From the Ground Up

History of the Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust

November 2025
by Kuni Kamizaki

Inclusive Local Economies

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SECTION ONE

INTRODUCTION

Parkdale is one of the few neighbourhoods in downtown Toronto that have remained relatively affordable and accessible to low-income, racialized, and equity-deserving communities. Like other inner-city neighbourhoods, however, Parkdale has been under intense pressures of gentrification, housing financialization, and displacement. In 2012, as a systemic response to these challenges, the Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust (PNLT) was established.[1] PNLT became Toronto's first grassroots community land trust and in 2014 it was incorporated as a non-profit organization.

Background

A community land trust (CLT) is a membership-based non-profit community organization that removes land from the speculative real estate market and stewards it democratically for long-term community benefits. A common form of community benefit is the provision of permanently affordable housing, although CLTs can also use land for community economic development, non-profit commercial space, and urban agriculture. CLTs bring questions of land ownership and private property to the forefront of struggles against gentrification and displacement, rather than focusing merely on the number of housing units supplied.

CLTs bring questions of land ownership and private property to the forefront of struggles against gentrification and displacement...

The CLT model garnered considerable support from community leaders and organizers in Parkdale when a group of planning students — including myself — first presented the idea in 2010. With funding support from the Metcalf Foundation, we established PNLT in 2012 to promote community ownership and stewardship of land in pursuit of equitable development, food security, and housing justice.[2] At the time we were often told that the idea was interesting but

[1] The Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust (PNLT) is a non-profit membership-based organization that acquires, owns, and stewards land for community benefits. The Neighbourhood Land Trust (NLT) is the charitable arm of PNLT, which owns and stewards lands that are provided to charitable operating partners to provide affordable housing, supportive housing, and community economic development. In this report, I use PNLT to refer to both organizations unless otherwise specified.
[2] The interim board was established in 2012 while PNLT was incorporated as a non-profit organization in 2014.

not practical. Many believed that acquiring a property in Toronto's strong real estate market would be next to impossible.

Despite these predictions PNLT succeeded in acquiring its first property, the Milky Way Garden, in 2017. Fast forward to 2025 and PNLT has grown to hold approximately eighty-six assets under community stewardship in west-end downtown Toronto. PNLT has also played a leading role in CLT movement building in Canada. Equally important, PNLT has contributed to reframing housing policy in Toronto and beyond. In 2024, Toronto Mayor Olivia Chow offered the following:

> *The Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust has shown us all what's possible when communities come together to save affordable housing and protect their neighbours from evictions and rent increases. The City of Toronto has followed the Land Trust's lead in establishing and expanding our housing acquisition fund, and now the federal government has taken notice. I want to congratulate the Land Trust for their trailblazing work — taking a successful model in Parkdale to drive a national conversation and win a national program. I look forward to continuing our shared work of protecting renters and affordable homes.*[3]

Motivation to critically reflect on PNLT's history

I became interested in documenting PNLT's journey for three reasons. First, PNLT's experience has come to serve as an inspirational example for other CLTs, grassroots groups, and policymakers in Toronto and beyond. This is particularly the case for groups interested in anti-displacement and housing justice strategies. To this end, I would like to share PNLT's experience and lessons as a "resource" that others can use to envision the potential of a CLT in their own contexts. I do not intend to turn the experience of PNLT into a model of replication. This report is neither a technical how-to handbook nor a guide for best practice. Instead, I analyze PNLT's experience in relation to specific neighbourhood contexts, history, and institutional and political-economic conditions that have enabled — and hindered — its development. In short, I would like to share how PNLT's practices have come to be what they are.

Second, my focus is to provide a grounded examination of transformative potentials of the CLT model. I detail the experience of PNLT, as some interviewees put it, as a "realm of possibilities" for social transformation. By engaging with building a transformative model on-the-ground, I have come to

[3] Melissa Goldstein and Joshua Barndt, *The Path to a City-CLT Partnership*, 13.

understand the importance of "push[ing] the limits of what is practical" — to borrow a phrase from urban planning scholar Peter Marcuse.[4] In turn, I have come to recognize a range of policy assumptions and systemic obstacles that are not easily visible by looking at issues only, and have developed a more holistic understanding of systemic issues — why the issue is produced *as well as* why a progressive solution is hard to implement. This analysis of PNLT's praxis helps extend the realm of progressive planning imagination.

...I see an urgent need to examine the CLT movement...for its potential to pursue community control, transformative change, and social and racial justice...

Third, as the CLT movement in Toronto has gained momentum, I have noticed that the CLT model is understood in varied and even selective ways. This reflects the flexibility of the model, as there are many variations from co-operative housing land trusts to government-led land trusts. Nonetheless, I see an urgent need to examine the CLT movement — and its historical roots — for its potential to pursue community control, transformative change, and social and racial justice, rather than merely being a tool for affordable housing production. The latter's narrow understanding risks reducing the potential of CLTs into crisis management over social transformation.

Structure and framing of the paper

The project report is divided into two parts. In Part One, ***From the Ground Up: History of the Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust***, I articulate a historical timeline of PNLT to help prefigure what may be possible in different contexts, using Parkdale's experience for organizing, strategic planning, and policy advocacy. In Part Two, ***Grounding Transformation: Possibilities for Community Land Trusts***, I reflect critically on the transformative potentials of CLTs, including enabling conditions and structural constraints, through the experience of PNLT.

This project is based on a year-long action research project that involved twenty-seven key informant interviews and two focus groups,[5] as well as analysis of organizational documents, research papers, and funding proposals. This paper is research-based with a first-person reflection based on my long-term engagement with PNLT.

Over the last ten years, my role has shifted from insider to collaborator to supporter. As a community-based planner working in Parkdale (and also a Metcalf Foundation Sustainability Intern), I spearheaded the establishment of the Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust (PNLT) as part of the Parkdale People's

[4] Peter Marcuse, "Changing Times, Changing Planning," 16.
[5] The parenthetical in-text citations within the paper identify individual interviewees or focus groups.

Economy.[6] I also mobilized PNLT as a vehicle for community-driven planning and organizing. After leaving Parkdale to pursue my PhD at the University of Toronto in 2016, I remained committed to PNLT as a planning consultant. In this role, I supported community action research projects, wrote grant proposals, and developed a strategic plan for PNLT.

I currently work in the School of Community and Regional Planning (SCARP) at the University of British Columbia. I continue my engagement with PNLT mostly as an observer and supporter through my Metcalf Fellowship and other projects. This long-term engagement with PNLT as an organization, a planning practice, and an inspirational idea, has given me a unique perspective to reflect on PNLT, enriched by my own memories and interactions with staff, board directors, and members.

From the Ground Up is organized as follows. First, I describe the CLT model briefly followed by the unique historical trajectories of CLT development in Canada.[7] Then I provide a detailed narrative of the history of the Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust.

This paper may be long and descriptive. However, it is through the process of building a CLT — starting from a small plot of land and eventually developing a considerable portfolio of community-controlled assets — that a number of PNLT members, board directors, and community stakeholders have experienced the transformational potential of the model. As some of them told me, the process in itself has been transformative. I hope to offer a historical narrative through which readers too, can experience this transformative potential.

[6] The Parkdale People's Economy project began in 2012 as a collaborative community project of agencies and organizations in Parkdale seeking to create local food economies. Since then, it has evolved into a network of more than thirty community-based organizations and hundreds of community members collaborating to build decent work, shared wealth, and equitable development in Parkdale.

[7] For the extended history of CLTs in Canada, please refer to Kuni Kamizaki, *A Case for Community Land Trusts in Canada*.

SECTION TWO

COMMUNITY LAND TRUST 101

The origin of the CLT model is rooted in the work of New Communities Inc. in Albany, Georgia. Their work emerged from the US civil rights movement in the 1960s, when a group of Black farmers and organizers developed a collective form of ownership and stewardship of land to fight for land security and racial justice.[8] The creation of the CLT model was inspired by Indigenous land stewardship practices and various international examples of non-market land ownership models.

Historical Roots

The historical roots of CLTs lie in struggles over land for racial justice and social transformation through the promotion of collective forms of land ownership and stewardship. This is important to reiterate, because the goal of CLTs in the present context is often conflated with the provision of affordable housing. For CLTs, affordable housing is not an end in itself but a means to achieve long-term goals of social transformation.[9]

To understand the CLT model, it is useful to pay close attention to the meaning of each word.[10] The CLT model has a "**community**" because it is a membership-based non-profit organization whose membership is place-based (e.g. a neighbourhood or a city). A membership is open to anyone who lives and works in a "service area," where the CLT operates. This open place-based membership structure makes the CLT different from other non-market housing models.[11] For example, only residents living in a co-op housing building can be a member of that co-op. Those who live in a building owned by a CLT can become core members, while those who live and work in the service area (e.g. Parkdale) can also be members of the CLT if they support the mission, vision, and values of

This open place-based membership structure makes the CLT different from other non-market housing models.

[8] John E. Davis et al., "Introduction: On Common Ground."
[9] Peter Marcuse, "Blog #38 – Community Land Trusts: Empty, Moderate, and Full-bodied."
[10] This approach is based on John Davis's approach in: *On Common Ground*.
[11] James Meehan, "Reinventing Real Estate," 113-133. As Meehan explains, the open membership structure was a conscious decision behind the creation of the CLT model, given existing shared land ownership mechanisms such as co-operatives did not have a mechanism to engage wider community members while influencing patterns of landholdings in the society.

the organization. This membership structure helps the CLT be accountable to wide community interests and priorities.

A CLT has "**land**" because it removes land from the speculative real estate market and uses it for community benefits. The CLT strives to de-commodify land and promote community ownership for community benefits. By doing so, the CLT challenges a prevailing notion of land as a commodity that should be used according to the principle of highest-and-best use. Instead, the CLT treats it as commons. As such, values and equity generated through the CLT ownership are not privately appropriated but rather collectively managed as shared community wealth.[12] Decisions are not made based on short-term financial returns, but on long-term community priorities and needs through democratic decision making.

...the CLT challenges a prevailing notion of land as a commodity that should be used according to the principle of highest-and-best use.

The last word "**trust**" means that land is held in trust under the community's democratic governance. It is different from a legal trust of real estate, as it reflects how a CLT is organized.[13] CLTs adopt a governance model where one-third of board directors are core members (e.g. tenants living in CLT-owned homes), one-third are community members at large, and one-third represent broader community interests (e.g. representatives of community organizations, planners, and so on). This governance model aims to provide a balance of power by ensuring wide community representation and participation in decision making. More importantly, this community governance model lies at the heart of the CLT model as it creates a mechanism for lower-income and racialized communities — historically excluded from decision making about the use of land — to be directly involved in decisions over their homes and neighbourhood development.

