

CONSERVATION **MATTERS**

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SOWING SEEDS

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The Power of Community Investment

CLF's Healthy Retail and Commerce Fund Offers a New Model for Social Investment

BY LAURIE O'REILLY

IN THE HEART OF PROVIDENCE'S SOUTH SIDE, work is underway to transform a historic building into a vibrant community food hub. When complete, the 12,000-square-foot space will be the new headquarters for the Southside Community Land Trust. But, more importantly, it will serve as a gathering place and source of healthy, affordable food for the neighbors, youth, and farmers the Land Trust serves.

As one of the inaugural investments of CLF's Healthy Retail and Commerce Fund, it will also showcase the power of social impact investing in supporting healthy, livable neighborhoods.



ALL PHOTOS: SOUTHSIDE COMMUNITY LAND TRUST



A loan from the Healthy Retail and Commerce Fund will help the Southside Community Land Trust open its Healthy Food Hub, a new facility that includes a Farm-to-Market Center, Youth Enterprise Center, commercial kitchen, and program space. The project will transform a historic commercial building located in the heart of the South Side into a vibrant, community-oriented space.



PROVIDENCE'S SOUTH SIDE ENCOMPASSES four neighborhoods that have long been a draw for immigrants, from Irish Catholics in the late 19th century to Hispanics, Africans, Laotians, and Hmong refugees in the 1980s. It was newly arrived Hmong refugees who helped the Southside Community Land Trust get its start. In 1981, they joined with other residents and students from Brown University to reclaim a vacant lot to grow fresh, culturally familiar, healthy food for their families and neighbors.

In the four decades since then, the organization's mission has evolved to serve people in urban neighborhoods where fresh produce is nearly impossible to find – especially in quantities and at prices that support residents' health. Today, Southside Community Land Trust's 52 gardens feed more than 3,000 families. The organization also provides land for 25 urban and rural farmers, trains 50 beginning farmers each year, and educates more than 200 children annually in the fundamentals of healthy food. Its scope extends to Central Falls and Pawtucket, while maintaining its South Providence roots.

One part of the organization hadn't grown in years, however – and that was the small house that serves as its headquarters. Those space constraints limited their ability to expand their staff and, in turn, the programs they could offer, says Executive Director Margaret DeVos.

Just as importantly, the Land Trust wanted a hub to support its local farmers. "Many of our farmers don't have the networks or the volume to sell their food outside of farmers' markets," says DeVos. The Land Trust envisioned a space

where they could help these small-scale farmers reach bigger markets by aggregating their produce with other crops and distributing them to large customers. "So every farmer doesn't have to sell every vegetable on their own – they can operate like other farms that are successful," she says.

When a 12,000-square-foot building came on the market, located not only along a major thoroughfare but also close to so many of its urban farms and community gardens, the Land Trust jumped at the chance to purchase it. Their only hesitation: The building was larger than they needed.

But, says DeVos, the Land Trust's Board of Directors simply encouraged her to think bigger about how the new space could serve the community. "We thought, let's create space for three healthy food enterprises," DeVos says. "[The Land Trust] has been very successful creating space for gardeners and farmers – let's do it for restaurateurs, grocers."

Not just any restaurateurs or grocers, however. DeVos and her team wanted to make sure those businesses "are owned, operated, and run by people who are connected to this neighborhood, who grew up here, who live here, whose customers are here."

With a robust vision for the Land Trust's Farm-to-Market Center emerging, next came the reality of securing the capital and financing to make it all happen.

AT THE SAME TIME THAT DEVOS AND HER TEAM were solidifying their expansion plans, Conservation Law Foundation was crafting a new vision of its own.



The Hub will create 30 jobs and space for three healthy food businesses owned by people of color. It will also expand the organization's reach to low-income families in Providence, Pawtucket, and Central Falls who are in need of better access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food.

Several years earlier, CLF had partnered with the Massachusetts Housing Investment Corporation (MHIC) to launch a social investment fund aimed at catalyzing the development of mixed-use, mixed-income real estate projects. The Healthy Neighborhoods Equity Fund invests in developments that will not only provide financial returns but also positively impact the community, environment, and, critically, health.

Achieving those returns includes ensuring the businesses that fill each development's retail spaces promote the health of neighborhood residents. But as the Fund's initial projects came to fruition, CLF staff realized that financing posed a major barrier to finding locally owned, sustainable businesses that both meet community needs and can afford to lease the available spaces in a neighborhood.

