LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

2023 was a notable year for our organization. We renamed ourselves Neighborhood Land Power Project, and adopted “Community Rooted, Community Grown” as our slogan. These, accompanied by a beautiful logo, are expressions of our evolution. They speak to the core of who we are and what we do.

If you know us, you know we center our community and the land we steward. Through NLPP’s food sovereignty work at Neighborhood Foods Farm and gardens, we exercise our belief that all people have the right to food that reflects their culture and history; and is grown in ways that honor the land and those with deep ties to it. Through our land justice work we seek to preserve and protect our beloved green spaces that nurture us, heal us, and give us a sense of belonging. The sum of our work is cultivation of multi-generational community participation and leadership, towards a healthy and thriving community.

This new organizational identity has come to life through a collaborative endeavor by our Staff and Board; neighbors and partners; and all the people that have made and sustained the organization before us. Together, we have cemented our transformation in history. We are deeply grateful to the team at Grid Principles whose skills and talent made our vision a reality.

In Solidarity,
Noelle Warford
Neighborhood Land Power Project was founded as Urban Tree Connection in 1989, and incorporated as a non-profit organization in 1997. For 25+ years, we have worked with neighbors in West Philly to reclaim and transform vacant lots into beautiful, useful community green spaces.

We are a BIPOC-led organization whose purpose is to cultivate progressive community leadership through food sovereignty and land justice practices. Alongside our neighbors, we steward six community gardens and green spaces that promote sustainable food production, social and ecological well-being, and building community power.
SECTION 2
KEY MILESTONES
2.1 - ORGANIZATIONAL TRAJECTORY (2015–PRESENT)
URBAN TREE CONNECTION (UTC) TO NEIGHBORHOOD LAND POWER PROJECT (NLPP)

2015–2016
- With pro-bono legal aid and community support, we acquired four of our garden sites after years of land stewardship and advocacy.
- Pennsylvania’s budget impasse deeply impacted the organization’s financial health and led to critical decisions around programming and staff.
- Our Founder and Director, Skip, retired after 27 years of leading UTC, and Noelle, an internal candidate, became the new Executive Director.

2017–2019

UTC created and implemented an 18-month strategic plan focused on the rearticulation of UTC’s identity and purpose:
- We developed a new mission statement, organization values, and vision.
- We adopted Just Transition and Food Sovereignty as guiding social justice frameworks.
- We transitioned from an historically white to a BIPOC-led organization (Board and Staff).
- We redirected all programming to Haddington, West Philly.
- We aligned programming to carry out our new mission, vision, and values.
2020–2021
Response to growing community needs during the height of the global pandemic—
- We doubled our annual budget, allowing us to convert part-time seasonal roles to full-time year-round positions at living wages and bolster our cash reserve.
- UTC hired its first Organizer and launched new experiments that center community engagement and leadership development (i.e. Food Sovereignty Share program, community redesign of Memorial Garden).
- We created a new strategic plan that included a theory of change.

2022–2023
- UTC ran its first land justice campaign #NoDevelopmentWithoutCommunityInput to save Memorial garden from development.
- We shifted towards base-building and community organizing.
- We increased internal capacity to respond to emergence of land justice work in coordination with food sovereignty programs.
- Rebrand—UTC becomes Neighborhood Land Power Project.
2.2 - NLPP AT A GLANCE

NLPP’s 2023 Focus:
Centered on three core areas, our work addresses the dynamic shifts in social and economic neighborhood conditions.

