BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HISTORIC PLACE: PRESERVATION IN POSTINDUSTRIAL URBAN PLANNING

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Abstract


Long-term population loss is recognized as a major challenge in older industrial cities throughout the Rust Belt, marked by widespread vacant and abandoned properties. Policies and programs at every conceivable level are attempting to address how to “rightsize” cities: how to transform them into physically smaller places with a higher quality of life.

Yet historic preservation is rarely included. This thesis asserts that preservation can contribute an essential perspective to reshaping cities by helping articulate their unique identity—an integral part of cities’ efforts to redefine themselves for brighter futures, retain population, improve the quality of life, and attract new businesses and residents. It attempts to articulate a role for the field in rightsizing by outlining its absence in the literature review, recognizing programs in other fields that build on existing resources, and recommending an approach to reshaping cities that explicitly draws on preservation.

The thesis explores how city planners, preservationists, and community development organizations in seven older industrial cities are using preservation to inform strategic demolition, targeted reinvestment, and broad planning efforts. Case studies include code enforcement in Cincinnati, investment in stable neighborhoods in Cleveland, homeownership programs in Detroit, land banking in Flint/Genesee County and Cuyahoga County, historic resource surveys in Philadelphia, preservation advocacy in Saginaw, and proactive municipally-led preservation in Syracuse. Finally, the thesis proposes an expanded role for preservation in making all cities stronger, more viable places to live and work.
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my grandfather, Phil Lowe, who believes in me beyond reason and good judgment, and who promised to read the entire thing.
Acknowledgments

First thanks go to my thesis adviser, David Hollenberg, who helped transform this from an overly ambitious idea into an actual document that marries on-the-ground research, theories, and ideals. The rest of Penn’s Historic Preservation faculty stepped up on this one, too. Randall Mason, Donovan Rypkema, and Aaron Wunsch were particularly helpful in offering advice, encouragement, ideas, and contacts. Josh Bloom of the CLUE Group added ideas and kindly reviewed drafts of the final chapters.

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Introduction

The shrinking city is not a new phenomenon in the U.S. Between the heady prosperity of post-war America and the turn of the 20th century, older industrial cities lost a significant proportion of their population to deindustrialization and the allure of suburbs. Cincinnati’s population declined by 35 percent; Buffalo, Detroit, Pittsburgh, and Cleveland each lost about 45 percent (Fig. 1).\(^1\) For every person who stayed in St. Louis, one left. Though revitalization efforts have experienced success in some of these cities, none has regained its former position as a hub of production and commerce. The recent spate of foreclosures that hit cities across the U.S. struck an especially hard blow to distressed postindustrial cities and set back some promising revitalization efforts.


Shrinking cities are gaining wide recognition as a significant issue. National organizations such as the National Vacant Properties Campaign, the Genesee Institute, and the Center for Community Progress have emerged to research effective politics and convene dialogues among planners and

politicians.² The annual Community Progress-sponsored Reclaiming Vacant Properties conference grew from 200 participants at its inception four years ago to over 900 in 2010.

Planning in shrinking cities is about making smaller, better places. It ranges from improving the quality of life and opportunities for remaining residents to attracting new residents to reducing the public financial burden of maintaining vacant properties. Planning tools for addressing the situation generally rely on familiar approaches scaled up to meet the magnitude of the problem. Large-scale demolition and urban agriculture are two popular approaches to repurposing vacant and abandoned properties. Other tools such as transit-oriented mixed-use development and adaptive reuse draw on lessons from growing cities.

Some cities like Youngstown, Ohio, are deliberately engaging in “rightsizing”—the realignment of the built environment to match a smaller population—via a comprehensive plan. More cities are actively thinking about the big picture and considering next steps: Of the top 20 shrinking cities, 10 have comprehensive plans developed in the last 10 years—4 in 2009-2010 alone—and 6 are currently undergoing comprehensive planning processes. Planners, politicians, institutions, foundations, and community members are engaged in lively conversations about how their cities should look, feel, and function in coming years.

With rare exceptions, though, historic preservation advocates are not at the table. The 2010 Reclaiming Vacant Properties conference included a scant two sessions on historic preservation, only one of which acknowledged shrinking cities. The conversation is not occurring in preservation circles either: The program for the 2010 conference of the National Trust for Historic Preservation (National Trust) does not mention shrinking cities. A pilot program currently being implemented by the National Trust does place a preservation specialist in Saginaw, and the 2011 National Trust conference will be held in Buffalo, but—by and large—a preservation perspective is absent from the national conversation around rightsizing. At the local level, preservation advocacy organizations and community development corporations continue to operate rehabilitation and adaptive

² The Center for Community Progress was formed in 2010 from a merger of the National Vacant Properties Campaign and the Genesee Institute.
reuse programs that draw on communities’ existing historic resources. Yet politicians and planners at the local, state, and national levels are making decisions at a large scale that will impact the long-term shape and identity of historic cities.

This omission is a glaring one, since rightsizing is fundamentally a preservation issue. Do we reinvest in the cities we have, with their attendant history, landmarks, vernacular buildings, and challenges; or do we look to the suburbs and New Urbanist communities for a fresh start? At a finer grain, do we proactively protect and invest in historic landmarks, districts, and non-designated landscapes that tell the story of the city; or do we reactively demolish deteriorated properties, regardless of their significance? Older industrial cities are still home to 16 million people and centuries of collective history; Detroit, the poster child for distressed cities, has over 700,000 residents and a continuing history of production and innovation.

Preservation has the potential, ability, and responsibility to bring a valuable new vision to shrinking cities. At its best, it recognizes existing community assets and development patterns and considers how development patterns occurred and how buildings can remain assets in the future. Reinvestment need not be concentrated around designated historic districts, but it should consider where historic areas of growth are located, and why. The resources and principles that prompted industries to cluster by waterfronts and drove the development of mixed-use neighborhoods along transportation routes should guide modern planning efforts and help allocate scarce resources to strategic preservation, reinvestment, and demolition.

Preservation also increases local investment. Historic buildings are tangible resources for rehabilitation, which generates jobs, income, taxes, and wealth. They can also help draw residents back to cities. “Historic preservation is more than an attempt to maintain old buildings for posterity’s sake; it serves as a planning and economic development tool that enables communities to manage how they will grow and change,” the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) states.3

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Finally, and perhaps most significantly, preservation helps articulate a place’s unique identity—an integral part of cities’ efforts to redefine themselves for brighter futures, retain population, improve the quality of life, and attract new businesses and residents. “It’s what makes us different than the suburbs. We’re competing in the marketplace, and it’s something we can offer that you can’t find out in many suburban communities,” says Jeff Ramsey, the Executive Director of the Detroit Shoreway Community Development Organization in Cleveland. “Preservation creates a sense of place.” Historic buildings and landscapes serve as reminders of proud industrial pasts. These pasts, when well-told, are invaluable in defining and marketing a compelling identity rooted in historic strengths, community identity, and existing buildings.

Historic resources can be designated historic landmarks or simply “old buildings,” tightly or loosely regulated, high-style mansions or vernacular cottages, residential neighborhoods or commercial districts. Whatever form they take, they are generally solidly constructed buildings that play central roles in establishing what a place is, what it has been, and what it can be. Planning for the future of shrinking cities without preservation—and preservation efforts that do not consider the broader landscape of planning—are missing a critical opportunity to develop thoughtful, effective strategies based on past strengths, tangible assets, historically strong identities, and the ultimate sustainability tactic of reuse. This thesis seeks to define and address that opportunity.

Scalability is an underlying theme. In a general sense, the thesis asks how to expand a field historically based on individual buildings to the scale of an entire city. More specifically, it examines existing plans and programs at the parcel, block, and neighborhood levels for their applicability to and impact at a citywide scale.

Its implications are not limited to the Rust Belt. Urban population loss is a problem in American cities as diverse as Birmingham, New Orleans, San Francisco, St. Paul, Boston, Buffalo, and Washington, DC. In October 2010, 1 in every 25 homes in Las Vegas was in foreclosure: not a sure sign

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4 Jeff Ramsey, Executive Director, Detroit Shoreway Community Development Organization, telephone interview with Cara Bertron, March 25, 2011.
of shrinkage, but evidence of the neighborhood destabilization that many rightsizing efforts seek to alleviate.6 Outside the United States, cities in England, Russia, China, and Japan have dwindling populations due to low birthrates and migration to other metropolitan areas. Indeed, one of every four urban centers in the world is losing population.7 Though this thesis will focus on just a few specific U.S. cities, the mindset it proposes—that preservation is an invaluable tool in re-imagining shrinking cities—will be apropos to many other cities in the United States and abroad.

**Research Questions**

This thesis investigates historic preservation’s role in planning for rightsizing through the following topics and questions:

1. **Planning for shrinking cities**
   - What is happening in older industrial cities at the intersection of preservation and rightsizing, either planned or *de facto*?
   - Is preservation incorporated into the decision-making process of municipal agencies, land banks, and community planning and development organizations?

2. **Implementation of rightsizing**
   - How are priorities determined for rehabilitation and demolition?
   - How do traditional preservation tools such as historic designation fit into rightsizing plans, policies, and programs?

3. **Capacity-building**
   - How can preservation advocates be more effective participants in the planning and rightsizing processes?

The thesis makes the assumption that shrinking cities will not regain sufficient population to attain their peak size again, and that some demolition is necessary to balance market supply and demand. It considers both planning and preservation programs and policies with the goal of clarify-

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ing how preservation is used in rightsizing efforts, both explicitly and implicitly. Though private entities can and are contributing to rightsizing efforts in shrinking cities, public and nonprofit advocacy actors are emphasized here.

**Thesis Structure**

The thesis begins with this introduction, which argues for the inclusion of preservation as a factor in rightsizing decisions, and continues with a methodological overview of the research process. The backbone of the thesis is a literature review summarizing the current landscapes in both preservation and planning for rightsizing.

It would be an impossible scope for this thesis to survey all efforts to reshape and re-vision cities creatively and sustainably. Thus, it focuses on seven case studies of policies and programs, primarily planning initiatives. The bulk of the thesis consists of a findings chapter that reports the results of these case studies. It is structured according to the research themes: planning, implementation, and capacity building.

The broad literature review and case studies serve as the foundation for a comparative analysis of how historic preservation—and, more importantly, a preservation ethos—are employed as part of a broad-based approach to re-thinking and reshaping shrinking cities. A brief manifesto on the future of preservation in planning rounds out the thesis.

**Challenges**

This thesis is exciting in its timeliness and urgency, but it was rife with challenges. The research topics and questions are only a small sample of potential subjects, yet each could support a thesis in itself. The vast majority of literature around shrinking cities is oriented toward narrowly defined planning objectives. Exploring preservation-related programs required focus infused with the awareness that preservation tenets can be found in unlikely places.

Reading all the extant literature was simply not possible. New plans, reports, and news articles appear each week as cities continue to grapple with rightsizing in a very real and immediate way. This thesis seeks to provide a picture of what has been done to date, give a sense of the direction of
the field, and propose adjustments to the course of organizations and policies. The danger in this necessarily selective approach is that the presentation might be skewed, relying more heavily on one type of information than another.

**Note on Terminology**

The terminology around planning in older industrial cities is murky. *Preservation* carries certain baggage: of house museums, painstaking restoration, and—more dangerously—obstructionism, wealth, and privilege. It does not convey what it so often is: management of change. More importantly, there is no clear, neutral word to describe the process of responding to long-term economic and demographic shifts—typically manifested in a large amount of vacant and abandoned property—through a policy that physically shapes the remaining city fabric. This is likely a result of the relative newness of the field: though practitioners have been dealing with the aftermath of extended population loss, it has only recently become a national conversation. *Rightsizing* is currently most commonly used, but it is clearly a euphemism for *downsizing* and fraught with emotional charge for some. *Downsizing, declining, and shrinking* are loaded with negative connotations. John Gallagher of *The Detroit Free Press* proposes *regenerating*, which focuses on reinvestment over demolition.⁸ The Center for Community Progress, with the Greater Ohio Policy Center, has formed a network to distribute information between *cities in transition*—a lengthy and ambiguous term, but perhaps an adequate one. Neutrality may be out of the question—after all, each person brings his or her own perspectives and experience to bear when hearing a word—but participants in this process of reinventing cities should agree on a term for common use and clearly explain what it means.

This thesis uses *rightsizing* to mean the process of tailoring cities to fit the needs of their current population, both through demolition and reinvestment. *Older industrial cities* is the primary term employed throughout to describe communities that built their prosperity on an industrial base and have sustained significant long-term population loss and large-scale vacancy and abandonment; *shrinking cities* is occasionally used interchangeably. These are imperfect terminologies, but they are currently prevalent among those working in the field.

To be more precise, the following definitions were adopted for the most common terms. With the exception of preservation ethos, all definitions here are quoted directly from existing literature.

**Abandoned property**  
A property whose owner has stopped carrying out at least one of the significant responsibilities of property ownership, as a result of which the property is vacant or likely to become vacant in the immediate future.9

**Older industrial cities**  
[Cities] still struggling to make a successful transition from an economy based on routine manufacturing to one based on more knowledge-oriented activities… On the whole they remain beset by slow (or no) employment and business growth, low incomes, high unemployment, diminishing tax bases, and concentrated poverty.10

**Preservation ethos**  
The view that historic narratives, older buildings, and cultural landscapes have a multifaceted value that includes but is not limited to physical fabric. This value can be incorporated into other fields (such as planning) to influence decisions about urban fabric and other designs, plans, and programs.

**Rightsizing**  
Refers to stabilizing dysfunctional markets and distressed neighborhoods by more closely aligning a city’s built environment with the needs of existing and foreseeable future populations.11 Many programs that respond to the reality of a smaller city are not explicitly called rightsizing. For the purposes of this thesis, rightsizing efforts are defined as those that consciously allocate resources to weak-market areas through demolition or “viable” areas via reinvestment.

**Shrinking cities**  
A special subset of older industrial cities with significant and sustained population loss (25% or greater over the past 40 years) and increasing levels of vacant and abandoned properties, including blighted residential, commercial, and industrial buildings.12

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11 Schilling and Logan.
12 Ibid.
Methodology

This thesis adopts a survey approach to determine how shrinking cities implicitly and explicitly include local historic resources and heritage in re-shaping their physical plants, whether deliberately or through less intentional inclusion. The survey approach provided a framework for organizing a staggering number of practices and policies into something that could be tackled in a nine-month research project. Here, seven older industrial cities are examined under three case-study headings with regard to the presence, direction, and intent of preservation-related themes, programs, and projects. The research methodology included interviews with key planners and/or preservationists in each city, as well as examination of comprehensive plans, program documents, and news articles.

Joseph Schilling and Jonathan Logan’s list of the 20 older industrial cities with the highest population loss and residential vacancy between 1960 and 2000 provided the basis for the city-specific research. Building on Jennifer Vey’s assessment of older industrial cities with significant population loss and struggling economies, the Schilling-Logan list navigates the immense landscape of potential study material—which comprises the entire Rust Belt, with a few exceptions, as well as individual cities throughout the United States and the world—and focuses it on a manageable terrain. The authors selected the 20 cities based on long-term population loss (at least 25 percent between 1960 and 2000) and high rates of abandoned and blighted residential properties (classified as “other vacant” in the 2000 U.S. Census) (Fig. 2).

Following the development of a literature review that synthesized historic preservation, revitalization, and urban planning, preliminary research was conducted to examine information about a number of the shrinking cities on the Schilling-Logan list. An extensive matrix was developed with demographic, political, and organizational information about each city on the Schilling-Logan list. Philadelphia was also included, due to its proximity to the author and relevance: Though

13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 Vey.
the city grew by 0.6 percent from 2000 to 2010, it still suffered long-term, large-scale population loss and faces the challenge of high vacancy rates and abundant vacant land. Scanning the matrix offered one way to consider the state of a given city in regard to selected factors, as well as basic comparisons between cities.

