

Community Land Trust Holds Promise for African Nova Scotians

Historic community aims to secure land for affordable housing and economic stability

Upper Hammonds Plains (UHP) is a historic African Nova Scotian community where Black refugees settled after the War of 1812. Today, increased development and rising costs are having a significant impact on the community, making it difficult for residents to find and secure affordable housing. The Upper Hammonds Plains Community Land Trust (UHPCLT) offers an innovative solution. By acquiring land to create more affordable housing in the community, UHPCLT creates pathways to homeownership while ensuring communal decision-making based on shared values.

3 Key Findings

- 1. Prioritize Community Land Ownership for African Nova Scotians:** Foster a thriving community by creating affordable homes and pathways to economic stability.
- 2. Explore Multiple Paths to Land Access:** Carefully evaluate diverse pathways to land acquisition, balancing financial feasibility with community interests.
- 3. Use Inclusive Governance:** Establish transparent, values-based governance to encourage diverse participation and ensure sustainability.

Project Scope and Outcomes

After the War of 1812, 500 Black refugees settled in Upper Hammonds Plains (UHP), Nova Scotia, following promises of land in exchange for service. Today, rising development pressures and increasing costs of living have significantly impacted the community. Outside developers are buying prime properties, making it harder for young people to afford staying in the community. As of 2024, only 38% of properties in UHP remain owned by families with ancestral ties to the original settlers.

Founded in 2022, the Upper Hammonds Plains Community Land Trust (UHPCLT) aims to acquire land in the historic African Nova Scotian (ANS) community. The goal is to provide affordable rental housing and pathways to home ownership. While Community Land Trust (CLT) models are becoming more common across Canada, they

are newer to Nova Scotia and the ANS community. Further, this is the first Canadian CLT that is exploring how land can be returned to descendants of the community's original settlers.

Funded through the National Housing Strategy (NHS) Solutions Lab project, the UHPCLT Lab tested innovative solutions to housing challenges, combining creativity with community collaboration.

A value-driven, community-oriented approach

The Lab adopted a creative and inclusive approach, engaging over 80 stakeholders in the process. Together, they explored community challenges, identified priorities, and developed strategies. These strategies were refined to create a high-level road map that includes questions to answer, groups to engage and next steps.

The Lab's approach was centred on values such as family, legacy, equity and community well-being. These values inform prototypes for governance, membership and land use—and ensure that decision-making remains community-focused.

Throughout the project, the UHPCLT team recognized that the Mi'kmaq people as long-standing stewards of the land. The Lab committed to sharing knowledge to advance shared efforts toward land justice.

Prototypes for action

The Lab produced two main prototypes:

1. **Membership decision-making framework:** Defines clear eligibility criteria and a transparent process for accepting new members, ensuring inclusivity and accountability.
2. **Pathways to land access:** Outlines four approaches for acquiring land, balancing feasibility, sustainability and community goals:
 - Tracing historical land titles to original holders
 - Purchasing land on the market
 - Encouraging land donations or reduced-price sales
 - Accessing surplus government land through purchase or donation

Each pathway has unique opportunities and challenges that must be carefully assessed before moving forward.

A roadmap for sustainable success

The UHPCLT Lab developed a detailed roadmap with clear goals for moving forward. It includes:

- Short-term goals such as finalizing membership criteria and engaging the Mi'kmaq community to honour shared histories.

- Medium-term goals involve securing charitable status, expanding leadership and launching a youth council to ensure intergenerational involvement.
- Long-term goals include acquiring land assets and implementing the community-led housing initiatives.

The UHPCLT Lab aimed to create a sustainable CLT model that empowers residents with affordable housing opportunities and economic stability. By sharing lessons learned, UHPCLT hopes to inspire similar initiatives in other ANS communities in Nova Scotia and across Canada.

Next steps

Launching UHP's first housing co-operative

UHPCLT has applied for CMHC's Co-op Housing Development Program for \$60.8M to develop 136 co-op housing units on permitted property in their community. Incorporated under the Upper Hammonds Plains Housing Co-operative Limited, this demonstrates the CLT model's ability to incubate housing co-operatives and ensure long-term housing affordability.

Little Pockwock pre-development project

UHPCLT is reclaiming five parcels (68 acres) of land with confirmed historical ties to the original refugees from the War of 1812, restoring legal access to water lost during the 1970s expropriation of Pockwock Lake. UHPCLT applied to purchase these lands from the Province in June 2023 with Ministerial approval for site feasibility and pre-development granted in October 2024. This represents a historic and transformational achievement for the community.

Partnership with Emmanuel Baptist Church

UHPCLT is collaborating on the "Standing on Faith: EBC and UHPCLT Partnership for Community Housing" project to assess the feasibility of developing church-owned land in the heart of the community. This highlights the potential of CLT partnerships with faith-based organizations to bring underutilized lands to better use.

7-Megawatt solar farm

UHPCLT is also developing sustainable energy infrastructure to support their community development, including constructing a 7-megawatt solar farm that will be community owned. The proposed location is on the Melvin Land Tract, with a Memorandum of Understanding for governance already executed.

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Program

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