreach with every district. This is achievable with the larger Consortium rather than one trust. With transparency gained across associated CDC's, the public will be more included to be open to the initiative.

Resources:

Long-term funding: A consortium of SEMIWILD would be able to pull together their existing resources to create one streamlined long-term fiscal itinerary. All 9 land trusts

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Jonathan Jarosz, Executive Director, Heart of the Lakes, 21 March 2014.

receive donations and membership fees. It is assumed that all trusts have leveraging staff that solicit grants required to implement conservation efforts. Additionally, the trusts should engage with The Conservation Fund as one consortium. With the security and support of these networks, fiscal support for the consortium can thrive.

Capacity building: It is assumed that most (if not all) SEMIWILD trusts are in a relationship with the Land Trust Alliance. The Consortium can also use their other existing partnerships as leverage to address the streamlining of capacity building also that would required for the collaborative to manage Innovation Ecological. Their internal resources combined can be applied to provide a competitive bidding process in the short-term. Their existing network of volunteers can help snowball for additional volunteers across the city and the region to support the initiative.

Stewardship:

Contracting stewards should not be a difficult task once the Consortium is in relationship with a local CDC in each neighborhood. Multiple bids can be administered to master stewardship seasonally and simultaneously across the entire city, and the Consortium can better help facilitate this. It is assumed that SEMIWILD trusts already have off-site management systems in place within their operational costs, and streamlining these can provide largely safe and secure spaces.

Additional Consideration: Land Bank and Land Trust Collaboration

Rather than a proposal, this is a consideration for DFC if they intend to expand Innovation Ecological into other city initiatives for blight removal. It emphasizes the need for a land trust to support DLBA's neighborhood stabilization initiative. A land trust can become allies with the bank to provide interim stewardship to newly demolished parcels under the banks holding. Using a clean and green approach, this proposal will be able to connect a model to the Neighborhood Stabilization Program. Stakeholders understand that Detroit may never see its peak population again. This reality proves that low-vacancy areas throughout the city may no longer be appropriately zoned for residential, commercial or industrial structures based on density trends. Therefore, a clean and green approach can provide a land typology for these sites where there is low market demand and high vacancy. The exploration of an opportunity for a land trust to place easements on some of these parcels if they purchase land from DLBA becomes a possibility to be further explored.

Section 6: Analysis Summary

Proposal 1: Regional or State Land Trust

A land trust can protect Innovation Ecological in perpetuity. It is also anticipated to become a growing model throughout the Detroit Metropolitan Area in the future. Though a specific land trust was not provided for this proposal, the regional or state scales were provided because they would better address the initiative and local concerns rather than a

national trust. Whereas this proposal meets certain considerations for each evaluative criterion, when accounting for the scale of this initiative and anticipated accountability an individual land trust may not be able to efficiently address Innovation Ecological.

Proposal 2: Consortium of Regional Land Trusts

SEMWILD is an already existing collaboration of land trusts within the SEMCOG region that have conserved different scales of land from parcel to landscape. Establishing a stronger merger across all 9 trusts is implementable and can strengthen to become a leading model. This consortium can combine their diverse experiences, partnerships and similar tools that are currently used around the SEMCOG region to work with DFC on what potential they have to successfully own and maintain Innovation Ecological in perpetuity. It is stronger with the criteria considerations provided compared to one land trust.

Section 7: Conclusions and Next Steps

In conclusion, when the original central policy issue is revisited: *What is the most appropriate conservation land management model for Detroit to utilize in order to stabilize widespread vacant land?* It is recommended that DFC utilize a collaboration of land trusts located in the SEMCOG region to strengthen to become a Consortium that addresses Detroit's vacant land. The 9 land trusts that make up SEMIWILD can still operate as individual entities to target their specific counties and communities, yet join forces to begin to discuss Innovation Ecological. Whereas there has been a lack of transparency with land trusts in the region to address Detroit's vacant land in the past, the existing operations of each trust can provide appropriate operational tools and expertise in order to acquire and conserve vacant land under their larger title. The 6 trusts that currently operate in the Wayne County area can provide a foot in the door for the entire Consortium. This proposal provides local and regional planning, and possesses the possibility for resources from the national scale.

