



Equitable Development Symposium Recaps

LINKING LAND, HISTORY & CULTURE

“LAND IS a way to hold POLITICAL, SOCIAL & ECONOMIC POWER”

In the first panel discussion on successes in equitable development, **K. WYKING GARRETT**, President and CEO of Africatown in Seattle; **MONICA BRAVO**, Executive Director of the West Side Community Organization in St. Paul; and **MIKEYA GRIFFITH**, Executive Director of the Rondo Community Land Trust in St. Paul shared the critical importance of understanding history and the essential role of land in creating, sustaining and protecting community – and the cultures of those who call that community home.



K WYKING GARRETT

“ My grandfather was an entrepreneur and community builder who bought 12 acres of land during the Great Migration and partitioned that off to allow for other Black families to settle people who were fleeing the South. When my grandfather came to Seattle he was an electrical engineer – one of the first in the Northwest – and eventually worked in the community to help establish the only Black bank in the area.



MONICA BRAVO

“ In the early 19th Century, when people first arrived to Minnesota, many would come here to a settlement home on the West Side. Because of that we became known as the little Ellis Island of St. Paul. We drew a very diverse community that was very rich in cultural heritage. Immigrants began to settle on the West Side Flats, and it really became an urban village. There were homes and businesses and a very tight-knit immigrant community.



MIKEYA GRIFFITH

“ My great aunt and uncle moved up here in the 1940s. They owned a lot of rental property and that’s actually how my grandmother was able to purchase a home. It was a lending from my relatives that made that possible. There was this wonderful interdependence in Rondo and when Interstate 94 came through and destroyed that interdependent commerce, it did destroy the community. But the resilience of the people was maintained – and is still maintained today.

This convening was organized by institutions located on the ancestral lands of the Dakota people. We recognize that this conversation did not include or specifically address Indigenous perspectives or histories, which are essential in such discussions. We invite you to join us in reflecting deeply on how to authentically center Native leaders and community members in equitable development.

Essential Tool: Community Land Trusts

What they do:

Community land trusts (CLTs) provide lasting community assets and shared equity homeownership opportunities for families and communities. CLTs develop rural and urban agriculture projects, commercial spaces to serve local communities, affordable rental and cooperative housing projects, and conserve land or urban green spaces. The focus of their work is creating homes that remain permanently affordable, providing successful homeownership opportunities for generations of lower income families. In 2022, there were more than 225 CLTs in the United States.

Who controls them:

A typical CLT is a nonprofit run by a board, staff, and community members. The community land trust balances the interest of its residents, the broader community, and the public interest to promote wealth building, retention of public resources, and solutions for community needs.

Where they came from:

The first community land trust grew out of the southern civil rights movement as a tool for establishing a new form of land tenure for Black farmers and their families. [New Communities Inc.](#) was founded in 1969 as a farm collective on 5,735 acres in Lee County, Georgia, and became one of the original models for community land trusts in the United States. In Minnesota, Rondo Community Land Trust was the first CLT in the state, established in 1993.

Additional resources:

- [Grounded Solutions: Startup Community Land Trust Hub](#)
- [Rondo Community Land Trust](#)
- [Africatown Community Land Trust](#)

STEPS TO COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

As Wyking Garrett of Africatown explained, community programs are irrelevant “if there’s no more community, no more people. That’s why we have an intense focus around land.” That focus extends from initial planning to longterm ownership, including:

DECIDING WHAT HAPPENS ON THE LAND:

Thanks to years of organizing and relationship building, the West Side Community Organization works with the City of St. Paul to co-create any Request for Proposals for development in their district, so they can ensure, from the very start, that projects in their neighborhoods benefit their residents.

BUILDING THE PROJECTS ON THE LAND:

In Seattle, Africatown works with Black and values-aligned planners, architects and general contractors to guide community in envisioning and building projects that meet their goals. They also became developers themselves with 600 units of housing in their pipeline and \$300 million in development, completed or on the horizon.

LIVING AND WORKING ON THE LAND:

The Rondo Community Land Trust is making it possible for Black residents who were displaced by highway construction to come home to and do business in their historic Black neighborhood. Through their reparative framework and programming, they’ve been able to, for instance, support a Black woman in purchasing a Rondo home that provided her the stability to go back to school and open a therapy practice in one of the CLT’s community spaces.

OWNING AND STEWARDING THE LAND:

As Mikeya Griffith from the Rondo CLT put it: “It’s all about community ownership. It’s all about the community at large being the author of its own destiny and how it wants to see development. It’s not only about utilizing things like the Equitable Development Scorecard when other developers are coming in, but also developing ourselves.”