THE PEOPLE'S GLOSSARY

For building a community-controlled housing movement in the Bay Area and beyond!!

BACKGROUND

This People's Glossary is a living document created by the People's Land and Housing Alliance (PLHA) to introduce key terms and concepts that articulate alternative models of housing that centers **people, not profit** in our communities. We envision a future where safe, clean, and permanently affordable housing is a human right.

Photo credit: Urban Habitat. Community members rallying for COPA in San Jose, CA.

The People's Land and Housing Alliance (PLHA) is a response to the structural failures of markets and local governments when it comes to the housing crisis specifically and, more broadly, to the inequalities in land distribution and use. The growing tenant movements in the Bay Area and around the state represent a frontline response to the crisis by impacted communities, and we stand in solidarity with them. Building upon their work, the PLHA focuses on long-term solutions to the housing crisis that fully take into consideration the race, gender, disability, environmental, and class inequalities that have defined housing policy throughout US history, and that must be grounded in the principles of housing equity.

We encourage individuals and groups to use the glossary to familiarize community members with important concepts that support active participation in public policy and other decision-making spaces where alternatives to the current housing models are being discussed. We need to look beyond our current housing model of building, buying, and selling housing for a profit and adopt strategies that ensure everyone has a home that is permanently affordable, accessible, and safe.

KEY TERMS

Affordable housing

According to the federal government, when a household spends 30% or less of their total income on rent and utilities, their housing is considered affordable. Most “affordable housing” programs calculate the rent for an affordable unit based on what would be affordable within a particular income bracket that is pegged to the Area Median Income (or AMI). This means that in high income areas in particular, the rent for an affordable housing unit may be significantly higher than what a family can afford. Additionally, while some families are able to afford paying 30% of their income on rent, many are unable to build up savings because they are paying for food, childcare, transportation, medicine, education, debt, and more. For those living paycheck to paycheck or on a fixed income, unforeseen circumstances such as an accident, a recession, or a layoff leave them vulnerable to choosing between being housed or going hungry. For too many families, the rent eats first, as the saying goes.

We offer an alternative definition of affordable housing, based on housing as a human right. We define housing as affordable if a person can cover all other expenses in addition to their housing costs. For most families, housing costs that are 15-30% of income would be reasonable. For some, such as people living on social security or people who don’t have any source of income, housing costs may need to be $0 in order to be affordable.

Area Median Income (AMI)	Describes the middle annual income of all households in a region, in a specific year, using census data. The AMI is determined by dividing the population into two equal groups, half will have income above that amount and half will have income below that amount. “Low Income” (LI) is defined as a household earning between 51% - 80% of AMI. “Very Low Income” (VLI) is defined as earning 31% - 50% of AMI. “Extremely Low Income” (ELI) is defined as earning 30% of AMI or less. Each level of income is adjusted for household size. Most agencies use the AMI amounts that are posted by HUD (US Department of Housing & Urban Development) every year.
Blight	Usually refers to property in an urban area that has been *intentionally* abandoned and/or not invested in. This term is commonly used by real estate developers and cities to label neighborhoods that they want to tear down and build market-rate housing, ultimately displacing large numbers of residents in those communities.
Collective ownership	Describes a group of people or community owning and caring for something together. In addition to property ownership, a collective ownership model offers residents the power to make decisions regarding the property or land. Examples of collective ownership of land and housing include community land trusts, housing cooperatives, and permanent real estate cooperatives.
Community-controlled development	Development projects that are initiated and led by current residents for the benefit of the community and minimize negative impacts to current residents and local culture.
Community-controlled housing	Housing that is owned by the people who live there and where decisions are made collectively. Examples of community-controlled housing include community land trusts and housing cooperatives.

Community land trust (CLT)

Led by community members, a community land trust is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization created to acquire land and housing from the speculative market to make it permanently affordable for low-income communities for generations to come. A CLT property is democratically controlled by residents and can be put to a wide variety of uses, including homeownership, rental and cooperative housing, food production through community gardens, commercial space, and more. For more information, check out the California Community Land Trust Network.

Decommodi-fied housing

Housing that has been taken off the speculative market so it cannot be bought and sold for a profit. Decommodified housing models are an alternative to speculative housing, which treats housing as a commodity to be bought and sold for profit.

