HISTORIC PRESERVATION IN SHRINKING CITIES:
NEIGHBORHOOD STRATEGIES FOR BUFFALO AND CLEVELAND

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ABSTRACT


This thesis examines the role that historic preservation can play at the neighborhood level in shrinking cities. Shrinking cities, located primarily along the Rust Belt, have suffered significant population losses and economic disinvestment over the last few decades. As a result, they face myriad problems associated with numerous vacant and abandoned buildings, many of which are considered historic. These cities have been responding to this surplus with aggressive, ad hoc demolition campaigns, which are eroding the historic context of neighborhoods.

Shrinking cities have been at the center of an emerging discussion among urban planning practitioners and scholars who are creatively addressing ways these cities can “rightsize” to become smaller, healthier places. However, the historic preservation perspective is absent from this conversation, though it is the preservation field that is most concerned with the loss of historic buildings and the effects of these losses on neighborhoods.

Using Cleveland and Buffalo as case studies, this thesis examines how historic preservation can contribute to the “rightsizing” of shrinking neighborhoods in shrinking cities. Furthermore, it analyzes what the preservation community is currently doing to address rightsizing and the possible roles historic preservation can play in shaping the future of shrinking cities. Finally, it offers recommendations to inform future preservation efforts and research on the role of historic preservation in shrinking cities.
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1. INTRODUCTION

Shrinking cities along the rust belt in the United States are facing serious problems. Chief among them is an abundance of vacant and abandoned building stock, a consequence of persistent population losses over the last decades of the twentieth century. Many of these cities have adopted aggressive demolition campaigns as a mechanism for dealing with shrinkage. An emerging debate about shrinking cities has occurred primarily among urban planning scholars and practitioners who raise important questions about how to reuse vacant land, what it means to be a smaller city, and how best to focus diminishing municipal resources. Absent from the shrinking cities literature is the historic preservation perspective. Preservationists should be inherently concerned with the irreversible loss of buildings of individual significance as well as the cumulative erosion of historic built environment as a result of these ongoing demolitions.

A defining characteristic of shrinking cities and towns is that their populations have been diminishing for decades for reasons that can include the loss of manufacturing and other industries, the draw of suburban development, social or racial tensions, or real estate foreclosures. Declining population and decreasing employment results in less revenue for the municipality, and in less private and public investment, thereby leading to a dysfunctional market. These losses produce a glut of underutilized and abandoned buildings for municipal leaders to manage.

How cities and organizations within them address these issues is broadly referred to as “rightsizing.” Rightsizing refers to the re-adjusting of a shrinking city’s built environment—including buildings and infrastructure—to match its current and projected population and development trends (Schilling 2008). This can take many forms, but it
speaks to a conscious adaptation to the realities of being a smaller city including the repercussions felt from crafting responses to shrinking and from focusing the allocation of resources on certain neighborhoods and not on others. Through the lens of urban ecology, agriculture, and open space, and community gardens, the urban planning field has developed creative approaches to reusing land. Municipalities are addressing vacant land through sanctioning side yard lot acquisitions. These allow homeowners to expand their property by purchasing adjacent vacant lots.

In neighborhoods where losses related to city shrinkage are most profound, buildings are abandoned and neglected and neighborhood cohesion is eroded. Abandoned buildings destabilize neighborhoods, lower surrounding property values, and generally diminish the spirit of the neighborhood. Vacant buildings can be extremely hazardous to public safety and costly for the city and taxpayers to maintain. They can be havens for drug and gang activity and for squatters, and they are targets for vandalism and arson (Belson 2007; de Wit 2006).¹ Squatters set fires inside abandoned buildings to stay warm and people scavenging for metal will rip out walls and floors in search of copper and other materials to sell. This destabilizes the building and opens it up to further damage from weather. Consequently, municipal leaders in shrinking cities are currently demolishing buildings by the hundreds and even thousands in efforts to clear “blighted” areas and create vacant land to use for new purposes. Historic buildings and the value they provide socially, aesthetically, and fiscally have a powerful role to play in shrinking cities. The field of historic preservation continues to adapt and expand to address changes in the built and social environment, and it is vocal about the importance of this flexibility (Moe 2010). Preservation has responded

¹ According to a New York Times article from 2007, 41% of all fires and 90% of all arson cases in Buffalo involved abandoned houses (Belson 2007).
to and created tools for inner-city revitalization, smart growth initiatives, creative adaptive reuses, industrial building typologies, and environmental sustainability. But, to date, there has been extremely little written about shrinkage from the preservation perspective.

There are models for how to deal with vacant and abandoned properties, such as the National Vacant Properties Campaign, in which acquisition and demolition are the main tenets. But they rarely discuss preservation (Beauregard 2010). Moreover, the Secretary of Interior Standards acts as the model for the treatment of historic buildings and the veritable fiscal, economic and cultural benefits they provide (Rypkema 1991; Mason 2005; NPS Secretary of Interior Standards). Housing rehabilitation of existing buildings is a component of many plans from cities and groups receiving Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) funds. But a model for how to address rightsizing through the lens of the historic, architectural, and local significance of preserving these buildings does not appear to be present. Preservation is more than just protecting individual buildings; it looks to the larger significance of neighborhood cohesion and preservation in context. Demolition is a necessary component of rightsizing. With the overlay of building and neighborhood significance incorporated into demolition decision-making, it can be used as a strategically guided tool to avoid historically valuable areas, thereby helping preserve the character-defining features of neighborhoods and cities.

The goal of this research is to examine how planners, preservationists, and community organizers consider historic preservation as a contributor to the “rightsizing” of shrinking neighborhoods in shrinking cities. From this study, determinations can be made on how preservation can play a role in the ongoing debate on shrinking cities and approaches to shrinking neighborhoods. In other words, this research asks the related
questions: What is the preservation community currently doing to address rightsizing? What do preservationists and planners see as a possible future role for historic preservation field to play as the future of shrinking cities continues to be explored?

This study focuses on two cities: Buffalo, NY and Cleveland, OH. Each city has been losing its population for decades and has a mix of stable, transitional, and distressed neighborhoods that are typical of shrinking neighborhoods throughout the rust belt region. Both cities also have an established historic preservation base. However, the two cities are addressing the problem of shrinking neighborhoods differently, through the use of different programs and groups. By gathering primary data through interviews of professionals and activists in both cities, this thesis will begin to uncover how preservationists, activists, and planners are addressing rightsizing issues in both cities in order to understand how historic preservation can play a role in the broader shrinking cities discussion.
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Over the last half a century, historic preservation has gained strength and importance through a growing public appreciation for the “old.” Landmark laws, together with public support, have aided in protecting historic buildings from demolition. Historic preservation has proven its worth as a mechanism for the positive revitalization of neighborhoods and downtowns, and as a catalyst for economic development; it is a beneficial, if often overlooked, constituent in the development of affordable housing (Rypkema 2002; Mason 2005). It brings together communities, stimulates the economy, provides jobs through rehabilitation, and raises property values (Rypkema 2002; Katari 2005). Additionally, historic preservation has increasingly moved beyond traditional tools of individual landmark and historic districts designation. For example, it relies on creative advocacy to get communities interested and involved when addressing the conservation of neighborhoods and historic assets. Rypkema (2002, 5) states: “Historic preservation today celebrates and champions the neighborhoods, downtown and rural areas that are less grand architecturally, but perhaps even more significant in the building of America.”

The increasing attention on and investment in the unique architectural assets of rust belt cities is being discussed as a mechanism for revitalization (Hampson 2009; Ouroussoff 2008). Groups such as Preservation Buffalo Niagara and the National Trust for Historic Preservation are working to increase recognition of the incredible benefits that historic preservation and landmark architectural heritage can play in revitalizing Buffalo. The National Trust has chosen to hold its esteemed 2011 National Preservation Conference in Buffalo, an event that draws attention and recognition nationwide. This is potentially
crucial for garnering attention on the city’s historic assets; this creates a ripple effect of increased recognition about historic homes and commercial buildings, which make up city neighborhoods (Ouroussoff 2008).

Some fear exists that historic designation will lead to the loss of affordability for current low-income residents. Coulson and Leichenko (2004) demonstrate that historical designation does not lead to gentrification or other significant demographic turnover. However, their findings also indicate that historic district designations are only a partial solution if the aim is to revitalize older, deteriorating neighborhoods; they suggest additional incentive programs that promote vacant housing purchases by owner-occupants (Coulson & Leichenko 2004). Rypkema (2002) cites that about 60 percent of the more than 11,000 historic districts nationwide are in census tracts with a poverty level of 20 percent or more. He further states that the vast majority of the most racially and economically diverse neighborhoods were either “National Register Historic Districts, local historic districts, had a concentration of historic structures, or a combination of all three (2002, 13).”

To remain viable and relevant, the field of preservation must be flexible and adaptive to changes in real estate, land use, and in shifting local and regional priorities. The tenets of the preservation field are consistently being challenged from the outside, and so the field must also be challenged from the inside if it is to keep growing and staying current. And since the passing of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (which was a response to the threat that urban renewal posed to historic buildings), many would agree historic preservation has remained current and flexible (Hurley 2010).

In response to economic, social and environmental changes within the US, historic preservation has continued to develop tools for taking action. For example, when historic
downtowns were ailing, the National Trust of Historic Preservation developed the Main Street Program in 1980, a time when many preservationists felt the tools of marketing, economic development, and urban infrastructure were out of their realm (Tyler 2009). Preservation has responded to and created tools for inner-city revitalization, smart growth initiatives, creative adaptive reuses, industrial building typologies, and environmental sustainability. Today, some of preservation’s challenges include fighting sprawl, restoring economic vitality to commercial corridors, and fortifying older residential neighborhoods. All of these are major factors that affect shrinking cities (Moe 2010). Accordingly, over the past few decades, the field has been responsive to preservation challenges as they have arisen.

Hurley (2010) advocates for a greater role in public history by attempting to preserve inner city landscapes and to cultivate a shared sense of belonging. When urban districts capitalize on their historical assets to attract residents and to encourage investment, they acquire the capacity to stabilize social relations, to articulate community values, and to plan more intelligently.

Rypkema (2010) wrote in an article, Making Historic Preservation Relevant for the Next 50 Years, that historic designation is becoming a tool by which the local community can determine what is important to them and can have a say in how their neighborhood changes over time. But he acknowledges that it is necessary to devise new tools other than ‘designation.’ Rypkema goes on to say that preservationists need to add flexibility to their treatment of buildings, relaxing the rigidity by which preservationists approach the majority of properties deemed worthy of protection.

Historic preservation and urban planning are often still seen as disparate fields.
The latter views the former as ancillary to the process of comprehensive planning, a key component for cities looking to rightsize. To a typical planner, while surveys and documentation of historic resources are important, their utility is considered limited. However, several authors hold that preservation needs to be better incorporated as an integral part of a community’s comprehensive plan (e.g., Kelly 2010; Tyler 2009). Kelly (2010, 4) writes:

Where preservation planning focuses on individual buildings, it is far more narrow in scope….where it focuses on preservation of a downtown, a neighborhood, or a context within which one or more historic buildings exist, it is much like comprehensive planning. Most effective preservation plans exist in the context of a comprehensive plan, with the comprehensive plan providing the land-use and other context for the preservation plan.

The urban planning field continues to forge ahead in discussing the future of shrinking cities and mechanisms for contending with the problems there. Rybczynski and Linneman (1999, 43-44) are among the few writing on urban shrinkage to mention historic preservation, if cynically, as part of the discussion: “Historic preservationists will undoubtedly object to wholesale demolition, since even decrepit areas contain buildings of architectural merit, and some of the worst areas are the locations of so-called industrial landmarks.”

Proponents of rightsizing encourage city and community leaders to take bold stands in addressing how they will plan for shrinkage in their areas. If preservationists wish to give voice to historic buildings as an asset to these communities, it is important to get in on the discussion now in order to create a place for the field in future rightsizing plans.

Historic preservation faces new challenges within the shrinking city context, and the field is being tested to adapt to scenarios of high vacancy rates, of a weak real-estate
market, and of fewer people within the city. Rightsizing within shrinking cities is the next challenge to address, and preservation needs to actively involve itself soon if it is to have a significant role to play.

**Shrinking Cities**

An examination of the history of shrinking cities shows that shrinkage is not a recent phenomenon for cities and regions along the rust belt (Rybczynski & Linneman 1999; Beauregard 2010). A group of interdisciplinary specialists who formed the Shrinking Cities International Research Network (SCIRN) came to a consensus in 2004 of a definition of a shrinking city: a densely populated urban area with a minimum population of 10,000 residents that has faced population losses in large parts for more than two years and is undergoing economic transformations with some symptoms of a structural crisis (Wiechmann 2007). What further defines the focus of the shrinking cities debate within the rust belt region is the sizeable and sustained population loss experienced by the cities of this region over time.

In a recent analysis, Beauregard (2009) examines the patterns of decline of the 50 largest US cities, revealing that the top 10 of these cities have been experiencing a constellation of symptoms of decline for decades. Perhaps the most compelling finding in Beauregard’s study is that almost every city that experienced population loss in multiple decades did so in consecutive decades, indicating that population loss in these cities is a persistent, chronic problem. It is the very persistence of this problem—compounded in the last few years by the recent foreclosure crisis—that has brought cities like Buffalo,

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Cleveland, Detroit, and Rochester to the forefront of the current shrinking cities discussion.

Cities are struggling with how to cope effectively with population losses and the scale of vacancy left in its wake (Schilling & Logan 2008). They are turning to aggressive demolition as a remedy for problems associated with vacancy. But the process has been piecemeal, rather than following a larger plan for strategic demolition. While the phenomenon of shrinking cities is not limited to the rust belt region (Pallagast 2009), the rust belt is the focus of this research because its cities have, in particular, been adversely affected by population declines. Rust belt states like Ohio and Michigan were hit especially hard by the foreclosure crisis, and Cleveland has been affected significantly.3 That said, the economic downturn is not the initial cause of their troubles. But it has catapulted the problems of population loss and unleashed a wave of funds available to cities to help deal with the related problems of shrinkage.

Following World War II, multiple factors, such as transportation and technological advancements, suburbanization, and foreign competition, contributed to the deindustrialization and decentralization of urban areas. These are shown to have primarily affected cities along the rust belt - cities whose initial urban core was built around ports, factories and industrial thoroughfares. Accordingly, once these industries were adversely affected, factories closed, employment declined, people moved out, and the tax base eroded (Beauregard 2009; Rybczynski & Linneman 1999).

But these factors are not the only ones that have led to urban decline and shrinkage. In a report by the Brookings Institute (Vey 2007), the author attributes three primary reasons for the continuation of decline in rust belt cities: failure to replace well-paying industrial

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jobs with employment in growing sectors; lower education levels in these cities; and
environmental contamination in older industrial cities. Reliance on primary manufacturing
industries has thwarted the development of other necessary and viable economic sectors to
balance the economy. The heavy reliance on blue-collar industry allowed for young people
to find gainful employment without completing a basic education (Poh & Wheeler 1997;
Goldman 2007). Once manufacturing industries left or dissipated, many did not have the
education or skills necessary to pursue other employment avenues.

Beauregard (1993) proposes that shrinkage means much more than a loss of
population and employment. Other significant factors must also be considered as under
the purview of shrinkage – e.g., the shrinking middle-class, the influx of minority and
low-income populations, and the physical deterioration of cities. The Brookings Institute
report echoes this by citing that the in-migration of low-income minority groups to city
cores has led to an increase in the out-migration of the white middle-class; this has caused
a marked segregation of cities that have affected adversely an already severe fiscal problem
(Vey 2007, 24). For example, the outflow of a segment of the population who pays higher
taxes, together with a deteriorating manufacturing core, has led to a decline of business and
private investment. The result is an eroded tax base, crumbling infrastructure and an aging
and neglected building stock (Gratz 1994).

Within the last decade, a group of urban planning practitioners and scholars have
developed a body of work on the concept of “smart shrinkage” in order to discuss the future
of shrinking cities (Beauregard 2010; Hollander et al. 2009; Gayley 2008; Rybczynski
& Linneman 1999; Pallagst 2009). As opposed to “smart growth” (a familiar concept to
urban planners and subscribed to by most U.S. municipalities), smart shrinking is used
describe cities that are not following a trajectory of growth but that are, rather, restructuring for a smaller city. Most proposed approaches to rightsizing involve some combination of the following: demolition of vacant properties; relocation or incentivization for residents to leave distressed neighborhoods; creative vacant land reuses; and land banking, which is a mechanism used to acquire and hold abandoned properties, allowing authorities wait for market rebounds to assemble parcels into larger groupings, or to rehabilitate homes for resale (Schilling 2009). Two models, a consolidation and a dispersion model, have emerged as approaches to dealing with an abundance of vacant space. The consolidation model looks to focus density in key nodes, or urban islands, relocating remaining populations from the peripheries into these target areas. Conversely, the dispersion model suggests that dispersing vacancy can be used to de-densify the city overall, and it does not call for the relocation of residents (Schwarz 2008; Hollander et al. 2009).

Within shrinking cities, neighborhood typologies have been developed using variables such as homeownership rates, vacancy rates, and value assessments to determine neighborhood market viability (Mallach 2008; City of Cleveland Version 3.0. 2009; Foreclosure-response.org; Stablecommunities.org). These have been used in cities such as Philadelphia, Memphis, and Cleveland as a means of determining appropriate levels of intervention, using between four and six classifications that essentially identify three primary typologies: stable, transitional, and distressed areas. The ‘stable’ neighborhoods had low vacancy rates with properties of stable value in good condition; ‘transitional’ neighborhoods had signs of physical or market distress with low to moderate housing values; and ‘weak’ neighborhoods were experiencing significant rates of demolition, abandonment, and depreciation of housing values (Schilling 2006; Mallach 2008).
idea is that by utilizing appropriate interventions, neighborhoods can be revitalized and prevented from cycling down to the next stage (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1 Revitalization cycle for vacant properties from Blueprint Buffalo

The problem is that no one knows yet what a successfully shrunken city will look like. ‘Smart growth’ is still the dominant term used in the current urban and regional planning discourses (Pallagast 2009), meaning that the American model of addressing urban advancement remains centered on growth and expansion (Yeater 2009). The traditional planning discourse and literature is oriented towards growth models, which leave the urban planning discipline poorly equipped to address the shrinking cities issue (Swope 2006; Schatz 2008). Rybczynski and Linneman (1999, 43) describe the obstacles facing shrinking cities as “massive, even possibly insurmountable.” But they also encouragingly state that the first step is to be realistic in addressing shrinkage. Over ten years later, advocates for rightsizing may now agree that shrinkage is a reality that must be faced and embraced.

It has enormous ramifications for a politician, in particular for a mayor, to speak
openly about his or her city as either shrinking or rightsizing. Many are uncomfortable using the terms ‘declining’ or ‘shrinking’ for the fear that it makes them seem weak and unpopular among constituents (Swope 2006; Beauregard 2003). Instead, big budget projects like convention centers, shopping malls and sports stadiums are incentivized and heavily subsidized (Swope 2006) – a method that has been proven to be ineffective for stimulating long-term revitalization, and even to further disconnect investment funds from where they are truly needed.

Efforts to address the problems faced by shrinkage have been focused primarily on the demolition of vacant and abandoned properties. Increased funding has allowed for this to happen at faster rates and in greater quantities than in previous years, while budget tightening, owing to the economic crisis, has dried up other funding sources. Still, using Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) funds and other funding sources, these cities have been able to launch an aggressive demolition campaign, removing thousands of buildings.

In 2006, Schilling, Professor in Practice in Urban Affairs and Planning at Virginia Tech, in conjunction with the National Vacant Properties Campaign and team of experts, unveiled Blueprint Buffalo, a comprehensive assessment report that set forth “four leadership and four policy actions to prevent, abate, reclaim, and reuse vacant and abandoned properties within Buffalo and its surrounding first-tier suburbs.” In it, Schilling et al. propose a rightsizing model that is a combination of green infrastructure initiatives, land banking, and community driven planning. The first step to this rightsizing model is to address the blight and decay caused by vacant properties, because blight begets blight in a downward spiral (Schilling et al. 2006; Schilling and Logan 2008). Shilling goes on
to say that once rightsizing strategies are in place to remove blight and vacancy, traditional incentives that attract people and private investment will be more successful. This blanket statement implies that these vacant properties (as generally defined above) are dead weight to a city, holding it back from moving forward rather than encouraging a focused and thoughtful rehabilitation, which takes into account neighborhood context, cohesion, and significance.

Missing from this model is a consideration for the historic, neighborhood and cultural value of the vacant and abandoned building stock, which appears to be lumped together generally as “blight,” at varying levels of decay. Also absent from the rightsizing discussion is how to include historic preservationists working at the city and neighborhood levels, so that they stand to play an integral role in helping guide rightsizing decisions. Just as the field of urban planning can develop and adapt to the concept of rightsizing, it stands to reason that historic preservation can also adopt a set of rightsizing approaches.

Royce Yeater, Director of the National Trust for Historic Preservation Midwest Office, is one of the few writers to address historic preservation as it relates to shrinking cities and, in particular, to the compounding complications resulting from the foreclosure crisis. Yeater (2009) recognizes that embracing shrinkage, or rightsizing, is an approach that cities are turning to. But he also highlights concerns about incoming funding from programs, such as the Neighborhood Stabilization Program, that, compounded with weak market viability for the foreseeable future, threaten to unleash a “pattern of demolitions (2009, 23).” Such demolitions would result in the veritable clearance of whole neighborhoods that “may in the next decade become a new form of ‘urban renewal.’ (2009, 23)” While needed federal and state funding will continue to pour in to distressed areas, Yeater warns to be aware that
this top-down, reactionary approach may “fail to grasp the subtle nature of community revitalization,” using language “still based on that vague term ‘blight’” (2009, 24).

Youngstown, OH, in 2005 is the first and remains the only American city to date that has adopted a master plan explicitly designed around the concept of shrinking smartly, titled Youngstown 2010. The city has experienced a halving of its population over the last fifty years and is currently estimated at around 74,000 (Hollander 2005). The city’s plan calls for a “better, smaller Youngstown” in order to rightsize around its current population. In the plan’s third “vision” (Improving Youngstown’s Image and Enhancing Quality of Life), it cites that “urban decay is a constant and demoralizing reminder of Youngstown’s decline.” Even within a city devoted to rightsizing, the negative discourse around shrinking prevails.

