

Community land trusts make housing affordable forever

[The Bethlehem Gadfly](#) [Affordable Housing](#), [Sharing your reading](#) April 28, 2021

 *Latest post in a series on Affordable Housing* 

Tip o' the hat to Barbara Diamond for sharing her reading on this timely topic in our town.

selections from [Michael Friedrich](#), "[Affordable Housing Forever.](#)" [New York Times](#), April 15, 2001.

Nonprofits that purchase land, build homes on it and sell them below market rate are giving low-income buyers a chance.

After being priced out of renting in a series of neighborhoods, Ms. Robey, a 43-year-old single mother, became determined to buy a house of her own. "Being able to build some kind of equity, being able to have this home base where your family can come visit," Ms. Robey said, "I wanted that for myself."

That wish became a reality when she discovered the [Atlanta Land Trust](#), an organization that creates and protects affordable housing. Community land trusts are locally run nonprofits that purchase land, build homes on it and sell those homes below market rate to low-income buyers. The trust keeps the deed for the land, leasing it to homeowners who sign a long-term agreement to limit their home's resale price, so that it stays affordable into the future.

"You make a one-time investment in creating a community land trust unit, and that unit is affordable forever," said Amanda Rhein, executive director of the Atlanta Land Trust.

The Atlanta Land Trust focuses on low-income buyers who make between 60 percent and 80 percent of the local median income and can readily support a traditional mortgage.

The influence that powerful private real estate interests exert on American city governments has caused housing prices and rents to soar over the past decades, increasingly placing homeownership out of reach for families of color, and Black Americans like Ms. Robey in particular. Community land trusts form a promising corrective to this trend. By removing land from the speculative market, they keep housing affordable for first-time homeowners — especially low-income people of color.

In America, community land trusts have always been rooted in racial equity. Unlike other types of land trusts, like those formed to conserve land by restricting development, they were devised specifically to prevent the displacement of communities of color.

Encouraged by research on the benefits of community land trusts, Grounded Solutions aims to support the creation of one million new units across the country over the next 10 years. The model has been shown to keep foreclosure rates low through recessions and prevent displacement. It also increases access to homeownership and builds wealth over time for communities of color, according to a 30-year study of land trusts and similar affordable housing schemes from the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy.