



Athens Land Trust Responds to the COVID Crisis



Athens Land Trust Housing Counselor Patrick Falkenstine (right) and Education and Empowerment Assistant Kathleen Killian (center) meet with an applicant for COVID-related emergency relief through the CARES Act on the front porch of the Athens Land Trust office.

ALT embraces a holistic approach to community development with the understanding that a community's needs and opportunities are many, overlapping, and evolving. Perhaps no time in recent memory has this been more apparent than now as we navigate the pandemic.

Athens-Clarke County acted quickly in March to implement a local stay-at-home order, with statewide shutdowns to follow. The repercussions of these necessary public health precautions were felt most immediately and acutely by the most vulnerable in our community. ALT began in the early spring to field a growing number of calls from those out of work, those facing reduced hours and income, as well as essential workers struggling to balance their service to the public with household needs. By June, with support from the **Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation**, and

Oconee Street United Methodist Church, ALT raised \$64,000 in private funding to provide COVID-related emergency assistance. ALT is also one of several organizations to receive funding through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. This federal funding allocated by the Athens-Clarke County Government is being disbursed to community members for such diverse needs as rent, mortgage, and utilities payments; car loans; child care costs and more. Through our private fundraising, we have also been able to partner with **Casa de Amistad** to provide assistance to undocumented immigrant families who may be ineligible for public relief.

ALT is operating this emergency assistance work through our Education and Empowerment program, which includes HUD-certified Housing Counseling staff who are trained to work with clients seeking relief in the courts through the CDC eviction moratorium, and team members taking calls, processing applications, and providing direct outreach. As of November, we have given out nearly \$130,000 in CARES funds and \$54,000 in private funds, and have served over 80 families. With an equal number of applications in process and up to 40 calls for help fielded per day, we know the need continues to grow. We are concerned about making sure families continue to have access to resources as funds go away at the end of the year, and hope to see the physical, economic, social, and emotional health of our community come through this challenge stronger than before.

ALT Crisis Response Snapshot

- \$64,000 raised in private funding to provide COVID-related emergency assistance.
- Nearly \$130,000 in CARES funds and \$54,000 in private funds distributed as of November
- 80 families served
- 80 + applications in process
- Average 40 inquiries for help a day

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*Our Board meets on the third Monday
of each month at 5:30 PM via Zoom.
Meetings are open to the public.*

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West Broad Garden Manager, John Anderson
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A Letter from Heather

First off, I want to wish you all a safe and healthy holiday season. While it's likely to be different than years past, I hope you find ways to make this year special in it's own right. The holidays are on my mind, but the other thing on my mind is the upcoming wave of economic hardship. We have been working diligently to meet the emergency needs due to the pandemic, but in January the eviction moratorium is set to expire and unemployment funds will be ending, setting up what could be a terrible crisis for many in our community. The cracks in our system are showing and while we are only one organization, I feel more convinced than ever that the strategies that we are using to address community needs are the right ones. I hope as you read through the newsletter, you feel good about your investment in an organization that is working to meet community-identified needs in thoughtful, creative, and effective ways.

Heather Benham



Join Us This December For Two Holiday Markets!



WEST BROAD
FARMERS MARKET & GARDEN

THE WEST BROAD FARMERS MARKET

HOLIDAY MARKETS

DEC. 5 & 12, 2020 • 10-2 PM
300 S. ROCKSPRINGS ST
ATHENS, GA 30606

Shop for gifts and support local businesses this holiday season! These events are in-person, but drive-thru will still be available, with online (wbfm.locallygrown.net) & phone orders (706-765-4020) accepted from Sunday at 5 PM to Thursday at 1 PM for Saturday pick-up from 11:30 AM-1:30 PM.

MASKS REQUIRED • SOCIAL DISTANCING ENFORCED

Williams Farm to Become Farm Incubator



The pavilion at Williams Farm houses wash stations, walk-in cold storage, and other resources available to incubator farmers for growing, harvesting, and processing produce.

For the past seven years, Williams Farm has been operating as a Certified Naturally Grown urban farm producing vegetables, fruit, flowers and herbs that were sold through the West Broad Farmers Market. The farm, located off of North Avenue within the city limits of Athens, sits on an acre and a half of land. The farm has also served as an agricultural laboratory for participants in the Young Urban Farmers program, a job training program that teaches young people technical farming skills as well as leadership development.

