

BUFFALO Commons

Proposal for Research

Created by the Partnership for the Public Good and Cornell in Buffalo, the **Buffalo Commons** seeks to make **Buffalo-Niagara-focused research** accessible to the community and to inspire collaborative efforts among researchers and practitioners that will expand that body of knowledge.

Through the research portal, community organizations can propose topics for research that would help them serve the public. Students and faculty can then choose from those topics and produce work to benefit the community. The Buffalo Commons will publish and archive the resulting research so that it is easily available. A description of your initiative will help researchers choose your topic.

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Name of your Organization Partnership for the Public Good

Brief Description of what your organization does/is and/or the community served

Partnership for the Public Good is a community-based think tank that builds a more just, sustainable, and culturally vibrant Buffalo Niagara through action-oriented research, policy development, and citizen engagement.

Brief description of the research needed

Affordable housing organizations in several NYS cities and counties (including Buffalo, recently) have been unable to purchase land from their respective municipality or county for less than market value. The ability of affordable housing organizations (e.g. Community Land Trusts) to purchase public land for a nominal fee is paramount because any resources that these organizations fork over to municipalities or county governments are resources that can no longer be used to create affordable housing. These city and county government officials tend to cite state law as the impediment to their disposing of land for a nominal fee. While NYS does have a constitutional prohibition of gifts, certain mechanisms at the municipality level or county level may legally allow for nominal fee disposition. For example, the Buffalo Urban Renewal Agency (BURA) policy states that "BURA may dispose of Property for less than fair market value of the Property where the disposition of such Property is intended to further... a 'Public Purpose.'" (The policy then goes on to describe a "Public Purpose.") Despite this mechanism, the FB Community Land Trust in Buffalo has not been able to purchase land for a nominal fee. Research Issues: • Do all of the municipalities and counties that cited this issue (counties in Adirondacks, Ithaca) have some way to dispose of properties at a nominal fee (perhaps similar to Buffalo's mechanism)—whether the municipality or county acknowledges it or not? • Please FOIL and otherwise research all sales of city-owned land and structures for less than market rate in last 10 years, excluding homesteads: address, sale amount, who was property sold to, what mechanism (or written policy) did the City or BURA use to facilitate a sale at less than market rate Please contact Sarah Wooton prior to starting this project. She will provide you with contacts for CLTs in the Adirondacks and Ithaca, as well as additional background information.

Title of Proposed Research Project Land for a "Public Purpose," at What Cost?

Is there a specific date by which this research is needed? Preferably within 3 months or so (By April 2019)

How will this research be used to aid the community? The results of this research will provide us with background knowledge for future conversations at the city-level as well as an understanding of whether other municipalities statewide have sufficient mechanisms for land disposition or whether the statewide coalition for community land trusts should take this on as a campaign to change state law.

What (if any) other community groups are involved: FB Community Land Trust, Center for NYC Neighborhoods

What resources can you offer to aid the researcher (access to data, people to interview, etc.):

People to interview, access to limited data, some completed legal research on these mechanisms in Buffalo.