### Top Twenty Shrinking Cities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>City</th>
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<td>Saginaw, MI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Binghamton, NY</td>
<td>Flint, MI</td>
<td>Scranton, PA</td>
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<td>Buffalo, NY</td>
<td>Harrisburg, PA</td>
<td>St. Louis, MO</td>
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<td>Huntington, WV</td>
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<td>Rochester, NY</td>
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</table>

**Figure 2.** Source: Schilling and Logan.

One of the richest sources of information came from shrinking cities that recently completed comprehensive or master plans. Of the twenty cities on the Schilling-Logan list, half have completed comprehensive plans since 2000; seven of those were completed since 2005. Of the ten cities remaining, six are in the process of developing citywide plans. Clearly, municipal governments and community members are thinking about the future of their places. The completed comprehensive plans provide a valuable window into priorities, plans, and hopes at a very local level.

**Case Study Selection**

Case studies were sought to provide detailed pictures of how municipal governments, citywide institutions, and nonprofits are working to plan and reshape the city. It was critical that people in each city be actively asking these questions and pushing for effective ways to tackle rightsizing. Additionally, it was necessary to ensure that local politicians, city staff, members of the preservation community, and representatives from relevant institutions and organizations were willing to be interviewed for research purposes.

A matrix of preliminary research was used as a starting point for case study selection. A number of factors were considered, including in progress, recently completed, or finalized comprehensive plans, which offer a detailed picture of a municipality’s view of itself and its future; and demolition,
rehabilitation, and reinvestment programs. A significant population decline and percent of vacant units were present in all cities in the matrix, as it was based on the Schilling-Logan list of the top twenty shrinking cities.

Non-U.S. cities were not considered as case studies, though the challenge of shrinking cities is hardly exclusive to this country. The importance of visiting the city, data access, and the benefits of common data and programs (the U.S. Census, the Neighborhood Stabilization Program/NSP, and Community Development Block Grants, to name a few) swung the balance in favor of domestic cities.

Sifting the matrix for the essential factors yielded a list of seven cities with notable policies and programs: Detroit, Flint, and Saginaw, Michigan; Syracuse, New York; Cincinnati and Cleveland, Ohio; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Fig. 3). Some programs are well-established; others are just now being launched. Most case studies focus on planning initiatives rather than preservation projects, as the planning realm currently offers a more robust and well-developed array of actions, policies, and programs to address rightsizing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Philadelphia</td>
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<td>Surveys</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Syracuse</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Proactive surveys and designation</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 3.** Case study cities with focus areas highlighted.
Selected planners and preservationists from the case study cities were contacted via email with a request for a brief telephone or in-person interview. Due to a focus on local policy and programs, as well as time restrictions, few people were interviewed from state and national agencies and organizations. Research does incorporate information on broader policies that significantly impact local plans, such as the Neighborhood Stabilization Program and rehabilitation requirements associated with the Department of Housing and Urban Development funding.

**Case Study Research**

Case study research consisted of research into programs that included an implicit or explicit preservation component and interviews with key figures. Programs with a preservation ethos were identified through trawling cities’ websites, Google Internet searches for key terms, and recommendations from interviewees and other local contacts. Fieldwork in four of the seven surveyed cities (Cleveland, Detroit, Flint, and Philadelphia) included meetings with contacts, photography, and explorations of downtown and other neighborhoods identified by research and local contacts.

Research relied heavily on interviews, since many initiatives are just now being developed and implemented. A number of cross-disciplinary interviews were necessary to gain a complete picture of each city’s approach to reshaping and re-visioning itself. At the city level, I spoke with staff members from planning departments, landmarks preservation commissions, and economic development offices. Staff members from local preservation nonprofits and SHPOs and representatives of neighborhood organizations provided invaluable insight into the local preservation landscapes—both physical and political. In some cases, programs were spearheaded by only one or two people, which limited the number of perspectives available. Interviews were conducted by telephone and in person; most lasted between 30 minutes and 1 hour, though a few ran longer.

A comparative analysis identified common characteristics among the surveyed cities, then sorted them into common themes related to the research questions. The resulting analysis draws connections and contrasts between various initiatives and notes some potential next steps.
After research and analysis established what is, the next step was to envision what might be, particularly with regard to the role preservation ideas and advocates can play in reshaping shrinking cities. The manifesto in the final chapter offers a roadmap for planners and preservationists to better integrate the two fields into an effective approach to building and improving thriving cities, shrinking or not.

**Sources**

In the literature review and later in the case study research, presenting a comprehensive view was a challenge. Municipalities; state and national policymakers; organizations, institutions, and foundations; and community members are developing creative approaches to reshaping and re-visioning cities even now, for rightsizing is not just a top-down project. Their voices emerge through diverse media: the books and journal articles of traditional scholarship, comprehensive plans and other policy and program documents, news articles, websites, and blogs. Together, these comprise an ongoing conversation at multiple levels—a thousand conversations in a thousand places.
Literature Review

Older industrial cities with long-term population loss face significant physical challenges. Decades of disinvestment have resulted in many vacant and abandoned buildings—some in good shape, others badly deteriorated. In many cases, demolition has followed decay, leaving a patchwork of vacant lots.\textsuperscript{16} Other properties are “at-risk”: occupied, but in poor condition.\textsuperscript{17} To exacerbate the challenge, these changes are not concentrated in a single area. Vacant and abandoned buildings share block space with stable, maintained housing; vacant lots are scattered among occupied houses. There is no easy way to excise decay.

Thus far, preservation has not been an audible voice in conversations about the large-scale transformation needed in shrinking cities. This thesis attempts to be one voice in that conversation by examining how these cities consider designated and potential historic resources, and simply old buildings, as they make decisions about where to demolish and where to reinvest—in effect, as they reinvent themselves as smaller, healthier places. This literature review is the introduction to the conversation. It outlines current efforts in preservation and rightsizing policy, with particular attention to how shrinking cities’ policies, programs, and preservation goals overlap.

The chapter begins with a look at how preservation has been promoted as a planning and revitalization strategy in cities where rightsizing is not necessarily a priority. Next, it considers views on using existing buildings as resources, without the lens of overt preservation. It then asks the open question of how cities should plan for smaller populations and examines the types of strategies now in place. As the body of work on shrinking cities is not substantial, the literature review relies heavily on a few authoritative works by established experts, supplemented by shorter articles focused on one city or region.

Preservation in Context

After George Washington’s Mount Vernon was saved, preservation advocates gradually expanded their purview to the preservation of historic districts, vernacular workingman’s cottages and factories, and, most recently, cultural landscapes. These efforts typically take the form of nomination to and designation in a historic register, with legal restrictions and/or incentives used to influence what happens to the designated historic property.

The ethos underlying these efforts is that place matters. Each house, neighborhood, commercial district, and industrial area tells a particular story about a specific people, place, and time. Design and construction speak to values about family, work, and leisure; the relation of houses and public spaces testify to divisions between private and public life; and the development of neighborhoods and cities tells how places of industry, education, and commerce relate to the lives of individuals and families. How those stories, values, and spatial relationships are preserved and retold is similarly revealing about modern priorities.

That broader preservation ethos has been used both as a foil to suburban sprawl and as a catalyst for revitalization. Sprawl is caricatured as identical, cheaply-built boxes marching in orderly rows and cul-de-sacs across former farmland, accompanied by driveways and neat yards: if not the antithesis of places that matter, then blots upon the concept. Detractors of sprawl point to inefficient use of increasingly scarce land and resources, auto dependence, historic segregation by income and race, separation from jobs and services, fiscal dependence on hefty subsidies, graceless aging, and lack of gathering places where casual social contact could take place.18 Preservationists hold sprawl up as a harbinger of a future where Jane Jacobs’ warning is realized: “Every place becomes more like every other place, all adding up to Noplace.”19 Detroiter John Gallagher mourns how “space is frittered away without a second thought, as if an endless amount of it lay just around the corner.”20 History is ignored, investments in infrastructure and buildings are wasted, and lessons

19 Jane Jacobs, Death and Life of Great American Cities, 440 (qtd. in Moe and Wilkie x).
from thousands of years of village, town, and city life are neglected, while built assets and residents in the urban core suffer from disinvestment and city services that shrink along with the tax base.  

James Howard Kunstler, an author admittedly given to colorful hyperbole, calls suburban sprawl “a landscape of scary places, the geography of nowhere, that has simply ceased to be a credible human habitat.”

It is in this urgent context that some preservation advocates embrace tools beyond historic designation. Urban planning obliterated countless historic buildings in urban renewal-fueled demolitions and highways in the 1950s and 1960s, but it now offers a way to focus resources on existing development. Directing growth to infill sites, redeveloping waterfronts and other resource-rich areas, creating viable alternatives to cars and highways, and changing zoning to allow mixed-use developments and downtown housing are ongoing projects in cities across the country. Portland, Oregon, set an urban growth boundary that restricts development to areas within the boundary, and—with 3 counties and 23 other municipalities—formed a metropolitan government to coordinate growth management plans. The State of Oregon encouraged these developments through legislation. Many cities complete long-term comprehensive plans that articulate the need to keep characteristic built fabric. Though these are not explicitly or exclusively historic preservation tools, they accomplish preservation aims by recognizing the value of existing assets and assuring developers and property owners that those assets will remain in the future.

Likewise, emphasizing the financial, emotional, and practical benefits of reusing existing buildings, neighborhoods, downtowns, and cities counterpoints the widespread build-new-build-better mentality. Economically speaking, historic houses, public buildings, parks, streets, and other infrastructure represent immeasurable past investments. Memphis developer Henry Turley explains:

A huge amount of our assets are tied up in these old buildings... and sewers and electric systems and what not. For us to throw that away and create a new one is not nearly so

21 Moe and Wilkie xii, 259.
23 Moe and Wilkie 218-19.
24 Ibid. 209.
25 Ibid. x.
good as to deploy that capital in a productive way. To destroy our social fabric and waste our economic assets just makes no sense to me.26

With sprawl as the lusterless alternative, people are realizing the importance of feeling connected to place and to each other. A lively, distinctive environment feels different, like a place where things happened in the past and where people want to be now (Fig. 4). It also provides opportunities for casual interaction as part of a larger heterogeneous community—not something to take for granted, given any experience with auto-centric suburban life.

Practically speaking, the suburban siren song may be growing softer. Young professionals, artists, and empty-nesters are recognizing the advantages of living in dense, historic, walkable environments with distinct identities and easy access to shops, jobs, schools, and transit. Of 24 U.S. cities in a 2001 study, 18 saw their downtown population increase during the 1990s.27 Many people—especially those without children—are choosing older urban houses and apartments with character, good construction, and city-centric locations over shinier single-family detached houses. Those

26 Qtd. in Moe and Wilkie 91.
who remain in the market for newer houses can look to urban infill or the New Urbanist movement, which constructs neotraditional towns in greenfields and draws heavily from historic neighborhoods and downtowns in terms of layout, scale, and even architectural design (Fig. 5). Transit-oriented design (TOD) is another relatively recent planning concept that mirrors the historical development patterns of older neighborhoods.

The preservation ethos also comes into play when focusing on positive investment. Roberta Brandes Gratz is a vocal advocate of “urban husbandry,” or the incremental changes that come with thoughtful small-scale revitalization. Contrasted with large-scale, unilateral “project planners” who rely on a one-project-fits-all solution, urban husbanders focus on strengthening and reinvigorating characteristic underutilized buildings and public spaces while acknowledging the complexity of the urban environment.28

Where project planning replaces, urban husbandry reinforces. With this preservation-based ethos, innovative solutions with a strong local flavor gradually bring life back to downtowns as others are

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spurred to rethink those places’ potential. This is nothing new for preservation, which has long been a grassroots activity. Numerous local programs around the country and the National Trust’s Main Street Program rely on citizen volunteers, activists, and investors to take figurative and literal ownership of struggling neighborhoods and downtowns. Outside the traditional preservation fold, a few community development corporations (CDCs) use preservation to stabilize historic neighborhoods, either by promoting revitalization or protecting low-income communities.29

As Gratz tells it, urban husbandry is largely a downtown tool. However, its central principles—that small changes add up and historic places strengthen individuals and communities—have widespread applications. At city and state levels, preservation projects provide more local jobs and income to local businesses than a comparable amount spent on new construction.30 Preservation stabilizes neighborhoods through restoring buildings, attracting new jobs and residents, and giving existing residents more reasons to stay. Older buildings provide more affordable start-up space for local entrepreneurs. The sum of this activity is a prosperous, stable, safe, innovative place where businesses and residents have a real financial and emotional stake in the community’s health. Former National Trust president Richard Moe writes, “Preservation has become less an end in itself and more a tool of neighborhood regeneration, a way of attracting investment, energy, and affection to places whose futures would be in doubt without it.”31

Addressing sprawl requires a coherent, long-term strategy that recognizes all its inherent costs and recognizes existing resources, and preservation is neither the only antidote nor the only effective revitalization tool. Yet it plays important roles in both. It helps to jumpstart economic opportunities, benefits from grassroots activism, and demonstrates long-term commitment to places. It affirms that places—and the people who live in them—matter. Gratz and coauthor Norman

31 Moe and Wilkie 141.
Mintz explore the synergy between economic health, quality of life, preservation, and aesthetics.\textsuperscript{32} Carnegie-Mellon professor and Pittsburgh preservationist Arthur Ziegler explains further:

Historic preservation can be the underlying basis of community renewal, human renewal, and economic renewal. Preservation is not some isolated cultural benefit. I don’t think of preservation as an end in itself. I see it as a means to create an operating community of concerned and reasonably happy people.\textsuperscript{33}

Yet the successful revitalization stories and urban renaissance described above are not the norm in American cities. Of 302 U.S. cities examined for economic health and residential well-being, 65 fell behind.\textsuperscript{34} These are largely older industrial cities in the Northeast and Midwest, now characterized economically by “slow (or no) employment and business growth, low incomes, high unemployment, diminishing tax bases, and concentrated poverty.”\textsuperscript{35} These cities have many of the assets prized by urban husbanders and preservationists: natural resources such as waterways and parks; distinctive historic buildings, dense urban fabric, and transit; economic strengths in employment centers, universities, and medical facilities; and intangible resources such as sports franchises, rich cultural offerings, and a sense of identity and pride (Fig. 6).

\textbf{Figure 6.} Intact streetwall in downtown Flint (2011).

\textsuperscript{32} Gratz and Mintz 236.
\textsuperscript{33} Qtd. in Moe and Wilkie 126
\textsuperscript{34} Vey 4.
\textsuperscript{35} *Ibid.*
But they have also lost significant percentages of their populations and tax dollars and incurred related social, economic, and physical challenges. The quality of public education—rarely an urban strength—has dropped with declining tax revenues, along with the amount and quality of social services. Crime and vandalism rates have spiraled up, even as police and fire forces are cut back to meet budget cuts. Employers have followed their employees to the suburbs or left the region. Many cities are losing population to developments just beyond city limits that offer newer houses, lower taxes, and better services. Eighty percent of the Detroit-area population lives in suburbs outside the city limits.36 Other cities contain sprawl within their boundaries, the result of eager annexation and unbridled growth. As the market moves to newer and greener pastures, widespread vacancy and abandonment of older properties results, creating spots and swaths of blight in already vulnerable neighborhoods.

**Vacant and Abandoned Properties**

National Housing Institute research director Alan Mallach defines an abandoned property as “a property whose owner has stopped carrying out at least one of the significant responsibilities of property ownership, as a result of which the property is vacant or likely to become vacant in the immediate future.”37 Vacant and abandoned properties are contextual buildings. Except in rare cases such as Detroit’s Michigan Central Station, these are not landmarks. They are boarded-up houses, deserted apartment buildings, ghost-empty factories, and commercial shells; their condition runs the gamut from minor cosmetic issues to severe dilapidation. When occupied, they set the tempo of residential streets and downtown street walls; they wove the fabric between monumental buildings. Grand language aside, they are ordinary buildings that once held ordinary residents, workers, and shoppers and contributed to the life of blocks, neighborhoods, towns, and cities.

