

# Urban & Community Forestry Strategies for Thriving Places

A Handbook for Practitioners & Planners



Prepared by CAPA Strategies, LLC  
with funding from the US Forest Service, 2025

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# Introduction & Summary

Greening is an essential tactic to improve urban liveability and public health and reduce the urban heat island (UHI) effect.\* Trees and green space are commonly recommended for underserved, heat burdened communities. However, recent case studies have found that green amenities can produce unintended harm by spurring **gentrification**, marked by rising property values and costs, changing neighborhood character, and displacement of residents.

This *Handbook* is a response to these findings and provides information on the issue to urban forestry practitioners and planners. The guide defines “green gentrification” – gentrification which occurs specifically because of green amenities such as trees and parks – and offers promising strategies to limit the negative impacts that sometimes result from greening. The guidance may also be useful to anyone in public, private, or non-profit sectors whose work intersects with urban forestry and green space.

Like gentrification more broadly, the specific subset of green gentrification is a complex, unpredictable, and often intractable problem with no quick fix. Combating it will require systemic changes in areas such as affordable housing, economic development, and zoning, all of which are outside the typical purview of urban forestry. The most effective strategies stem from government policy and code-making rather than individual projects, limiting the direct influence of practitioners. Therefore, it is important to emphasize that forestry practitioners cannot resolve the issue alone. This handbook covers a range of approaches practitioners can take to both directly and indirectly support the communities in which they work.

Notably, gentrification most often impacts homeowners and renters, and the majority of strategies covered in the handbook refer to residential settings, though several are equally relevant to small businesses. Later chapters provide additional information and tips related to other challenges that may emerge with greening: impacts on small businesses; green amenity maintenance; and access for diverse populations including unhoused individuals. Proposed strategies are based on published studies, practical applications, and current best practices.

Direct actions include reducing the likelihood of green gentrification through careful planning, building wealth through job creation, and obtaining community buy-in through deep engagement. Those are explored here as **direct action strategies for practitioners**, which can be applied at the project scale. More common are anti-gentrification and anti-displacement measures that are beyond the reach of urban forestry alone. Although practitioners cannot affect systemic changes directly, they and their partners can take an active role in advocating for supportive codes and policies locally. **Strategies to advocate** are described, including inspirational case studies.

The following tables (Table 1 & 2) provide a summary of the multiple strategies included in this handbook, their beneficiaries, and those responsible for their implementation.

\* Urban areas are susceptible to a phenomenon known as the urban heat island (UHI) effect. Hard, impervious surfaces in developed areas absorb solar radiation and heat throughout the day. Concentrated human activities like driving cars and running air conditioners also add heat to the environment and exacerbate UHI conditions. Shade and vegetation help to combat the UHI effect. (<https://www.epa.gov/heatislands>)

# Introduction & Summary

**Table 1.** Summary of green gentrification mitigation strategies.

Type	Strategy	Description	Beneficiaries	Implementers
Direct Action Strategies for Practitioners	'Just Green Enough' & Selective Greening	Limit the scope of greening to improve local liveability and combat the UHI effect without inciting gentrification. This should be considered a bridge solution which allows greening to continue while systemic changes are pursued.	Renters; Homeowners; Small Businesses	Forestry & Planning Practitioners
	Green Jobs Development	Initiatives to bolster employment for locals through green jobs, apprenticeships, and educational programs. Job development could be funded by forestry grants and implemented with the help of local non-profits or community-based organizations.	Renters; Homeowners	Forestry & Planning Practitioners; Non-Profit Partners; Local Government
	Community Engagement	Interact with the local community through informational, participatory, or decision-making pathways. This improves feelings of community ownership and buy-in and ensures that new greening projects respond to local interests and needs.	Renters; Homeowners; Small Businesses	Forestry & Planning Practitioners; Non-Profit Partners; Local Government
Strategies to Advocate	Inclusionary Zoning	A municipal ordinance mandating new multi-family residential buildings have 15% of units devoted to affordable housing.	Renters	Local Government
	Rent Controls & Rent Stabilization	Tenant protection laws that cap or regulate the percentage that rent prices can rise each year.	Renters; Small Businesses	Local Government
	Property Tax Freeze	Reduces the property tax cap or reduces the percentage that property owners pay on property taxes.	Homeowners; Small Businesses	Local Government
	Community Land Trust	Land purchased by non-profit organizations and rented to low income homeowners, small businesses, or community groups to reduce the cost burden from property taxes.	Renters; Homeowners; Small Businesses	Local Government; Non-Profits
	Preservation/ Historic Districts	Zoning laws designed to preserve a specific neighborhood character by placing restrictions on new developments and neighborhood aesthetics.	Renters; Homeowners; Small Businesses	Local Government; Non-Profits
	Just Cause Eviction Ordinances	Tenant protection laws stating landlords can only evict tenants under specific circumstances, such as breaking a lease.	Renters; Small Businesses	Local Government

# Introduction & Summary

**Table 2.** Strategies that address other concerns related to greening, such as impacts on businesses, maintenance, and access.

Type	Strategy	Description	Implementers
Strategies for Small Businesses	Business Alliances or Associations	These organizations provide education for owners and connect them with funding opportunities that can support a business in a gentrifying area.	Businesses; Community Groups; Financial Institutions
	Commercial Cooperatives	Similar to business alliances or associations, co-ops emphasize networks among business owners and workers that provide resources.	Businesses; Financial Institutions
	Neighborhood Serving Zoning Laws	Dictate that the size of businesses in certain areas stay small; require new retailers to show that a majority of their sales come from local residents.	Local Government
	Legacy Business Programs	Protect longtime businesses that contribute to neighborhood culture through grants, technical assistance, or other forms of business support.	Businesses; Community Groups
Strategies Related to Maintenance & Access	Addressing Community Expectations	Solicit and respond to stated community concerns on topics like gentrification, crime, and maintenance during project design.	Forestry & Planning Practitioners; Non-Profit Partners; Local Government
	Maintenance Funds For Green Spaces	Include a budget to partially or fully cover maintenance costs, possibly including hiring locals as maintenance workers.	
	Community Education	Clarify misunderstandings on topics of concern to residents.	
	Volunteer Days	Formal events to maintain/plant parks, gardens, and other green spaces.	

This handbook is a resource for urban and community forestry practitioners, green space and environmental planners, and their partners in public, non-profit, and private sectors. It is a response to recent scholarship and case studies which show that green interventions – trees, parks, green stormwater infrastructure, and the like – can cause unintended harm to underserved populations. While green amenities may increase public health, neighborhood livability, and quality of life, they can also raise property values, attract outsiders to formerly undesirable areas, and lead to the displacement of longtime residents. The handbook equips practitioners with essential information to help them mitigate green gentrification in the communities they serve.

## Purpose of the handbook

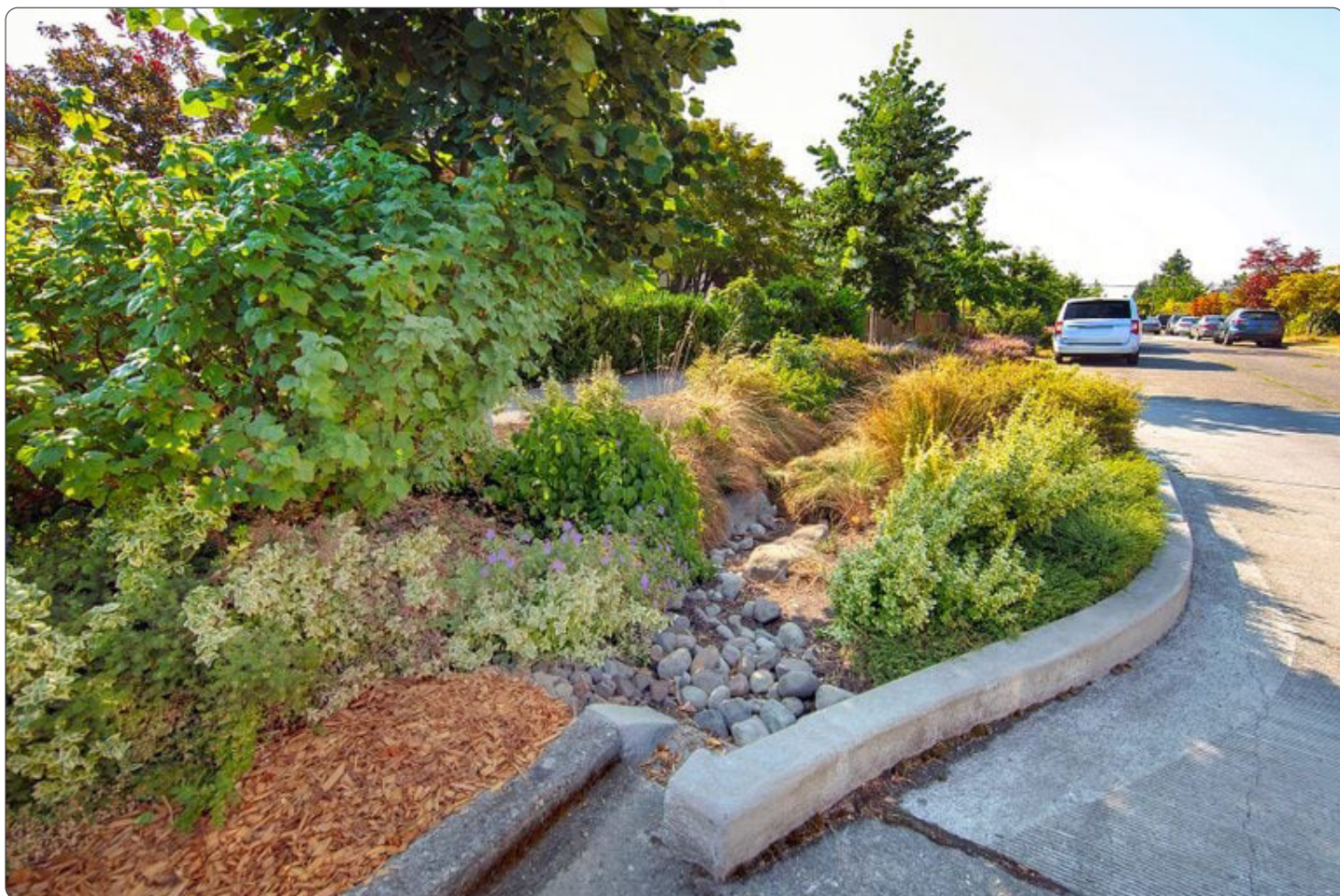
- Set realistic expectations for what practitioners can do to mitigate gentrification. (Chapter 1)
- Propose a role for forestry practitioners as advocates for communities that are engaged, green, and protected from displacement. (Chapter 1 & 7)
- Explain “green gentrification” to build practitioner awareness of the issue. (Chapter 2)
- Introduce strategies that practitioners can implement to mitigate green gentrification, including benefits and limitations of each. (Chapter 3)
- Introduce broad anti-gentrification and anti-displacement strategies that apply to green gentrification, including benefits and limitations of each. (Chapter 4)
- Introduce action and advocacy strategies that may address other challenges related to small businesses, maintenance, and access. (Chapter 5 & 6)
- Complement and synthesize research summaries and practitioner guidance available in recent materials.

## Explore green gentrification

This document is a practitioner-facing primer that provides concise information on green gentrification, and concisely introduces intervention strategies including benefits, limitations, and illustrative case studies to facilitate the integration of research and practice. It exists among an emerging suite of complementary resources from the field of forestry. Readers are encouraged to explore the following related materials:



1. [Great parks should not uproot communities: Green gentrification risk factors and anti-displacement options](#). Trust for Public Land, 2024 – This report offers a thorough review of the literature and theory on green gentrification, structured primarily for an academic or researcher audience.
2. [Changing the story about park and green space equity: A messaging guide for advocates](#). Berkeley Media Studies Group, 2024 – This “yellow book” is a reference guide for a practitioner audience emphasizing messages and content framing around green gentrification. Messaging guidance may be useful to practitioners attempting to implement the strategies presented in this handbook.
3. [Policy and Planning Tools for Urban Green Justice](#). Barcelona Laboratory for Urban Environmental Justice and Sustainability, 2021 – This wide-ranging document provides deep descriptions of 50 strategies for residential housing equity and equitable green development with accompanying case studies. Readers may use the BCNUEJ report to learn more about the strategies presented in this handbook.
4. [Small Business Anti-Displacement Toolkit](#). Small Business Anti-Displacement Network, 2024 – This resource describes nearly 30 strategies to prevent small business displacement and includes an interactive feature to help practitioners identify appropriate solutions. This toolkit may be useful to practitioners interested in gentrification in commercial as well as residential areas.





## Consider the role of forestry practitioners

As awareness of green gentrification has grown, so too has interest in combating it through urban and community forestry. Practitioners are increasingly seeking options to mitigate green gentrification and ensure that greening projects do not harm the communities they are intended to benefit. Finding a solution to green gentrification has gained urgency as unprecedented amounts of federal funding flow to state and local foresters and non-profits, prioritizing disadvantaged communities for greening interventions.

Practitioners must consider the potential ramifications of their work and ensure that projects are planned with community input and an assessment of equity. It is recommended that the strategies provided in Chapter 3 be considered at the start of each new greening initiative. These are the most direct pathways through which forestry practitioners, planners, and their partners can affect green gentrification and displacement at the project level.

Although greening projects initiated by forestry practitioners may ultimately lead to gentrification, the ability of practitioners to directly prevent that outcome is limited. The vast majority of strategies to combat green gentrification (Chapter 4-6) are the same as those prescribed for gentrification more broadly. They are structural, based on codes, policies, and zoning regulations, and must be implemented by local governments. The most promising solutions address underlying challenges





such as housing affordability, land ownership, income, poverty, and taxes and are not specific to “green” scenarios. This means that forestry practitioners do not have the option to implement most of the strategies in this handbook directly. Rather, practitioners should consider themselves as advocates for needed systemic changes.

This may feel unsatisfying for practitioners who wish to resolve green gentrification alone, or implement solutions on a project-by-project basis. However, it is important to be clear about what foresters realistically can and cannot do to address the problem. Like gentrification more broadly, the specific subset of green gentrification is a complex, unpredictable, and often intractable problem with no quick fix. Entities with sufficient resources, such as the US Forest Service, might spearhead an outreach campaign to raise awareness of green gentrification among local governments, advise on possible mitigation strategies, and connect the dots between greening, public health, housing, and urban economies. Locally, forestry practitioners can advocate for changes to code and support community-based or non-profit organizations with a mission to reduce harm while improving conditions for underserved residents.

