LVC WEBINAR 13 REPORT

Community Land Trusts: Preserving Long-term Housing affordability & Strengthening Community Stewardship



Written By
Michael Clark

Compiled By
Raevaldo van Rooyen

August 2026

www.landvaluecapture.org.za

1. INTRODUCTION

On 18 August 2026, the National Land Value Capture Programme (LVC programme) hosted the thirteenth webinar in its Land Value Capture Webinar Series, which explored Community Land Trusts (CLTs) an innovative land policy tool that offers the potential to secure long-term housing affordability, protect tenure rights, and ensure that land and housing continue to serve local communities across generations. The webinar took place over Microsoft Teams.

The webinar drew **74 attendees**, including **local, provincial and national government officials from seven metropolitan municipalities and various intermediate cities across South Africa, international experts, technical advisors, programme partners and private sector participants**. The session continued the series tradition of open dialogue between metro colleagues. The dialogue drew on international experiences of CLTs having been successfully implemented in a range of contexts, including the United States, Puerto Rico, and Brazil – and the potential of this land policy tool in the South African context. Rather than presenting CLTs as a fixed solution, the webinar opened a conversation about the potential opportunities and limitations of the tool to address the housing affordability, tenure regularisation, and community stewardship challenges facing South African cities.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE LVC WEBINAR SERIES

The National Land Value Capture Programme (LVC programme) was established in 2020 as a tri-partite partnership between the National Treasury's City Support Programme (CSP), the Development Action Group (DAG), and the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy (LILP). The programme aims to strengthen the capability of officials in metropolitan and intermediate cities to design, adopt and implement innovative land value capture tools and strategies that promote affordable housing, inclusive urban development and spatial transformation.

Since 2020, the programme has hosted the Land Value Capture Webinar Series for local government officials covering a range of topics related to leveraging land value capture to drive spatial transformation, deliver affordable housing, promote inclusive urban development, and improve municipal fiscal health. After twelve webinars, the webinar series has become one of the programme's most established and successful learning platforms that improves knowledge and understanding of the different contexts under which LVC principles and tools are applicable in South Africa. By bringing together officials from South Africa's eight metropolitan municipalities and various intermediate cities, the webinar series provides a valuable space for community building and peer-to-peer exchange, strengthening both technical understanding and collaboration across cities.

3. AGENDA



LAND VALUE CAPTURE WEBINAR SERIES FOR CITY OFFICIALS

COMMUNITY LAND TRUSTS: PRESERVING LONG-TERM HOUSING AFFORDABILITY & COMMUNIY STEWARDSHIP

PROGRAMME

14:00-14:15	**Welcoming and Introduction** Claudia Hitzeroth
14:15-14:35	**Community Land Trusts (CLTs): An Innovative Model** Tarcyla Fidalgo
14:35-14:45	**Potential Application of CLTs in South Africa** Michael Clark
14:45-15:20	**Panel Discussion** Claudia Hitzeroth (Facilitator) Tarcyla Fidalgo, Harry Smith, María Hernández Torrales
15:20-15:45	**Q&A Session: Open Floor** Claudia Hitzeroth
15:45 -16:00	**Closing** Claudia Hitzeroth

PANELISTS



Tarcyla Fidalgo
International Center for CLTs



Harry Smith
Community Organizing & Development Consultant



María Hernández Torrales
University of Puerto Rico

4. IN THE ROOM

The webinar drew **74 attendees**, bringing together an international panel and a broad set of government officials from across South Africa. Seven of the eight metropolitan municipalities were represented, alongside several intermediate municipalities, national programme partners, and private sector participants.

Technical team, programme partners and speakers	Officials from metropolitan and intermediate cities
DAG, Technical advisors, National Treasury, CSP, LILP, and international speakers from Brazil, Puerto Rico, and the United States.	City of Cape Town, City of Ekhuruleni, City of Johannesburg, City of Tshwane, eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality, Manguang Metropolitan Municipality, Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Municipality, George Municipality, Stellenbosch Municipality, Mossel Bay Municipality, and Polokwane Municipality

The programme departed slightly from the usual format. There were two opening presentations to provide background on CLTs and the potential application of CLTs in the South African context, followed by a facilitated panel discussion between international speakers, and an open floor discussion. Claudia Hitzeroth (LVC technical advisor, PDG) facilitated the webinar and panel discussion. Speakers and panelists included:

- Tarcyla Fidalgo – Lead of the Global South CLT Initiative at International Center of CLTs and long-term affiliate of the Favela Community Land Trust in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil;
- Michael Clark – Urban Land Researcher at LVC Programme;
- Harry Smith – Community Organizing and Development Consultant and long-term affiliate of the Dudley Street Neighbourhood Initiative in Boston, United States; and
- María Hernández Torrales – Adjunct Professor at the Law Clinic at University of Puerto Rico and long-term affiliate of the Caño MartÍn Peña Communal Land Trust in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

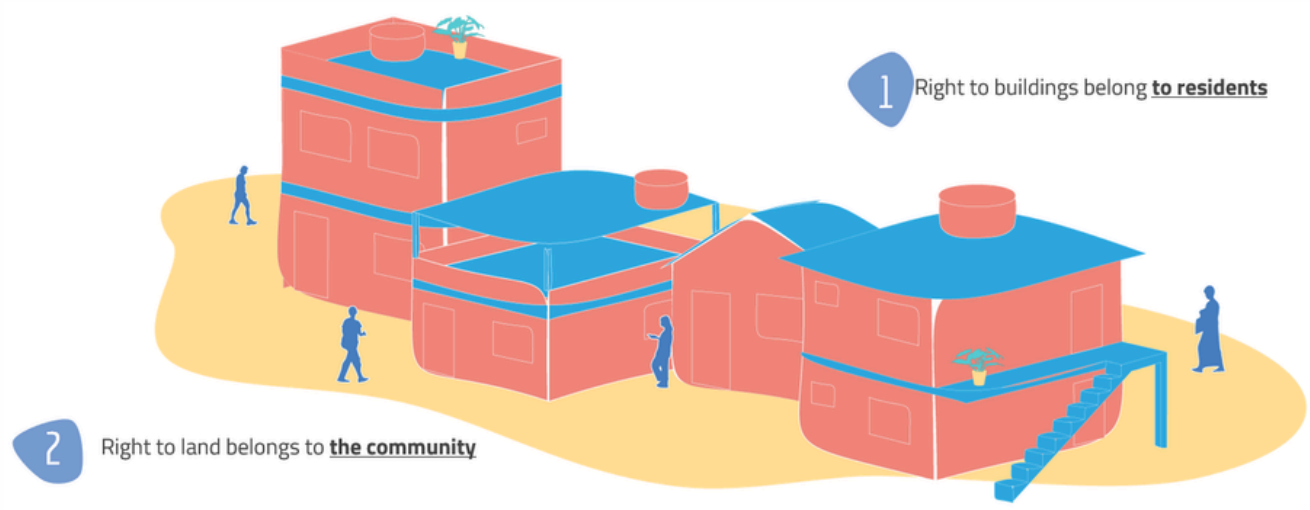
In addition to the above, two notable international experts with extensive experience in LVC tools and CLTs attended the webinar, namely David Amborski (Professor and Director of the Centre for Urban Research and Land Development at Ryerson University, and LILP affiliate) and John Emmeus Davis (Director of the Center for CLT Innovation).

5. CLTS: AN INNOVATIVE MODEL WITH POTENTIAL APPLICATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

The webinar opened with two presentations providing a conceptual overview of CLTs and the potential application of CLTs in South Africa.

The first presentation, delivered by Tarcyla Fidalgo from the International Center for Community Land Trusts (ICCLT), provided an overview of history and core features of CLTs as a model for the collective ownership and co-management of land by communities and government that preserves housing affordability, prevents displacement of low- and middle-income households, and facilitates community-led, inclusive development. She traced the history of CLTs to the civil rights movement in the United States in the 1960s. However, the model grew in popularity in the 1980s and 1990s in the United States and Canada. In 2017, CLTs were recognised as an inclusive and sustainable housing model in the United Nations' New Urban Agenda (a document establishing global guidelines for good governance of cities developed as an outcome of the UN Habitat III Conference). This firmly placed CLTs on the agenda as an innovative housing solution for low- and middle-income communities that should be supported by UN member states.

The presentation highlighted the **flexible nature of the CLT tool and its wide-ranging application to a variety of different contexts across the globe**. Of particular relevance for South African cities was the use of CLTs in countries such as Brazil, Puerto Rico, Bangladesh, Kenya, Indonesia and the Philippines (countries in the Global South), to secure the tenure of households and communities that have been marginalised from the formal land and housing markets in their cities.