Now, these properties detract from a community’s economic, physical, and social health. They drive down the values of nearby properties by an average of $6,500 and discourage investment.38

37 Mallach 1.
38 Ibid. 8.
They raise the risks of fire, can harbor drug-related activity, and pose a danger to local children and public health. Deteriorated buildings are linked to higher crime rates. Vacant lots, where houses or industrial buildings were demolished, are sites for illicit activity and illegal dumping. Securing or demolishing these buildings and cleaning vacant lots sucks up municipal funds; trying to track down and galvanize negligent owners to act has high costs in city staff salaries. From 2001 to 2006, the city of St. Louis spent $15.5 million just to demolish vacant buildings. Meanwhile, tax-delinquent properties are not contributing anything back to city coffers. The market—with little demand to fuel it—has failed.

The problem cannot be ignored. A 2002 study found that an average of 15 percent of land in the 100 largest cities was vacant. The 2000 Census estimated that Philadelphia had over 37,000 abandoned dwelling units, Baltimore 21,000, Detroit 16,000, and Cleveland 8,000 (Fig. 7). (Vacant commercial and industrial buildings are not counted systematically.) These buildings are concentrated in weak-market cities that have lost a sizeable portion of their populations, but they are also appearing in great numbers in apparently prosperous cities such as Las Vegas and Fresno, California, that were hard-hit by the mortgage crisis of the late 2000s.

An excess of vacant and abandoned land appears when the costs of occupying or maintaining a property exceed the potential benefits. It can also be caused by speculative property flipping or predatory lending. It is affected by location and the size of the real estate market, physical obsolescence (requiring expensive rehabilitation), and market obsolescence (where layout or size makes the building unattractive to potential owners and occupants).

Mallach calls abandoned properties “the single most destructive” issue in inner cities because they compound other common problems: “Neighborhoods would still have crime and fires if they contained no abandoned properties, but probably to a far lesser extent. Older cities would still

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39 Moe and Wilkie 102.
40 Mallach 9.
42 Cited in Mallach 309.
43 Ibid. 5-6.
have fiscal problems if no properties were abandoned, but those problems would be less severe and more easily solved."\textsuperscript{44}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{housing_vacancy_rates_detroit.png}
\caption{Housing vacancy rates in Detroit by Census Block Group (2010). Darkest areas have a vacancy rate of 20 to 60 percent. Source: Data Driven Detroit.}
\end{figure}

The movement to address vacant and abandoned properties is not led by preservationists, but by housing and community development advocates. A fundamentally local problem, it is increasingly the subject of national attention: the 2010 Reclaiming Vacant Properties conference in Cleveland attracted 950 officials, politicians, nonprofit and private-sector practitioners, and students representing local, county, regional, state, and federal agencies and organizations.

The primary forum for the national conversation is the recently formed Center for Community Progress (CCP). CCP was established in 2010 from a merger of the Genesee Institute (a research

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid. 9.
arm of the Genesee County Land Bank) and the National Vacant Properties Campaign, a joint project of Smart Growth America, the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), and the International City/County Management Association (ICCMA). CCP issues reports, brings together research fellows, organizes the annual Reclaiming Vacant Properties conference, and lobbies for state and federal policies that address vacant and abandoned properties. The National Trust also weighed in with its 2002 publication Rebuilding Community, which offers overviews of 22 policies and projects that employ preservation as a key component to the rehabilitation and reuse of abandoned buildings.

Tackling the problem of vacant and abandoned buildings requires a multi-pronged approach, but formal preservation strategies are not usually on the short list. Abandonment prevention strategies include assistance to absentee property owners and homeowners, such as loans, rental management help, and building rehabilitation codes that adjust stringent modern standards to work within the constraints of existing buildings—in effect, making rehabilitation work financially possible. Comprehensive information systems allow city officials to track trends in properties and landlords and develop an early warning system for abandonment. As a last resort, court-appointed receivership can keep abandoned properties in use, preserving housing units and naming a party responsible for building upkeep.45

Once properties are abandoned, it is essential that city governments have the legal tools to acquire them. Land banks are public authorities that acquire abandoned tax-delinquent properties and strategically reconvey them for productive uses that achieve public policy goals such as affordable housing, neighborhood stabilization, green space provision, and brownfield revitalization.46 Gus Frangos, the President of the Cuyahoga County Land Reutilization Corporation, called land banks “a marriage between the funding stream, transactional capability, and know-how.”47 The Genesee County Land Bank is an early and successful model. Since its establishment in 2002, it

45 Ibid.
47 Gus Frangos, President, Cuyahoga County Land Reutilization Corporation, telephone interview with Cara Bertron, March 14, 2011.
has facilitated the reuse of more than 4,000 residential, commercial and industrial properties. Typical activities include foreclosure prevention, demolition, housing sales, side lot transfer, housing rehabilitation and rental, emergency property maintenance, “clean and green” project support, brownfield redevelopment, and development projects. Tax lien foreclosures, condemnation, and eminent domain are other tools to bring properties into public ownership.

Finally, encouraging productive, sustainable reuse of the properties involves stimulating market demand and capturing internal and regional demand that might otherwise move to the suburbs (residential and commercial sprawl) or other regions (commercial and industrial). Marketing cities and neighborhoods is one large step toward stimulating and capturing demand; making available incentives for homeownership or rehabilitation is another. Reuse strategies should be oriented to meet market demand. Critically, they also should be guided by neighborhood revitalization plans in which the community has articulated its vision for the neighborhood and how that vision can be achieved.

Demolition is sometimes the best option, given historic and continuing population loss. Cleveland’s Neighborhood Progress, Inc. writes:

Blighted homes are a cancer destroying neighborhoods, yet there are neither sufficient resources – nor a viable market – to renovate and reuse them all. Demolition is therefore a regrettable, but necessary, strategy to protect neighborhood markets and the health and welfare of citizens.

Along with Neighborhood Progress and other CDCs doing neighborhood-specific work, local governments are principal actors in dealing with vacant and abandoned properties, but state-level legislation enables municipalities to be more effective. State action can enable new rehabilitation-oriented building codes, property acquisition tools such as land banks, and more expedient fore-

50 Mallach.
closure on tax-delinquent properties. Where they exist, state rehabilitation tax credits applicable to homeowners and split-rate taxation help encourage the development of historic properties and vacant lots by effectively lowering rehabilitation costs and raising the holding cost of vacant land, respectively. Brownfield cleanup programs, smart growth initiatives, and state enterprise zone programs are other state-level programs that can provide incentives for redevelopment and infill of vacant properties.

Federal programs add even more resources for tackling vacant and abandoned properties. The Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008 established the Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP), which provides funding for targeted neighborhood stabilization through the acquisition, rehabilitation, and redevelopment of abandoned or foreclosed properties. NSP funding has been issued in three iterations. NSP1 distributed $3.91 billion to state and local governments on a formula basis, where areas of greatest need received the most funding. NSP2, enabled by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, provided $2 billion to state and local governments and nonprofit agencies on a competitive basis. The foreclosure crisis shifted NSP policy significantly toward rehabilitation, and NSP2 funding recipients were required to spend at least 25 percent of funds on the purchase and redevelopment of abandoned and foreclosed residential properties for households earning less than 50 percent of area median income. An additional $1 billion in NSP3 funds were enabled in 2010 and were disbursed to state and local governments on a formula basis.

One requirement associated with federal funding is particularly relevant to historic properties: compliance with lead-based paint procedures. Approximately 75 percent of houses built prior to 1978 contain lead-based paint, a toxic substance particularly dangerous to children. Though un-
disturbed paint does not pose a risk, construction activity that disturbs leaded paint can be risky, and recipients of NSP funds can be held liable for any lead-related problems for twenty years.\textsuperscript{57} This mandate makes rehabilitation much more involved and expensive, as agencies and organizations often seek to abate all lead rather than risk health and legal repercussions.

The campaign to reclaim vacant and abandoned properties is, by and large, a preservation cause. It tries to preserve a place’s physical fabric—including its architectural character and built history—through retention of abandoned buildings in a way that meets current and future population needs. It recognizes that vacant and abandoned properties are tangible assets that can be promoted in conjunction with cities’ cultural and historical resources.\textsuperscript{58} Reusing abandoned buildings provides opportunities for new housing, neighborhood stabilization, and downtown revitalization, and builds wealth within the community.\textsuperscript{59} Paul Brophy and Jennifer Vey recommend that rehabilitation of abandoned properties “be considered part of a long-term strategy for preserving the special character of the urban environment.”\textsuperscript{60} Additionally, comprehensively addressing abandoned buildings offsets a potential cause and effect of sprawl.\textsuperscript{61}

**Planning for Smaller Places**

“Make no little plans,” wrote 19\textsuperscript{th}-century architect Daniel Burnham. “They have no magic to stir men’s blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans, aim high in hope and work… Think big.” A number of cities that have experienced significant population losses are thinking big about smaller futures. This process occurs through a comprehensive or general plan that lays out the city’s current situation and future prospects in social, economic, and physical terms, often with neighborhood-specific components. Public input is a substantial component. Of the 20 older industrial cities in the U.S. with the highest population loss, 16 have undergone comprehensive planning processes in the past ten years or are currently developing comprehensive plans (Fig. 8).

\textsuperscript{57} Christina Kelly, Lead Planner, Genesee County Land Bank, interview with Cara Bertron, March 21, 2011.  
\textsuperscript{58} Brophy and Vey 16.  
\textsuperscript{59} Mallach.  
\textsuperscript{60} Brophy and Vey 16.  
\textsuperscript{61} Alexander.
Youngstown, Ohio, received widespread attention for its 2002 “Youngstown Vision” and 2005 comprehensive plan that acknowledged permanent population loss. At the town’s peak, it had 170,000 residents; in 2002, it had 82,000. After a two-year process that engaged over 150 community volunteers, the Youngstown 2010 plan was produced for a future stabilized population of 80,000. The plan was based on a vision with four tenets: accept that Youngstown is a smaller city, define the city’s role in the new regional economy, improve the city’s image and quality of life, and ensure action. As an envious Detroit-based columnist wrote, “Youngstown hasn’t loaded the chamber with silver bullets, but at least they’ve had clear targets.”62

Youngstown 2010 was followed by the Connecting Cleveland 2020 Citywide Plan in 2006. This plan acknowledges Cleveland’s population loss and current challenges but asserts that the natural and historic assets from its heyday can help transform the city into a thriving place with a high quality of life. Other cities’ comprehensive plans take similar angles.

**Reshaping Shrinking Cities**

Rightsizing is where comprehensive plans meet the realities of vacant and abandoned property. Rightsizing strategies aim to trim and reinvigorate cities. Trimming strategies range from the

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physical to the financial to the political: de-annexing vacant land to reduce the cost burden of
maintenance, demolition of properties, decommissioning surplus public infrastructure and limit-
ing municipal services, declaring a moratorium on public and nonprofit investments in distressed
neighborhoods, transferring the responsibility for municipal services to a private entity, and
creating an urban growth boundary to encourage infill development and vacant property reclama-
tion in cities. Reinvigoration focuses on the assets that remain: consolidating resources to inject
new life—or concentrate old life—into cities. It includes attracting new industries, businesses,
workers, and residents; revitalizing existing downtowns and commercial corridors; and providing
resources to rehabilitate existing historic resources or construct new infill developments.

Of course, each of these is political, with immediate and long-term implications for residents,
business and property owners, and local officials and politicians. Schilling and Logan caution that
any rightsizing effort must balance resident input, short-term concerns, long-term community vi-
ability, and social equity: “Residents in neighborhoods with high concentrations of vacant proper-
ties are often predominately low-income and people of color” with powerful memories of urban
renewal.

Demolition’s central place in current rightsizing efforts strengthens that association. As a visible
response to widespread vacant and abandoned properties, and with maintenance of vacant lots
being cheaper in the short term than securing buildings, demolition is a relatively simple and at-
tractive step for city officials. Dayton, Ohio; Saginaw, Michigan; and Pittsburgh demolish between
500 and 800 vacant houses each year. Philadelphia and Buffalo each raze 1,000, while Cleveland
takes down 1,700 (Fig. 9).

Detroit, called “the most symbolically important of our urban tragedies,” has a residential vacancy
rate of 27.8 percent. In 2010 the city began a campaign to demolish 10,000 empty residential

63 Schilling and Logan.
64 Sujata Shetty, “Shrinking Cities in the Industrial Belt: A Focus on Small and Mid-Size Cities in North-
western Ohio,” University of Toledo Urban Affairs Center (for the WORC Proposal on Shrinking Cities),
December 2009, 11.
65 Schilling and Logan 453.
66 Gratz and Mintz 80; Susan Saulny, “Razing the City to Save the City,” New York Times, June 20, 2010.
buildings within a few years, a move hailed by the *New York Times* as “shrinking the city in order to save it.”67 The first 3,000 buildings were to be demolished in 2010 based not on physical condition but on their location in high-crime areas.68 Critics charge that Detroit lacks a long-term vision for reshaping itself. Some hope that will change with the Detroit Works comprehensive planning process, but others remain skeptical. “We have a lot of history of things being promised, land being taken,” said one business owner. “We have to be vigilant about everything. We have to be on guard.”69

When not based on a local and regional market demand and consideration of historic fabric, demolition programs can duplicate the mistakes of urban renewal: unnecessary demolitions, fragmented communities, and loss of physical fabric.70 “Abandoned buildings can break a neighborhood’s heart. Demolished buildings can destroy its soul,” writes Richard Moe. “Years of experi-

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67 Saulny, “Razing.”
69 Saulny, “Razing.”
70 Mallach 73.
ence… have clearly demonstrated the folly of destroying a place in order to save it." Alan Mallach provides a less emotional evaluation: “Cities that have lost large numbers of people… often have a vast oversupply of housing, much of it of little value” due to shoddy construction or low square footage. Yet he cautions that other abandoned houses are well-constructed and roomy:

It is arguably inappropriate to write them off a priori, particularly in cities where population and housing demand are rebounding from past losses. In those cities, one could argue that the burden should shift to those who want to demolish, rather than to preserve, abandoned properties.

Mallach outlines four questions to guide demolition/preservation decisions. These address the building’s quality and architectural or historical value, the physical fabric of the neighborhood, potential redevelopment or revitalization opportunities tied to the building’s demolition, and the severity of the building as a nuisance or other hazard. Preservation can play a role in the first three questions: by evaluating significance, neighborhood context, rehabilitation opportunities.

“Greening” is a long-term solution that is not reliant on market demand and increases quality of life. It involves creating purposeful open space—parks, yards, recreation areas, or farms—from already vacant land or as the result of demolition (Fig. 10). Green space can be temporary or permanent and includes pocket parks, larger parks, or minimally maintained parcels. Greening should be guided by a strategic reuse plan that integrates new and existing open spaces with each other, links them to other planning activities, and ensures that they improve the physical, social, and economic qualities of the community.

Some open spaces serve environmental ends, as with environmental preserves that help filter and absorb storm water runoff. Green energy production is another idea: A former industrial site in Lackawanna, New York, holds a wind farm, and some envision vacant lots as perfect locations for solar cells or geothermal wells. Green space could also herald a return to historical natural landscapes. Terry Schwarz of the Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative (CUDC) advocates unpav-

72 Mallach 176.
73 Ibid. 294-95.
ing creeks that were culverted centuries ago, restoring the natural water flow and creating more
greenways and natural urban parks.

Side yards are another type of green space that could reshape the landscape more subtly. Many
cities have instituted side yards programs that sell vacant properties to adjacent homeowners for a
pittance. This solution is popular with homeowners and cities, who transfer the responsibility for
maintenance. However, it transforms historic development patterns by thinning out, or de-densi-
fying, houses; and may make future efforts to assemble large areas of vacant land for large develop-
ment projects more difficult.

Large-scale urban agriculture and smaller community gardens have captured the most popular
and media attention. Urban farms take up significant amounts of vacant land, create jobs and eco-
nomic activity, and increase access to healthy local foods. However, it is not a panacea. In Detroit,
“the epicenter of the American urban agriculture movement,” more than 15 acres of vacant land
are now used as urban farms. Yet Detroit farmers struggle to find water, pick out broken glass

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75 Mallach 286.
76 Ibid. 289-90.
and concrete, eliminate lead from the soil, keep the homeless out of greenhouses, and deal with produce thieves.

