

Urban Land Protection Case Study

PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

Southside Community Land Trust, July 2010

SOUTHSIDE COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

The Southside Community Land Trust (SCLT) is an urban land trust focused on environmental stewardship, food security, and community development in South Providence, Rhode Island. As a membership organization, SCLT's mission is to provide land, education, and resources to help people grow food in their own neighborhoods. Established in 1981, SCLT began by converting a half-acre vacant lot into a community garden that is worked by 20 families. Today, SCLT manages 13 community gardens serving 200 families; an extensive school-based and public environmental educational program; City Farm, an urban certified organic farm; and Urban Edge Farm, a 50-acre farm in Cranston, RI where SCLT offers a Farm Business Incubator program for low-income farmers to launch new businesses.

Potters Avenue Community Garden and Park

In 2005, SCLT partnered with The Trust for Public Land (TPL), the City of Providence, and the State of Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) to permanently protect the Potters Avenue Community Garden and Park, an active community garden and park in Lower South Providence. Lower South Providence is one of the most densely populated and poorest neighborhoods in the state, and is an area that is seriously deficient in open space and natural areas for local residents. Through their collaborative efforts, SCLT and TPL have preserved this green space where residents gather to grow food and enjoy the outdoors.

The Neighborhood—Lower South Providence

Lower South Providence, the neighborhood that directly benefited from the project, is densely populated (5,744 within 0.88 sq. mi.) and a median household income of \$16,857, which is below the 2003 U.S. poverty threshold for a family of four. Forty percent of Lower South Providence families live below poverty, and only 28 percent of homes are owner-occupied. Eighty-four percent of Lower South Providence residents are people of color: 35 percent



Potters Avenue Community Garden and Park—before

are Black or African-American and 55 percent are Hispanic.

According to the City's Department of Planning and Development, Providence lacks both green space and parkland, and this was keenly evident in Lower South Providence. Further, the affordable housing shortage in Rhode Island placed extraordinary pressure on policy makers and developers to build homes. This pressure led to a recent rush by land speculators and developers to develop land without careful attention to mixed-use planning objectives.

Potters Avenue Community Garden and Park was the only greenspace other than two schoolyards and a tiny pocket park in all of Lower South Providence. The one-acre open space, reclaimed by neighbors more than 20 years ago, is a haven in an area densely packed with triple-decker and single-family homes and industrial buildings. In the context of these pressures, SCLT sought to move quickly for this rare opportunity to conserve the entirety of the Potters Avenue Community Garden and Park.

Urban Land Protection Story – PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Project History

The Potters Avenue Community Garden and Park has been managed by SCLT since 2000 and is used by 40 gardeners from Lower South Providence. Prior to 2000, neighbors had used some of the area informally for gardening, but most of the lots were vacant and neglected. SCLT and neighbors removed ten dumpsters of trash from the site, transforming this blighted area into the Potters Avenue Community Garden and Park. Today, an attractive wooden fence surrounds the property, encompassing a community garden, a children's garden, seating, a gazebo, and a playground used by residents of South Providence. Within this matrix of uses was a privately-held property, which straddles the children's garden and several garden plots in the middle of the Potters Avenue Community Garden and Park.

In November of 2004, the landowners notified SCLT that they intended to sell the land to a private developer who planned to build a triple-decker house on the land. SCLT contacted TPL and ultimately requested TPL's assistance with the real estate negotiations necessary to acquire the property. Subsequently, TPL entered into an agreement to purchase the property from the landowners.

The Partnership

The Southside Community Land Trust and the Trust for Public Land have a successful history of partnership. In 1990, TPL assisted the Southside Community Land Trust with the acquisition of a lot adjacent to City Farm, a $\frac{3}{4}$ -acre certified organic urban farm. The lot had been acquired through tax title by a notorious Providence real estate developer, but SCLT was able, with TPL's assistance, to increase the size of City Farm for the educational benefit of school groups and the financial, health, and community benefit of its neighbors. Acquiring the property in cooperation with TPL would help take this partnership one step further.