The four core features of CLTs are:

- **Separate ownership of land (which is owned collectively) and homes / buildings (which are owned or held individually)**: Parcels of land, scattered across a geographic area as small as a single neighbourhood or as large as a metropolitan region, are collectively owned and managed on a community's behalf by a non-profit organisation (which is managed directly by the community). Homeowners, cooperatives or businesses either own or hold long-term tenure rights over the buildings that are located on these land parcels on an individual basis. This could include rights such as servitudes, usufructs, or long-term leases (e.g. a 99-year, renewable and inheritable lease agreement, which offers rights that are tantamount to ownership).

- **Voluntary membership or affiliation with the community**: Membership of the community in whose interest the land is acquired, owned and managed, is voluntary.

- **Comunity participation and leadership**: The non-profit landowner is established, guided, and governed by residents of the organisation's service area, who participate in making decisions about infrastructure projects, housing development, and other territorial interventions affecting their community.

- **Long-term stewardship and affordability preservation**: The CLT is an active, watchful guardian of housing and other buildings located upon its land, ensuring the long-term affordability, quality, and security of all the land-based assets entrusted into its care. This ensures that land is protected from speculative market pressures that could drive-up prices and ensures lasting affordability of housing developed through public-sector investment.

The presentation also reflected on the lessons learned from the establishment, governance and operation of the **Favela Community Land Trust** in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. A key take-away was the need for **consistent, long-term and robust community mobilisation** throughout the process of investigation, establishment and running of a CLT. This should go hand-in-hand with awareness raising, targeted legal and policy advocacy, and technical considerations. In addition, funding to support The interplay between these different approaches lay the foundation for CLTs to be established as a collective land holding model throughout Brazil – with various local governments opting to adopt a similar model to Rio de Janeiro.





The second presentation, delivered by Michael Clark from the LVC programme, framed the status and potential application of CLTs in South African. This presentation also briefly covered the core features of CLTs, but empahsised two important features for the South African context:

- **Separate ownership of land (which is owned collectively) and long-term tenure rights over homes / buildings (which are held individually)**: According to the South African common law, the ownership of land and the buildings on land cannot be separated. However, there are innovative ways to still apply the CLT principle in the South African context. For example, individuals or household could be offered long-term, renewable and transferrable leases over their homes or buildings (such as a 99-year lease), which would be grant people largely the same rights as ownership. The only limitation would be in relation to their ability to freely dispose of or sell their homes – which would be constrained to either selling the home back to the CLT or to selling it to a different community or household within the same income bracket.

- **Removing the land from market protects it from speculative interests and protects low- and middle-income communities from displacement**: The core of how CLTs protect vulnerable communities from displacement and promote the long-term affordability and stewardship of the land, is by removing the land from the speculative market. This prevents displacement as a result of rising land prices. By ensuring that the land remains in the hands of the CLT and that households are required to sell their homes or buildings back to the CLT or to a different community or household within a prescribed income bracket, CLTs ensure that the affordable unit that has been created remains affordable in the long run.

In South Africa, **CLTs are not currently an established legal structure** (as they are in recognised internationally). However, **there are variety of legal vehicles that could be used – either collectively or individually – to give effect to the same features of CLTs**. E.g. **property trusts**, **cooperatives**, or **non-profit companies**. The presentation also underscored the adaptability and potential flexibility of the CLT model – both in terms of structure (e.g. in the United States, local government often has representation on the board of CLTs, whereas CLTs in Brazil are fully constituted by community members / residents) and the **outcomes that they aim to achieve** (e.g. securing the rights of informal settlement residents, affordable housing development, managing rental housing or inclusionary housing units).





The presentation also outlined John Emmeus Davis' argument of CLTs "fixing the leaky bucket" of public investment in affordable housing. In essence, this argument is states that CLTs prevent affordable housing that is delivered through public investment from being "lost" to the speculative land market. This is an important challenge for the South African context, where state-subsidised housing is delivered through significant public investment. However, once the affordable housing has been developed and handed over to the beneficiary, there are very few mechanisms to ensure that the affordable housing unit is not lost to the private market (e.g. the seven year restriction on the resale of state-subsidised housing, which is largely ignored and hardly enforced).