Some vacant lots are simply stabilized with routine maintenance. For example, the City of Philadelphia contracts with the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society to maintain vacant lots throughout the city, sometimes with trees and fences.

At present, all comprehensive rightsizing strategies are hypothetical. As with reclaiming vacant and abandoned properties, no cities have the fiscal wherewithal, political consensus, and capacity for vacant and abandoned property handling to move forward with a comprehensive, coordinated plan. Youngstown 2010 acknowledges, “Many difficult choices will have to be made… A strategic program is required to rationalize and consolidate the urban infrastructure in a socially responsible and financially sustainable manner.” However, it does not provide a clear map of what to do with the city’s 4,500 vacant structures and vacant land—43 percent of the total area. The plan’s implementation section focuses on short-term projects in three categories: cleaner, greener, and better planned and organized. The city is currently surveying and documenting every property. Other priorities include aggressive demolition and focused development incentives and rehabilitation programs in neighborhoods with more dense populations.

In Detroit, Mayor Dave Bing is currently spearheading the Detroit Works planning process. City officials and planners are considering “real, tangible, and monetary” incentives to convince residents to relocate from less- to more populous areas. They have already identified seven to nine population centers where better services—and people, they hope—will be concentrated. Meanwhile, the city’s demolition efforts are chipping away at a stock of 33,000 vacant houses.

77 Youngstown 2010 Citywide Plan (Youngstown, OH: City of Youngstown, 2005), 18.
78 Paris.
80 Schilling and Logan 461.
Re-Visioning Shrinking Cities

As Youngstown’s first tenet suggests, accepting the new reality as a smaller city is a significant step. Shrinking cities must re-conceive of what they are: No longer workshops of the world or industrial powerhouses, hubs of steel or automobiles, but smaller, less prosperous places. One journalist cheered rightsizing as “an opportunity to free struggling cities from a paralyzing preoccupation with past glories.” Yet so glibly discarding historical accomplishments and identity—like discarding historic buildings—wastes an invaluable and irreplaceable asset. Cities must promote themselves as dynamic places of opportunity to potential residents, visitors, and investors, but they must also define an identity that resonates with the existing community. Obscuring historic greatness disregards some important factors that led to success, as well as the assets that remain: people, natural resources, and the built environment.

Several examples from Europe demonstrate marriages of place and identity through physical developments with overt connections to the past. Gateshead, near Newcastle, England, constructed new buildings and adaptively reused others in a way that “honors traditional identities and regional skills but does so in ways that look forward and encourage direct participation in cultural production.” In Germany’s Ruhr District, an advertising campaign contrasted working-class clichés with images of technology and innovative reuse. “The Pott’s Boiling” emphasized the district’s strong heritage and cultural renaissance with images of a factory containing an orchestra (“Until recently the foreman set the pace here. Today it’s the conductor”) and a brewery (“Performances, visual worlds, and art installations. Visiting a brewery is back on the program.”) (Fig. 11). Similarly, the Leipzig Freedom advertising campaign for Leipzig, Germany, played on the city’s history as one of the first free trade centers and the home of the world’s first daily newspaper.

83 Bennett.
In the U.S., Buffalo is attempting to improve its image through its historic buildings. Advocates hold that local gems by big-name architects can draw tourists, new residents, and businesses: Frank Lloyd Wright’s Darwin Martin House, the largest example of Prairie Style architecture; Louis Sullivan’s terra cotta-clad Guaranté Building; and the Buffalo State Asylum, H. H. Richardson’s largest building and a potential future visitor and conference center. The National Trust will host its 2011 conference in the city, helping to prove that “there is gold in glorious architecture.”

Re-visioning a city cannot solve problems by itself, but it is an important step in re-making a city for a brighter future. Yet challenges remain, even and especially in the question of identity. Racial divisions run deep in cities like Detroit, where people seeking to create a new image seemingly must choose between showing a black city and a white city.

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89 Ibid.
Historic Preservation in Shrinking Cities

For the most part, preservation efforts in shrinking cities have been limited to individual buildings and catalyzed by the threat of demolition; only a few articles and programs have addressed the broad issue of preservation in rightsizing cities. Known exceptions are a Detroit-focused piece in the National Park Service publication *Common Ground*, an article by Richard Moe on Cleveland.com urging patience in rightsizing, and an action plan developed by the National Trust to maintain a preservation presence in two shrinking cities. (The final plan developed into support of a Preservation Specialist in Saginaw, Michigan; this is discussed further in the Preservation Planning Survey chapter.)

Moe acknowledges the seriousness of population loss, but underlines the “profound difference between planning for change and simply smashing neighborhoods to rubble.” He asserts the necessity of a master plan that considers many factors, including the historic value of housing stock; discourages forced resident relocation; and advocates the preservation of unique housing and landmark buildings even where widespread demolition occurs. He concludes with a pledge:

> The National Trust for Historic Preservation believes that America’s once-great industrial cities can be “rightsized” as smaller, better-functioning places to live. We’re eager to work in partnership with local governments and preservation groups to help ensure that each community’s historic resources are surveyed and, when possible, saved. It will be painful to see portions of historic neighborhoods disappear -- but with good planning and careful management, elements of our heritage can survive as links with the past and foundations for renewed growth in the future.

The “Action Plan for Youngstown Intervention (Draft)” outlines a three-year program of intensive, on-the-ground support in Youngstown. The program includes assistance to the City of Youngstown, program development around potential revitalization efforts, community education, strengthening organizational capacity of local and statewide organizations, and marketing program results. “The idea here is to… help the community come to understand the power and processes of preservation and apply its ethic as at least one organizing principle to the process of shrinking the city,” writes the National Trust’s Midwest Office director Royce Yeater.
Building-focused preservation interventions are much more common. A historic district in Saginaw, Michigan, attracted local press attention after it was de-designated to allow the demolition of 49 houses.91 A Pittsburgh columnist mourned the loss of the city's historic Mellon Arena, writing, “Hopefully... the city won’t right-size away its considerable history as well.”92 Preservationists in Cincinnati fought a building’s classification as a fire hazard and public nuisance, saying that “a more surgical strike” is needed with regard to demolition, “not a hit on the head.”93 The Cincinnati Preservation Association and the Over-the-Rhine Foundation (OTRF) lobbied city council members to create more tools to deal with vacant properties in historic neighborhoods, such as a receivership program and changes in the municipal code. (See Preservation Planning Survey.)

Derelict landmark buildings receive another type of attention. Michigan Central Station, the photographic face of Detroit’s distress, has been called out for its resemblance to Roman ruins, as a potential catalyst for redevelopment and local morale, and as “an iconic eyesore” (Fig. 12).94 The 500,000-square-foot building has been proposed for reuse as a hotel and office park, fish hatchery and aquarium, amphitheater, casino, “extreme sports castle,” new-generation railway station for high-speed trains, center for government security offices—or a tourist attraction in its current state. None of the proposals have stuck due to high rehabilitation costs, and supporters warn that “the clock is ticking” on demolition. The National Trust named the historic buildings of downtown Detroit to its 11 Most Endangered Historic Places list of 2005, calling on the city to “work with developers and preservationists to breathe new life into old buildings and save the history of one of America’s great cities.” The 1924 Book Cadillac Hotel and 1917 Fort Shelby were rehabilitated into luxury hotels in 2008.95 Still, in 2009 the nearby 1923 Lafayette Building was demolished.96

Industrial heritage has received more comprehensive attention, perhaps because of the large scale and largely open, utilitarian design of industrial developments and their consequent potential for reuse. Industrial heritage studies examine reuse of a specific type of building and landscape common in shrinking cities. Two 2010 masters theses from the University of Pennsylvania’s Historic Preservation Program consider how to preserve, redevelop, and reuse industrial heritage, specifically in waterfront locations and historic industrial complexes. Neither thesis is targeted specifically at industrial landscapes in shrinking cities, but both are germane to developments in shrinking cities.

Figure 12. Michigan Central Station, Detroit (2011).
Missing Pieces

This literature review covers a number of interrelated topics: sprawl, downtown and neighborhood revitalization, vacant properties, land banks, and many others. A full thesis could be written on any of these subjects, with or without the lens of preservation. Here, they are used to construct a larger framework showing their use in older industrial cities with long-term population loss. Within this framework, it is clear that historic preservation as an explicit practice has been only a minor element, with use generally limited to demolition protests or revitalization strategies not specific to older industrial cities.

It appears that large-scale demolition is necessary. Detroit’s physical plant, built for a city of two million but now home to only 700,000, stands as an extreme but compelling demonstration. If cities are to raise quality of life for remaining residents, improve their environments, and achieve fiscal responsibility, they cannot continue to maintain thousands of vacant and abandoned properties. Preservationists must respond to this imperative for demolition with a way to help prioritize buildings to be saved for future rehabilitation.

In a larger sense, preservationists can and should offer more to rightsizing efforts than simply tagging individual buildings to save. Cities with complex, rich histories deserve rightsizing plans that consider those histories. Like the Action Plan for Youngstown Intervention, historic preservation should engage city officials, community members, and potential investors in exploring local history and older buildings and landscapes, and how they can be used to regenerate cities. Most comprehensive plans endorse sustainability and building on assets, but do not substantively consider local history, historical development, and built assets.

Rightsizing is about more than physical buildings—it is about reorienting cities to new realities. Similarly, preservation goes beyond physical restoration to consider community pride and economic revitalization. It can be used to help attract new residents and investment, as in Gateshead, Leipzig, and Buffalo. It provides a historical perspective, another way to value existing buildings and landscapes, and assorted incentives. Its largest contribution, however, is as a tool for keeping local identity—both social and physical—intact and strengthened through change.
A wealth of possibilities exists. Low-rent buildings in Manchester’s city center attracted musicians who sparked a thriving music scene, which was followed by condominiums, bars, and businesses.\\footnote{Stohr, “Shrinking City Syndrome,” \textit{New York Times}, February 5, 2004.}

Art projects based on vacant buildings can become tourist destinations, as with Detroit’s Heidelberg Project, and hubs for community development, as with Houston’s Project Row House.

Moe and Wilkie celebrate the potential of preservation:

\begin{quote}
Community after community is proving that reinvestment in the historic built environment offers some of the best hope for improving a community’s self-image, increasing civic activism, luring new residents to replace the ones who have left, and bolstering long-term neighborhood stability.\\footnote{Moe and Wilkie 139.}
\end{quote}

They are answered by Roberta Brandes Gratz and Norman Mintz:

\begin{quote}
Historic preservation, however, should never take on an importance that makes it an overwhelming end in and of itself. It should be viewed as one tool in a larger tool kit, and an essential one at that. A builder, after all, would not stop with acquisition of a hammer when he still needs a saw…But preservation has to be about more than bricks and mortar.\\footnote{Gratz and Mintz 266.}
\end{quote}

Finally, from the 1966 publication \textit{With Heritage So Rich}:

\begin{quote}
If the preservation movement is to be successful, it must go beyond saving bricks and mortar. It must go beyond saving occasional historic houses and opening museums. It must be more than a cult of antiquarians. It must do more than revere a few precious national shrines. It must attempt to give a sense of orientation to our society, using structures and objects of the past to establish values of time and place.\\footnote{With Heritage So Rich: A Report of a Special Committee on Historic Preservation Under the Auspices of the U.S. Conference on Mayors With a Grant From the Ford Foundation (1966).}
\end{quote}
Preservation Planning Survey

On the ground, most physical rightsizing strategies look like green space: parks, community gardens, urban agriculture, or restored natural ecosystems that take up the slack of unused lots in high-vacancy neighborhoods and provide new amenities to nearby residents and visitors. Cities’ increasing focus on quality of life also yields rightsizing strategies that reinvest in existing assets such as commercial corridors and aim to attract or expand new assets like arts communities and redevelopment projects.

This chapter explores seven rightsizing strategies with preservation components in as many cities and counties: preservation planning in Syracuse; character studies in Philadelphia; strategic neighborhood-level investment in Cleveland; land banking in Genesee County and Cuyahoga County; targeted code enforcement in Cincinnati; targeted resident attraction in Detroit; and increased preservation infrastructure in Saginaw. As this list indicates, for the most part traditional preservation planning tools such as historic designation and historic resource surveys take a back seat to planning policies and programs. Similarly, the buildings being preserved are not always landmarks, but parts of the vernacular cultural landscapes that define each place and provide a backdrop for daily life. Physical preservation rarely means painstaking rehabilitation in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation of Historic Properties (Secretary’s Standards), but rather retention of the form, essential fabric, and feeling of a building. The preservation ethos of managing change with attention to existing resources might not be readily apparent in each instance, but it is there: in organizations that value existing assets, in keeping foreclosed houses occupied, in thinking twice about which buildings to demolish or retain and rehabilitate.

Though the seven case study cities share high vacancy rates and long-term population loss, each has its own political, social, and economic climate; boasts distinctive built assets; and faces particular challenges. This survey does not attempt to comprehensively explore each place. Instead, it touches briefly on policies, programs, and agencies that may be relevant to other cities seeking to tackle their own specific challenges.
The survey is possible because shrinking cities have much in common, both historically and today. Each Rust Belt city grew up on a lakeshore, riverbank, or canal to facilitate transportation of goods and people. Later, explosive railroad growth thrust tracks through industrial areas and residential neighborhoods, creating or enlarging them in the process. Indeed, those geographies often coincided: Downtown was generally a distinct commercial district, but it was not uncommon for industrial buildings and worker housing to rub shoulders across property lines outside the core (Fig. 13). The cheap, cramped housing hastily thrown up for factory workers contrasted with owners’ and managers’ grand mansions in more genteel neighborhoods. Commercial corridors and transit lines served as neighborhood arteries, with churches and schools as local landmarks alongside factories and houses.

Figure 13. The dense Nicetown neighborhood in Philadelphia developed around a major railroad interchange, clustered factories, and the historic Germantown Avenue. Industrial properties are hatched, commercial and mixed-use properties are shaded, residential properties are not colored (Land Use Map, 1942). Source: Works Progress Administration, Philageohistory.

Today, both downtowns and commercial corridors in these cities suffer from a loss of business to big box stores, commercial chains, and suburban shopping malls. Decades of population loss have left many houses vacant and eroded church congregations and school populations to the
point where the buildings must be converted to other uses, mothballed, or demolished. Moreover, because that population loss rarely occurs in blocks or swaths, vacant buildings and lots are patch-worked across the urban landscape.

By far, most vacant and abandoned buildings are residential. Still, empty factories punctuate neighborhoods and linger in industrial areas. Some cities like Baltimore and Pittsburgh have sought to capitalize on their waterfronts as public destinations; other waterfronts remain inactive and edged with empty factories. Though projects such as New York City’s High Line, Gas Works Park in Seattle, and Atlanta’s Belt Line have sparked conversations in cities across the country about how obsolete infrastructure can be transformed into active parts of the urban landscape, rail corridors and industrial remnants lie across most shrinking cities like scars.

These landscape features have planning implications today. They can catalyze reinvestment, redevelopment, and revitalization, or remain passive remnants of the past. This is true in any place, but especially critical in shrinking cities that face a staggering surplus of vacant and abandoned properties, inadequate resources, and the mandate to take decisive action or face almost certain continuing population loss. Rightsizing deals specifically with physical fabric and is implicitly influenced by landscape patterns and features. It is preservationists’ job to make that influence explicit in the planning and implementation involved with large-scale rightsizing and the capacity building that underpins planning efforts.

The chapter is structured in three parts that reflect these three aspects of rightsizing: planning, implementation, and capacity building. Because destruction and preservation are both part of the resource consolidation process, demolition and rehabilitation are included alongside each other in many of the survey examples.
Planning

Planning entails thinking strategically about the future and laying the logistical groundwork for practical action. This section considers preservation planning, character studies, targeted investment, and land banks. Land banks include a great deal of on-the-ground implementation but are included in this section to highlight their important role in city and regional planning.

