



# Athens Land Trust

685 N. Pope Street  
Athens, Georgia 30601  
[www.athenslandtrust.org](http://www.athenslandtrust.org)  
706.613.0122

## Newsletter

Fall 2022 • Volume 25 • Issue 2



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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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**Executive Director's Note | Heather Benham**



*Shopping at the West Broad Farmers Market Fall Festival, Saturday, October 22, 2022.*

into programming, and attract the resources to grow the programs.

Please stay tuned because official announcements will be happening soon, but know that this good work wouldn't be possible without support from our donors. We work hard to leverage every dollar donated and have a track record of leveraging each dollar of your donation 12 times.

So thank you for considering making an end-of-year gift to Athens Land Trust. You can feel good about your donation and know that we will put it to good use to help address our community's pressing needs. ♦

Exciting things are in the works -- the hard work we've put in the past few years building up our newer programs, while also continuing to invest in our core work, well I believe it's all about to pay dividends for our community.

By showing proof of concept success, we have been able to take the community's identified needs, turn those

*Cover: Keenan Brown with D&D Heating and Air Conditioning installs a unit at the historic Mack-Burney House, which is being restored for the development of affordable apartments, a pressing need in Athens. Read about ALT's model of permanent affordability on page 6.*



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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



At 12 years old, Malon James takes junior-level classes, is the lead investigator on an internationally recognized research study, and is certified as one of the youngest farmers in Georgia!

Malon's research focuses on tackling food insecurity through innovative climate change conservation practices such as hydroponic growing. In part with contributions from Farmer Outreach Specialist

and hydroponics expert, Dr. Sherman Green on behalf of Athens Land Trust, Malon was able to set up a lab at Georgia State University for his research, while also growing fresh food for local distribution.

We're proud to support Georgia farmers like Malon, and we can't wait to see where his research takes him!

*Malon and his grandmother, with Kim Fritz of Gwinnett County Extension (far left), and Sherman Green, (far right).*

The Young Urban Builders program (YUB) has delivered repair services to more than 50 low income homeowners in Athens since 2018, making homes safer, more livable, and more affordable through improved energy efficiency. With a new 3-year grant from the US Dept. of Energy we're excited to be able to expand the program to more neighborhoods in 2023!

- The YUB program is hiring! Know a promising youth ages 18 - 25?
- Wondering if you qualify for repairs?

*email [colin@athenslandtrust.org](mailto:colin@athenslandtrust.org) or call (706) 613-0122 for info!*



We've helped create five new homeowners so far this year! Tony Grajirena (center) celebrates closing on his home with Heather Benham (right) and Housing Coordinator Turice Brown, August 2022.



# The Interview

## Raleigh Robinson

### on the West Broad Advisory Board's role in community revitalization

Raleigh Robinson is a licensed and certified Life and Health insurance agent with Dynamic Life And Health LLC. He was born, raised, and currently lives in Athens, GA. He's also a gospel musician and a self-described servant of his community.

#### **What are you most excited about in being a part of the Advisory Board?**

It's been amazing to learn about all of the history of the community where I was born and raised. There were many things going on in my neighborhood that I did not know about before I started going to the community meetings held for residents to learn about programs that were available. I'm most excited about working to empower my community to become more actively passionate about preserving our historic West Broad Community, become more vocal about major decisions and new policies proposed that will impact our community, and to help residents understand how Athens Land Trust wants to help preserve our community and make it better.

#### **You have a heart for community service. Does your faith inform your community service work?**

I had faithful church-going parents who did not miss many



*"I'm most excited about working to empower my community to become actively passionate about preserving our historic West Broad community."*

days of Sunday service as I recall, who took me with them even on days when I would want to stay home and watch cartoons or play games. I was at church singing in the choir, working as an usher, and sometimes teaching Sunday school class to my peers when our adult teacher was absent. So yes, it absolutely does. It inspires me to stay positive and faithful with my outlook upon big tasks that need to be completed that will help others and myself. In

other words like my father taught me, "to treat others as I wish to be treated". As I learn and work to improve my community while being on the West Broad Advisory Board, I hope to achieve great things for my community.