To reiterate, Innovation Ecological is a long-term initiative. First, the planning priorities of the City Council and Mayor Duggan must be addressed and the Master Plans must account for future productive land uses that incorporate green and blue infrastructure in order for Innovation Ecological to become a reality. With this recommendation looking at the long-term strength and potential of Innovation Ecological, a number of next steps are recommended for DFC to consider:

Step 1: DFC should build communications with the Conservation Fund. The Conservation Fund has indicated that the network is very interested in the overall approach of Innovation Ecological. They hope to learn more about the mechanics behind the initiative and expanding their network of Detroit projects.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Based on interview with Ole Amundsen, Land Conservation Loan Program Manager and Strategic Conservation Program Manager, The Conservation Fund, 7 March 2014.

Step 2: DFC should approach SEMIWILD and obtain buy-in. SEMIWILD should then engage in a dialogue with the Greening of Detroit in order to match conservation missions, designs, strategize and establish a tentative timeline.

Step 3: It is recommended to connect with local groups like the Detroit Mower Gang to help stabilize vacant land in the interim prior to implementation. The Detroit Mower Gang is a successful collaboration of mowers that clean up abandoned green spaces and playgrounds throughout the city. They may ultimately be interested in Innovation Ecological stewardship.¹⁰⁹ Looking forward, additional stewards will be recruited and encouraged to apply for contracts through the facilitation of local CDC's in neighborhoods.

Step 4: As stated in the introduction, DFC may be able to partner with the Detroit Department of Water and Sewerage to facilitate the management of storm water retention ponds in perpetuity. Continuing this dialogue to strategize is key.

Step 5: DFC should engage in dialogue with public authorities on the best policy for transferring public land. They should also establish a tentative list of private parcels and engage in a dialogue with landowners about potential public access.

Step 6: Although implementation was not the focus of this report, Innovation Ecological is recommended to take an edge treatment approach. As referenced in the research, edge treatments are recommended for citywide initiatives in order to build capital and assess the success of a piloted site prior to investing in more. That way, measurable success can provide investment and policy for disinvested areas. PHS acknowledges vacant lots that are within well-traveled corridors surrounding existing development are a good starting point.¹¹⁰

Step 7: Most importantly, DFC is strongly encouraged to continue its civic engagement with Detroit's communities. Acquired partnerships with CDC's may facilitate this communication. It is especially important to meet the needs of communities at the grassroots level where Innovation Ecological will have the biggest impact. It is important to encourage the greater public of the social and economic benefits of the initiative, and reiterate that disproportionate policies and practices are no longer accepted.

Whereas the final recommendation was provided based on the research provided in this report, the entire contents of this report should guide DFC into making the best decision for their implementation team. A combination of other theories, case studies, models and interview data emphasized throughout the paper can provide additional and proposals and recommendations. The finalization of a model will begin once conversations with different stakeholders commence, the Emergency Manager departs and the final Master Plan of Policies has been approved.

¹⁰⁹ *Home of Detroit's Lawnmower Gang*. <http://www.mowergang.com>

¹¹⁰ *PHS Philadelphia LandCare: Reinvesting in Philadelphia Neighborhoods*. Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, 2013: 1.

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Figure 1: *2012 Detroit Strategic Framework Plan*. Detroit Future City, 2013: 98.

Figure 2: *2012 Detroit Strategic Framework Plan*. Detroit Future City, 2013: 28.

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Ole Amundsen, Land Conservation Loan Program Manager and Strategic Conservation Program Manager, The Conservation Fund, 7 March 2014.

Mike Brady, Detroit Land Bank Authority, 25 March 2014.

Bob Grossman, Executive Director, Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, 13 March 2014.

Dean Hay, Director of Green Infrastructure, The Greening of Detroit, 20 March 2014.

Jonathan Jarosz, Executive Director, Heart of the Lakes, 21 March 2014.

Liz Johnston, Director of Conservation Transactions, Forterra, 14 March 2014.

Christina Kelly, Director of Planning and Neighborhood Revitalization, Genesee County Land Bank Authority, 21 March 2014.

Paul Krystyniak, Housing Department Project Manager, Bridging Communities, 12 March 2014.