Planning Ahead: Proactive Municipal Preservation in Syracuse

Located on the Erie Canal, the city of Syracuse, New York, was once a national leader in salt production, a manufacturing center in the region, and fertile ground for new businesses developing innovative technologies. The city’s architecture reflects its 19th- and 20th-century prosperity, with buildings by prominent local architects such as Archimedes Russell.

In the post-World War II era, though, Syracuse’s fortunes turned. Factories moved to the American South and overseas, taking jobs with them; sprawl lured residents to the suburbs via federally funded highways; and another federal project, urban renewal, concentrated poverty into a few large new developments. The city lost more than 30 percent of its population between 1960 and 2000, and some parts of its historic built landscape deteriorated and became pocked by vacant lots. Upstate New York was mired in a regional recession through the 1990s. A succession of mayoral administrations viewed old buildings as liabilities and favored demolition as a straightforward response to deterioration and vacancy. Though Syracuse’s population loss has slowed—it decreased by only 1,500 people between 2000 and 2010, suggesting a “plateau”—the city still contains 3,500 vacant lots and 1,700 vacant buildings.

103 “Renewing the Promise of Syracuse.”
104 Schilling and Logan.
106 Christine Capella-Peters, Outreach Unit, New York State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), telephone interview with Cara Bertron, April 7, 2011.
107 Katelyn Wright, Land Use Planner, City of Syracuse, telephone interview with Cara Bertron, March 30, 2011.
Planning did not offer any alternatives. As recently as 2003, the City did not have a planning department. However, preservation recently has emerged as a potential guide for planning efforts, with a strong, supportive mayor, planners with preservation backgrounds and sympathies, and a growing contingent of vocal preservation advocates for downtown Syracuse.\footnote{Capella-Peters.}

In 2009, Common Council member and mayoral candidate Stephanie Miner drew up a \textit{50 Point Plan} in which she acknowledged the challenges facing Syracuse and pledged to help the city “recognize its true potential.”\footnote{“Renewing the Promise of Syracuse.”} As a member of the Common Council, Miner had welcomed professional advice about many topics, including preservation, and supported preservation initiatives.\footnote{Capella-Peters.} Her campaign promises followed suit. The plan’s opening text summarized local history and hailed architecture as a positive reminder of local pride and history: “Many of our proudest structures still stand as monuments to this era of creativity and prosperity.”\footnote{“Renewing the Promise of Syracuse.”} It continued to lay out a vision for the city that was firmly rooted in history: “Syracuse was born into prosperity and preeminence through a spirit of resolve, innovation, and self-determination—and through this spirit it will be reborn.”

The \textit{50 Point Plan} addressed six major policy areas: economic development and job creation; education and youth; public safety; community development, housing, and neighborhoods; sustainability and the environment; and government modernization and efficiency. Preservation was explicitly cited as an objective in the community development section and tacitly included in two other sections. For example, one economic development priority was to draw private reinvestment to the central business district and revive neighborhood commercial corridors via marketing campaigns and tax incentives like the New York State Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit: “[It] will provide viability to many properties in Syracuse and throughout the state that hold incredible potential for economic success with the value-added [sic] that comes with unique historic architecture.”\footnote{Ibid.} The plan reframed downtown’s high vacancy rate as an opportunity to help create

\footnote{108 Capella-Peters.}
\footnote{109 “Renewing the Promise of Syracuse.”}
\footnote{110 Capella-Peters.}
\footnote{111 “Renewing the Promise of Syracuse.”}
\footnote{112 Ibid.}
“a healthy, walkable, convenient and sustainable city” based in existing buildings. Historic commercial corridors received additional attention in the public safety section, which recommended focusing crime reduction efforts in neighborhood business districts to improve their safety and economic viability.

The community development section was very clear: “Make preservation a priority in Syracuse.” Framing preservation as a quality of life matter threatened by vacancy and teardowns of historic buildings, the plan offered two strategies to preserve and capitalize on its historic neighborhoods and buildings. The first proposed to develop form-based zoning policies that emphasize walkability, mixed-use development, quality places, and good urban design—elements absent from the existing suburban-style zoning that would preserve neighborhood character.113

The second strategy endorsed the development of “a proactive approach to preservation that identifies historic properties before development or demolition is proposed in order to create clarity for property owners and members of the community while safeguarding our invaluable architectural assets.” It argued that older buildings serve both as heritage and unique marketable assets and recommended several improvements to the municipal preservation system to take advantage of them: a proactive historic designation process, clear guidelines for designated properties, and integration of preservation with planning and revitalization efforts.

Following Mayor Miner’s election in fall 2009, her transition team elaborated on the recommendations of the 50 Point Plan.114 With regard to preservation, it recommended new and improved regulations: review and revision of the existing landmark preservation ordinance, as well as design guidelines for business districts. It also proposed increasing staff review power to expedite reviews by the Landmark Preservation Board. Designation of historic properties was suggested along with an inventory of historic properties, measures anticipated to slot preservation into a “comprehensive revitalization effort.” Finally, it recommended prioritizing development in vacant downtown properties and reversing the population loss in the city’s core.

Backed by Mayor Miner’s assertion that “preservation should be the norm rather than the exception,” the city has prioritized rehabilitation of existing buildings.\textsuperscript{115} Some infill is done in targeted blocks and neighborhoods, but it is accompanied by rehabilitations.\textsuperscript{116} City planners are also taking steps to implement a proactive new approach to preservation planning. They aim to improve the delivery system by increasing predictability, transparency, and equitable application of the landmark ordinance; increasing public understanding of preservation; and protecting the city’s historic resources through proactive identification and designation of historic properties.

Knowing what exists is one of the key aspects of a comprehensive preservation system, one Syracuse sorely needs. In summer 2009, intern Katelyn Wright completed a review of the city’s Historic Properties List.\textsuperscript{117} (Wright is now a planner for the City of Syracuse.) The project was prompted by an influx of demolition requests funded by federal stimulus money; all had to be reviewed by the Landmarks Preservation Board. The Historic Properties List contains locally designated historic properties, properties listed in or eligible for the National Register, and properties listed in a general “Architecturally Significant” category; it is based on surveys completed intermittently between 1976 and 1993.

Wright found that of 1,880 properties on the list classified as Architecturally Significant—that is, flagged for demolition review by the Landmarks Preservation Board but not officially designated as historic—700 had been demolished or altered beyond eligibility for designation. Though the instructions for Wright’s review explicitly requested that no properties be added to the Historic Properties List as a result of the project, the final project report identified potential historic districts, conservation districts, and neighborhoods that had not been surveyed intensively, as well as surveyed neighborhoods with non-listed architecturally significant buildings.

For the future, the report recommended immediate surveys for four neighborhoods facing high demolition and redevelopment pressures, followed by a phased neighborhood-by-neighborhood

\textsuperscript{115} "Renewing the Promise of Syracuse”; Wright, March 30, 2011.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{117} Wright, “2009 Historic Properties List Update”; Katelyn Wright, telephone interview with Cara Bertron, April 5, 2011.
survey of the city’s 32 neighborhoods using a hybrid of intensive and reconnaissance-level survey methods. “This type of comprehensive inventory coverage is necessary to effectively protect one of Syracuse’s greatest and most unique assets—its historic neighborhoods,” the report asserted.\textsuperscript{118} It estimated that approximately 50,000 buildings in Syracuse had been constructed prior to 1960 and needed to be surveyed, though most would likely not retain a sufficient degree of integrity to be historically designated. A preservation brief issued by Wright and preservation planner Kate Auwaerter in 2010 echoed the report’s recommendations to use SHPO funding to survey historic neighborhoods and integrate survey data into a comprehensive, up-to-date inventory of the city’s historic properties.\textsuperscript{119}

Survey work is already underway. In fall 2010, a Cornell University class co-taught by Wright completed a survey of the historic Scottholm neighborhood in fall 2010.\textsuperscript{120} Two thematic surveys are planned, and planners aim to make major improvements to existing surveys soon.\textsuperscript{121} Two multi-property National Register nominations completed in previous years will be reviewed and submitted by planners after consultation with property owners.

The development and adoption of a citywide historic preservation plan is also planned by fall 2011.\textsuperscript{122} The plan will consider national best practices, reassert the importance of historic survey/inventory work, and recommend economic incentives for preservation; it is anticipated to tie into the City’s Housing and Land Use plans. Planners are currently considering how to assemble a steering committee for the plan with specialized subcommittees.\textsuperscript{123}

Expanded incentives for locally designated properties are an important missing piece, says Wright.\textsuperscript{124} She notes an imbalance between regulation and incentives: Whereas income-producing properties listed in the National Register are eligible for lucrative tax credits without being subject

\textsuperscript{118} Wright, “2009 Historic Properties List Update.”
\textsuperscript{119} Historic Preservation brief, Syracuse Bureau of Planning and Sustainability, n.d. (ca. 2010).
\textsuperscript{121} Wright, March 30, 2011.
\textsuperscript{122} “Renewing the Promise of Syracuse”; \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{123} Wright, March 30, 2011.
\textsuperscript{124} \textit{Ibid}.
to local regulation of exterior alterations (though review for tax credit projects is strict), locally designated properties are heavily regulated and have few incentives available. Incentives like transfer of development rights (TDRs), which work well in cities with high land values and development pressure, simply are not effective in weak-market cities with an abundance of inexpensive land. Wright cites city-level preservation-based tax abatements for property improvements as one example, but acknowledges that the City is “still at the drawing board” on developing incentives. She hopes that the preservation plan will spark creative, innovative economic incentives for locally designated properties.

Outside the preservation realm, the city is in the process of developing a new land-use plan, which will lay the groundwork for a form-based code. This concept nods to Wright’s 2009 proposal for conservation districts in historic neighborhoods that have lost too much historic fabric to be historically designated. The form-based code will emphasize context rather than use, mandating that new development have a form compatible with its surroundings. It could potentially shift the city’s zoning to denser, more urban standards—a change that New York SHPO employee Christine Capella-Peters says is necessary. As long as Syracuse’s zoning ordinance allows low-density suburban-type development, people will want to build low-density development incompatible with historic fabric, she says, and preservationists will continue to fight “all the same preservation fights day to day to day to day.”

The Syracuse Urban Redevelopment Authority (SURA) also takes a preservation-oriented approach. Established in the 1960s and revived in 2010 to facilitate the acquisition, transfer, and “banking” of properties, SURA aims to stabilize and improve neighborhoods by returning tax-foreclosed properties to productive use. (Its function is intended to be similar to that of a land bank—see Strategic Planning through Land Control: Land Banks in Genesee County and Cuyahoga County in this section.)

126 Capella-Peters.
128 Wright, March 30, 2011.
Prospective purchasers of SURA properties must provide a rehabilitation plan that demonstrates code compliance and, in some cases, exterior improvements. These improvements, meant to “enhance curb appeal” and encourage investment in nearby properties, focus on buildings’ street-facing facades. Guidelines cover form, siding types, windows and doors, ornament and paint colors, site and landscaping, and commercial storefronts (Figs. 14-15). SURA does not have dedicated staff, but is operated by five City employees from other departments—including Wright, who authored the rehabilitation design guidelines. SURA has not sold any properties to date—the agency was reconstituted in 2010, and the tax foreclosure process can take up to 120 days—so the design guidelines have not yet been tested. It is currently consolidating ownership of vacant land from the City and housing agencies, but will likely acquire a few houses soon.

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Inappropriate enclosed porches (left) break up the traditional pattern of the streetscape (right). When desired, porch enclosures should be mostly transparent and consistent with the style and proportions of the home (see below).

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**Figures 14-15.** Excerpts from SURA design guidelines regarding building form and windows. Source: City of Syracuse.

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129 “Design Guidelines for Building Rehabilitations.”
130 Wright, March 30, 2011.
131 Katelyn Wright, email to Cara Bertron, April 11, 2011.
Syracuse does not have a formal approach to rightsizing. For the most part, vacancy is scattered throughout its neighborhoods, with few empty or high-vacancy blocks (Fig. 16). For those dozen or so blocks, mostly located near the junction of freeways and residential neighborhoods, Wright anticipates “a quiet policy” that uses public money to fund demolition instead of new construction or rehabilitations.

Planners are attempting to make demolition throughout the city as mindful as possible by doing windshield surveys of all properties on the demolition list, which generally contains about 150 properties. Deteriorated buildings that appear to be dragging down surrounding property values are fast-tracked for court-ordered demolition. Landmark-eligible properties on the demolition list are flagged for further documentation and generally recommended for stabilization or rehabilitation; the City tries to secure funding to save deteriorated houses in designated historic districts.

For the rest of the city’s 1,700 vacant houses, planners are conducting a windshield survey that considers each block from a comprehensive planning perspective. Future land use, neighbors’ wishes, potential market demand, and building condition are all taken into account as vacant properties are sorted into demolition, rehabilitation, and stabilization categories.

The City of Syracuse is also putting together a fund that will use money previously used for demolition to stabilize and mothball privately owned buildings in targeted areas. These target areas will include historic districts and areas around historic landmarks, key downtown buildings, and Syracuse Housing Authority priority areas. Owners will be billed for repair work, with collection a priority for the City’s law department, and payments will be returned to the fund. (See Historic SOS program in Making Decisions on the Ground: Code Enforcement in Cincinnati in this chapter for a similar initiative.)

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132 Wright, April 5, 2011.
133 Wright, March 30, 2011.
134 Ibid.
Figure 16. Red parcels are vacant buildings, brown parcels are vacant land, and green parcels are parks (2011). Source: City of Syracuse.
Establishing Priorities: Character Studies in Philadelphia

Setting priorities is especially necessary with concrete actions such as demolishing and rehabilitating buildings, but it is also an important component of planning on a larger scale, such as with citywide and neighborhood-level plans that determine allocation of attention, funding, and other incentives. Careful prioritization is not always a given in cash-strapped cities, but it is becoming more common and expected, enabled by software advances for data collection and analysis.

GIS, or Geographic Information Systems, is a multifaceted tool that is increasingly indispensable in planning contexts. It enables synthesis and analysis of multiple complex variables with geographic components. Data Driven Detroit, the Real Property Information System in Youngstown, NEO CANDO at Case Western Reserve University, and the Market Value Analysis from Philadelphia’s Neighborhood Transformation Initiative all use GIS to incorporate data about property values, vacancy rates, population characteristics, and trends to classify neighborhoods and draw conclusions about various conditions, appropriate funding, and planned interventions. Moreover, GIS allows these variables to be analyzed in relation to each other, highlighting correlations and potential causations.

Despite their sophistication, these systems do not weigh the historical significance of buildings and areas. Gregory Parrish, the Technical Manager at Data Driven Detroit, believes that historic designation should be included as an existing condition about a property, but also as an indicator. “Because of that designation, then you could qualify for a certain incentive package, and your set of assets is bigger than in non-preserved areas or non-designated areas,” he says.135

Information about potential historic properties—central to preservation planning—has typically been accomplished by intensive historic resource surveys that evaluate architectural significance and integrity on a building-by-building basis and historic context statements that knit those physical locations to broad historical themes. Information from the survey and context statement are used to designate and protect significant buildings and neighborhoods, educate residents and

135 Gregory Parrish, Data and Technical Manager, Data Driven Detroit; interview with Cara Bertron, March 22, 2011.
visitors about local history, and—not least—influence plans for future land use and economic and community development projects.

However, traditional parcel-level survey is currently untenable in most older industrial cities. Governmental budget cutbacks and tighter nonprofit budgets leave few resources for funding and staffing a full-scale historic resource survey. On the ground, many areas have seen substantial loss of historic fabric, making a fine-grain survey of all properties unnecessary. Finally, the rate of deterioration and demolition in older industrial cities—both planned and de facto—makes an up-to-date survey impossible. Still, survey data is one of the most substantial, convincing ways through which preservation advocates can help direct planning efforts.

A group of organizations, agencies, and institutions in Philadelphia is working to outline an appropriate scope and methodology for a new type of historic resource survey. Their approach recognizes surveys’ importance to large-scale planning projects as well as the very real limitations of budgets, staff, and time, and proposes a “quick and dirty” approach to prioritizing survey resources based on planning-oriented remote analysis for each surveyed area. Though Philadelphia is not considering rightsizing, survey efforts can help target reinvestment dollars and redevelopment plans.