According to American Farmland Trust, we are losing almost 40 acres of farmland a day in the United States. Once covered in cement, good soil is gone forever. We are also losing farmers. According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, the average age of a farmer in Georgia is 57.9 years old, and only 8.4% of farmers in Georgia are under the

age of 35. Nationally, 57% of farmers are over 60 and getting ready to retire. People who are interested in farming have struggled to find affordable land. Escalating prices from development and real estate speculation, keeps land out of reach for most young farmers, especially farmers of color or those who have been historically discriminated against. Simply put, no farms means no food.

This fall, Athens Land Trust received a grant from the **USDA 2501 Program** to help solve some of these problems in the Athens area. The 2501 Program awards funding to organizations working with socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers in owning and operating sustainable farms and ranches. Over the coming year, Williams Farm will transition its purpose to become an incubator for new farmers. New farmers, or those who are interested in becoming a farmer, will be able to lease a small plot of land at the Farm where they can hone their skill and start growing their business. Growers will have access to the pre-made beds, irrigation systems and other tools offered at Williams Farm. Additionally, Farm Manager Seth Nivens will be on site to provide education and assistance to the beginning farmers. As described by Seth, “it will be like farming with training wheels”.

Urban Agriculture is particularly important because according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, there has been a substantial increase in the number of people living in areas with limited access to grocery stores, supermarkets or other sources of healthy food. Williams Farm helps alleviate this problem by contributing to the local food system.

Farmers will begin at Williams Farm and hopefully grow through other resources offered by ALT like the **Farmer Network, Farm Business Development,** and **GAFarmLink.** These programs work to help farmers transition to owning and operating a farm of their own. Through the incubator model, growers will be able to get started with less investment and less risk. Many farmers start out their careers accumulating a great deal of debt, but this model will help ease the financial burden. Should a prospective farmer lease a plot and decide that agriculture isn't the field for them, they will have a way out without having made a large financial commitment. For more information about this program please visit: athenslandtrust.org/our-work/comag/williams-farm/williams-farm-incubator-program/.

West Broad Advisory Council Continues to Support the Neighborhood

The Community Education and Empowerment team closes the year out very excited about the support and outreach provided to many residents in our community. The **West Broad Community Advisory Board** members have gone beyond the call of duty to serve as a liaison for residents to share concerns about their homes, unhealthy trees in the neighborhood, dangerous traffic patterns, and any other issues they wanted to be addressed. The establishment of a phone tree where each of the advisory members were given 20 community people to "check on" during the height of COVID also increased resident engagement.

Early this year, the residents spent time thinking through a \$4 million transportation grant. This project was the perfect setting to establish norms between city officials and community members. Talking through plans, listening to rationale on both sides, and working through plans truly boosted the level of confidence community members have with planning projects and working with city staff. In response to the pandemic, community meetings had to be swiftly moved from in person gatherings that included dinner to virtual meetings where participants could sign up for dinners to be delivered to them right before the meeting. Even though the format of the meetings changed, it did not hamper the progress residents made in advocating for their neighborhood. Athens-Clarke County District 3 Commissioner, Melissa Link attended most meetings, and provided individual support on issues and concerns shared during meetings.

Other topics presented during the monthly meetings included a series on "protecting our legacy", which was facilitated by advisory board member Shirley Grant. These conversations focused on the need to prepare for the future through insurance, creating wills, and understanding what the probate process is after a family member dies. Community members were assisted in establishing clear plans for their homes and lands, many which have been in the community for several generations. Resources were presented around living in a food desert, and boxes of food were delivered to members in the community identified through advisory board members. Finally, a presentation from the Young Urban Farmers about the air and water quality testing they did in the neighborhood have rounded out these community meetings. Ultimately, Athens Land Trust aims to replicate the work in the West Broad neighborhood to other areas in the community. A strong focus on outreach and staying close to the residents is what makes this program successful.