Jill Lewis, Executive Director, Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy, 12 March 2014.

Alan Mallach, Senior Fellow, Center for Community Progress, 13 March 2014.

Dara O'Byrne, Land Use Convener, Detroit Future City, 13 February 2014.

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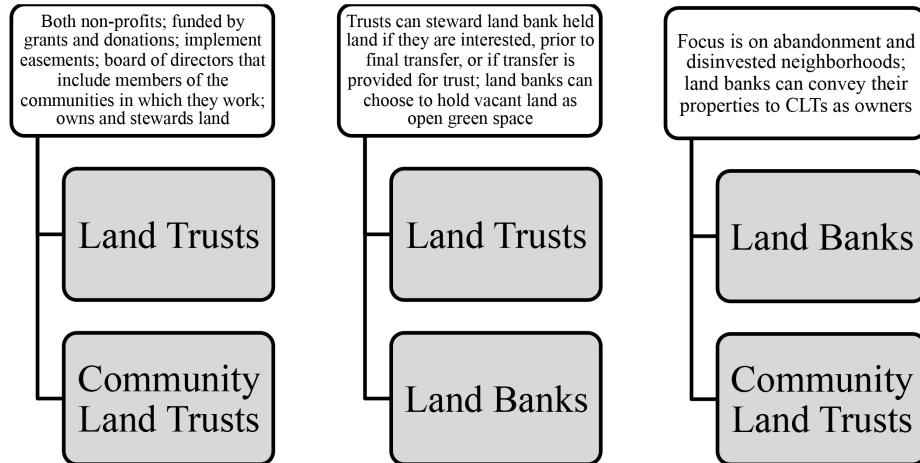
Rich Tuzinsky, Director of Land Protection, The Nature Conservancy (Michigan), 18 March 2014.

Tom Woiwode, Director of GreenWays Initiative, Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan, 20 March 2014.

Appendices

Appendix A: Vacant Land Management Models Comparative Analysis

	Land Trusts	Community Land Trusts	Land Banks
Other titles	Land Conservatives, Conservation Land Trusts	CLTs. Overlapping missions with CDCs, Community Development Financial Institutions	Municipal Land Banks, Land Bank Authorities, Land Revitalization Corporations
What is it?	Non-profit organization that actively works to conserve public and private land in perpetuity	Non-profit organization that acquires and manages land on behalf of a community. Protects the affordability of housing and land in perpetuity	Public authorities that actively work to manage and develop vacant, abandoned and tax-foreclosed properties. Responsible for cleaning up titles and liens on properties, cleaning the lot, then finding productive re-uses of properties, with the ultimate goal of neighborhood. Under law, cities, townships and counties are able to create land banks, or utilize state-wide land banks
Board of Trustees/Directors	Yes, often residents of the communities in which they operate in	Yes, often residents of the communities in which they operate in	No, elected public leadership
Do they own land?	Yes	Yes	Yes
In perpetuity?	Yes	Yes	No, they own land until it is transferred to appropriate owners for productive re-use
Public or private land?	They own private land acquired through easements. They own public land if transferred to them or purchased	They own and maintain public and private land. Acquired through government, easements, deed-restrictions, ground-lease or fee-simple ownership with other stakeholder	They own transferred public parcels, and the structures on them
Conservation Easements?	Yes, on privately owned land, when landowner voluntarily donates land. The trust works landowners to better maintain and preserve land	If a CLT has a conservation mission, they have the ability to implement easements on privately owned land	No, land banks do not own land in perpetuity, or implement conservation easements
Geographic Scale	Site, regional, landscape	Site, neighborhood, regional, landscape	Site, neighborhood, regional, county, state
Do they perform stewardship?	Yes, they provide frequent stewardship for parcels they own in perpetuity. Stewardship is either completed by staff, or contracted to community groups and other institutions	Yes, they provide elaborate stewardship for structures and land in perpetuity. It is either completed through CLTs stewardship operations, or contracted to community groups and other institutions	Yes, they provide stewardship for structures and lots. Sometimes, they contract out with community groups or experienced workers to clean and maintain land, until the space is provided with a better use
In perpetuity?	Yes	Yes	No, only while land is within their holding
Financial structure	Funded through membership fees, donations, foundational, local, state, federal grants	Funded through membership fees, donations, foundational, local, state, federal grants	Funded through Hardest Hit Fund, foundational grants, local, state and federal grants, tax surcharges, and bonds. Generates revenue through the resale of tax-foreclosed properties
Tax-exempt?	Yes, exempt from taxes on land. Sometimes they voluntarily make payments in lieu of taxes	Property taxes are the responsibility of community members living on the land. The CLT is exempt from taxes on land, or may make payments in lieu	Yes, structures within their holding are exempt from property taxes. 5-year 50% tax recapture on all properties
Pros	Works on conserving land in which local governments or private landowners may not be able to do so. Provides for communities and their missions	Enforces affordability in perpetuity, as well as improves community health, engagement and empowerment, sustainability and representative governance within communities	Improves blighted properties through short-term financing. Improves the local tax roll. Engages with districts to better maintain properties and vacant lots. Enforces long-term policies for planning and revitalization
Cons	Financial trouble if unable to provide for stewardship fees or legal fees for easement abuse. Many land trusts are new, underfunded, with weak initial structures in place. May have to carry out residential evictions	Complications when working in market-rate areas; higher risk of land insecurity	Understaffed, overwhelming number of properties
Model within Michigan context	43 land trusts actively working to preserve and conserve ecosystems, wetlands, farmland, wildlife through scientific approaches. They work only in critical environments with pressing priorities	4 active CLTs throughout Michigan. 1 working at the county scale, 3 at the local	Michigan has the most progressive land banking system in the United States. Tens of thousands of properties throughout Michigan have been improved through land banking
Model within Detroit context	9 land trusts within SEMCOG region. 6 operate in Wayne County. Not much activity in Detroit yet due to clashing values over conservation, massive remediation required	No CLTs working in Detroit currently. CDCs develop affordable housing in the interim. CDCs looking to work with CLTs in the near future to build capacity and work more efficiently	Detroit Land Bank Authority: major priority is to stabilize neighborhoods through clearing vacant and abandoned properties, auctioning off savable properties, and holding abusive homeowners accountable. Open green space is not a priority for DLBA in the short-term