**Land stewardship** through urban farming, community gardening, and park maintenance

- A group of dedicated, multi-generational land stewards grew **2,310 pounds** of food at Neighborhood Foods (NF) Farm
- We utilized agroecology and regenerative growing practices such as companion planting, composting and crop rotation, that produce nutritious food while nurturing soil health and life
- Land stewards grew community-identified, culturally significant crops (i.e. okra collards, beets, tomatoes, and beans) that honor and carry on Black, southern heritage foodways of Philly

**Community-led food distribution** to neighbors

- Developed a food-distribution plan with community Food Sovereignty Leaders (FSLs) to expand our reach and community-based partnerships
- FSLs distributed **589 free produce shares** to 80 families and individuals between June to November

**Multi-generational community education**

- Co-led **4 health and wellness education workshops** for neighbors to share and grow knowledge on produce and herbs at NF farm (cooking with, nutritional and health benefits, etc.)
- To protect the land we steward and grow on, we held **10+ land justice workshops** which explored building power and fighting against displacement of Black and Brown communities
This year brought some big improvements at NLPP’s different sites! They included:

- An arbor at NF Farm which will allow us to experiment with trellising different crops like cucumbers and grapes, and enrichen our agroecology practices

- A new fence and landscaping at Sickles St. Garden. These upgrades helped make the space feel bigger and more welcoming to neighbors who live on the block

- Thank you to Justin Levy and Jim Rogan whose skills and labor helped make these projects possible
Here are some of the people and organizations who helped us steward the land this season:

**DAN**, who entered his third season of landscaping with NLPP and helped to maintain NF Farm, Queen’s Garden, and Pearl St. Community Garden.

**ELLIOTT**, who was our part-time farm assistant at the beginning of the season and became full-time staff in the Fall as a farmer and land steward.

**CORNELL**, an NF Farm Member, who increased its growing space by starting and tending a small garden in the driveway leading to the farm.

**ONA**, who we welcomed this year as a full time staff member. Using his herbalism skills and knowledge, Ona was able to expand NLPP’s apothecary by growing more medicinal herbs and flowers. This apothecary also helped to welcome more relationships based on herbalism, health and community wellbeing.

**The Carversville Farm Foundation**, who provided us with crop starts throughout the Spring and Summer

**The Philadelphia Orchard Project (POP)**, who held work days at Conestoga St. Orchard throughout the Summer to maintain its various fruit trees and herbs

**The Penn State Extension Program**, who conducted soil test, helped build a new compost system, and improved the irrigation system at NF Farm

**The Xerces Society**, who helped deepen our agroecology practices by providing us with insects to improve pollination and reduce pests like ladybugs and praying mantises

These contributions gave us more time and space to focus on our community organizing work, deal with unexpected challenges, and test new experiments. We are deeply grateful for them.
AGROECOLOGY ADVANCES

One of the difficulties of building a food and land system under climate change is unpredictability. After facing intense heat and drought last Summer, we worked this season to deepen our agroecological practices, and community’s involvement in this process:

Climate
After hearing about our climate-related challenges in 2022, community member Trina was inspired to learn about beekeeping. In 2023 she took classes with the Philadelphia Beekeepers Guild, and is learning about how to bring more pollinators to NF Farm.

Air Quality Challenges & Precautions
In early Summer, Philadelphia experienced a series of days with dangerously bad air quality due to wildfires in Canada. We quickly developed a protocol to prioritize staff and community health, which included very limited outside time and resource sharing. This was especially important since Haddington is already disproportionately affected by pollution and poor air quality.
NLPP Farm Stewards
Throughout the season NLPP welcomed three community stewards at NF Farm: Natasha, Anansi and Illi. Together these stewards helped to grow and harvest crops and expand their knowledge of herbalism and regenerative farming.

