

BY Francesca Dalleo

COMMUNITY Ties

ATHENS LAND TRUST'S DUAL MISSION

For Athens Land Trust, “it is important that the community know who we are and what we do,” says Executive Director Nancy Stangle. Located in Athens, Georgia, the organization faces the challenge of being in the smallest county in the state, where land use decisions are always a major issue. The land trust addresses these community needs with a unique dual mission of land conservation and affordable housing.

“Our approach to land use is very holistic,” Stangle says. “We see land as a community resource, and we promote wise land use decisions that improve quality of life for the whole community.”

With her land trust accredited in 2008, Stangle notes that going through the process made the entire organization stronger. “I also learned how committed our organization is to the highest standards of excellence and integrity,” she says, “and was reminded that it is made up of very dedicated people, both paid and volunteer, who have great passion and commitment to our mission.”

As both a community land trust and conservation land trust, Athens Land Trust provides tools to protect different types of land in its area. A great example of the organization’s dual mission is found in its work to revitalize the historically African-American neighborhoods near the University of Georgia in downtown Athens. Many low- to moderate-income families in these neighbor-

hoods experience pressure from gentrification. The land trust helps preserve affordable housing and cultural heritage in these communities, as well as keeps them green.

With support from funders such as the Fund for Southern Communities, the Ben & Jerry’s Foundation, and Athens-Clarke County, the land trust works to increase the amount of open space, neighborhood parks and community gardens in the neighborhoods. This support demonstrates how being so involved in different aspects of their community has widened the organization’s access to a variety of funding sources.


Along with a unique mission, the organization also has an economically and racially diverse board of directors. At least one-third of the board is made up of Athens Land Trust homeowners, one-third are conservation experts, and the remaining third are architects, land planners, attorneys or developers.

The land trust applied for accreditation in 2008 after completing *Assessing Your Orga-*



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nization, the Land Trust Alliance’s organizational assessment tool, a year earlier. It had been following *Land Trust Standards and Practices* since the organization’s inception and found the self-assessment to be a great way to start evaluating its practices and planning ahead. During the accreditation process the staff learned that while there were some things they could improve, it was also a validation that they were properly following Standards and Practices.

Athens Land Trust has two part-time staff who work on conservation and one full-time housing person. They have protected 814 acres of forests, wetlands, working farmland, county parkland and neighborhood open space in four Georgia counties, and have over 100 affordable housing units. For a small land trust with a big mission, being involved in their community in different ways has clearly benefited both the organization and the community it serves. 

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