#### **I understand you're a gospel musician! Tell me a little about your experience with music in Athens.**

I've been a musician for more than 20 years. For the last 12 years I have dedicated myself musically to God's calling and I became the Christian Worship Artist AKA AwesomeNdynamic. I've had the honor of performing at the Georgia Theatre, the Hot Corner Celebration, and at many more places in Athens. I'm proud to be an Athens native and my musical experience here has been glorious.

#### **Is there a special project or other work you want to highlight here?**

I'm excited to be working with Athens Land Trust to help my community address concerns and to help improve conditions within our community that many people here desperately need... with the future of our county changing all the time, I plan on working hard to help with the projects that are already on the table and on the new ones that will come next. ♦

# Williams Farm Bees Aid Research on Pollinator Health

*Athens urban farms and food gardens will benefit*

The bees on Williams Farm have recently been promoted to VIB status (that's Very Important Bees), and in mid-October we checked in with Farm Manager Seth Nivens to learn more.

Bees are disappearing in urban areas, causing headaches for farmers and gardeners who rely on the insects to pollinate their crops. But not on Williams Farm. Seven bee boxes there are occupied by honey bees (*apis mellifera*) but the majority of pollinator traffic turns out to be coming from wild hives. Researchers have identified at least 17 species of bee active on Williams Farm, indicating Athens is still home to a thriving community of pollinators.

The Farm is situated perfectly to collect data on how urban

heat islands and climate change are impacting urban agriculture and pollinator populations. Seth shared that "... What [researchers] were really looking for was an intersection between urban and rural, and this is perfect because we're right in town." Williams Farm, which also houses Athens Land Trust's Farm Incubator program, is located about one mile from downtown Athens.

Williams Farm is one of 12 sites in the region selected by Kennesaw State University for research on the effects of urban heat islands on these at-risk pollinators. Several environmental factors will be monitored and measured as part of the study, then compared with findings in eight other cities across the



United States collected by collaborating institutions North Carolina State and Bowling Green State University. Ongoing monitoring of temperature, soils, flowering plant diversity, and precipitation will continue at Williams Farm through 2023.

Interestingly, the researchers are also monitoring bee body temperature and the rate at which bees visit flowers. Quadrants were marked out with tape, and observers tallied insect activity within their squares from the comfort of lawn chairs. Researchers also captured bees with insect nets for closer observation.

The contribution of Williams Farm VIBs to this body of research may help urban planners, farmers and gardeners adapt to climate change as it impacts pollinators and agriculture. ♦



*Above right: Bees "bearding" at the entrance to a hive. This helps cool the hive by creating more space inside for ventilation on hot, humid days.*

*Above: Williams Farm Manager Seth Nivens (left) gives volunteer newsletter editor Corrina Beale a tour of the farm and update on the pollinator research, October 3, 2022.*

# Feature Story

## Forever Affordable

### How the Community Land Trust model helps generations of Athens homeowners

When Sherrie became a homeowner through Athens Land Trust in 2019, she had lived and worked in Athens, GA for most of her life. She'd become tired of renting. The three-bedroom, two-bathroom home she purchased for \$96,000 was in-town, close to work, and best of all, it was her own home. For Sherrie, "...homeownership was my goal. When I started this journey, I wrote *Day 1* on the calendar on the day that I decided to start really working to buy a house. I marked every single day with my goal in mind."

Along with Sherrie, Athens Land Trust has worked with more than 60 individuals and families to become first-time home buyers through our Affordable Housing

program. Many bought newly constructed, energy efficient EarthCraft certified homes built on vacant or blighted lots, and some became the second purchasers of an Athens Land Trust home – which are affordable now, and affordable forever through the Community Land Trust (CLT) model.