West Broad Community Garden Update



This fall the Young Urban Builders installed the first of the West Broad Garden Sponsorship Plaques at the New West Broad Community Garden. Sponsorships are still available and will make an excellent gift for the person who has everything AND loves unique things about Athens! Please visit <https://athenslandtrust.org/garden-sponsorship/> for more information on how you can support this important community resource.

Remembering Clo Barnett

This past September, Clothilda Barnett who was the Director of Affordable Housing for Athens Trust passed away after a brief battle with cancer. In addition to her roles as a Mother, Grand-Mother, Sister and Wife, Clo was a well known and much loved advocate for affordable housing in the Athens Community. At Athens Land Trust, we were fortunate enough to have Clo join our team in 2019. She brought knowledge, patience and a generous spirit to our team. Clo had a major impact on the people she assisted. She guided residents before, during and after the home-buying process. Sherrie Hannah, who purchased an ALT home in 2019 said she simply couldn't have done it without Clo's guidance and encouragement. Clo had an unwavering dedication to her profession and her community, and she is missed greatly by many.



Alvin Sheats, her former colleague at Hancock Community Development, Inc., remembers Clo this way: *"Clothilda Troupe Barnett was a very special person. For Hancock CDC and the Hancock Corridor, as well as, the 10 County region- she was sent by God, for her spirit was to help any and everyone who came to Hancock for assistance. With Clothilda on board, we became known to many as the dynamic duo. Her Husband Steve often referred to her as Super-woman, because one-time she had him and I, along with my wife Brenda, working on a grant non-stop. We worked on that grant for 24-hours and were pushing a deadline for a sizable amount of funding. The grant had to be completed and get it delivered the next day, and we got it done."*

Clothilda had only been with Hancock 4 months when she became Acting Director while I was called to active duty in Iraq and Kuwait. After my return from the Middle East war Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) campaign, Clothilda immediately started to work on Hancock CDC becoming a certified HUD housing counseling agency to provide housing counseling services. In 2006 she got Hancock CDC its first HUD housing counseling grant. We all really knew then she was truly a heaven sent person who provided a plethora of services to all who came to us.

Clothilda's quiet, generous and compassionate can do personality is now missed forever more. To everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under the heavens (Eccles 3:1). As for me personally, she was living proof that God sends special people to help us for a season. May the joyful memories of Clothilda lead us each day to help someone along the way."

The Clo Challenge – By Ovita Thornton

1. Never gossip.
2. Never complain.
3. Always try to better yourself.
4. Accept disappointments and loss as a part of life. Not that you were dealt a bad hand.
5. Never engage in community discourse that hurts people personally.
6. Do whatever you can do to make the community better and be guided by wisdom.
7. Be confident not cocky. Be proud but not prideful.
8. Forgive as God has forgiven you.
9. Post rarely on Facebook but always post inspiration.
10. Love family.
11. MAIN POINT "Always SMILE".

"We cannot do all of these things like Clo, because we are made differently by God. We have our own character print. But there are some things Clo taught all of us and we didn't even realize we were learning, while she was living. If you knew Clo, you were automatically in Clo's classroom. But this challenge will help you even if you didn't know Clo. If you are reading this, it is not too late to take the Clo Challenge. Be blessed."

Athens Land Trust Welcomes New Team Members



Cary Ritzler has joined Athens Land Trust as the Director of Affordable Housing. Prior to her time here she worked as an elementary school teacher and worked on the 100% Athens Clean & Renewable Energy Initiative with Environment Georgia. She will oversee development of affordable housing projects, community outreach and information sessions regarding the Athens Land Trust Affordable Housing program, and work with clients towards home ownership. Cary has three boys who attend Clarke County schools, and her husband teaches at Clarke Central High School. "I am proud to call Athens home and thrilled to be able to raise my kids here" she says.



Marquita Richardson has over 11 years of experience working with the local community. She has previously provided employment and development services, and volunteered with the local youth as a mentor and coach. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration specializing in Human Resources & Business Management. Marquita joined the staff of ALT as the Affordable Housing Program Operations Specialist in October of 2020. Her duties include meeting with potential renters and homebuyers to describe ALT's Affordable Housing Program, and assisting in the completion of applications.