Examples of decommodified housing include community land trusts and permanent real estate cooperatives, which create secure and affordable housing for generations to come. (Sonoma County Tenants Union)

Disinvestment

The purposeful withholding or withdrawal of investment from communities by city leaders, developers, and builders who no longer wish to spend money to improve the built environment of neighborhoods. Over time, this lack of investment in a community means there is less infrastructure to support a healthy and vibrant community. For example, unsafe housing, school buildings that are in disrepair, lack of access to necessities such as medical facilities and grocery stores. https://www.openscied.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/L6.Reading_-Systemic-Racism-and-Disinvestment-in-Communities.pdf

Displacement

When longtime residents are pushed out from their homes and neighborhoods due to economic factors, such as rent increases. Displacement is experienced by a community when gentrification is happening and leaders fail to mitigate its effects. See gentrification.

Ellis Act Ordinance

The Ellis Act is a state law that gives landlords the right to evict tenants for the purpose of changing the use of an apartment building from "rental" to "ownership" (e.g., Tenancy-In-Common or Condo Conversion). For a landlord to move forward with an Ellis Act eviction, they must evict all the tenants.

Environment/ environmental health

The environment is what surrounds living beings and what they need to take in to survive. A healthful environment supports a healthy mind and body, including the air we breathe, the land we walk on, the water that runs through the land, and the food we eat.

One indication of a healthy environment is that the organisms living in that environment are ecologically balanced and thriving. Dangerous environmental conditions exist when the air, water, and soil are polluted and unable to sustain natural life.

Extractive economy

An economy based on the removal of wealth from communities through the depletion and degradation of natural resources, the exploitation of human labor (a particularly precious natural resource), and the accumulation of wealth by interests outside the community (i.e. big banks, big oil, and big box stores). The purpose of the extractive economy is the accumulation of wealth and power in the hands of a few, enforced through the violent enclosure of land, labor, and capital. The violence of enclosure can only result in the erosion of biological and cultural diversity (Movement Generation).

Gentrification

A process where people with considerably higher income move into a neighborhood where longtime residents have lower incomes. Land and housing is cheaper in this area due to historical disinvestment and the chance to make a profit is high due to the influx of high-wage-earners who are willing to pay higher rents. This often leads to the displacement and erasure of existing residents, businesses, and culture.

Ground lease

An agreement between a resident-leasee and the landowner which generally gives the resident-leasee freedom to construct buildings or otherwise improve the land as if they were the owner, whereas other lease agreements are usually much more restrictive. In a CLT, the restriction is designed to maintain affordability by ensuring it is resold to low-income people forever.

Housing cooperative

A democratically-controlled, member-based corporation established to provide housing for members. Cooperatives are businesses governed on the principle of one member, one vote. Each household owns a share in the corporation, which entitles the member to occupy a unit of housing. The model can be used for single-family homes, townhomes, apartments, mobile home parks—virtually any type of housing construction. (community-wealth.org and California Center for Cooperative Development)

Land stewardship

The practice of caring for and respecting the environment, including the water, the air, the land, and the circles of life, as indigenous communities have done for thousands of years. Land stewardship also means remedying the centuries of harms of colonialism and capitalism through protecting ecosystems from further destruction, reimagining our relationship to the Earth, and rematriating stolen land to indigenous communities. See rematriation.

Land theft

The intentional, forced seizure or sale of land, often by targeting Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) through the structural, violent, and legal forms of white supremacy. For example, falsified treaties with Indigenous Americans, racial exclusion in legal and estate building services, and predatory lending policies. Stripping people from the land not only disconnects them from the earth, but it diminishes their ability to sustain themselves. (https://www.kentucky.com/opinion/op-ed/article243951522.html https://wfpc.sanford.duke.edu/media/black-land-loss)

Land use

The various ways land can be used is determined by its municipal or local laws known as zoning. Zoning laws determine the specific way a particular property can be used. For example, if an area is reserved solely for single-family homes, then nothing else can be built on that land (e.g. restaurants, parks, duplexes, etc). Land use can be appealed to the appropriate governmental jurisdiction.

Limited Equity Housing Cooperative (LEHC)

A type of co-op that is designed to be permanently affordable. Though the land and housing owned by the cooperative may grow in value in the speculative market, in an LEHC, the owner agrees to limit the amount of profit they may earn when they sell their property in exchange for keeping the property affordable for future residents.

Limited Liability Company (LLC)

A legal entity that limits the liability of its owners, LLCs are often used by individuals or corporations (even non-profits and CLTs) to own property. This reduces risk because if anybody sues the LLC (like if you borrow money through the LLC and can't pay it back) they usually can't go after the owners of the LLC, only the LLC itself. It is also a common way to structure a partnership with multiple owners. It can be difficult to find out who owns an LLC, so it can be used by nefarious owners to stay anonymous. Unfortunately this means slumlords and corporate landlords can use these entities to shield themselves legally, and try to avoid accountability.