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Appendix B: Land Trust Year 1 Management Plan

This land trust year 1 management checklist comes from the Maine Coast Heritage Trust. It is provided to give an idea of management considerations, but management plans will vary across trusts and regions.¹¹¹

- Establish tax status
- Secure property insurance (if applicable)
- Conduct natural resource inventory
- Conduct additional studies
- Develop basic map indicating cover types and significant features and structures
- Locate and mark boundaries
- Install signage
- Learn about local context and stakeholders
- Establish protocol for inclusion of partners
- Identify and address particular issues, i.e. boundary issues, structure removal, etc.
- Identify property maintenance (if applicable)
- Identify monitoring protocol

¹¹¹ Brown, Hugh and Andrew Pitz. *Caring for Land Trust Properties*. Land Trust Alliance, 2008: 196.

Appendix C: Conservation Easement Draft

This conservation easement draft is based off of an example that uses the Colorado Open Lands Trust as the grantee:¹¹²

GRANTOR:

By:

(Type name here)

STATE OF COLORADO)

) ss.

COUNTY OF _____)

The foregoing instrument was acknowledged before me this ____ day of _____, 200__, by _____ (*Grantor name*) _____ in his/her individual capacity as a ____ owner of the Property.

Witness my hand and official seal.

My commission expires: _____

Notary Public

GRANTEE:

COLORADO OPEN LANDS,
a Colorado non-profit corporation

¹¹² Data provided by *Land Trust Standards and Practices*, Land Trust Alliance, 2004

By _____

STATE OF COLORADO)
) ss.
COUNTY OF _____)

The foregoing instrument was acknowledged before me this ____ day of _____, 200__, by Daniel E. Pike as President of Colorado Open Lands, a Colorado non-profit corporation.

Witness my hand and official seal.

