

Housing for the Long Haul

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From January 13 to 16, Cara Armbrister and I visited community land trusts, manufactured housing cooperatives and a mutual housing association in Vermont, New Hampshire and Connecticut – states well-known for their successful implementation of these respective approaches to affordable housing.

On May 5, 2004, the Delaware Housing Coalition will be hosting a conference on these housing models. The conference, to be held at the Modern Maturity Center in Dover, will bring together grassroots leaders, advocates and policymakers to learn and discuss the future of community- and resident-controlled housing models in Delaware. The conference will include panels with representatives of community land trusts and manufactured housing cooperatives, as well as breakout sessions where participants can learn in greater detail about specific models and engage in discussion with experts. The Speer Trust, GMAC Bank, and Citigroup have been kind enough to extend their support to this event.

This research trip will also contribute to a master's thesis project I am working on both at school and DHC. The paper is intended to evaluate these housing models and their potential applicability in Delaware, and includes further primary research such as surveys from community land trust and manufactured housing cooperative leaders. Much more detailed information will be in this final paper, which will be available from DHC upon its completion in June 2004.

With the generous support of Citigroup, the Housing Capacity Building Program, and other funders, DHC is continuing to dedicate a large portion of its time and effort to the development and support of Morris Mill Pond Cooperative, the state's first manufactured housing cooperative. We are also facilitating statewide discussion on manufactured housing issues, including cooperatives, through the committees formed as a result of the symposiums convened in summer 2003 by Terri Hasson of Citigroup and Lorraine deMeurisse of Deutsche Bank Trust Company DE. For more information about any of these activities, including the conference, please feel free to contact us at DHC.

Vermont-Community Land Trusts

We first visited the Central Vermont Community Land Trust and Rutland County Community Land Trust, both well-established community land trusts in Vermont, which is home to several mature and successful CLTs. Vermont has a long history of public sector support for community land trusts. As a result, the community land trust (CLT) model has taken hold in Vermont. Most of the state's nonprofit housing developers are, in fact, CLTs. Those few that do not explicitly follow the CLT model still build their methods around CLTs' focus on perpetual affordability, subsidy preservation, and community control.

The Central Vermont Community Land Trust (CVCLT) and Rutland County Community Land Trust (RCCLT) both own and manage multifamily rental housing, hold ground leases on single-family homes, and own and manage manufactured housing communities. Both emphasized the importance of a broad mission that incorporates rental housing and homeownership. The CVCLT and RCCLT have incorporated neighborhood revitalization into their

housing development by acquiring and rehabilitating or building structures in downtown neighborhoods.

Both also operate rental housing targeted to populations with special housing needs, such as seniors and those with disabilities. As the legalities of single-family homeownership under the CLT ground lease model can become quite complex (and thus costly in terms of legal services the CLT needs), the CVCLT now uses deed restrictions to insure perpetual affordability and subsidy preservation in its single-family homeownership development.

The CVCLT also has a community organizing project. CVCLT, like many other CLTs and CDCs, has had difficulty in organizing its residents and community members and maintaining their involvement in the leadership of the CLT. CVCLT feels that this is a result of several forces: the rural nature of the area, the local lack of a culture of civic involvement, and the familiar problem of developing grassroots leadership and fostering a sense of ownership of tenants' interest in their housing. Despite the best efforts and intentions

of CLTs, the CLT/tenant relationship often resembles the traditional landlord/tenant relationship more than the vision of partnership and involvement that lies at the heart of the CLT mission.

Our visits with the Central Vermont Community Land Trust and Rutland County Community Land Trust gave us much food for thought and greater familiarity with the history and unique situation of CLTs and nonprofit housing developers in Vermont. An initial recommendation is to further investigate how nonprofit housing developers in Vermont that are not CLTs have incorporated CLT ideas, such as the orientation towards perpetual affordability and community control, into their housing development strategies. While many of the newer CLTs started across the country have focused on single-family homeownership, many with this narrower vision have also failed. CLTs in Vermont have included a strong commitment to the development of affordable multifamily rental housing in their mission, and the leaders we met with attribute the greater success of CLTs in Vermont to this broader