



Future young residents of the People of Hope Park review the plat design of their park.

A Success Story for Displaced Mobile Home Park Residents: The Amazing Effort That Made it Happen

The former residents of a mobile home park in Athens, Georgia will find housing stability through park ownership via a community land trust.

Residents of Garden Springs, a 28-year old mobile home park in Athens, Georgia were notified they had 60 days to move as the land had been sold for a high end student apartment complex. The residents are a diverse group comprised of 150 adults and 175 children (60% Hispanic, 30% black and 10% white). Some residents were disabled or elderly, and all were lower income. When this crisis hit, Georgia Legal Services Program (GLSP) responded but quickly realized that the need was greater than the resources at hand.

While GLSP lawyers are experts in poverty law and community development strategies, GLSP lawyers recognized the need to bring in business lawyers to assist with the complex issues. Georgia Legal Services Program went to work to round up volunteer lawyers to assist its staff attorneys. Sutherland, Asbill & Brennan, LLP

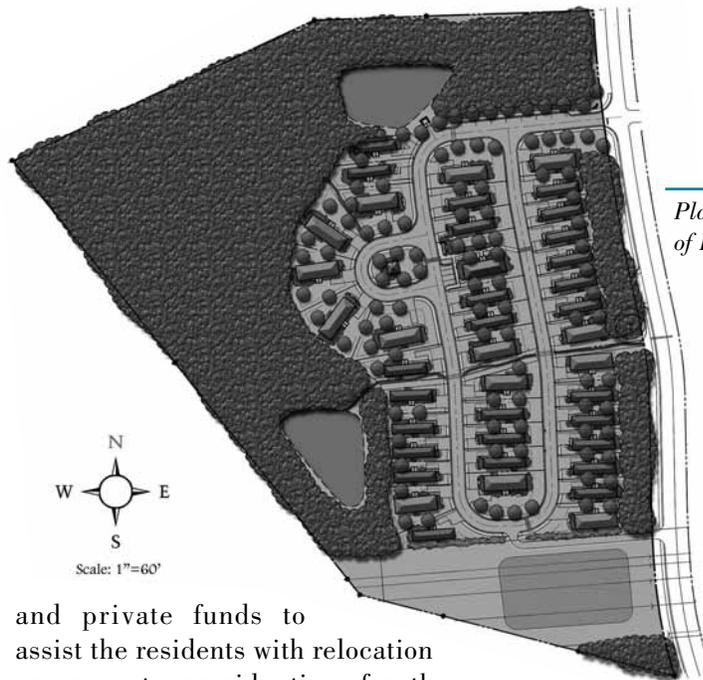
stepped forward to provide litigation and business legal services to the residents of Garden Springs. Sutherland partner Charles Lester and GLSP community economic development specialist attorney Skipper StipeMaas developed an extensive legal team and partnership with the University of Georgia Schools of Law and Social Work, churches, other non-profits, and hundreds of individuals. The Garden Springs legal team grew to include 29 attorneys, paralegals, social workers, law students, and translators.

Led by GLSP and Sutherland, the legal team negotiated a settlement so the residents had nine months to relocate. Through the legal team's help, 73 families were relocated to new trailer parks, if they had trailers that could be moved, or to houses/apartments, if their trailers could not be moved. The team raised almost \$200,000 in public



Barbara Champion, President of People of Hope, Inc., presents Charles Flickinger, a partner of Sutherland Asbill & Brennan with a small token of appreciation for the pro bono legal hours SAB has provided POH for the past five years.

According to StipeMaas, “One of the most endearing aspects of this case was meeting with the residents during warm months on the park’s basketball court---the only space large enough to accommodate all of the clients at one time---and using headlights to read by while swatting at mosquitoes as darkness arrived. As days got shorter and colder, meetings were moved into the cramped spaces of trailers and, no matter how late or how often, Sutherland lawyers were there, standing side-by-side with us as we sorted out all of the legal issues and strategies.” According to Charlie Lester, Sutherland’s head litigator, one of the most rewarding aspects of working with the residents and GLSP was the combination of litigation and transactional work and how it pulled together different social and legal skills within Sutherland and GLSP.



Plat Design for the People of Hope Park.

and private funds to assist the residents with relocation expenses to provide time for the legal team to explore with the residents the creation of a structure to purchase their own land for a long-term solution. Sutherland and GLSP worked closely with the Athens-Clarke County government for money from the Governor’s discretionary fund and affordable housing and eviction crisis money from the Department of Community Affairs. The fundraising effort made it possible to provide each family with \$2,500 to help relocate for expenses of moving the trailers, moving to apartments or houses or for increased rent. Sutherland also set up an innovative strategy for getting the money dispersed to the residents, which was complex and involved numerous agencies as a means to stay within the legal parameters of funds for each source of funds. When asked why Sutherland had taken on the arduous task of dispersing the money, Lester simply said, “We had the capacity, so we took on the responsibility.”

Since the settlement, GLSP and Sutherland have provided legal services to form a non-profit (People of Hope, Inc., www.peopleofhope.us) for the former resi-

dents of Garden Springs. GLSP and Sutherland, on behalf of their client, People of Hope, negotiated and signed a contract to purchase an 18 acre tract as a new trailer park site for this new non-profit; applied for 501(c)(3) status, drafted bylaws and board resolutions, maintained the legal records of the board meetings; provided legal consultation for development and zoning laws, applicable affordable housing programs; and advised the steps necessary to meet the legal requirements to have funds for the purchase of the land to develop the park. People of Hope purchased the property, and will break ground in the next few months to build their park.

As a means to address the systemic problems plaguing trailer parks, Sutherland and GLSP have provided legal work to create a Georgia Community Loan Fund, Inc., which plans to be a Community Development Financial Institution and provides low-interest loans for communities, like community-owned trailer parks, that have a hard time accessing capital.