Negative narratives around urban decline and neighborhood shrinkage directly affect how cities view themselves and their future, as well as the buildings that remain there (Swope 2006; Schilling et al. 2006). Structures, in particular those that are abandoned and vacant, are viewed as “eyesores” and “blighted”. Beauregard (1993) points to the term ‘decline’ as a culprit in how narratives of national decline and urban decline intersect. ‘Decline’ is discussed as offensive to the understood American model of growth, which disallows discussing decline as a result of development and demographic dynamics, and instead associates urban decline as a sign of failure and loss:

Weak and uncompetitive, susceptible to more powerful and prosperous nations, no longer “the best,” facing a future that one can neither control nor anticipate with great expectations, and deprived of the lifestyle to which one has become accustomed are the meanings of urban decline that surface as one explores its intersection with other popular and scholarly debates (Beauregard 1993, 193).
Through changing the negative dialogue on how shrinking is perceived, it is possible to change the way that buildings themselves are viewed. As efforts continue to shift the thinking of politicians and the public to see that a smaller city can be a better city, perceptions about buildings can shift – from being considered as blatant signs of disinvestment and decline to being seen as possibilities for rehabilitation for first-time homeowners, as affordable housing units, and as new opportunities for business development. Shifting perceptions is a small step with big ramifications, which could allow a window for historic preservationists, community members, planners and politicians to view existing buildings as assets instead of liabilities.

**Urban Renewal and Planned Shrinkage**

Leaders in shrinking cities still view demolition as the first line of attack on the problems faced by their cities. Demolition is seen as a mechanism for ridding cities of “blight” and unsightliness, as well as for fighting and deterring crime. In short, the view is that the abandoned building is a source of the problem (Favro 2010). When cities look to redefine themselves in light of what is perceived as a negative shadow cast upon them (aging, blighted areas, high crime, high abandonment or vacancy), there is desire to clear away the old and begin again. Many aspects of this scenario reflect a time in American urban history when large-scale demolition was also seen as a catalyst for change.

While abandoned buildings detract from property values and are unsightly and sometimes dangerous, cumulative neighborhood erosion through demolition is not a viable long-term solution. In discussing shrinking cities, the terms “blight” and “slum” are used to describe abandonment and deterioration of the built environment. Proponents of rightsizing
condone and recognize that entire neighborhoods may be lost or sacrificed. These concepts have been seen and played out in the eras of urban renewal and planned shrinkage. Urban renewal was also an attempt to combine policy and design to reverse inner city decline, but the process was non-participatory and exacerbated the very problems that the program was supposed to resolve; moreover, the length of time it took to complete projects left many sites fallow and unplanned (Gayley 2008; Anderson 1964). It is important to be cognizant of the connection to urban renewal when discussing rightsizing, so that the same thing will not be said in the future.


In Triage as Urban Policy, Marcuse et al. (1982) responded to the triage approach of planned shrinkage, initially proposed by Roger Starr in New York in the 1970s who forwards it as a mechanism for addressing declining neighborhoods. Starr (1976) essentially argued that public funding should be funneled into the areas most likely to succeed and thrive, and that deteriorating areas should be cut off from further public investment and allowed to continue to decline, so that the buildings are razed and the land let to fallow until the market returns. But Marcuse et al. argue that the policy of triage is likely to encourage the decline of neighborhoods, not just in population but also in jobs and capital. They argue that planned depopulation and density reduction throughout a city could result in highly desirable and necessary benefits, such as more park space, room for activities, increased light, and improved air quality. This statement is reflective of the current discussion of how
to approach shrinking cities positively.

In discussing how this would affect the physical environment, Marcuse (1982, 36) recognizes that “[i]t would involve looking at the quality of individual structures, their age, their suitability for their current uses.” The article also argues that through this carefully deliberated and conscious approach to shrinking, “planning becomes planning for reduction in size and planning for reduced densities and improved quality of life, rather than planning for the amputation and death of entire neighborhoods (ibid).”

Rypkema (2002, 6) highlights that, today, the same arguments for demolition are being made as during urban renewal:

There is today almost universal agreement that the Urban Renewal demolition of large tracts of downtowns was misguided, self-defeating, and ultimately a failure as a revitalization strategy. The sustained success stories in downtown revitalization today are found in those cities that maintained and reinvested in their historic buildings and recognized their character, quality, and ultimate durability… It is hard to conceive that cities are using what is a demonstrated failure in Urban Renewal as the strategy of choice in neighborhood renewal. It is not that no building should ever be torn down, rather that demolition should be the last resort not the first option.

Teaford (2000) suggests that federal urban renewal, with a few exceptions, left much to be desired, and that it generated so much criticism and disappointment, that from it urban revitalization efforts developed that were more locally driven and preferred rehabilitation and preservation over destruction and clearance. Gratz (1994) further investigates this period from the preservation perspective. Gratz discusses how top-down approaches to dealing with struggling inner city neighborhoods gave rise to a community-based grassroots response that used historic preservation tools to revitalize their neighborhoods. These actions helped bolster the preservation field as a positive mechanism for rejuvenation.

Gayley (2008, 38) insists there are three ways that smart shrinking should be
differentiated from urban renewal:

First, neighborhood/public involvement is essential in every stage of smart shrinking—visioning, planning, designing, and implementing... The second difference between urban renewal and smart shrinking is that shrinking benefits from the luxury of hindsight... Finally, the third difference is that smart shrinking, as policy and design, adopts a fundamentally different goal, [tailoring policy and design to address current residents needs, not growth and new investment], from urban renewal.

What the above comment shows is that the rightsizing discussion is attending to the problem of preventing a repetition of the negative consequences of urban renewal efforts. Likewise, historic preservationists know the losses sustained during this period as well, and they can make a strong contribution to preventing history from repeating itself.

It is important to realize that the planned amputation of neighborhoods was proposed thirty years ago and that this level of action is being considered again in the current shrinking cities discussion. In the 1970s, with planned shrinkage, these decisions were driven by the few at the top with power and big business interests rather than through participation with community members who would be directly affected by any course of action—or inaction. In today’s context, local decision makers in shrinking cities must ensure as much participatory planning as possible. It is also a fundamental reason for preservationists and other activists to have a voice at the table. Cities that have made notable comebacks in resorting vitality to their once ailing residential cores are those that have empowered citizens in decision-making (Hurley 2010).

The problems associated with shrinking populations and an abundance of vacant building stock are a current and critical problem for cities. The approach that shrinking cities are taking is mixed, and it is also continuously changing in response to the problems and to the funding available. The potential benefits of de-densification, increased public
green space, and lot enlargement of homeowners should not be discounted. Moreover, the value of historic buildings in defining neighborhoods, of creating affordable housing, and of maintaining a sense of place should be considered high on the urban planning agenda. Shrinkage is happening in these cities, but how they choose to deal with it, and to what extent historic preservation involves itself in this process, is still ongoing.

The following section will discuss the research design for this thesis, followed by an outline of the background on each case study city—including history, current demographics, and an overview of organizational infrastructure. The subsequent chapters will be dedicated to analysis that aims to compare approaches and responses between the two case studies, which also span areas relevant to the problems faced by other shrinking cities. These chapters look at rightsizing and at the current political discourse, examining how historic preservation can stay relevant in shrinking economies, and how preservation has responded to rightsizing thus far. These chapters will be followed by recommendations for next steps and by suggestions for expanding future research.
3. RESEARCH DESIGN

This research was designed to answer the question: How can historic preservation contribute to the “rightsizing” of shrinking neighborhoods in shrinking cities? It further examines how historic preservationists are participating in the rightsizing debate, and how the rightsizing debate is informing preservation. Accordingly, this study draws on multiple data sources to compare and contrast rightsizing responses in two primary cities.

Two case study cities were selected: Buffalo, New York and Cleveland, Ohio. In order to examine their differences, each city’s master plans, state preservation plans, and shrinking cities literature were examined. An array of neighborhood-oriented programs that were relevant to preservation and neighborhoods were analyzed, as well as the outcomes from funding sources such as the Neighborhood Stabilization Program.

Demographic data from the decennial US Census from each decade between 1970-2010 were collected at the citywide scale. Figures collected from the census data for each decade were: Total population; total White and African-American populations; median household income; total housing units; total occupied housing units; and total vacant housing units. Vacancy rates per decade were calculated using total housing units, total occupied units, and total vacant units. For 1970, census information for New York and Ohio was acquired using U.S. Census Bureau bound volumes on Housing Characteristics for States, Cities, and Counties, and Characteristics of the Population. For each subsequent decade, sources for census data were: GeoLytics (1980), American FactFinder (1990, 2000), and American FactFinder2 (2010).

Statistical assessment of neighborhood markets was not possible for this research; accordingly, neighborhoods are identified using market typologies, as outlined by Schilling
(2006): stable, transitional, or distressed. Determination of each identified neighborhood is based on primary interview data, literature research, and visual observation.

The primary data for this study came from interviews with individuals from Buffalo’s Office of Strategic Planning and Cleveland’s City Planning Commission, the Buffalo Preservation Board and the Cleveland Landmarks Commission; New York and Ohio state historic preservation offices; Preservation Buffalo Niagara and the Cleveland Restoration Society; two community development organizations (People United for Sustainable Housing and the West Side Community Coalition); and additional organizations, such as Neighborhood Progress, Inc., the Cleveland Urban Design Center, and Buffalo LISC. Interviewees were asked a mix of open-ended and closed questions. An extended list of interviewees and the dates they were interviewed can be found in Appendix A. A list of questions asked can be found in Appendix B.

While other groups active in preservation and planning discussions were not interviewed, the people interviewed were deemed to be the primary actors in their fields. Not all of those interviewed are quoted, but those that are featured heavily throughout this thesis will be briefly highlighted in the following paragraphs.

The problems Cleveland and Buffalo face as shrinking cities extend beyond the city boundaries. Suburban areas around each city face similar issues, making this a larger regional issue. However, this research focuses on each city independent of their regional context to control for the number and jurisdiction of preservation organizations and planners interviewed.
LIMITATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH

It must be recognized that while Buffalo and Cleveland, as two rust belt cities, are in some ways representative of other shrinking cities within the region, there are limitations associated with their selection and thus with the applicability of recommendations resulting from this research. Buffalo and Cleveland are among the larger of the cities facing these issues in the region. Numerous smaller cities and towns are experiencing shrinking populations but with fewer resources in the form of large institutional investors (such as universities, medical centers). These institutions may be a factor in shaping the future of shrinking cities through attracting student populations, creating employment opportunities, and generating projects that respond to the issues of rightsizing. They also have fewer or weaker preservation organizations, and they possess varying levels of vacancy and abandonment.

Lastly, this research is limited within the US context. However, the shrinking cities dilemma is a worldwide issue, affecting countries such as Germany, Italy and China. Each shrinking city and town needs to determine where it sees itself in the rightsizing discussion and what future change looks like on a city-by city basis. While this research will hopefully convey the importance of incorporating historic preservation into rightsizing efforts, should that be the direction a city decides to take. What form historic preservation involvement means on the ground must be tailored to some extent for each location.
4. BACKGROUND ON CASE STUDY CITIES

This study focuses on two cities, Buffalo and Cleveland, for several reasons. Both cities share important commonalities that give them a similar baseline to better examine their differences in how preservation is being approached. Buffalo and Cleveland share a history of heavy industrial development along important waterways and railroads. This made each a thriving manufacturing hub within the rust belt through the first half of the twentieth century. Today, Buffalo and Cleveland are frontline cities in the rightsizing and shrinking city debates, as each has seen its population halved since their respective peaks in 1950, and each has experienced dramatic job and industry losses – all resulting in persistent economic decline. As in most shrinking cities, Buffalo and Cleveland are facing high vacancy and abandonment rates. Populations continue to diminish, and, in each city, demolition has been seen as a necessary remedy.

In addition, both cities have an established preservation ethos, which gives them a strong base from which preservation responses can be crafted. This is an important component of the research. In order to maintain a constant by which to gauge how preservation is responding to the current shrinking cities dilemma, there needs to be an historic preservation presence already in place both at the city level and active on the ground. The remainder of this section provides baseline historical, socioeconomic, and statistical context on both cities.
In 1825, the completion of the Erie Canal placed Buffalo at the epicenter of a shipping network, connecting the Great Lakes and the Hudson River. It began rapidly growing as an industrial hub, perfectly positioned for receiving and distributing raw goods. Four major industries dominated: steel, grain, rubber, and lumber.

Lucrative industries created a host of affluent families and bolstered Buffalo as a growing cultural mecca. Buffalo became a playground for architectural experimentation in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The city attracted such notable architects as Louis Sullivan, Henry Hobson Richardson, and Frank Lloyd Wright to design homes and institutional buildings. Buffalo remains the only city that can claim to have designs by all three of these architects (Block 2010). Richardson completed the Buffalo State Asylum for the Insane in 1870, a sprawling Romanesque compound and his largest commission (Oursoussoff 2008). Daniel Burnham contributed the Ellicott Square Building in 1896, a block away from Sullivan’s 1895 Guarantee Building, which preservationists would fight against demolition for ninety years later. Wright’s contributions include the Darwin Martin House (1905) and the Larkin Building (1904). The Larkin Building is especially noted for Wright’s innovative design inclusions, such as built-in metal furniture, floor to ceiling glass doors, and an air-conditioning system (Oursoussoff 2008). In 1870, Frederick Law Olmsted, considered the father of American Landscape Architecture, and Calvert Vaux designed a magnificent sprawling park system for the city; they later expanded upon this system, in the 1880s (Olmsted Parks Conservancy).
In the early 20th Century, Buffalo was growing as a steel-manufacturing city, with Lackawanna Steel shipping more than one million tons in just its first year of operations, in 1906. Railroad development initially made the city a critical transfer point; it directly employed tens of thousands, with many more in related industries. The first decades of the 20th century also introduced the rampant use of trucks and automobiles. Automobile manufacturing and repair accounted for thousands of jobs. As industries grew and attracted a larger working population, the building trades—carpentry, glazing, electricians, etc.—grew in kind, and neighborhoods accordingly grew denser. World War I brought demand for chemical and airplane manufacturing; with so much work and growth, optimism abounded in the city (Goldman 2007).

Neighborhoods were formed not just by ethnicity but also by industry. The city was divided into thirteen wards, without the consideration of population distribution. Two alderman representatives—often representing the strongest ethnic majorities—were present from each ward in the City’s Common Council. The Common Council controlled every system from education to police, and a string of weak mayors were unable to change this power dynamic. The introduction of electric streetcars allowed for redistribution of residents, as well as for the development of a downtown business district, behind which were powerful banking and business families. These powerful, moneyed groups were concerned about the city’s uncontrolled growth and the disorder of automobile traffic affecting downtown business; thus, they lobbied the Common Council to give the city government power over land use and planning (Goldman 2007). The City Planning Association was formed in 1920 and, inspired by the City Beautiful movement, quickly began trying to remedy Buffalo’s chaotic and haphazard growth. The inordinate number
of automobiles was a huge concern in the city and for decades was the impetus behind the development of numerous plans for beautification. Some plans went nowhere, but others set the trajectory for big business interests to determine large-scale demolition efforts in the future. But while the Great Depression devastated Buffalo’s economy in the 1930s, economic decline also led to rampant demolitions. Landlords recognized that their property had more value as a surface parking lot to accommodate the surge in automobile usage.

At the same time, Buffalo grew as a cultural capital; it attracted notable architects Eliel and Eero Saarinen to design a music hall, opened in 1940. World War II brought renewed optimism and demand for production of goods and materials, and Buffalo remained an industrial giant into the mid-century. But strong demand for industrial workers meant that Buffalo’s youth were leaving school young to join the workforce, ultimately resulting in a large population unprepared for anything other than manufacturing in the future.

By the 1950s, the city was seeing signs of decline. Buffalo was no longer the hub of transshipment, as rail and auto usage supplanted dependence on water-based shipping. In 1959, the St. Lawrence Seaway opened, bypassing Buffalo altogether (Dillaway 2006). Industries were beginning to leave the city due to crippling worker strikes and because city infrastructure was becoming outdated. Many diversified industries had left, making the city’s economy less dependent on such major industries as steel and automobiles. In the neighborhoods, Main Street was being reinforced as a racial dividing line by the Board of Education, with African Americans on the East Side and white Europeans on the West Side. Race riots contributed to the departure of the remaining white population from the East Side (Goldman 2007). Wright’s Larkin Building was demolished in 1950 to make way for a truck stop that never materialized—a loss still mourned by Buffalonians and
Mid-century Buffalo and its moneyed families that controlled big business were still struggling to figure out why downtown was vacant. They looked to solve these problems through large, expensive, and disastrous urban renewal policies, which planners and politicians saw as the only way to make real effective change for Buffalo. The City Planning Association thought that nothing less than a complete remodeling of the central city was necessary; this would result, they said, in a “clean slate,” involving the removal of hundreds of acres of old buildings and “blighted” neighborhoods. The city was desperate for a silver bullet solution, for anything that could quickly remedy the vacancies, the loss of investment in industry, and the ‘white flight’ that was taking place. They saw a massive overhaul as the answer. Urban renewal wreaked havoc on Buffalo – all in the name of saving the city. Articles from the late 1960s in Buffalo recognize failures of urban renewal efforts to generate the change they promised; these failures led to a vast majority of razed neighborhoods and of buildings sitting vacant (Baldwin 1968).

Allentown, an artsy, creative neighborhood, had a few activists who were appalled by the demolitions occurring all around and within their neighborhood. They organized the Allentown Association, based on the understanding that the future of the neighborhood was intimately tied to the integrity of its historic fabric, including a number of large Victorian houses. The result: throughout the mid-1960s, the population actually grew. Goldman (2007) highlights a 1970 article in which the journalist writes: “The historic, preserved aura of Allentown’s buildings…give its residents a sense of deeper roots.” Out of the preservation activism in Allentown, the Landmarks Society of the Niagara Frontier was founded in 1966. Buffalo’s landmarks preservation ordinance was adopted in 1974.
Nevertheless, the 1970s were to bring heavy losses to the city—namely the loss of the steel industry, eroded by foreign competition, which spurred the laying off of tens of thousands of workers over the decade and into the early 1980s.

During the 70s and 80s, tax bases shrank, expenses soared, and people left by the thousands (Goldman 2007). There had been a chronic failure of leadership for decades, and opportunities for change and partnership—with the African-American population, for example—had been lost or left incomplete (Dillaway 2006). Still, planners in Buffalo continued to develop plans bought into by the naïve and desperate political leaders of the city. They used federal redevelopment funds to prepare land for more silver bullet solutions: downtown, large scale projects, hotels convention centers, highways, and covered malls, which planners saw as leading to population growth and economic revitalization.

Meanwhile, real and lasting renewal was happening by the increasing efforts of historic preservationists, who knew that preservation worked. Throughout the 1970s, as threats to historic resources from urban renewal and decline continued, preservationists advocated for and successfully gained a number of National Historic District designations. Four more districts were designated in the following two decades. Preservation continued to strengthen through the 1980s, when preservationists successfully averted multiple attempts to demolish Louis Sullivan’s 1896 Guaranty Building. The Guaranty Building now stands as a testament to preservation efforts in Buffalo (Preservation Plan Program Report 2004).

Throughout the 1980s, the fledgling preservation movement gained momentum, creating historic districts and landmark designation to protect Buffalo’s important buildings.

Though the Landmarks Society of the Niagara Frontier certainly made preservation strides, it did not develop a robust membership with significant resources. By 1980, some
members felt that the organization had fallen into complacency by working from within the government, which they saw as lacking action and follow-through. Seeking a more activist-oriented approach to preservation, some members of the Landmark Society broke off to form the Preservation Coalition. They engaged in a more defiant and outspoken way. This garnered support as well as opposition. They were thus sometimes viewed as obstructionist.

The director of the Preservation Coalition then branched off to form his own organization: The Campaign for Greater Buffalo History, Architecture and Culture. All three groups remained active, but they weren’t working together, ultimately rendering each less effective and creating a divided preservation movement in the city. Meanwhile, Buffalo in the 1990s was a mishmash of failed federal projects, which encouraged continued out-migration. Most of those who continued to leave were young and white (Goldman 2007). The economy continued to decline during the early 21st century. Thus, downtown has been unable to keep steady businesses present. The city was suffering and preservation groups were in conflict and so in little position to help prevent the deleterious effects of shrinkage.

In the mid 2000s, Buffalo’s Convention and Visitors Bureau approached Catherine Schweitzer of the Baird foundation to suggest making a bid for the 2011 National Trust of Historic Preservation annual conference, which brought a lot of these groups and foundations together. The city of Buffalo won the bid. But in 2007, the National Trust was uneasy about coming to the city, owing to its three small, ineffective preservation group, which continued to work separately from one another. After a series of efforts, however, Preservation Coalition and the Landmarks Society combined forces to become Preservation Buffalo Niagara (PBN).
Preservation activism in Buffalo today encompasses people from a range of backgrounds, all focused on revitalizing the city’s historic architecture. In his article “Saving Buffalo’s Untold Beauty,” Ouroussoff (2008) writes: “today [Buffalo’s] grass-roots preservation movement is driven not by Disney-inspired developers but by a vibrant coalition of part-time preservationists, amateur historians and third-generation residents who have made reclaiming the city’s history a deeply personal mission.” Iconic historic buildings still remain vacant such as G.W. Post’s Statler Hotel and H.H. Richardson’s Buffalo State Asylum—though over the last 10 years, New York State funding has gone towards stabilizing the buildings. The city had been annually bailed out by state aid until 2001, relying on the state to counterbalance the loss of taxes due to population loss; but without ever doing any internal restructuring of its own, the city had not used these funds efficiently for the purpose of reversing or holding off shrinkage. Thankfully, Buffalo’s real estate market was spared the housing bubble. And so the city didn’t experience a surge in foreclosures as in Cleveland (Dugas 2010).

**Demographic Changes**

Today, Buffalo is at the forefront of the shrinking city discussions, as population and industry declines have left it with an abundance of vacant buildings and vacant land. From its population peak of 580,132 in 1950, 2008 American Community Survey estimates Buffalo’s population at 270,919. As seen in the table below (Fig. 2), white populations continue to diminish and the African-American population continues to rise. Vacancy rates have climbed each decade, with a sharp increase between 1970-80 and 1990-2000. As of September 2010, US Postal Service data estimate Buffalo city’s vacancy rate at 15%, with
As of 2009, American Community Survey data reveal that Buffalo is the third poorest city in the nation, with a poverty rate of 28.8% (New York Post 2010). While some neighborhoods in Buffalo are thriving—with steady housing prices, strong commercial corridors, and low vacancy rates—others are severely distressed. Main Street, which begins at the base of downtown and runs northeast through the center of the city, has continued as the characteristic divider between the West Side and the East Side of Buffalo. Each side consists of multiple, small neighborhoods, each with varying degrees of relative strength or weakness, as measured through vacancy, housing prices and remaining density.

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4 Vacancy rates are difficult to calculate accurately. There are many reasons a building becomes empty. For example, a person may walk away from a house in foreclosure, but the time between this departure and when another entity takes on the property can be expansive. One method for calculating vacancy is through counting chronically undeliverable addresses through the US Postal Service. Addressees not collecting their mail for 90 days or longer are considered chronically vacant. Once a property is demolished, it is no longer considered an address. (Source: Partnership for Public Good, Monthly Forum presentation, October 19, 2010)
Today, Buffalo is composed of thirty-two neighborhoods (Fig. 3). Some are relatively stable, while others are distressed. Stable neighborhoods, where housing costs in the residential areas are relatively strong, are located primarily in the center and...
northern parts of the city. These include Allentown, Elmwood, North Buffalo, and North Park. Strong property values are found along primary arteries west of Main Street that include Delaware Avenue, Elmwood Avenue, and Richmond Ave (Fig. 4a).

