

Chinatown creates land trust

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Chinatown residents and activists have formed a land trust in an attempt to buy properties and keep them affordable for residents of the Boston neighborhood, which has been giving way to gentrification.

“What we’re really trying to do is preserve as much of the residential stock that exists in Chinatown in a form that is more affordable so the whole neighborhood doesn’t become luxury, thus pricing out the Chinese community that is here,” said Jeff Hovis, president of the nonprofit Chinatown Community Land Trust. “It’s not all going to be ultra-low end properties. There may also be some mixture of more middle-income, condo-type properties really designed for families.”

Row houses are the primary target of the trust, which hopes to get funding from sources including the city’s Department of Neighborhood Development and foundations, and partner with nonprofit or for-profit developers. Some residents held a rally yesterday on Hudson Street, to protest what they said was a forced relocation of tenants from a row house.

“The city of Boston funds affordable housing development, so it’s very conceivable that we would be able to fund, at least in part, a purchase of housing in Chinatown if it was going to remain affordable,” DND director Sheila Dillon said.

The Chinatown land trust is getting help from the city’s first land trust, the nonprofit Dudley Neighbors Inc., which formed in 1988 and has partnered to develop 225 affordable residential units in Roxbury’s Dudley area.

“Funding is a big challenge, because when we started, we were able to access blighted vacant land,” DNI director Harry Smith said. “They’re in Chinatown. There’s not a lot of vacant city-owned land.”