Neighborhood Stabilization

Neighborhood stabilization is a strategy to develop a neighborhood under threat of blight and/or abandonment. Generally, this would be a neighborhood that has foreclosed properties that could be acquired and developed. Revitalization could avoid gentrification by intentionally involving local businesses and current tenants and homeowners. The type of housing (affordable vs. market rate) could also influence whether or not a neighborhood is gentrified.

Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing (NOAH)

Refers to unsubsidized housing, owned by private owners, that is relatively affordable compared to other housing nearby. NOAH can be housing in neighborhoods that are considered undesirable by owners/investors who are seeking to make exorbitant profits through the speculation and therefore have not experienced a significant increase in value. NOAH is beneficial to tenants who may not experience high rent increases. These can also be homes with long term tenants in rent controlled cities where the tenant's home is affordable due to their long tenure as renters in the same home or building.

One key goal of community-controlled housing groups is to buy these NOAH homes, address any of the health and safety issues, give the tenants more control over their housing, and keep rents affordable while protecting the tenants from displacement.

Permanent Real Estate Cooperative

A PREC is a cooperative corporation and land ownership model that combines features of CLTs, limited equity housing cooperatives, real estate investment cooperatives, and self-organizing social movements from around the world. CLTs and PRECs have many similarities and emerge from the same movement toward equitable and democratic control of land. Both engage community members in governance and permanently remove real estate from the speculative market.
https://www.theselc.org/prec_pilot

3 Ps

A commonly referred-to combination of policy solutions for the affordable housing crisis in the Bay Area. The 3 Ps refer to the production, protection, and preservation of affordable housing:

- **Production** - Refers to the building or construction of new housing to address the lack of affordable housing. Unfortunately, in the Bay Area the construction of market-rate and luxury housing has outpaced affordable housing production, causing or accelerating gentrification and displacement. Although it is important to increase the stock of affordable housing, without strong renter protections, newly built affordable housing do not stay affordable over time.
- **Protection** - Refers to measures that create or expand protections for renters from excessive rent increases, unsafe conditions, and displacement. For example, affordable housing protection measures include rent control, rent stabilization, Just Cause for Eviction ordinances, and more funding for tenant legal aid.
- **Preservation** - Refers to retaining existing affordable housing, whether subsidized or market-rate and protecting its affordability for current and future tenants. Preservation strategies are usually combined with repairs to the property.

Often the property is purchased by a new owner who is committed to the long-term affordability of the property and is then renovated and managed along with those values. Affordable housing preservation is an environmentally and economically sustainable solution that keeps people housed. Unfortunately, this strategy is underfunded at every level of government: federal, state, regional, and local.

Redlining

The term has come to mean racial discrimination of any kind in housing and banking.This practice comes from the 1930's, during the New Deal era when government and financial institutions outlined areas on a map where Black residents lived and decided they would not provide mortgage loans to these communities because of a perception of being high-risk, leading to segregation that exists to this day.

Rematriation

Indigenous women led work to restore sacred relationships between Indigenous people and their ancestral land. Honoring indigenous matrilineal societies and lineage's ways of tending to the land, in opposition to patriarchal violence.

Rent burdened

When a household pays more than 30% of its pre-tax income on rent, they are considered rent burdened. If a household pays more than 50% of its income on rent, then they are considered severely rent burdened. These definitions are set by the Federal Government. Even though the affordable housing industry typically sets its rents at 30% (or more) of the tenant household's income, this level of rent is not truly affordable for most low-income households.

Speculation/ speculative market

Describes the practice of buying a home or property in order to resell it for a profit in the future. In the housing market, it is common for investors to purchase a home or land with the sole purpose of reselling it for a high profit. This also occurs at even larger scales with mega investors who have entire portfolios of homes. Flipping homes is also a part of the speculative market, whereby an investor buys distressed property, makes repairs, and resells it at a profit. These types of actors increase housing prices substantially.

Solidarity economy	A transformative and alternative economic development framework in which there is community ownership and democratic governance for political, cultural, and economic power. It is grounded in practice and principles of solidarity, mutualism, cooperation, sustainability, and pluralism. Learn more at https://ussen.org.
Tenant rights association	A formalized group of tenants working together to improve their housing conditions and support others doing the same. A tenant rights association may organize to pressure their landlord to make improvements in a building or to fight against unfair rent increases. There can be several tenant rights associations in any one city.