



The Athens Land Trust Strategic Plan

Fall 2005

The Athens Land Trust's mission is to promote quality of life through integration of community and the natural environment by preserving land, creating affordable and energy-efficient housing, and revitalizing neighborhoods. ALT believes in a holistic approach to sustainable development that addresses environmental, economic, and community needs. The Athens Land Trust is one of the few land trusts in the country that addresses both land conservation and affordable housing. We believe that both are uses of land that are important to a community's quality of life. Because Athens-Clarke County is the smallest county in Georgia in area, we want to see both of these community needs addressed. We believe that we can offer solutions for our community by using both land trust models to protect open space and create permanently affordable housing.

I. Conservation

VISION

The Athens Land Trust will protect forests, river and stream corridors, wetlands and other ecologically rich areas, working farmland, community gardens and parks, neighborhood greenspace and scenic areas in the Athens-Clarke County (ACC) region. This region includes ACC and the five counties that border it: Jackson, Madison, Oglethorpe, Oconee and Barrow. Conservation opportunities outside this geographic range will be considered by the Board of Directors and reviewed on a case by case basis.

Protecting natural areas sustains critical ecosystem products such as clean air and water, wildlife habitat, biodiversity, water supply and productive soils. These "natural commodities" provide a wide array of benefits to humans and wildlife and create the foundation for environmental and economic sustainability. When feasible, the Athens Land Trust will protect natural areas that are ecologically connected to existing protected greenspace. The protection of interconnected greenspace, or green infrastructure, will further ensure the viability of the ecosystem functions and products of the ACC region.

The Athens Land Trust will work with governmental and non-governmental organizations and individuals to develop and implement programs that protect land. In addition, the Athens Land Trust will continue to work with our land trust partners, including the Oconee River Land Trust and the Broad River Watershed Association, and develop new partners to broaden our goals and reduce the duplication of effort.

GOAL 1

To permanently protect forests, river and stream corridors, wetlands and other ecologically rich areas, working farmland, community gardens and parks, neighborhood greenspace and scenic areas in the Athens-Clarke County region.

OBJECTIVE 1: TO BE A VIABLE, RESPONSIBLE, AND ETHICAL LAND PROTECTION ORGANIZATION.

STRATEGY

Adopt and implement the Land Trust Alliance's revised Standards and Procedures.

ACTION STEPS

1. Purchase new additions of the Land Trust Alliance's revised Standards and Practices.
2. Direct ALT staff to review Standards and Practices.
3. Direct Conservation Director and Development Director to create a synopsis or scorecard of how ALT complies with the new standards.
4. Direct Conservation Committee to review areas where ALT can improve and better comply with the new standards.

OBJECTIVE 2: TO USE VARIOUS TOOLS TO PROTECT LAND.

STRATEGY

Pursue the donation and purchase of conservation easements and use other protection tools when necessary.

ACTION STEPS

1. Respond to landowners who inquire about conservation easements.
2. Follow the Athens Land Trust's "Steps to Completing a Conservation Easement" once an interested landowner with a qualified property is identified.
3. Identify and pursue funds to buy conservation easements on appropriate land.
4. Consider fee simple acquisition and other permanent land protection tools when necessary.

OBJECTIVE 3: WORK WITH GOVERNMENTAL AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS TO DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT PROGRAMS THAT PROTECT LAND.

STRATEGY

Continue our role with the Oconee Partnership for Farmland Protection, and seek other coalitions through which ALT can leverage funds and other resources to protect land.

ACTION STEPS

1. Continue to participate in the Oconee Partnership for Farmland Protection.
2. Sit on the Athens-Clarke County Greenspace Acquisition Program public advisory committee.
3. Participate in the Georgia Alliance of Land Trusts.
4. Continue to collaborate with the Oconee River Land Trust and Broad River Watershed Association.
5. Seek additional partnerships to create Transfer of Development Rights and Purchase of Development Rights programs and other land use planning and policy strategies to protect land.

OBJECTIVE 4: CREATE AN ATHENS-CLARKE COUNTY REGIONAL LAND PROTECTION PLAN.

STRATEGY

Use existing data sets and new programs to prioritize land for conservation.

ACTION STEPS

1. Use GIS data developed during Athens-Clarke County's TDR feasibility study to identify large tracts of environmentally sensitive land.
2. Sit on the Athens-Clarke County Greenspace Acquisition Program public advisory committee to help facilitate the identification of key land protection priorities.
3. Follow the Georgia Land Conservation Partnership's Plan to protect greenspace throughout the state. Consider incorporating priority areas that are identified through this process into our land protection plan.
4. Use other data sources, including the Community Tree Council, University of Georgia, local governments and Regional Development Centers to prioritize land.

OBJECTIVE 5: DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS.