My commission expires: _____

Notary Public

EXHIBIT A

Legal Description of the Property

EXHIBIT B

Building Envelopes / Map of Property

EXHIBIT C

(Retained) Water Rights

EXHIBIT D

Sample Notice of Transfer of Property

To: Colorado Open Lands (“Grantee”)
From: **[Insert name of fee owner]** (“Grantor”)

Pursuant to Section 10 of the Deed of Conservation Easement, Grantee is hereby notified by Grantor of the transfer of the fee simple interest in the subject Property legally described in **Exhibit A** attached hereto effective **[insert date of closing]** to **[insert name of new Grantor]**, who can be reached at **[insert name, legal address, phone and fax number]**.

GRANTOR:

By: _____

Title: _____

STATE OF COLORADO)
) ss.
COUNTY OF _____)

The foregoing instrument was acknowledged before me this ____ day of _____, 200__, by _____ as of _____.

Witness my hand and official seal.

My commission expires: _____

Notary Public

Date: _____

Appendix D: Interview Summaries

1. **Rob Aldrich** is the Director of Community Conservation at the Land Trust Alliance (LTA). He provided insights on the successes of the LTA network, as well as thoroughly defined conservation easements, and the importance of the land trust staying involved in perpetuity. He stressed that land trusts have not worked in brownfield redevelopment as much as he had hoped, and that it is an impediment to the nature of the land trust in the urban context. He established that the Western Reserve Land Conservancy in Cleveland is the closest case study to Detroit. Because there is not enough land trust activity in the Detroit area, he believes that Detroit should utilize a national approach, with an organization such as The Conservation Fund, where they hold experience in macro-level conservation developments and have financial security. He then recommends they team up with a local trust (if applicable) to understand the most context specific characteristics of the vacant parcels proposed for Innovation Ecological. In regards to other models aside from land trusts, he notified that the Athens Land Trust is the only example of a successful Community Land Trust with conservation priorities.

2. **Ole Amundsen** is the Land Conservation Loan Program Manager and Strategic Conservation Program Manager at The Conservation Fund. The Conservation Fund has historically worked in rural areas, and supports the federal government by holding land for them in the interim of a sale or development. However, more and more they are aiming at urban vacancy as a means for conservation. He understands Detroit's need for vacant land reform, but he has yet to analyze a success story of vacancy at the scale of Detroit. However, many cities are moving in the same direction as Detroit, especially throughout the Rust Belt region. As the local government cannot be held accountable, the private sector will have to provide and invest for Detroit's open space network. The project will not be realized unless sufficient grants and/or tax revenue flows. He thinks that a land bank has the flexibility to act as a land trust, if they so choose too. Innovation Ecological is going to be expensive to roll out, and he recommends that it be implemented in smaller phases. He also says social constructs of vacancy in Detroit may hinder the initiative, and it's important to educate the public on the importance of changing Detroit's landscape immediately for green priorities.

3. **Mike Brady** is on loan at the Detroit Land Bank Authority from the Center for Community Progress where he was the Vice President for Policy Research. He summarized the ultimate goals of the Land Bank: neighborhood stabilization (or blight removal), lawsuits against homeowners who misuse their properties, and the consolidation of public land. He believes that Innovation Ecological makes a lot of sense, but that the biggest challenge is implementation (time and construction), securing grants and its overall approach. The biggest consideration in his opinion was public engagement, and if these open green spaces will meet that consideration. He does not understand how a land trust and a land bank could work together, notifying that it would take significant operational changes. As much as the Detroit Land Bank would like to provide green initiatives within their structure, the resources for this are not in place.

4. **Bob Grossman** is the Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society (PHS). He explained their relationship with the Neighborhood Garden Trust, which is a paternal trust that facilitates open green space development with PHS. Since the 1990's, PHS has provided Philadelphia with vibrant open green spaces in once vacant parcels. PHS provides the stewardship, and has an organized calendar and system for doing so. He stated that with the help of PHS, these new developments have improved public safety and quality of life in communities, as well as the local real estate market. He recommends an edge treatment for Detroit, suggesting they implement green space in invested neighborhoods first, in order to create the financial infrastructure for the rest of the city.