## Set realistic expectations

This handbook introduces the idea that forestry practitioners must engage in a mix of direct and advocacy actions to mitigate green gentrification. Setting expectations related to the role of foresters, local governments, and others can reduce frustration and ensure that appropriate entities are engaging in the most effective ways.

It is important to remember that the field of green gentrification is still developing. There are many unknowns as to where and when gentrification will occur, the most effective means for preventing it, and the long-term impacts of different mitigation strategies. Even if following all recommendations provided in this handbook, there is no guarantee that practitioners can avoid green gentrification, community dissatisfaction, or other unintended outcomes in their work.

Furthermore, greening projects typically occur on a faster timeline than green gentrification or systemic changes. It can take years after project completion to know whether greening has produced gentrification. Likewise, advocating for and securing changes to local ordinances which might limit the negative impacts of greening is likely to be a lengthy process. This does not mean that greening initiatives are not worth pursuing, but should remind practitioners to plan carefully, intervene to reduce the likelihood of harm where possible, and tailor greening projects to local conditions and community interests.

Urban greenery and park space are prized for their numerous benefits to residents, including neighborhood beautification, air quality improvements, and cooling. Trees and green space have become an increasingly valuable resource in recent years as summer temperatures have risen in cities across the country.<sup>1</sup> Research shows that living in close proximity to parks and trees has a positive effect on the mental and physical health of residents.<sup>2</sup> Often, low-income communities are disproportionately exposed to hazards such as urban heat and air pollution,<sup>3</sup> which urban forestry and greening can help to address. While many practitioners and communities now recognize the benefits of green space, the addition of amenities such as street trees and parks can have unintended consequences.<sup>4,5</sup>

When a neighborhood becomes more green, it may become more attractive to developers and wealthier populations. In general, the arrival of wealthier residents to low-income neighborhoods can drive up property values and rents, and dramatically alter neighborhood character, eventually displacing those who originally lived in an area in a process known as gentrification.<sup>6,7,8</sup> Gentrification can be triggered by many things including the arrival of tech companies or upscale businesses,<sup>9</sup> a boom in the housing market,<sup>8</sup> or the addition of desirable amenities to an area, such as a park.<sup>10,11</sup> When an area undergoes gentrification due to the addition of green space, this is known as green gentrification <sup>6,7</sup> (Figure 1).

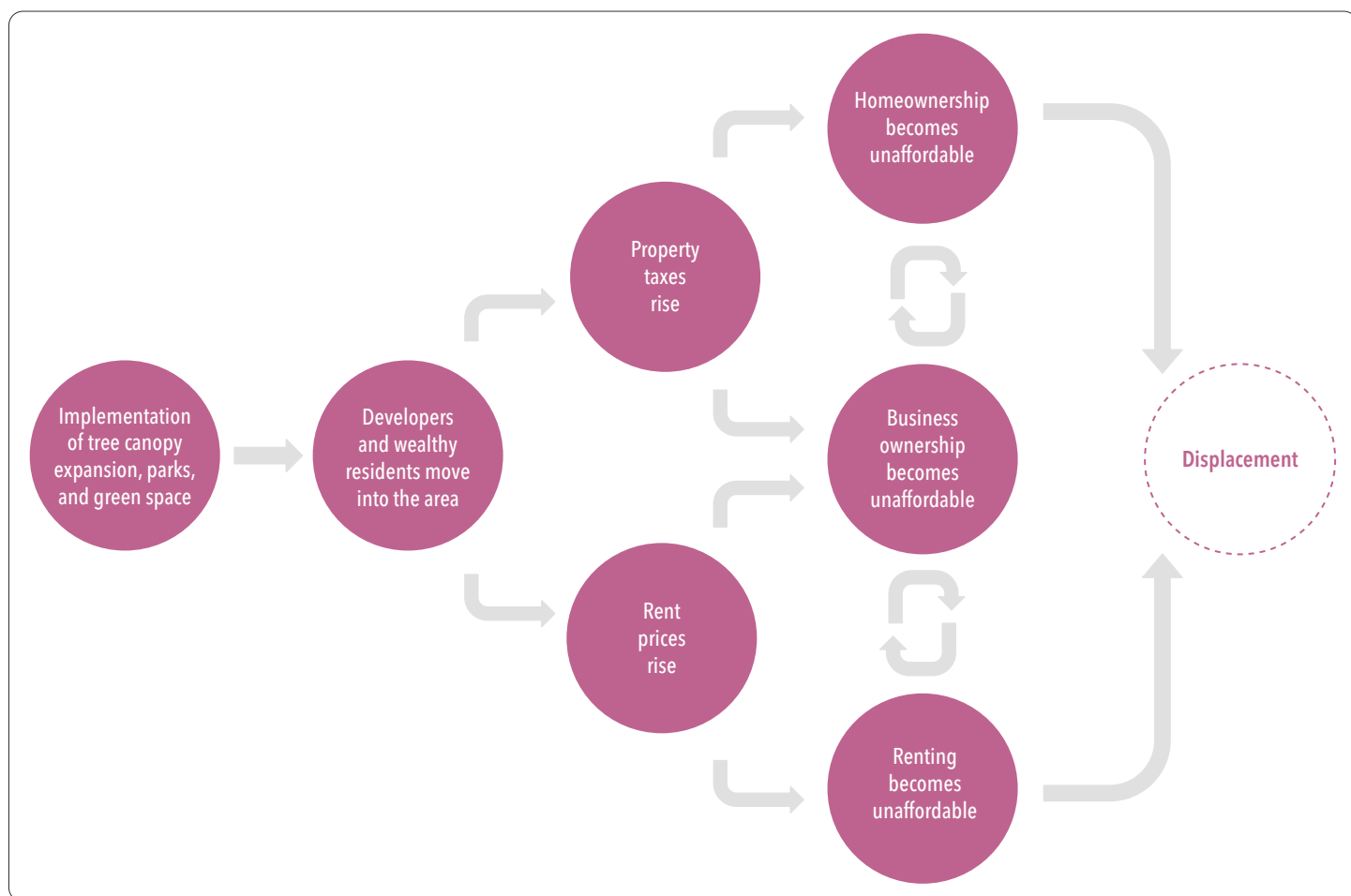
Green gentrification can affect urban or rural neighborhoods and contributes to a degradation of community culture.<sup>13</sup> Gentrification usually occurs when developers capitalize on new residential green spaces. It can also occur organically when societal conditions increase the value of green and open space, as with the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>14</sup> New buildings developed around green spaces typically attract a wealthier demographic, while the introduction of street and yard trees has been shown to increase the value of existing properties.<sup>15,16</sup> Higher property values may benefit homeowners looking to sell, though can eventually lead to unaffordable property taxes for those who remain. When greening and value increases occur, landlords of existing buildings may feel empowered to raise rents. As the real estate market heats up, higher property values, taxes, and rents affect homeowners,<sup>17</sup> renters,<sup>18</sup> and small businesses.<sup>19</sup> When these groups are priced out of their homes and livelihoods they begin to leave the area, eroding neighborhood character. The sustained arrival of newcomers can create a domino effect of displacement, an issue that is especially damaging to older, long-term residents.

Green gentrification and its effects occur gradually, often over many years, and are not always predictable. For example, one study found that urban tree planting did not produce gentrification for six years and that the effect increased as trees matured.<sup>20</sup> This makes the problem easy to overlook at the start of a local greening initiative and difficult to address head on.

