



**Testimony to the New York City Council
Committee on Housing and Buildings**

Preliminary Budget Hearing for FY2023

March 14, 2022

Good afternoon, Chair Sanchez and members of the Committee, and thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Deyanira Del Rio and I am the Co-Executive Director at New Economy Project, a citywide organization that works with community groups to build an economy that works for all, rooted in racial and social justice, neighborhood equity, cooperation, and ecological sustainability. New Economy Project coordinates coalitions and campaigns to challenge systemic discrimination in our financial system and economy, and to support cooperative and community-led development in NYC neighborhoods of color.

I'm pleased to testify today about community land trusts (CLTs), and to urge the Committee to support \$3 million in FY2023 funding for the Citywide CLT Initiative (see attached one-pager). New Economy Project further urges the Committee to advance legislation to strengthen CLTs and expand nonspeculative, community- and tenant-controlled housing. In the wake of the pandemic, public investment in CLTs and other forms of social housing will be critical to stabilize housing, combat speculation, and promote a just recovery in low income and Black and brown neighborhoods hardest-hit by the COVID-19 crisis.

With coalition partners in the NYC Community Land Initiative, New Economy Project has supported the growth of CLTs to address our city's affordability crisis and advance racial equity. CLTs are community-governed nonprofits that own land and ensure that it is used to provide permanently-affordable housing and other public benefit. The CLT model is flexible and meant to support a range of community needs – from rental housing and limited-equity cooperatives to commercial and cultural spaces, community gardens, and more. Locally, CLTs are rooted in broader movements for housing justice and economic democracy.

CLTs are designed to permanently lock in affordability restrictions. In this way, they protect public investment and ensure that housing remains affordable over generations. Cooper Square CLT on Manhattan's Lower East Side, for example, has stewarded more than 300 units of deeply-affordable housing for households at 26% - 36% of Area Median Income (AMI), as well as two dozen storefronts for local small businesses, in a neighborhood with rapidly rising rents.

Launched in FY2020, the **Citywide CLT Initiative** has helped catalyze CLT organizing in the South and Northwest Bronx, East Harlem, Richmond Hill, Brownsville, East New York and beyond. Groups in the initiative have made major strides – engaging thousands of renters, homeowners and small business owners in education and organizing; developing strong grassroots leadership; incorporating new CLTs; and acquiring and preserving hundreds of permanently- and deeply-affordable housing units as well as community and retail spaces. Strong support in the FY2023 budget will allow groups to sustain and build on this tremendous progress.

In addition to increasing discretionary funding support for CLTs, NYC Council should pass legislation such as the Community Opportunity to Purchase Act (COPA), which would give CLTs and other mission-driven nonprofits a first right to purchase buildings when landlords sell. The Council should permanently abolish – and work with the administration and community groups to replace – the tax lien sale. We further urge the Council to pursue legislation requiring NYC to prioritize CLTs and other nonprofits when selling or transferring public land. We look forward to working with this Committee to develop and win passage of these proposals.

New York City's housing and land disposition policies have, for decades, prioritized large for-profit developers and exacerbated inequality. The City's approach has accelerated market-rate development in low-income, majority Black and brown neighborhoods; creation of so-called "affordable" housing that is out of reach for most neighborhood residents; and displacement of longtime, low-income New Yorkers from their communities and networks of support. We need new and community-driven solutions, like CLTs, and policymaking that removes land and housing from the speculative market, for good.

We urge the City Council to redouble its commitment to CLTs at this critical time. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today.



Community Land Trust Initiative

FY2023 Discretionary Funding Request

The **citywide Community Land Trust (CLT) Initiative** requests **\$3 million** in FY2023 City Council discretionary funding to support 20 organizations working to develop CLTs and permanently-affordable housing, commercial and community spaces. The initiative combats displacement and promotes community-led development in Black and brown neighborhoods hardest-hit by the pandemic – by incubating CLTs and providing comprehensive outreach, education, organizing, and legal and technical support.

Launched in FY2020, the initiative has catalyzed the growth of CLTs across the five boroughs. Groups have engaged thousands of New Yorkers in community and tenant organizing and neighborhood planning; surveyed vacant and underutilized property in their communities; preserved hundreds of units of permanently-affordable, tenant-run housing – including more than 80 recent acquisitions; and advanced campaigns to shield land and housing from predatory development.



In FY2023, the CLT initiative will engage two new groups and deepen CLT capacity to steward land and housing. We will engage 20 organizations to:

- ◆ Provide 100+ CLT education and organizing sessions – in multiple languages – for tenants, homeowners, small business owners, and other stakeholders.
- ◆ Develop training curricula to support community and tenant governance.
- ◆ Provide 50 legal and technical assistance engagements to emerging CLTs on incorporation, bylaws, developer partnerships, property feasibility research, and more.
- ◆ Provide capacity-building training for 50 CLT board and steering committee members.
- ◆ Complete feasibility studies and bring more properties into CLT stewardship.

Over the long-term, the CLT initiative will create and preserve thousands of units of deeply- and permanently-affordable housing; provide affordable commercial space for small and worker-owned businesses; support community solar and other resilient infrastructure; and build community wealth in historically-redlined Black and brown neighborhoods.



CLTs protect public subsidy by taking land and housing out of the market – ensuring that housing stays affordable, over generations. CLTs are flexible and support diverse community needs, from limited-equity co-ops and mutual housing to commercial and mixed-use development, cultural and green spaces, and more. Manhattan’s Cooper Square CLT and East Harlem El Barrio CLT, for example, provide housing that is affordable to families earning 30-35% AMI, as well as storefronts for two dozen community-serving small businesses.

With evictions and speculation looming in the wake of COVID-19, NYC must invest in CLTs and democratic housing and land ownership models that combat displacement, stabilize neighborhoods, and promote community safety and self-determination. To learn more about CLTs in NYC, visit nyccli.org.