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This direct democratic control is crucial. Democracy is typically associated with attending public consultations, voting in an election, and asking questions to politicians. CLTs strive to extend democracy beyond this political sphere into the economic sphere: that is, economic democracy.[14] The CLT ensures the right to make democratic decisions directly about the use of lands and to influence neighbourhood development. Again, it goes back to the first word: community. A CLT is not only about land development and housing management; it combines land stewardship with community planning and organizing.

[12] Christopher Gunn and Hazel D. Gunn, *Reclaiming Capital*.
[13] John E. Davis et al., "Introduction: On Common Ground," p. xxvii.
[14] Kuni Kamizaki and Katharine Rankin, "Planning the Social Economy," 213-232.

SECTION THREE

HISTORY OF CLTS IN CANADA

CLTs have taken a unique trajectory in Canada, where the model first came to receive attention in the 1980s. Although various groups utilized the model, it was the co-operative housing sector that took a particular interest.

First generation Canadian CLTs

In the 1980s, housing co-operatives experienced rapid growth owing to federal government programs for social housing and a shift in emphasis from public housing to non-profit and co-operative housing.[15] One reason why the co-operative housing sector took up the CLT model was a looming concern about the potential loss of affordable housing and access to land after the expiration of thirty-five-year operating agreements with the Canadian Mortgage Housing Corporation (CMHC).[16] Canada's co-operative housing sector adopted the CLT model as a tool for the consolidation of assets, long-term affordability, and further sector growth.

This is the background against which "sector-based land trusts" emerged, constituting the first generation of Canadian CLTs.[17] Emblematic to this group are Colandco Co-operative Homes in Toronto and the Community Land Trust Foundation of British Columbia. Taking a more neighbourhood-based focus, the Communauté Milton Parc was established in Montreal. Milton Parc governs fifteen housing co-ops, six non-profit housing organizations, and a community economic development entity.[18,19]

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[15] J. David Hulchanski, *Housing Policy for Tomorrow's Cities*.
[16] Communitas Inc., *Land Trusts for Non-Profit Continuing Housing Co-Operatives*. Assets were owned and managed by individual co-operatives not by sectoral network organizations such as the Co-operative Housing Federation of Toronto. A risk was that individual co-operatives could sell their assets after the operating agreement.
[17] Susannah Bunce and Joshua Barndt, "Origins and Evolution of Urban Community Land Trusts in Canada," 93-115.
[18] Lucia Kowaluk and Carolle Piché-Burton, "Communauté Milton-Parc," 24-35.
[19] Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, *Critical Success Factors for Community Land Trusts in Canada*. The experience of first generation Canadian CLTs is documented in this CMHC report. It should be noted that the report pays little attention to the effects of the neoliberal restructuring of government social programs and the cancellation of housing funding programs on the community housing sector and housing markets.

Sector-based land trusts were not necessarily seen as tools for community development or local empowerment, but as a complementary mechanism that enabled non-profit and co-operative housing projects to stabilize and expand. They are sometimes simply called "land trusts," while their "community" tends to be defined specifically as those residing in buildings stewarded by a land trust (e.g. co-op members).[20]

This generation of CLT development came to a halt in the early 1990s due to economic recessions, the government's cancellation of social housing programs, and housing policy shifts toward neoliberal market-based approaches.[21,22,23] It should be noted that first generation CLTs contributed to building and maintaining long-term affordable homes for lower- and moderate-income tenants.

...first generation CLTs contributed to building and maintaining long-term affordable homes for lower- and moderate-income tenants.

Second generation Canadian CLTs

A series of neoliberal reforms at all levels of government in Canada in the 1990s resulted in withdrawals of social housing funding, cutbacks in social programs, and the introduction of market deregulatory measures.[24] In Toronto, these political-economic reforms resulted in growing socio-spatial inequality.[25] Downtown neighbourhoods experienced gentrification, condominium constructions, and an influx of higher-income residents while inner-suburban areas saw neighbourhood poverty concentration, racialization of poverty, and social service gaps. For global cities like Toronto, urban development assumed an increasingly central role in capital accumulation and economic growth.[26] Housing unaffordability, eviction, and displacement became everyday challenges faced by lower-income and racialized communities in gentrifying neighbourhoods.

From the early 2010s, community land trusts began to attract considerable attention from progressive planners and community organizers as a potentially transformative response to issues of social injustices in urban settings. This resurgence marks the second generation of Canadian CLTs.[27] These CLTs place principles of community control, equitable development, and social justice at the forefront.

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[20] Christopher Cheung, "The Secret to Real Affordability?"
[21] Later in the 1990s, non-profit housing groups started community land trusts, such as West Broadway CLT in Winnipeg and the Calgary Community Land Trust Society.
[22] J. David Hulchanski, *Housing Policy for Tomorrow's Cities*.
[23] Greg Suttor, *Still Renovating*.
[24] Julie-Anne Boudreau, Roger Keil, and Douglas Young, *Changing Toronto*.
[25] J. David Hulchanski, *The Three Cities Within Toronto*.
[26] Stefan Kipfer and Roger Keil, "Toronto Inc?" 227-264.
[27] Susannah Bunce and Joshua Barndt, "Origins and Evolution of Urban Community Land Trusts in Canada," 93-115.

...issues of gentrification and displacement prompted the formation of the Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust...

Concerns arising from issues of gentrification and displacement prompted the formation of the Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust in 2012. PNLT — as Toronto's first grassroots CLT with an explicit emphasis on anti-displacement — played a crucial role in popularizing the concept of the model. PNLT helped pave the way for the formation of other CLTs such as Hamilton Community Land Trust in 2014, Kensington Market Community Land Trust in Toronto in 2016, and Hogan's Alley Society in Vancouver in 2017. During this time, sector-based land trusts also re-engaged in efforts to strengthen their portfolios, including expansion of the Community Land Trust Foundation of BC through a large-scale transfer of assets from the City of Vancouver in 2012.[28]

The current moment

Since the 2010s, there has been a rapid proliferation of CLTs across Canada and in other geographies from Brazil and Puerto Rico to Belgium, Kenya, and Australia. In the United States the number of CLTs has grown to over 260.[29] In Canada, based on the most recent census survey and available information, there are over forty-five community land trusts.[30] Thirty of these were, or are, in the process of establishment and incorporation since 2020. This growth is characterized by the convergence of three opportunities:

- a national CLT movement;
- the use of CLTs for reparation, decolonization, and racial justice; and
- the development of enabling public policies.

National CLT movement

The effectiveness of the CLT model has been demonstrated by a series of successes in new expansion and community-led housing preservation, inspiring a range of groups to consider starting a CLT in their communities. Supporting this rapid growth has been the creation of the Canadian Network of Community Land Trusts (CNCLT). CNCLT has contributed to bringing together first generation, second generation, and emerging CLTs to build a unified movement. CNCLT has enabled peer-to-peer learning and technical support to scale public impacts at the national level.

It is important to note that a diverse landscape of CLT development has emerged that goes beyond generational differences. Some CLTs are focused on the production of affordable housing at a city-wide or a regional geographic service area. For example, the Ottawa Community Land Trust is a city-wide CLT

[28] Penny Gurstein, *Community Land Trust Foundation of British Columbia*.
[29] John E. Davis et al., "Introduction: On Common Ground."
[30] Mia Trana et al., *The 2023 Census of Community Land Trusts in Canada*.

that has been committed to community governance and base building efforts at the neighbourhood scale.

Reparation, decolonization, and racial justice

Although the CLT movement has been sparked by an urgent need to respond to the deepening housing crisis, the current phase of growth has been driven by emerging CLTs committed to mobilizing the model for racial justice. The COVID-19 global pandemic exposed and worsened pre-existing socio-economic and racial inequalities. An imperative to redress historical and ongoing injustices of structural racism has been furthered by the Black Lives Matter movement as well as the Indigenous resurgence movement.

...the current phase of growth has been driven by emerging CLTs committed to mobilizing the model for racial justice.

In Nova Scotia, four new Black-led CLTs are using the model as a concrete platform for economic reparation in areas where Black communities have historical roots.[31] Toronto Chinatown Land Trust and Little Jamaica Community Land Trust in Toronto have been formed to pursue racial justice through the preservation of commercial and cultural spaces. Moreover, the CLT model has been taken up by Indigenous-led organizations as a tool to move forward on reconciliation, land back, and decolonization.[32]

Enabling public policies

The model has gained attention from government planners and policymakers as the housing crisis has deepened, resulting in the development of supportive policies and funding programs. Key to the increased recognition of CLTs is their demonstrated success with the acquisition and preservation of at-risk privately-held housing. CLTs have joined efforts with non-profit and co-operative housing organizations to advocate for public grants for acquisition. These programs include City of Toronto's Multi-Unit Residential Acquisition (MURA) Program, the BC government's Rental Protection Fund, and the Canada Rental Protection Fund. Equally importantly, CMHC launched the 2021 Demonstrations Initiative dedicated to community land trusts and other innovative land assembly solutions.

The Canadian CLT movement's three phases of growth have not unfolded in a linear fashion, with newer models replacing older models. A variety of CLTs continue to exist on a wide spectrum, illustrating the CLT's versatility to meet community needs specific to different places and different community priorities.

[31] Nat Pace and Jane O'Brien Davis, *Reclaim, Remain.*
[32] Margaret Low and Tiana Lewis, *More than Just Affordable Housing.*

CLT Models

Sector-based CLTs demonstrate the potential for asset consolidation and affordable housing provision at a scale by ensuring effective asset consolidation, management, and development. They foreground the primacy of housing supply at scale over the commitment to community governance.

Neighbourhood-based CLTs show the power of community governance and community action indispensable to community-led housing preservation and equitable neighbourhood development. The CLT model becomes an organizational mechanism for promoting local democracy, community-based planning, and a transformative model of land stewardship and community-owned homes.

Emerging CLTs weave housing strategies with efforts for reparation, racial justice, and decolonization to redress intergenerational harms of structural racism and settler colonialism.

SECTION FOUR

HISTORICAL TIMELINE OF PNLT

In 2010, Parkdale was going through a rapid pace of gentrification. A public debate on urban issues in Toronto at that time was marked by the growing socio-spatial inequality which became known as "the three cities within Toronto."[33] In order to explore local responses, Parkdale Activity-Recreation Centre (PARC) commissioned a research project to a planning studio class at the University of Toronto.[34] A particular concern was food insecurity due to decreasing affordable food options in the neighbourhood, coupled with a considerable surge in the number of community members accessing meal programs and food banks. This was the context in which a group of U of T students from the Planning Program — including myself — collaborated with PARC to examine impacts of gentrification on neighbourhood affordability and accessibility.

Exploration (2010–2013)

A resulting research report, *Beyond Bread and Butter*, recommended ten community-based strategies and policy options. One of them was to start a community land trust in Parkdale.[35] There were little precedents to refer to in Canada. Nonetheless, the idea of building a CLT garnered considerable support from community leaders in Parkdale. A subsequent report titled, *A Place for Everyone,* explored the idea of community ownership in contrast with public and private ownership.[36] This paper helped further a community conversation on the CLT model in Parkdale.