Gentrification disproportionately affects minority communities, especially those with dominant Black or Latino populations, further exacerbating challenges caused by systemic racism.<sup>7,21</sup> Social isolation caused by displacement can lead to physical and mental health decline among these displaced communities.<sup>22</sup> It is important that practitioners understand the potential for green gentrification, and their options to support mitigation, so that efforts to improve environmental conditions do not result in harm, financial stress or displacement for underserved communities.

There are a number of strategies that practitioners, community groups, and local governments can implement when proceeding with greening efforts to lessen gentrification and avert displacement.<sup>23</sup> Strategies that employ a mix of social, economic, and political initiatives, addressing short term challenges as well as systemic issues related to housing and affordability, will do the most to protect vulnerable communities.<sup>24</sup> By engaging with residents, non-profit partners, and the public sector, forestry practitioners can help ensure that communities who are most in need have equitable access to greenery without displacement or the loss of neighborhood character.

**Figure 1.** How green spaces and trees can lead to displacement.







## Displacement of Renters

### The New York City Highline

In 1999, a raised freight train line running through West Manhattan was scheduled for demolition by the City of New York after falling into disrepair for decades.<sup>25</sup> While many thought the railway was an eyesore in the community, two local residents saw beauty in the landmark, founding the Friends of the High Line, a non-profit conservancy dedicated to revitalizing the space. After years of planning, design, and construction the first segment of the High Line Park opened to the public in 2009. Since breaking ground in 2006, the public park has undergone several extensions and now spans 1.45 miles across the Chelsea neighborhood, offering gardens, eateries and art installations along the path.<sup>26</sup>

The construction of the High Line has been praised by economists for boosting the local market for retail, real estate, and commercial office space. However, this economic boost has come at the expense of residents and businesses due to skyrocketing property taxes and raised rents. In some areas directly adjacent to the park, median rent prices increased 68% between 2009 and 2013.<sup>18</sup> Rapid price increases disproportionately affect low-income residents who are more likely to rent than own their homes.<sup>27,28</sup>

The local community was not substantively consulted when the High Line was built, and the park currently serves tourists more than locals.<sup>29</sup> Today, gentrified West Manhattan is populated with upscale retail and luxury highrise residential property.



## Displacement of Homeowners

### The Atlanta Beltline

Similar to New York City, Atlanta, GA is a city that historically relied heavily on rail transport to keep the economy flowing. Railroads circled the city's perimeter and during the 1900s expanded out like tree rings.<sup>17</sup> In 1999, a student researching the relationship between transport lines and segregation saw potential for historically segregated districts along rail lines to be connected through a green space. This idea was the starting point for the Atlanta Beltline.<sup>30,31</sup>

In 2005 the Atlanta Beltline Project was given non-profit status by the City and planning began for an extensive greenway system including a 22 mile loop with parks and trails. An original goal of the project was to prioritize affordable housing for workers along the Beltline. However, after the Great Recession the funding model for the project changed. As developers began construction on the Beltline, affordable housing goals were increasingly sidelined. One study showed that property taxes within a half a mile of the Beltline rose 17.9-26.6% more than other properties in the city from 2011 to 2015.<sup>30</sup>

Despite efforts to build new affordable housing, there were no initiatives in place to protect homeowners who already lived along the Beltline from rising property taxes. Tax increases are particularly challenging for low-income homeowners who are paying a higher percentage of their total income for housing, and may have less flexibility when prices suddenly change. Increases around the Beltline have led long-term residents to sell their homes in favor of more affordable locations, producing displacement in the wake of green gentrification.<sup>32</sup>



Foresters, green space planners, and practitioner partners have limited options when it comes to directly affecting green gentrification. There is not a standard roadmap that practitioners can follow in each project or greening initiative to ensure that gentrification will not occur. Mitigation of green gentrification depends largely upon local codes, policies, and zoning ordinances, which are controlled by local governments. Related strategies are explored in Chapter 4.

Chapter 3 examines the direct action strategies that are available to practitioners and can be applied at the individual project scale. While none of these offers a guarantee of averting gentrification or displacement, they are recommended as best practices to gain community participation, build wealth and capacity, and allow greening to continue while systemic changes are pursued locally.



## Just Green Enough & Selective Greening

While recognizing that anti-displacement and anti-gentrification goals will take time to achieve, forestry practitioners should not cease greening in high-need urban areas. Rather, selective greening can be employed as a bridge strategy which provides enough improvement to heat, air quality, or beautification without greening excessively or inviting gentrification. The exact definition of “enough” must be determined in consultation with local partners, residents, and other stakeholders who can identify needs and the minimum requirements to meet them.



An approach which ultimately limits the number of new trees, parks, or other greenery in a high-need area is not necessarily a satisfactory long-term strategy. However, it offers some hope for improving local conditions without gentrification in the short term. Ideally, selective greening will be viewed as a temporary fix as local governments and advocates pursue formal anti-gentrification strategies through code and policymaking.

“Just green enough” (JGE) is a strategy that focuses on greening cities through relatively small or fragmented spaces. This technique prioritizes improvements to existing green amenities rather than adding new ones (e.g., improving an existing park with new trees or vegetation), or expanding greenery at a small enough scale to avert unwanted attention from developers.<sup>33,34</sup> Selective greening may also mean that projects incorporate more gardens,<sup>35</sup> vegetated bioswales,<sup>36</sup> low-lying plants, moveable planters or other greening strategies beyond large tree plantings or park development, as the latter two amenities are most associated with green gentrification.



### Benefits<sup>33</sup>

- This approach integrates community perspectives and desires to determine the appropriate scale of greening, meaning that community needs are more likely to be heard and met.
- JGE can result in a more equal distribution of green space because amenities are spread out across a city, rather than being concentrated in a single location.
- Limiting the scope of greening projects allows practitioners to address local needs through forestry and reduces the potential for green gentrification.
- Gardens, low-lying vegetation, and non-tree based greening strategies provide unique ecosystem services and support pollinators.<sup>37</sup>



### Limitations

- Small greening projects still may trigger gentrification, especially if they are close to city centers.<sup>38</sup>
- Parks with an active transportation component, such as those with extensive walking or biking trails, are more likely to cause gentrification even if they have been improved rather than newly developed.<sup>39</sup>
- Strong community leadership, activism, and engagement are needed in order to effectively employ a JGE strategy.<sup>34</sup>
- JGE and selective greening are not ideal strategies for the long-term as they limit the presence of greenery in underserved communities.
- Greening strategies such as gardens and bioswales are not known to cause gentrification to the same extent as urban trees, though these features also offer less heat mitigation potential and fewer co-benefits. Furthermore, although case study literature does not strongly link non-tree and non-park greening strategies with gentrification, alternative interventions could possibly yield the same problems.<sup>39</sup>



## Application

In the Greenpoint neighborhood along the outskirts of Brooklyn there has been extensive work done in the community to clean up the environment after pollution from Mobil Oil. This remediation work is done following the “just green enough” strategy. Instead of working to make the land a luxury green destination, the community pushed to prioritize smaller fragments of functional greenspaces that balanced community needs while maintaining the manufacturing industry in the area. One way the community has achieved this is by working with the Brownfield Opportunity Area (BOA) Program which works to revitalize brownfields (previously developed lands that have been contaminated with pollutants or hazardous material) and vacant areas to bring prosperity to polluted communities.<sup>33, 40</sup>



## Green Jobs Development

In addition to physical displacement due to property tax and rent increases, green gentrification can lead to an erosion of job opportunities for residents. By creating green job opportunities for local residents – such as the planting, development and/or maintenance of trees and parks – practitioners can introduce a source of wealth-building alongside urban greening.<sup>41,42</sup> Job training programs, maintenance corps, or similar initiatives could be established with funding from forestry grants and administered with the help of local non-profit or community-based organizations. Green jobs development also provides some assurances that new green infrastructure will be properly maintained in the future.