#### How the CLT model works

What does it mean for a home to be "permanently affordable"? Through the CLT model, a community-based organization builds, acquires, and stewards property for affordable housing, often with a focus on preserving affordable units in low-income neighborhoods that are rapidly gentrifying – where development pressures mean

*"I wrote Day 1 on the calendar on the day that I decided to start really working to buy a house. I marked every single day with my goal in mind."*

Sherrie, Athens Land Trust homeowner since 2019

older homes are being torn down or rehabilitated for more lucrative rental and investment properties.

Thanks to public subsidies for their acquisition and construction or rehabilitation, CLT homes are priced well below comparable homes on the traditional market, and are therefore affordable for low-to-moderate income individuals and families.

At the time of closing, ALT and the homeowner enter into a ground lease agreement. As a nonprofit membership organization governed by a board of directors, ALT holds the land on which a house is built in trust in perpetuity as a community-owned resource. The homebuyer purchases the house and has the same access to and use of the land as a traditional homeowner. The



Left: ALT homeowner Sherrie on her front porch.



Right: ALT builds homes that will always be affordable – they are insulated from market conditions if they are resold to another low-income family. Proceeds are used to build additional affordable homes.

lease is for 99 years and is renewable, and homeowners can bequeath the home to their heirs, allowing opportunities for homeownership and wealth-building across generations.

### Benefits for the homeowner

For low-income households, the alternative to CLT ownership is, too frequently, renting. Research has shown that CLT homeowners experience less financial hardship and greater housing stability and security than renters.

Many CLTs, including Athens Land Trust, offer ongoing support to homeowners – workshops on home maintenance, financial literacy, estate planning, and more. As a result, CLT homeowners are far less likely to experience foreclosure than traditional homeowners, even though they may have lower incomes.

CLT homeowners also build wealth. The ground lease includes a *limited equity resale formula* that gives the homeowner a percentage of the market appreciation of the home's value if they choose to sell.

And this can be a bridge to market-rate homeownership. One study found that more than

two-thirds of CLT homeowners who sold their home had accumulated enough assets to purchase a market rate home with no additional subsidy.

### Benefits for the community

While CLTs do limit the equity that can be derived from home sales, this model sustains affordability each time the house sells and ultimately serves multiple low-income families in building equity through homeownership.

If a homeowner chooses to sell, ALT will buy the house back from them, or find another income-eligible individual or family to purchase the home. This means that a one-time community investment in the development of an affordable home will:

- always be owner-occupied
- always benefit a low-income household
- never revert to market rate housing or unaffordable rental property
- help generations of homeowners to achieve housing stability and to realize the benefits of homeownership. ♦

For more information on Athens Land Trust's Affordable Housing Program:  
[sara@athenslandtrust.org](mailto:sara@athenslandtrust.org)  
[turice@athenslandtrust.org](mailto:turice@athenslandtrust.org)

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



## CLT Homeownership means:

### Affordability

ALT homes sell for around \$110,000, less than 1/3 the median home price in Athens.\*

### Stability

CLT homeowners are 6 times less likely to face foreclosure than traditional homeowners.

### Equity

CLT homeowners build assets as they pay off their mortgage and earn a share of the appreciated value if they sell.

### Perpetuity

CLT homeowners own their homes and can pass them on to their heirs.

\*Sept. 2022. Other data courtesy of Shelterforce

# Preserving Georgia Farmland Forever

*Athens Land Trust connects farmers to USDA program benefits*

For the last two decades, Georgia has ranked near the top among states where agricultural land is rapidly being lost to development. This includes land with some of the best soils for growing food and crops -- a hit to the economy, where agribusiness is the state's largest industry, and to the stability of local and regional food systems.

Under the ACEP-ALE program -- that's Agricultural Conservation Easement Program -- Agricultural Land Easement -- the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is

partnering with organizations like Athens Land Trust to help landowners secure permanent protection for their farms and ranches. In fact, as an ACEP-ALE Certified Entity, ALT has a proven track record in farmland protection through this program.

This past September we closed on two easement projects through ACEP-ALE, adding more than 300 acres of permanently protected agricultural land in Georgia. The *easement* is a legal tool through which the landowner agrees to restrictions on development

in exchange for certain tax benefits.