Allentown and Hamlin Park are two of Buffalo’s thirty-two neighborhoods that are designated National or Local Historic Districts. Portions of Downtown and the Delaware District are also designated districts. The majority of built structures within the city of Buffalo are older than 50 years. This is a benchmark, in consideration of eligibility for landmark designation on the National Register of Historic Places.

Transitional neighborhoods include the West Side, Hamlin...
Park, and the Fruit Belt. The city’s most severely distressed neighborhoods are located in the East Side, which comprises multiple smaller neighborhoods (Fig. 4b). Distressed neighborhoods, such as Polonia, referred to as Broadway-Fillmore by most interviewees, and areas farther east within the East Side; they are struggling with high vacancy and abandonment. These areas are pockmarked with vacant land resulting from rampant demolition. Figure 5 illustrates where vacancies are most prevalent in Buffalo through mapping chronically undeliverable addresses by census tract. The results support the claim that the East Side is struggling with high vacancy rates. The darkest shaded tracts are in the neighborhood of Broadway-Fillmore.

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**Fig. 5** Percent of vacant and chronically undeliverable addresses by census tract in Buffalo.
ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The City of Buffalo is divided into nine Common Council Districts, each of which is represented by a Common Council member. The Council is vested with the legislative powers of the city, while the Mayor retains executive powers, including veto power. The number of Council members has been reduced since 2002—from thirteen to nine—as a result of redistricting after the 2000 US Census population figures showed major declines. The Council is a critical piece of the City’s infrastructure. And in Council President David Franczyk, who has drafted legislation and advocated for causes around historic preservation during his 25-year tenure, preservation has a strong ally.

Buffalo’s city preservation branch is the Preservation Board, housed within the Office of Strategic Planning. It is composed of eleven volunteer members and a non-voting Secretary. Their overall responsibilities include those typical of a city-level preservation office: reviewing permits for alterations, renovations, and demolitions; enhancing the historic distinctiveness of the city; and working to protect and maintain the historic landmarks of the city (Steigman 2009). The Common Council ultimately decides upon the designation of landmarks or historic districts. Michele Brozek Knoll, Senior Preservation Planner, and Paul McDonnell, Chair of the Preservation Board, were interviewed for this study.

Preservation Buffalo Niagara (PBN) is the city’s primary preservation organization that is working to address the issues of preservation. PBN is a group that many are looking to establish a needed preservation base in the city for the purpose of launching several efforts related to preservation. The group is small, essentially a three-person operation, but with a strong board and a membership of more than 1000. PBN’s executive director,
Henry McCartney and Andrea Rebeck, a Preservation Specialist working with PBN as a field representative for the National Trust, were interviewed for this study.

People United for Sustainable Housing (PUSH) is a grassroots community-based nonprofit organization focused on a 25-block area within the West Side bounded by Richmond Avenue, 14th Street on the west, West Ferry Street on the north, and Vermont on the south (Fig. 6). The organization’s goals include developing affordable housing and community capacity building through the acquisition, rehabilitation, and redevelopment of vacant housing units for low-income residents. PUSH was co-founded by Eric Walker, a community activist, and Aaron Bartley, a Harvard Law School graduate and native Buffalonian who returned to Buffalo to improve living and working conditions in Buffalo.
neighborhoods. Their West Side focus was initially determined by the purchase of a single house at City auction, and it happened to be on Massachusetts Avenue, a primary corridor diagonally dissecting the current PUSH boundary area. As of January 2011, PUSH owns 45 parcels of property—23 buildings and 22 vacant lots—and they have developed eleven units of affordable housing, with many more in progress (Fig. 7). PUSH aims to demonstrate itself as a model of community development that holistically addresses the needs of a neighborhood—this includes rehabilitation, job training for local youth, and vacant lot redevelopment. It seeks grants and public financing for its efforts. They are looking to build a sustainable organization that can deliver services to the community and that can attract a continued flow of funds for neighborhoods. While the city has assisted PUSH’s agenda in some ways, the majority of PUSH’s funding and support has come through organizations like Buffalo LISC and from state and national level programs. Aaron Bartley was interviewed.

The West Side Community Coalition is a second grassroots organization whose neighborhood revitalization efforts are also focused on the

Fig. 7 Two examples of PUSH rehabilitated buildings, converted into affordable apartments (top) and undergoing rehab (bottom).
West Side. The WSCC’s efforts have moved strategically west from Richmond Avenue since being founded eight years ago by Harvey Garrett. The WSCC takes a block-by-block approach to revitalization, addressing each block’s individual issues and finding solutions for each building along the way (Fig. 8). This involves holistically addressing issues that affect residents and designing a plan around that, which can include painting boarded up houses, organizing neighborhood clean-ups of vacant lots, getting drug dealers evicted, and pushing out crime. Garrett then helps the neighbors on each block form a block group to take over the monitoring and protecting of their own block, allowing the WSCC to continue moving their work west. The WSCC is not looking to build a long-term, traditional staff organization nor does the group directly seek funding to grow its capacity. The perspective of the WSCC, which is not and does not claim to be traditional preservation organization, is about empowering individuals to take action to change and invest in their own neighborhood, rather
than waiting for the city to do it for them. Harvey Garrett was interviewed.

In Buffalo, additional interviewees included Jennifer Sepulveda, Community Planner in the Office of Strategic Planning (OSP); Anthony Armstrong from the Buffalo Local Initiative Support Coalition (LISC), a group that is active in community-based and citywide revitalization efforts; and Michael Skrebutenas, President of the New York State Office of Housing Preservation, who is also a key actor in the Sustainable Neighborhoods Initiative (SNI).
By the 1840s, Cleveland had joined Buffalo and Detroit as a dominant Great Lakes city in trades such as wheat and flour. It was also ripe with raw materials like ore, coal, copper, stone, and sand (Poh & Wheeler 1997). Canals were the predominant mode of transportation and a defining attribute until the mid 19th century, when railroads became the connective tissue between Cleveland and other cities, laying the groundwork for it to become a major industrial hub. As Cleveland grew, with an influx of Irish and German immigrants, so did manufacturing industries producing machinery, iron and steel, railroad equipment, and oil refineries.\(^5\)

But the late 19th century brought significant unrest among Clevelanders. Populations were doubling every decade from 1870-1900; this led to significant unemployment, even with the rapid expansion of industry. Municipal leaders and city services had not been keeping up with the needs of city residents. This unrest led to a series of actions, including strikes, that led the city to make small steps in addressing concerns, leading to a sewage overhaul, reservoir construction, and the development of electric streetcars. The ill effects of industrialization were already being felt. As railways extended outward, those with money were able to leave the city center, where buildings were more densely packed, for the fresh air and more open landscapes of neighborhoods like Glenville on the East Side. This led to the rapid stratification of the city along class lines (Poh & Wheeler 1997).

The Cleveland Industrial Exposition of 1909 showed off the city as a leading manufacturing center, with production of iron, steel, castings, automobiles and automobile

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\(^5\) Cleveland gave rise to John D. Rockefeller of Standard Oil.
parts as dominant industries. World War I prompted a demand for goods, but it also stripped Cleveland of able-bodied young men. Coupled by quota restrictions on immigration, the war opened the door for southern African-Americans to fill the need for manual labor. Prior to this, Cleveland’s African-American population was quite low, hovering around 1% of the total population (Poh & Wheeler 1997). This period saw neighborhoods in a state of flux and saw the development of the ‘black ghetto.’ Post-war years saw an increase in discrimination and residential segregation. In 1930, Cleveland was the 6th largest city in the nation at 900,429. But the Great Depression hit it hard, and the following decade brought the first instance of population loss (of roughly 22,000). Despite these declines, the city continued to sprawl outward and build new highways, creating further incentives for families that were able to leave the increasingly crowded and polluted city for the suburbs.

Following WWII, demand for housing ballooned and the suburbs were targeted for expansion, with four dwellings built in the suburbs for every one in the city, and retail businesses followed (Poh & Wheeler 1997). As middle class whites left for the suburbs, African-Americans from the south continued to fill the need for wartime work and began to leave traditional black neighborhoods for Hough, Glenville, and others that had been traditionally white. But as the city was focusing on how to make the central business district downtown more attractive to shoppers, racial tensions were growing in the East Side neighborhoods, erupting in riots in the mid-1960s. This was a major factor that encouraged further retail and ‘white flight’ to the suburbs. Neighborhoods were emptying and neglected, downtown was struggling, and Cleveland responded with the largest urban renewal program in the country—encompassing 6,000 city acres of land clearance. Freeway
construction not only compounded demolition and displacement, but it also facilitated travel further into the suburbs and relegated industry to the periphery of the city.

By the 1970s, large industries were relocating elsewhere. Plants closed, retail had declined significantly, the transit system was in financial ruin, and population losses increased. This left behind a more “dependent” population of less wealthy individuals (Poh & Wheeler 1997). At the same time, historic preservation was formally establishing itself in the city. In 1971, the Cleveland Landmarks Commission was established “to safeguard the heritage of the city by preserving sites and structures of cultural, social, economic, political and architectural history” (Van Tassel & Grabowski 1996, p 224). In 1972, a trio of Cleveland residents formed the Downtown Restoration Society over their shared concern for the rapid demolition of Cleveland’s historic buildings (clevelandrestorationsociety.org/about/history). Three years later, the group’s name was changed to the Cleveland Restoration Society and the organization continued to build a professional staff and a good reputation.

Meanwhile, as with many ailing cities, public subsidies were being offered to attract new developments on land cleared through the demolition of historic buildings. This plan did not remedy the problem and in 1978, depressed and emptied, Cleveland’s city government defaulted on $15.5 million in loans (http://www.ohiohistorycentral.org/). Poh and Wheeler (1997) state: “The legacy of urban renewal, poverty, violence, and despair could all be seen in the Cleveland of 1980.” While manufacturing continued to leave or close down, a new economic mix of service and health industries grew, and Cleveland was called “The Comeback City.” However, as in Buffalo, this meant that much of the uneducated blue-collar population was not participating in this growing sector. An article
from The Washington Post depicts two separate cities: “The New Cleveland is corporate headquarters, service and professional jobs, downtown construction, recreational and cultural amenities. The Old Cleveland is neighborhoods struggling against decay, double-digit unemployment, racial tension, factory closings, poverty and long-suffering schools” (Sinzinger 1986).

In 1980s, however, historic preservation was gaining momentum. Planning efforts, led by renown city planner Norman Krumholz, shifted gears to address the needs of the remaining dependent Clevelanders. Historic tax credits ignited interest in the rehabilitation of areas like downtown’s Warehouse District, in developing offices, coffee shops, and restaurants. Local community development corporations focused on neighborhood rebuilding, while the city focused its efforts on large-scale projects. Increasingly, from the 1960s onward, the community development movement had strengthened and number of groups increased substantially. The focus was on community organizing and housing rehabilitation, with support from Standard Oil and other philanthropic groups. During the 1980s and 1990s, Cleveland aggressively tried to develop its downtown, pumping hundreds of millions of dollars into shopping malls, sports facilities, and office buildings (Yin 1998). Also, by the 1990s, community development groups were feeling the pressure to direct themselves toward market-oriented real estate development to compete with the suburbs, perhaps setting the trajectory for Cleveland CDCs to focus more on big-picture undertakings (Yin 1998).

Throughout the 2000s, Cleveland’s population continued to decrease and vacancy rates continued to climb; demolitions were heavily used to try and combat the issues. Cleveland was hit early and hard by the foreclosure crisis in a way Buffalo was not.
Throughout 2007, Cleveland’s foreclosure rate was among the highest in the country; in 2009, it was estimated that 1 in 13 houses were vacant (Kotlowitz 2009). In the summer of 2008, Cleveland received $25.5 million in the first round of Neighborhood Stabilization Funds, and the city had to lobby to convince congress that “stabilization” meant large-scale demolition, and that they would plan to spend over half on razing 1,700 houses (Kotlowitz 2009).

**Demographic Trends**

From its position as the 6th largest US city in 1930, with a population peak at 914,808 in 1950, Cleveland’s population had fallen to 478,493 in 2000—the first time it had fallen below 500,000 in 100 years. The 2010 US Census results show a loss of almost 100,000 over the last ten years, falling below 400,000. As of 2009, American Community Survey data show Cleveland is the second poorest city in the US, with a poverty rate of 35% (New York Post 2010). The chart below (Fig. 9) shows that the white population has been steadily decreasing between 1970 and 2010 and that the African-American population has been increasing by about 3% a decade since 1980. Also important to note, despite the

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<td>43.8%</td>
<td>46.5%</td>
<td>50.7%</td>
<td>62.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Household Income</td>
<td>$11,883</td>
<td>$12,277</td>
<td>$22,448</td>
<td>$25,928</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Housing Units</td>
<td>264,053</td>
<td>239,433</td>
<td>224,311</td>
<td>215,856</td>
<td>207,536</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Occupied Housing Units</td>
<td>248,280</td>
<td>218,297</td>
<td>199,787</td>
<td>190,638</td>
<td>167,490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Vacant Housing Units</td>
<td>15,773</td>
<td>21,136</td>
<td>24,524</td>
<td>25,218</td>
<td>40,046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacancy Rate</td>
<td>5.97%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 9 Change in Cleveland demographics from 1970-2010. (Source: US Census, GeoLytics, American FactFinder)
total number of housing units decreasing each decade, at least in part due to demolitions of vacant units, the total number of vacant units continues to increase—with a dramatic rise over the last decade.

NEIGHBORHOOD OVERVIEW

A map of Cleveland neighborhoods is presented on the following page (Fig. 10). It is shown adjacent to a map from Cleveland’s Department of Community Development (January 2009), showing the density of vacant and distressed structures and underscoring the effects of shrinkage during this time (Fig 11). Stable neighborhoods include Ohio City, Tremont, and Detroit-Shoreway as well as some others in the western and southern portions of the city. Similar to Buffalo, Cleveland has an East Side, a general term for the expansive area of the city east of downtown (Fig. 12). According to Cleveland’s Neighborhood Market Typologies (2009), developed for the city to determine neighborhood investment strategies, many of the neighborhoods within the East Side are considered transitional or distressed, such as Hough, Central, and Glenville. For example Hough, 

Fig. 12 Vacant houses in the Central neighborhood (top) and a vibrant corner in the Tremont neighborhood (bottom.)
Fig. 10  Top: Map of Cleveland neighborhoods

Fig. 11  Bottom: Shades of red indicate areas with higher rates of vacant and distressed structures.
once a prosperous neighborhood with architecturally significant housing, suffered during the Hough Riots in the mid 1960s and in some ways never recovered. The upwardly mobile left soon after, and the neighborhood has become increasingly poor.

In Cleveland, a particular issue affecting preservation is the large size of some of the historic housing stock. Some of the city’s largest and architecturally significant houses are located in historically wealthy areas but in what are now some of Cleveland’s poorest neighborhoods, such as Hough (Fig. 13). The cost of heating such a large structure is too much for many families to bear. The effect: abandonment and subsequent decay of many of these structures.

Organizational Structure

Cleveland is divided into nineteen wards; each ward has an elected councilperson. The City Council can initiate legislation to develop citywide programs, and it has been active in addressing the problems of vacancy and abandonment. In addition, ward-based initiatives can be funded and supported through council people, and each councilperson is allotted a certain amount of discretionary funding to apply to projects of his or her choosing. These funds are often directed at projects that reflect the priorities of ward constituents. Each councilperson is highly involved in their ward, representing the needs and priorities of
their constituents at the city legislative level, and so the connection between neighborhood organizations and their councilperson is strong. The number of wards is determined based on citywide population, and each ward has roughly the same population. In March 2009, the number of wards was reduced from twenty-one to nineteen. There is an expectation that the 2010 US Census numbers (which show a further reduction in city population) will incite a further reduction, so that there will be one councilperson per 50,000 people (Kramer 2009).6

Cleveland has an abundance of community development corporations (CDCs) and similar neighborhood development groups (Kotlowitz 2009). There has been a push from a number of funding organizations (such as Neighborhood Progress, Inc., a powerful neighborhood development and revitalization organization) for consolidation among the CDCs in order to maximize efficiency of funding streams (Yin 1998). The reason for this is a matter of streamlining the effectiveness of funding from sources such as the Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) and Community Development Block Grants (CDBG). Funds are diluted when distributed through too many organizations; thus, funding has often been directed to a handful of stronger CDCs, while those that are weaker, and that sometimes represents needier neighborhoods, may go without. Despite their quantity, community development organizations are powerful in the city of Cleveland. Some CDCs tend to be more preservation oriented, such as those in the Ohio City and Detroit-Shoreway neighborhoods.

There are two primary preservation actors discussed in Cleveland: the city historic preservation arm and the primary non-profit preservation organization. Other preservation-
oriented groups, including CDCs, were not interviewed.

The city preservation arm is the Landmarks Commission, also an eleven-member board of “preservation-minded individuals” who serve a standard role of reviewing applications for demolition, conducting surveys of historic properties, and reviewing designation nominations for historic landmarks and districts. The Commission is housed under the Department of City Planning. Final decisions about landmark designations are made by the City Council. The Landmarks Commission Secretary, Robert Keiser, and the Commission Chair, Jennifer Coleman, were interviewed.

The Cleveland Restoration Society (CRS), founded in 1972, is a prominent and nationally recognized organization that is the leading non-profit historic preservation organization in the city. (The Director of Preservation Programs, Michael Fleenor, was interviewed for this study). Through their Historic Home Program, CRS directly addresses the issue of maintenance and reinvestment in historic homes. One component of this program offers free technical assistance to all owners of historic properties 50 years or older; this assistance includes determining preservation-friendly treatments on an array of issues, such as preventative maintenance, increasing energy-efficiency, and repairing or finding appropriate replacement options for historic materials. A second component is the Heritage Home Loan program that offers low-interest home improvement and rehabilitation loans to property owners whose homes are at least 50 years old, thereby encouraging reinvestment in historic properties.

The Heritage Home Program loans program is not a revolving loan fund. Instead, CRS has secured “link-deposit funds that buy-down traditional loan rates” through partnering with “City, County, and State governments and agencies.” This program has been
spotlighted nationally as a model for preservation loan programs (Getty Institute, 2004). The properties must be residential, but they do not have to be designated as landmarks or even within historic districts to qualify, making the program accessible to a wide array of homeowners. A Cleveland State University study (2006) demonstrated that CRS’s loan program will “benefit homeowners and the surrounding neighborhood as well” through increased investment, resulting in boosted property values. Within the City of Cleveland, CRS’s powerful Heritage Home Loan program is only available to homeowners within wards where the councilperson has used his or her discretionary funding to support CRS. CRS does target wards based on a determination of whether historic integrity is intact enough for the loan program to contribute. But involvement has to be mutual between CRS and the contributing councilperson. Currently, their program is available in nine of nineteen wards. They have recently extended their programs to serve Cuyahoga County as well.

In Cleveland, non-traditional preservation actors interviewed include Terry Schwarz, Director of the Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative (CUDC) out of Kent State and the Shrinking Cities Institute, which is working to develop sustainable approaches to vacant land reuse and to employ creative ways to become a smaller city—in doing so, these organizations are forerunners in developing rightsizing strategies. Wayne Mortensen, Enterprise Rose Fellow at Neighborhood Progress, Inc. (NPI), was also interviewed. His organization is an influential non-profit community development organization that works to strengthen Cleveland neighborhoods through an array of programs and services.

The following chapter examines where each city stands in terms of rightsizing, policy and organizational response, and how this affects preservation activity.
5. RIGHTSIZING: POLITICAL RHETORIC, POLICY RESPONSE, & IMPLICATIONS FOR PRESERVATION

“Demolition is a tool, not a strategy.” –Harvey Garrett, 2011

This chapter aims to frame the complexities of rightsizing, so that it becomes clear where each case study city stands in its approach to the topic, and in order to provide an overview of how agencies and organizations are responding to rightsizing.

Neither Mayor Brown of Buffalo nor Mayor Jackson of Cleveland has officially adopted a rightsizing policy or an open discussion of rightsizing as a citywide approach in response to the issues facing their shrinking cities. Both cities have had strong demolition campaigns, which are in essence rightsizing by default rather than strategic approaches to the issue. Demolition is a necessary component of any rightsizing effort, but optimally it is a tool to be used as part of a larger, strategic plan. Such a plan was not present in Cleveland. In Buffalo, however, Mayor Brown attempted to develop such a plan in his “5 in 5” program (discussed later in the chapter), but it failed to act effectively as a cogent citywide strategy.

Multiple interviewees in Buffalo expressed desire for a strategic rightsizing plan, which would be a guide for how agencies and organizations could tailor their own responses. Michele Brozek Knoll, City of Buffalo Senior Planner Historic Preservation states: “We don’t really have an actual policy of that, so it’s sort of like this unspoken cloud of an idea that’s hovering.” Knoll goes on to say that she wishes there were a more of a direct statement or policy coming from leadership that would define rightsizing as something they are specifically working on.
Anthony Armstrong of Buffalo LISC states: “the first thing necessary to talking about rightsizing is what has happened with the people who are in the neighborhood, whether they want to be there or not, that’s got to be the primary thing. Behind that is the existing [physical] fabric and what becomes of it.” He goes on to highlight the disappearance of neighborhoods and the long shadow of urban renewal that hangs over discussions of rightsizing. Harvey Garrett of the WSCC adds: “Right now we’re losing everything; it’s just killing everybody.” He goes on to say: “To save this stuff in a shrinking city, you’re going to have to lose that stuff, but if you sit around all day long and just not make the decision on what you’re going to do, then you lose everything. So there’s gotta be a plan.”

According to Knoll, the current administration does not like the term “shrinking city” because the Mayor feels that it implies he will be “abandoning parts of the city and forgetting about people.” Jennifer Sepulveda, Community Planner at the Office of Strategic Planning, who echoes Knoll’s understanding of the Mayor’s concerns, states that, by looking at where demolitions are being focused, the issue at hand is the telling of a story about abandoning areas and of rightsizing, but no one is willing to call it that. While the city has largely officially ignored confronting the issue of rightsizing, it has been happening in other ways, sometimes by default, states Aaron Bartley, Executive Director of PUSH. Demolitions and abandonment are permanently altering the physical landscape. Buffalo’s “5 in 5” plan is an example of a reactive response to the larger problem of an abundance of vacant housing; but it lacks a more holistic and forward-thinking strategy. It also lacks collaboration with other affected groups, such as preservationists and neighborhood organizations.
Buffalo has also been the target of rightsizing efforts from outside the city sphere through Blueprint Buffalo (Schilling, et al. 2006), an extensive report that put forth recommendations for how Buffalo could be “the nation’s first Living Laboratory for vacant property reclamation.” The report also contained a few preservation-friendly components. Anthony Armstrong of Buffalo Local Initiative Support Coalition claims that the recommendations section of the report are still being considered by the Distressed Property Task Force, but that implementation of “leadership actions” outlined in the report and general impact on the city do not appear to be realized yet. This is understandable considering the Mayor does not seem comfortable taking hard positions.