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[33] J. David Hulchanski, *The Three Cities Within Toronto.* Three cities represent the growth of high-income neighbourhoods through gentrification and redevelopment in downtown, combined with the diminishing middle-income neighbourhoods and the growth of lower-income and racialized neighbourhoods in inner-suburban neighbourhoods.

[34] PARC is a non-profit organization that offers a range of supports and programs including supportive housing, drop-in programs, and community development initiatives. At the time of the research project, PARC was taking a leadership role in neighbourhood-wide issues such as gentrification and food insecurity as PARC understood it could not address these issues alone but required collaboration with other community groups. The leadership of then Executive Director Victor Willis and his support for PNLT cannot be emphasized enough.

[35] Richer et al., *Beyond Bread and Butter.* The original proposal that the group made was to create a commercial-focused CLT to preserve spaces for existing affordable food options and community-driven food initiatives.

[36] Brendon Goodmurphy and Kuni Kamizaki, *A Place for Everyone.*

Question of Land Ownership

The CLT model offered a different point of departure for community action, as the issue of gentrification and displacement cannot be separated from the question of land ownership: who owns land, who has power to make decisions about what can happen on that land, and who benefits?

Three events support PNLT's development

The coming together of three events made the development of PNLT timely and helped establish a fertile ground for a broad-based neighbourhood alliance to build a community land trust. Each of them has had lasting impacts on PNLT's holistic approach to CLT development.

First, ESL students at the Parkdale Public Library — many of whom were Tibetan refugees — were taking care of a container garden site called the Milky Way Garden along with a local urban agriculture organization, Greenest City.

Milky Way Gardeners. Photo: Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust

The owner of the site expressed an interest in potentially donating the land or selling it at below market rates. This possibility of land transfer became a concrete opportunity from which to develop a CLT in Parkdale.

Second, the development of PNLT emerged as a part of a broader solidarity economy initiative in Parkdale, known as the Parkdale People's Economy. Around this time, a group of community development practitioners were developing a multi-stakeholder food co-operative, West End Food Co-op, and designing an alternative community currency called the Co-op Cred program. The timing of these initiatives corresponded to the Metcalf Foundation's launch of the Inclusive Local Economies program. We received funding through both

the Metcalf Foundation's Opportunities Fund and the Sustainability Internship program. This enabled PARC to hire me, in 2012, as the first staff dedicated to working on the development of a community land trust, under the umbrella of the Parkdale People's Economy.

Third, development of PNLT came at a particular time of neighbourhood change in Parkdale. Due to expensive real estate market conditions, some community members believed we needed to have started CLT development when prices were lower in the 1990s. Yet, Parkdale was characterized by community conflicts around rooming houses and gentrification in the 1990s.[37] Community leaders recall those days when it was next to impossible to hold a community conversation without fighting.

The global financial crisis (2007–8) had called into question "market forces" that prioritize profits over people's lives. Despite this real estate-induced economic crisis, by the early 2010s Toronto was experiencing a condominium boom. Community members in Parkdale viewed this real estate-driven transformation as a loss of democratic control over how neighbourhood change happens and who benefits. Exclusionary gentrification and extractive redevelopment were making it far more difficult for lower-income and marginalized members to secure basic conditions of everyday life.[38] Concerns were further intensified by then Toronto Mayor Rob Ford's administration's attempt to cut social services and public assets under the banner of "stopping the gravy train at city hall."

Building Toronto's first grassroots CLT

The establishment of the Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust started with the formation of an interim board of directors in 2012. The board began its work with an explicit goal of transitioning to a community-elected board as soon as possible. To represent the diversity of the neighbourhood, the interim board consisted of a local development consultant and representatives from eight community-based organizations and groups: PARC; Greenest City; West End Food Co-op; Roncesvalles Macdonell Residents' Association; St. Christopher House (later renamed West Neighbourhood House); Parkdale Community Legal Services; Parkdale Village BIA; and Sistering.[39] This way of organizational development is called an "organization of organizations" approach.[40]

We took this organizational development approach as we thought it would take time to build a membership base and the infrastructures necessary to be a

[37] Tom Slater, "Municipally Managed Gentrification in South Parkdale Toronto," 303-325.
[38] Katie Mazer and Katharine Rankin, "The Social Space of Gentrification," 822-839.
[39] Some of the interim board members continued to serve on the board after the first community election such as Victor Willis, Rick Eagan, Nancy Henderson, Brian Torry, and Ayal Dinner. Judy Josefowicz served on the board for a few terms, and returned as staff in 2022.
[40] Peter Medoff and Holly Sklar, *Streets of Hope*.

non-profit community organization that could deal in real estate. Moreover, Parkdale is home to a variety of organizations that have established connections with diverse communities. At the early stage of organizational development, we were able to tap into these already existing connections, rather than duplicating efforts for outreach and community organizing.

As we prepared a letter of objects for non-profit incorporation, we needed to discuss a name for the organization and a "service area." Defining a service area would inform:

1. opportunities for land acquisition, and
2. the scope of community membership which constitutes community governance.

The question of scaling figured from the beginning. Some board members expressed the importance of focusing on Parkdale as a service area because that was where lower-income and marginalized communities lived — groups we wanted to prioritize working with. Other members felt we should expand the boundaries beyond Parkdale because there would not be enough opportunities for housing preservation and development if we limited our work to one neighbourhood.[41]

The board decided not to specify the service area in the letter of objects in case future organizational change and opportunities emerged outside of the boundaries. The board agreed to base the former city Ward 14 (Parkdale-High Park) as functional boundaries for governance and membership development. To reflect this, the **Neighbourhood Land Trust** was used as a legal name for incorporation, while we decided to use the **Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust** as an operational, public-facing name.

...how to ensure a social justice orientation and avoid becoming merely a social purpose real estate organization.

Furthermore, we thought that if the boundaries were not limited to one neighbourhood, then the Neighbourhood Land Trust could hold land titles in different neighbourhoods for other organizations that may need support. A concern that remained was, how to ensure a social justice orientation and avoid becoming merely a social purpose real estate organization. To this end, we developed objects in a way to pursue a charitable status in order to be able to prioritize social justice goals. These board decisions have continued over time to shape PNLT's organizational development.

...we were able to focus our considerable energy on stakeholder engagement, community organizing, and public education.

Finding international inspiration

Because we started out not owning any assets, we were able to focus our considerable energy on stakeholder engagement, community organizing, and public education. We delivered presentations about the CLT model at board

[41] Retrospectively, I see this initial debate as an illustrative example of tensions between real estate and community organizing inherent in the CLT model.

meetings of different organizations in Parkdale. We dedicated staff time and board activities to develop organizational community infrastructures, such as working with U of T students on a research project about community governance. We publicized the need for the CLT by responding to the City Planning Division's Restaurant Study after they placed an interim control bylaw to manage rapid commercial gentrification on Queen Street West.

Nevertheless, we faced one recurring challenge: not many people in Toronto knew what a CLT was. It was common for CLTs to be discussed as if they were a policy tool like inclusionary zoning to produce affordability. Some people thought CLTs were not designed for urban contexts because they thought of land trusts as being for ecological conservation. Moreover, when we described the intention of the model, a common response was "an interesting idea but not practical" or "how can you acquire a property in Toronto's expensive real estate market?"

Lack of understanding about the CLT model became an obstacle in being able to gain support from city administration and housing organizations. Because of the association of the CLT model with the co-op housing sector in Canada (i.e. first generation CLTs), the CLT model was regarded as an extension of — or a different form of — housing co-operatives. One local stakeholder recalls an initial misunderstanding of PNLT's goals:

> *So I had this notion of a land trust almost being like a formal mechanism to make co-ops possible, but not in itself an interesting piece of work. And … it took me a little while, when people were talking about a land trust in Parkdale, to really imagine it being the center, like the entity itself, being an interesting site for the work…. The Parkdale Land Trust conversation woke me up to a new possibility that I hadn't considered before (int-17).*

At that time, there were not a lot of resources or materials on urban grassroots CLTs that we could use to inform board development and community engagement. Resources tended to focus on affordable homeownership in rural or economically struggling areas. However, we were aware of urban CLTs such as Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative in Boston, T.R.U.S.T. South LA, and Cooper Square CLT in New York City — three CLTs centered on social justice to fight against issues of gentrification and displacement. The early 2010s also marked the growth of grassroots CLTs in the United States and England from similar concerns around gentrification, displacement, and the housing crisis. We were able to learn from these organizations through the work of Susannah Bunce, a U of T researcher working on CLTs, who shared her research with the board and community members. In addition, when Stephen Hill from London

CLT in England visited Toronto, we were able to set up meetings with city staff, a local councillor, and the board to learn how London CLT was able to achieve affordable housing in a strong real estate market.

In 2014, I participated in the US CLT Network conference in Cleveland. This experience had a formidable impact on me and, in turn, on my efforts to help shape the development of PNLT. I was able to connect with people from CLTs that I knew of from limited online resources. The Right to the City Alliance brought a group of organizers and housing researchers from their member organizations to the conference. Representatives from New York-based organizations, such as the New Economy Project and Picture the Homeless, were also present.[42] I brought lessons from these organizations back to Parkdale and these inspirational experiences helped concretize our vision for PNLT. Since then, PNLT's development has benefited from continued learning exchanges with these CLTs through webinars, site visits, and reports.

Adopting a holistic approach to community development

Culminating our activities in this phase, we conducted the first visioning session with interim board members, community leaders, and other active volunteers. We developed a foundation of purpose, vision, and values, and came to define community benefits in a more holistic way. Initial interest in the CLT model derived from the need to preserve commercial spaces for existing affordable food options and community-driven food initiatives. In keeping with this interest, as we prepared funding proposals to the Metcalf Foundation, the opportunity to acquire an urban agriculture site first emerged. While advancing stakeholder engagement and community organizing, we also recognized the pressing need for affordable housing. It was clear from the outset that we would focus on rental housing, not homeownership.

Through engagement efforts we learned that community members were feeling a sense of loss of control over neighbourhood change. PNLT started to garner more support around concepts of community control and grassroots democracy. We became increasingly interested in the CLT model's neighbourhood-wide membership base and community governance, which we thought could be mobilized as a vehicle for community-based planning and as a counterpoint to real estate-driven statutory public planning in Toronto.

PNLT started to garner more support around concepts of community control and grassroots democracy.

This role of community-based planning was absent in Parkdale. For example, when PARC wanted to advocate for neighbourhood benefits, their work was often perceived as representing only the interests of community members who are psychiatric survivors. PNLT began envisioning being able to serve as a

[42] Joshua Barndt — who later became PNLTs first dedicated staff person — was there as a member of the Right to the City Alliance's New York Chapter.

community planning body to support community initiatives and advocate for neighbourhood-wide interests around issues of social justice. With several notable exceptions, not many CLTs undertake this community-based planning role.