STRATEGY

Create specific educational tools for the following audiences: landowners, developers\builders\realtors, government staff and policy makers, and the general public.

ACTION STEPS

1. Direct Conservation committee to identify the most important educational audience(s) and message(s).
2. Direct Conservation Director to work with partners to fund and produce educational materials.

OBJECTIVE 6: BUILD ALT'S CAPACITY TO PROTECT LAND.

STRATEGIES

- Hire a full-time Conservation Director, provide benefits and training, and incentives for continued education.
- Ensure adequate funding to purchase, enforce, maintain, and monitor easements.

ACTION STEPS

1. Determine and frequently review costs of enforcement and maintenance of easements, and set fee structure accordingly.
2. Fundraise.
3. Advertise for the position.
4. Hire full-time Conservation Director.

POSSIBLE FUTURE IDEAS

Develop a plan for fee simple acquisition and subsequent sale for revenue generation.

II. Housing

VISION

The Athens Land Trust will provide affordable housing for low-to-moderate income residents and will assist in the revitalization of low-income neighborhoods through increasing homeownership, slowing gentrification, and establishing public open space. ALT's single family program of homeownership uses the community land trust (CLT) model to provide:

1. More affordable housing with the cost of land removed from the sale price;
2. Opportunities for residents who would otherwise be lifetime renters to become homeowners and build personal wealth;
3. Housing that helps generations of families;
4. More stable and healthy neighborhoods of homeowners who take care of their housing investment and care about the neighborhood;
5. Residents with a way to gain control over local land use and reduce absentee ownership; and
6. Wise use of government resources through permanently affordable housing for residents of ACC.

In recognition of the fact that many residents of ACC do not have sufficient income to purchase a home, ALT will provide affordable rental housing that is also decent and safe. With stable and affordable rent, it is our hope that some of these families can prepare for homeownership. ALT's goal is to provide housing that enables low-income residents the opportunity to move upward on the economic ladder.

Increased open space, such as parks, community gardens, and undeveloped land, is essential to quality of life in urban settings. Combining ALT's tools for land conservation with our affordable housing and neighborhood revitalization tools, ALT can address many uses of land that will make our community a more healthy and enjoyable place to live for residents of all income levels.

The Athens Land Trust will work with governmental and non-governmental organizations and individuals to develop and implement programs to provide affordable housing and neighborhood revitalization. In addition, ALT will continue to work with our major partners including the Athens Housing Authority (AHA), East Athens Development Corporation (EADC), Hancock Community Development Corporation (HCDC), and the Athens-Clarke Heritage Foundation (ACHF) to increase our impact and reduce the duplication of efforts.

GOAL

To improve quality of life for very low to moderate income residents by providing new opportunities for these residents to live in safe, decent, and affordable houses in healthy neighborhoods.

OBJECTIVE 1: TO PROVIDE HOMEOWNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES FOR LOW-TO-MODERATE INCOME INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES.

STRATEGY

Use the community land trust model to ensure permanent affordability, empower residents who would otherwise be lifetime renters, and provide equity for disenfranchised people.

ACTION STEPS

1. Rehabilitate blighted properties.
2. Build new homes on vacant land, i.e. infill housing.
3. Buy properties and place them in the CLT model.
4. Purchase land or provide subsidies for mortgage-ready clients (Buyer-Assistance Program).
5. Accept donations of land to be used for housing.
6. Recruit buyers ahead of rehabilitation process through churches, banks, large employers such as Athens Regional Medical Center (ARMC) and UGA, technical institutions, and non-profit agencies such as EADC, HCDC, AHA, and ACTION, etc.

7. Partner with other agencies to provide housing counseling, homebuyer education, credit counseling to develop a pool of qualified applicants.
8. Partner with People of Hope.

OBJECTIVE 2: TO PROVIDE AFFORDABLE RENTAL HOUSING FOR LOW INCOME INDIVIDUALS.

STRATEGY

Use the tax credit program and work with other organizations to provide rental housing.

ACTION STEPS

1. Build Fourth Street Village.

OBJECTIVE 3: RAISE AWARENESS OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING NEEDS IN ACC.

STRATEGY

Educate the community and policy makers regarding the need for affordable housing.

ACTION STEPS

1. Develop an organizational philosophy regarding affordable housing issues in ACC.
2. Educate the Planning Department, county government staff, and policymakers (Commissioners) regarding obstacles for affordable housing.
3. Obtain demographic information in order to understand housing needs.
4. Research Inclusionary Zoning as a tool for our community
5. Continue to educate policy makers, government staff, very-low to moderate income residents of ACC, and the general public about ALT's programs and the CLT

OBJECTIVE 4: ENHANCE ENERGY-EFFICIENCY IN ALT BUILDINGS.

