

Urban Agriculture Project Decision Guide

This guide was developed by the National Community Land Trust Network to assist community land trusts in evaluating new urban agriculture projects. It is a companion to the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy Working Paper entitled "Beyond Housing: Urban Agriculture and Commercial Development by Community Land Trusts", by Greg Rosenberg and Jeffrey Yuen.

MISSION	Questions to Consider
Charitable Purpose	Does it conform to the corporate purpose defined in the CLT's bylaws?
	Does it constitute a "charitable purpose" under 501(c)(3) of the IRS code?
	Will it generate revenue from an activity that is not an allowable "charitable purpose", thereby jeopardizing tax exempt status?
Community	Will it strengthen the immediate neighborhood in which the proposed project is located?
	Will its impact reach beyond the immediate neighborhood, benefitting the larger community served by the CLT?
	Will it help to build connection and solidarity among households who inhabit CLT housing?
	Will it help to weave CLT residents into the surrounding community?
Household	Will it improve the lives of lower income households housed by the CLT?
	Will it improve the lives of lower income households residing in the CLT's service area who are not housed by the CLT?

NEED	Questions to Consider
Gap in Service or Supply	Does the project serve an area without an adequate supply of needed community garden plots?
	Does the project provide an opportunity for urban commercial growers that is otherwise unavailable?
Role of the CLT in Filling This Gap	Will the project happen without the CLT's involvement?
	How much involvement/investment by the CLT is needed to make it happen?
	What roles is the CLT willing and able to play -- securing land, managing program, and/or growing the food?

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DEMAND	Questions to Consider
Market	<p>Will there be a sufficient, ongoing supply of active gardeners for the community garden plots?</p> <p>Will there be a sufficient supply of interested and competent growers to participate in a commercial agriculture</p> <p>Will there be consumers for the products that are commercially grown?</p>

COSTS	Questions to Consider
Development	<p>What are the costs associated with predevelopment activities?</p> <p>What are the costs associated with obtaining site control?</p> <p>What are the costs for installing site infrastructure?</p>
Stewardship	What are the costs associated with ongoing site maintenance, staff support to tenants, property taxes, debt service, etc.?
Programming	What are the costs associated with managing an urban agricultural program?

FUNDING	Questions to Consider
Considerations	<p>Does it open up doors to new sources of funding?</p> <p>Does this project compete with funding or staff time to accomplish a housing-related project?</p> <p>Will the costs of staff time and overhead be covered? Is there a developer fee to reward risk-taking and bridge the CLT to its next development project?</p>

PERSUASION	Questions to Consider
Outreach & Partnerships	Who needs to be convinced this is a good idea? Who might pose opposition or competition, or want to collaborate and partner?

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REWARDS	Questions to Consider	Potential Outcomes
Portfolio Enhancement	Will it protect, improve, or expand the CLT's current or future portfolio of affordable housing?	Long-term food production as an enhancement to existing or new housing: (a) an amenity (like a pool or clubhouse), which enhances marketability, improves resident satisfaction, and reduces turnover; (b) deflect negative responses to affordable housing development; (c) short-term land-use strategy until housing development market is ripe; and (d) contribute to comprehensive community development.
Strategic Relationships	Will it build new strategic relationships for the CLT?	<p>Urban agriculture/food security is a high priority issue for many community foundations and philanthropists -- including many that are not necessarily drawn to CLTs for their affordable housing programs. Expanding into urban agriculture may expand the overall funding base for the organization.</p> <p>Community gardeners and urban agriculture/local food advocates are a</p> <p>Many community gardeners are higher income and may become future donors to a CLT that protects their community garden.</p>
Organizational Identity	Will the project enhance the CLT's brand? Will it be perceived as an extension of the "community" mission in the CLT?	

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RISKS SPECIFIC TO PROJECT TYPE	Questions to Consider	Potential Outcomes
Community Gardens	What could cause it to fail?	The CLT offers land, but there is not an ongoing supply of active and competent gardeners.
		Ongoing costs for support of the gardens are higher than projected,
		Promised grants for improving the land or subsidizing operations do not
		If the garden is managed by an outside entity, the risk is that they could fall
		Foundation support for stewardship functions tapers off over time, without a
		Eminent domain threat.
	What happens if it fails?	Land sits unused.
		Site becomes a nuisance.
		Funders attempt to reclaim funding due to failure to meet the terms of the
		Where the CLT is landowner, the site may need to be sold to recover costs and repay funds. Where the CLT is not the owner, land may be lost through termination of ground lease.
	How can the CLT's risk be minimized?	Partner with existing organizations with a positive track record of managing
		Only establish new community gardens when and where requested to do so
		Associate community gardens with CLT housing projects, where the CLT has
		Minimize borrowing for infrastructure improvements (water, fencing, storage
		Obtain insurance to protect the CLT against liability.

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RISKS SPECIFIC TO PROJECT TYPE	Questions to Consider	Potential Outcomes
Commercial Urban Agriculture	What could cause it to fail?	The CLT offers land, but there is not an ongoing supply of active and competent growers.
		Ongoing costs for maintenance of grounds and facilities are higher than
		Weather decimates crops and/or grower is unable to cover the lease fee and
		Vacancies result in loss of income to cover maintenance costs.
	What happens if it fails?	
		Land and facilities sit unused.
		Site becomes a nuisance.
		Funder attempt to reclaim funding due to failure to meet the terms of the
	How can the CLT's risk be minimized?	Where the CLT is landowner, the site may need to be sold to recover costs and repay funds. Where the CLT is not the owner, land may be lost through termination of ground lease.
		Work with established growers.
		Keep lease fees low in order to reduce financial burden on growers.
		Negotiate stepped up lease fees to keep fees low to growers at the
Organizational Identity	Will the project "blur" the CLT's brand or be perceived as "mission drift"?	
		Will it seem like a departure from the past, thereby confusing the community or existing funders?
Other Risks	Will the CLT be called upon to adjudicate disputes among community gardeners or commercial growers?	
		Will the CLT want to convert agricultural land to residential uses down the road, creating potential displacement of community gardeners or commercial growers?