This approach can be especially beneficial for minority communities who have historically been excluded from green spaces, and in low-income communities that are most likely to be harmed by green gentrification.<sup>43</sup>



### Benefits

- New sources of income may allow residents to keep up with rising property values and rents, protecting them from displacement if green gentrification does occur.
- Green jobs lead to the development of strong relationships with green spaces and encourage historically excluded groups to interact with green spaces.
- Demand for green-collar jobs, including construction and revegetation, are rapidly increasing. Providing residents with training opportunities and job experiences sets them up to engage in a growing economic market.



### Limitations

- It can be difficult to promote long-term opportunities for people who receive job training in order to maintain the economic benefits for underserved communities.
- Job training programs are often underfunded and understaffed, making it difficult to hold employers accountable for reaching quotas related to job training and recruitment.
- Wealth building may help limit the impact of green gentrification but does not prevent green gentrification from occurring.



### Application

When construction began on the 11th Street Bridge Park in Washington DC in 2023, the goal was to promote workforce development for residents adjacent to the park. A high percentage of the population living adjacent to the park were unemployed or outside of the labor force, prompting designers to include local hiring goals and requirements to maximize the number of residents participating in construction jobs and apprenticeships. Working with the DC government, park planners aim to cultivate local employment as well as prioritize harder-to-employ groups during post-construction maintenance.<sup>44</sup>



# Community Engagement

Community engagement is an essential part of planning green spaces because it allows people to envision what is important for the character of their neighborhood and have their needs reflected in designs and programs. Engagement can take several forms and be informational, involve participatory planning, or give decision-making power to the community.<sup>45</sup> Engagement may focus on details such as design features, types of spaces, services or programs, and accessibility.<sup>46</sup> Research shows that community engagement early in the project planning and implementation process may be essential for integrating parks, trees, or other green space into the community and giving residents a sense of ownership.<sup>12,47</sup>

Community engagement may yield greater satisfaction with greening projects, and may serve as a venue to inform residents about the potential for green gentrification. However, engagement alone cannot prevent gentrification from happening. Engagement can help ensure that greening projects are conducted with and for local communities, meaning that they serve community needs even if unintended impacts occur. Forestry projects that are designed and implemented without substantive community input risk creating gentrification without addressing local interests as a benefit.

Robust engagement is also an effective way to understand the equity implications of greening at a local level. A common critique of top-down greening initiatives is that they assume a shared public benefit when in fact green amenities may create harm or inconvenience for certain populations and are not always welcome.<sup>5,7</sup> Residents of underserved communities are uniquely positioned to share their desires and concerns related to greening and articulate inequities that may emerge. This type of equity assessment, informed by community input, should assist practitioners in tailoring their designs and ambitions to local conditions.



## Benefits

- Green spaces designed with community input are more likely to reflect the wants and needs of the community, and align with community character.
- Community engagement develops a sense of ownership among the community.
- Engagement brings new, innovative ideas to the design process and averts reliance on a “one size fits all” approach to greening.



## Limitations

- Community engagement may inform residents of potential changes to their neighborhood, but this cannot stop rising property values and living expenses.
- It can be time consuming to engage in a meaningful way and difficult to access marginalized communities, especially those with a language barrier.
- Engagement can lead community members to have high expectations for greening that may lead to dissatisfaction if all expressed needs or desires are not met by a project.



### Application

Bartram's Garden is the oldest botanical garden and park in Philadelphia, PA and is located in a neighborhood that is majority Black. Since the park was first made public in 1891,<sup>48</sup> there have been several updates and extensions, including the addition of a 1.1 mile trail in 2017 called the Bartram's Mile Trail. One 2019 study that measured perceptions of community engagement after the trail's installation showed that residents who were more engaged in planning were more likely to demonstrate feelings of ownership and view the park as integrated into the social fabric of the neighborhood.<sup>49</sup>

Policy and code-level solutions that keep housing costs low and limit displacement, many of which can be applied to green gentrification situations or to gentrification in general, are especially important to maintaining current residential populations. While foresters and planners may not be able to directly engage in policy creation, advocating for anti-displacement policies and other long term solutions, such as the following, can be useful to supplement direct actions and make lasting change. Green gentrification as a field of study is still evolving and the practical effectiveness of the following solutions, while promising, is not fully known at this time.

## Inclusionary Zoning

Inclusionary Zoning (IZ) policies are municipal ordinances that require a certain percentage of units (most often 10-15%) to be “affordable” in new multi-family dwellings. IZ policies were originally developed to combat a legacy of exclusionary housing policies in the US, such as redlining. These policies usually include developer bonuses, such as allowing for a higher density of apartments, in order to incentivize construction. If developers do not want to comply with construction guidelines they are required to pay into a fund that goes towards development of other affordable housing units. The exact definition and cost of “affordable” housing is typically based on the Area Median Income (AMI) and fluctuates depending on local ordinances.<sup>50</sup>



### Benefits

- IZ housing promotes mixed income neighborhoods, allowing people with low or mid level incomes to live in greener areas that would otherwise be inaccessible.
- Integrated neighborhoods reduce social challenges that are often higher in impoverished neighborhoods.
- IZ relies on developers to fund housing, freeing up government and non-profit funds.



### Limitations

- IZ only works well in competitive housing markets.
- There is rarely enough oversight to implement these policies efficiently.
- IZ policies alone do not meet the affordable housing needs of most neighborhoods.
- IZ policies do not benefit those who already live in a gentrifying area and face rising housing costs.





## Application

In November 2017 the Atlanta City Council announced an IZ policy designed to aid communities affected by gentrification in the Westside and along the Beltline. This policy stated that any new rental developments near the public infrastructure projects must include either 10% of units for households at or below 60% of the AMI or 15% of units for those at or below 80% of the AMI.<sup>51,52</sup> As of September 2022 there have been 983 affordable units constructed with another 1,300 in planning.<sup>53</sup> While these units have been helpful in alleviating the burden on low and middle income renters in the city, in order to combat the extensive housing shortage some members of the city continue to push for more units targeting populations making 30% of the AMI.<sup>53</sup>

## Rent Control & Rent Stabilization

Rent controls are a set of policies that put a price cap on how much a landlord can charge for rent while rent stabilization policies regulate how much a landlord can raise the rent each year.<sup>54</sup> These types of policies often have two goals: to maintain affordable housing and to reduce disruptions caused by rapid rent increases.<sup>55</sup> Stabilizing rent enables tenants to adjust to new prices at a slower pace, leading to less turnover. Rent controls can also be helpful for small businesses renting commercial space.



### Benefits

- Rent control policies enable people living on fixed incomes to have more economic stability.
- Given that wages increase more slowly than rent prices, rent control policies allow for easier economic adjustment in low-income households, keeping people in their original neighborhoods longer.
- Rent controls preserve mixed income neighborhoods when green gentrification might otherwise displace lower-income residents.