Having already spearheaded one successful social investment fund, CLF and MHIC decided to do it again – this time for retail. With seed money from the Kresge Foundation, the organizations launched the Healthy Retail and Commerce Fund. The goal: to support businesses that will create new jobs in a neighborhood, improve food access and affordability, and bring new economic vitality to communities.

"Providing access to affordable capital is critical to fueling the sustainability of these foundational small businesses and nonprofits in the communities that need them most,"

They're providing opportunities for immigrant farmers and gardeners to grow food while providing healthy food access for community members. What could be better?

—Alex Linkow, CLF

says Alex Linkow, Senior Associate on CLF's impact investing team.

While the new fund started out with a focus on the real estate projects supported by the Healthy Neighborhoods Equity Fund, CLF soon expanded its vision. Says Linkow, "We found that there were great opportunities to support health-promoting enterprises in neighborhoods similar to where we were already working" – opportunities like Southside Community Land Trust and its Farm-to-Market Center.

A MUTUAL CONTACT CONNECTED

Linkow with DeVos when she began exploring financing options for the purchase and renovation of the Land Trust's new headquarters.

The Land Trust project fits the goals of the Healthy Retail and Commerce Fund in many ways, says Linkow. "This is an organization that has been an integral part of the South Providence community for decades. They're providing opportunities for immigrant farmers and gardeners to grow food and supplement their income while providing healthy food access for community members. What could be better?"

Unlike a traditional borrower-lender relationship, the motivation for supporting the Land Trust's vision isn't financial returns but social ones. That understanding has been critical, says DeVos.

PARTNERS FOR HEALTH

The Healthy Retail and Commerce Fund leverages investments from hospitals, health systems, and foundations. To find the right healthcare partners for the Southside Community Land Trust project, CLF's Alex Linkow took to the phones, working his network to seek out investors who were active in South Providence and had a vested interest in the neighborhood and its residents. The priority, he says, was finding healthcare groups who were bought into "the idea of investing in the social determinants of health, job creation, healthy food access, and walkable communities."

The focus narrowed to Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island and Neighborhood Health Plan of Rhode Island. "Once they heard about what Southside Land Trust was doing, and how we were proposing to help them get this Farm-to-Market Center off the ground, it didn't take a lot of convincing," says Linkow.

"It takes vision and creativity to make healthy food in places where it is hard to find," says Southside Community Land Trust's Margaret DeVos. "Our health insurance partners are showing just that kind of vision. Their investment will improve health outcomes for years to come."



"I have never had a lender this knowledgeable about my perspective," she says. "It's fair to say that's part of the reason why there's the need for [investment] funds like this, because of that difference in the expectation of the bottom line and the return on investment."

Even when the price tag for the project inched up after additional renovations were needed to accommodate the Land Trust's expected retail tenants, CLF and MHIC didn't balk. "We were intent on providing the right amount of financing at the right price to allow Southside to do what they wanted, with huge impact in the community," says Linkow.

WITH THE FARM-TO-MARKET CENTER now just a few months from completion, DeVos's team is excited at the possibilities the new space will offer the Land Trust and its community. The produce processing facility will take pressure off its small farmers, allowing them to focus on growing their businesses rather than on the onerous logistical details of distribution. The retail spaces will highlight local entrepreneurs of color while providing a neighborhood resource for healthy, affordable food. And the expanded program space will allow the Land Trust to launch

a Youth Enterprise Center where its youth staff will develop workforce skills and lead workshops for their peers and neighbors.

For CLF, the Center's opening points to the vital role organizations like the Land Trust – and the other health-promoting businesses supported by the Healthy Retail and Commerce Fund – play in underserved communities, especially as people continue rebuilding after the pandemic. "Providing access to healthy food and good jobs can lift up the health of an entire neighborhood," says Linkow. "It's the power of community investment at work." ♦

LEARN MORE

- ▶ Explore the Southside Community Land Trust's work at www.southsideclt.org
- ▶ Find out more about CLF's impact investing work at www.clf.org/health

holding producers accountable (for the waste they create)

BY OLIVIA
SYNORACKI

THE PROBLEM

Big corporations blame the influx of trash tainting the planet on consumers, saying we need to recycle more. But even when we do our best, much of what we put into our recycling bins still ends up in a toxic landfill or incinerator. The problem is that large manufacturers keep churning out single-use packaging that can't be recycled.