Justin Merrifield holds an M.S. in Marine and Environmental Biology from Nicholls State University and a B.S. in Animal and Poultry Sciences from Virginia Tech. As the Conservation Director at Athens Land Trust, Justin increases conservation opportunities to protect and improve Georgia's working and natural landscapes and works to connect Georgians more closely to the landscapes around them. Prior to joining Athens Land Trust, Justin spent 7 years with the Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority, working to focus development and implementation efforts for comprehensive protection of Louisiana's working coast.



Colin Blodorn spent a number of years in Los Angeles working as a builder, artist and farmers market vendor. As a builder, he renovated homes and built exhibits for a children's museum before relocating to Athens. Now, Colin joins us as a Foreman for our Young Urban Builders. As the foreman he will help our YUB members develop and expand their skill sets while working on improving homes in the community. Colin looks forward to collaborating with these students to effect positive change and develop community empowerment. He currently lives in Athens with his two children and a dog.



Kathleen Killian has her Associates degree in Social Work from University of North GA. Previously, she worked for Project Safe as a shelter Advocate and volunteered with their child care assistance. Kathleen was born and raised in Athens, where her father, the late Rev. Archiblad Killian was the first black police officer in Clarke county and very involved in the community. Kathleen has 3 children- Scotty III, Bryce and Sariah Randolph. She is very involved with her church, Clifford Grove Baptist Church in Rayle GA. Most of all, Kathleen loves helping people and strives to make a difference in the lives of others.

Preserving History and Housing through the Mack Burney House



Since our founding in 1994, we have identified the preservation of historic housing as an indispensable tool in our efforts to create strong, vibrant neighborhoods. As growth impacts the affordability of our target neighborhoods, it can also threaten their cultural fabric through the loss of both single-family homes and historic institutions. In addition to rehabilitating dilapidated historic homes that are now permanently affordable owner occupied homes, and working through the Young Urban Builders program to preserve the safety and livability of homes for low-income residents, ALT recognizes the need to work quickly to preserve landmarks from Athens' African American heritage that are disappearing day by day.



One such treasure is the historic Mack Burney House in the Hancock Corridor, which was since the 19th century a center of life for Athens' African American business owners, teachers, doctors, and families. At that time, the Mack Burney House housed several notable African American community members, including Annie Burney, an educator and Vice Principal of Athens' first African American high school, and her husband Isadore Horace Burney, Athens' second African American dentist. In the early 1900s, the Burneys rented rooms at an affordable rate to other young educators who taught in local schools. The Mack Burney House is one of the largest homes in the historically African American neighborhood, and also bears structural details that could possibly be dated to the pre-Civil War era.



Amid growing public pressure in the past few years, Athens-Clarke County Commissioners brokered an agreement with the Gordy family to save the house. With an eye toward the home's historic and architectural significance, ALT is working with Athens-Clarke County, state historic preservation specialists, and most importantly, with stakeholders representing the interest in the community to preserve this landmark. We are proud to have been entrusted with the donation of the property and to take on the task of rehabilitating it. To uphold the legacy of the Burney House in providing housing for community members over the years, ALT is currently at work renovating the home into a four-unit apartment community. With a far higher share of renters than homeowners in Athens, and with nearly half of Athens renters qualifying as "cost burdened" (meaning they spend more than 30% of their income on rent), there is also a growing need for affordable rental housing in our community. We continue to seek innovative ways to address the housing affordability gap while preserving neighborhoods for their existing residents.

Top: Construction is underway on the historic Burney Home.

Center: Athens Mayor Kelly Girtz (right) tours the home and hears about the project from historic preservation specialist Mike Todd.

Bottom: Features such as the staircase spindles and treads have helped date elements of the home's construction and later renovations from pre-Civil War through the early 20th century.

Funding made available for these affordable housing projects by Athens-Clarke County Department of Housing and Community Development HOME and CDBG Programs of the Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County, an Equal Opportunity Employer. Participants will not be discriminated against based on race, color, religion, disability, familial status, or national origin.



Athens Land Trust Completes Permanently Affordable Home in Kenney Ridge



Like all of ALT's newly constructed permanently affordable homes, the new home in Kenney Ridge is a certified EarthCraft home built using sustainable construction materials and practices, and is energy efficient -- and therefore more affordable -- for the homeowner.