These efforts are vital, given that Philadelphia has never had a citywide historic resource survey or overarching historic context statement. Indeed, a 2007 study found that only four percent of the city’s buildings had ever been surveyed for historic significance. Most surveys had been completed more than twenty years earlier. Ninety percent of the city’s sixty National Register historic districts were located in four planning areas (out of twelve total in the city), and local historic districts were similarly concentrated. “To the extent that preservation happens, it happens opportunistically,” notes Randall Mason, the Chair of the Graduate Program in Historic Preservation at the University of Pennsylvania.

137 Randall Mason, Chair, Graduate Program in Historic Preservation, University of Pennsylvania, interview with Cara Bertron, March 29, 2011.
As the local regulatory agency, the Philadelphia Historical Commission (PHC) is ultimately responsible for the identification, designation, and protection of Philadelphia’s historic resources. However, the PHC is very understaffed, with accordingly long waiting periods for designation and difficulties with proactive identification and designation.

In 2008, the Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia (Preservation Alliance) decided to develop a methodology for a citywide historic resource survey as a part of a citywide preservation plan. Its intention was catalyzed partly by the lack of a citywide survey and, more immediately, by the City of Philadelphia’s plan to develop a new citywide comprehensive plan and reform the zoning code. These large-scale, high-impact planning initiatives presented a significant opportunity—and urgency—to integrate preservation data and priorities. The Preservation Alliance methodology drew from those tested in several small, grant-funded historic district nominations completed from 2005 to 2009. The earlier surveys used digital photography and GIS mapping to increase efficiency and data integration with PHC and Philadelphia City Planning Commission (Planning Commission) activities.

The citywide survey methodology adopted a four-pronged approach: mapping with historic atlases, field surveys, development of an overarching historic context statement (supported by neighborhood-level and thematic contexts), and a preservation planning framework. The methodology was tested in the Frankford neighborhood in two iterations (2007 and 2008-09). Digitized historic atlases were compared with current aerial photographs and maps to “pre-determine” the location of historic resources and historic patterns. During the second iteration, a partnership with a neighborhood historical society helped target survey efforts more precisely. Field surveys utilized hand-held Trimble devices with rudimentary GIS and database capabilities to field-check

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138 Alan Urek, Director, Strategic Planning and Policy, Philadelphia City Planning Commission, and Laura Spina, Center City Planner, Philadelphia City Planning Commission, interview with Cara Bertron, March 29, 2011.
140 Urek and Spina.
the atlas-based predictions and input information on historic resources into the GIS geodatabase. The historic context statement for Philadelphia was completed, along with two context statements for neighborhood “clusters” in North and Northeast Philadelphia and the themes of industrial heritage and modernism from 1945 to 1980.143

Grants from the Barra Foundation, the Pew Center for Arts and Heritage, and the William Penn Foundation funded the project, which was undertaken as a collaborative effort between the Preservation Alliance, the Athenaeum of Philadelphia, Dominique Hawkins and Judy Peters, Emily Cooperman, and Randall Mason of the University of Pennsylvania. Staff members from the Planning Commission and the PHC sat on the advisory/steering committee for the project but did not actively participate in shaping the project.

Though the Preservation Alliance hoped to continue doing survey work through other Philadelphia neighborhoods, it was hampered by insufficient funding. Nevertheless, its pilot projects laid the groundwork for future efforts.

In fall 2010 the University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate Program in Historic Preservation attempted to refine the methodology for the new survey model, called character studies.144 “How should preservation thinking be applied consistently at the scale of the city?” asked the project.145 Graduate students in the preservation program were tasked with testing the methodology for incorporating preservation into the City’s district plans in four weeks. They focused on two districts in North and Northeast Philadelphia that not been documented for preservation purposes.

Like the Frankford pilot project, the students utilized historic atlases, historic context statements, and local contacts to target field surveys and recommend areas for further study. Research on the districts’ evolution through archival data collection and digitization of historic maps yielded information on how physical growth patterns related to major historical themes. These conclusions

143 “Preserve Philadelphia! Summary Report.”
144 N.B. The author was a member of the graduate studio class that undertook this work.
145 Randall Mason, ”HSPV 701 Historic Preservation Studio” syllabus, University of Pennsylvania, Fall 2010.
guided the rest of the work: classification and mapping of current building typologies, windshield surveys, photography, and formal interviews with community groups and informal conversations with residents and employees. All information was synthesized in GIS to highlight significant areas for further survey and potential preservation (Fig. 17).

The character studies encountered several challenges.146 Local contacts obtained through the Preservation Alliance were limited and occasionally hard to reach. Historic context researchers struggled to locate documentation on local history. Creating and interpreting building typology was a nuanced challenge, especially within a class structure that required groups of four to five people to work with new tools under a tight schedule. In the bigger picture, the studies were initially intended to coincide with the first district plans to be developed; however, changes in Planning Commission priorities meant that other districts were selected for the first plans. Future character studies will attempt to allay these challenges through a more extensive list of local contacts and informal neighborhood historians, different allocation of student labor to streamline processes such as creating and classifying building typology, and clearer communication with the Planning Commission.

Planning Commission staff and Randall Mason are currently discussing how to continue producing reconnaissance-level character studies to inform district plans, which will translate the sweeping policies of the Philadelphia 2035 comprehensive plan (2011) into geographically specific recommendations for land use, zoning changes, and capital facilities (Fig. 18).147 Alan Urek, the Director of Strategic Planning and Policy at the Planning Commission, asserts that preservation should be integrated in each district plan. “It doesn’t make sense not to embed it,” he says, since Philadelphia has a rich variety of historic buildings and landscapes throughout the city. Understanding historic resources helps generate better, more informed plans.

146 Mason, interview.
147 Urek and Spina.
Figure 17. Map showing areas of interest for further preservation planning work based on overlapping factors (September 2010). Source: HSPV 701: Preservation Studio, University of Pennsylvania.
The Planning Commission aims to complete two district plans every six months, and it is anticipated that graduate students will complete one character study each semester and two each summer to keep pace. Each district character study will be completed prior to the beginning of that district's planning process, with the results packaged into GIS for Planning Commission use.

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148 Ibid.; Mason, interview.
149 Urek and Spina.
Targeted Investment: Cleveland’s Strategic Investment Initiative

The allocation of limited resources over a relatively large space is one of the most difficult choices in preservation planning. In older industrial cities, where disinvestment and deterioration are not limited to well-defined areas, it is an even bigger challenge. Neighborhood Progress, Inc. (NPI), a Cleveland umbrella organization that supports local community development corporations, tackles the challenge through its Strategic Investment Initiative (SII). Though SII is not targeted at historic districts, it shores up older neighborhoods through focused reinvestment and physical improvements.

The SII was established in 2004 in response to philanthropic requests to focus community development funding.150 SII is a market-driven approach that leverages approximately $2 million of private investment—as well as public funding and technical assistance—within neighborhoods with strong existing assets and community infrastructure that also have engaged residents and effective community development corporations.151 It aims to strengthen local real estate markets and raise quality of life through a “comprehensive rebuilding agenda,” a multi-pronged approach that includes new construction, rehabilitation, improvements in the public realm, small business development, improved City services, neighborhood marketing, and safety.152

Linda Warren, NPI’s interim president, explained:

Ideally, we would have enough funding to invest in every Cleveland neighborhood. But in a resource-depleted environment in which NPI’s available funds decreased by 20 percent, we must invest in neighborhoods that can leverage other dollars and make the most impact.153

Nearly 25 of Cleveland’s 36 neighborhoods contain community development corporations (CDCs) focused on real estate, community, and economic development.154 The Connecting Cleveland

150 Bobbi Reichtell, Senior Vice President for Programs, Neighborhood Progress, Inc., telephone interview with Cara Bertron, March 17, 2011.
153 “NPI To Expand the Successful Strategic Investment Initiative.”
154 Reichtell.
city plan (2007) notes the “quantity and quality of...community development corporations that combine grassroots connections with technical skills to create unique capabilities for revitalizing neighborhoods.”\textsuperscript{155} It tasks CDCs with developing and implementing neighborhood-level plans that reutilize vacant properties in alignment with the citywide land use plan.\textsuperscript{156}

NPI works to support those CDCs, with the goal of being “a catalyst for change” via each organization’s projects and visions.\textsuperscript{157} It offers technical support and acts as a financial intermediary between government agencies, CDCs, and funders, directing money from banks, the municipal Department of Community Development, and foundations to CDCs for predevelopment, new construction or rehabilitation, and neighborhood development and promotion.\textsuperscript{158} Its activities are closely tied to City policies and functions; the director of the City’s Community Development Department sits on an NPI Board committee and helped to craft the Strategic Investment Initiative.\textsuperscript{159}

Since its founding in 1988, NPI has supported the construction or renovation of over 6,400 single-family houses and 2.5 million square feet of commercial space.\textsuperscript{160} It also produces plans and studies with community partners, including Re-Imagining a More Sustainable Cleveland (2008) and the Vacant Land Pattern Book, which explore a range of options for reutilizing vacant urban land, and is under contract with the City of Cleveland to produce plans for 20 NSP2 target neighborhoods in and around Cleveland.\textsuperscript{161} These plans identify where demolition, rehabilitation, and mothballing of buildings should happen; as well as good locations for greening strategies like community gardens and parks.

In 2004, NPI started the Strategic Investment Initiative with six neighborhoods located throughout Cleveland: Cudell, Detroit Shoreway, Fairfax, Glenville, Slavic Village, and Tremont, increasing

funding to CDCs in these neighborhoods and reducing funding for other CDCs.\textsuperscript{162} The neighborhoods were selected by NPI based on CDC capacity as well as neighborhood qualities. The CDCs were rigorously evaluated for the quality, feasibility, and scale of their SII proposals; past development performance and current development capacity; and partnerships with other CDCs.\textsuperscript{163} Neighborhoods were required to have stable or rising real estate values and assets such as parks, proximity to major employment centers, access to public transportation, and historic architecture.\textsuperscript{164} At the time of the program’s inception, Cleveland’s real estate market appeared to be recovering from a long decline. Consequently, the initiative included large-scale new development as a program cornerstone. It has since refocused to emphasize rehabilitation.

Within those neighborhoods, attention and funding are targeted to incrementally smaller areas.\textsuperscript{165} Each CDC produces a Strategic Investment Plan for a target area within the neighborhood, then develops a plan for house-by-house improvements in an even more focused Model Blocks area of one to five streets.\textsuperscript{166} Large-scale new projects are developed as local SII nodes that aim to improve market perceptions.\textsuperscript{167} These highly visible projects are supported by Model Blocks in the surrounding neighborhoods, where SII funds exterior repairs to individual houses, landscaping and streetscaping, and new green spaces through grants or matching grants. Neighborhood Stabilization Teams use data from mortgage companies to target assistance to individual homeowners at risk of foreclosure; the program has since been expanded to all NSP target areas in the city.\textsuperscript{168} Meanwhile, the City of Cleveland increases code enforcement and demolition in SII areas and targets its Housing Trust Fund money and federal HOME, CDBG, and NSP2 dollars there as well (Fig. 19).

\textsuperscript{162} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{163} “NPI To Expand the Successful Strategic Investment Initiative.”
\textsuperscript{164} “Reinvigorating the Urban Marketplace.”
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{166} Reichtell.
\textsuperscript{167} “Reinvigorating the Urban Marketplace.”
\textsuperscript{168} Reichtell.
Neighborhood Stabilization Program Areas
1. Detroit Shoreway/West Tech/Cudell
2. Tremont/Cark
3. Slavic Village
4. Glenville
5. Buckeye-Larchmere
6. Fairfax
7. Colfax/Garden Valley
8. Collinwood
9. St. Clair-Superior
10. Mt. Pleasant
11. Corlett
12. Lee-Miles
13. Old Brooklyn
14. Westown
15. Ansel/Newton

Strategic Investment Initiative Areas
1. Burten Bell Carr Development, Inc.
   a. Campus District
   b. Lower Kinsman Corridor
2. Buckeye Area Development Corporation
3. Detroit Shoreway Community Development Organization
4. Fairfax Renaissance Development Corporation
5. Fannie Mae Foundation
6. Northeast Shores Development Corporation
7. Ohio City Near West Development Corporation
8. Slavic Village Development
9. Tremont West Development Corporation

Reimagining a More Sustainable Cleveland
2010 Land Reuse Projects

Bright Idea Award from Harvard University
Neighborhood Progress, Inc. was selected as a "Bright Idea" by the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University for its creative partnership with the City of Cleveland to improve the economic strength and development of Cleveland neighborhoods.

2010 Neighborhood Investment Map

Figure 19. Map of NSP areas, Strategic Investment Initiative areas, and land reuse projects (2010). Source: Neighborhood Progress, Inc.
In 2010, SII funded the construction or rehabilitation of over 330 housing units, including 170 rehabilitations, and 441,169 square feet of commercial/retail/institutional space. Many storefront rehabilitation projects also were supported. Cleveland Housing Network provided foreclosure prevention and rehabilitation services in SII target areas. That year, 48 houses were repaired and 46 vacant houses rehabilitated and re-occupied by the Model Block program. Additionally, 27 houses were landscaped and 10 vacant lots greened, often through special events and volunteer activities. Gateways, murals, and banners also were erected.

The program has been hailed as a national model, and three neighborhoods were added to the original six for the 2011-2013 funding cycle. Center for Community Progress Senior Advisor and Virginia Tech professor Joe Schilling calls SII “a more realistic and holistic lens of looking at things through the neighborhoods.” A 2009 report by local think tank PolicyBridge concurs, though it does not specifically name NPI or SII:

Faced with limited reinvestment dollars and daunting economic and societal challenges, it’s appropriate to have a discussion about rationed care. Cleveland must make strategic choices about rebuilding its neighborhoods, making tough decisions about investing aggressively in some while scaling back investments in others… Quality of place, or the potential for it, tends to be determined by a neighborhood’s anchoring institutions or amenities…

SII is not a formal preservation strategy, though historic architecture is considered as part of the criteria for neighborhood selection and five of the nine target neighborhoods contain historic districts. It is fundamentally a community preservation initiative, as it focuses on stabilizing neighborhoods with existing assets. Historic architecture is considered one “locational asset” to build on. Others—close proximity to public transportation, parks, major employment centers, cultural institutions; green space, shopping, services, and entertainment—are naturally found in many

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170 “Reinvigorating the Urban Marketplace”; “NPI To Expand the Successful Strategic Investment Initiative.”
171 Joseph Schilling, Associate Director—Sustainable Communities, Metropolitan Institute, Virginia Tech, telephone interview with Cara Bertron, February 20, 2011.
173 Schilling.
older neighborhoods that were built densely enough to support public transportation; cultural, educational, and medical and institutions; and jobs and retail.174

The goals of SII—stronger real estate markets and a higher quality of life—are very relevant to older and historic neighborhoods. Home improvements keep older housing stock viable. Greening and landscaping and targeted demolition are central parts of maintaining property values, stabilizing neighborhoods, and making places more attractive. The Model Block program uses small investments to “demonstrate to residents that market recovery is possible, and that their efforts to improve their homes, streets, and communities are supported.”175 Foreclosure prevention is also critical in preserving contextual fabric, as foreclosed houses are much more likely to become dilapidated or fall prey to vandalism or arson. Even if a house at risk of foreclosure is not architecturally stunning, it still provides a sense of rhythm and continuity in a streetscape.