Looking at Cleveland, one can see a more programmatic response to rightsizing in terms of addressing vacant land through the city’s comprehensive plan from the City Planning Department as well as from land bank authorities. This suggests that Cleveland has started to move towards a rightsizing approach on a citywide scale, though the language of rightsizing is not necessarily present. In Cleveland, there is collaboration between city planning and non-governmental agencies, including the Cleveland Land Lab and Neighborhood Progress, Inc., which have designed and published a report titled “Re-Imagining A More Sustainable Cleveland.” The report outlines strategies for returning vacant properties to productive use at the citywide scale. The Cleveland City Planning Commission adopted this report in December 2008. Additionally, the Shrinking Cities

7 Blueprint Buffalo is an extensive report that takes a regional perspective on the issues of vacancy and abandonment, land reuse, community building, and overall rightsizing. This regional revitalization strategy was created and researched by a team of experts from the National Vacant Properties Campaign, and it outlined action points that could be taken by leadership. The Erie County Distressed Property Task Force, comprising an array of public, private, and non-profit officials, has since 2007 provided a coordinating role and has “convened on a regular basis to outline priority initiatives for each sector to implement that would cut across municipal boundaries to combat the spread of vacancy and abandonment in the region, while returning neglected, tax-delinquent properties to productive re-use.” (Erie Buffalo Vacant Property Coordinating Council one-page summary.)
Institute collaborates with the CUDC and Cleveland Land Lab on creative ways to reuse and highlight vacant spaces. Cleveland has over 20,000 vacant lots throughout the city, according to Terry Schwarz of CUDC. As a result, vacant land reuse strategies have developed successfully through non-profits and other organizations, and they have been supported by city officials (Lefkowitz, 2010). However, these various vacant land strategies are not necessarily “preservation” driven.

The city’s Department of Community Development also appears to have a well-developed set of programs, grants, and loans available that explicitly encourage rehabilitation efforts as a method of preserving neighborhoods. However, Mayor Jackson is not considered a passionate champion of preservation, according to Jennifer Coleman, Chair of the Landmarks Commission (Department of Community Development, city.cleveland.oh.us). The City’s The Division of Neighborhood Services, under which these loan programs are administered, lists the Cleveland Restoration Society’s Historic Preservation and Heritage Home Loan program as one of these loan programs. That seemingly small connection between the city and preservation organizations demonstrates recognition at the city level that historic preservation can be a component of neighborhood preservation.

Cleveland’s Storefront Renovation Program is an ongoing city-led program that benefits preservation efforts, revitalizes neighborhoods, and encourages commercial development. The program has been active since 1983. It is an exterior rehabilitation program, combining financial incentives with free design assistance using CDBG funds, and it is implemented through collaboration between the City and local CDCs. These rehabilitations have helped revitalize historic commercial corridors in tandem with
neighborhood historic preservation efforts, which bring pedestrian traffic and investment to the area. Everyone interviewed on the issue lauded the Storefront Renovation Program. However, with the program’s two primary leaders retiring, there is concern for how it may now change. This program is not a recent rightsizing response, and so it demonstrates an early, focused effort to respond to a need to address vacant storefronts. Again, while rightsizing is a term used in addressing the current discussion around shrinking cities, the problems of vacancy have been persistent for decades—and this is one response that Cleveland has developed.

Cleveland is also equipped with two land bank entities, which take on vacant, abandoned, and foreclosed properties—an essential rightsizing tool that shrinking cities have increasingly been turning to. The City of Cleveland has had a land bank since 1976—though it did not start handling a significant number of properties until 1988—that effectively handles vacant land (Alexander 2005). In 2008, the Cuyahoga County Land Reutilization Corporation (CCLRC) was formed. This is a countywide land bank, which, unlike city land banks, is administered by a non-profit with its own source of funding (Cuyahoga Land Bank Website: http://www.cuyahogalandbank.org/). Importantly, unlike the Cleveland land bank, the CCLRC does take on and rehabilitates properties with buildings. In Buffalo, Assemblyman Sam Hoyt, also a preservation advocate, has proposed the New York Land Bank Act.8 This piece of legislation would create the first land banks

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8 An earlier version of the bill was proposed in 2006 but ultimately vetoed by Governor Patterson. Dan Kildee, creator of the highly successful forerunner, Genesee County Land Bank in Flint, MI, helped Hoyt draft the measure. Land bank legislation would involve the city creating a “central repository for all vacant houses and lots,” which could then be sold to homebuyers or prospective developers. Any taxes collected after a property is sold would be split between the city’s general fund and the land bank (Sondel 2010). Hoyt and others believe that a land bank would enable Buffalo communities to take control of the properties and land around them and, rather than forcing the market to absorb property, banking it for a future use when it will be more beneficial to the neighborhood.
in the state of New York and is expected to pass the Senate and Assembly this year. The potential collaboration between land bank authorities and preservation organizations will be discussed in the final chapter: Recommendations for Next Steps.

Michael Fleenor, Director of Preservation Services of the Cleveland Restoration Society, claims that there is a progressive rightsizing vision for the City of Cleveland that includes new parkland and urban forests. Fleenor adds that “there will be neighborhoods of choice—that there will be neighborhoods that remain and neighborhoods that do not.” Here, he is speaking to a programmatic approach that is in essence rightsizing—by focusing municipal resources in targeted areas. Creating “neighborhoods of choice” is a goal that Mayor Jackson has espoused in the report, Rebuilding Cleveland: 2010 Five Year Capital Improvement Program (February 2010).

While many aspects contribute to the tapestry of what makes a desirable neighborhood—e.g., schools, proximity to transportation and grocery stores—neighborhood character and a sense of place are components that historic building stock can uniquely offer. ‘Neighborhoods of choice’ necessarily means talking about what aspects make a neighborhood attractive to people who choose to stay in the city, and it means attempting to connect preservation to this citywide goal. Fleenor adds: “If you look at what are going to be the neighborhoods of choice, especially in a city like Cleveland, where people just continue to leave, the neighborhoods that are doing well are neighborhoods that have good historic building stock.” Buffalo’s Mayor Brown also proposed a ‘neighborhoods of choice’ program in 2007, though it does not appear to have resulted in any measurable impact, and it also appears to have been absorbed into other programs.

Jennifer Coleman, Chair of the Cleveland Landmarks Commission, presents an
alternative view to the rightsizing discussion. Coleman says there can only be so many big cities and that this current phase in Cleveland and others’ development is part a larger struggle to define what it means to be a “midsized city” in the United States. She indicates that “it’s such a romantic idea of shrinking cities, but cities will contract naturally and they grow naturally. Cleveland went through an amazing boom; we overbuilt and did not necessarily plan well.” She espouses the need to focus on the urban core, drawing a diverse population and achieving a critical mass, as the important step now.

Once primarily an advocacy group, Cleveland Restoration Society (CRS) established a receivership arm in 1992 that allows groups to legally take responsibility for threatened structures and make necessary repairs. They can either put a lien on the property against the owner or sell the property themselves. Fleenor says that CRS only participated in a few receiverships (Fig. 14) but stopped about ten years ago partly because the process of finding new owners for properties was incredibly time consuming. Keiser of the Landmarks Commission says CRS’s receivership arm was a strong tool for protecting buildings, and he wishes CRS could continue.
that piece of their operation. Keiser suggests that this level of intervention could also be achieved by local CDCs taking on abandoned or neglected properties, and then working with CRS to rehabilitate them in preservation-friendly ways.

In Buffalo, there is discussion around encouraging similar development or receivership capabilities with Preservation Buffalo Niagara (PBN). The growth of a development arm of the organization is highly anticipated by many as a critical piece that could allow PBN to take on more bricks-and-mortar projects—in other words, it would involve physically intervening in order to save buildings. On paper, a development branch currently exists but is lying dormant while other critical pieces of the organization are strengthened first. Though the exact structure of this branch is not fully known yet, it would involve a component like a revolving loan fund—e.g., a pot of money that could be used to purchase distressed buildings, rehabilitate them, and put them back on the market, and then reinvest those funds back into the pot. The development of this arm would allow for targeted preservation efforts aimed at specific buildings in specific neighborhoods. This could make big strides for preservation in Buffalo. However, to develop this capacity would mean designing a program and attaining initial funding—which Garrett feels optimistic about—and increasing staff capacity as well.

Cleveland has an established preservation authority both at the city and non-profit levels that are in a strong position to adapt, react, and respond when necessary. Multiple interviewees indicated their confidence in the Landmarks Commission and especially in the extensive experience and multifaceted preservation programs, offered through the Cleveland Restoration Society, at the neighborhood level. Fleenor has been critically thinking about how historic preservation and rightsizing can interrelate, and has given a
presentation on the topic at the October 2010 Reclaiming Vacant Properties conference in Cleveland. That presentation highlighted CRS’s Heritage Home Program (HHP).

Organized historic preservation in Buffalo today is trying to define, establish, and strengthen itself—and there is a lot on the plate. Buffalo has a lot of preservation attention from within and outside of the city, and a growing group of people have vested interests in revitalizing the city’s architectural heritage. A history of conflicting non-profit organizations and a lack of cohesion have held preservation efforts back until quite recently, with the forming of PBN. But a great deal of confidence was expressed in Henry McCartney and Andrea Rebeck to lead PBN and lead the preservation of the city. Preservation today in Buffalo involves overlapping circles with non-traditional preservation efforts all in the name of one goal—to stabilize and enhance Buffalo’s neighborhoods. This important collaboration will be discussed in later chapters.

However, three important impressions of how Buffalo’s leadership is viewed emerged from current newspapers, online media, and interviews with local professionals and advocates; these impressions are important for understanding the dynamic between community organizations and city leadership (as conveyed through interviews). These impressions arguably speak to a level of apathy and powerlessness felt by local residents to tackle the problems the city faces in spite of lax leadership. Conversely, perhaps these same perceived shortfalls have also given rise to the strong leaders in community development and preservation initiatives.

First, Buffalo suffers from a lack of organized, targeted, and effective plans initiated and implemented at the leadership level. This frustration was expressed in multiple interviews, and it provides a pervasive impression that undermines the faith
in city leadership from every level. Rebeck remarks that “the city doesn’t like to have plans…but most people need plans” to effectively carry out goals. While plans such as the Neighborhoods of Choice program, among many others, are created to have the potential to affect change through targeting funds directly at neighborhoods, they frequently fall to the wayside or are lumped together with other initiatives, making them indistinguishable and ultimately ineffective. This directly affects the Historic Preservation Office arm of the city, whose efforts to complete “the preservation plan and make it officially a part of the city plan so there can be concrete goals” is currently underway.

Second, a perception of weak leaders for mayors over the last few decades is pervasive. Mayors have continued to make choices that focused on bringing silver bullet solutions in the form of big business that would benefit few and cost the city millions, while neighborhoods continued to suffer from disinvestment. This continuing trend fostered distrust in leadership’s ability to make real revitalizing changes for the city. Rebeck states: “there are a small group of people that are profiting from big growth projects, even though Buffalo is shrinking.”

Third, Buffalo suffers from what could be called, for lack of a better term, low self-esteem. According to those interviewed, this stems from an awareness of the city’s declining status, from a feeling of being forsaken by investment flowing to other parts of the state, from being known for “snow and cold”, and from an overall feeling of powerlessness to change the status quo. Both Garrett and Rebeck indicated that Buffalonians don’t know the value of their built environment because they have no frame of reference for how unique it is—what Garrett calls the “Buffalo bubble”—and this has hampered neighborhood preservation efforts. In an interview with Garrett, he emblemizes this ethos in an anecdote
about trying to understand the defeatist mentality in Buffalo:

I really had to think about what it would be like to live here for the past three decades with bad leadership that kept promising you things and not taking things away; watching your family move away, watching the jobs move away, watching your neighborhood fall apart, watching the crime increase. That’s what did it, that’s what created this massive depression and pessimism that exists.

At the same time, people in Buffalo share a strong sense of camaraderie and neighborliness. So much so, in fact, that in terms of traditional preservation, some neighborhoods’ buildings have been historically compromised because of what Rebeck refers to as “handymanitis:” alterations made over the years by working machinists and carpenters doing home repairs for themselves and neighbors.

The following is an example of a policy from Buffalo’s Brown administration, illustrating the frustration actors working and living there feel, and speaking to an acknowledged lack of coherence in programmatic responses to rightsizing.

THE “5 IN 5” PLAN

Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown’s “5 in 5” plan was created to address what his administration saw as one of the most important issues facing the city: vacant and blighted properties. It was a citywide policy approach to rightsizing, but it incited backlash from many preservation-oriented groups and individuals—including State Assemblyman Sam Hoyt, a long-time advocate for historic preservation—as it was seen as so heavily weighted towards demolition. The negative publicity the plan received set the framework for Buffalo’s demolition crisis, as many perceive it, and so it is important to discuss this critical piece of city policy.
The “5 in 5” plan, announced in August 2007, called for the demolition of 5,000 properties in five years, a goal Brown indicated would bring the vacancy rate in buffalo closer to 5% and require $100 million in funding over the 5-year period (Policy Briefs from the Brown Administration, 2007). This plan, according to the Mayor’s 2007 policy brief, would accelerate Buffalo’s economic revival by “removing blight and opening up shovel-ready sites for new investment.” While demolition is not a new strategy in Buffalo—more than 2,000 buildings were demolished between 2000 and 2007 (Belson, 2007)—the Mayor’s plan pledged to focus demolition efforts first at the most dilapidated structures and those around schools which presented the greatest safety threats.

But the “5 in 5 plan” was seriously criticized as being a demolition-heavy approach to addressing the city’s problems that lacked a cohesive overall strategy. Grassroots organizations, philanthropic groups, preservationists, and planners criticized the plan as relying too heavily on scattershot demolition rather than sound planning that also included rehabilitation (Fairbanks, 2008; Belson 2007). Brown later added a goal of rehabilitating 500 houses in five years. Jennifer Sepulveda, Community Planner in the Office of Strategic Planning, counters that the “perception is that Buffalo’s strategy is a demolition-only strategy and anti-preservation.” She cites owner-occupant rehabilitation assistance, emergency repair funds, and City acquisition, rehabilitation, and resale as efforts that the city makes to support preservation activity. Sepulveda goes on to say that Buffalo has such a big problem with vacancy that demolition is one tool the city has to deal with it.10

9 The cost of demolishing a building is $15,000 according to Jennifer Sepulveda of the Office of Strategic Planning, though estimates range from $10,000 to $20,000 depending on the source consulted. Costs of maintaining vacant properties to the city include nuisance reports, inspections, maintenance and mowing, foregone taxes, and eventual demolition; these are estimated to cost the city of Buffalo $12,000-20,000 over a period of five years (Schilling, 2008).

10 Sepulveda indicated that roughly four rehabilitations used HOME funds in 2010. She also cited that the City of Buffalo spends $2.2 million a year to maintain vacant lots.
majority of other interviewees indicated that the lack of any strategy for where demolitions could be targeted, for the purpose of achieving broader redevelopment goals, was a major grievance they had with the “5 in 5” program.

Funding for Buffalo’s demolitions has come from a mix of city and private sources. Over half has come through New York State (Sondel, 2010). RestoreNY, a statewide funding program developed by Assemblyman Sam Hoyt, and targeting neighborhood revitalization, was aimed at attracting people, businesses and industry back to cities through a mix of “rehabilitation, restoration, deconstruction, and demolition to strategically strengthen neighborhoods (Hoyt on the Brown Administration, 2008).” It was allocated based on each city’s application for funding and dispersed in three rounds until the program was stopped due to state budget cutbacks. But Buffalo used the majority of its RestoreNY funds, ironically, for demolition, for which it was highly and publicly criticized, and which fed the perception that Buffalo was looking to demolition as its only approach to rightsizing rather than long-term revitalization strategies. RestoreNY, however, was never supposed to be about demolition, according Andrea Rebeck of Preservation Buffalo Niagara.

Assemblyman Hoyt, prior to the third and last round of RestoreNY applications, had this to say about Buffalo’s use of the program’s funds:

To date, the City of Buffalo has used RestoreNY funding primarily for demolition of properties, and even that has not been done in a particularly strategic way… What is the point of bringing big business to our City if we do not have affordable, thriving neighborhoods where people would choose to relocate to work and raise a family? That is the only way to create the holistic economic development that will truly restore Buffalo to what is should be (Hoyt on the Brown Administration, 2008).11

11 Buffalo ultimately received $7,635,526 from the third and final round of RestoreNY, saying that while demolitions would continue to closely follow the “5 in 5” plan for demolitions, it will also contribute to ongoing neighborhood strategies that involve “working with community-based organizations in restoring and preserving salvageable properties, including historic structures, for reuse” (Restore New York Communities Round III Project Descriptions, 2009).
Today, the “5 in 5” plan, while still active on the city ledger, has receded from prominence in the public sphere, due largely to the pushback it received and the dwindling funds the program has been able to secure. According to Sepulveda, the city has been forced to cut back from 1000 to 500 demolitions a year now because of the loss of RestoreNY funds, and because emergency demolitions come out of city funding (J. Sepulveda, January 10, in-person interview). But Anthony Armstrong of Buffalo’s Local Initiatives Support Coalition (LISC) says that the city was already demolishing 600-700 a year prior Mayor Brown’s “5 in 5” program announcement, and that a goal of demolishing 1000 housing units a year was already outlined in the city’s 2004 Comprehensive Plan. This essentially amounts to the Mayor repackaging what was already on the books in order to have something to show as part of his term in office. With the demolition funds drying up, the city is doing essentially what it had been prior to the Mayor’s plan.

This slowdown of rampant demolition due to the city’s lack of funds has allowed preservationists and community activists a chance to show the city that alternatives exist (Smith 2007). It is unfortunate, some indicated, that so much money was sought and spent on demolitions without a larger comprehensive plan for strategic targeting. Garrett states that “Buffalo is going to have to do some rightsizing, and instead of doing a ‘5 in 5’ plan, we really should have looked at what we can sustain as a shrinking city, and that does include taking whole neighborhoods off the grid.”

Although neither city has openly adopted a rightsizing plan and although neither city’s leadership body is openly calling their city a “shrinking city,” per se, Cleveland demonstrates that policy and collaboration is advancing the rightsizing discussion. This in turn has set the stage for historic preservationists to join the rightsizing discussion there. In
Buffalo, PBN is a relatively young organization working to solidify a preservation footing in the city. Buffalo’s political environment, as seen in the policy examples, is still geared towards growth and development with a poor track record of policy implementation. This affects how much rightsizing can inform preservation organizations in their work.

Connections between rightsizing approaches and urban renewal were anticipated, but interviewees did not make this connection immediately. In interviews, when similarities between these were drawn, they were met with concern that anything akin to urban renewal—by which both cities were enormously affected—should be avoided. But the lack of immediate connection was likely absent because, while current losses from demolition are substantial overall, they are still piecemeal. Moreover, the level of focused and targeted demolition efforts seen in urban renewal to clear swaths of room for redevelopment is just not present in either city.

In the following chapters, the reader will find that current preservation responses in each city are primarily addressing the symptoms of city shrinkage and are reactionary to policies (if they exist), rather than being a part of a larger rightsizing plan for reasons laid out above. In other words, while preservation responses to the problems of vacancy, demolitions, and struggling neighborhoods are more present than had been anticipated, they have been found to be piecemeal approaches rather than part of a definitive “rightsizing” plan. This was also anticipated, as the field of preservation is still working to meet this challenge—which takes different forms in different cities—and this is difficult without explicit support from leadership.

The following chapter discusses the concerns around keeping historic preservation relevant in shrinking neighborhoods in shrinking cities. Examples from Buffalo and
Cleveland demonstrate how preservationists and grassroots groups are trying to find the balance between encouraging and enabling property investment, while holding on to and maintaining preservation values. Subsections within the chapter will examine the rehabilitation work of grassroots community groups and their overlap with preservation, the issues of window replacement and vinyl siding additions, and the use of building relocation as a preservation tool.
6. KEEPING PRESERVATION RELEVANT: RE-EVALUATING THE FLEXIBILITY OF STANDARDS

Many of those interviewed indicated that the stringency by which preservationists adhere to “white glove” standards is detrimental to the credibility and relevance of the field in shrinking cities. Preservation is too often viewed as “obstructionist” or “anti-revitalization”—a perception the field has been working to change perhaps since its inception. When historic preservation is viewed as burdensome, overly stringent, or a field limited to the wealthy, its relevancy in shrinking cities is reduced dramatically.

Terry Schwarz of the Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative says that historic preservation could be more influential if it were less stringent. She acknowledges that Fleenor of CRS understands this, but she believes that preservation as a field should be much more flexible:

If you spend all of your time planning house tours and window mullion profiles, that’s for the trees…At some point historic preservation is going to have to take a deep breath and deal, but if you expect things to be perfect you’re going to get demolitions.

Part of rightsizing is consciously adapting to the reality of a smaller city—e.g., less investment at every level, increased threat to particular building types, high vacancy rates, and increased demolitions. This chapter discusses the challenges to keeping preservation relevant and flexible on the ground in shrinking cities. The contrast across cities demonstrates how preservation has been adapting its responses to these challenges through flexibility and by embracing informal preservation efforts.

The most aggressive campaigns to address rightsizing issues are seen from two grassroots community organizations in Buffalo that are practicing informal preservation through rehabilitation and neighborhood stabilization work.
Informal Preservation: Pushing the Boundaries

In Buffalo, direct responses to the issues of shrinking neighborhoods have come in the form of non-profit grassroots community groups, which have targeted areas for direct neighborhood intervention. Their larger goals of neighborhood revitalization are producing informal preservation outcomes. While these groups do not take traditional preservation approaches to their rehabilitation efforts, the historic preservation community has been overtly supportive of their neighborhood work. This alliance exemplifies progressive preservation efforts in the face of immense challenges and losses. Grassroots organizers such as People United for Sustainable Housing (PUSH) and the West Side Community Coalition (WSCC) have taken the lead in Buffalo’s neighborhood revitalization for the reason that “[t]he city government isn’t doing things, and people get tired of trying to work from within the system,” states Andrea Rebeck of Preservation Buffalo Niagara (PBN). There is an acknowledged paucity of strong and effective CDCs in Buffalo. While Buffalo has a number of small neighborhood groups, some are more active than others or more preservation-oriented than others. Overall, claims Garrett, founder of the WSCC, they don’t learn from or even talk to one another.

According to Bartley, Executive Director of PUSH, the next step for Buffalo is to encourage both CDCs and for-profit developers to get better at what they do. “Everyone’s capacity needs to grow to do more work,” he states, referring to neighborhood development and community capacity building. He goes on to state that there is a lot of money being left on the table, in terms of tax credits, grants, and other available funding. He also adds that groups need to strengthen sufficiently for the purpose of seeking, receiving, and utilizing these funds to execute effective work.
In terms of addressing shrinking neighborhoods that experience high vacancy rates, Bartley looks at the CDC model as being able to strategically save as much of the built environment as possible. According to Bartley, while there are twelve CDCs in Buffalo, most are focused on counseling homeowners or acting as community centers, rather than being active in rehabilitation or redevelopment efforts. This is not to say that community development groups in Buffalo are not doing beneficial work for the neighborhoods they represent, but rather that the robust development of the CDC movement successfully seen in Cleveland and other cities such as Boston, New York, Chicago, and Rochester, did not develop in Buffalo. Interviews indicate that the stunted development of this movement may be due to political reasons. In Buffalo, interviewees indicate that support flows through political loyalty, inextricably tying financial support to groups that seek the Mayor’s backing through providing a voting constituency— which in Buffalo is frequently correlated with church congregations, especially in parts of the East Side.