Kenney Ridge is an intentional conservation community located on 132 acres of rolling woods and farmland in northwestern Clarke County. The community donated a lot to Athens Land Trust to be designated for affordable housing in 1997 at the same time a conservation easement was placed to preserve the property. We are proud to announce that the home is finished and another amazing ALT resident has moved in!

Turice Brown, knew 10 years ago that she wanted to live in the Kenney Ridge Community. "I pulled into the neighborhood to care for a friend's children, and I just knew," says Turice, who joins a long list of ALT residents. "There is just a real peace about the neighborhood. I love that it is an actual community and not just a place to live," she said. When asked about the homebuying process, Turice said "patience is key. Not everything happened on my timeline, but it happened on God's timeline and it worked out just perfectly."



The interior of the home features an open kitchen, living, and dining floor plan, with three spacious bedrooms and two large bathrooms. The home also features a front and side porch overlooking the wooded land and hills surrounding the property.



Athens Land Trust Successfully Renews National Accreditation



Athens Land Trust received news this fall that our national accreditation status with the **Land Trust Accreditation Commission** was successfully renewed, proving once again, that as part of a network of over 400 accredited land trusts across the nation, it is committed to professional excellence and to maintaining the public's trust in its conservation work.

The Land Trust Accreditation Program recognizes land conservation organizations that meet national quality standards for protecting important natural places and producing lands forever. Prior to achieving this distinction, ALT completed the rigorous accreditation process, which requires extensive documentation, interviews with Athens Land Trust board and staff, and evaluation of multiple sources of information including comments from the public.

“Renewing our accreditation shows Athens Land Trust’s ongoing commitment to permanent land conservation in Georgia” said Sarah Sutherland, President of the Board of Directors for ALT. “We are a stronger organization than ever for having gone through the accreditation renewal process”

The Land Trust Accreditation Commission awarded renewed accreditation, signifying its confidence that the land conserved by Athens Land Trust will be protected forever. Accredited land trusts now steward almost 20 million acres – the size of Denali, Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, Glacier, Everglades and Yosemite National Parks combined.

“It is exciting to recognize Athens Land Trust’s continued commitment to national standards by renewing this national mark of distinction,” said Melissa Kalvestrand, executive director of the Commission. “Donors and partners can trust the more than 400 accredited land trusts across the country are united behind strong standards and have demonstrated sound finances, ethical conduct, responsible governance, and lasting stewardship.”

Athens Land Trust is one of 1,363 land trusts across the United States according to the Land Trust Alliance’s most recent National Land Trust Census, which is a complete list of accredited land trusts and more information.

“We look forward to many more years of conserving and improving Georgia farmland, urban greenspaces and unique landscapes to ensure clean air and drinking water, food security, scenic landscapes, recreational places and wildlife habitat for generations to come,” Justin Merrifield, Director of Conservation for Athens Land Trust.

Athens Land Trust is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization whose mission is to conserve, empower and sustain communities through responsible and visionary land use.

Another Successful Year of Farmland Protection Through ACEP-ALE Program



Farmer Outreach Specialist, Dr. Sherman Green, helping a grower install a hoop house that was acquired through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. Hoop houses help farmers extend their growing seasons.

The Athens Land Trust Conservation and Farmer Outreach teams had the most successful year to date for the **Agricultural Conservation Easement Program – Agricultural Land Easement (ACEP-ALE)**. ALT applied 7 landowners for the program in fiscal year 2020, all of which were accepted for funding under the **United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service**. Through these projects, over 700 acres of viable farmland in North Georgia will be permanently protected from development and the farmers will receive funds to maintain and further their farms business operations.

The Farmer Outreach team has also provided ongoing support to limited resource and socially disadvantaged farmers, helping them to apply for USDA NRCS programs, and implement best conservation and business practices on their farm.

The Young Urban Farmers Learn Air and Water Quality Testing Measures

This summer was the second summer three YUF completed air and water testing in the West Broad neighborhood as part of our **EPA Environmental Justice** grant. Three locations along the Brooklyn Creek were chosen as testing sites and samples were collected and measured water's conductivity, pH, and temperature. They also checked for visual cues that indicated the water's health. These cues included watercolor, wildlife presence, and foreign matter. The YUF noticed there was a large amount of trash in each of the water testing sites, something that frustrated the students and inspired them to discuss the importance of keeping our waterways clean.