Cleveland's Detroit Shoreway neighborhood offers a good example of this broad approach to landmark and community preservation. Located west of downtown on the banks of Lake Erie, the neighborhood contains two SII anchor projects. One—the National Register-listed Gordon Square Arts District—received SII funding to rehabilitate the historic Capitol Theatre as part of an arts-based revitalization strategy for an intersection with pre-World War II buildings on all four corners (Fig. 20).176 The other is Battery Park, a 328-unit market-rate housing development under construction on the site of the former Eveready Battery plant. The plant’s historic power station has been adaptively reused as a community center.177

Just south of Battery Park, the Model Block program tackles improvements to houses and the public realm on six streets in the Edgewater Hill area.178 The Model Blocks contain predominantly wood-frame cottages built from 1900 to 1920; an estimated 85 percent were in poor condition before the Model Block program began in 2005. The Detroit Shoreway Community Development

174 “Reinvigorating the Urban Marketplace.”
175 “Neighborhood Progress Model Block Program,” Presentation, Neighborhood Progress, Inc., n.d.
176 "Investing in City Life"; Ramsey.
177 Michael Fleenor, Director of Preservation Services, Cleveland Restoration Society, telephone interview with Cara Bertron, February 10, 2011.
178 Ramsey.
Organization (DSCDO), the neighborhood’s CDC, demolished nine of the properties in the worst condition, provided funding and equipment to 135 homeowners for home improvements and landscaping, and organized community beautification events and public art projects.

To date, nearly everyone in the Model Block area has received direct and/or matching grants of $500 and $2000, respectively, for exterior improvements ranging from porch repair to painting to roof repairs. The vast majority of houses are now in good or excellent condition. Recently, the Model Block program expanded to the east to include another 188 houses abutting the Gordon Square Arts District.

DSCDO’s program is driven by market concerns around the new housing development as well as preservation of the existing neighborhood fabric: “People aren’t going to buy a new house in a new housing development if the neighborhood around it looks [awful],” says DSCDO Executive Director Jeff Ramsey. Model Block homeowners propose their own improvements, which the DSCDO reviews.

179 Landscaping is eligible for grants of $100 and $250 in two subsequent years. (Ramsey)
DSCDO has received NPI funding since NPI was founded in 1988. Ramsey says that the organization has been targeting investment around existing resources for a long time. It has utilized federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits and Low-Income Housing Tax Credits for multiple apartment, commercial, and mixed-use buildings. In 2009, the Cleveland Restoration Society presented NPI with awards for its rehabilitation of the Wade Chateau Apartments and the Langston Hughes Center.

Strategic Planning through Land Control: Land Banks in Genesee County and Cuyahoga County

Land banks aim to stabilize neighborhoods and revitalize cities. As agencies that span an entire county or city, they play a central role in setting priorities and strategically allocating resources across a relatively large area. A 2009 newspaper article describing the establishment of the Cuyahoga County Land Reutilization Corporation waxed ambitious, emphasizing the agency’s potential for a big-picture perspective and capacity for action:

> It [the Cuyahoga Land Bank] could soon turn Cleveland into the nation’s biggest urban laboratory on how a declining industrial city with a comatose real estate market can downsize gracefully -- and prepare to rebound in the future… What’s key…is whether the land bank establishes a strong vision or simply creates a vast patchwork that leaves the city looser and baggier, not better.

Land banks acquire tax-foreclosed properties from the county treasurer or, as in Cuyahoga County, purchase foreclosed houses at low prices from Fannie Mae or HUD. Most typically, an agreement with the county treasurer provides a way to gain relatively rapid control of tax-foreclosed properties, which can quickly deteriorate and drag down the values of surrounding properties. Land banks’ “banking” capacity also removes real estate from the market, helping tame speculation.

180 Ramsey.
183 Frangos, telephone interview.
Flint, Michigan, is home to the Genesee County Land Bank Authority (the Land Bank), a national model for strategic management and reuse of abandoned and tax-delinquent properties. The Land Bank's work begins with a foreclosure prevention program aimed at keeping homeowners in their houses. However, the bulk of its activities consist of evaluating and acquiring foreclosed properties for demolition, rehabilitation, sales, rental, greening, or assembly for future redevelopment, then carrying out those activities—essential steps in re-balancing a regional market containing an estimated 20,000 blighted and abandoned properties.

The Land Bank itself holds about 6,500 properties: 4,000 vacant lots in largely abandoned areas; almost 2,300 residential buildings and 300 commercial and industrial properties, most slated for demolition; and nearly 100 rental units as of early 2011. As a major landowner in Flint, the Land Bank plays a large role in physically shaping the city through the preservation and renovation of housing and commercial buildings, as well as the demolition of buildings in poor condition and/or in weak-market (“non-viable”) neighborhoods. Its housing renovation program is explicitly aimed at stabilizing and revitalizing viable neighborhoods that could benefit from strategic investment: downtown and the River District; the Carriage Town and Grand Traverse neighborhoods, both near downtown; and Central Park and Fairfield Village in the north part of the city. These priority areas are determined by community plans and NSP2 funding. The City of Flint designated areas eligible for NSP2 funding based on existing neighborhood plans; the Land Bank's NSP2-funded projects are targeted at those areas.

184 The Land Bank was established in 2002 as the Genesee County Land Reutilization Council and became the Genesee County Land Bank Authority in 2004, after the Michigan state legislature passed progressive reforms in 1999 and 2003. Public Acts 123 and 258 streamlined the tax foreclosure process and enabled the creation of county land banks, and amendments to P.A. 381 helped the land banks finance acquisition, clean-up, and rehabilitation or demolition with brownfield financing and tax increment financing (TIF). These legislative reforms helped shave the tax foreclosure process to 2½ years from up to 7 years and prevent irresponsible speculators from acquiring foreclosed properties, assure purchasers of clear property titles, and provide a funding stream for land bank operations. (“Imagine It: 2002-2006 Review”; “About Us,” Genesee County Land Bank, www.thelandbank.org/aboutus.asp)


186 “Genesee County Land Bank 2002-2010 Annual Review.”

187 Kelly, interview.
In terms of preservation, several Land Bank programs address the basic level of intact physical fabric: keeping houses occupied and secure, ensuring compatible neighborhood development, and stabilizing property values. Since its inception in 2002, more than 1,000 homeowners have been granted a one-year postponement from tax foreclosure through the foreclosure prevention program.\(^{188}\) Purchasers of sale properties must provide a detailed description of the property's future use and may be required to make specific repairs to a property.\(^{189}\) Homeownership and investment are encouraged through “rent-to-own” land contracts where rent and renovation work are credited to the house purchase price.\(^{190}\) Side lot disposition and two maintenance programs enlist adjacent homeowners and community groups in cleaning, maintaining, and beautifying local vacant properties, with the goal of improving neighborhood appearance and raising the values in nearby properties.\(^{191}\) On a large scale, the Land Bank's planning team is leading a process to plan the transformation of the Flint River into a central community asset.\(^{192}\)

The Land Bank performs major and/or cosmetic rehabilitation work on almost every house it retains to bring it up to code. Between 25 and 50 houses are rehabilitated and sold or rented each year, with more rehabs in recent years using federal NSP funding.\(^{193}\) Most renovated houses are not historically significant; however, in 2006 the Land Bank acquired and planned to rehabilitate six houses in the Carriage Town neighborhood, a local historic district that has suffered from disinvestment and widespread demolition (Fig. 21). Flint’s local Historic District Commission (HDC) approved all the rehabilitation work and the designs of nine new houses to be constructed at the same time.\(^{194}\) “The proposed redevelopment will provide high quality housing currently not available in many of Flint’s neighborhoods,” the Land Bank newsletter reported in spring 2006, adding,

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\(^{188}\) “Programs,” Genesee County Land Bank, www.thelandbank.org/programs.asp.
\(^{190}\) “Imagine It: 2002-2006 Review.”
\(^{191}\) “Programs”; “Imagine It: 2002-2006 Review.”
\(^{192}\) “Planning and Outreach,” Genesee County Land Bank, www.thelandbank.org/planning.asp.
\(^{194}\) Amy Hovey, “Neighborhood by Neighborhood,” The New View newsletter, Spring 2006, Genesee County Land Bank.
“Concentrating the development in a tightly defined area guarantees a better return on investment and encourages neighborhood stabilization.”\textsuperscript{195} However, in 2008 the entire project was halted indefinitely due to the discovery of a Native American burial ground on the site.\textsuperscript{196}

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image1.jpg}
\caption{Vacant lots surrounded by boarded-up houses in the Carriage Town Historic District (2011).}
\end{figure}

More recently, two Victorian-era single-family houses in Carriage Town were rehabilitated, with a duplex rehabilitation in progress as of March 2011 (Fig. 22). These rehabilitations met HDC standards for exterior work and feature new roofs, flooring, updated bathrooms, and energy-efficient appliances. Each completed house is for sale for less than $40,000, not including purchase incentives such as forgivable financing that can further reduce the cost.\textsuperscript{197} Though their prices are heavily subsidized from the rehabilitation cost, there have been few potential buyers in Flint’s depressed housing market.\textsuperscript{198}

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{195} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{196} Tim Monahan, President, Carriage Town Historic Neighborhood Association, interview with Cara Bertron, March 21, 2011.
\textsuperscript{197} "Buying a Home Is Easier Than You Think," Advertising flyer, Genesee County Land Bank, n.d. (ca. 2011).
\textsuperscript{198} Kelly, interview.
Historic preservation takes the spotlight in the development program, which focuses on returning properties to the tax roll while supporting smart growth through reinvestment. The Land Bank’s first major commercial rehabilitation project was the Hughes and Hatcher Clothing Store, a downtown commercial building that sat vacant for almost 30 years before foreclosure. The rehabilitation was completed in 2005 at a cost of approximately $5 million and resulted in ground-floor commercial space with office space and apartments above; it now houses the Land Bank Center. “The process that this building went through will serve as a template for the future that can be passed on and duplicated,” stated Genesee County Treasurer and Land Bank co-founder Dan Kildee at the project’s completion.

201 “The New Land Bank Center Opens.”
The process was followed, if not duplicated, almost immediately with the 2005-08 rehabilitation of Berridge Place (1926) and the Tinlinn Building (1911) in the Carriage Town neighborhood (Figs. 23-24). The properties—historically used as a hotel and an upscale boarding house for managers in the auto industry, respectively—are both listed in the National Register. The Land Bank partnered with the Court Street Village Non-Profit Housing Corporation, the Carriage Town Historic Neighborhood Association, and other local, state, and national partners to transform the buildings—Berridge Place then “a nightmare” of prostitution and drugs—into safe, attractive developments at a cost of $6.2 million.\textsuperscript{202} Financing included federal rehabilitation tax credits. Berridge Place now holds 2 small commercial spaces and 17 residential rental units; the Tinlinn Building contains 4 residential rental units.\textsuperscript{203} Kildee asserted, “By ‘bringing back the Berridge,’ this project will further fuel a growing sense of hope and opportunity among area residents…[and] re-use a jewel of Flint’s past to create high quality, affordable housing that is so essential to the city’s new future.”\textsuperscript{204}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure23.png}
\caption{Berridge Place, rehabilitated by the Land Bank from 2005 to 2008 (2011).}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{202} Monahan.
\textsuperscript{203} Amy Hovey, “Developments in Carriagetown,” \textit{The New View} newsletter, Fall 2009, Genesee County Land Bank; “Development.”
\textsuperscript{204} “Development.”
The rehabilitation of the Berridge and Tinlinn buildings and the Land Bank’s clean up and sale of a vacant gas station across the street (now a deli) contributed to the River District strategy.

Most recently, the historic Durant Hotel underwent a major historic rehabilitation that transformed the 1920 landmark into a mixed-use building with 93 residential units, ground-floor commercial space, and a fully restored dining room and lobby.²⁰⁵ Hailed as “a powerful statement that this city does have a future,” the $25 million project was completed in August 2010 as a partnership between the Land Bank, several foundations, two State agencies, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the County.²⁰⁶ It utilized 14 different funding sources, including state and federal historic rehabilitation tax credits and federal brownfield tax credits. The building was anticipated to serve students from nearby University of Michigan Flint campus and Mott Community College. As of March 2010, the property’s residential units were 80 percent occupied.

²⁰⁵ Hovey, “Developments.”
These historic buildings are lauded as local gems and symbols of hope. Berridge Place has “historical charm, modern amenities, classic design, and unique appeal,” boasts the rental website, and the Tinlinn Building is “an absolute treasure.”207 The Durant Hotel holds even more significance: “For 37 years it was the symbol of failure of the auto industry and Flint,” said Dan Kildee. “Now it’s the symbol of what we think can happen with perseverance.”208 His uncle, U.S. Congressman Dale Kildee, feels similarly: “It’s not just another building but an important part of Flint’s history… This can be a symbol of the greatness of the past and the greatness of the future.”209

Land Bank lead planner Christina Kelly calls the Berridge, Tinlinn, Durant, and house rehabilitations “an important part of the strategy to revitalize downtown and Flint” and a key step toward creating a niche market.210 The Carriage Town neighborhood is close to most of the city’s significant assets: increasingly vital downtown commercial and office space; the campus of the University of Michigan-Flint, which has steadily been expanding its student population; Hurley Medical Center, the largest medical center in the county; and Kettering University, which boasts the #2-ranked mechanical engineering program in the United States and the #21-ranked overall undergraduate engineering program.211 Businesses and institutions in or near downtown employ 6,000 people, some of whom Kelly—and the Land Bank—hope will move to Carriage Town and nearby neighborhoods.212

Despite this focus, demolition remains the Land Bank’s primary goal. It emphasizes that these higher-value historic properties provide a funding mechanism for demolition of more distressed properties, of which there are plenty.213 Flint continues to suffer from widespread vacancy and abandonment, continuing population loss—its population dropped from almost 125,000 in 2000

209 Ibid.
210 Kelly, interview.
212 Kelly, interview.
to just over 102,000 in 2010—and rising foreclosures. The city contains about 18,000 blighted and abandoned properties—32 percent of all residential properties are abandoned—and neighboring communities hold about 2,000 more. Between 2002 and 2010, more than 10,000 properties passed through the tax foreclosure process; alarmingly, annual foreclosures nearly doubled from 1,200 in 2008 to 2,300 in 2010.

Still, the Land Bank’s focus—“to restore the integrity of the community by removing dilapidated structures and redeveloping abandoned properties”—aligns well with the preservation goal of retaining a community’s built character, and its record is impressive in a place with no citywide preservation community. Since it was created in 2002, it has leveraged more than $35 million in public and private investment and returned over $10 million worth of property to the tax rolls through sales of vacant and improved lots. More than 1,000 buildings have been demolished; still more vacant lots receive periodic maintenance. Some Flint residents view the Land Bank as “the biggest slumlord in town” and call for more regular maintenance, but Tim Monahan, the president of the Carriage Town Historic Neighborhood Association, believes the Land Bank is doing its best with an enormous inventory of largely non-functional houses.

Inspections and demolitions by the Land Bank are based on physical condition and location criteria. Funding heavily influences this strategy: though NSP2 prioritizes rehabilitation of existing buildings, most federal money targets demolition of dilapidated structures. Christina Kelly defends demolition as a necessary measure to remove blight and improve quality of life for nearby residents, even as she acknowledges preservation’s value. It is important to “acknowledge the realities of what it is to have a vacant home in your neighborhood… [as well as] the value of historic

217 “Dispelling Common Misconceptions.”
218 Monahan.
219 “Programs.”
220 Kelly, interview.
preservation and the value of quality of life and the value of safety,” she says. “There need to be advocates for historic preservation, but there are a lot of competing values… They don't necessarily need to be competing values—but in that context, they are.”

One competing value is associated with scarce funding and high costs. A rehabilitation project can cost $250,000 to $300,000—a high figure, considering that it would be a stretch to support a sales price of $40,000 in the Flint housing market. Kelly says that funding agencies HUD and the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) are skeptical of the high costs of historically sensitive rehabilitation work. The Land Bank still does it as part of its downtown revitalization strategy, she adds, “but [costs] do sometimes make the case kind of hard.” Tim Monahan puts the case more bluntly: “We get a lot of hell from people [about rehabilitation costs]… A lot of people are very, very upset that [the Land Bank] is doing this at all.”221 Kelly says that the Land Bank examined some houses several times as potential candidates for rehabilitation but could not make the funding work. Yet without investment by the Land Bank, a community development organization, or dedicated, well-funded preservationists, the buildings will sit vacant and deteriorate further, negatively impacting the neighborhood environment and harming neighbors’ ability to buy home insurance and feel safe.