As I reflect on the historical formation of PNLT, I see two benefits to PNLT's origins being part of broader social-solidarity economy initiatives under the umbrella of the Parkdale People's Economy.[43] First, it meant that PNLT was conceived as a place-based response to specific neighbourhood challenges such as gentrification, not as a property-based response to the shortage of affordable housing. Second, PNLT was developed as a systemic response to structural challenges by building an alternative place-based organization with the capacity to change material conditions of people's lives through community ownership and stewardship of land.

...PNLT was conceived as a place-based response to specific neighbourhood challenges such as gentrification, not as a property-based response to the shortage of affordable housing.

For this broader framing of the CLT model, the role of progressive foundations in Toronto cannot be underestimated and the Metcalf Foundation's Inclusive Local Economies program was particularly timely. Their grantmaking practice allowed PNLT to pursue a broader framing of issues including critiques of system issues such as the private property market and statutory land use planning.[44] With attention to the question of land ownership, a goal of social transformation was integral to the conscious framing of PNLT and Parkdale People's Economy.

Organizational capacity building (2014–2016)

After the initial exploration stage, we submitted a grant proposal to the Ontario Trillium Foundation for organizational capacity building. With this funding, we were able to hire Joshua Barndt as the first dedicated staff for PNLT in 2015. Born and raised in Parkdale, Joshua brought a wealth of experience in community organizing and grounded knowledge of the CLT model through his collaboration with the Cooper Square CLT and the Right to the City Alliance in New York.

Having a dedicated staff person was essential at this stage to undertake organizational infrastructure development, capacity building, and membership development. While conducting a community needs assessment was one of the primary activities we undertook during this time, developing both a strategic plan and a business plan was equally important. Committee members turned the

[43] The Parkdale People's Economy grew to represent the network of community-based organizations, grassroots groups, and residents who were initially brought together through the Parkdale Community Economic Development (PCED) Project in 2015–2016.

[44] James DeFilippis, Brian Stromberg, and Olivia R. Williams, "W(h)ither the *Community* in Community Land Trusts?" 755-769. This experience contrasts with that of CLTs in the United States, where public and private funders tend to pressure CLTs to increase housing supply and scale up their operation as DeFilippis et al document.

work plan, submitted to the Ontario Trillium Foundation, into PNLTs first strategic plan.[45] Three housing experts were hired to develop the business plan.[46]

Becoming a strategic convenor

Business planning helped us understand a unique role PNLT should play in Parkdale: strategic convenor. This role was identified by assessing a gap in the non-profit community housing sector in Toronto. Parkdale is home to a range of non-profit and supportive housing organizations focused on the operation and management of affordable rental and supportive housing, but none of them specialize in acquisition and preservation of existing at-risk affordable housing and/or vacant sites. This gap is likely a consequence of decades of government disinvestment in social housing that curtailed growth of the community housing sector. PNLT's proposed contribution was to fill this gap by taking a different approach to equitable neighbourhood development and focus on the question of ownership, rather than operation.

PNLT's proposed contribution was to...focus on the question of ownership, rather than operation.

As a strategic convenor, we emphasized bringing together community members, non-profit organizations, grassroots groups, and other community stakeholders. We developed a partnership model where we focused on project management, financing, and land acquisition, while non-profit partners brought their expertise and resources for housing operation and management. This was compatible with our holistic approach as our focus would be the acquisition and stewardship of land for a range of community priorities from supporting local-serving businesses to protecting an urban agriculture site.

Our vision, however, was not compatible with the requirement of obtaining a charitable status. In conversation with local law firm Iler Campbell, we realized we needed to contemplate an organizational structure that would work for our application of the CLT model. Major areas of interest were not seen as "charitable" including mixed income housing, co-operative housing, leasing commercial spaces for local serving businesses, and even community planning. It became clear to us how restrictive it could be, as the bottom line was that a charitable organization is allowed to engage in *poverty reduction*, but not *poverty prevention*. In 2017, after two years, we were able to obtain a charitable status. This restrictive nature of a charitable status prompted us to explore building a creative non-profit organizational structure.

Acquisition of the Milky Way Garden enabled PNLT to develop necessary organizational infrastructures and resources. We explored this acquisition in partnership with Greenest City, who had been working with the Tibetan gardeners. The aim was to protect the site, as a community-owned urban

[45] Matt MacLean and Judy Josefowicz took the leadership role in building the first strategic plan.
[46] Derek Ballantyne and Paul Connelly undertook the first stage of business planning while Tim Welch completed the second stage.

agriculture area, from pressures of speculative redevelopment that often displace these social and cultural practices.

PARC as a backbone organization

PARC's role as a backbone organization was an important condition for the early success of PNLT.[47] PARC offered essential support, administration, and infrastructure that went beyond their organizational mandate to support neighbourhood-wide community development initiatives. This was so helpful because it meant PNLT did not have to initially invest time and resources on building these infrastructures, but could focus on essential tasks.

As a 40-year-old organization, PARC had established its own track record, credibility, and social capital in Toronto. PARC harnessed these assets for the benefit of PNLT. For example, PARC shared their connections with sector networks, foundations, policy makers, and politicians. This facilitation opened up access to information, resources, and public policy debates that PNLT alone would not have been able to cultivate at the early stages. Furthermore, PARC was invited to important stakeholder meetings to inform policy advocacy and policy development, such as the future of Toronto Community Housing's scattered homes in 2012, and extended these invitations to PNLT. This is an invisible but crucial benefit PNLT received from PARC.

Equally important was PARC staff's mentorship to PNLT staff. We were able to tap into their experience of community organizing, stories, and ongoing efforts that reflected long-term commitment to working with vulnerable community members such as psychiatric survivors and immigrant communities. On a day-to-day basis, we interacted with PARC staff and members through meetings, joint projects, and informal chats in the hallways of 1499 Queen Street West. These interactions enabled us to learn systemic critiques of oppression and marginalization, and an ethic of community care. Such minute but crucial connections helped ground PNLT in people's day-to-day experience and Parkdale's long history of social justice activism.[48]

These interactions enabled us to learn systemic critiques of oppression and marginalization, and an ethic of community care.

Community support for the CLT model grows

In fall 2015, PNLT held its first Annual General Meeting at the Bonar-Parkdale Presbyterian Church. By this time, PNLT's efforts of community engagement, membership drive, and community forums — including co-organizing a mayoral debate at PARC's drop-in centre in 2014 — started to receive community and

[47] PARC also hosted the entire Parkdale People's Economy and hired a few dedicated staff for different initiatives, later forming the "systems change" team within PARC. PARC's backbone organizational support went beyond conventional administrative supports.
[48] Above all, Bob Rose, then Program Director of PARC, shared his extensive experience in anti-poverty organizing and community development in Parkdale.

media attention as being ground-breaking, such as in the *Toronto Star* article: "In neighbourhood land we trust, some Parkdale residents hope."[49]

At the AGM, we transitioned from the interim board to a community-elected board. Ten new board members were elected from fifteen candidates. All candidates made passionate speeches sharing why they wanted to be part of PNLT. For example, a community development practitioner told everyone that he wanted to address the process of gentrification to which he had contributed when their family recently purchased a house in Parkdale, and PNLT was a concrete place from which to show commitment to the neighbourhood. This feeling was not uncommon at that time. A range of new residents were attracted to Parkdale and some of them were conscious about potential implications of their own actions.

The AGMs are a constant reminder of why the organization exists.

This practice carries on and every AGM includes speeches from candidates of different backgrounds who share their passion for PNLT. The AGMs are a constant reminder of why the organization exists. At one AGM, Bonnie Briggs, a long-term activist on the issue of homelessness, offered the following:

> *I hope to be able to share my homeless experience with the Board. I'd also like to share some of my accomplishments which occurred after [my husband] and I came off the street … [including] the preservation of the … bus route in North York and stopping the Front Street Extension from roaring through Parkdale. We took our landlord to the tribunal twice and won. We were granted rent control by the Tribunal. So what do I bring to the board? … I bring my desire to fight for Parkdale and help do what I can to help preserve Parkdale's character and to make life better for people in Parkdale.*

As awareness of the CLT model grew, we attracted a number of experienced community members and value-aligned professionals to the PNLT board. Around this time, CLTs were also seeded in other places, such as the Hamilton Community Land Trust and the Kensington Market Community Land Trust in Toronto. We were also in touch with the Hogan's Alley Society in Vancouver who were exploring the CLT model.

Community-based planning (2015–2016)

From 2014 onwards, the pace of gentrification and displacement in Parkdale further accelerated. Pressures on the affordability of high-rise apartments and eviction threats in Parkdale intensified rapidly after financial corporate landlords — notably Europe-based firm Akelius — started to acquire more

[49] Catherine Porter, "In Neighbourhood Land We Trust."

apartment buildings. This was the initial wave of housing financialization and the rise of "corporate landlords" that was spreading across major metropolitan areas where rent controls were relatively weak.[50] One of these landlords even attempted to rename Parkdale as Liberty Village East.[51]

Although we were making progress to acquire the Milky Way Garden, it was clear that removing one piece of property from the speculative market would not stop the broader processes that drive gentrification, including exclusionary forms of urbanization and growing socio-spatial inequality. Real estate actors such as REITs were moving faster to find ways to extract benefits from Parkdale. We needed to be proactive in identifying community strategies rather than reacting to the inevitable.

...removing...property from the speculative market would not stop...exclusionary forms of urbanization and growing socio-spatial inequality.

Expanding the realm of community control

A unique and remarkable strength of Parkdale is its diversity of alternative community economic initiatives that can address multiple aspects of local economies. Along with PNLT, there are social enterprises, co-operative housing, the Co-op Cred program, and the Community Food Flow project. But diversity does not automatically translate into oppositional economic practices for wider political goals. This became clear to me as I engaged with community partners who were not aware of initiatives other than those they were directly involved in. To overcome this challenge, we realized we needed to embed the process of building and expanding alternative economic institutions, such as PNLT, into wider processes of community-driven planning and organizing.

These circumstances, coupled with the designation of South Parkdale as a Neighbourhood Improvement Area by the City of Toronto, promoted the launch of the Parkdale Community Economic Development (PCED) Planning Project in 2015. Funded by the Atkinson Foundation, this eighteen-month planning project convened over twenty-five community-based organizations and hundreds of community residents and businesses. The main goal was to create a community-driven neighbourhood plan. For PNLT, this was timely because we were planning to undertake a community needs assessment to see how we could align with, and advance, Parkdale's neighbourhood priorities and visions.

Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative and the idea of community control

The PCED Project was inspired by the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI) in Boston. DSNI have a range of tools and strategies they use for community control and development without displacement, to help them

[50] Martine August and Alan Walks, "Gentrification, Suburban Decline, and the Financialization of Multi-Family Rental Housing," 124-136.
[51] Liberty Village is a neighbourhood adjacent to Parkdale to the east. The area used to be an industrial area but has been revitalized as a cultural economy hub and home to high-rise condominiums.

increase community control over land that they do not own.[52] They include: eminent domain, a community-driven master plan, community standards for design and development, and a Memorandum of Understanding with the City of Boston that gives DSNI authority to review development applications within their service area.