Manufacturers should not be allowed to reap profits while their toxic products and packaging harm our health and environment – all while New England's cities and towns foot the bill to manage that waste. Only by dumping disposable products can we move towards more sustainable methods for managing our trash.

CLF IN ACTION

CLF launched its Zero Waste Project in 2017 to protect New England communities from the dangers posed by the trash crisis. In addition to opposing landfill and incinerator expansions across New England, CLF is tackling the waste crisis at its source by pushing to phase out single-use products and packaging.

The key to that work is holding large manufacturers accountable for the waste they create. CLF advocates are pushing for legislation called "Extended Producer

Responsibility for Packaging" across the region. When put into practice, this kind of law requires corporations that make and use single-use packaging – like Clorox and Johnson & Johnson – to reimburse cities and towns for the cost of managing their trash.

Putting the responsibility for the flood of single-use packaging waste back onto manufacturers provides a financial incentive for them to redesign their packaging to be truly recyclable – or, better yet, reusable.

PROGRESS

Earlier this year, CLF and its partners successfully pushed Maine's legislature to pass a first-in-the-nation bill that makes producers responsible for their packaging. The legislation will make recycling work for Mainers, not corporations.

Now, a fee will be imposed on each type of packaging (plastic, paper, cardboard, aluminum, etc.) to reflect the total cost of collecting, processing, transporting, and recycling it. This money will be used to reimburse Maine's cities and towns for the costs of dealing with all this packaging waste. Fees can be adjusted if manufacturers reduce their wasteful packaging, increase its recyclability, or minimize its toxicity.

Building on Maine's momentum, in August, members of CLF's Zero Waste Team attended a two-day conference with many of its partners. The attendees' goal: to draft model legislation that other states can use in their own efforts to hold plastic producers accountable, while protecting the health and environment of their communities.

NEXT STEPS

In Maine, state regulators now must develop the rules for implementing the landmark law. Elsewhere, momentum around producer responsibility for packaging is growing. Nearly a dozen states – including Vermont and Massachusetts – introduced similar laws in 2021. Most of these bills were defeated, however, showing that the fight for manufacturer accountability has just begun.

CLF is now turning its attention to Massachusetts, which still has an opportunity to pass its bill and change the state's recycling system for the better.

Producer responsibility laws have the potential to drastically cut our waste generation and disposal – and their harms. CLF is committed to building on the victory in Maine and advancing this groundbreaking solution throughout New England. ♦

Mei and Irene Li

Co-founders of Mei Mei Dumplings and Food Waste Feast, Mei and Irene are on a mission to pass along their professional knowledge for reducing food waste in the kitchen. Designing dishes that use up everything in the fridge and offering workshops on how to make your dollars go further by cooking smarter, the sister-duo is on the cutting edge of the food waste revolution.



1 Where did your passion for cooking with little to no food waste start?

We became interested in reducing food waste when we opened our food truck and restaurant and saw just how much money we spent on ingredients. Wasting food made no sense from a business perspective.

It also felt so frustrating to throw out food knowing just how hard all the farmers we partner with work to grow vegetables and raise animals. Once we started paying attention to our food waste at work, it made sense to implement the same strategies and philosophies at home.

2 What role do Mei Mei and Food Waste Feast play in educating others about our food waste?

Our goal at Food Waste Feast is to help home chefs cook more creatively and eat all the food they buy. Not only does this help people eat better and save money, but it helps reduce the amount of perfectly edible food that goes to landfills.

The highest percentage of wasted food actually takes place in homes – it's over 40%! It's a daunting figure, but anyone who buys and cooks food can help address

the problem. How? By looking at best-by dates more critically, moving something to the freezer before it goes bad, or making an omelet with everything you've cleaned out of the fridge. At Mei Mei Dumplings, we teach lots of cooking classes where participants learn not only to fold and cook dumplings, but also how to use up all kinds of ingredients. It's okay if your spinach is wilted if it's going inside a dumpling!

