



Athens Land Trust

685 N. Pope Street
Athens, Georgia 30601
www.athenslandtrust.org
706.613.0122

Newsletter

Winter 2021 • Volume 24 • Issue 2



Tackling invasive species together, p. 5

Bringing a campus and kitchen to the West Broad community, p. 6

Building on our partnership with the United Way, p. 9

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Executive Director's Note | Heather Benham



Heather Benham (right) reviews neighborhood maps with students and staff from the UGA College of Environment and Design at a charette, February 15, 2012.

I don't think we could have known back in 2012 at our first charette for West Broad neighborhood revitalization what the journey would look like, but after so many fits and starts, we are making progress on building out the West Broad Campus that was identified by the community as a path to solving local needs. It's been a bit of chicken-and-egg figuring out the space needs for programming, identifying available sites, and then designing around the site.

It's exciting to announce that we are in the process of hiring the

architects who will help us do this work. The identified purposes of the site will be to serve youth and their families with space for a construction lab, classroom space for homebuyer education, credit classes, and Grow Your Business classes, among many others.

There will also be a commercial kitchen available for rent to small food-based businesses -- something many West Broad Farmers Market vendors have been requesting for several years -- and space for the Young Urban Farmers to expand their business offerings and have the ability to create value-added products that can be sold at the market.

Potentially most important is the idea that other nonprofits serving youth may be able to have space on the campus to create a healthy culture of activities to change some of the negative outcomes that we've been seeing for our youth. The West Broad neighborhood is continuing to rise in so many ways and we haven't been deterred from bringing the resources to get the job done. ♦



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Athens Land Trust is a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) organization whose mission is to improve quality of life for all and to strengthen the fabric of the community through education and the stewardship of land for purposes of affordable housing, conservation, agriculture, and economic development. We respond to community-identified needs and build individual and collective power among historically marginalized people.

Impacts & Inspirations

"Being a homeowner is a blessing. Knowing I'm no longer renting is an amazing feeling."

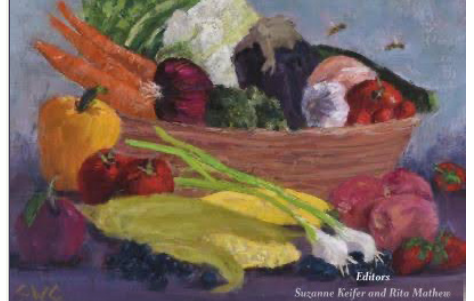
-- Lolita Halfkenny



Covid has had a devastating impact on housing security for thousands in our community. For this reason we're even more proud of the fact that we have supported **four new families** in becoming first-time homebuyers this year.

Lolita Halfkenny moved to Athens in 2017 and had been discouraged by the challenges of the local rental market. After beginning working with Athens Land Trust in November 2020, Lolita closed on her home in East Athens this past July, and is enjoying the pride and security that come with homeownership!

There is a Season




There is a Season: An Intentional Approach to Sustenance, includes many recipes, artwork, poetry, and reflections on environmental stewardship.

We're grateful to have been chosen as the recipient of donations generated by the sale of this book. Purchase a copy online at: <https://order-thereisaseason.square.site/>

HOUSING IMPACT

- 4 NEW HOMEOWNERS
- 3 NEW HOMES UNDER CONSTRUCTION
- 6 NEW APARTMENTS UNDER CONSTRUCTION

 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

Upcountry

Oyster roast

Save the date!

March 27th, 2022
The Portico, Bishop, GA

Visit athenslandtrust.org/classes-events/oyster-roast/ for more info



Cover: An artist's rendering of the West Broad Community Campus, which will include a permanent home for the West Broad Farmers Market, classroom and creative spaces for youth programming, and other resources for children and families.

The Interview

Vanna Cure

on ALT's work and the wealth-building benefits of homeownership

Vanna Cure started working in politics in 2010 for former Congressman John Barrow, an Athens native. Cure worked in his Capitol office as a legislative aide and also on his campaign team. She is now associate director of advocacy for Prosperity Now, a Washington, D.C.-based group pushing for policies that enhance financial stability and build wealth for low-income people. In October 2020, Cure joined the Athens Land Trust board. We asked her about her ties to Athens, and about why removing barriers to homeownership is important.