Michael Skrebelenas, President of the New York State Office of Housing Preservation, indicated that many city mayors want to control CDCs and these types of development groups because “whoever controls real estate controls a lot of city power.” Skrebelenas goes on to say that it takes a certain kind of mayor and political class to see the potential in CDCs and to choose to support them outside of the reciprocal relationship of voter control and funding support. It is important for mayor’s to see that strong, robust CDCs are their vehicles for community and neighborhood change, rather than being threatened or feeling opposition simply because mayors do not control the board.

This analysis will center on Buffalo’s contribution to the discussion, as this genre of targeted grassroots-meets-preservation groups did not appear prominently in Cleveland.
According to Keiser, the city is lacking in grassroots organizations and is in need of a new generation who are willing to invest in neighborhoods through “sweat equity.” Coleman adds that Cleveland lacks urban non-profits that can “focus in on certain ideas and can run the charge instead of CDCs.” Cleveland CDCs are focused more on “big meaty things,” says Coleman, such as quality of life, how to put people back to work, partnering with large institutions such as the Cleveland Clinic, or creating “arts districts,” rather than on the creation of affordable housing or focusing on rehabilitations. Though preservation-oriented CDCs have done rehabilitation work, the CDC community in Cleveland is more established in contrast with Buffalo’s groups that are zealously working to address rightsizing issues from the bottom up.

PUSH and the WSCC are rehabilitating, rather than historically restoring vacant buildings that would otherwise likely be demolished. As a result, the overall neighborhood integrity, seen in the historic and architectural character of the built environment, is preserved. Neither group uses traditional preservation tools, such as historic rehabilitation tax credits, and neither is seeking landmark designations. But the broader preservation goal is there: the building is still standing, its embodied energy is preserved, and it continues to contribute to the block. The primary goal of their work is not to attain the sort of level of detailed historic preservation restoration as one can find in Buffalo’s Allentown or Elmwood Village. In those neighborhoods, the housing market is active, and detailed preservation work strengthens the value of those homes. According to Bartley, it is a “triage situation” on the West Side, where they are retaining what is salvageable to preserve neighborhood cohesion and, specific to PUSH’s mission, are also working to preserve affordable, quality housing for residents in this struggling neighborhood.
These two groups have focused strategically on the West Side, partially because of its proximity to stronger neighborhoods; therefore, such a focus is a tactical choice for drawing investment. Richmond Avenue, the threshold from which the neighborhood moves west, is lined with large, beautifully painted and fully occupied houses that sell in the hundreds of thousands. One block west of Richmond, however, the character of the West Side neighborhood starkly changes. There are vacant lots, houses are smaller and less ornate, and many are vacant or dilapidated (Fig. 15).

The group’s broader preservation goals are to preserve density as a key factor in revitalization of the neighborhood. Where viable, PUSH engages in the construction of infill housing. These houses are designed to be

Fig. 15 Houses on Richmond Avenue (top) and one block west of Richmond on Rhode Island Avenue (bottom).

12 The West Side, a large neighborhood in western Buffalo, was historically occupied by a working class Italian community and a more prosperous German Jewish population. In the 1970s, a Puerto Rican population settled in the Lower West Side (Dillaway, 2006; Goldman, 2007). While neighborhoods in the East Side had large cultural turnovers within the last sixty years, the West Side remained primarily working class, with German Jews eventually moving north to the suburbs. As manufacturing jobs dwindled and the working class population began to age, the West Side suffered severe population losses and disinvestment. Today, the West Side has seen a resurgence of immigrants, many from African countries, creating a diverse influx of young, working people interested in building equity in their homes and a stable neighborhood for their families. Despite this, Bartley estimates the vacancy rate of the West Side at 20-25%, compared to 15.7% average across the city of Buffalo.
appropriate in massing and lot size to surrounding buildings, but they are not “historically accurate.” Vinyl siding and new windows are components of new construction. When necessary, rehabilitations can also include vinyl siding and window replacement. This is not ideal, and preservationists at PBN wish this did not have to be the case. But to PUSH, who relies a great deal on public funding, these are the most cost effective methods. Bartley indicates that PUSH tries to be conscientious of appropriate color palates.

The WSCC is interested in building human capacity through block-by-block empowerment and stimulating investment through homeownership. Homeownership is the sustainable factor to breaking the disinvestment cycle, according to Garrett, and this is a premise of what the WSCC does. If a building can be saved, Garrett and block members will figure out a solution on a building-by-building basis. Solutions could manifest in the form of private investment into rehabilitation and then of lining up a buyer to do the rest for little more than cost, or in the form of getting another group with purchasing capacity, such as the West Side Neighborhood Housing Services (a group Garrett was once a part of), to purchase it for rehab. Only once, however, has the WSCC purchased a building themselves using private funding. The goal is to get buildings occupied, blocks stabilized, and create investment. Garrett does not impose any stipulations on homebuyers. Also, there is not any regulatory oversight, which means that historic features may be removed or that “inappropriate” additions may be constructed.

While neither the WSCC nor PUSH is restoring buildings in a traditional, preservationist way, they make deliberate choices to respect the architectural character of the buildings they save. This issue is compounded by the reality that many of the houses
these groups save from demolition have advanced to such a level of decay that primary features may be gone or their retention is fiscally unfeasible. These two group’s approach to neighborhood revitalization challenges some inherent definitions of historic preservation. While their respective approaches are quite different, the outcomes of their efforts fit into a broader category of preservation: they save buildings that would otherwise be lost (Fig. 16).

Garrett and Bartley both acknowledge that they have come to see their work as a form of preservation in a broader sense, though neither considers themselves as preservationists. But Bartley admits preservationists have supported and embraced their work, and this support cannot go unnoticed. The National Trust for Historic Preservation approached both Bartley and Garrett to be involved in planning sessions for conference. And in fact, each sits on the board of Preservation Buffalo Niagara, participating in preservation decisions for the city. Knoll calls their work “preservation by action,” and preservation professionals come over to the West Side to see their outcomes. Though Rebeck of PBN is not in favor of vinyl siding and window replacement, she appreciates the broader scope of preservation and community development work being done. Knoll, well-versed and experienced in traditional preservation tools, sums up the relationship of the WSCC and PUSH’s efforts to
The West Side of Buffalo...is much more preservation centric in their approach. Although they may not want to use the word preservation or historic preservation or use some of the terms we use typically, and they may be kind of shying away from traditional historic districts and the old tools that we have, really they’re doing historic preservation: they’re living and working it. They’re taking their buildings, reusing them, doing them right, reusing exiting building materials—so they’re doing everything that is historic preservation and not calling it that.

PUSH’s building rehabilitation efforts received a financial boost when they were chosen to lead Buffalo as the pilot project for the newly formed New York State Sustainable Neighborhoods Initiative (SNI) in 2010. The Sustainable Neighborhoods Initiative was crafted under the leadership of Michael Skrebutenas, then working as the Deputy Secretary for Housing and Community Development, out of the understanding that—for cities experiencing such dramatic losses on all fronts—there is no silver bullet solution. This program is important to highlight because it was a key piece of legislation that formally acknowledged, at the state level, that the way to address revitalization of cities was to stabilize and address housing issues at the neighborhood level.

As early as 2008, there was discussion amid Governor Patterson’s office around how to address Buffalo’s continuing decline. The city is an anchor for western New York and its problems of wide scale loss and abandonment have effects not only within the city but regionally. Though New York State was trying to focus some resources there, it was hard to invest in Buffalo in its current state, especially considering that New York State’s budget was also in decline. Michael Skrebutenas made a pitch that the state should invest in some neighborhoods with groups that could work in transitional neighborhoods—areas that are on the cusp of being distressed, but that, with the right investments, can
be tilted back towards stabilization. This tailored approach to neighborhood investment was a program category Skrebutenas said did not really exist, but it was well received by the Governor who was, at the time, running for reelection and looking for support from western NY voters. In his 2010 State of the State address, Governor Patterson endorsed it as one of the few new programs proposed, and it became the Sustainable Neighborhoods Initiative (SNI).

The program was designed as an urban revitalization approach “to create new, affordable, high quality homeownership opportunities by rehabilitating vacant and abandoned buildings and making them available to first-time homebuyers” and would encourage state agencies to work closely with community development groups (DHCR. "Governor Paterson Announces Sustainable Neighborhoods Program Is Moving Forward." Last updated February 10, 2010. (http://www.dhcr.state.ny.us/PressRoom/news100210.htm.)

While a few other Buffalo groups were considered, PUSH was selected to be the recipient of the first round of funding. State officials joined Aaron Bartley and others on walking tours of the West Side areas in which they had worked, and they were shown that PUSH was established and capable enough to exact visible and meaningful results. Bartley states that part of SNI was getting state officials to come and understand their model of energy efficient rehabilitation, vacant land reuse strategies, and community revitalization, and to see if it could be elevated statewide. With the successful efforts of PUSH behind it, SNI has now expanded to work in Utica, Rochester, and Syracuse. Though New York State has just elected Andrew Cuomo as the new governor, Bartley indicated that Cuomo has put SNI into his urban agenda, to which PUSH was able to positively and heavily contribute.
While SNI did not have a direct preservation aim, its goal had a preservation-friendly outcome—the retention and rehabilitation of existing structures. Skrebuteenas indicated that it was not their desire to get into the complexities of landmark designation in developing the program. But he acknowledged that a strong component present in the decision to focus on the West Side was its architectural appeal, that the neighborhood was “home-grown.” The West Side contains a lot of late 19th early 20th century worker housing that visually and historically characterizes the neighborhood. This type of housing has market appeal for buyers interested in historic building stock. This architectural character is something PUSH and Skrebuteenas, through the program, aimed to preserve.

PUSH has also received funds from a number of sources, including Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) funds, Community Development Block Grants, and other programs through the Department of Housing and Community Renewal. Bartley says that while NSP funds enabled the group to purchase properties, money for rehabilitation had to come from other programs, such as SNI. Some funding can be raised privately as well. While the City of Buffalo can’t sell the properties it owns to PUSH for less than market value, according to Sepulveda of OSP, when PUSH does get some funding for acquisition of properties, the City has assisted them in acquiring those buildings.

PUSH has in essence effectively bypassed the city level to find most of its support in Albany. The WSCC has also moved forward successfully without much support from the city. According to Garrett, “everyone is waiting for the city of Buffalo to do things;” he attributes that mentality to a time “when there was a political machine here in Buffalo that actually worked,” referring to a more connected system, such as exists in Cleveland, where elected committee members represented individual neighborhood needs at the city level.
Garrett goes on to verbalize the mentality of Buffalonians, as he understood it to be:

When you needed your sidewalk fixed, you knew who to go to. You knew that you would be voting for someone based on that person coming to fix your sidewalk. It was corrupt, but it worked. You couldn’t just call city hall and get someone to fix your sidewalk. When the political machine started breaking down because the resources weren’t there anymore, that person disappeared, and your connection with that machine started breaking down. So now you’re angry because there’s no one to go to to get that sidewalk fixed.

In her book, Power Failure: Politics, Patronage, and the Economic Future of Buffalo, New York (2006, p 44-45), Dillaway reinforces this understanding when she says that in neighborhoods, “‘community’ and politics were one in the same” and that “[w] ard representatives, political bosses, and patronage were the political party’s—and each neighborhood’s—lifeblood.”

To Garrett, “the question is: Do we rebuild the political machine… that broke or do we rebuild the mentality that you can do things yourself?” His position is that this is the most sustainable model because you do not need to rely on city or external funding. He also looks at the grassroots model as showing that change is possible despite “poor leadership,” which “we’re not going to have forever.” Garrett furthers: “not all leaders are bad, [Buffalonians] just don’t know what to ask for or demand.”

Informal preservation is also happening through individual action. The popular Sweetness 7 Café in Buffalo, started by a woman who chose a boarded up building on the West Side to start a business venture, is considered an example of a non-traditional preservation success story. Garrett sums up the success:

She is doing preservation, but does she think of it as preservation? No. And to me, that’s how we get people. We don’t need to have them feel like preservationists, we just need them to feel the value in the stuff that we have.
In her restoration efforts, she used reclaimed components from Buffalo ReUse, a group that salvages architectural pieces through deconstruction. Preservation Buffalo Niagara gave her a preservation award for her work (Fig. 17).

In Buffalo, we have seen that goals of preserving neighborhood density are allied with more traditional historic preservation goals of grassroots groups, though they are not using traditional preservation tools or mechanisms to achieve their goals. Demonstrating reciprocal support among these groups and preservationists works to integrate preservation into other facets of city change and revitalization. It also shows that the challenges to what is an acceptable approach to historic buildings are surpassed by a higher preservation goal in common: the retention of neighborhood architectural and historic character, form, and scale. Their actions involve getting people connected so that they can develop an increasing concern and care for their built environment, and so that they can view every single house and building as a potential asset to them and the neighborhood. This accordingly helps to foster the values of historic preservation without necessarily labeling it as such.

The work of these Buffalo grassroots groups is not traditional preservation; it is thoughtful rehabilitation within the

Fig. 17 Sweetness 7 Cafe and other retail stores and apartments in the West Side rehabilitated building.
practical and budgetary constraints of a non-profit. Both Garrett and Bartley are cognizant of the architectural and historic value of the buildings that these groups rehabilitate, and the two claim that these are assets in revitalizing the neighborhood as a whole—even if some of the efforts are antithetical to preservation (such as when vinyl siding is used). Their models can demonstrate different approaches that lead to a single successful broader preservation outcome: houses and buildings are preserved from demolition and a neighborhood’s density and physical character is maintained. And preservationists have gotten on board with and supported their models in Buffalo, as will be seen in greater detail in the next chapter. They have done so because in some ways so much needs to be done that preservationists cannot afford to be so “parochial” (a word Jennifer Coleman used to describe the Landmarks Commission in Cleveland). And with a lack of faith in mayoral guidance and support, Buffalo groups have in turn supported each other.

This kind of collaboration and alignment will continue to be key to advancing historic preservation efforts in Buffalo and elsewhere, and to embracing grassroots efforts and offering positive preservation guidance when possible. By preserving buildings from being demolished, these groups preserve not just density and physical structures, but they create a chance for traditional preservation work to take place in the future (should that be desired). For example, traditional preservation could take the form of designating individual buildings, a historic district, or offering technical assistance in maintenance in the neighborhood, such as CRS offers. But once a neighborhood looses building after building to demolition and decay, the cycle of abandonment will only be expedited, leaving hollowed out neighborhoods such as along the East Side. When this happens, historic preservation’s role in these areas becomes exponentially more difficult to define.
Shrinking cities, and within them transitional and distressed neighborhoods especially, are suffering from weak markets, disinvestment, and an array of other pressing issues like unemployment and poverty. These issues can affect the role that historic preservation plays in these neighborhoods. Original window replacement and the addition of vinyl siding to historic buildings are highly contentious issues, within the preservation community. The use of these materials is considered antithetical to traditional preservation ideals and is generally not acceptable within historic districts or in landmarked buildings. But they are often seen as affordable alternatives to maintaining wooden windows and siding. While these issues are not specific to shrinking cities, they are examples of preservation regulations that become particularly pernicious in declining cities. Considering the larger costs at stake—such as perpetuating disinvestment by property owners or furthering a negative perception of historic preservation’s benefits to a neighborhood and city, preservationists are having to make hard decisions.

Through this research, the issues of window replacement and vinyl siding additions became examples through which the increasing and necessary flexibility of preservation response can be seen in both cities. To illuminate this point, the discussion will look at a

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13 The common misperception that original windows are too difficult or expensive to repair, are not energy efficient, or unsafe is almost universal. Preservationists view windows as the eyes to the building, one of the first characteristics noticed. Original windows on older houses tend to be wood frame with any number of configurations of glazing—one over one, six over six, etc.—but are replaced with aluminum or vinyl windows which are known to have a 15 year lifespan before needing replacement. Therefore, when property owners want to replace their original windows, historic preservationists balk and cringe—and usually try to convince them otherwise.

The same can be said for a second typical alteration to historic buildings—vinyl siding. Many historic homes in Buffalo and almost all in Cleveland are wood-frame, which mean they have wooden clapboard and often shingle siding. This wood is visually attractive and a key original feature to historic homes. But a common alteration to buildings of this construction is the addition of vinyl siding which does not require the same level of maintenance and upkeep as wooden clapboards. Vinyl siding is considered by many to be a cost-effective alternative to painting and maintenance of wooden clapboards. This also is an alteration preservationists in both cities highly discourage, as it too obscures an important component of the historic building.
case study in Buffalo’s Hamlin Park and from CRS’s Heritage Home Loan Program.

**Flexibility in Historic Districts: Buffalo’s Hamlin Park**

There is a great deal of literature demonstrating higher property values, increased economic stability, and higher levels of diversity within designated historic districts. In a shrinking city suffering from overall as well as specific pockets of disinvestment, a reality is that there will be struggling neighborhoods overlaid within and around historic districts. Encouraging property investment is key to maintaining value, but regulations within historic districts on what investments are appropriate can cause friction. Responses within Buffalo’s Hamlin Park demonstrate a way in which the preservation community is addressing this conflict (Fig. 18).

Direct preservation response at the city level has come proactively from the Buffalo Preservation Board in response to Hamlin Park, a transitional and struggling neighborhood that also contains the only local historic district on the East Side. While historic districts in Buffalo tend to be very strong in terms of property values and overall cohesion, Hamlin Park Historic District continues to struggle. Hamlin Park, once primarily German and Jewish-American until post-war dispersion to the suburbs, became in the 1950s one of the first African-American middle class communities in western New York (Betha & Davison, Hamlin Park Neighborhood, Buffaloah.com). In 1998, residents aimed to protect their historic neighborhood from encroachment of nearby Canisius College and approached the city to request a historic district designation. Knoll claims, however, that “the tool they wanted wasn’t what they got; they wanted some controls, but they didn’t understand what it meant to be a local district.” Here, she is referring namely the level of preservation standards
that resulted from designation. Knoll further states that the “methods used to nominate the original district were so off” in terms of evaluating the boundaries and specific inclusion of blocks based on historic merit rather than on the neighborhood’s desire for protection.

Regarding the district’s composition, Knoll states: “There is a high level of integrity, there are pockets of really spectacular buildings, but it’s still a struggling neighborhood and many can’t afford the preservation standards.” But McDonnell, Chair of the Preservation Board, says the residents “don’t recognize what they have there.” The historic district designation and the restrictions governing that level of protection, such as the replacement of windows and the addition of vinyl siding, are seen as burdensome. Rebeck of PBN states these regulations are “causing residents to buck” against preservation. Garrett of the West Side Community Coalition supports this in
saying that “what [preservation] is asking them to do is hard; it is cheaper to put in vinyl windows than to rehab their wooden windows, it just is. No one is investing in their homes in Hamlin Park because to invest would cost so much more than the property is worth. So we’re encouraging a disinvestment cycle.”

In response, there has been a great deal of discussion around “downgrading” parts of the district from a local historic district to a less restrictive conservation district, sometimes referred to as “historic district-lite.” A publication from the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia discusses the “historic district-lite” districts as being reviewed against standards “that are similar to but more lenient than historic district-type standards” and as being divided into contributing and non-contributing buildings, much as a typical historic district would (2003, p 2). The contributing buildings would then be reviewed much like historically designated buildings are, while non-contributing buildings would be reviewed with a more lenient standard. These standards would be determined neighborhood by neighborhood. The report identifies that “[t]he key difference in this type of ‘lite’ district is that it would not have met the full criteria to be created as, but had elements of, an historic district” (ibid.).

A consultant has offered to re-study Hamlin Park to determine where a potential national historic district could be designated. From there, Knoll says she would be supportive of modifying the local historic district into a conservation district. Local historic districts have more control over alterations and changes than a national historic district provides because of a strict local review process. This strictness is the crux of the issue. Garrett adds that the WSCC can help support Hamlin Park’s needs:

14 Garrett describes a “disinvestment cycle” as something where people don’t invest in an area because of a negative perception, which leads to no one else investing because they do not see investment from anyone else.
Michele [Brozek Knoll] said there are some sections that should be conservation districts. Providing some additional tools to other sections, all the stuff that WSCC is doing are those other tools: remove blight, remove crime, encourage reinvestment privately. If we need a new tool, [we’ll] create it.

But a source at the National Trust for Historic Preservation is concerned that once this acquiescence is made in one instance, it will set a precedent for other neighborhoods who wish to not to be bound by the restrictive components of a historic district. This is a legitimate point, and one that must be considered. But to be effective and to stay relevant, preservation entities must make difficult decisions that balance the greater good, which preservation serves, and the real and consequential problems that a struggling neighborhood faces.

The Preservation Board has also taken a proactive step to address the window replacement issue in Hamlin Park. Homeowners within Hamlin Park were coming to the Board with proposals from Belmont, a non-profit organization that receives state money for assistance of low-income renters and homeowners, who were offering to replace their windows, sometimes for free, with vinyl. Of course the Preservation Board would say no, says McDonnell, “and then who looks like the bad guy.” The Board responded by initiating a meeting with Belmont to convince them to spend a little more money on new wooden replacements for the houses in Hamlin Park, rather than the standard vinyl. The Board determined two options of pre-made windows as acceptable for replacement when necessary. While this does not mean the Board will approve all homeowners for window replacement, this level of compromise in the face of a mounting problem was a proactive step, designed to assist homeowners within the historic district, while also maintaining a level of historic integrity.
Through the collective work of the city, non-profit sector, and community groups doing broad preservation work, targeted efforts help to bridge the gap between creating investment opportunities and contributing to preservation efforts.

**Heritage Home Loan Program and Window Replacement**

In Cleveland, CRS’s Heritage Home Loan program has also adapted in response to the problem of window replacement. Through their loan program, CRS has control over specs and the quality of the work done by funding recipients. But their methodology is not ‘white glove,’ according to Fleenor. Before Michael Fleenor became the director of the CRS loan programs, his predecessor had not allowed window replacement as a permissible use of the loan funds. Homeowners who have already replaced original windows with vinyl will not prevent CRS from helping with other components of restoration or repair—in other words, you are not punished for past deeds. According to Fleenor, sometimes you can convince people that their original windows are important and salvageable simply by informing them that there is a preservation-friendly repairperson who CRS recommends. But according to Fleenor, there are those that are set on replacement, so he decided to adapt the program to allow loan funds to cover window replacements. Doing so meant that CRS could have some preservation influence over the choice in style and material. Fleenor elaborates:

[Homeowners] think it’s the magic bullet, and if you turn them away, they will go out and choose the least compatible cheapest window replacement available. I saw us turning people away and then drive by two months later and there they have white vinyl window everywhere. And so my thought was if they’re dead set on replacements, at least if we’re involved with them we can make sure the replacements fit the house.
Keiser, Secretary of the Cleveland Landmarks Commission, says that unless “you’re talking about really fine pieces of Victorian architecture,” preservation does not need to be so strident about things like window replacement and vinyl siding, which are ultimately investments to keep their properties viable. Encouraging investment at all levels is critical to maintaining property values and keeping people in their homes. Vinyl windows can be removed and wooden clapboards can be preserved under the siding, Keiser says; so if a level of preservation detail is ever desired in that area, it can be restored. That said, restoration of these features from the onset can also be affordable and practical, and homeowners should be encouraged and educated towards this through education and outreach.

