



**Testimony to the New York City Council Committee on Finance
Preliminary Budget Hearing for FY 2020
March 27, 2019**

Good afternoon, Committee Chair Dromm and members of the Committee on Finance, and thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Julia Duranti-Martinez, and I am the Community Land Trust (CLT) Coordinator at New Economy Project. New Economy Project is an economic justice organization that works with community groups throughout New York City to fight discriminatory economic practices and to support cooperative economics and community-led development, rooted in racial and gender justice, neighborhood equity, and ecological sustainability. New Economy Project co-founded and co-convenes the NYC Community Land Initiative, a coalition of more than two dozen housing and social justice organizations advocating for CLTs to preserve and create deeply affordable housing and stabilize neighborhoods. Since 2017, we have coordinated a citywide Learning Exchange for groups at various stages of CLT formation. As an outgrowth of this work, New Economy Project and 14 partner organizations are proposing a new citywide CLT Initiative, with FY2020 discretionary funding support, that would incubate and expand CLTs in all five boroughs of NYC.

CLTs are a proven mechanism to preserve vital affordable housing stock, prevent extraction of public subsidies, and combat displacement. A CLT is a nonprofit that owns and stewards land in the community's interest, and leases use of the land for affordable housing development and other community needs. CLTs typically issue renewable 99-year ground leases that establish resale and rental restrictions and ensure that CLT leaseholders cannot earn speculative profits if they choose to sell or rent their property. These permanent affordability restrictions protect public investments in CLTs from being lost to the market over time—a key advantage that CLTs have over conventional affordability terms of 15 or 30 years. The longstanding Cooper Square CLT, on Manhattan's Lower East Side, for example, has developed and preserved 400 units of housing for households earning 26.5% - 36% of Area Median Income (AMI), and will continue to do so in perpetuity.

CLTs also engage community members in meaningful decision-making over neighborhood and housing development. CLT boards of directors are typically composed of equal parts CLT leaseholders, community members, and public stakeholders. The CLT facilitates broad community engagement and participation in land use and planning decisions. Both Cooper Square CLT and the East Harlem/El Barrio CLT grew out of sustained community-led planning and visioning processes, and continue to have strong relationships with their community boards and other local partners. The Northwest Bronx Community & Clergy Coalition's proposed Bronx CLT will partner with nonprofit housing developers to identify development opportunities and engage residents in the planning and management of properties.

While housing remains a key focus for many CLTs, the flexibility of the CLT model can support any land use. CLTs around the country incorporate commercial uses, community and cultural spaces, community gardens, and open space into their work. The development of green space as well as public space that uplifts the resilience of local residents is particularly critical in communities that have been deeply affected by decades of environmental injustice and divestment. The Mott Haven-Port Morris Community Land Stewards engaged in extensive community visioning and design processes to develop its plans for community gardens, and recently completed a feasibility study for a community health and arts center (H.E.ARTS). Similarly, the Mary Mitchell Center for Family and Youth plans to create a CLT that will partner with community gardens to cultivate healthy food and value-add products for income generation.

In addition to fostering permanently affordable housing, equitable community development, and community engagement in planning and land use processes, CLTs can be important partners in disaster recovery and resilience in the face of climate change. CLTs from the Bay Area to the Florida Keys incorporate ecological building techniques and green energy into their work, and partner with community members in the wake of hurricanes and other extreme weather events to rebuild. Locally, the South Bronx Land and Community Resource Trust—a partnership between We Stay/Nos Quedamos, the South Bronx River Watershed Alliance, the NYC Community Gardens Coalition, and the South Bronx Culture Collective—plans to prioritize affordable housing as well as community gardens and green infrastructure, such as community-owned utilities, micro grids, and storm water mitigation.

The CLT model has sparked a citywide movement that has achieved tremendous gains in recent years—including passage of the City’s first local law defining and entering CLTs into the administrative code; increased NYC Dept. of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) support for the CLT model; expanded training, legal and technical support networks; and investment of NYS Attorney General settlement funds in local CLTs. More than a dozen community-based organizations from the Northwest Bronx to Brownsville are working to develop local leadership, deepen community partnerships, organize tenants and homeowners, and identify properties suitable for their CLTs.

The proposed citywide CLT initiative will allow groups to build upon this exciting progress at a critical moment of opportunity. The initiative will support essential CLT community education and organizing, board and member training, and other start-up costs; build capacity through legal, financial, and technical assistance; and promote coordination among CLTs so they reach a sustainable scale. We ask the Committee to include the CLT initiative in its budget recommendations for FY2020.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. For more information or questions, please contact Julia Duranti-Martínez at New Economy Project (212-680-5100, julia@neweconomynyc.org).