You live and work in Washington, D.C. but you serve on the board for a land trust in Athens, Georgia. Why is Athens important to you?

Athens will always be home. The city raised, educated and shaped me. My family is still there so I have a vested interest in the community that's raising my niece and nephews. D.C. is like a bubble in many ways. What happens here isn't always reflective of what's going on outside of this bubble, so it's just nice to stay connected to the community. No matter where I go, I think my heart will always be for my hometown.

How do community land trusts like ALT help low-income people build wealth and achieve more financial stability?



“Land trusts are an important piece of the puzzle when it comes to preserving housing affordability . . . With the market the way it is, much of the land that ALT preserves for affordable housing would be lost to investors.”

Land trusts are an important piece of the puzzle when it comes to preserving housing affordability. Athens has changed so much over the last 10 years and, like we're seeing nationally, housing affordability is a crisis. Land trusts provide another option for people to get out of

the inflated rental market, secure an affordable mortgage and get on a path to building wealth. With the market the way it is, much of the land that ALT preserves for affordable housing would be lost to investors.

What can state and local policy-makers do to make it easier for low-income people to own homes and start building wealth?

Address the barriers that impede people from buying a home. Many people don't have the credit to get an affordable loan product. Supporting CDFIs [Community Development Financial Institutions] and other financial institutions that provide loans to low-income families is a start. Funding first-time homebuyer grants is another way. Organizations like ALT do a great job of educating prospective homebuyers but . . . people also need a financial leg up.

What's your favorite thing to do in Athens?

Any time I'm in Athens, I just enjoy spending time with my family and friends. When I do get out, I enjoy doing things that make me feel like I'm home -- going to Clarke Central games, eating at places like Zaxby's and Maepole that we don't have in the DC area. I'm an avid road cyclist so I want to bring my bike down and explore trails in Athens. It would be nice to see the city from that perspective. ♦

Restoring Heritage Park

Volunteer invasive plant removal is key to effort

In early 2019, Jeanne Barsanti noticed the proliferation of a certain plant at Heritage Park, an Oconee County Park boasting 364 acres of natural forest intersected by trails for walking, biking, and horseback riding. Upon bringing a sample to the State Botanical Garden, she discovered that the plant species -- *Elaeagnus pungens* (Thorny Olive) and *Elaeagnus umbellata* (Autumn Olive) -- are both recognized as class 1 invasives in the Georgia Piedmont region.

When Jeanne brought this information to Athens Land Trust and the Northeast Georgia Invasive Plant Cooperative (NGIPC) and Oconee County Parks and Recreation, she spurred the creation of a series of Invasive Removal Volunteer Workdays that winter. In collaboration with Keep Oconee County Beautiful



Conservation Specialist Carly Evans, kneeling, leads volunteers in a work day at Heritage Park in Oconee County, Georgia in October 2021.

(KOCB), NGIPC and Oconee County Parks and Rec have since hosted more than 20 workdays to restore Heritage Park to its natural state. Volunteers and staff work to remove Autumn Olive, which is crowding out native species and causing ecological harm. “Removing invasive plants helps to restore natural habitats that are critical in ensuring the diversity of our native plants and animals,” said Parks & Recreation Director Lisa Davol.

While removal efforts are ongoing, this project is already a success story. Over 560 volunteer hours have contributed to the clearing of 35 acres of heavily invaded habitat, and after just one season of regrowth, we are seeing native plants pop up in massive numbers, providing healthy habitat and food sources for native fauna. One section is now covered in a thriving patch of

native River Cane, a plant known for both its cultural significance and ecological importance.

Invasive removal efforts are paramount for protecting Georgia’s native plants and animals, and can have positive impacts on climate change and human health. “Partnerships like this one allow us to not only make a . . . difference in invasives removal,” said KOCB Executive Director Cindy Pritchard, “but also allow for an educational opportunity on the detrimental effects that invasives have on our environment.”

