

# Dudley Neighbors Inc. celebrates 25 years building community through land trust

**Martin Desmarais** | 6/5/2014, 8:15 a.m.



Former Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative board president Che Madyun cuts a cake during a celebration marking 25 years for Dudley Neighbors Inc., the development corporation founded by DSNI in 1989. (PHOTO COURTESY OF DUDLEY NEIGHBORS INC.)

Dudley Neighbors Inc., a community land trust under the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, last week celebrated a quarter-century of success as one of the ground-breaking land trusts in the country.

Created in 1989, Dudley Neighbors Inc. was an early effort to fight displacement and gentrification in Boston. Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative established the trust to spearhead the development of 1,300 plots of vacant land that the City of Boston targeted in its 1988 “Comprehensive Community Revitalization Plan.”

Working with both nonprofit and for-profit developers, Dudley Neighbors Inc. has created 225 affordable homes on vacant land in the Dudley Triangle, located between Blue Hill Avenue, Dudley Street and Howard Avenue. The homes include 95 owner-

occupied units, along with 77 cooperative units and 53 rental units.

The trust owns 34 of the 62 acres in the Dudley Triangle and, in addition to its efforts, most of the other 1,100 empty lots have been turned into parks, open space, community centers, affordable housing and small businesses. This includes the Trina Persad Playground, a community greenhouse and farm operated by The Food Project and a community garden and orchard.

While other developers and community development organizations have played their part, Dudley Neighbors Inc. has had a key role in the elimination of almost all of the vacant lots in Dudley.

“We have really, in the last year, completed the disposition of the city land in the Dudley Triangle,” said Harry Smith, director of Dudley Neighbors Inc., during the celebration event at St. Patrick’s Church in Roxbury. “We are celebrating because of what has been accomplished. The effort is really a result of a community setting a vision and then organizing to actually implement that vision.”

Smith credits the overall efforts of the Dudley community for the work that has been done. He looks back at the city’s community revitalization plan in the late 1980s and says that such plans were not uncommon, but too often they were left only at the planning stage.

A key factor in their ability to move forward on the plan and actually develop land was the city’s granting to Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative the power of eminent domain over the land. According to Smith, this was the first time the city granted eminent domain to an organization and it directly led to the start of the Dudley Neighbors Inc. land trust in 1989.

In the land trust model, Dudley Neighbors Inc. owns the land while private entities and individuals own “improvements” to the land, such as homes, and lease the land from the trust. Decisions about the land trust are made by a community board that includes residents, leaseholders and representatives from city and elected officials. Homes are deed-restricted so the sale price cannot inflate along with the market.

Smith said the land trust model allows for “development without displacement” because, no matter the market or rise in housing costs in the city, the land trust homes remain affordable and can help residents remain.

“It really provides the kind of stability homeowners need while allowing them to gain equity in their home,” he said.