In December 2004, SCLT and TPL clarified their respective roles and responsibilities for this project campaign. Southside Community Land Trust acted as the leading grassroots and local support for the project and led a private fundraising campaign to acquire the land. TPL led the legal and real estate negotiations for the acquisition of the Potters Avenue parcel. Each group brings its own complementary area of expertise to the effort, and together they could preserve critical greenspace and natural resources for this underserved urban neighborhood.



Potters Avenue Community Garden and Park — in progress

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Due Diligence

On March 4, 2005, TPL secured site control by entering into an agreement to purchase the property from the landowners by May 31, 2005. TPL conducted all necessary pre-acquisition due diligence in accordance with the terms of this agreement in preparation for the conveyance of the property to SCLT. Due diligence included reviewing the title, conducting the environmental assessment, and obtaining a boundary survey. Upon acquisition of the property, SCLT conveyed a conservation easement on this parcel and the five adjoining parcels containing garden plots to the State of Rhode Island to ensure that the entire park remains open agricultural land for at least 20 years.

Sustaining the project

The project is currently sustained by the continued engagement of residents and urban gardeners in land stewardship, in programs and activities for youth to learn about food security and the environment around them, and in opportunities for cultural and community events. The Potters Avenue Community Garden and Park also hosts numerous community gatherings, such as church picnics, neighborhood watch meetings, birthday parties, and the like.

The successful purchase of this land initiated a multi-phase project of land acquisition for SCLT. SCLT is working with TPL to develop a long-term strategy and larger capital campaign that will build our capacity and permanently protect up to 10 additional priority parcels in SCLT's existing gardens throughout South Providence. Though not part of

this current proposal request, SCLT and TPL anticipate that the Potters Avenue Community Garden and Park project will be a catalyst for future conservation successes.

Project Funding

SCLT's programs are supported through foundation support, the city of Providence (CDBG funds), federal grants, and individual and corporate donations. For this particular project, the 40 Potters Avenue gardeners and their families organized to support this project, as well as several project abutters, including the Mt. Calvary Church of God.

The land acquisition, project costs, and stewardship costs of the Potters Avenue Community Garden and Park project totaled \$174,000. Costs included the direct expenses associated with purchasing the property, staff time, environmental assessments, survey, title, and legal expenses. Local funding sources included a City of Providence Neighborhood Improvement grant, The RI Department of Environmental Management, and the Bafflin Foundation.



CAPTION?

Urban Land Protection Story – PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

The purchase of the privately-held parcel by the Southside Community Land Trust has had a lasting impact in the Lower South Providence neighborhood of Providence, RI. In permanently protecting the entirety of the Potter Avenue Community Garden and Park the SCLT has accomplished the following through this unique land protection project:

- Protected public access to a valuable natural resource in the middle of a neighborhood experiencing intense development pressure;
- Preserved a beautiful, healthy, and sustainable garden and park to enhance quality of life in one of Providence's poorest, most densely-built neighborhoods;
- Protected a quiet, clean, safe, and financially sustainable green open space that benefits gardeners, neighbors, passing pedestrians, and wild species;
- Ensures continued public access to the property for community gardening and environmental education opportunities; and
- Protected the community character of the neighborhood and saved a site of food security significance.



Potters Avenue Community Gardener

This case study was produced following a visit in Dec. 2009 to the Southside Community Land Trust by the **Urban Land Protection Council (ULPC)**. The ULPC was founded to develop and enhance the collaborative efforts of the urban land protection community and is partially funded by **The Jessie B. Cox Charitable Lead Trust**. The ULPC includes the Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust, the Greater Worcester Land Trust, the Waltham Land Trust, and Groundwork Lawrence.



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The Trustees of Reservations' Putnam Conservation Institute is an active participant with the ULPC as well, providing significant in-kind support. If you would like to be part of a growing statewide network of people who care about protecting and caring for land in Massachusetts' cites, sign on to www.UrbanParkAdvocates.org.