Keiser’s above statement is supported by some in the conservation field. According to George Wheeler, Director of Conservation Research at Columbia University, vinyl siding can often effectively preserve historic features underneath. Based on his experience in the field, Wheeler indicates the greatest risks to the covered materials are insect infestation and biological growth. Thus, while the addition of vinyl siding is not a preservation ideal, experts indicate it can be considered a reversible intervention from a long-term preservation perspective. In the face of significant lack of investment from personal property owners in struggling neighborhoods and a resistance to traditional preservation standards, flexibility around siding and window replacement can be looked at as short-term compromises for the purpose of achieving long-term goals.

**RELOCATING BUILDINGS: TRIAGE AND PRESERVATION**

The physical relocation of buildings is a highly contentious preservation issue. It is considered a triage mechanism, a course taken when all other routes for preservation of
a threatened building have been exhausted. Removing a building from its original setting jeopardizes the buildings historic significance by severing the ties to its historic context, and it leaves a void in the historic landscape left behind. Relocation also presents a threat to the physical integrity of the structure, which could be damaged during the move. All this can result in the structure being removed from or becoming ineligible for historic designation listings. Additionally, relocation can be an expensive and logistically complex endeavor. In a city with an already tight budget, moving a historic building is not likely to be a top priority. Preservationists argue that a historic building and its surrounding landscape often work together to convey the significance and integrity of the block, street, neighborhood, and city. This intimate tie between building and environment is the crux of the argument for why relocation should only be considered in triage situations. Encroaching development and real estate pressures are a common threat to historic buildings. Conversely, in shrinking cities, the threats faced by historic structures are neglect and decay rather than development pressures. And in some shrinking neighborhoods, the historic context is already significantly compromised, severing the tie between environments and buildings by default.

A diminishing population also means fewer churchgoers, and churches are becoming an increasingly obsolete and threatened building type. The Catholic Diocese has been making decisions to consolidate parishioners and close churches throughout the rust belt region. As this shrinking dynamic continues, preservationists are having to face tough decisions about the use of relocation as a tool for preservation.

An example in Buffalo revolves around the controversial sale, dismantling, and relocation of St. Gerard’s Church, a vacant 800-seat Italian renaissance revival basilica built
in 1911, to a parish in Norcross, Georgia (Fig. 19). Preservation advocates are split over the decision. The director of the Campaign for Buffalo History, Architecture and Culture, Tim Tielman, calls the project “a demolition and salvage operation. They want to harvest our architectural heritage and put it in a box (Hampson, 2010).” Tielman is trying to get the building landmarked by the city of Buffalo in an attempt to halt the relocation. But without future prospects for investment, what does landmarking do for the building but allow it to remain in place and continue to decay? The countering opinion comes from PBN, who has supported the relocation. In their 2009 statement, PBN states that this relocation is illustrative of the dilemma in Buffalo in that “[i]t highlights the city’s architectural richness while also underscoring our economic distress and shrinking population.” PBN goes on to say that finding a reuse for such a large structure is daunting, and while preserving the building in Buffalo would be ideal, it would require a great deal of work and investment that the city lacks. Thus, PBN states: “rather than focusing opposition on a unique situation involving one church…[Preservation Buffalo Niagara’s] energies will be better spent focusing on efforts to deal with the larger problem of vacant and soon-to-be vacant religious structures in Buffalo and surrounding areas (Preservation Buffalo-Niagara Statement, 2009).”

The Cleveland Restoration Society (CRS) is also contending with the issue of vacant religious
buildings. Their Sacred Landmarks Assistance Program realistically recognizes the challenges this building type faces in a shrinking city. Their program offers tailored technical assistance that directly addresses issues that religious institutions face in relation to the distinctive physical features of their historic buildings, such as stained glass, masonry, and unique roofing systems. CRS’s program also addresses a broader level of preservation intervention through their Sacred Landmarks Task Force that works with church owners and the Catholic Diocese to find adaptive reuses for vacant sacred buildings, and to align projects with available economic incentives, stating simply: “Our mission is to help preserve landmarks, and this work takes many forms.” Relocation of historic churches or other properties did not arise in Cleveland.

The variation in responses in both cities to a similar issue comes down in large part to the robustness of the preservation organizations. Buffalo’s response demonstrates that preservation organizations on the ground have limited powers of intervention beyond advocating for an outcome, especially when the building is not a current landmark. On the other hand, Cleveland’s non-profit preservation sector is more highly developed and has in place the infrastructure to intervene and address the issue on multiple levels. This does not mean that situations involving relocation will be avoided, but that for religious buildings, the program preemptively intervenes to address many of the issues that would cause a Diocese to consider selling a building to someone who would relocate it. The use of relocation as a preservation tool extends far beyond religious buildings.

Relocation of historic homes as infill structures in adjacent neighborhoods is a powerful way to combine the preservation of buildings and the achievement of increased density. In both pre- and post-Katrina New Orleans, relocation has been a tool used to save
buildings, and many preservationists have embraced it as a necessary preservation triage mechanism in the city (Jacobs 1988; Vogel 2010; Pratt 2010). Preservationists expect that at least 70 historic homes will be relocated to neighborhoods throughout the city to contribute to ongoing revitalization efforts there, as a result of clearing land to build a large VA Hospital (Pratt 2010).

Building relocation could also be a method applied to transitional and distressed neighborhoods in shrinking cities. Distressed neighborhoods are often highly vacant and their historic integrity has been lost or significantly compromised. But individual historic structures may still be present. Relocating these buildings from distressed and highly vacant neighborhoods into transitional neighborhoods can increase the physical density of the area. This in turn can draw people to move into or relocate to these neighborhoods, creating a critical mass to support investment and generate property taxes on lots that might otherwise sit vacant. It is a strategy that could work harmoniously with broader plans for focusing resources, redeveloping land, and for improving city services to particular areas.
7. PRESERVATION RESPONSE

Direct preservation response to rightsizing is limited because no focused rightsizing plan has been disseminated from the mayoral level, where a holistic, large-scale plan could allow for the development of a wider range of preservation responses. That said, preservation organizations at the municipal and non-profit levels—as well as non-preservation grassroots organizations doing informal preservation work—are in different ways responding to some of the symptoms resulting from demolition campaigns, city shrinkage, and the overall disinvestment that accompanies it.

BUFFALO’S PRESERVATION PLAN

While both Cleveland and Buffalo have current comprehensive plans that include a preservation component, neither city currently has a preservation plan. This level of preservation integration is highly effective in encompassing a holistic approach to citywide preservation (Kelly 2010).

Buffalo, however, is currently working to develop a complete preservation plan, headed by Michele Brozek Knoll, City of Buffalo Senior Planner of Historic Preservation. Preservationists in Buffalo are eager to have the plan completed. Completing and formalizing this plan can position preservation to have a strong base from which rightsizing responses can be crafted. With a plan at the city level, resources can be focused and prioritized, and preservation efforts can be targeted and strategic. It will also provide an added level of legitimacy to historic preservation at the citywide level. McDonnell of the Preservation Board and Rebeck of PBN both categorically agree that a preservation plan is an important next step for preservation..
Knoll states that a rightsizing tenor seems to be present in the city’s “zoning code, land use plan…and it seems to be kind of in our preservation plan.” While developing a preservation plan is not a response specifically related to Buffalo as a “shrinking city,” it is a direct effort to address preservation priorities and actively to survey the city through a preservation lens, the effects of which have the potential to be immensely important in positioning preservation to play a proactive role in future rightsizing efforts.

The creation of a preservation plan was begun and partially written in 2004-2005, but it was never completed. In a 2005 Buffalo News article titled “The City Needs a Historic Preservation Plan,” an urgent need is expressed for the city’s Preservation Board to have a “‘fire prevention plan’ in the form of a historic preservation plan.” In other words, the article is calling for the Preservation Board to be less reactive in putting out “fires” in the form of preventing demolitions by having a plan based on surveys of existing resources at hand.

Knoll has revived the project and with a grant in-hand intends to hire a consultant to complete the preservation plan, with the goal of having it finished within a year and officially adopted by the City of Buffalo. The plan will act as a guide for which neighborhoods and areas historic preservation efforts should be focused. It will help to inform designation, help to determine potential historic or conservation districts, and it can possibly lead to better understanding of how funding programs may be targeted specific areas. As a result of surveys, focus areas will be determined by factors such as density, age of the buildings, historic integrity, and a feeling of place. Community input will be a part of this process, encouraging people to identify what is important to them.

Cleveland’s Landmarks Commission, on the other hand, does not have a preservation
plan. Moreover, no such plan is considered a priority. According to Robert Keiser, Secretary of the Landmarks Commission, a preservation plan was begun roughly 10-15 years ago, but the documents developed “didn’t seem to have any immediate or foreseeable use.” Thus, the plan was never completed, though the Ohio State Historic Preservation Office has encouraged them to produce one. However, Keiser says that if the Landmarks Commission and historic preservation in general were more central to the planning process, a preservation plan would have more of a role and could probably help. The Landmarks Commission and the Planning Commission (who have two separate boards) work together on issues such as design review and Section 106 projects. But preservation is generally reactive, according to Keiser. He would like the Landmarks Commission to be more central in planning as then “they could know the rationale behind some of the planning decisions” involving land use and other projects.

It seems that preservation will remain reactive until proactive steps, such as the development of a preservation plan, lead the field from the city level to identifying important nodes for preservation concentration. This process would inevitably incorporate some level of the community as well as planning professionals. Developing a preservation plan will position historic preservationists to make important decisions about the built environment.

FULL DEMOLITION REVIEW

Demolition is a necessary component of rightsizing but is also a tool that is often indiscriminately used. In Buffalo, preservationists have gained a valuable tool for direct preservation intervention in the cycle of demolition and historic loss. The Preservation
Board has review of all building demolition requests. In most cities, the scope of a municipal preservation arm’s review of demolitions is usually limited to buildings that are individual landmarks, those within a historic district, and demolitions that use state or federal money, triggering a Section 106 review. In a shrinking city, this line of defense against the permanent loss of buildings is significant, if ultimately reactive, in determining the fate of the built environment. While in Cleveland, the Landmarks Commission review of demolitions falls into the scope described above, Buffalo’s municipality has increased the scope of this tool in response to the extensive abandonment and demolitions the city was facing. The Buffalo Preservation Board has the power to review all demolition requests as initiated by city and private actors across the city, regardless of landmark status. The extent of this preservation mechanism is powerful, in theory, as a tool of intervention. However, in practice, Buffalo shows us that review alone is not sufficient for this tool to be truly effective.

In 2006, Mayor Anthony Maisello enacted legislation, as proposed by preservation-friendly Common Council President David Franczyk, to give the Buffalo Preservation Board the power to review all demolitions. This came as a response to the notorious “Friday afternoon” demolition permits that were issued so speedily that they bypassed appropriate agency review. While this ability for demolition review offers a critical safety net for historic structures, it is in practice a more complicated process. The Preservation Board, which usually meets twice a week, obtains approximately 400 information packets of to-be-demolished properties from the city every 3-4 months, according to Paul McDonnell, Chair of the Preservation Board. Private demolition requests are fewer, numbering approximately 2-5 packets every two weeks.
Each packet of a threatened building includes a picture of the front façade, sometimes accompanied by a couple of additional photographs of the structure, and a printout of a Google map indicating its location. Not included is information on the building’s condition or age, and especially “no information on context,” states McDonnell. Contextual information is incredibly important in making triage decisions about a building’s fate. A less architecturally significant house might be considered more “preservation-worthy” if it is surrounded by occupied or stable houses, whereas—and this has occurred, says McDonnell—a unique building that is completely divorced from its original context and surrounded by large shopping centers, may have to be sacrificed. While this review of demolition requests takes a lot of time, states McDonnell, “it’s a worthwhile effort.”

With the exception of designated properties and of those within a historic district, the extent to which the law allows the Board to act is limited to essentially “recommending” a property not be demolished. If the Board recommends “no” on a demolition request, another option has to come forward within a relatively short period of time or the property may be demolished. These options could include finding a new owner or designating the building a landmark. But landmark designation takes a great deal of manpower and research to make a compelling argument that the building rises to landmark-worthy status. In the case of a residential structure, which many of these demolition requests are, landmarking is not a feasible option. The strength of the legislation giving the Board the right to recommend against demolition has been tested in the court system, and the case was ultimately lost. The legislation is still in place, but according to Michele Brozek Knoll, City of Buffalo Senior Planner Historic Preservation, this legislation needs to be toughened so that it acquire “some teeth.” In other words, the legislation gives the Board
limited ability to act above opposing demolition.

The demolition review does offer a safety net for preventing loss of historic structures and is a direct preservation response, which addresses the growing dilemma of prolific demolitions. The process is not perfect and is ultimately reactionary. Often buildings that cross the Board’s desk have been in decline for some time, and their structural soundness must be a consideration in the Board’s decision. But giving the power of total review to the municipal preservation arm of a city is not sufficient alone if the legislation does not have the “teeth” to hold up in court. To be most effective, legislation needs to have clear delineations of power and consequence, as well as next courses of action. Otherwise, the determining preservation bodies will not have much power other than the limited say they possess in the current review process. In addition, including more comprehensive information on each property to the reviewing preservation body will allow for decisions to be made that include such key factors as neighborhood context. Full demolition review is a powerful tool and acts as a preservation filter to prevent potentially significant and irreparable losses through demolition.

Neighborhood Strategies

Interviewees in both cities indicated that neighborhood focused preservation efforts have been less than ideal. Neighborhoods in each city vary in terms of their strengths and weaknesses. That is, they vary in many of the following ways: in their level of distress or stability; in what remains of the historic built environment; in market strength; in tools at their disposal (such as active community groups); and in their perceptions of what it means to preserve their buildings and other aspects of their surrounding area.
According to Andrea Rebeck of PBN, there has been a decline in neighborhood activism over the last few decades. She states that although “there is great concern for neighborhoods, there are very few preservation efforts.” Buffalo neighborhoods like Allentown, a stable neighborhood with a lot of character and a long preservation history, do not need a lot more intervention. Some transitional neighborhoods, such as Black Rock, are just beginning to see the benefits that capitalizing on preservation can make their neighborhood stronger. In Cleveland, CRS’s strong programs access neighborhoods through their residential homeowner assistance and home loan program. Beneficiaries are those that are already predisposed to reach out for the services—and some of the most distressed neighborhoods in Cleveland are not primarily residential. Anthony Armstrong of Buffalo LISC says that no one “has done a really good job of putting together a preservation strategy at the neighborhood level.”

But this is just beginning to change in Buffalo, thanks to the National Trust conference and the strength and assertiveness of Buffalo’s grassroots groups. Garrett of the WSCC has recently started the Neighborhood Coalition, which is an effort that was generated by the National Trust for Historic Preservation conference’s Neighborhoods Forum and by a few concerned foundations that want to find a way to show the value of architecture in neighborhoods. Rather than doing a traditional conference session, Garrett formed the Neighborhood Coalition. Through the Coalition, neighborhood groups and individuals learn from and talk to each other throughout the city as well as individuals from other cities. The goal is an interchange of knowledge among community groups handling similar issues elsewhere.

Additionally, Buffalo’s preservation plan identifies nodes of concentration that can
serve as an important tool for identifying target areas for a neighborhood’s preservation efforts. It is akin to an asset-based planning approach—one that has been discussed at the city planning level in Cleveland—which would similarly focus reinvestment, promote infill, and reduce demolitions in nodes of concentration. These areas would be selected based on criteria such as transportation access, existing property values, and overall strength of the neighborhood. Terry Schwarz of the Cleveland Land Lab suggests that this approach could help focus rehabilitation efforts and stave off demolitions in these areas, and states: “If we can’t save the whole city, can we save the historic residential fabric in these particular geographies so that you get some sense of what the city used to be.”

In contrast, a recent policy initiation that is still unfolding in Buffalo is generating some excitement among preservationists. The Buffalo Green Code is a contextual zoning policy that aims to address every neighborhood individually. This is part of a comprehensive rewrite of Buffalo’s Zoning Ordinance, which was last updated in 1951 (Project Launch, 2010; http://www.buffalogreencode.com/about/). Mayor Brown has stated that the Green Code will “act as the foundation for the new place-based economic development strategy for Buffalo’s neighborhoods in every section of the city,” and that neighborhood and historic context will be key components. This policy is in line with the City’s Comprehensive Plan (2006), which speaks directly to generating re-growth in Buffalo, and to which the city has steadfastly continued to base policies and plans around.

The Green Code does not align with notions of Buffalo as a shrinking city; however, it addresses ensuring contextual design for new development—essentially a smart-growth initiative. But preservationists like Knoll are looking at it as “a preservation-friendly” city initiative, respecting the scale of the current built environment. Alternatively, Schwarz
suggests that for a shrinking city to take on form-based zoning code is a “red herring” when there is little to no new development happening. She goes on to say that “form based codes are great when you’ve got development demand and relatively open land—you say, This is what we want the form to look like—but the form’s already there. Honestly I don’t get it.”

Rightsizing necessarily means strategically determining areas in which to focus assets and investment, which includes building rehabilitations, demolitions, and new developments. One reason people chose to live in a neighborhood is based on its unique character—“and character is what neighborhoods have,” says Armstrong. Attracting and creating a critical mass of residents, who have chosen a neighborhood because of its character, can also create a group with the drive to see that neighborhood preserved.

Considering areas where density should be fostered is a component of the consolidation model to city shrinkage, which also addresses encouraging relocation of residents to these areas from less populated ones. This is in contrast to the dispersion model that advocates for de-densification, using property vacancies to reduce the overall density of the city (Schwarz 2008). It is the consolidation model that offers the most benefits to preservation because locations where creating and maintaining density is a priority can mean focusing on rehabilitations and preservation as opposed to demolition.

To elaborate briefly on the qualities of the dispersion model, Schwarz, who subscribes to the dispersion over the consolidation model, discusses de-densification through side lot acquisition—a method by which homeowners are deeded adjacent vacant lots, sometimes for as little as $1: “[When] you give a lot to a neighbor next door, you have permanently altered the land use in that area.” But this can raise the value of adjacent
homes too, based on the idea that scarcity—fewer homes and lots on which to build them—increases value. Skrebutenas further suggests that perhaps we need to rethink very dense neighborhoods in automobile-driven communities, and that selective demolition in some neighborhoods could provide opportunities for off-street parking that would compete with desirable suburban benefits. But Mortensen of NPI cautions that once side yard expansions are granted to an area, it is very difficult to undo, and the area is forever de-densified.

Density is critical to stimulating investment, and denser areas will continue to be locations where resources are focused in future rightsizing efforts. This was echoed in interviews in both cities, and it was a tenet of the two grassroots groups discussed as regards Buffalo.

**Targeting Preservation on Transitional Neighborhoods**

There was an expressed desire within both cities to designate areas that still have the necessary level of integrity to warrant a local or national designation. Though neither in Cleveland nor in Buffalo did city preservation offices indicate that they had prioritized surveying in the more deteriorated sections of the city, many indicated that having a detailed survey of what remains throughout each city would be immensely important. Fleenor of CRS indicated that they have photographic surveys of most residential historic districts, but that possibly the last survey of the entire city of Cleveland was in 1976. In Buffalo, Andrea Rebeck of Preservation Buffalo Niagara acknowledges that preservation in Buffalo is “woefully behind on inventory” of extant historic resources. Paul McDonnell says that the Preservation Board “doesn’t have resources to survey what’s left” and that in many neighborhoods the situation is too far-gone in terms of building loss. This sentiment
is echoed in Cleveland. Robert Keiser admits that there are areas he would like to see the Landmarks Commission survey and consider for designations, but some areas are not possible “until the economy turns around.” Keiser goes on to admit that designation decisions are often contingent on the market, though he states that “historic preservation should not ideally be tied to the economy, but the reality is that is the reality here.” In terms of distressed neighborhoods, Michael Skrebutes, President of the New York State Office of Housing Preservation, says that planning has to be sensitive in terms of where to focus reinvestment strategies, building by building. He also notes that while there are probably some historic buildings to be salvaged, without a market, over investing in these areas would not be the most efficient use of funds.

Preservation is still highly reactive, according to Rebeck, because many cities like Buffalo are not up-to-date on historic inventory. Preservation organizations can only respond to crises associated with threats of demolition. Illuminating the challenges that preservation organizations in Buffalo face in addressing such large issues of vacancy and demolitions, Rebeck states:

[Buffalo was] built as though we’re going to be 600,000 [people] forever, and now we’ve got tons of buildings we can’t maintain, and not a very big city government, and tiny preservation organizations don’t have the staff to take this on ourselves; so we’ve got to find ways to do things quickly and efficiently and effectively that don’t cost us a ton of money.

Rebeck sees a thorough, comprehensive survey and a mapped, GIS-based inventory of the city’s building stock as a critical step to bringing preservation out of a reactionary position. But this would require a large source of funding. Rebeck has brought this idea to the Preservation Board as something they should actively consider. McDonnell indicates
that he believes the Board should focus surveys on specific areas that still have enough integrity and where preservation can have a positive impact, such as the University District, Marston, or the Fruit Belt.

A similar call for focusing preservation resources on neighborhoods that still have intact historic integrity was heard in Cleveland. Jennifer Coleman, Chair of the Landmarks Commission, believes that preservation efforts should focus on Glenville as a next step. Glenville has “incredible architecture” and some preservation activity already, including small districts and individual landmarks. It also has Famicos, a CDC that has used preservation as a tool. But areas like Central and Hough, says Coleman, are struggling from overall disinvestment and decimation. In those neighborhoods, there is little to be done other than landmarking and protecting what is left. According to Bartley of PUSH, in neighborhoods experiencing the level of abandonment and vacancy as the West Side, “it’s hard to say in a totally bottomed out market” if preservation districts and landmarking would contribute, because, when buildings are “total shells,” it can be seen as “presenting burdens to getting something going.”