As a result, affordable housing units are quite quickly lost to the private market – along with the public investment in those units. By removing affordable housing from the speculative market, CLTs essentially "plug" the holes in "leaky bucket" and ensure that the public's investment into affordable housing remains affordable to low- and middle-income communities for the long run.

CLTs offer a potential response to various urban challenges in the South African context, namely:

- Preserving the long-term affordability of inclusionary housing units – As cities across South Africa adopt inclusionary housing policies and these units are starting to be developed, cities are grappling with how to ensure that inclusionary housing units remain affordable in the long run. This is particularly pertinent given the limited institutional capacity within local government to manage inclusionary housing units, alongside the limited capacity and willingness of private developers, home owners associations or bodies corporate to manage these units. In terms of the CLT model, CLTs act as the dedicated entity that is responsible for managing and preserving the affordability of inclusionary housing units (potentially throughout the whole municipality);
- Regularising and converting inner-city occupied or abandoned buildings;
- Securing the tenure rights of informal settlement residents and upgrading of informal settlements; and
- Affordable housing development.







6. EMERGENT THEMES

Flexibility and adapatability of the CLT model

The three international speakers indicated how flexible the CLTs mechanism is, and how it could be adapted to address the needs of a particular community. In particular, CLTs could differ widely in terms of their structure, how they are regulated, or what outcomes they are used to achieve.

In terms of differing **structures**, the cases discussed illustrated how dynamic the CLT model could be:

- Harry Smith from the Dudley Street Neighbourhood Initiative (DSNI) in Boston, Massachusetts in the United States explained that the traditional structure for CLTs in the United States is for the **governing body of the CLT to consist of a third of community leaders (that live in the community and were often instrumental in establishing the CLT), a third of homeowners or lessees living on the CLT land, and a third of resource and technical experts (this could include legal, real estate management, fundraising or even government officials to provide expert guidance or oversight of the board)**. This model means that two-thirds of the governing body remains community members that are living in the community or on the CLT land – thereby ensuring community control and stewardship.
- In Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and San Juan, Puerto Rico, the **governing bodies of the CLTs were made up entirely of community leaders** living in the community and on CLT land.
- Maria Hernandez Torrales, presented the case study of the Caño MartÍn Peña CLT in San Juan, Puerto Rico and explained that the process of establishing the CLT entailed the establishment of two entities. First, the land was transferred to a government-owned company, the ENLACE Corporation, with the intention that it would be transferred back to the community once the CLT has been established. Through over 700 community outreach activities and participatory workshops, the community developed a set of regulations for the CLT with the assistance of an advisory board and legal representatives. In 2004, the state government transferred over 80ha of public land to community ownership to be held by the CLT, which is fully controlled and managed by the community.

CLTs could also be used to achieve different **outcomes**, from acquiring land for affordable housing development; monitoring the quality and affordability of affordable housing; or regularising or formalising the tenure rights of informal settlement residents:

- The cases of the Favela CLT in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and the Caño MartÍn Peña CLT in San Juan, Puerto Rico, illustrate how the CLT model could be used to **secure the tenure rights of informal settlements residents** – and could therefore be used to regularise or formalise legal rights over the land on which communities are already living. This could have potential application for the South African context.

- The case of the DSNI in Boston, United States, the CLT played a more active role in **acquiring land, facilitating the development of affordable housing and other inclusive urban development projects (like green houses, urban farms or even some commercial endeavours), and facilitating community participation in planning and development processes**.

A common thread: CLTs depend on a **localised, contextually sensitive approach, and can be adapted to suit the particular needs of a specific community**.

CLTs could be given legal recognition through different mechanisms

CLTs could be established through a wide **range of different mechanisms**, these include using existing legal vehicles – either jointly or severally – to give effect to the structure of a CLT (e.g. trusts, cooperatives, or non-profit companies); or CLTs could be established through special enabling legislation (e.g. a law that specifically created CLTs as a separate legal entity, or ordinances that create a specific legal vehicle to act as a CLT). The vehicle used in a particular context depends on the legal and regulatory framework and powers of government entities.