### Limitations

- Rent controls are criticized by economists who argue that rent controls discourage landlords and developers from investing in new rental properties and maintaining available housing.<sup>56</sup>
- They can lead to poor housing quality due to lack of landlord investment.
- Rent controlled apartments are often not distributed equitably to low-income households and some literature supports rent controlled apartments being skewed towards older, white residents.<sup>55,57</sup>



## Application

In 2019 Oregon passed a bill that enabled statewide rent regulations. These regulations included a 7% cap on rent growth plus inflation each year and established some protections for tenants, such as no eviction without cause notices. This bill was passed after median rents in Portland, OR rose 30% between 2011 and 2019 leaving three quarters of low-income renters paying over 50% of their wages towards living expenses.<sup>56</sup> This ordinance does not apply to buildings for the first 15 years of their existence in order to encourage developers to continue supplying housing for the market.

## Property Tax Freeze

Property taxes are paid to local governments by landowners based on a percentage of the property value. As green gentrification raises property values, taxes increase concurrently. Property tax freezes or limitations can be mandated at a city or neighborhood level to reduce the taxes owed by homeowners or to lower costs for developers, theoretically encouraging them to produce more affordable housing units.<sup>23</sup> These policies work by either reducing the percentage that a homeowner or developer has to pay on their property or by granting tax abatements to buildings within certain areas. These programs often target specific subgroups such as seniors or disabled veterans.<sup>58</sup>



### Benefits

- Homeowners still pay property taxes even after a mortgage is paid off, meaning that this is one of the most effective ways of reducing costs for low-income homeowners.
- Reducing property taxes for low-income households in greener areas enables long time homeowners to stay in their homes and benefit from green amenities.



### Limitations

- Many property tax freeze policies require homeowners to supply a clean ownership title to prove length of stay. This is a challenge if homes are passed down informally or shared between family members. Some cities have instituted programs to help homeowners sort out issues with their titles so they can apply for tax freeze programs.
- Property tax freezes could limit funding to local services, which may ultimately worsen inequalities and neighborhood conditions.<sup>59</sup>



### Application

The Longtime Owner Occupants Program (LOOP) in Philadelphia enables households making less than 150% of the area median income to reduce their tax rates by limiting their home assessment to a 50% increase each year. This program applies to homeowners who have owned their home for over ten years and experienced either a 50% increase in their property assessment over the last year or a 75% increase over the last five years. The program can be applied for along with other real estate tax relief, which benefits low-income residents. As Philadelphia is a city with high homeownership rates, a program targeting affordability of property taxes can have wide reaching effects.<sup>60</sup>

# Community Land Trust

Community Land Trusts (CLT) are non-profit organizations, governed by community representatives and CLT members, aimed at preserving and protecting land for community use. A standard CLT works by buying land for affordable housing (owned and rented), urban development, agriculture, small businesses, or other community-centered uses, and may fund development of housing or other structures on that land. The CLT sells houses and other buildings at an affordable rate while maintaining ownership of the land. Parcels of CLT land are leased to building owners under long term, low cost, renewable leases. This means that when a homeowner buys a house on the CLT's property, they pay a significantly reduced cost. Homeowners also pay reduced property taxes because they are assessed at the CLT's managed value instead of market value.<sup>61,62</sup>

When homeowners are ready to sell, contracts require homeowners within the CLT to sell their houses at an affordable rate. This supports the CLT's goals of promoting homeownership opportunities for low-income residents. There are currently 225 CLTs operating in the US.<sup>63,64</sup>



## Benefits

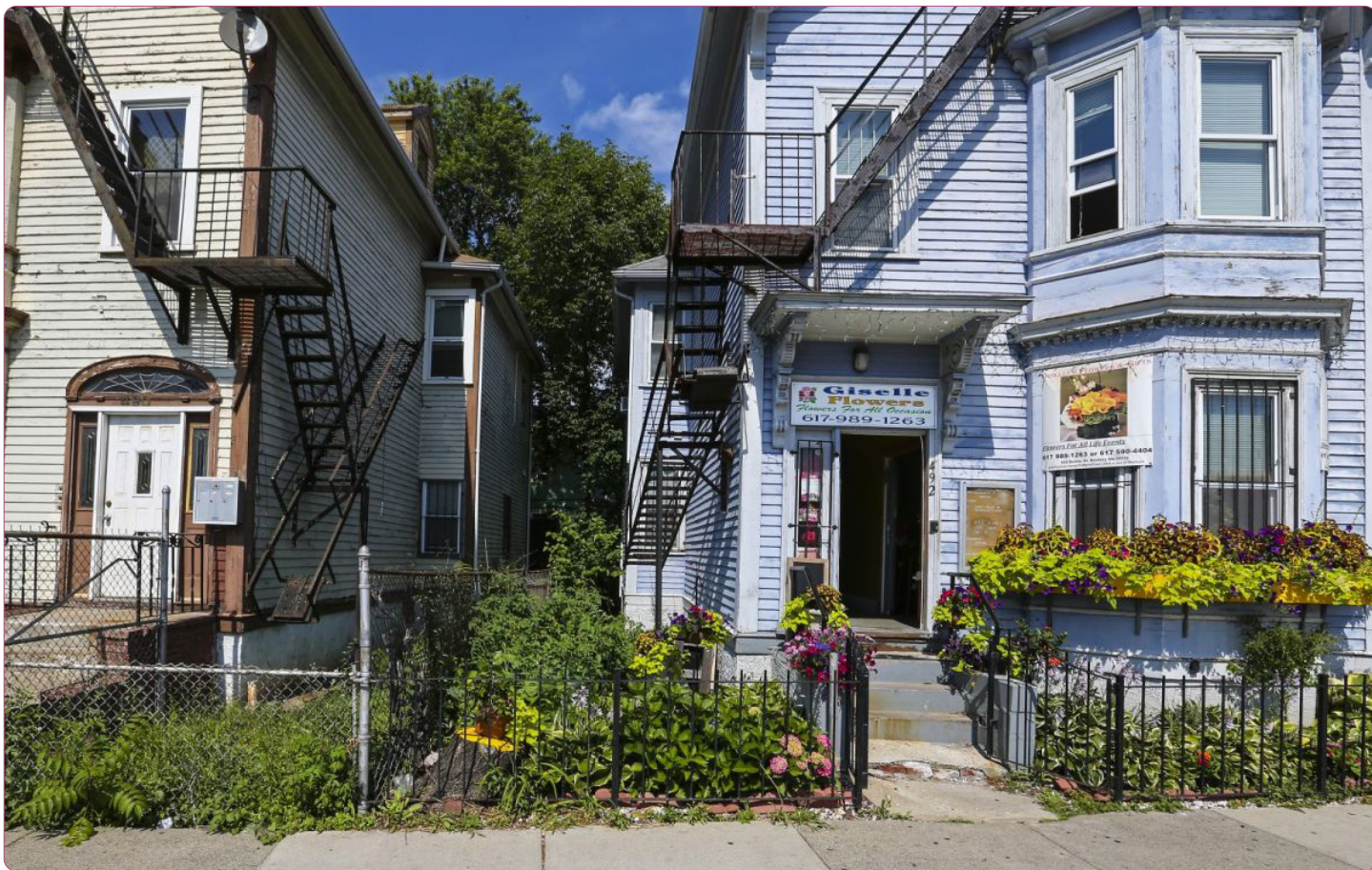
- CLTs guarantee affordable homeownership opportunities for low-income residents on their property.
- They are explicitly community-focused and are structured to avoid the influence of developers.
- They are especially effective in areas that have been historically disinvested, leading to vacant lots, and areas that are beginning to experience gentrification.
- CLTs established at the start of localized urban greening provide opportunities for residents and businesses to stay in a neighborhood, although they may be priced out of their original homes or facilities.