5. **Dean Hay** is the Director of Green Infrastructure at The Greening of Detroit. Their initiatives are based on community need, and they engage the community by distributing testing applications twice a year, where they select the best proposals based on what more prevalent. They work at the most local scale by developing individual parcels, and he recommends that Innovation Ecological take a similar approach. They collaborate with DFC when their practices overlap with the Strategic Framework. Their Vacant Land Program has analyzed different treatments across Detroit in which Innovation Ecological will be most appropriate. He has established that Innovation Ecological could also fall into their Urban Agriculture Department if applicable, and could provide for food resources of vacant parcels in the future.

6. **Jonathan Jarosz** is the Executive Director of the Heart of the Lakes Center for Land Conservation Policy. He stated that a number of land trusts in the Detroit area do not have the capacity to provide for widespread vacant land, which has been problematic. He was also concerned that land trusts throughout Michigan suffer in attaining both relational and transactional skills. Land trusts in general are rare to jump up at large-scale remediation projects, because trusts are more so interested in saving what already exists, rather than creating something new. He recommends that the development in Detroit take a hot spot approach, in order to provide pilot models in the city, that way this successful model will provide more partnerships and more capacity building. These hot spots can then provide the policy and implementation for the rest of the city. He recommends connecting with the Western Reserve Land Conservancy in Cleveland, to understand their approach, since it serves as a close example to Detroit's landscape.

7. **Liz Johnston** is the Director of Conservation Transactions at Forterra, a regional land trust in Washington. Forterra provides policy for local governments on the best strategies to utilize when implementing green space. In Seattle, Forterra has been able to develop underserved communities by redeveloping vacant lots. They provided spaces that include storm water retention ponds, urban farms, and forests. Forterra leases land to other groups for stewardship, and have been able to engage the broader community within this aspect. She believes that green open space networks are a priority for cities, and that land trusts are a good answer to land use.

8. **Christina Kelly** is the Director of Planning and Neighborhood Revitalization at the Genesee County Land Bank Authority. They are able to provide for specific conservation actions, though conservation is not within the mission. Similar to the Detroit Land Bank Authority, their biggest priority is blight removal. They implement their Clean and Green

program, which invites the community to participate in the stewardship of vacant lots in Flint. For the conservation practices they are able to implement, they are unable to do so at a citywide scale. She understands that conservation missions are dependent on specific land banks, and whether they have the capacity to do so. If the legal structure was in place, then a land bank could authorize a conservation easement, though it's not a common practice. She recommends that Detroit work with an established land trust that would be able to manage the easement, raise the appropriate funds, and conduct programming and stewardship themselves, rather than rely on government and quasi-governmental agencies.

9. **Paul Krystyniak** is a Project Manager in the Housing Department at Bridging Communities, a CDC in Southwest Detroit. Bridging Communities is in the process of finding a Community Land Trust to work with, in order to carry out development projects. Whereas conservation is not one of the initiatives, they have been able to carry out small greenway developments in the form of pocket parks. He understands the lack of cohesion in terms of publicly owned properties and parcels, and that can affect the work of his organization when it comes to future development. He believes that the Detroit Land Bank Authority may finally be able to create simplicity, and can be a great asset for people who want to develop land at the most local level. They can hold parcels until land trusts find the best uses for the land.

10. **Jill Lewis** is the Executive Director at the Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy. They work mostly in non-urban areas where land is primarily privately owned, and authorize easements and technical assistance on these landscapes. They have not been as active in the Detroit area as they would have liked to. This is due to the conservation nature, and many brownfields require too expensive remediation practices, and may require significant financial resources for stewardship. More contamination equates to less conservation value. She understands that brownfields may provide for great land typologies other than conservation. She stated that this is the case for many land trusts in the area. No matter what Detroit decides to do, she recommends that the new open space network utilize public access, so that Detroiters are provided with vibrant spaces.

11. **Alan Mallach** is a Senior Fellow at the Center for Community Progress. He was responsible for contributions to the Land and Building Assets section of DFC's Strategic Framework. He emphasized that much of Detroit's land may not be able to see redevelopment in the future, so Innovation Ecological could provide an alternative use to vacant land. In principle, he foresees significant economic benefits from the initiative, especially when it comes to storm water management. He believes that land trusts may be able to provide the necessities to get Innovation Ecological implemented, though its still going to be a difficult implementation, especially with Detroit's level of contaminated soil all over the city. He also can vision the Land Bank holding parcels for the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department to provide maintenance for storm water management systems if necessary, in lieu of a land trust. Overall, he sees Innovation Ecological as a means to improve the quality of life in communities. Public green space is a priority for Detroiters, and it is time to change the zoning ordinances to meet that priority.