CLTs also differ in terms of the **types of rights that are offered to the households, individuals or businesses over the homes or buildings** on CLT land:

- In the United States, households, individuals or businesses are offered **ground leases** – i.e. long-term leases (often decades long) that grant lessee strong rights over the buildings on a piece of land or allow lessees to build or develop a piece of land.
- In the case of the Caño MartÍn Peña CLT in San Juan, Puerto Rico, the city adopted a special ordinance that was jointly drafted by the city and community leadership structures, which was used to transfer title of the land to the CLT and title of the homes to the households or individuals living in them. In this case, the households an individuals were granted **surface rights deeds**, which enable their rights to be registered in the land register in Puerto Rico.
- In the South African context, the common law of property means that the ownership of land and the building or improvements on land cannot be separated. However, households or individuals could still be granted long-term secure rights over their homes or buildings that are akin to ownership. E.g. **usufructs, servitudes (which could even be recorded against the title deeds of the property), or long-term leases (such as a 99-year, transferrable, renewable lease)**.

Supportive role of local government

Local government has a **critical role to play in supporting CLTs and similar community-led land-holding structures**. Local governments across the globe have supported CLTs in a variety of ways, including:

- Donating or releasing discounted municipal land to CLTs;
- Using expropriation or eminent domain powers to acquire land for CLTs;
- Offering grants, loans or tax exemptions to CLTs for affordable housing development;

- Offering inclusionary mandates and incentives;
- Providing infrastructure installation;
- Offering regulatory concessions; and
- Providing operating support for community stewardship (e.g. establishing community participation offices or offering administrative support).
- In the United States, local government is also often actively involved in the management of CLTs – enabling local government to perform useful oversight and advisory functions.

While not all of these mechanisms fall within local government's powers in the South African context, there are various local government functions and powers that could similarly be employed to support CLTs.

Harry Smith reflected on the DSNI's **evolving and shifting relationship** with the City of Boston over the last 30 years.

- He noted that the relationship with the city started out adversarial, with the community organising again the inequitable infrastructure investment from the city administration into the neighbourhood and advocating for more active participation and influence in spatial plans and planning decisions that affect the community.
- The CLT was born out of a community organising campaign called Take a Stand on the Land, which sought to give the community more control over the land in the community and planning decisions regarding the community.
- Since then, the DSNI has built a strong partnership with the City of Boston, with the City using its eminent domain powers to expropriate derelict and abandoned properties in the area and donating them to the CLT for community-led development initiatives such as affordable housing development, green houses, urban farms, community spaces and even some commercial spaces. The City has also strongly encouraged private developers in the area to engage with DSNI about it's plans for the area, which has led to more affordable housing units being built in private developments, which he described as sharing or transferring planning powers back to communities.
- This partnership did not happen overnight, but was built over many years of community organising and engagement.

Maria Hernandez Torrales similarly reflected on the Caño MartÍn Peña CLT's relationship with the city administration and how spatial planning mechanisms enabled the San Juan Municipality to transfer title to the CLT and secure the rights of informal settlement residents.

- In particular, San Juan Municipality played an important role in facilitating community participation, including establishing a dedicated Office of Citizen Participation that was responsible for promoting, coordinating and supporting the involvement of the residents, residents' associations and the community housing committee. A dedicated Group of Eight Communities (G8), made up of the elected representatives from 12 community-based organisations, was established to monitor the comprehensive development plan, assist with the establishment of the CLT and facilitate communication with the community. Community participation underscored that the community were united in wanting to ensure that they were not displaced from the area, and, significantly, the transfer of the land to the community.

- She emphasised the importance of local government offering administrative and resource support to communities as part of the establishment and management of CLTs.

CLTs do not have to do it alone, and can build capacity over time

Harry Smith underscored that CLTs do not have to immediately have all the capacities they require to develop and manage affordable housing – **CLTs can build their capacities over time or develop partnerships** with non-profit housing developers or building management agents.

- E.g. he noted that DSNI does not act as an affordable housing developer, but rather partners with non-profit developers. Similarly, it does not manage the rental housing stock itself, but partners with management agents.

CLTs could similarly partner with local government or civil organisations to access funding, install or improve services, and ensure proper administration of the land it holds.

Key take-away: The discussion underscored the importance of communities and local governments to experiment and build their capacity through partnerships or capacity-building.