## Limitations

- Prospective homebuyers may be reluctant to buy homes on CLT land because they can only lease, not own, the land on which the home sits.
- Prospective homebuyers may be deterred by the cap on resale value which can reduce equity growth.
- The legal and financial proceedings to run a CLT are complicated and can cause issues with land and building acquisition.





## Application

One of the most well known and successful CLTs in the US is the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI) in Boston. This CLT began in the early 1980s when the Dudley neighborhood community successfully advocated for renovation of their impoverished community.<sup>65</sup> The DSNI gathered over 200 community members to design and implement a community revitalization strategy. The groups used their strong community voice to attract grant money and leverage the municipal government to assist them in making their plans reality. Today the Dudley Land Trust owns 225 affordable housing units as well as a playground, office spaces, a greenhouse, and a community garden.<sup>66</sup>

## Preservation/Historical Districts

Preservation and Historical Districts are areas zoned to preserve existing buildings or constructions based on their historic or cultural value. While these districts exist for many reasons, they can act as a way of preserving neighborhoods that are under threat of gentrification by protecting against demolition or redevelopment. Designation of these districts is approved by local governments, often in conversation with non-profits or community groups.<sup>67</sup> If a neighborhood is designated a Preservation or Historical District, protections may include required maintenance of historic character and aesthetics.



### Benefits<sup>68</sup>

- Historic districts create protections for current residents by limiting the changes that can be implemented in the neighborhood, including limiting new housing developments while preserving existing green spaces.
- Housing values are often stabilized by this designation, reducing displacement of long-term residents.
- These protections ensure the longevity of neighborhood culture and character.



### Limitations

- In some neighborhoods, designation as a Preservation or Historic District may hasten gentrification by attracting higher income residents interested in the architecture or character of an area.



### Application

In Dallas, TX, Tenth Street is one of the few remaining segments of a historic Freedman's Town, a town originally settled by formerly enslaved people after the American Civil War. In the early 1950s, redlining cut off this district from the rest of Dallas, leading to the decline of multiple historic homes and structures. In 1993 the area was designated a historic district in order to preserve what remained of the town, therefore protecting Freedman homes. The benefits of the historic district designation have been jeopardized by a 2010 ordinance that provides protections only to homes over 3,000 square feet, and by efforts of those outside the area to have the designation revoked. However, while fully in place, the historic district designation has allowed long term residents to remain in their homes without fear of redevelopment.<sup>69</sup>

## Just Cause Evictions

Just cause eviction laws are tenant protections that aim to reduce the number of tenants experiencing unreasonable evictions, rent hikes, and non-renewable lease agreements. These laws state that a minimum set of requirements must be met by the renter, such as breaking the lease or engaging in crime on the property, before a landlord can proceed with eviction. These laws are often passed in tandem with rent stabilization measures to further protect tenants.<sup>70</sup> These laws have been especially important in the wake of Covid-19 and have a strong positive impact on minority groups, especially women of color as the head of household.

### + Benefits<sup>71</sup>

- Just cause eviction ordinances protect tenants from being evicted without cause meaning landlords can not evict residents in order to fill a unit with a higher-paying tenant.
- They also protect against retaliation from landlords when tenants request maintenance or report inadequate living conditions.

### — Limitations

- Many landlords fear that just cause eviction ordinances will take away their rights as property owners.
- Limiting evictions does not ensure that rent increases will not lead to displacement over time.

### ✓ Application

While there are five states that have passed statewide just cause eviction ordinances, some cities, such as Baltimore, MD, have also started passing these laws. Baltimore passed its Just Cause Eviction ordinance (House Bill 881) in 2021 in response to housing insecurity due to the Covid-19 pandemic and concern for renters, which make up over half the population.<sup>72,73</sup> Since the pandemic several other local bills have passed protecting tenant rights with potential to expand to adjacent local districts or the state, as Seattle's ordinances did in Washington.<sup>73</sup>



Green gentrification is often studied in terms of its residential impacts, with an emphasis on strategies to limit resident displacement. While residential environments are heavily impacted by gentrification, transformation of commercial spaces can also lead to displacement of residents and business owners, and a loss of neighborhood character.<sup>74</sup>

Like homeowners and renters, business owners and commercial property owners are also subject to rising rents and taxes in gentrifying areas. As small businesses are priced out, they are often replaced by premium shops in a process known as “retail upscaling.”<sup>75</sup> Niche businesses such as art galleries, coffee shops, designer boutiques, and high-end grocers may attract tourism and wealthier residents. However, the shift may mean that long-time residents can no longer afford goods and services where they live, or that new business offerings do not appeal to the tastes of longtime residents.<sup>76</sup> The increasing presence of high-end businesses, in turn, increases the neighborhood appeal for incoming residents and developers. Retail upscaling during gentrification disproportionately affects ethnic businesses and may create or exacerbate economic insecurity in marginalized communities.<sup>75</sup> A selection of mitigation strategies specific to small businesses are provided below.

## Small Business Alliances or Associations

Small business alliances and associations bring together stakeholders including business owners, community leaders, developers, and financial institutions to collectively promote and connect small businesses with resource networks. These organizations often provide education for owners and connect them with funding opportunities that can support a business in a gentrifying area. These types of organizations, while helpful in areas experiencing green gentrification, can also assist communities experiencing decline, disinvestment, or downturn for any number of reasons.<sup>77</sup>



### Benefits<sup>78</sup>

- Business alliances support the community as a whole by thinking holistically about community development and improvement.
- Community support groups provide networking opportunities that connect businesses with helpful non-profits and financial institutions with extensive knowledge on how to financially support them.
- Small business alliances provide opportunities for businesses to strategize against common problems and build stronger community networks.
- Maintaining a healthy ecology of small business helps maintain local culture.



### Limitations

- Many business alliances charge membership fees which can make engagement with their services inaccessible to those who are most in need.
- Small businesses may not have the time to dedicate to networking opportunities or seeking out help from other organizations.

## Commercial Cooperatives

Similar to business alliances or associations, commercial cooperatives (co-ops) emphasize networks among business owners and workers. There are several types of co-ops, such as those for marketing, supplies, workers, and consumers. These organizations are democratically operated and used by small businesses to access resources and strengthen their role within a community.<sup>75,79</sup>



### Benefits<sup>79,80</sup>

- They can help businesses access shared resources or land that they would otherwise be unable to buy on their own.
- Some co-ops can help with maintaining equal workload for employees and creating quality job opportunities.
- Some consumer co-ops give members positive dividends for their membership, like receiving seasonal vegetables from a farmshare.



### Limitations

- Co-ops are often internally funded and reliant on membership dues to operate which can make starting up difficult and exclusive to low-income members.
- Decision making can be slow due to the democratic nature of this organizational structure.

## Neighborhood Serving Zoning Laws

Neighborhood serving zoning laws dictate that the size of businesses in a certain area stay small and require new retailers to show that a majority of their sales are coming from local residents. These zoning ordinances are especially beneficial in mixed zoning districts with historic commercial corridors, but can also be helpful in residential areas with commercial clusters.<sup>81</sup>

### + Benefits<sup>82</sup>

- These zoning laws protect against large commercial developments looking to attract tourists and high business turnover.
- The scale and requirements of the zone often reflect neighborhood desires, preserving the culture of a neighborhood.