DSNI's work illuminated PNLT's need to explore a more expanded concept of community control infused with anti-displacement.[53] The PCED Project was an opportunity for us to come up with ways to do this. We felt the potential of PNLT to pursue social change and equitable economies could be even further strengthened if the CLT model was integrated with social procurement, community benefits agreements, and alternative community-owned enterprises.

...PNLT...could be... strengthened if the CLT model was integrated with social procurement, community benefits agreements, and alternative community-owned enterprises.

The Queen's Hotel and Naming-the-Moment

Design of the PCED Project focused on long-term strategy development and neighbourhood visioning.[54] At the very early stage, however, we had to respond to rapidly unfolding challenges of eviction and displacement in Parkdale. In August 2015, twenty-six tenants were unlawfully evicted with only a week's notice from what used to be called Queen's Hotel. It was in fact a rooming house. A real estate developer had purchased the property and sent residents an informal one-week eviction notice. What's worse, the actual eviction process involved police and violence. As one community member who was evicted wrote to *NOW Magazine*:

> *I currently live in a substandard rooming house, after a mass eviction from the Queen's Hotel in 2015, with six days notice. I managed to land the room. Most of the hotel's other tenants weren't so lucky: it was couch surfing and overcrowded shelter system for them. In the wake of the eviction, the new owners made minor improvements, doubled the room rates, changed its name to the Roncey Hotel and started advertising for tourists on AirBnB, Kijiji and Craigslist.*[55]

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[52] In the field of CLTs, community control usually refers to community ownership, governance, and direct control of land through community governance. What is insightful about the DSNI's work is a more expanded notion of community control based on their range of strategies. With these, DSNI has acted as a community planning body to shape neighbourhood development. We got to learn the work of DSNI in details through the webinars organized by the Right to the City Alliance and a site visit via the New Economy Coalition conference.

[53] In addition to DSNI, the PCED Project was inspired by the community action research project on shared wealth by the Bronx Cooperative Development Initiative and the Cleveland Model for community wealth building.

[54] In designing the project, we benefited from the support of the Catalyst Centre, a popular education organization in Toronto, and Chris Cavanagh in particular.

[55] *NOW Magazine*, "Parkdale's Vulnerable are Hanging by a Thread."

After the incident, PNLT convened a public forum where over 100 tenants and community members got together at PARC to discuss displacement issues and community responses.

This incident had a huge impact on me, as a lead planner for the project, and on other collaborators. In the same year, there were other rooming house closures and evictions in Parkdale. These incidents exposed the real violence and everyday practices behind gentrification and real estate capital. The Queen's Hotel incident was not an isolated event but part of wider forces behind housing injustice, mounting pressures of displacement, and homelessness faced by lower-income and racialized tenants in Parkdale. These incidents raised thorny questions: how could we be accountable to community members who face immediate pressures of eviction and violence, when we talk about long-term strategies for equitable futures? What is to be done *now* in the face of immediate community needs without losing sight of long-term visions?

What is to be done now in the face of immediate community needs without losing sight of long-term visions?

Naming-the-Moment

Naming-the-Moment is a popular education approach to political analysis for social action.[56] Its approach revolves around the idea of "conjunctural analysis." **Structural analysis** helps identify root causes of issues and systemic constraints. But the relations of structural forces — political, economic, cultural, ecological, and so on — are neither permanent nor fixed. They change and show weaknesses and fissures, which can open up political opportunities at a particular moment (ibid.). **Conjunctural analysis** directs attention to these fluid movements of structural forces and identifies what may be possible at a particular conjuncture. Thus, the Naming-the-Moment approach helps identify and seize such conjunctural possibilities that the present moment might offer, to act on appropriate short-term strategies in relation to long-term goals.

The Naming-the-Moment approach was particularly compelling for those of us involved with the PCED Project who had to grapple with the tension between long-term social change visions and immediate pressures of eviction and displacement that marginalized communities were facing. Importantly, this approach is a method as much as a way of thinking and acting. While details of the methods are beyond the scope of this document, we used them to reorient the framework of the participatory planning process, which was grounded in community-based action research.

[56] Deborah Barndt, *Naming the Moment: Political Analysis for Action.*

Embedding PNLT into neighbourhood visions and priorities

The PCED Project resulted in the Parkdale Neighbourhood Plan (2016) which outlines a diversity of community development strategies. They range from mobilizing PNLT for equitable redevelopment and organizing community benefits agreement campaigns, to supporting tenant organizing. It was important to combine strategies as concerted planning interventions. Short-term strategies were essential to build the necessary conditions and community power for achieving long-term goals.[57]

Through the PCED Project, PNLT helped shift a common feeling people in Parkdale had at that time, that gentrification was inevitable, to a shared sense of possibilities for equitable development. The planning project helped denaturalize "market forces" behind gentrification — often seen as natural forces we cannot do anything about — and instead identified areas of community action and policy options to guide neighbourhood change.

The planning project helped denaturalize "market forces" behind gentrification...

The PCED Project also allowed us to develop deeper partnerships and align our strengths with the priorities and expertise of existing housing organizations. The plan became the basis of a shared neighbourhood vision within which we were able to position our work. This difference matters. If organizations project their vision as a neighbourhood vision, they run a risk of putting their organizational priorities over neighbourhood priorities. The PCED planning project helped embed PNLT into neighbourhood-wide priorities and strategies to advance community control over neighbourhood change.

When the Parkdale Neighbourhood Plan was released at a community forum, we organized a walking tour to showcase promising directions that the plan set out for specific sites (e.g. St. Mark Church for a community food hub idea, and a rooming house for PNLT's preservation strategy). This gave community members the chance to link the plan's strategies for change to actual spaces they use on a day-to-day basis. The Parkdale Solidarity Mural transformed a Green P Parking lot into a space that visualized the guiding principles of shared wealth, equitable development, and decent work.

[57] It is noteworthy that PNLT has been able to implement a number of directions identified in the plan as described later in the report.

Celebration and launch of the Parkdale neighbourhood solidarity flag mural in 2016. Photo: Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust

The PCED Project became an opportunity to scale up the work and the impact of PNLT beyond owning land. It helped embed PNLT into public discourses, everyday conversations, and people's sense of hope and possibility for resisting gentrification and guiding neighbourhood change in a more equitable fashion. One of the planning project leaders recalls:

> *We have a very strong counter-narrative in the neighbourhood and the media. Our critiques are out there. Our alternatives are out there. This is backed up by our planning work. Parkdale has a spotlight as a place that is willing to push back and [as a place] that has alternatives. We have changed the narrative that it is impossible to stop gentrification.... People are organizing and owning that story.*[58]

The Milky Way Garden as a grounded site of possibilities

The culmination of the planning process in summer 2016 coincided with a fundraising event for the acquisition of the Milky Way Garden where we organized a community potluck and a screening of Naomi Klein's film *This Changes Everything*.

[58] Kuni Kamizaki, "Parkdale Planning Theory for Social Change."

Milky Way community fundraiser. Photo: Jordan Lui

Community members and supporters gathered on the site, which, for that night, served as a performative space of what community ownership would mean and feel like. As one community stakeholder recalls, "it was such an important signifier of … what the bigger values are … together, we bought this land, and … we have more assets than we think, and community ownership is compelling" (int-15).

The acquisition was supported by 188 community donations of approximately $25,500 in total, demonstrating the community's ability to mobilize resources and acquire real estate assets in Toronto. A staff characterizes this first acquisition as a critical moment representing PNLT "doing something that people thought was not possible…[and] generat[ing] more energy and momentum than people anticipated" (int-27).

The urban agriculture site may be small in size, but it has had considerable impact on the trajectory of PNLT. For one, it proved the possibility of the CLT model in Parkdale to prioritize social use over conventional "highest-and-best-use" in land development. A staff member affirms, "there was much more value in demonstrating how you wanted to work with the community [through the CLT model] than there was in trying to maximize the development potential of the site" (int-27).

…it proved the possibility of the CLT model in Parkdale to prioritize social use over conventional "highest-and-best-use" in land development.

For example, Tibetan gardeners became the first "core members" of PNLT's community governance. Accordingly, we started to change governance practices, notably by making sure to have an interpreter present in board meetings. The Milky Way Garden became an important socializing space for Tibetan elders and newcomer communities. For some, taking care of the garden and land allowed them to earn necessary volunteer hours because it is coordinated by the Greenest City. And through PNLT, Tibetan community members started to join wider neighbourhood initiatives and felt supported to take action on other issues such as housing.

To envision the future of the Milky Way Garden, we collaborated with the Greenest City to host participatory planning sessions in 2017 to build a site plan

and a business plan. These sessions engaged over 200 members. The resulting vision emphasized keeping the Milky Way Garden as an urban agriculture site, with a focus on environmental education and inter-generational knowledge sharing.

Rooming house preservation (2017–2020)

Throughout the PCED Project, we witnessed an alarming rate of rooming house closures. While pressures of gentrification and real estate reinvestment grew, many rooming house owners were close to the age of retirement without any succession plans. When they decided to close their businesses, their properties often came up for sale without much notice. As a result, community groups, including PNLT, needed to respond to sudden mass evictions of tenants who often ended up in shelter systems or, in the worst cases, homeless.

Parkdale's homelessness crisis and the rooming house study

This urgent need for eviction prevention and anti-displacement was identified in the Parkdale Neighbourhood Plan, and PNLT made this a priority. With funding support from Maytree Foundation and John Van Nostrand Developments, PNLT undertook the Rooming House Study, a six-month community-based action research project to understand the current state of rooming houses in Parkdale.[59] PNLT convened community housing partners, planning professionals, and tenants for the project. The research process brought these multi-stakeholders together to grapple with the rapidly diminishing housing stock. Importantly, six rooming house tenants were hired as community-based researchers to shape and implement community action research.

Results of the rooming house study were revealing, frightening, and called for urgent planning action.[60] The study identified over 198 rooming houses in Parkdale, far exceeding 112 licensed ones the city was aware of. As of 2017, these rooming houses offered deeply affordable housing options for 2,700 lower-income tenants. The study also confirmed an alarming trend of ongoing loss. From 2006 to 2016, there were twenty-eight closures resulting in the dislocation and eviction of 350 vulnerable tenants. Even more pressing, the study exposed imminent risks of losing fifty-nine more rooming houses through single-family conversion and upscaling. This meant over 800 rooming house tenants in Parkdale were at risk of eviction, displacement, and homelessness.

...over 800 rooming house tenants in Parkdale were at risk of eviction, displacement, and homelessness.