Athens Land Trust, the Northeast Georgia Invasive Plant Cooperative, KOCB and Oconee County Parks and Rec are in the midst of our third winter series of workdays at Heritage Park, meeting every other Tuesday through February 15, 2022. ♦

CONSERVATION IMPACT

HERITAGE PARK, OCONEE COUNTY, GA

364 ACRES OF NATURAL RESOURCES WITH WOODS AND CREEKS, BORDERED BY THE APALACHEE RIVER

35 ACRES OF INVASIVE SPECIES CLEARED

560 VOLUNTEER HOURS DEDICATED

Feature Story

West Broad Rising

Updates on the West Broad Community Campus

It's been a while since we've reported in these pages on the development of West Broad Community Campus. And now we've got exciting news to share about it. So, we decided this was a good time for updates about -- and an overview of -- one of our community collaborations that has been years in the making.

Architects have been selected

First, the news: in mid-November 2021 a team of architects was selected to help campus stakeholders -- representatives from different groups involved in the development of the campus and those it's designed to benefit -- decide on a final site for the campus and to begin preliminary design work on the campus itself.

The preliminary design work involves programming, which is the research and decision-making that will help the architects understand how neighborhood

residents want the various parts of the campus to function and relate to one another.

The design team includes a lot of local expertise. Athens-based Arcollab Architecture Collaborative, LLC and Koons Environmental Design, Inc. will do much of the building and site design work. Pratt Cassity, former director of the University of Georgia Center for Community Design, will help with engaging the community about the design criteria.

Jeff Bacon, an executive chef and cookbook author based in Winston-Salem, NC and part of Catalyst Kitchens -- an organization that supports nonprofits that provide pathways to jobs through a food service job training model--will assist with the design and set-up of the commercial kitchen that's at the heart of the community campus project.

"It's really exciting that this is finally happening," said Heather Benham, ALT's executive director.

What is a Community Campus?

A quick refresher: At a general level, the community campus idea is about a way to help people in low-income areas -- often historically Black ones -- preserve neighborhoods and important local institutions, celebrate local culture, increase access to healthy foods and give a space for local entrepreneurs to grow.

Based on extensive surveys and work with local residents, the West Broad Community Campus project was developed. This project will include: a new, permanent location for the well-loved West Broad Garden and Farmers Market, a fully-equipped commercial kitchen to support food-based entrepreneurs, and infrastructure for an array of youth and community programs.



The campus will include a permanent home for the West Broad Farmers Market, which provides infrastructure and coaching to help low-wealth people build small businesses, while bringing fresh food to a neighborhood with limited access.

"To finally have a place to learn...to have all the tools and resources in one place, will be awesome," said Xavier Coates, a 20-year old West Broad resident and crew leader for Athens Land Trust's Young Urban Builders program who has been active in supporting this project.

Why West Broad?

But why locate a community campus in the West Broad area? One reason is that residents there got organized (more about that below). Another reason is need.

The West Broad neighborhood lies between West Broad St. on the north and Baxter Street on the south and is capped by Alps Rd. on the west and South Milledge on the east. The neighborhood is home to many of Athens' historic Black institutions including churches, businesses and schools -- and has remained politically, economically and culturally important in Athens to this day.

But there are problems. There's a high poverty rate, and while not meeting the federal definition of a food desert, the neighborhood has a dearth of healthy food retail and other commercial investment, even as development pressures have been rising in the area. Nearly one in four West Broad households have no vehicle access, making the chain grocery store at the edge of the neighborhood relatively inaccessible. In sum, diminished food security, limited healthy food access, and a lack of resources mean that many low-income and other underserved neighborhood



Youth have been involved in the planning of the campus since early in the process. Young Urban Farmer Dontae Meadows (center) describes his experiences on a trip to Green Opportunities in Asheville, NC in May 2017. ALT coordinated nearly a dozen such learning trips.

residents lack the ability to participate equitably in the local food system.

In addition, youth and families in the neighborhood have long identified the need for resources, programming, and jobs for young people.

Key Partners

Moving the idea of creating a community campus for the West Broad neighborhood closer to reality has taken a long time, and required the work of many partners.

A neighborhood desire to create a community commercial kitchen -- the idea at the heart of the campus project -- was discussed at least as early as 2005. In 2015, though, serious organizing for the project began when the West Broad Rising group was formed and started a grassroots campaign which helped secure funding from the Athens-Clarke

County Government through a competitive grant process.

"To finally have a place to learn . . . to have all the tools and resources in one place, will be awesome."