This means that Athens Land Trust now holds 18 conservation easements over more than 1,400 acres of farmland land under ACEP-ALE as well as its predecessor program, the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP). These lands, located in Athens-Clarke County, Oconee County, Newton County, and Walton County, will forever be available for agriculture.

Both recently protected farms consist of a high percentage of



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Prime and Statewide Important Soils -- so designated by USDA/ NRCS because of their quality for growing food and crops. The first, in Oconee County, protects 30 acres of pasture and mature tree canopy.

The second farm, also in Oconee County, features perennial streams and wetlands. This means that in addition to agricultural benefit, the easement ensures permanent protection of water quality for the area as well.

Athens Land Trust closed on our first conservation easement under the FRPP in 2004, protecting a portion of a multi-generation family farm in Oconee County. Over the years ALT has continued to work with Oconee County and its farmland preservation committee, as well as farmers in other neighboring counties, to protect valuable agricultural land in our region. We are looking forward to continued partnerships as we work to permanently protect quality soils and family farms, and to ensure access to locally sourced food. ♦

*Opposite page, left: The Powers-Breedlove barn at what is now known as the Pastures of Rose Creek, a multi-generational family farm in Oconee County. This is the first property ALT protected through an agricultural easement, in 2004 under FRPP. Opposite page, right: Pasture and tree canopy at a 2022 protected farm, Oconee County.*



## WEST BROAD FARMERS MARKET HOLIDAY MARKET & CRAFT FAIR

*and*

## ATHENS LAND TRUST ANNUAL MEETING & CELEBRATION

SATURDAY DECEMBER 10, 2022

MARKET: 11 AM - 2 PM

MEETING: 1:30 - 3PM

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YEAR IN REVIEW  
LOOKING AHEAD  
SEASONAL  
REFRESHMENTS &  
HOLIDAY CHEER

# Why we Give

## Jared Harper & Elena Brown

**They saw affordable housing disappearing in their neighborhood, and took action**

Jared Harper and Elena Brown have been Athens Land Trust supporters in one way or another for more than 15 years. We asked them to share a bit about why they give. Here's their story, as told by Jared.

*We used to live in Habersham Hills, a modest development off of Milledge Ave. The houses were prefab houses built for Korean War veterans. Over time, we saw students come in and families leave as almost a third of the houses became rundown rentals with absentee landlords.*

***"We like to give money away, especially to our local community and its people. Being involved with an organization like Athens Land Trust makes us feel good."***

*Elena and I got the idea for what you could call small-scale neighborhood revitalization by buying and renovating one house at a time. We began with the houses near us. We would fix up a house and rent it to a couple or family . . . and eventually we sold them all for single-family homeownership.*



*Elena Brown (left) and Jared Harper (right) with their younger daughter Elizabeth.*

*After that we became involved in the Partners for a Prosperous Athens (PPA) movement. There was a lot of community support around their mission to discover the causes of persistent poverty in Athens and propose a solution. Volunteers arranged themselves according to interests and skills, and Elena and I chose Affordable Housing.*

*At the time, we had never heard of Athens Land Trust. Heather [Benham, ALT's Executive Director who was Housing Director at the time] led the affordable housing group. The ALT staff consisted of just four people.*

*Not long after our involvement with PPA, Nancy [Stangle, ALT co-founder] asked if we would be interested in serving on the Board of Directors. I served on*

*the ALT board for ten years, and after stepping down I continue to serve on the Affordable Housing Committee.*

*Elena comes up with ideas for how we might help ALT in their mission. We have financed the mortgage on an Athens Land Trust house. We have made a recurring monthly gift for the past 15 years. Recently, after seeing the impact of the pandemic on Athens' housing crisis, we worked with Heather to identify a local family we can assist for a year with monthly housing costs.*

*We like to give money away, especially to our local community and its people. Being involved with an organization like ALT makes us feel good. ♦*

[athenslandtrust.org/donate/](https://athenslandtrust.org/donate/)

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