[59] Lucas Van Meer-Mass joined PNLT to coordinate the project.
[60] Neighbourhood Land Trust, *No Room for Unkept Promises*.

Parkdale rooming house eviction prevention and preservation strategy

Based on the research findings, PNLT proposed a ten-year rooming house preservation strategy for Parkdale. It is important to emphasize this was a *neighbourhood* strategy, based on a recognition that PNLT alone would not be able to solve the rooming house crisis in Parkdale, and that other community housing organizations would contribute to this shared goal. Equally important, the study insisted that the City of Toronto should play a role in this collaborative work.

With this strategy, we applied for the Ontario Local Poverty Reduction Fund. The resulting work plan became a de facto strategic plan for PNLT for the next few years.[61] We proposed a three-year pilot initiative built on two components outlined in the rooming house preservation strategy:

- The **Proactive Eviction Prevention (PEP)** project was a tenant-led approach to eviction prevention. This strategy revolved around proactive monitoring of at-risk buildings, tenant engagement, creation of tenant committees, legal education, and leadership development to support tenants in organizing to claim their rights.
- The **Rooming House Acquisition and Rehabilitation (RHAR)** project focused on the community-led acquisition and rehabilitation of privately-owned, at-risk rooming houses into community-owned permanently affordable homes. Objectives were preventing eviction of sitting tenants, preserving buildings as permanently affordable housing, and improving living conditions.

This pilot initiative was crucial to demonstrate how PNLT, as a grassroots CLT, could achieve the first successful community-led preservation of an at-risk rooming house. There was still skepticism towards the model from government staff, as one PNLT staff recalls that the CLT model was not yet proven for housing (int-06).

The initial design of the three-year pilot assumed a vital connection between the PEP and the RHAR projects.[62] The PEP's proactive interventions and ongoing monitoring would enable early detection of warning signs of a house sale and potential eviction. Then, landlord engagement would provide the opportunity to make early interventions and offer succession planning where possible before properties were listed in the open market. A site of tenant organizing could become a potential site of housing preservation.

It turned out, however, that the relationship between the two projects was not as seamless as we had presumed. Supporting tenants against evictions and

[61] Raven Williams and Ana Teresa Portillo joined PNLT to support the demonstration project.
[62] This pilot initiative development was inspired by the successful small site acquisition work of the Bay Area Consortium of Community Land Trusts for supporting tenant organizing against eviction and preserving small-scale buildings as community-owned homes.

working with landlords for succession planning, on the same site, entailed various conflicts. For one, landlords were not necessarily interested in selling their properties to non-profits, and to address this we decided to engage a commercial realtor for market monitoring. Nevertheless, the relationship between tenant-led organizing and community housing preservation remained critical and the two projects complemented each other.

Exposing everyday practices of gentrification and housing policy assumption[63]

Through PEP tenant-led organizing, we became aware of landlord tactics and realtor's practices behind "vacant possession." For example, owners may try to evict tenants before putting a building on the market, in order to offer a vacated building to purchasers. Vacant units enable the vendor to increase the projected market value of the building based on higher asking rents rather than lower sitting rents. Investors who purchase buildings with the intent to upscale them often demand vacant possession, or evict sitting tenants, in order to carry out renovations.

Investors who purchase buildings...often demand vacant possession, or evict sitting tenants, in order to carry out renovations.

We became aware of this practice through connections with tenants as well as our acquisition work. For the latter, we were able to access buyer information packages that often showed considerable gaps between projected rent revenues and current rent revenues.[64] PEP tenant organizers shared information about these realtors' tactics with tenants. In response, tenants independently organized the "The man who sold Parkdale" campaign against a realtor who was promoting the sale of rooming houses. Their organizing exposed everyday real estate practices behind gentrification that are far more complicated than typical demographic accounts of higher-income people moving into lower-income neighbourhoods.

Meanwhile, the RHAR project led PNLT to its first dedicated attempts to acquire and preserve at-risk affordable residential buildings. A dozen attempts were made. All failed. Failure helped staff reflect on acquisition planning challenges and increased the board's understanding of acquisition and funding issues. For example, PNLT's Acquisition Committee developed a due diligence checklist and staff established a comprehensive approach to feasibility assessment that encompassed not only financial but also social and physical feasibilities.

Despite vigorous monitoring of real estate opportunities, support from funders, and the development of tools for feasibility analysis, we faced barriers to acquisition. In September 2017, staff prepared an evaluation report inviting

[63] Based on an internal evaluation report by Kuni Kamizaki and Emily Paradis in 2017.
[64] James Crowder Jr. et al., *Our Homes, Our Communities*, 18. This is related to the issue of the "displacement premium."

board members to reflect collectively on failed acquisition and financing. In the report, staff suggested:

> *It is our opinion that with increased financial readiness, project planning and a revised project team, this model of rooming house preservation could be feasible. However, to have a successful acquisition, PNLT needs to be in control of either the time or the money (emphasis added to the original).*[65]

This captures the essence of the problem. Conventional real estate practices demand a faster pace of due diligence and closing. We needed to be able to sign an Agreement of Purchase and Sale and close a deal within two to three months. However, existing government programs at that time took more than three months to go through the approval process. A past board member shares the frustrating process of attempted acquisitions:

> *A lot of frustration! We were a bit naïve.... We thought we could find a sort of sympathetic and empathetic owner that would say, "I don't really need to sell my property in the next two weeks ... I could hold off for six months or a year." We weren't really successful [with] finding those people (int-22).*

The biggest challenge in acquiring and preserving at-risk affordable housing was being able to raise acquisition funds — including funds for down payment — quickly enough to acquire properties in the open market. In short, the absence of predictable upfront government grants for acquisition was a major obstacle.

The biggest challenge in acquiring and preserving at-risk affordable housing was being able to raise acquisition funds...

We came to understand how fast real estate investors and landlords were repositioning properties through vacant possession. These purchases were financed by commercial banks based on the assumption rents would dramatically increase. In addition, we learned that existing housing programs largely emphasize operational subsidies, grants for retrofits, and investments in new construction. In turn, our community-led acquisition efforts exposed a dominant assumption behind housing policy that emphasizes the market-led supply of new housing over community-led housing preservation. To preserve at-risk rooming houses, we needed to support tenant-led organizing, pursue community-led acquisition, *as well as* work for policy change initiatives to challenge current housing and planning systems.

...we needed to support tenant-led organizing, pursue community-led acquisition, *as well as* work for policy change initiatives...

[65] Joshua Barndt and Raven Williams, "Project Evalu-Action."

Building a system for community-led acquisition

It would be tempting to blame individual organizational practices and the lack of readiness for failed acquisitions. However, the loss of existing affordable housing and resulting evictions were a result of (the lack of) public policy. Eviction is a systemic failure of the housing system. As Joshua Barndt of PNLT has expressed, the failure of public policy is an opportunity for policy change.[66]

Eviction is a systemic failure of the housing system.

Using the Rooming House Study results and learnings from the pilot project and organizing efforts, PNLT engaged in a community-driven policymaking process. Reflecting on the public impact of the Rooming House Study, a former board member stresses that it was research that helped position PNLT as a credible expert:

> *PNLT became an expert in something that no one else was, an expert in the rooming house [issue]. They had this incredible report that had better data than the city had. There was this deep, deep base of knowledge that [PNLT] was able to leverage really well to give [themselves] credibility [with] the city and build a name for itself (int-06).*

Both the Rooming House Study report and the subsequent Dwelling Room Preservation Policy report played a key role in advocating for an acquisition program. PNLT and PARC worked with the local city councillor to share information and analysis with the City of Toronto's Housing Secretariat. As a number of past and present board members recall, PNLT was proposing a community-driven solution to a housing issue (i.e. the loss of rooming houses) that government did not have viable responses to.

This collaborative policy work resulted in the establishment of the Rooming House Acquisition and Modernization pilot project that enabled fast-tracked funding approvals in 2018.[67] With this pilot initiative, PNLT was able to save a 15-unit at-risk rooming house in May 2019.

[66] Joshua Barndt, "Scaling the Community Based CLT."
[67] The idea of the pilot project came up in a meeting with Joshua Barndt, local councillor Gord Perks, and Sean Gaden from the Housing Secretariat, to discuss how the city could support this direction without having to create a new program.

Celebrating PNLT's first acquisition of a 15-unit rooming house in 2019. Photo: Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust

That same year, PNLT organized a city-wide Dwelling Room Preservation Policy Working Group.[68] This policy work contributed to city council passing an Official Plan Amendment (OPA) 453. It stipulates the protection of dwelling rooms by requiring the replacement of rooms demolished due to redevelopment of buildings where six or more rooms are lost.

PNLT's experience shows that community housing acquisition goes far beyond raising sufficient capital and buying a property. It requires the mobilization of political will as well as grassroots tenant action. PNLT has changed how the market is governed. In fact, PNLT's work demonstrates the need for building a system of community-led preservation by acquisition.[69] This system approach is grounded in commitment to:

- the leadership of a community-based organization such as PNLT that specializes in undertaking acquisition;
- community-based research and data such as the Rooming House Study;
- the development and implementation of supportive public policy for community-led housing acquisition; and
- tenant-led organizing and eviction prevention.

Community-led acquisition as an anti-displacement strategy raises a question of how to gauge "success." PNLT was not able to save all at-risk existing affordable housing. For one, some at-risk buildings did not meet PNLT's

[68] Melissa Goldstein joined PNLT to support policy research on dwelling rooms and coordinate the working group.
[69] Urban Habitat, *Building a Community-Centred Housing Preservation Ecosystem.*

framework for physical and financial feasibility even if they had high social feasibility and needs. However, at the same time, tenant-led organizing was able to make timely interventions through ongoing neighbourhood-wide monitoring of at-risk buildings. Tenant organizing encouraged tenants to fight and stay put, preventing the loss of existing affordable rental units. This demonstrates how success is defined not only by acquisition and the number of preserved units, but also by eviction prevention through tenant-led organizing.

Tenant organizing encouraged tenants to fight and stay put, preventing the loss of existing affordable rental units.

Community benefits organizing campaigns

While we were developing real estate expertise and organizational infrastructures necessary for acquisition, we still continued to commit to community organizing and neighbourhood engagement. Around this time, gaps in directions and emphases on strategies between the Parkdale People's Economy and PNLT became large. PNLT no longer needed PARC for backbone support and decided to set up an office in St. Mark Church. PNLT and the Parkdale People's Economy continued to collaborate in organizing a series of community workshops on community benefits agreements as a community organizing tool.

One major campaign PNLT and the Parkdale People's Economy collaborated on was the "Not In My Lifetime" campaign against a redevelopment project of luxury condominiums at King Street West and Dufferin Street.[70] The developer proposed two luxury condos, a total of about eighty meters higher than what's permitted in Toronto's Official Plan, with no on-site affordable housing. This was a proposal to a neighbourhood designated by the city as an area of high social needs and equity gaps. PNLT members and other community groups made a number of deputations to object to this proposal at the city council meeting. On the National Housing Day in 2017, we also organized street demonstrations with PNLT members and residents.

