

# New Frontiers in Land Conservation: Conserve, Redevelop, Un-develop

## The Private-Public Interface and Opportunities for Incentives, Innovation, Landowners, and Land Conservation Organizations

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Land is finite—when we have reached the maximum limit of raw, large-scale, private land protection through the use of perpetual conservation easements, what can be done with the smaller parcels of undeveloped land and the already-built environment? Like the mantra of Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, the new frontiers for land protection will be Conserve, Re-Develop, and Un-Develop. This session will explore these three options as the new frontiers of land: conserving land in suburban and urban landscapes for publicly accessible or owned parks, gardens, trails, and community spaces; re-developing dedicated land uses and existing buildings to other purposes that better suit the public's needs and interests; and un-developing the built environment to return the land to a new public purpose, which may help transform the landscape into an interconnected functional network of urban ecological systems that provide multiple benefits for people and nature.

### **I. Public/Private interface for land conservation, redevelopment, and undevelopment**

- A. Individuals and individual incentives
- B. Conservation organizations
- C. Programmatic conservation, local, land use, guided, cooperative, collaborative

### **II. Existing incentives**

- A. Historic tax credits
- B. Affordable housing credits
- C. Brownfields tax credits
- D. New market tax credits
- E. Conservation easement tax deduction (fed)
- F. Conservation easement tax credit (state)

### **III. Opportunities for new and existing incentives**

- A. Tax Increment Financing: State and Local  
Tax increment financing (TIF) is the most popular financial tool for financing local redevelopment activities. It has been widely used for revitalizing blighted areas, redeveloping new housing units, and cleaning up environmentally contaminated and

polluted sites. Currently, TIF is authorized in 49 states and the District of Columbia. Simply defined, TIF is a financial mechanism to capture the new or incremental taxes that are created when underutilized and vacant properties are redeveloped and use the captured revenues to finance the costs of redevelopment. TIF is generally thought of as a self-financing district.

-In concept, local governments do not lose anything during the TIF period because the projects would not have occurred “but for” the TIF. At the end of the TIF period, the local governments receive higher tax revenues. TIF has several benefits. First, it provides incentive for private developers to build in economically depressed areas; second, it increases property values and creates a stronger tax base; third, it does not require a general tax increase.

-Local Revitalization Financing districts authorized by state to allow districts to receive state tax revenues as long as matched by new local tax revenue through TIF future property tax revenue

B. Redfields to Greenfields?

#### **IV. Conservation organizations at work**

##### **A. Western Reserve Land Conservancy**

From the countryside to the city, Western Reserve Land Conservancy provides the Cleveland region with natural places that nourish and support vibrant and prosperous communities by identifying, preserving, restoring and maintaining essential assets like clean water, working farms, wildlife areas and parks.

-A broad coalition of civic organizations and public officials including Western Reserve Land Conservancy wants Ohio to receive \$200 million in funds from the \$13 billion settlement of mortgage-fraud claims brought by the U.S. Department of Justice against JPMorgan Chase. The Ohio Plan, the coalition’s proposal for the settlement funds, calls for the money to go toward the razing of dilapidated properties throughout the state, programs to prevent home foreclosure and abandonment, the renovation of blighted homes and the re-purposing of vacant parcels resulting from demolition.

##### **B. The Compact of Cape Cod Trusts: Discovering Opportunities for Undevelopment, Park Creation and Environmental Restoration on Cape Cod and the Islands**

-MISSION: The Compact of Cape Cod Conservation Trusts, Inc. is a regional non-profit organization dedicated to assisting its twenty-two member land trusts in the acquisition, preservation and management of open space on Cape Cod.

-THE COMPACT AND UNDEVELOPMENT: The Compact's concept of undevelopment inspires a vision of developed and damaged land restored to its natural state for the benefit of both wildlife and people. Land preserved in its natural state provides the resource base for the region's environmental and visual quality.

-The Compact of Cape Cod Conservation Trusts defines “undevelopment” as the removal of existing manmade structures and influence upon the land followed by site restoration to a more natural state.