Soil Testing & Compost System
At the beginning of the 2023 season we received soil tests for NF Farm. Our soil continues to be safe, but we found that the mushroom compost we’ve used for years has too much biomass. This means the soil is so dense that the plants can’t extract the nutrients, some of which go into our watershed and can have negative effects. This moved us into building two new compost stations onto the farm, with the help of Penn State Extension’s Master Gardener Program. The compost our farm makes is the perfect nutrient for the soil. Creating a closed food system of growing, eating and decomposing food isn’t just easier but is ecologically more supportive. At the start of the 2024 growing season, we will be able to use our own neighborhood food’s farm compost!
In 2023, NLPP continued our third season of the Food Sovereignty Share (FSS) Program. Through shifts in the program, we were able to build important new relationships. These relationships occurred by building a community food distribution plan with Food Sovereignty Leaders. Together, we experimented with distributing food at new places in our neighborhood which allowed us to reach new community members. From June through November we distributed free, bi-weekly shares of food to:

- Two neighborhood blocks in Haddington
- The YMCA in Haddington
- Carroll Park in West Philadelphia

A special thanks to the Friends of Carroll Park and The West Philadelphia YMCA who hosted us every Friday, and to the mutual aid group Food Not Bombs, who helped to distribute extra produce from our harvests.

In 2020, NLPP started the People’s Forum newsletter. This newsletter is included in each share with the goal of deepening our connections with Food Sovereignty Members. This season, different community members contributed interviews, recipes and plant care tips to the People’s Forum. Thanks to Mila, Trina and Kadasia for their work and sharing their knowledge!
3.3 - COMMUNITY EDUCATION

MULTI-GENERATIONAL PROGRAMMING

One of our goals in offering community education and programming is to encourage multi-generational relationships and learning. Here are some of the spaces that offered this during 2023:

- A rich new relationship with Mastery Charter School, Shoemaker campus in Haddington. Students from Shoemaker and their social worker, Sarah G., participated weekly with NLPP through harvest days and visits to Conestoga St. Orchard.

- Over the summer, four Shoemaker Students worked as youth farm apprentices to support their knowledge around land and agroecological practices in Haddington.

- Three community classes held in partnership with the Haddington YMCA and led by our Food Sovereignty Leader, Lisa Q. These classes focused on developing a stronger relationship with local food systems and minimizing food waste through preservation and meal planning.

- In collaboration with the Philadelphia Orchard Project (POP), Food Sovereignty Organizer, Ona, led a Fire Cider Workshop. Participants learned how to make Fire Cider (an herbal tonic for colds + flu) using herbs grown by NLPP and POP.

- This year Philadelphia hosted the Black Urban Growers Symposium (BUGS). As part of the symposium, Black growers from around the country toured NF Farm, participated in herbal medicine making workshop and discussed shared challenges and solutions.
LAND JUSTICE PROGRAMMING

In Spring 2022, NLPP found out that Memorial Garden had been sold by the city for development. We launched a campaign for the city to listen to the community who overwhelmingly didn’t want this project or the changes it would bring. Ultimately, the city gave us a concession: some of the land will remain open, but most of it will be developed.

Through the Memorial Garden struggle, we recognized that land justice is essential to our mission as it affects the community’s long-term ability to stay in Haddington. This emerging work has helped deepen our community organizing and strengthened our ties between land, food sovereignty and community empowerment.

Our land justice work in 2023 included:

Community Land Justice Series

The Memorial Garden Campaign showed us that West Philly residents are worried about the future of their communities. This series brought together a cohort of neighbors to collectively learn about the reasons gentrification occurs and how we can build strong communities that resist this displacement.

Citywide Land Justice Convening

NLPP also helped to convene a group of growers and land workers from across the city for a series of 5 sessions. This convening aimed to build stronger relationships within the Philly Land Sector and how we can move forward with unity and strategy in the future.
SECTION 4

OUR IMPACT
I keep coming back to the farm because I love the whole environment here. It's a vibe. I learn new things and can cook with new things that I didn't know about. My dream is to graduate from high school and go straight into college, either studying photography or cooking.”

-Kadasia, Youth Land Steward

The biggest take away from the land justice series for me was hope; there are so many community members who want to work together with the love we have for one another to make our neighborhood one to take pride in.”

-Faye, Community & Land Justice Series Member

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-Kadasia, Youth Land Steward

I know more of the people on my block now, and I'm more excited to be outside...I like planting and gardening more.”