STRATEGY

Incorporate green building principles into ALT's program.

ACTION STEPS

1. Build new construction to Earthcraft standards.
2. In rehab, make all reasonable effort to ensure energy-efficiency
3. Seek grants and recognition for these efforts in order to promote energy efficiency more widely

OBJECTIVE 5: INCREASE OPEN SPACE, SUCH AS COMMUNITY GARDENS, NATURAL AREAS, AND PARKS. IN NEIGHBORHOODS WITH PERMANENTLY AFFORDABLE HOUSING

STRATEGIES

- Work with neighborhood residents, local government, and environmental groups.
- Use conservation easements or other land protection tools to protect valuable greenspace in these neighborhoods.
- Create environmental opportunities within neighborhoods with permanent affordable housing, including, but not limited to, permanent land protection.

ACTION STEPS

1. Secure grants and other funds.
1. Partner with other groups, including Greenfest volunteers, graduate students in UGA's Masters of Social Work program students, ACC's Leisure Services, EADC and HCDC, to determine needs and to increase results.
2. Work with neighborhoods containing permanent affordable housing and civic groups such as churches, student organizations and classes and other

organizations to create or improve community gardens, trails, ball fields or other environmental opportunities.

3. When land is identified for permanent protection and support is received, direct Conservation Director to follow Land Trust Alliance's Standards and Practices to complete the project.
4. Once land is protected, direct Conservation Director or appropriately designated person to continue to foster use and stewardship of the greenspace by the neighborhood.

III. Organizational Development

VISION

The Athens Land Trust will be a highly ethical, well-respected, community-based, non-profit organization. ALT will be supported by a large and diverse membership of local citizens, as well as the federal, state, and county governments and local corporations. ALT will be able to sustain itself and will have the financial capacity to carry out the programs outlined in the Conservation and Housing Strategic Plans. ALT Board members will make decisions that ensure ALT's non-profit status and sound financial basis. ALT will operate with the highest ethical standards and will efficiently use its resources.

GOAL 1

To build a financially sound organization that has the capacity to carry out ALT's mission

OBJECTIVE 1: DEVELOP THE POLICIES, STRUCTURES, AND PRACTICES THAT ENSURE RESOURCES FOR ALT OVER THE LONG TERM

STRATEGIES

- Develop a database that can track donors and assist with fundraising tasks
- Provide staff and Board development to ensure meaningful work and volunteer experiences

ACTION STEPS

1. Identify and recruit volunteers to assist ALT staff when possible
2. Involve the Board of Directors and staff in the development process through educational activities regarding fundraising
3. Send staff and board to appropriate trainings and workshops
4. Develop a cash flow projection each year

OBJECTIVE 2: BUILD A DIVERSIFIED FUNDING STREAM THAT USES VARIOUS SOURCES TO FUND THE WORK OF ALT 100% EVERY YEAR

STRATEGIES

- Work with Development Director to write a fundraising plan to be revised annually
- Establish a fundraising committee for ALT made up of community resource people who will provide advice and financial resources and will assist in the implementation of the annual fundraising plan
- Seek funds from a variety of sources including individuals, large donors, corporations, foundations, churches, and the federal, state, and local governments
- Build membership

ACTION STEPS

1. Create fundraising plan based on cash flow projections and program goals
2. Determine the optimal number and qualifications of members of the fundraising committee
3. Identify and invite potential fundraising committee members
4. Publish 2 newsletters annually with membership renewal forms
5. Send out letters to 100 prospective new members annually
6. Develop 2 annual fundraising events—one with ORLT and one with PoH
7. Explore foundations that will support our dual mission and write 2 grants per year for our overlapping projects or organizational capacity
8. Annually, write a minimum of 2 grants to conservation-oriented foundations and 2 grants to housing-oriented foundations. Housing activities may include a joint grant with the Athens-Clarke Heritage Foundation
9. Contact local banks for CRA funds to be used for housing subsidies

10. Develop a partnership with Home Depot and the Home Depot Foundation
11. Make direct appeals to churches and individuals
12. Contact 10 local corporations and request donations annually
13. Continue to pursue CDBG and HOME funding for housing
14. Develop administrative fee structure for ACC Greenspace Acquisition program and USDA FRPP applications

OBJECTIVE 3: SECURE ALT'S FUTURE BY HAVING AN OPERATING FUND ENDOWMENT AS WELL AS A STEWARDSHIP ENDOWMENT

STRATEGY

BUILD AN ENDOWMENT FUND THROUGH DIRECT FUNDRAISING

ACTION STEPS

1. Initiate a capital campaign with a monetary goal and timeline
2. Annually, contact 10 local corporations and request donations
3. Annually, contact 5 individuals to request donations