Although there was fierce opposition, city council approved the project because they believed that the developer could take the case to the Ontario Municipal Board, which could result in the loss of a $2 million Section-37 contribution. Despite this loss, community members who engaged in the demonstrations came to develop a fine-tuned understanding of city planning processes and the politics of urban development.

...community members who engaged in the demonstrations came to develop a fine-tuned understanding of city planning processes...

Community action continued. Through the PCED Project, we had come to learn that the provincial government redeveloped a funeral home on Queen Street West — where it could have built additional affordable housing units — into a one-story LCBO without any community outreach and consultation. The provincial government had also failed to communicate to the city about the

[70] Mercedes Sharpe Zayas from PPE played a crucial role in the campaign along with PNLT members.

potential opportunity for an affordable housing project at a former LCBO site on Brock Avenue. We framed these as failures of public statutory planning. On the National Housing Day in 2018, PNLT and its members occupied the Brock Avenue site to demonstrate the immediate need for government action to address the escalating housing crisis. This site was later purchased by the City of Toronto. In 2024, it was announced that it would be redeveloped into a supportive housing project by PARC.

The growth phase (2020–current)

In 2020, PNLT renewed a strategic plan to help embark on a new "growth" phase from 2021 to 2026. A main concern at this time was how to scale community impacts in Parkdale while ensuring financial sustainability for long-term stewardship. There were two contexts for this aspiration.

First, we saw continued need and opportunities for community-led preservation of at-risk rooming houses, and started work on an RFP response to the city's Tenant First Initiative through which the City of Toronto would transfer Toronto Community Housing's scattered homes to non-profit proponents.[71] A dozen of these homes were located in Parkdale. This RFP was an opportunity to preserve at-risk public housing against privatization and grow our asset holdings. We felt this growth was needed to get to a scale that would ensure long-term organizational and financial sustainability. There was also interest in pursuing a scaling strategy such as a "portfolio approach" exemplified by the Community Land Trust Foundation of British Columbia.

...growth was needed to get to a scale that would ensure long-term organizational and financial sustainability.

Second, neighbourhood-based CLTs like PNLT were sometimes described as ineffective as they were too small to make meaningful contributions to addressing the deepening housing crisis. Even in Toronto, some non-profit housing stakeholders would suggest that instead of supporting many neighbourhood-based CLTs, having one or two large CLTs would be more efficient.

The compounding housing crisis

On a day-to-day basis, we witnessed tenants struggling against the loss of affordable rental housing. Pressures from the financialization of purpose-built rental housing in Parkdale were escalating; the need for community-owned homes was pressing. The imperative for scaling PNLT's impact was amplified by the global pandemic that exposed and exacerbated pre-existing socio-economic, racial, and gendered inequalities. Many lower-income and racialized communities found themselves unable to pay rents due to the loss of work and faced increasing risks of eviction and homelessness. The central bank's low-

[71] Darnel Harris joined PNLT as Operations Manager and supported PNLT's RFP response process.

interest measures helped fuel real estate market speculation and the consolidation of ownership by financialized landlords.

During the pandemic, PNLT undertook further community action research, this time focused on tower apartment buildings in South Parkdale. The Tower Rental Housing Study revealed that financial firms own over half of the private tower buildings in South Parkdale, demonstrating a growing disproportionate control and consolidation of rental housing ownership in the hands of financial actors.[72] Existing affordable housing units were being lost.

While we faced the need to scale our impacts, we were confronted with the inherent challenge of scaling the CLT. Bringing the real estate portfolio to scale could result in sidelining the commitment to community control, community organizing, and movement building, which presented various challenges.[73] Yet we also recognized that there is an important connection between a level of community control and the scale of a real estate portfolio.[74] We debated the meaning of "growth" carefully through the strategic planning process. The question was: can a grassroots CLT like PNLT pursue a scaling strategy without losing its roots and commitment to social transformation goals?

The question was: can...PNLT pursue a scaling strategy without losing its roots and commitment to social transformation goals?

The policy win for community-led housing acquisition

Despite PNLTs demonstrated success in 2019 and a pressing need for preservation, still no acquisition grant program was available. To pursue further community-led acquisitions, we decided to launch a new social finance investment initiative in partnership with Vancity Community Investment Bank (VCIB). The Preserve and Protect Guarantee Program would serve as bridge funding until PNLT could secure government grants. We were able to galvanize support from non-profit organizations and foundations such as PARC, Cota, Metcalf Foundation, and Atkinson Foundation. Through this impact investment program we raised a pool of $8.5 million, including $2.6 million in guarantees from the Preserve and Protect Guarantee Program. This fund enabled PNLT's second successful acquisition of a thirty-six-unit small-scale building in 2021.

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[72] Neighbourhood Land Trust, *Parkdale Tower Rental Housing Study*.
[73] Olivia Williams, "Community Control as a Relationship Between a Place-Based Population and Institution" 459-476. Williams identified major challenges such as: 1) the professionalization of CLTs that become expert-driven rather than being based on community participation and member leadership; 2) the pursuit of growth in the number of asset holdings through the expansion of geographic service areas for financial sustainability (i.e. economies of scale); 3) the reliance on external government funding that could dictate organizational priorities and objectives at the expense of political and fiscal autonomy.
[74] Jeffrey S. Lowe, Natalie Prochaska, and W. Dennis Keating, "Bringing permanent affordable housing and community control to scale."

Celebrating PNLT's second acquisition of a 36-unit rental apartment building in 2021. Photo: Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust

Also in 2021, we supported other non-profits, such as PARC, in acquiring rooming houses and small-scale buildings in Parkdale. And we supported the Kensington Market Community Land Trust in its first preservation of affordable housing. By sharing our knowledge we were able to offer technical advice and resources for acquisition planning — such as mentorship to staff and contact information for services necessary for due diligence.

Through these processes, City of Toronto housing policy staff and councillors — particularly with the leadership and expertise of city councillor Gord Perks — learned how the city could support community-led acquisition and came to understand its critical importance to addressing the housing crisis. All of these efforts culminated in a historic housing policy development in 2021, when the city adopted the permanent acquisition program called the Multi-Unit Residential Acquisition (MURA) Program.[75] With MURA funding, PNLT was able to refinance the thirty-six-unit building mentioned above.

The fight continues against eviction, displacement, and financialization

Through anchor institution strategies led by the Parkdale People's Economy, PNLT supported a campaign for the preservation of existing rental housing buildings owned by University Health Network — some of which had been vacant for over a decade. While our call for community ownership did not materialize, a collaborative initiative among University Health Network, the City of Toronto, and United Way Greater Toronto was launched in 2021 to develop a four-storey building with fifty-one affordable rental units.

[75] MURA was created to support the acquisition, renovation, and refinancing of rental homes by non-profit providers.

From 2019 to 2022, we supported a local community benefits campaign led by the Justice for Queen's Hotel (J4QH) coalition and the Parkdale People's Economy. This campaign was in response to a redevelopment proposal by the same developer who had unlawfully evicted twenty-six tenants back in 2015. After the incident, thanks to organizing and tenant testimony, the developer was charged under the Residential Tenancies Act for unlawful evictions. While they were fined a total of $14,000, they came back a few years later with a redevelopment plan to build market-rate rental housing. The developer submitted an appeal to the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal. With the support of the J4QH coalition, we sought Party Status to advocate for affordable housing and fair compensation to former tenants.

This campaign resulted in a major win. The settlement included $1 million for creating affordable housing in Parkdale through the MURA Program and $200,000 for compensation to former tenants evicted by the developer. It was the PNLT's community board who believed this campaign was a critical neighbourhood issue and directed staff to get involved. PNLT also shared the cost of hiring a community organizer to conduct necessary background research to prepare for a Local Planning Appeal Tribunal process.[76]

PNLT continues to engage with broader policy issues through the Canadian Network of Community Land Trusts. PNLT has played a role in supporting the national network from its inception, by organizing webinars and holding an informal gathering at the US CLT Network conference in Oakland in 2017. Through the informal Toronto Community Land Trust Network, PNLT has also supported other grassroots groups across the city to learn about the CLT model. There are now five neighbourhood-based CLTs with a few more in formation.

The transfer of Toronto Community Housing's scattered homes

Back in 2012, the Rob Ford city administration first expressed an interest in selling a total of 600 scattered housing sites across the city in an open market. The rationale was that the sale of these public assets would pay for the repair backlog of public housing. Toronto Community Housing tenants opposed the idea and were joined by social housing advocates, including PNLT, in favouring the transfer to non-profit community organizations. In response, the city decided not to sell them but to issue a Request for Proposal (RFP) for a transfer

[76] It should be noted that the learning exchange with the Better Bloor Dufferin Group, who had experienced the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal process, helped PNLT and community members participate effectively (int-12).

to non-profit organizations. This process marked the beginning of the formation of the Circle Community Land Trust.[77]

The opportunity to respond to the RFP was appealing but posed a few questions given our lack of organizational track record and infrastructure to manage a much larger portfolio. Another major consideration was the need to expand geographic boundaries of our catchment area beyond Parkdale. Properties in Parkdale were included in a bundle of over eighty properties scattered in west-end downtown Toronto. We submitted an expression of interest proposal to transfer those properties in Parkdale alone, but the city did not alter the design of the bundles when they released a request for proposal call. To develop an RFP response to a bundle with properties outside of our catchment area, we decided to partner with the YWCA.[78]

In 2022, the City of Toronto announced the transfer of Toronto Community Housing's scattered homes to the Circle Community Land Trust and Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust. For many people involved, this success was unanticipated. It was, however, the result of community investment and the cumulative impacts of preceding community efforts.[79] Through the two successful rooming house acquisitions in 2019 and 2021, we had developed a relationship with VCIB. Because of this prior work with PNLT, VCIB was confident and supportive of the major undertaking of the transfer of over eighty properties. And the partnership with YWCA Toronto offered a necessary boost for the track record that PNLT did not have: the ability to manage and operate a housing portfolio at scale.

This successful transfer meant expansion of PNLT's service area beyond Parkdale.[80] It prompted us to think carefully about community governance and our place-based connection to Parkdale. The number of core members (i.e. those residents living in buildings owned by PNLT) increased from around forty to approximately 450. A practical question was how this rapid increase should be reflected in the composition of five core member seats on the community governance (one third of the total of fifteen) to ensure the ability to represent place-based populations of Parkdale. Instead of representation by the number of units, PNLT made a bylaw amendment to allow the distribution of core member seats based on three portfolios: one seat for Milky Way, two seats for rooming

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[77] The Circle CLT was established in 2017 in response to the Toronto City Council's proposal to sell over 900 Toronto Community Housing scattered homes. Circle won the RFP to become the steward of 560 scattered homes throughout the city and PNLT received the transfer of the rest of the portfolio concentrated in west-end Toronto. Circle Community Land Trust, *Retrofit & Renew 2024*.
[78] As noted earlier, PNLT could hold assets beyond Parkdale because the incorporation letter of the Neighbourhood Land Trust indicated Toronto as the area of service.
[79] The acquisition committee — particularly the leadership of Daisy McCabe-Lokos and Fatema Jivaji — made an immense contribution to the successful transfer.
[80] With the transfer, PNLT also grew the staff team. James Partanen, Tendon Dongtotsang, and Monica Hutton joined PNLT to support organizational growth. Tendon also led the Tower Apartment research project prior to this.

house properties, and two seats for scattered homes. In addition to direct board participation, PNLT formed a tenant advisory committee for each portfolio to increase different ways of participation and tenant leadership.