-- Xavier Coates

Other key partners include the Clarke County School District, the Athens Housing Authority, The Kendeda Fund and The Kresge Foundation -- not to mention everyone who contributes to Athens Land Trust.

Next steps

So, what's next for the project?

There are a number of steps that need to be completed before ground is broken: selecting the site, securing more capital funding and selecting contractors. We'll keep you posted on progress. ♦

Sustainability project to expand reach

Environmental and grassroots leadership grows in West Broad and North Athens

On a gray morning in early October, neighborhood leaders, County officials, school board members, and stakeholders from across Athens gathered in downtown Athens at a workshop to discuss environmental leadership at the neighborhood level, and to explore the role it can play in the decisions and policies that affect Athens' environmental health and sustainability.

Facilitated by the Partnership for Southern Equity (PSE), the workshop highlighted how structural racism has led to unequal outcomes for low-income, predominantly Black communities in Athens. Workshop participants from diverse backgrounds shared their perspectives, and through a multi-faceted view of history explored how local, collaborative efforts can promote a more equitable Athens.

The West Broad Community

Our experience with the West Broad Sustainability Project -- an effort supported by ALT, neighborhood residents, PSE, and the Southeast Sustainability Directors Network (SSDN) -- shows how effective environmental leadership can be at the neighborhood level. In that project, residents identified a range of environmental challenges and then successfully engaged local government to begin addressing them.



Director of Education & Empowerment, Dr. Tawana Mattox (center) with West Broad Neighborhood Advisory Board members Shirley Tillman and Willie Thomas at the Partnership for Southern Equity workshop at Creature Comforts, October 8, 2021.

What is environmental leadership?

Answering the question, "What is environmental leadership?" seems easy at first: it's about land conservation, sustainable

At the workshop, Shirley Tillman, a West Broad resident, reminded us that everyone values healthy environments, clean water, access to affordable, energy efficient homes and safe neighborhoods -- but not everyone has access to the resources to realize these values.

farming practices, and green building practices with a focus on energy and water efficiency. But, as we have worked with the West Broad community, the definition of environmental leadership has evolved to focus squarely on the leadership of our most impacted communities in determining their own environmental fate.

Keeping community history in mind

Hearing from residents like Shirley Tillman, whose family roots go back almost as far as Athens' founding, we were reminded of our community's living history. With memory of family members who lived through emancipation, Mrs. Tillman's story was one of challenge and strife but also optimism and progress.

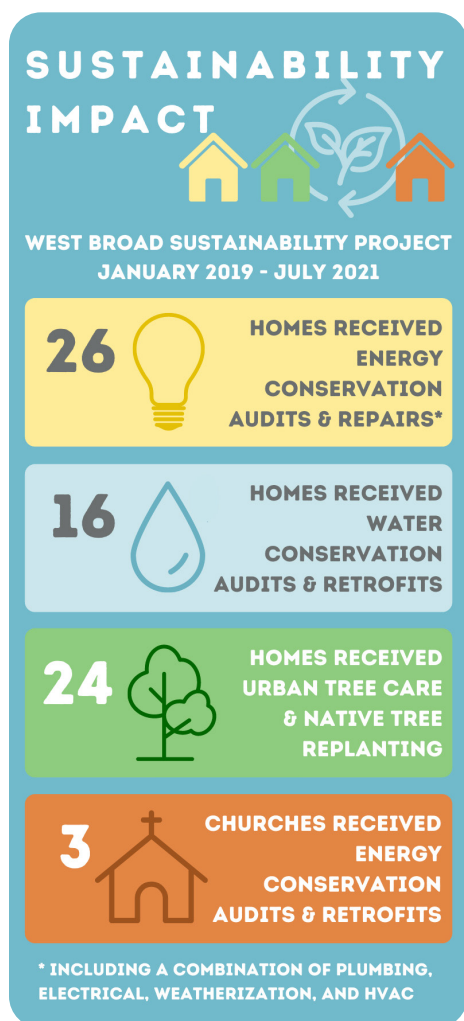
As she and others shared their stories, we were reminded that everyone values healthy environments, clean water, access to affordable, energy efficient homes and safe neighborhoods -- but not everyone has access to the resources to realize these values.

Takeaways and next steps

We know that engaging residents upfront and early about identifying specific neighborhood needs is critical to meeting community needs equitably. So part of the discussion that morning was about how to build leadership among North Athens residents to take on a similar project in their own neighborhood.