12. **Marcus Presley** is the Senior Policy Associate at The National Community Land Trust Network. The Network provides technical assistance and funding for CLTs and in

some cases CDCs across the country. He is hoping for a much stronger presence of CLTs in the Detroit area in the near future. He thoroughly emphasized how CLTs strengthen community engagement, by including them in the design process. Most CLTs are stable in operation otherwise they would not exist. Similar to Conservation Land Trusts, they may outsource for stewardship efforts, while the trust owns the land. He believes that the best land trust model is one that is grassroots, and started at the bottom to work its way up. If appropriate and legal, he recommends Detroit utilize the Detroit Land Bank Authority to hold public land, and partner with a land trust that can manage stewardship practices before an ultimate use of the land is declared.

13. **Sarah Ryzner** is the Director of Projects at the Thriving Communities Institute of the Western Reserve Land Conservancy. Her team works directly with the Cuyahoga Land Bank in the Cleveland area to demolish blighted structures, clean the plots, and reforest the land. The Land Bank co-owns the land in perpetuity with the land conservancy, and the land conservancy provides stewardship through its Stewardship Conservancy Department. The work can be seen from lot scale, to landscape scale. She understands the importance of connecting open green spaces to a larger network with urban environments, and the land conservancy is in the process of creating green space to connect to the larger regional trail system in the Cleveland Metropolitan Area. Final green spaces come in the form of gardens, orchards, and public art installations to name a few. She recommends that the organization selected to launch Innovation Ecological engage with CDCs and other local groups to better engage the community.

14. **Rudy Serra** is a Democrat for State Representative in Michigan. He understands the historical controversies of the role of agriculture in Detroit, as well as community opposition from certain planning projects, and the difficulty of publicly providing for lower density communities. He believes its time to educate the public on productive uses of land that exclude agriculture, and yet provide an economic boost and engagement. Current day, he believes that Detroit is finally getting the attention it deserves, and when the Emergency Manager departs this summer, Detroit's budget will be balanced for the first time in decades. He has notified that there seems to be strong transparency between Mayor Duggan and the City Council, and that relationship will continue to grow as Duggan transitions the city. This is the first time ever that the City Council has been elected by district scale, rather than city-wide scale, and that will be able to better provide for localized planning. He believes that Innovation Ecological is admirable and achievable.

15. **Rich Tuzinsky** is the Director of Land Protection at The Nature Conservancy in Michigan. His team owns and manages land like a trust, but they also enforce policy and advocacy around land protection for trusts across Michigan. With limited resources, it's crucial to work in critical natural environments. They also set have a stewardship endowment for maintenance. Because of the nature of their scientific approach to conservation, they have yet to work in urban areas. Their partnerships have been with primarily townships and smaller cities, where they can hold land for local governments, until agencies are able to purchase it back. Because they work at a natural landscape level, they have rarely designed community farms and gardens. He believes that every trust is unique in its own way, and if they provide the drive and capacity for establishing an open

space initiative in a city, then they will do so. The Nature Conservancy is following the situation in Detroit very closely, but do not know yet what role they will play in its future, whether that is an active trust, a facilitator, or an advocate.

16. **Tom Woiwode** is the Director of the Green Ways Initiative at the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan. He also played a role in the creation of the Strategic Framework. Though they operate throughout the region, Detroit is where most of their foundational grants can be seen. He stated that in most case scenarios in the past, urban land trusts are interested in existing infrastructure or network, and the restoration or preservation of that network. They are not as inclined to simply maintain open space. He understands that Detroit's proposed open space network will be the first of its kind in the United States, and that Detroit will have to create the model. He recommends that Innovation Ecological provide the sustainability for long-term funding: where there is flows of revenue in the short-term, philanthropic dollars will have to end at some point in time, and revenue will have to come from elsewhere. If this is not established before implementation, then Innovation Ecological will not be realized.