The Young Urban Farmers monitor the air quality with a Bluetooth testing device and app at the West Broad Community Garden.

Air samples were taken using stationary as well as handheld devices. Particulate matter in the air has a correlation to health issues. Particulate matter, ozone, and other pollutants related to the combustion of fossil fuels and road travel was recorded. These samples were taken and recorded at each of the sites, twice a week for 12 weeks. After the testing period the YUF wrote a report detailing their methods and findings. Two brochures were created, one for air and one for water, that detailed their work and listed scientific sites where residents can learn more about the air and water conditions locally.

The goal was get young people interested in air and water quality and give them exposure to the tools and skills needed to measure it. We are proud to engage our Young Urban Farmers as citizen scientists.

West Broad Farmers Market To Begin Operating Year Round



Young Urban Farmers Coordinator Kennedy Mayfield-Smith (right) works with a market intern to prepare orders for pick-up.

Athens Land Trust recently received funding from the **USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program** to begin operating the West Broad Farmers Market year round. The Market will continue operating in the successful online format that it began this summer as a response to the COVID pandemic. Since then, the Market has garnered over \$70,000 in sales for small local businesses and farmers.

“So far this year, we have fulfilled over 2,000 orders and worked with 52 vendors who sell everything from fresh produce to donuts to copper earrings. The variety of the offerings never ceases amaze me!” Said Ellie Adams, the West Broad Farmers Market Manager.

In the coming months buyers can expect more delicious prepared food, creative handmade goods and of course, fresh seasonal produce. To order online go to wbfm.locallygrown.net. The online market is open for shopping from Sunday at 5:00 p.m. to Thursday at 1:00 p.m. Goods and produce are picked up Saturdays between 11:30-1:30 in the parking lot of the **Athens Housing Authority**, located at 300 Rocksprings Street.

Upcoming Volunteer Opportunity at Heritage Park

INVASIVE SPECIES REMOVAL
HERITAGE PARK
VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

DECEMBER 8 & 22
9AM-1PM

Athens Land Trust

Help with removing an invasive species from Heritage Park
DECEMBER 8 & 22
Join us on one or both Tuesdays
9A-1P | Heritage Park
706-769-3965

Volunteering at a work day is an excellent opportunity to get outside, learn more about forest health and meet new people.

Autumn Olive, though beautiful, is crowding out native species causing ecological harm to our forest and its inhabitants.

No training or experience is required; each volunteer will be trained in identification and removal.

Volunteers must pre-register: <http://www.oconeeconomy.com/HeritagePark>

The Northeast Georgia Invasive Plant Cooperative has hosted several socially distanced volunteer workdays removing invasive *Elaeagnus* from Heritage Park in Oconee County. This is continuing a series of workdays that began last winter, with an eventual goal of restoring the entire 364 acre park to native and natural forest habitat. These successful workdays have cleared a total area of nearly 30 acres thus far.

If you would like to participate in a volunteer workday at Heritage Park, you can sign up on the Oconee County Parks and Rec website: <https://www.oconeeconomy.com/1124/Heritage-Park-Invasive-Plant-Species-Rem> The remaining workdays of 2020 occur every other Tuesday, including Dec. 22, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. We hope to see you there!

Please note that masks and following of social distance measures are mandatory. You may wish to bring your own work gloves as an added safety precaution.

Keep up-to-date on the latest ALT news!



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This giving season, please consider a gift to Athens land Trust. Your donation helps to connect community members to safe, affordable housing, quality community-education, youth job training, financial coaching and access to healthy food. Our programs rely on donors to be successful. We simply couldn't do it without you. Thank you for your generosity and support.

Text "Give" to 706-715-8717 to donate via text

\$10

\$25

\$50

\$100

\$250

\$500

other amount _____

Name _____
(as you would like to be acknowledged. Please print)

Address _____

Email _____

Phone _____

Please make checks payable to Athens Land Trust, or visit athenslandtrust.org/donate/
ALT is a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit corporation. All donations are tax-deductible, as provided by law

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