The challenges facing a shrinking neighborhood reduce the role that historic preservation can play in shrinking neighborhoods to a chicken-or-the-egg scenario. In other words, investment in an area needs to happen before preservation can serve a relevant purpose. Keiser’s previous statements, tying historic preservation to the economy, speak to this. But in shrinking neighborhoods, where there is no investment, the buildings in need of protection continue to decay. This also limits the potential for future preservation or rehabilitation interventions. And context again comes into play here, begging the question: How successfully can preservation intervene in a shrinking neighborhood—if its
neighborhood context has been severely compromised? Knoll suggests that “there might be individual houses [of some level of significance], but it’s not worth it [to designate them] because there’s nothing around them left.” This was echoed in McDonnell’s previous statement about unfortunate decisions that the Board has to make regarding demolition of unique buildings, owing to the overall loss of context. If broader rightsizing plans existed that outlined areas for vast parkland and agriculture, unique buildings in those areas could be preserved without their original context. They could play new functionary roles in a new context; but that level of planning has not reached any significant stage.

The approach that Buffalo’s grassroots movement has successfully taken in the transitional West Side demonstrates tactics for how to approach other cities’ struggling neighborhoods. Aaron Bartley of PUSH and Harvey Garrett of the WSCC chose to focus revitalization efforts on this neighborhood because they saw the market and investment strength of Richmond Avenue as an asset for strengthening the blocks adjacent to it.15 While Richmond Avenue is a highly desirable corridor with high, steady property values, just one block west into the West Side, the character of the neighborhood changes dramatically. Both Bartley and Garrett saw the potential to build strong, affordable, and desirable blocks based on the strength of adjacent assets. This potential has been realized. According to recently compiled data from the Buffalo Niagara Association of Realtors and LISC, the 2010 average sale price for houses within the WSCC working area is $79,000, as compared to $23,000 in 2002.16 This demonstrates that the WSCC model can be successfully applied to transitional neighborhoods to generate market value. According to Garrett:

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15 Initially, PUSH’s West Side focus was partially determined by the purchase of a single house at City auction that happened to be on Massachusetts Avenue, a primary corridor diagonally dissecting the current PUSH boundary area.
16 Data based on MLS Completed Sales of Single and Multifamily Residential. Report received from Harvey Garrett through email communication March 6, 2011.
There’s another level of aesthetics, that’s where the market is. Create a system to encourage people financially because resources [such as tax credits and grants] aren’t available. Let the market encourage people and show people good design and everyone will emulate what you did. [It’s] all about private investment and the private market.

By choosing the West Side and PUSH, the Sustainable Neighborhoods Initiative and those driving it show that conscious choices were also made to focus on transitional neighborhoods—those that have a stronger chance of stabilizing—rather than the more severely distressed. Skrebutenas echoed this in stating that for SNI to invest a lot in the East Side doesn’t make sense because it is “hollowed out.” To over-invest in these areas without a market to support it could lead to waste.

Garrett believes that the WSCC’s approach can be put into place in other borderline neighborhoods, using the same strategic approach that looks for strong proximal assets to build on: “Let’s say the far East Side is the most challenged, the Near East Side and West Side have the best chance of succeeding; if Main Street is the dividing line, we can work from there on the Near East Side.”

One potential neighborhood Garrett believes would benefit from the WSCC model is the Fruit Belt, located in the Near East Side, close to Main Street and a few institutional campuses. The first step to making this strategy viable, says Garrett, is to “stop demolishing buildings in the Near East Side, unless it’s structurally unsound,” to preserve the density and character that remains. Garrett has no intention of pursuing city support in this. But this rightsizing approach could help to preserve density in key locations where strengthening private investment is possible, thereby preserving the existing housing stock for rehabilitation efforts. This strategy echoes Cleveland’s nodes of concentration but stems from the ground up rather than from (and even in spite of) city support.
Garrett’s proposed strategy for the Fruit Belt could be seen as a part of a consolidation model that does not advocate for controlled relocation, as that level of planning does not exist yet. Rather, the model focuses on attractive rehabilitation of housing in strategic areas to provide incentives for people to choose to live elsewhere, outside of vacant neighborhoods. According to Garrett, people are quick to say that “you can’t take back the East Side,” referring to a negative perception of the revitalization potential for Buffalo’s highly distressed neighborhoods. But that perception is so strong, according to Garrett, that it prevents people from seriously discussing what it would take to revitalize the area. He states that these discussions need to happen before you can honestly say, “we’re going to shut off whole neighborhoods.” Garrett continues: “We’re not ready for that conversation because that conversation means the Mayor would have to say that and the Mayor’s not going to say that…He has no benefit to say that.” Garrett’s comment reconfirms mayoral resistance to discussions of relocation.

Some interviewees cautioned about making investments at all in struggling neighborhoods, and many expressed concern and differing viewpoints on what should and can be the role of preservation in such neighborhoods. Defining characteristics of distressed neighborhoods include an erosion of historic context due to extensive demolitions and neglect, and a very weak market. These impair the role preservation can play. The unfortunate reality is that historic preservation is almost inextricably tied to some level of investment, and when investment is lacking — and lacking investment is a major component of the problems faced by many parts of Buffalo, Cleveland, and other shrinking cities — traditional historic preservation can only go so far.

The level of loss and erosion in neighborhoods in parts of the East Side in Cleveland
and perhaps more so—based on this author’s observation—in the East Side of Buffalo, makes the use of traditional preservation tools, like historic district designation, difficult. Michel Brozek Knoll, Senior Planner of Historic Preservation is a strong advocate for landmark designation and districts. She sees these tools as a “way of protecting what we have and having more control over what is lost.” But Knoll accedes that in neighborhoods like Polonia/Broadway-Fillmore, there may be more pressing needs to the community than preservation. And despite preservationist’s desire to protect historic structures, perhaps those tools are not right for application there. In this area, a handful of small organizations are discussing the creation of a thematic group designation, based around a few remaining buildings important to a time and culture that no longer exists in that area.¹⁷ This situation begs two related questions of preservationists: Whom does the history of that neighborhood ultimately belong to and when is that level of preservation intervention inappropriate?

Anthony Armstrong of Buffalo LISC states that the first thing to consider in discussing struggling neighborhoods is what the current residents want or need. He also notes that concern for the built environment follows second:

There has to be acknowledgement of importance of place, and you can’t recreate a place, but you can capture the character of the place and move forward even as a smaller neighborhood than it once was. But those are not easy conversations by any means. Laid on top of that is this approach to who actually has nostalgia for these places… It’s got to be relevant to folks on a day-to-day level. Until you understand what people want from their neighborhood you can’t impose a solution.

Serious discussions are not happening in either city as regards neighborhood strategies involving relocation out of exceedingly vacant neighborhoods. And these discussions

¹⁷ A National Register thematic designation means a group of properties would be nominated that are related to one another in a distinguishable way. They may be related through an historic person, event, important development, or related to one another by architect or architectural style.
cannot realistically take place without a broader rightsizing plan that strategically maps areas where city investment and services will and will not continue. Relocation is an extremely complicated conversation that, on the level necessary to craft a bigger vision for a shrinking city, has not yet happened.18

Terry Schwarz of the CUDC says that, in Cleveland, the vacant places and populated areas are not separate; they are all together. She further notes that there are not enough places in the city that are distressed enough to justifiably suggest total vacation. Schwarz believes the dispersion model is most appropriate for approaching rightsizing in Cleveland, stating: “I don’t know if it’s just in Cleveland we haven’t reached that level of depletion to make [relocation] realistic, but it’s utterly unrealistic and I couldn’t go to the city and propose it and I don’t think I’d want to.” Relocation is very expensive, says Schwarz, and there is no guarantee that the same issues that affected the first neighborhood won’t affect the second in the future.

Aaron Bartley of PUSH suggests that in Buffalo “we don’t even have our development figured out yet,” and that more high quality units need to be rehabbed or developed before serious discussions of relocation can happen. If city-led relocation were to occur, Bartley continues, it would drive what’s already happening, which is that “people are relocating to the West Side on their own.”

According to Harvey Garrett of the WSCC, these big decisions about strategic investment in some neighborhoods and not in others are “not something that an elected official is going to say.” Rather “this has to come from the neighborhoods,” and he indicates that people he has talked with are okay with that approach to talking about these

18 It is for that primary reason that relocation is not discussed at length in this thesis, as that level of movement is still in the realm of debate, rather than active on the ground.
bigger issues, as long as they are included in all parts of the process. Though Garrett’s revitalization strategies are not contingent on the City taking action, he talks about an overall plan as a beneficial step to consolidating individual homeowner investment, and notes he would like to see the following:

…A plan [that says] it’s going take 20 years, and we’re going to knock down the houses; you can stay, but we’re not investing there anymore, and at same time make more houses on the Near East Side more attractive… So just the idea that we know it’s going to happen, that there is a plan, would be a huge step. And then people that would otherwise buy something in that neighborhood won’t buy in that neighborhood. Make these ones that you were going to knock down anyhow available [to people] who were going to buy over there... That’s what we have to do, it’s not that I’m okay with it; it’s what we have to do. It’s got to happen.

In considering lessons from the past, Schwarz expresses concerns that there is no way to know if Cleveland is going to experience a similar recovery as New York in the 1990s, for example, and should therefore not be demolishing as heavily and focusing more on mothballing strategies. She continues, “I don’t know that anyone really knows what’s important to protect, but eventually someone’s going to have to take a long term view of this.”

Looking to the more recent past, Philadelphia’s Neighborhood Transformation Initiative (2001-2008)—a city-led effort aimed at addressing vacancy and blight through a heavy demolition campaign to create open space for new development—illuminated the city’s lack of cohesive neighborhood strategies for focusing redevelopment in the most distressed neighborhoods, leaving behind neglected, overgrown lots (Smith 2007). But Smith and others indicate that Philadelphia emerged from this program more focused on neighborhood planning and at least more sensitive to preservation issues than before.
Rochester’s Landmark Society of Western New York shows us an example of how preservationists worked at the neighborhood level to promote and revitalize historic neighborhoods. Their Home Room program offered education to realtors on selling in historic neighborhoods and building types, and was a resource to buyers looking for neighborhoods with historic character. According to Roberta Lane of the National Trust for Historic Preservation:

Preservationists really led the effort to market neighborhoods on the edge, compiling info on their history, taking prospective buyers on architectural tours, connecting new buyers with resources for rehab and repair. For historic neighborhoods that really need new investment, and that are kind of like hidden gems, this is a crucial part of revitalization that cities are often unable to do themselves (Email communication October 13, 2010).

Almost every interviewee in both cities indicated that historic preservation is a strong tool to help stabilize, enhance density, and revitalize neighborhoods. Historic preservation protects the built environment and offers a sense of place in which people want to live and work. Jennifer Coleman adds about the built environment that “you can’t go to any successful city and not be impressed by how the city honors its identity.”

This is not to say that there are not a number of current and developing city-led programs targeted at the neighborhood level in both cities. But preservation strategies and collaboration at the neighborhood level appear to be still developing. The community development and rehabilitation work by PUSH and the WSCC straddle preservation, and Buffalo’s pending preservation plan can contribute to neighborhood strategies. CRS’s preservation programs directed at neighborhoods are vitally important to preservation in Cleveland, but their approach is different than say a neighborhood preservation plan developed around preserving the physical characteristics important to residents. So much of
neighborhood planning happens at the CDC level in Cleveland, as seen in previous chapters, that it complicates preservation integration—especially if the CDC is not preservation-oriented. The Neighborhood Coalition underway in Buffalo is ripe with possibility for introducing preservation integration at the neighborhood level, but it is just beginning. So the extent that historic preservationists can play a role in neighborhood interventions in struggling neighborhoods remains undefined and still emerging. Observation of these processes over the next year will likely show that more is yet to unfold.

**Preservation of Density: Infill and Rehabilitation**

Despite clearly shrinking in population, both cities continue to engage in new housing construction. In both cities, infill developments have been heavily subsidized. Though many of these developments are built as low-cost housing, the cost differential between real costs for construction and what the units rent or sell for appears to most as fiscally untenable for the city. In Buffalo, efforts over a period of years have been bungled, “opportunistic and ad hoc”—as highlighted in a 2004 three-part Buffalo News series (Heaney 2004). According to the articles, many developments have been heavily subsidized by the city only to be foreclosed upon, leading to an overall level of incoherence and a tremendous waste of resources. According to Terry Schwarz of the CUDC, over the last twenty years the City of Cleveland has been building new, heavily subsidized housing ad hoc, wherever land was cheapest, with a vision of bringing people back to repopulate the city.

In both cities, preservationists urged an emphasis on rehabilitations as a critical component of a redevelopment strategy and for retaining neighborhood density. In fact,
interviewees in Buffalo expressed a desire to see a reduction—if not a moratorium—on investment and subsidies in new construction. Sepulveda indicated that there might be some legislation in the future that would restrict new-builds—though she says it is too early to know whether that would mean restricting style, quantity, location, etc. While this represents one end of the spectrum, it is likely both Buffalo and Cleveland will continue with some level of new construction. Infill housing itself is not necessarily negative; the key is to achieve a balance between strategic and contextual infill and rehabilitation efforts.

The current model of new housing construction today is simple and formulaic. Demolition is a simple undertaking. Construction is so “cookie cutter” that contractors hardly have to think about it. And real estate brokers know how to sell newly constructed suburban style homes. The sum of these pieces makes new construction an easier alternative to rehabilitation of an existing building. And there are money and political friends to be made at every step, implies Rebeck and Henry McCartney of PBN. It is investing in the existing building stock, the assets that the city already has, that takes more forethought, collaboration, and attention. According to McCartney, the city likes to erect new buildings, and a shift away from that will have to happen at the political level.

For rehabilitations to compete with the speed and cost of new construction is difficult, and many community groups doing rehabilitations are limited in terms of scope, funding, and manpower. According to Paul McDonnell, Chair of the Preservation Board, when the city continues with new construction, it is grassroots groups that must demonstrate rehabilitation is the viable option. And this is what groups like the WSCC and PUSH are working on. But Sepulveda of Buffalo’s Office of Strategic Planning counters that the city cannot match rehabilitation costs that grassroots organizations can offer because its use
of federal monies holds the city to a higher standard of soil and material remediation and code standards. So while a grassroots organization could potentially invest $15,000 into a house to make it livable and line up an owner to invest the rest, for the city the price tag is $220,000 for a home rehabilitation, depending on the size and condition. Interviewees in Cleveland indicated that a few CDCs and groups like Neighborhood Progress, Inc. are starting to do more rehabilitation, but there is still a ways to go in making rehabilitation a priority for redevelopment.

Preservationists in Cleveland offered an unexpectedly supportive perspective on appropriate infill developments alongside historic areas, and demonstrated that these do not have to be antithetical to preservation or done in lieu of rehabilitation efforts. According to Jennifer Coleman, Chair of the Cleveland Landmarks Commission, infill serves a purpose in drawing people back to core areas of the city. She adds that some people want a type of dwelling that the older housing stock within the city cannot offer—e.g., a great room or a modern kitchen. Accordingly, infill works to support those needs while drawing people and investment back to the city. Keiser adds that “a lot of the [older] housing stock is not appropriate to how people live today.” Keiser believes new development is an important part of the future of the city—though he stressed the importance of design compatibility—and can help bring back middle-income people, who are key to revitalizing the city as a whole. Certainly not all new developments have been successful, well placed, or attractive to new residents.

Neighborhood Progress, Inc. (NPI), a strong community and neighborhood presence in Cleveland, has been behind a number of strategic infill projects aimed at increasing density. According to Wayne Mortensen, Enterprise Rose Fellow at NPI, encouraging a
level of urban density is a critical piece of their community development efforts. Some of these projects, once constructed, were more isolated geographically, simply due to their location. According to Michael Fleenor of the Cleveland Restoration Society, preservation projects that have revitalized core neighborhoods like Gordon Square in Detroit-Shoreway have in turn helped bridge some of these infill developments and encouraged rehabs in the connecting areas.

In Cleveland, new construction has been occurring in and throughout different types of neighborhoods and with varying styles. Infill projects that interviewees there considered successful were densely built townhouse-style buildings with garages either on ground level or in the rear. Some developments used like-materials to its surroundings, such as brick, while others took a more modern approach. But what they had in common was a dense, urban lot line and appropriate scale. (Fig. 20)
Conversely, most of Buffalo’s infill construction is perceived very negatively. This development has been occurring in more heavily distressed neighborhoods where land values are lower and therefore cheaper to build on. This is not where Buffalo is wisest to invest in new construction, according to both Garrett and Skrebutenas. Additionally, developments have largely been incongruous vinyl-clad, suburban-style single family or townhouse-style construction.

While design-appropriate and strategic infill developments as a component of a neighborhood strategy can compliment preservation efforts, incongruous developments in ill-chosen locations can adversely affect historic neighborhood cohesion. There is a category of people that want to live in the city, but they don’t have the time or inclination to reinvest in the rehabilitation and upkeep of an historic home. Buffalo wants to attract new residents as much as Cleveland does, but the latter city demonstrates a model of infill housing that offers the modern—even suburban—amenities that families desire while maintaining an appropriate design context. McDonnell cites an example of urban-style brick homes constructed in Buffalo in 1980 with essentially a zero lot line. These remain popular and sell quickly at market value today, but he says the city has not replicated this model for city subsidized development and instead chooses the style described above.

To conclude, preservationists can play many roles in addressing shrinking neighborhoods. First, preservationists need to focus on areas where preservation intervention will have the greatest affect. Where these areas are will vary from city to city. These locations can be identified through the use of windshield surveys, through developing preservation plans, or in conjunction with other asset-based planning work. A second role preservationists can play is to partner with community groups to develop
a feasible, sustainable, and preservation-friendly model for rehabilitation that can be presented to the city as well as other funding organizations. And a third role is to advocate for models of infill housing that are reasonably congruent with surrounding historic areas that offer modern amenities.
8. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT STEPS

This study has thus far demonstrated that preservation responses, while present, have been limited, and that the extent to which historic preservation can play a role in transitional and distressed neighborhoods is still unclear. This leads to the questions: Where can historic preservation go from here, and what resources would that take? The important contributions that preservation and planning professionals in both cities made when addressing this question have led to the following recommendations, which can be extrapolated to other cities facing similar issues.

1. MAKE PRESERVATION STANDARDS MORE FLEXIBLE

Preservationists need to recognize that their role right now is vital to protecting the built environment. But for preservation to be seen as relevant to declining areas, the field needs to adapt itself city by city, neighborhood by neighborhood, tailoring approaches as needed. Earlier chapters have highlighted responses from interviewees about this, and they have discussed ways in which Buffalo’s Preservation Board and the Cleveland Restoration Society have adapted their policies and approaches in response to the issues individual homeowners are facing.

According to Harvey Garrett of the WSCC, there is a lack of understanding of what historic preservation is and how it can be used as a positive tool: “Even though we’ve had a lot of successes, we haven’t had enough successes, and the media isn’t reporting on them as much as they should.” Education and outreach at a neighborhood and even block level would be a complimentary component here.

The challenges facing cities in decline, and the field of preservation within these
cities, are vast. The scale of the issues continue to grow and change, creating new and unforeseen challenges. The complexity of the problems means that agencies working from multiple angles, preservation being one, need to work together. And preservation needs to see the limitations—both real and as perceived by the public—of a more traditional preservation approach, if they are to play a more relevant role in the uncertain future of shrinking cities.

2. **Prioritize Historic Resource Surveys**

“If we don’t know what’s out there, we’re always behind, always reacting.” - Andrea Rebeck, 2011

Surveys are a fundamental tool to preservation and are not foreign to any preservation organization. Their application in shrinking neighborhoods in shrinking cities is key to ensuring minimal historic loss. For historic preservation entities to become more proactive and make important preventative decisions around historic loss, they must first have accurate information regarding what still remains. While historic resource surveys are important in every city, the immediate threats posed by ongoing demolition and persistent neglect make identifying important resources in shrinking neighborhoods especially critical.

Historic resource surveys in each neighborhood typology—stable, transitional, and distressed—can lead preservationists to determine unique courses of action.

- Distressed Neighborhoods: Distressed neighborhoods are not necessarily where
historic preservation tools can be effectively targeted with viable results because the loss of historic fabric is already so great. However, individual buildings of significance may still exist in these neighborhoods and should be identified, so that next steps for protection can be taken. These steps could include:

- Relocating the building to a more densely populated or stable neighborhood. While this is a controversial decision, in the case of a highly threatened resource it may be the only viable solution.
- Designating the building as an individual landmark to prevent demolition.
- Incorporating the building into future plans for the surrounding area that will serve a purpose for the area’s new use.

- Transitional Neighborhoods: Prioritizing surveys in transitional neighborhoods may be the most critical step. While vacancy and neglect are present, as the neighborhood continues to decline without intervention, the building stock will continue to suffer—putting individual buildings and its broader historic context at risk. Surveys in transitional neighborhoods are important for:
  - Identifying potential local or national historic districts or individual landmarks.
  - Obtaining a firm grasp on where demolitions should be avoided so that CDCs or preservation organizations can focus on rehabilitations.
  - Targeting infill to increase density and determining what form these projects could take.
  - Offering support to community organizations already doing work in these areas. This could be through supporting preservation-friendly approaches to rehabilitation work, putting on workshops to demonstrate economically feasible ways of preserving historic character, or job training on preservation-oriented construction techniques.
• Stable Neighborhoods: Many stable neighborhoods in both case study cities already corresponded to a preservation presence (such as a historic district) or to preservation-mindedness. Where there are historic districts, documentation will already exist to some extent. In Cleveland, Michael Fleenor of the Cleveland Restoration Society indicated that his organization has documented much of these areas. However, the uncertainty of shrinking cities and their economies implies that stable neighborhoods could at any point cross the threshold of decline.

Decisions that affect the built environment are being made all the time, and, to take a seat the table, preservationists need to be armed with as much valuable information as possible. A documented record of what and where buildings exist, and of their level of significance would better allow historic preservationists to make informed recommendations to city governments and planners about where to prioritize preservation responses and where there is room for compromise. The citywide survey components of Buffalo’s pending preservation plan will hopefully be a good start to this process.

The importance of having a complete inventory was underscored in the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s Preservation Development Assessment Report (2005), which reviewed and evaluated the effects that Philadelphia’s demolition-heavy Neighborhood Transformation Initiative had on historic neighborhoods. This final report states that the primary barrier to identifying historic buildings affected by the demolition process was a “lack of building inventory.” The first recommendation was to “make the development of a comprehensive inventory of historic and significant buildings a priority, and embark on developing a systematic program to accomplish this task.”
3. EXPAND PARTNERSHIPS

To address the multifaceted problems facing shrinking neighborhoods in shrinking cities, preservation organizations can benefit from expanding partnerships with other agencies and groups that are conducting research, and developing programs around rightsizing and shrinking neighborhoods.

PARTNER WITH CDCS AND GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS

Some of the most vigorous responses to the challenges of shrinking neighborhoods are coming from grassroots groups doing informal preservation and focused rehabilitation work on the ground. In Buffalo, this was seen through the work of PUSH and the WSCC. Positive partnerships between these groups and established preservation organizations such as PBN and the National Trust for Historic Preservation demonstrate that preservationists see that collaboration can achieve mutual benefits.