-Mila, Youth Land Steward and FSL
The Land Justice convening was a powerful opportunity for our sector to build connection, dream, and strategize. Although most of us face shared land struggles, we rarely get the chance to come together and strengthen our bonds for future organizing work. It is essential we continue these coordinated efforts and keep building power to win the land justice we deserve.”

- Ryan, Philly Land Justice Convening Participant

Bringing students to the NLPP weekly has been a gift on multiple levels. Multiple students separately reported they feel at peace when they are at the farm. The youth land stewards (and I) get to learn all different farming practices and about the food that is being grown. They have an opportunity to be in fresh air, outside and moving their bodies in all kinds of weather. They build relationships they wouldn’t otherwise have and experience mentoring from the farmers. They get to contribute meaningfully to their community. I am so grateful for you.”

- Sarah
Community Member & Social Worker at Master Shoemaker High School

With just a little bit of work on my part, [i] gained a place to commune with other gardeners and farmers...I am so proud that Neighborhood Foods Farm is a thriving community farm helping to provide food for the neighborhoods I grew up in. Another thing I like about Neighborhood Land Power Project is that they are concerned about land sovereignty, land justice and cultivating black and brown leadership. This has my African and Indigenous ancestors praising our efforts in West Philly.”

- Trina
Community elder, NLPP Land Steward and FSL

SECTION 4

NEIGHBORHOOD LAND POWER PROJECT | 2023 ANNUAL REPORT
SECTION 5
OUR GROWTH
NLPP is growing to meet the moment and prepare for the future. We are intentionally expanding and diversifying our skills as well as our resources.

5.1 - SKILL-BUILDING

**AGROECOLOGY**

Four Staff participated in a delegation to Cuba to learn about their farming cooperatives and agroecology practices; Elliott completed an herbalism course with [The Solidarity Apothecary](#).

**ORGANIZING**

Sharpened our organizing and campaign development skills through [Midwest Academy](#)’s Organizing for Justice training.

**STRATEGIC STORYTELLING**

NLPP received coaching support from [Social Movement Technologies](#) to tell compelling stories of our organization’s history, work, and impact.
As we look ahead to 2024, some of our key organizational priorities include:

- Launch of our new website, an integrated system that will strengthen our external communications and internal data collection
- Document our organizational transformation process through a book of case studies
- Develop a succession plan that intentionally grows the next leaders in our organization

To deepen our impact in Haddington, our priorities for our community-based work are to:

- Grow our neighborhood base, increase community participation
- Support and resource community-driven food sovereignty and land justice projects
- Further integrate our food sovereignty and land justice programs
5.3 - COMMUNITY OF SUPPORTERS

We are incredibly grateful to our community of supporters, which include monthly sustainers, donors, and funding partners who make our work possible.

Our Current Funders Include:

- Allen Hilles Fund
- Berkowitz Foundation
- Bread & Roses Community Fund
- Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church
- Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, Healthier Together
- Claneil Foundation
- Community Resilience & Environmental Justice (Philadelphia City Fund)
- First Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia
- Focus for Health Foundation
- Independence Foundation
- Justice Outside: Liberated Pathway
- Leo & Peggy Pierce Family Foundation
- Merck Family Fund
- Millrace Foundation
- Patricia Kind Foundation
- Philadelphia Food Justice Initiative (The Reinvestment Fund)
- Philadelphia Horticultural Society & City of Philadelphia (DHCD)
- Philadelphia Foundation
- Rite Aid Healthy Futures Foundation
- Samuel S. Fels Fund
- William Penn Foundation
As we enter into this growth phase, we are seeking to expand our community of supporters. If our project speaks to you, and you are interested in supporting NLPP, contact Executive Director, Noelle Warford at noelle@urbantreeconnection.org

For more information and updates follow us on Facebook or Instagram or visit our website.