### — Limitations

- Zoning laws can be difficult to change once put in place, meaning that unless they are designed equitably and with extensive input from the community they may exclude minority or immigrant-run businesses.
- Large commercial retailers may still be able to find loopholes with scaled down store fronts.

## Legacy Business Programs

Legacy business programs are initiatives put forth by neighborhood businesses, business associations, or other community groups, such as historic preservation associations, aimed at protecting longtime businesses that contribute to neighborhood culture. These programs provide grants, technical assistance, or other forms of business support to owners as well as often providing financial incentives to landlords if they maintain a legacy business.<sup>83</sup>

### + Benefits<sup>84</sup>

- Protecting legacy businesses maintains a neighborhood's character and provides support for places of community gathering, especially for immigrant populations.
- These programs give businesses more financial stability.

### — Limitations

- Language barriers and time constraints may discourage minority and immigrant-run businesses from applying.
- Funding is often competitive and dependent on local government assistance.



In some cases, green gentrification is not a primary concern of residents in low-income communities. However, residents in these areas may resist greening for other reasons. The cost, time commitment, and responsibility for maintenance can be burdensome to low-income populations, and it is often difficult to identify community members in high-need areas who are both willing and able to practically support green infrastructure projects.<sup>5,85</sup> Residents in an area may fear damage to personal property or power lines from fallen limbs, and mess from fallen debris, particularly with regard to tree planting. Further, some communities are concerned that parks, trees, and green space will attract crime and unhoused individuals to the area, making them feel unsafe or unwilling to use those spaces themselves.<sup>6</sup> The strategies below provide some guidance for dealing with and overcoming these community concerns.

## Addressing Community Expectations

It is especially important to engage with communities where fear about maintenance and unwanted visitors is common in order to set realistic goals that reflect community wants and needs. When the community is an active part of the design process they can voice concerns relating to issues such as gentrification, management, and crime and have their perspectives considered in the design process, creating a sense of ownership.<sup>33</sup> As communities feel more ownership they are more likely to view co-designed spaces as safe and participate in activities that keep green spaces safe and inclusive.<sup>49</sup>



### Benefits<sup>75</sup>

- Communities that are more engaged in design are more likely to use park spaces. This is especially important for individuals who have historically been excluded from public green space.
- When communities have ownership over a space they may feel more comfortable using it.



### Limitations

- While foresters, planners, and partners can work with residents to discuss their concerns, they have limited authority or control in terms of crime prevention.
- Some communities may be against parks or street trees regardless of engagement level, leaving planners to meet community expectations in other ways such as supplying streetside raised beds or scaling parks to smaller sizes.<sup>33</sup>
- Communication barriers with highly isolated populations can make it difficult for them to be engaged in planning.

## Maintenance Funds For Green Spaces

A major concern for many communities is maintenance of parks and street trees, specifically who is going to be responsible for long-term care. Urban greening initiatives can include a budget to partially or fully cover maintenance costs, possibly including hiring locals as maintenance workers.<sup>86</sup> Planning to keep green spaces and trees well-maintained can ease fears about cost burden and responsibility, and potentially alleviate fears of crime.

### + Benefits<sup>44</sup>

- Park maintenance jobs can help employ locals, bringing economic benefits to impoverished areas.
- Clean parks are more likely to be used by locals and encourage people to develop a connection with the space.

### — Limitations

- Finding funding to cover park maintenance may be difficult and competitive.
- Large jobs, like tree removals, may be very expensive for low-income residents even with assistance from a maintenance fund.<sup>5</sup>

## Community Education

Community education initiatives can be helpful in breaking down stereotypes surrounding homelessness, which is important in addressing and mitigating fear in a community.<sup>87</sup> Education initiatives can also be a way for people to learn about and establish a relationship with local urban green spaces.

### + Benefits<sup>44</sup>

- Breaking down stereotypes helps people feel safer in their space.<sup>87</sup>
- Education can help build a sense of ownership over urban green spaces which may lead people to engage in maintenance activities.<sup>49</sup>

### — Limitations

- Connecting communities with educational resources may be difficult especially in immigrant communities where there may be a language barrier.<sup>88</sup>



## Volunteer Days

Regularly scheduled volunteer days are one way to maintain parks or other urban green spaces while building community. While volunteering is often seen at urban gardens, these types of programs can also be applied to other spaces like parks or urban woodlands to reduce trash accumulation, remove invasive species, plant new vegetation, or maintain trails. Volunteering can help a community get connected with the land and create a cleaner, safer space for residents.<sup>89</sup>



### Benefits

- Volunteering promotes community connections, reduces loneliness, and enhances the culture of a neighborhood.<sup>90</sup>
- Volunteer days may reduce the cost of maintenance of trees, parks, and other green amenities.



### Limitations

- Some low-income communities may not have the time to devote to volunteering.
- Volunteer groups often feature little racial or ethnic diversity and additional steps may need to be taken in order to engage minority communities.<sup>91</sup>



Urban greening is an important strategy to mitigate urban heat, increase neighborhood livability and aesthetics, and improve the physical and mental health of residents. However, greening can in itself be a stressor to low- and middle-income residents due to rising rents and property taxes, displacement, and neighborhood changes brought on by green gentrification. As trees, public parks, and other green amenities are added to underserved neighborhoods it is important for practitioners to engage with strategies that maintain neighborhood affordability and character.

Mitigation strategies are most effective when planners take an interdisciplinary approach to their implementation, meaning engaging with several strategies in order to mitigate risk for homeowners, renters, small businesses, and other community groups. Planners and foresters that are conscious of securing sufficient funding and employing strategies early on, before new developments begin, will have a stronger impact on gentrification than those who engage strategies as an afterthought to planning. Mitigation should be integrated on multiple levels from the start of a project in order to best maintain community culture and ensure that residents are not displaced by urban green spaces that are intended to improve their wellbeing.

There are several direct strategies that foresters, planners, and their partners can explore to prevent green gentrification at the project scale. Yet, anti-gentrification measures implemented by local governments are essential for broader community stability. Forestry practitioners are encouraged to apply direct actions where possible while advocating for systemic changes so that green amenities can be enjoyed by local communities without fear of displacement.

## Suggested Additional Reading & Resources

[Great parks should not uproot communities: Green gentrification risk factors and anti-displacement options.](#) Trust for Public Land, 2024 – This report offers a thorough review of the literature and theory on green gentrification, structured primarily for an academic or researcher audience.

[Changing the story about park and green space equity: A messaging guide for advocates.](#) Berkeley Media Studies Group, 2024 – This “yellow book” is a reference guide for a practitioner audience emphasizing messages and content framing around green gentrification. Messaging guidance may be useful to practitioners attempting to implement the strategies presented in this handbook.

[Policy and Planning Tools for Urban Green Justice.](#) Barcelona Laboratory for Urban Environmental Justice and Sustainability, 2021 – This wide-ranging document provides deep descriptions of 50 strategies for residential housing equity and equitable green development with accompanying case studies. Readers may use the BCNUEJ report to learn more about the strategies presented in this handbook.

[Small Business Anti-Displacement Toolkit.](#) Small Business Anti-Displacement Network, 2024 – This resource describes nearly 30 strategies to prevent small business displacement and includes an interactive feature to help practitioners identify appropriate solutions. This toolkit may be useful to practitioners interested in gentrification in commercial as well as residential areas.

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