Rapid growth raised critical questions regarding the meaning of community control. Over time, PNLT's community organizing has shifted from neighbourhood engagement to tenant (i.e. core member) engagement in renovation and moving. As tenants attest, when we took over the portfolio, we found a range of building issues that had been left unattended due to years of disinvestment and neglect. This meant we needed to address capital repair backlogs while also supporting the stressful process of relocation during construction.

Rapid growth raised critical questions regarding the meaning of community control.

Community wealth through social procurement

When housing and apartments are owned by private owners, local economic resources can leave the neighbourhood and be spent elsewhere (often for further private profit making). There is no guarantee resources will be recycled and reinvested back into the local neighbourhood. In the field of community economic development, this issue is called a leaky bucket.[81,82]

In contrast, PNLT treats its considerable rental revenues, from over eighty affordable homes, as community shared wealth. PNLT has community-based economic power and can organize resources so as to transform conditions of people's everyday life and social relations. For example, for maintenance, retrofitting, and renovations, PNLT teamed up with Building Up. Building Up is a social enterprise that creates employment opportunities for people facing barriers to entering the workforce. It provides a supportive entry point for individuals seeking long-term positions in the trades. This practice is called "social procurement." It prioritizes the use of organizational spending and purchasing from for-profit businesses, to social enterprises and co-operative businesses that pursue social benefits.

PNLT has community-based economic power and can...transform conditions of people's everyday life and social relations.

When preparing for the transfer of scattered homes, PNLT developed the Social Procurement and Sustainability Action Framework.[83] This framework helped inform the strategic partnership model in collaboration with Building Up. What enabled this unique partnership to commit to the principle of social transformation, was the scale of PNLT's portfolio.

PNLT is undertaking several small-scale intensification projects to improve and expand affordable housing. One project is a major renovation of a single-family home into a ten-unit apartment building. PNLT is also planning to add a new floor with nine additional units to the former rooming house building with

[81] Bernie Ward and Julie Lewis, *Plugging the Leaks*.
[82] John Davis, "Plugging the Leaky Bucket."
[83] Diana Yoon et al., *Social Procurement and Sustainability Action Framework*.

thirty-six units that PNLT preserved in 2021. These major renovations are promoting ecological sustainability by using energy efficient materials and structures, which bring down long-term costs of operation and reduce energy consumption. This retrofit work is critical as lower-income tenants tend to live in older buildings whose high energy costs are often born by the tenants.

The Parkdale Community Hub proposal

PNLT has expanded its staff team and its development capacity to manage the increased portfolio and undertake complex construction projects for state-of-good-repair renovation work (int-27).[84] The expanded portfolio and geographic scale have posed challenges, but they have also prepared PNLT to build readiness and capacity in undertaking an equitable development opportunity that the community identified in the 2016 Parkdale Neighbourhood Plan: a community hub redevelopment at Cowan Avenue and Queen Street West. Currently the corner of Queen Street West and Cowan Avenue is made up of several publicly-held assets including the Parkdale Public Library, the Masaryk-Cowan Community Recreation Centre, an artist building, and a municipal parking lot.

The proposal to redevelop these assets into high-density affordable social housing was championed by the local city councillor and a motion passed in 2017. At first, the city's plan did not include any affordable housing, although the community groups and residents continued to advocate for the need. In the revised plan in 2018, the city included the housing component, including the expropriation of a privately-owned dollar store site to expand the scale of affordable housing units.

At the 2023 AGM, PNLT staff presented a few options that focused on a number of groups who have historically faced barriers to accessing affordable housing including single parent households, households with seniors, households with accessibility needs, people receiving social assistance, and BIPOC residents. Members voted for the potential allocation of one-third of units for Indigenous community members, one-third for Black community members, and one-third for other racialized community members. Based on community engagement and stakeholder consultation, PNLT has submitted a proposal to build a sixteen-storey affordable housing project with 175 units.

[84] The staff team has grown to seven full-time staff members as of 2025. PNLT has moved to a co-directorship led by Judy Josefowicz and Tendon Dongtotsang. Judy was one of the first interim board members of PNLT. Also, Chantal Cornu joined PNLT to lead the state-of-good repair work with a strong focus on ecological sustainability.

SECTION FIVE

LOOKING AHEAD

In ***From the Ground Up***, I have offered the story of PNLT's development in relation to changing contexts of Parkdale and broader political economic conditions. This historical timeline is, to some extent, unique to the experience of PNLT. All CLTs go through different milestones of organizational development in different orders. PNLT's experience can prefigure what it may look like to imagine potential paths and obstacles for pursuing social transformation through the CLT model.

At the beginning, building a CLT in Parkdale was seen as next to impossible. PNLT has defied these expectations since its establishment. PNLT has grown to be a community-controlled organization that brings together diverse community members to hold land together. PNLT has kept expanding a "realm of possibilities" for social change through the CLT model. And it has done so by foregrounding the Naming-the-Moment approach to pursue long-term strategies while responding to people's immediate needs and issues of eviction and displacement.

PNLT has kept expanding a "realm of possibilities" for social change...

For PNLT, the CLT model is about more than housing provision. PNLT has demonstrated the potential of the CLT model to act as a vehicle for community-based planning, organizing, and action research. This community practice has been essential to advancing — and practicing —alternative future visions for Parkdale in which PNLT is embedded. In so doing, PNLT has contributed to shifting the prevailing sense of gentrification as an inevitable result of market forces, to the possibility of equitable development in Parkdale.

...PNLT has contributed to...the possibility of equitable development in Parkdale.

The experience of PNLT also illustrates that a place-based approach, not a property-based approach, is indispensable to seeking community control and housing justice. PNLT's place-based commitment is also a building block for long-term responsible asset management and community wealth building through social procurement.

Timeline of the Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust

Various historical and institutional conditions, at different moments, have been points of strategic consideration with which PNLT has had to grapple. The following is a simplified version of Kuni Kamizaki's original timeline.

Timeline of the Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust

Global

- Global financial crisis
- Arab Spring
- Rise of financialized landlords and finance-led economy
- Rise of conservative populism and nationalism
- Black Lives Matter movement
- Standing Rock protests
- Housing crisis
- COVID-19 pandemic
- Black Lives Matter movement
- Historically low interest rates
- Russia-Ukraine war
- Deepening homeless crisis
- Israeli-Palestinian conflict
- Cost-of-living crisis

National & Provincial

- Idle No More movement
- Inclusionary zoning policy debate
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission report
- Working poor / precarious work
- Election of Justin Trudeau
- Community Housing Transformation Centre established
- National Housing Strategy
- Ontario Bill 23
- CMHC's NHS Demonstrations Initiative on CLTs
- Yellowhead Institute Land Back paper
- Encampments
- BC Rental Protection Fund
- Re-election of Doug Ford
- Canadian Housing Acquisition Fund

Toronto

- Condo boom
- Election of Rob Ford
- Tower Renewal
- TCH scattered homes sell-off proposal
- Increase in premature deaths at drop-in centres
- Core Service Review
- Election of John Tory
- Community wealth building
- Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy 2020
- Election of Doug Ford
- Reduced size of City Council
- Re-election of John Tory
- Multi-Unit Residential Acquisition (MURA) program
- Election of Olivia Chow
- Generational Transformation of Toronto's Housing System report

Parkdale

- Commercial gentrification
- Food insecurity
- Queen and Dufferin redevelopments
- Interim bylaw and restaurant study
- West End Food Co-op opens
- Parkdale Food Network
- Community Food Flow
- Co-op Cred Program
- Akelius and financialized landlords
- Neighbourhood Improvement Area designation
- Rent strikes
- Queen's Hotel eviction
- Rooming house closures
- 11 Brock
- King and Dufferin redevelopments
- Vegandale opposition
- Mutual Aid Parkdale
- Parkdale Community Benefits Framework
- Wave of condo proposals
- Justice for Queen's Hotel Coalition LPAT win
- Parkdale Hub redevelopment project
- Parkdale People's Economy concludes

2010 2015 2020 2025

Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust

Exploration

- Parkdale People's Economy forms
- PARC as common platform
- Non-profit incorporation
- Interim board

Capacity Building

- First AGM
- Base building
- Charitable status
- Strategic Plan I

Community Planning

- Neighbourhood-wide visioning
- Housing needs assessment
- Two-tier governance model
- Milky Way fundraising
- Milky Way Garden

Demonstration

- Parkdale Free School
- Community action research
- Parkdale Proactive Eviction Prevention & Rooming House Preservation Project
- 26 Maynard
- Policy learning from Bay Area
- Gentrification tax action
- VCIB Preserve and Protect Guarantee Program
- Strategic Plan II
- 22 Maynard

Growth

- State of good repair tenant engagement
- Tenant advisory committee
- Asset management for green retrofit and densification
- TCH scattered homes
- Social procurement
- Learning from Downtown Eastside

PNLT's impacts extend beyond the neighbourhood scale. PNLT has made immense contributions by broadening Toronto's housing policy debate from the market-led supply of new housing, to the importance of community-led acquisition to turn at-risk affordable housing into community-owned homes. Looking ahead, PNLT has created enabling conditions for other CLTs to emerge and thrive, building the CLT movement in Toronto and beyond.

These efforts lie at the heart of PNLT's commitment to pursuing social transformation and nurturing people's re-imagination of what's possible. In ***Grounding Transformation***, I will elaborate more on these actions to examine the transformative potential of CLTs.

In *Grounding Transformation*, I will elaborate more on ...the transformative potential of CLTs.

At the same time, however, PNLT's experience with pursuing CLT's transformative potential has brought to light critical questions that have received limited attention in the CLT field. While PNLT has shown that grassroots CLTs can achieve scale, this comes with important caveats that reveal inherent contradictions of the CLT model for social transformation in the context of settler colonialism, property ownership, and capitalist markets.

For CLTs, housing acquisition is often seen as a goal and a major win. Yet PNLT's experience shows that it is just a beginning that opens up systemic challenges that can destabilize the commitment to social transformation unless addressed. Removing land from the speculative market is crucial but insufficient for the goal of social transformation. Examining how PNLT grapples with these challenges is the crux of ***Grounding Transformation***.

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