3 How can cooking creatively help restaurants and shoppers alike save money?

Professional chefs know that so many commonly discarded meat and vegetable parts can be used in unexpected ways. Mei stopped buying chicken stock once she realized how easy it was to make stock from chicken bones, onion ends, and carrot peels. You can buy fewer expensive fresh herbs when you both take the time to preserve them and use all the parts. For example, instead of storing basil in the fridge, keep it in a glass of water on your countertop. And don't just use cilantro leaves to season your dishes – chop up the flavorful stems to use as well.

4 Tell us about the biggest challenge and success you've had in cutting down food waste.

If you can't eat it, compost it! Composting food scraps returns nutrients to the soil, while food in landfills emits tons of greenhouse gases. We try to compost whenever possible, but it's challenging to do at home. So, Mei now outsources her composting to a local company.

As for our biggest success, it always feels great when someone tells us that our tips helped them change their kitchen habits. The more small steps we can take towards reducing our food waste, the better!

5 Who inspires you and why?

Our friend Rich Shih, also known as Our Cook Quest, is a trailblazer in the world of fermentation, preservation, and using mold to make food taste delicious. He's an amazing collaborator in the culinary world who loves teaching, exploring, and learning. Plus, he's the bravest person we know when it comes to eating really old things out of the fridge. ♦

Hear More from Mei and Irene

Watch CLF's Tips for Creating a Zero Waste Kitchen with Food Waste Feast at www.clf.org/foodwastefeast.



MEI & IRENE'S TOP 3 TIPS

FOR REDUCING FOOD WASTE

1

USE A SMOOTHIE BAG

Save all your fruit, from browned bananas to mushy berries to uneaten apple slices, in a sealed bag in the freezer. Once the bag is full, make smoothies!

2

LABEL AND DATE EVERTHING

Keep a permanent marker and painter's tape by the fridge so you can date and label containers easily. No more throwing out unidentifiable brown sauces!

3

TREAT EXPIRATION DATES WITH A GRAIN OF SALT

Did you know that most expiration dates are just manufacturer suggestions as to when a product is at peak quality? Use your senses – does it look and smell fine? Don't feel like you have to throw something out based on the best-by date.

A VICTORY FOR NEW ENGLAND'S OCEAN

In October, President Biden restored protections for the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument – the only marine monument in the Atlantic Ocean. CLF and its partners pushed for the monument's creation in 2016 and sued the Trump administration when it illegally opened the area to commercial fishing in 2020. With Biden's action, the monument will remain permanently protected – a boon for the many fragile marine plants and animals that call it home.

AROUND CLF

MAINE

CLF and other conservation groups are suing Brookfield Renewable Partners, the owner of four dams on the Kennebec River. Brookfield is violating the Endangered Species Act because the operation of its dams kills Atlantic salmon and blocks access to their traditional spawning grounds. The Kennebec once saw salmon runs in the hundreds of thousands, but that number has dwindled to less than a hundred. CLF and its partners are calling for the dams to be removed to give salmon the chance to recover.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

CLF's Legal Food Hub launched in New Hampshire in early November. The Hub is a first-of-its-kind network that connects smaller-scale farmers, food businesses, and food-related organizations with pro bono legal services. The program aims to help bring economic stability to New England's farm and food sector. With the New Hampshire launch, the Legal Food Hub now serves every New England state.

RHODE ISLAND

CLF is supporting local groups in opposing a proposal to expand a propane shipping terminal in the Port of Providence. The expansion could worsen air quality in nearby neighborhoods already overburdened by industrial pollution. It also could add to the state's carbon pollution, making it harder to meet the mandated emissions goals set out in the Rhode Island Act on Climate bill.

VERMONT

Global Foundries, a major manufacturer of semiconductors, is trying to remove itself from the oversight of Green Mountain Power and become a "self-managed utility." That would exempt it from the requirements of the state's 2020 Global Warming Solutions Act, allowing it to continue using polluting fossil fuels. CLF is pushing back against this irresponsible proposal, which would undermine the state's efforts to cut its carbon pollution.

MASSACHUSETTS

CLF is pushing state officials to reject a proposal to expand the Bourne Ash Landfill. The Cape Cod Commission approved the expansion, even though the landfill is a dangerous source of toxic "forever" chemicals and other pollutants. The landfill is also one the Cape's largest emitters of methane, a potent climate-damaging gas. CLF wants officials to adopt zero-waste solutions to cut trash rather than allow this ill-advised expansion plan to move forward.