United Way invests in Athens youth

A key takeaway was the importance of defining -- and taking -- the next steps. To that end, we're working with county staff, West Broad neighborhood leaders and North Athens residents to build formal roles for North Athens grassroots leaders in expanding the project to their community.



By centering the experiences of these citizens, we grow the base of environmental leadership and set the stage for healthy sustainable communities that serve all Athenians. ♦

Since early in 2021, United Way of Northeast Georgia has been investing in Athens Land Trust's workforce development efforts. The investment is the first time the regional nonprofit has awarded funding to us, and it's a recognition of the impact we're making.

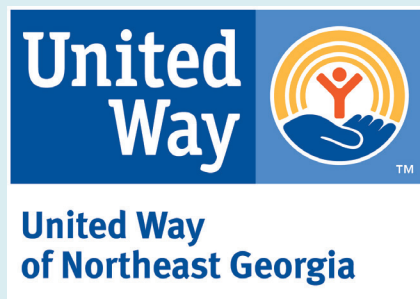
This partnership comes as a result of United Way of Northeast Georgia (UWNEGA) changing how it evaluates where to focus its investment. The process -- known as "community impact model" -- is aimed at giving a more strategic focus to meeting some of the highest priority needs for our community: basic needs, early childhood success, and workforce development.

Our work in three unique employment and leadership development programs -- Young Urban Farmers, Young Urban Builders and Young Conservation Stewards -- is the focus of this investment. (See "Youth Development is Community Development" in our Summer 2021 Newsletter for more about these

programs.) We're proud to have secured a second year of United Way funding despite the challenges of safely operating these hands-on youth programs amid evolving pandemic conditions.

Just this month, we welcomed a team of United Way staff and board members to tour youth program worksites and meet some of the promising young people involved.

We're thrilled to be among the 28 organizations and collaborations awarded grants for 2022. And we're grateful that the United Way of Northeast Georgia and its supporters are helping us to make the sort of investment in people and the places they live that is needed more than ever in our community. ♦



UWNEGA representatives Mark Madison (far left) and Alison Alwes (front row, left) join ALT staff and youth program participants at the West Broad Garden as part of a site visit for ALT's Community Impact grant, November 18, 2021.

Why we Give

Rod and Lindsay Lammers

They sold their house for a premium, and gave profits back to the community



Rod and Lindsay, with their two boys.

Even though academic career demands kept their stay in town fairly brief, Rod and Lindsay Lammers (and their sons Teddy and Jude) grew very attached to Athens. When they sold their house to move to Michigan, they donated profits from the sale to Athens Land Trust. We asked them to share a bit about why they give. Here's what they had to say.

"When we moved to Athens three years ago, we were not expecting to become so attached to the area. We took advantage of the great parks, farmers market, and local businesses as much as we could while we lived here. These amenities are simply the outward result of the great people living in this community."

"This community is worth investing in and we are proud to support all the work Athens Land Trust does. We hope ALT will continue to support others' journeys to home ownership in this wonderful place."

-- Lindsay Lammers

When a job opening caused us to move North, we were fortunate to sell our home when the market was soaring. It was clear to us that the right thing to do was leave the profits of the house here in the community.

This community is worth investing in and we are proud to support all the work ALT does. We hope ALT will continue to support others' journeys to home ownership in this wonderful place."

Note to readers: *Why We Give*, a new feature for the Newsletter, aims at letting our contributors say in their own words why they give to Athens Land Trust. Our hope is to inspire others to give as well. If you want to share your story about why you give to ALT, please send an email to Erin O'Brien our development coordinator, at erin@athenslandtrust.org.



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CAHEC
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Enterprise Community Partners
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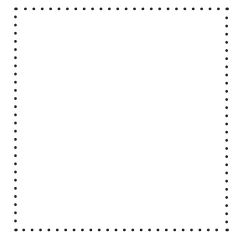


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Yes! I want to make a difference in Athens and beyond with a gift of:

\$10 \$25 \$50 \$100

\$250 \$500 other amount _____

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

Address _____

Email _____

Phone _____

Would you like to join our listserv? Yes No

Would you like to volunteer? Skills or Interests: _____

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

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