CLTs are not only a tool for affordable housing, but also for active community participation in planning and development processes

Maria Hernandez Torrales highlighted the **usefulness of planning tools** in the redevelopment and environmental restoration process for the canal, and establishment of the Caño MartÍn Peña CLT. The San Juan Municipality designated a special planning district around the MartÍn Peña canal and developed a comprehensive development plan for the area, which centralised active and sustained community participation throughout the planning process.

Harry Smith also emphasised that greater community participation in planning and development processes was a key motivator for the establishment of the DSNI and CLT.

Organised and capacitated communities are essential to the success of CLTs

CLTs depend on the existence of **strong, representative, and accountable governance structures** that are capable of managing collective land ownership over the long term.

This requires sustained community participation, democratic decision-making processes, and robust mechanisms for conflict resolution. Historical experiences with collective land ownership arrangements in South Africa have demonstrated that maintaining active community involvement and organisational legitimacy after legal entities are established can be difficult. A decline in community participation over time can undermine accountability, weaken governance structures, lead to internal conflicts, and potentially threaten the sustainability of the collective ownership model.

Institutional and capacity constraints of local government in relation to community participation

A key challenge identified by the local government officials to the successful implementation of CLTs in the South African context is the **limited institutional capacity within local government to facilitate community participation, involvement and capacity building**.

Michael Clark noted that community participation is a skill is lacking in local government, with the primary mode of public participation in the local government context being Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) – which offer limited or inconsistent public participation mechanisms and are often implemented using external consultants. This discussion highlighted the need to local government to consider alternative mechanisms for public participation.

CLTs offer an innovative tool to preserve the long-term affordability of affordable housing, thereby protecting public investment in affordable housing over time

The discussion surfaced an inherent institutional and capacity shift that would need to be considered if CLTs were to be used in the South African context: from local government's limited role in housing development, to a more long-term role in ensuring long-term affordability.

At present, local government (especially in housing and human settlements departments) conceive of their role as being constrained to the preparation of land, installation of services and development of homes. Once the homes are developed, they are handed over to beneficiaries and the role of local government ends. CLTs required a longer term involvement from local government. This longer-term involvement may be warranted in the South African context, as the current approach to affordable housing means that affordable housing is often lost to the property market. A more sustained role for local government could ensure the preservation of longer-term affordability, thereby preserving the public investment in affordable housing for decades or even generations to come



7. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Below, we've included some additional resources where participants could access more information about CLTs:

- Davis, JE, Algoed, L & Hernandez-Torrales ME, Community Land Trusts and Informal Settlements in the Global South, International Center for Community Land Trusts (ICCLT) Publication (2020): https://www.cltweb.org/terra-nostra-press/.
- Davis, JE, Algoed, L & Hernandez-Torrales ME, Community Land Trusts Applications in Urban Neighborhoods, International Center for Community Land Trusts (ICCLT) Publication (2020): https://www.cltweb.org/terra-nostra-press/.
- Davis, JE, Algoed, L & Hernandez-Torrales ME, On Common Ground : International Perspectives on Community Land Trusts, ICCLT Publication (2021): https://www.cltweb.org/terra-nostra-press/.
- Davis, JE & Jacobus, R, The City-CLT Partnership: Municipal Support for Community Land Trusts, Lincoln Institute for Land Policy (LILP) Policy Focus Report (2008): https://www.lincolninst.edu/app/uploads/legacy-files/pubfiles/the-city-clt-partnership-full.pdf.
- Davis, JE & King-Ries, K, Preserving Affordable Homeownership: Municipal Partnerships with Community Land Trusts, Lincoln Institute for Land Policy (LILP)Policy Focus Report (2024): https://www.lincolninst.edu/publications/policy-focus-reports/preserving-affordable-homeownership-municipal-partnerships-community-land-trusts/.
- Lincoln Institute for Land Policy (LILP), "Municipal-CLT Partnerships that Produce and Preserve Affordable Homeownership", (24 June 2025): https://www.lincolninst.edu/events/2025/municipal-partnerships-community-land-trusts-preserve-affordable-homeownership/ (webinar recording).
- UN Habitat, The Community Land Trusts: Affordable Access to Land and Housing (2012): https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/download-manager-files/Community%20Land%20Trusts%20Affordable%20Access%20to%20Land%20and%20Housing.pdf.
- YouTube, "Holding Ground: The Rebirth of Dudley Street: Part 2" (9 December 2010): https://youtu.be/TElaNRPBXPO?is=i88uNtdXnFKFNR8H.