CONNECTICUT

In a win for clean air, DATTCO, Inc., a major bus service provider in Connecticut, will stop illegal idling of its coaches and buses. CLF sued DATTCO for violating the Clean Air Act, as toxic fumes from its buses were harming people and the environment. Among other concessions, DATTCO has committed \$1.8 million to begin transitioning its operations to a zero-emissions fleet.

TAKE ACTION!

Your Voice Matters

Take action on these issues and more across New England. Sign up for CLF emails so you'll be the first to know when we need your help. www.clf.org/signup

Other ways to keep up to date:

- CLF's blog: clf.org/blog/
- Twitter: @clf
- Facebook: facebook.com/TheCLF

WHY WE GIVE



Nate Hausman & Christine Hertz Hausman

Montpelier, Vermont | Donors since 2014

Vermont natives Nate and Christine have a strong sense of place and belonging – especially in nature. They spend much of their time outdoors hiking, paddling, and enjoying all of Vermont’s natural beauty.

Today they share that passion with their daughter, Marie. “We love to see her interactions with nature and want to be sure she can always live and play in a clean environment.”

In 2010, Nate was a legal intern at CLF working alongside our advocates to challenge the polluting Vermont Yankee power plant. He experienced firsthand the importance of CLF’s legal capacity and local roots in making real systemic change in Vermont and New England.

As an educator, Christine has a focus on the future and is always thinking

about how we can leave the world a better place for future generations. “Knowing that we are in a place of privilege, we want to use that in a way that ensures smart growth, preservation of the landscape, and a welcoming and inclusive community for all who visit and live in Vermont,” she says.

Supporting CLF is one way they feel they can make a difference. While many organizations work to raise awareness and harness young energy to advocate for a healthy environment, CLF can turn that advocacy into action. The law is a potent defense in the face of tough challenges. That – combined with CLF’s experience, regional focus, and dedication to stay in these fights – inspires Nate, Christine, and Marie to support CLF.

Our donors inspire us to never give up because so much is at stake. Hear more from CLF supporters at www.clf.org/whywegive.

DOUBLE YOUR DONATION

Does your employer have a matching gift program?

Many companies support causes their employees care about. **That means they will match your donation to CLF.** Some even match gifts made by spouses and retirees – so your support for CLF can go twice as far.

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Want to give a one-time donation? Or give an honorary or gift membership? Or learn about planned giving?

You can do it all in a few clicks.

So come visit us online and make your donation today.

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Contact us today to learn more about giving to CLF.

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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



Achieving CLF's mission to create a healthy and thriving New England means looking at the "environment" as more than one's natural surroundings.

The environment also encompasses the built spaces in which we live, work, play, and learn.

Even as we strive to clean up Vermont's Lake Champlain, we're also rooting out lead poisoning in the state's schools. While we fight to protect New Hampshire's Merrimack River, we are also pushing for more street trees to alleviate heat stress in Manchester's low-income neighborhoods. And, as we hold Shell Oil accountable for its climate deceit in Rhode Island, we are also supporting the growth of a 40-year-old urban land trust in Providence's South Side neighborhood.

This breadth of work builds on CLF's core strengths, from legislative advocacy to legal watchdog. It also lets us use newer tools, including our innovative impact investment strategies.

Central to CLF's effectiveness is our ability to reimagine how we do business – quite literally. Too often, the business community gets painted as the bad guy exploiting our environment and our communities. But, in fact, the market can play a powerful role in achieving

environmental equity – particularly when it comes to social investments like the one you'll read about in this issue of *Conservation Matters*.

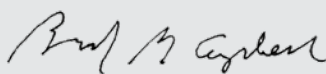
For too long, low-income and communities of color have had change imposed on them by outside forces – change that destabilizes neighborhoods and overburdens them with environmental harms.

CLF's unique social investment funds flip that script. With our business, philanthropic, and community partners, we have created a national model for ensuring that change is led by the people already living in a neighborhood, united by a common vision for their future.

No one should have to live in a community that puts their kids at higher risk of asthma, that leaves them vulnerable to toxic air pollution, or that fails to provide access to fresh, affordable food.

Our environment – whether it's forests and fields or buildings and streets – should sustain our health, our well-being, and our sense of connectedness to each other and the world at large.

Gratefully,


Bradley Campbell, President

Bradley Campbell
President

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