Community development organizations are the groups on the ground, doing neighborhood intervention work and who perhaps know these areas best. Creating partnerships can weave a preservation perspective into neighborhood revitalization work, which is directly addressing the vacancy and decay of the historic built environment. Preservationists need to get involved and support those who are doing rehabilitation work. It is important to demonstrate to groups that there may be preservation-friendlier alternatives to some methods of rehabilitation (expanded upon in the following recommendation on expanding outreach).

As has been demonstrated, in shrinking neighborhoods within shrinking cities, there is an urgency to protecting, preserving, stabilizing, and rehabilitating structures
before they are demolished or lost to decay and arson. Many of these buildings are not likely candidates for meticulous restorations, but rather are in need of interventions that preserve their structure, form, and architectural assets. Each of these buildings contributes to the preservation of the neighborhood and context.

Preservation groups can also help launch pro-preservation CDCs and grassroots groups to target neighborhood revitalization efforts. This can happen whether or not groups doing this kind of work already exist.

Additionally, it is important to bring community leaders into the preservation sphere as well. In Buffalo, both Garrett and Bartley sit on the board of Preservation Buffalo Niagara and both have been approached by the National Trust for Historic Preservation to lead and participate in sessions for the October annual conference. Again, while neither individual considered himself as a preservationist or had any formal training as such, each is actively involved in the field throughout the city. Informal preservation activity doesn’t have to be called “historic preservation” for it to be in the pursuit of the broader goals of protecting the built environment.

**PARTNER WITH LAND BANKS**

Increasingly, as cities are expanding rightsizing toolkits for their communities, many are turning to the development of land banks as a method for creating coordinated redevelopment opportunities and strategically handling vacant and foreclosed properties (Schilling 2008; Billitteri 2010; Mallach 2010). Preservation involvement with land bank authorities has been limited to date, but partnering with these entities is a critical step in shaping broad, long-term strategies for the historic built environment. The valuable
application of land banks in shrinking cities has been demonstrated in the Genesee Country Land Bank in Flint, MI, started by Dan Kildee; this organization has served as model for land bank initiatives in the region.

The Cleveland Restoration Society is taking initial steps to collaborate with the Cuyahoga County Land Reutilization Corporation (CCLRC), formed in 2008, which is able to take on and rehabilitate properties with existing buildings. Jennifer Coleman of the Landmarks Commission states that they have not worked with CCLRC yet, but she hopes they will. She also notes that the first step is to be knowledgeable about where to refer people for help, how to collaborate on a plan for a building, and to determine what the procedures are for mothballing properties. According to Michael Fleenor, the CCLRC was intentionally avoiding buildings within historic districts because of what they foresaw as complications in dealing with these buildings (problems such as not being qualified to do preservation rehabilitation work). Fleenor states that the Cleveland Restoration Society can help them navigate that territory and has already demonstrated an example of how this relationship could work. In October 2010, the owner of an 1836 house within Shaker Heights, a National Register Historic District and inner-ring suburb of Cleveland, donated the property to CRS. CRS then transferred the property to the CCLRC who maintained the property while CRS restored the house, cleared its violations, and found a buyer. The property—now under consideration as an individual local landmark—was then transferred back to CRS who turned it over to the new owner in March 2011.

In Buffalo, Assemblyman Sam Hoyt, a preservation sympathizer who initiated the legislation of New York State historic preservation rehabilitation tax credits, has proposed

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19 The recently passed New York State Historic Preservation Tax Credit legislation is also an incredibly exciting tool at the hands of preservationists and developers in Buffalo. The Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit (HRTC), though still in its infancy, is perceived widely as a crucial asset to reinvestment and restoration in Buffalo’s neighborhoods. Assemblyman Sam Hoyt of Buffalo and Senator David J. Valesky of Syracuse
the New York Land Bank Act. After its anticipated passing this year, individual land bank entities would be formed, and many indicated that the City of Buffalo should develop its own rather than being part of a larger county land bank. There is reason to believe that Hoyt’s pro-preservation position will engender a positive partnership between preservation organizations and the land bank authority.

Land bank collaboration with preservation could offer a number of benefits. A preservation group such as PBN or CRS could have control over the rehabilitation or mothballing of a building within a historic district, which came under land bank ownership. In addition, the land bank staff could alert preservationists should a building that is not designated, or that is outside of a district but of unique or architecturally significant character, come under their purview. Jennifer Sepulveda, Community Planner in Buffalo, states that future land bank initiatives that would bring preservation on board to focus efforts on rehabs in target areas are already being considered. But for this type of collaboration to be mutually successful, it will require education and an open dialogue among preservation, planning, and land bank organizations, and it should start early. With New York land bank legislation in the works, Buffalo preservationists are positioned to take a proactive approach to this kind of collaboration. In doing so, the city could set a new precedent for preservation involvement in land banks across shrinking cities.

championed the legislation, signed into law under Governor David Patterson, as a highly successful means of attracting investment and community revitalization into neighborhoods and cities. Hoyt has been honored by PBN for his support in initiating this program.

The New York State Historic Preservation Tax Credit program is seen as a crucial tool to incentivizing building owners to invest in the upkeep and restoration of historic structures in Buffalo and throughout the region. To a city like Buffalo, the tax credits are key to attracting investment that will have wide-ranging potential for economic stimulus. The inclusion of a residential tax credit component encourages investment in historic residential properties. Ohio’s state program does not contain a residential credit component. According to Tania Werbitzky of the Preservation League of New York, there are at least eighty projects currently underway, statewide, using homeowner tax credits.
PARTNER WITH OTHER SHRINKING CITIES PROJECTS

There are numerous groups doing creative projects, data collection, surveying, and community-based work that are not related to historic preservation or rehabilitation, but whose missions could potentially overlap with preservation interests.

Preservation organizations should consider partnering with groups doing data collection and survey work as part of other projects related to tracking foreclosures, assessing neighborhood conditions, or determining demolition decisions. For example, in Cleveland a project titled The Eye is a property analysis tool currently under construction through the CCLRC (Schramm 2011). The Eye aims to aggregate numerous data sources that will enable land bank staff—as well as other agencies and developers—to make data driven acquisition and demolition decisions related to vacant land and buildings (Schramm 2011; Email correspondence with Schwarz April 19, 2011). There is also a GPS component to this project that will allow current, parcel-specific information on fields such as ownership, value, and condition. Preservation could contribute to and benefit from this project through the addition of a historic component to the data collection. Beyond just the date of construction, this could include architectural style, an historic preservation “value” system, landmark eligibility or designation, and other historical data.

Alternatively, Pop-Up City, part of the Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative and originally organized by Terry Schwarz and others, is a creative partnership that historic preservationists could consider partnering with. Events through Pop-Up City aim to bring public and development attention to some of the city’s most beautiful but underutilized properties through creative, temporary activations of the sites (http://www.cudc.kent.edu/popup/). These events can attract huge crowds and engage—if only temporarily—
unique and spectacular buildings in Cleveland through one-time events. And owners of the
buildings and sites are always a part of this process. While Pop-Up City may be unique to
Cleveland, organizations in other cities may be activating—or want to—vacant sites that
they feel are significant. Preservation groups could channel the creative energy and critical
mass of these kinds of events to convey a meaningful message about the history, historic
value, and redevelopment potential of important structures within cities.

4. **Expand Education and Outreach**

“*Preservation can be affordable*” - Andrea Rebeck, 2011

Much of the extent to which historic preservation can play a role in neighborhoods—
specifically transitional and distressed neighborhoods—is by making preservation as
accessible and owner-friendly as possible. Preservationists face stereotypical perceptions
that have been present for decades—e.g., preservation is for the rich, its regulation is
burdensome, it is financially unfeasible, it is obstructionist—and these are still absolutely
present in neighborhoods today. Often, especially in low-income communities, people hear
the term “historic preservation” and are immediately opposed, because these perceptions
of a fiscal burden and overregulation are so strong. Effective education, outreach, and
demonstration of how preservation programs, tools, and approaches can benefit individual
neighborhood issues can be a powerful tool. Preservationists need to know their audiences,
because to get through to people in every neighborhood, there needs to be a tailored
approach. Earlier chapters have suggested that window replacement and the addition of
vinyl siding is not the end all be all for a building. However, teaching historic building
owners that there are restorative solutions before it reaches that critical juncture is key.
Preservationists can demonstrate that doing maintenance such as window repair and weatherization techniques can be both preservation-friendly and affordable. Rebeck states that substantiating this connection is how historic preservation can become more centrally considered in struggling neighborhoods. She envisions developing a list of contractors who are able to do good preservation work and who are trained both in the skills and in the oversight of restoration and rehabilitation. This list would be something PBN and others could hand out to CDCs and neighborhood groups to connect them to preservation-friendly workers. McDonnell indicates that education is incredibly important to benefit both homeowner and preservationist, particularly outside of strong preservation friendly neighborhoods: “If you have a house that has peeling paint, give it a good scrape and paint it, and you’re going to spend $4,000 instead of vinyl siding for $10,000.”

While these values may be obvious to preservationists, they need to be conveyed outside of the field. Developing and distributing a user-friendly document of preservation contractors is something universally achievable by preservation groups across struggling cities. It is a simple first step in achieving a connection between preservation and affordability in neighborhoods where individual investment is a concern.

Rebeck states that preservation can support solutions to other issues, such as unemployment, by training youth and adults in weatherization, remodeling, and window repair. One component of PUSH’s mission is youth training, and though the organization is not training specifically in preservation-friendly techniques, the model is replicable for extending to serve preservation’s goals.

Preservation’s role in education and outreach in neighborhoods is not limited to those with historic districts or specifically with landmark buildings; its universal goal
of protecting and extending the life of the historic built environment spans across each city. The Cleveland Restoration Society demonstrates this through their free technical assistance service offered to any homeowner with a property that is over 50 years old. As a free asset that people are aware of, an environment is created where preservation is seen as offering beneficial services universally, rather than as an elitist enterprise. While this level of engagement necessitates a certain concentration of manpower, the central concepts of a program—which is free, with minimal prerequisites for qualification, and that serves to improve the homeowner’s property—can be enormously effective in making preservation accessible and in engaging with a neighborhood and an individual’s needs. McDonnell of the Preservation Board as well as Campaign for Greater Buffalo states that it would be a worthwhile expansion to extend education efforts on preservation-friendly rehabilitation outside of historic districts.

Furthermore, the arenas into which historic preservation could provide education range from politicians and lawmakers to community development groups to contractors, because each of these fields directly or indirectly affects the built environment and, therefore, affects the extent to which preservation approaches can be used. Jennifer Coleman, Chair of the Cleveland Landmarks Commission, expresses her vision for what outreach could look like:

The first step would be to get all the politicians and council people on board about the importance of historic preservation, because not everyone is alike. They all have different opinions about what’s the most important service they can offer their constituents. But the most successful neighborhoods are the ones that have the most passionate council people about the physical landscape.

Other groups to consider reaching out to include real estate agents. Planning
firms would also benefit from collaboration with preservationists, whose expertise could complement efforts in revitalization, recognition, and promotion of neighborhoods.

5. Develop Plans for Targeted Preservation Efforts

Developing holistic, citywide rightsizing plans is an extensive undertaking that must be inclusive of governing bodies, neighborhood residents and pretty much every agency, organization, and community concerned. Having this discussion at a citywide scale would enable agencies and organizations to develop focused rightsizing strategies across disciplines, including historic preservation.

However, preservation organizations do not need to wait for the city to develop broader rightsizing plans to determine areas where preservation interventions can be most effectively targeted. These areas will vary from city to city, but key factors to consider may include:

- Neighborhoods where individual buildings and overall historic context may be threatened by high vacancy and abandonment rates, making them especially vulnerable to demolitions.
- Neighborhoods where grassroots groups or CDCs are focusing efforts on rehabilitations.
- Areas where focused asset-based planning approaches are already being considered.
- Areas where attracting new residents and increasing density is viable.
- Neighborhoods that have experienced heavy losses through demolition and neglect to protect what remains.

Developing and implementing preservation plans with a rightsizing overlay can be one way to achieve this. Much of this data could emerge from previous recommended
steps such as undertaking surveys and expanding partnerships with other organizations. Preservation organizations can advocate or lobby for targeted preservation components as a part of other planning or redevelopment projects.

To have a development arm with funding capabilities is a powerful tool, which is used by preservation organizations nationwide, often through mechanisms like revolving loan funds. Developing these mechanisms and using them in targeted ways is a direct method through which preservationists can play a strong role in saving individual buildings and affecting neighborhoods.
9. CONCLUSION

Buffalo and Cleveland are two of many shrinking cities along the rust belt region. Shrinking neighborhoods within these cities encounter myriad problems. The built environment, much of which is considered historic on multiple levels, is suffering immensely as a result of abandonment, neglect, and demolition.

The historic built environment is under siege, and vacant buildings are under direct threat. Even those that are not vacant could easily become so in cities with volatile struggling economies, high risk of home foreclosures, and job insecurity. Not just houses, but schools, churches, office buildings, and commercial buildings are all meeting—or at risk of meeting—the bulldozer. But these decisions are not being guided by considerations for future land use opportunities, neighborhood context, or historic value. So where is the preservationist’s voice, speaking up for the built environment? Discussions around shrinking cities, rightsizing, relocation, and reinvestment strategies continue to emerge. Creative approaches to land reuse and new tools for property assessment continue to be developed. Historic preservationists are still primarily off the radar—their perspective is not being heard. Groups like the WSCC and PUSH in Buffalo are getting spotlighted through media attention and political support for their direct and effusive responses to struggling neighborhoods.

It does not appear that either city is considering developing a strategic rightsizing plan. Buffalo in particular is vocal about encouraging re-growth. But regardless, preservation does not need to wait for a plan to stem from municipal leadership to make preservation determinations. Whatever leadership’s political stance, the reality on the ground continues to be the same; buildings are being demolished piecemeal and neighborhoods are being
eroded. It is true that at the time of this writing, the future of Buffalo, Cleveland, and other shrinking cities is unknown. No one can at this point say what a successfully shrunken city looks like. But historic preservationists, among others, know that the architectural and historic built environment contributes to making neighborhoods unique. And conversely preservationists are deeply aware of how large-scale losses of this type can be devastating for decades to come. When these structures are gone, there is no second chance. Many of these buildings may not individually stand up as landmarks or appear particularly exceptional, but the defining character of their cumulative contribution to the neighborhoods of a city is an anchor of identity—no matter what the future of the city is.

This is why consideration of unconventional approaches to doing preservation in shrinking cities is called for. Some examples include reconsidering the stringency of preservation standards as applied to struggling historic districts and neighborhoods, looking toward a “historic district-lite” approach for protection, and considering the relocation of historic buildings.

The Cleveland Restoration Society has an established reputation as a renowned preservation organization and their historic home loan program is looked to by organizations around the country and region as a successful model. Their well-developed programs are extensive. However, as a consequence, their staff are spread thin and they are not as effective at changing the status quo as they could be. While a historic preservation ethos is deeply ingrained in Buffalo, a few of their key organizations are relatively new. This newness actually positions these organizations to incorporate innovative thinking through a rightsizing lens as they continue to develop. Buffalo demonstrates this already by partnering with grassroots groups as well as by developing the tool of total review of
demolitions. This is a powerful tool, if time consuming and ultimately reactive, that could give preservationists considerable power if supported by the right legal language.

As vacancy in neighborhoods rises, buildings are neglected and become unsafe, vandalism and crime rates rise; these vacant buildings are targeted for demolition and those residents who are able are apt to move elsewhere, feeding the cycle of decline and abandonment and creating increasingly more distressed neighborhoods.

The challenge of doing preservation in shrinking cities and shrinking neighborhoods requires a different approach than might be taken in an economically challenged urban neighborhood in another type of city. Losses to demolition and neglect are not localized to one deteriorating neighborhood—they are spread throughout much of the city and in staggering numbers. Neighborhood problems are not necessarily about unequal distribution of wealth or poor access to employment in these cities; they are about an overall out-migration of jobs and of the middle-class. And when entire cities are dealing with the consequences of disinvestment and reduced demand for housing and commercial space, the challenges to making historic projects viable are exponentially increased. The challenge of doing preservation in shrinking neighborhoods involves finding the balance between achieving preservation outcomes while being cognizant of the struggles that each neighborhood faces.

Some of the tools discussed as useful to preservation approaches in shrinking cities—e.g., surveys, preservation plans, expanding partnerships with CDCs—may be common to preservation groups around the country. However, their application in shrinking cities is important through a different lens: one that recognizes that some loss through demolition is necessary and inevitable and that targeting areas for preservation intervention is critical.
There needs to be urgency in the use of these tools with the express purpose of identifying and protecting resources that preservationists are not willing to lose.

Targeting areas for focused preservation work is critical. Without targeted intervention, losses will continue to happen piecemeal, making preservation work increasingly difficult as neighborhoods and context are eroded. Inaction means continuing losses; focusing efforts means greater preservation success. As elaborated on in the section on recommendations, targeting can be done through collaborating with other organizations and agencies, or by aligning with other projects. Targeting is not at the exclusion of other neighborhoods. Rather it means focusing on the use of limited resources, just as rightsizing does. But as the cycle of vacancy and decline continues, preservationists will increasingly be limited in their role.

This research represents a snapshot of one period on the continuum of shrinking cities’ evolution and of historic preservation’s current level of response. The hope is that preservation organizations will start making big moves, both as a field and through building new partnerships in the near future. The outcomes and forms that this will take are unknown. Future research could entail a retrospective analysis of tools and partnerships developed by preservation organizations in efforts to step up protection efforts. Research on developing collaborations with organizations, such as land banks and how those partnerships function, could be a valuable contribution. And should rightsizing plans be developed for cities at a future time, the role that historic preservationists play alongside planners, community groups, the public, and city leadership in determining outcomes, could illuminate the perceived value of the field in a shrinking city’s future.
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEWEES AND DATES OF INTERVIEWS

1. Anthony Armstrong, Buffalo’s Local Initiative Support Coalition (LISC) [In-Person Interview: January 8, 2011]
2. Aaron Bartley, Executive Director, People United for Sustainable Housing (Buffalo) [In-Person Interview: January 9, 2011]
3. Jennifer Coleman, Chair, Cleveland Landmarks Commission [In-Person Interview: January 11, 2011]
4. Michael Fleenor, Director, Preservation Programs at the Cleveland Restoration Society [In-Person Interviews: January 11 & January 13, 2011]
5. Harvey Garrett, West Side Community Coalition (Buffalo) [In-Person Interview: January 8, 2011]
6. Robert Keiser, Secretary, Cleveland Landmarks Commission [In-Person Interview: January 12, 2011]
7. Michele Brozek Knoll, Senior Planner Historic Preservation, City of Buffalo [In-Person Interview: January 10, 2011]
8. Roberta Lane, Senior Program Officer & Regional Attorney, National Trust for Historic Preservation [Telephone Interview: October 12, 2010]
9. Henry McCartney, Executive Director, Preservation Buffalo Niagara [In-Person Interview: January 7, 2011]
10. Paul McDonnell, Chair, Buffalo Preservation Board; Associate Architect, Buffalo Public Schools [In-Person Interview: January 10, 2011]
11. Susan West Montgomery, Associate Director, Statewide and Local Partnerships, National Trust for Historic Preservation [Telephone Interview: September 28, 2010]
12. Wayne A. Mortensen, Enterprise Rose Fellow, Neighborhood Progress, Inc. [In-Person Interview: January 11, 2011]
13. Barbara Powers, Department Head, Inventory and Registration, Ohio State Historic Preservation Office [Telephone Interview: January 18, 2011]
14. Andrea Rebeck, Preservation Specialist, Preservation Buffalo Niagara and National Trust for Historic Preservation [In-Person Interview: January 7, 2011]
15. Jennifer Sepulveda, Community Planner, Office of Strategic Planning, City of Buffalo [In-Person Interview: January 10, 2011]
16. Terry Schwarz, Director, Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative [In-Person Interview: January 13, 2011]
17. Michael Skrebutenas, President, New York State Office of Housing Preservation [Telephone Interview: January 18, 2011]
18. Brian Swartz, Senior Drafting Technician, Buffalo Public Schools [In-Person Interview: January 13, 2011]

20. Royce Yeater, Director, The National Trust of Historic Preservation Midwest Division
   [Telephone Interview: September 10, 2010]
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Section I: Structured Questions

Please answer the next set of questions using a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest rating and 5 the highest

(1=Not at all, 2=Somewhat, 3=Moderately, 4=Strongly, 5=Principally)

1. To what extent is historic preservation being considered a mechanism for future change within the city?

2. To what extent are preservation efforts or interventions being targeted at the neighborhood level?

3. How important is it that historic preservation be a part of the rightsizing discussion?

4. To what degree is historic preservation an appropriate tool to help stabilize, enhance density, or revitalize neighborhoods?
   a. To what extent is historic preservation present in rightsizing discussions at a city level?
   b. (1=Not at all, 2=somewhat, 3=in specific neighborhoods, 4=increasingly, 5=significantly)

Section II: If answers in Section II = 1 (NO preservation mechanisms are considered)

1. Why?

2. How might preservation become more centrally considered?

3. What would the next step be?

4. What potential resources would make historic preservation a more influential force in addressing distressed/transitional neighborhoods?
   a. Who should be part of the conversation?
   b. What additional resources or support would that require?

5. What are the assessing criteria used to determine the buildings that are demolished, rehabilitated, or mothballed?

6. Does historic character, age, or other preservation oriented qualifier play into this decision?

Section III: If answers in Section II = 2-5 (‘somewhat’ to “principally”)

1. How are the neighborhoods chosen in which efforts are being focused?
   a. What are the assessing criteria used to determine the buildings that are demolished, rehabilitated, or mothballed?

2. Does historic character, age, or other preservation oriented qualifier play into this
decision?
3. How are community development organizations determining which buildings will be the best investment?
4. Are you working with preservation groups, city planners, community development groups, and political officials to address rightsizing?
5. What potential resources would make historic preservation a more influential force in addressing distressed/transitional neighborhoods?

Section IV: Specific to Cleveland
1. In what ways has preservation been involved with the Cleveland Land Bank?
2. To what extent do you see the land bank as an asset to preservation? (Not at all / Somewhat / Needs strengthening / An essential asset)
3. Do you think that Cleveland is moving towards a rightsizing narrative as a citywide approach? (Yes / no / a little / maybe / not sure)
   a. How does historic preservation play a role in this scenario?
4. Have historic preservation advocates made attempts to request use of NSP funds?

Section V: Specific to Buffalo
1. Assemblyman Hoyt has proposed legislation to create a land bank for the city of Buffalo. Do you see the formation of a land bank as a potential asset to historic preservation efforts? (Not at all / Somewhat / Possibly, with certain qualifiers / Absolutely)
   a. (If somewhat, possibly or absolutely) What components of land bank do you see as being beneficial to preservation and why?
2. Do you see the rehabilitation work done by community development corporations like PUSH as a form of historic preservation? (No / Somewhat / Depends (on what?) / Yes)
3. Have historic preservation advocates made attempts to request use of NSP funds?
4. Do you believe Governor Paterson’s Sustainable Neighborhoods Project affects or could affect historic preservation in Buffalo?
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