Additional difficulties include the lack of demand, uncertainty surrounding regulations and outcomes, and a sticky relationship between the HDC and the Land Bank. The two rehabilitated houses in Carriage Town remain on the market, though Flint residents praise the quality of the rehabilitation work. HDC project review involves evaluation on a number of factors and leads to regulation that Kelly feels can be inflexible and unpredictable, increasing staff time and costs. Uncertainty about plans for entire blocks hamper the Land Bank, homebuyers, and homeowners, all hesitant to invest in property and improvements if boarded-up houses remain on the block to drag down property values and perceptions of safety.

Finally, the Land Bank’s interactions with Carriage Town residents and HDC members have not always been smooth. “There’s kind of an automatic set-up that there’s a contentious relationship,”

221 Monahan.
says Kelly. She says she understands preservationists’ defensive stance in service of protecting their neighborhood, but sees the need for a change: “How can we approach this in a way where we actually have the same goals? How can we [the Land Bank] think more flexibly…so it’s not like, ‘Oh, great, we have to go through the Historic District [Commission]?’”

In Cleveland, 220 miles to the southeast, the Cuyahoga County Land Reutilization Corporation (CCLRC) has a structure and function modeled on the Land Bank, albeit a larger one: Cuyahoga County has three times Genesee County’s population and a correspondingly larger need for land banking. Its vision is to revitalize neighborhoods, promote economic growth, and create job and workforce development opportunities through demolishing or rehabilitating deteriorated properties, stabilizing or raising property values, and preventing speculative property flipping. To do this, it employs funding from restricted NSP2 grants and has an annual revenue stream of about $7 million from penalty and interest fees on delinquent real estate taxes. However, unlike the Genesee County Land Bank, the CCLRC avoids acquiring designated historic properties without specific plans for their disposal.

Part of the reason is “a problem of immediacy,” says CCLRC President Gus Frangos. The land bank receives 180 properties each month, with no signs of slowing: in 2009, about 15,000 properties were awaiting demolition in the county. The CCLRC’s 19 staff members are kept busy managing acquisitions; assessing each property for demolition or rehabilitation; coordinating rehabilitations, demolitions, and deconstructions; transferring properties to municipalities and developers; and developing systems to evaluate potential acquisitions more strategically and begin managing occupied properties. While historic preservation is a component of community development, it is not a part of CCLRC’s core mission.

222 Kelly, interview.
223 Litt.
225 Frangos, telephone interview; McShephard and Stewart.
The rehabilitation requirements tied to historic designation appear to be bigger deterrents. As in Flint, the Cleveland Landmarks Commission sets higher rehabilitation standards for designated historic properties than the city’s building code. Spending scarce funds on a historically appropriate rehabilitation reduces the number of other properties that could be acquired and treated in a high-need area and adds risk that the rehabilitated properties might be too expensive for buyers and remain on the market indefinitely, requiring specialized maintenance. Advertising historic properties for others to rehabilitate requires time that CCLRC staff do not have and risks long-term listing—and ongoing maintenance—in the lagging local real estate market. More stringent regulation around demolition of historic properties is an added disincentive.

Preservation “is a key component to the fabric of a neighborhood,” though, says Frangos, and the CCLRC is willing to partner with preservation-focused organizations such as the Cleveland Restoration Society to preserve historic resources. If preservationists identify significant structures at risk, the CCLRC can acquire and hold them during an advocacy campaign by the preservationists. Frangos believes that CCLRC can be “a helpful partner in the time-out sense” by holding the property tax-free while preservationists muster public support and resources and find a sympathetic buyer.

That buyer is the CCLRC’s focus. The land bank has the ability to clear financial liabilities like back taxes and liens to make a historic property more attractive to a purchaser, but the Restoration Society must find the purchaser and locate incentives for rehabilitation. Negotiating a timeline for ending CCLRC’s possession of the property helps both parties to understand their responsibilities. If no user is located by the end of the agreed-upon period, the property title will be transferred to the Restoration Society. “We’ve just got to have an end somewhere,” says Frangos—otherwise, the CCLRC would be left holding a historic property that it couldn’t demolish and did not want to rehabilitate to the higher standards.

This partnership was piloted with the Asa and Chloe Carter Upson House, an 1836 residence in the city of Shaker Heights notable for its well-preserved 1940s-era Colonial Revival “moderniza-
tion” (Fig. 25).226 The house was unsuccessfully listed for sale in 2007, then rented until October 2010, when the owners consented to donate it to the Restoration Society. The Restoration Society transferred it to the CCLRC, which agreed to hold the property for 18 months. In the meantime, the Restoration Society corrected a long list of code violations—a step required by the City of Shaker Heights prior to sale—such as exterior painting and landscaping.227 It also nominated the Upson House as a local landmark, developed a property history, and implemented energy efficiency measures as part of a marketing campaign.228 After it located a buyer—a young family—the CCLRC re-transferred the property and the Restoration Society sold the house with a preservation easement in March 2011.229

![Figure 25. Upson House (2010). Source: Cleveland Restoration Society.](image)

The Upson House was handled through a fairly straightforward arrangement. The CCLRC, which is structured to hold and manage property efficiently, performed tasks like changing the locks on...

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227 Michael Fleenor, telephone interview with Cara Bertron, April 19, 2011.
228 Kerri Broome, Associate Director, Development & Publications, Cleveland Restoration Society, email to Michael Fleenor, January 19, 2011.
229 Fleenor, April 19, 2011.
the house and mowing the lawn.\textsuperscript{230} The Restoration Society focused its efforts on physical rehabilitation and marketing to attract a buyer who valued the house’s historic nature. “This was a real success story which impels us now to do more with the Restoration Society,” wrote CCLRC President Gus Frangos in an email.\textsuperscript{231} Michael Fleenor, Director of Preservation Programs for the Restoration Society, concurs. He anticipates working with the CCLRC in the future, perhaps again this year if an appropriate property can be located.\textsuperscript{232}

The chief contributions of the Restoration Society in the Upson House were to identify the house as significant, negotiate with the owners to have it donated, rehabilitate it in a way sympathetic with the historic fabric, and secure a suitable purchaser through marketing the house’s historic nature (Fig. 26). It also ensured long-term preservation of the property by nominating it as a local landmark and adding an easement to the property title. For its part, the CCLRC held the property tax-free for a predetermined window of time, taking care of basic property maintenance and reducing the carrying costs for the property. The Upson House was not subject to local historic commission review at the time of its rehabilitation, but it is anticipated that the Restoration Society’s role would be much the same with a similar at-risk historic property that was in a local historic district or listed as a local landmark, with the addition of navigating the historic review process. (Most of the city of Shaker Heights is listed in the National Register, but this listing does not trigger local project review unless federal funds are used.)

Outside of historic districts and designated landmarks, the CCLRC rehabilitates non-historic properties to standards that meet local building codes. To date, it has rehabilitated almost 15 properties and sold 30 more to developers to rehabilitate. Since the CCLRC opened in June 2009, it has acquired close to 900 vacant foreclosed properties from the county, HUD, and Fannie Mae; demolished about 200; and transferred 200 vacant lots back to Cleveland’s city land bank, which is only able to hold unimproved property.\textsuperscript{233} This year, the CCLRC will demolish about 700 houses. It

\textsuperscript{230} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{231} Frangos, email.
\textsuperscript{232} Fleenor, April 19, 2011.
\textsuperscript{233} Frangos, telephone interview and email.
also has funding to deconstruct about 20 houses and is exploring a sustainable business/workforce development model for deconstructing additional houses.

In strong neighborhoods, the CCLRC rehabilitates or demolishes scattered problem properties; in weaker neighborhoods, it is more likely to turn more to demolition. Even then, demolition funded by a $41 million NSP2 grant was projected to affect fewer than 11% of residential properties even

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BLACKSMITH BY TRADE: The Shimmins

By 1874, William and Margaret Shimmin owned the Upson house, 37 acres in Lot 45, and 10-acres in Lot 64 as documented in the Cuyahoga County Atlas. By that time, the Upson’s remaining southern 60-acres was owned by the H. Lord family. Apparently, the Shimmins came from the town of Northfield in Summit County, where they are listed in the 1870 census. William Shimmin was employed as a blacksmith, in business with his 26-year-old son, John.

In the census records, both William and Margaret are listed as immigrants from the Isle of Man. It is interesting to note that a sizeable portion of the population in Warrensville Township were from the Isle of Man, located in the Irish Sea. In fact, the Warrensville West Cemetery on Lee Road was known as the “Old Manx” cemetery.

In the 1880 Census, Margaret Shimmin is listed as a 71-year-old widow whose single son, John, had taken over the blacksmith business from his father. A detailed sketch of the property under the Shimmins’ tenure is included in Mueller’s 1897 Cuyahoga County Atlas. The sketch includes the location of sheds, barns and the blacksmith shop in relation to the house. Census records indicate that the Shimmins had left the property by 1900.

Changes the Shimmins made to the Upson House

It appears that by the time of the Shimmins’ ownership, the Upson home was enlarged and re-fashioned in the Gothic Revival style. Most certainly, the Shimmins added the small rear addition, which likely housed a new kitchen. Measuring approximately 14 x 14 feet, it rests on a sandstone foundation tooled with methods common in the late 1800s. By moving the kitchen to the back addition, the Shimmins could create a fashionable dining room where the kitchen had been. The blacksmith shop was located to the west of the house and close to the road. Perhaps the updated house projected the success of the Shimmins’ business. Remnants of the wares of the blacksmith shop were unearthed in 1940-41 and include horseshoes, harnesses, wedges, picks and wagon parts. A portion of these are now displayed in the rear porch.

Figure 26. Excerpt from Upson House educational/marketing report (2010). Source: Cleveland Restoration Society.
in the most distressed target areas: "This will retain significant neighborhood character and fabric on which to build a new market," a CCLRC report predicted.234

The CCLRC acquires about half of its properties through the county’s tax foreclosure process. It has also purchased 700 foreclosed houses for nominal prices from Fannie Mae and HUD.235 Fannie Mae and HUD houses are often in very bad shape, and approximately 80 percent of those properties are demolished.

Part of the focus on demolition is because the CCLRC does not currently manage occupied properties.236 It has been responding to the substantial immediate glut of vacant and abandoned foreclosed properties, which can be expedited through the foreclosure process. (Occupied properties go through a lengthier foreclosure process with options that enable the homeowner to keep his or her house.) The CCLRC is committed to acquiring occupied properties in the future “because of necessity and because of the budgets,” says Frangos, and staff members are currently exploring what a property management system will entail.237

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234 “Funding Approval and Grant Agreement for Neighborhood Stabilization Program 2 (NSP2) Funds,” between the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and Cuyahoga County Land Reutilization Corporation, approved January 14, 2010; Frangos, email.
236 Fleenor, February 10, 2011.
237 Frangos, telephone interview.
Implementation

Implementation strategies include demolition, reinvestment, mothballing, and a range of options in between. Implementation is composed of field-based strategies that take the maps out of plans and into neighborhoods and blocks to apply goals, strategies, and action tools to streets and houses. This section includes two strategies that incorporate preservation into on-the-ground implementation: coordinated code enforcement and incentives programs that work to attract residents to historic neighborhoods and districts. In both cases, planning processes and documents closely tied to implementation are also explored.

Making Decisions on the Ground: Code Enforcement in Cincinnati

Cincinnati’s built environment faces many challenges. More than 4,800 buildings were vacant or abandoned in February 2011—a number that had increased by 15 percent since 2010 and 171 percent since 2006.238 As in other weak-market cities, speculators and investors have little incentive to maintain their vacant buildings.239 Without maintenance, the buildings deteriorate from exposure to the elements and become magnets for crimes like arson. Foreclosing on tax-delinquent buildings takes five to six years, unless code enforcement officials seek expedited foreclosure through the county.240 The City has little effective recourse if the building is not tax-delinquent, except for eventual condemnation and demolition by code enforcement officials once it becomes a public safety hazard.

The city’s historic districts—28 listed in the National Register and 21 locally designated, with 11 overlapping—are not exempt from these issues.241 The most significant is the locally and nationally

240 This is done for key properties in high-need neighborhoods, areas where blighted properties impede or impair community development corporations’ work. (Edward Cunningham, Division Manager, Property Maintenance Code Enforcement Division, Cincinnati Department of Community Development, telephone interview with Cara Bertron, March 9, 2011)
241 Larry Harris, Urban Conservator, City of Cincinnati, telephone interview with Cara Bertron, April 21, 2011.
designated 19th-century Over-the-Rhine Historic District. Over-the-Rhine is Cincinnati’s oldest neighborhood and one of the largest urban historic districts in the United States. It has seen almost half of its pre-1930s building stock demolished (Figs. 27-28, p. 85). Disinvestment, high crime, demolition, and large-scale redevelopment efforts threaten much of the rest. Seventy-two buildings in Over-the-Rhine (OTR) are currently condemned, and code enforcement officials have ordered another 238 vacated. Twelve percent of the land and 500 buildings in OTR are vacant. A 2010 report from the National Trust’s Midwest Office asserts, “Over-the-Rhine’s incredible history and architecture are the keys to the neighborhood’s revitalization,” but the neighborhood faces big challenges.

Yet Over-the-Rhine—and Cincinnati—also have considerable assets: a concerned City Council with a committee dedicated to livability, a proactive code enforcement department with targeted requirements for vacant building maintenance, and two active preservation organizations with the resources and political wherewithal to develop preservation plans and successfully lobby for their implementation.

The Cincinnati Preservation Association (CPA) is the citywide preservation advocacy group, formed in 1964 to preserve archaeological resources in the city. Since then, CPA has broadened its mission to include the preservation of all historic cultural resources in the Cincinnati area. Its three-person staff offers technical assistance, publicizes historic buildings at risk of demolition and for sale, participates in studies and planning efforts, purchases significant at-risk properties, runs an easement program, and sponsors luncheons and house tours.

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244 Warminski.
245 “Where We Work: Over-the-Rhine”; Warminski; “Sharing Tools and Training in Over-the-Rhine.”
The Over-the-Rhine Foundation (OTRF) focuses on the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood, which it sees as “the heart of Cincinnati and the key to a better future, not only for OTR – but for the region as well.”\(^\text{247}\) Founded in 1992, the nonprofit organization runs educational and advocacy campaigns centering on historic preservation and environmental sustainability. It sees these as natural partners, particularly within the context of OTR’s high vacancy rate and hundreds more in need of rehabilitation.

A 2009 “Green-Historic Study” commissioned by OTRF addressed the perceived conflict between green building and preservation and explored ideological and practical synergies in the fields.\(^\text{248}\) It emphasized the importance of aligning preservation with sustainability tenets:

> Whether Over-the-Rhine is viewed as obsolete or can be recognized as a critical asset for rebuilding an environmentally conscious urban environment may determine whether this historically significant neighborhood is finally embraced for its full potential or is permitted to be lost to neglect.\(^\text{249}\)

Finally, the study produced designs for the rehabilitation of four OTR buildings that met three standards: LEED certification, compliance with the Secretary’s Standards, and cost effectiveness.

In 2008, Vice Mayor Roxanne Qualls approached OTRF about finding statistics on the number of demolitions in Over-the-Rhine and developing a plan to stop them. In fall 2008, CPA joined OTRF and Over-the-Rhine residents to develop the *Over-the-Rhine Plan for Preservation*.\(^\text{250}\) The plan was completed in summer 2009 and presented to the Vibrant Neighborhood Committee (now the Livable Communities Committee), a City Council committee chaired by Qualls that is charged with integrating neighborhood needs and economic development.\(^\text{251}\) Three presentations

\(^{249}\) Ibid. 3.
to the committee addressed the impact of widespread building loss, policies that enabled demolitions, and recommendations for slowing or halting demolitions.252

The plan focused on changes to the Cincinnati Municipal Code and offered 30 recommendations for code changes.253 Though primarily directed at the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood, the plan included many citywide recommendations such as receivership, a tool for improving and taking ownership of vacant historic buildings.254 Under this system, a nuisance suit would be brought against a negligent property owner with unresolved code violations. If the owner did not take action, a judge would appoint a nonprofit receiver to bring a dilapidated building up to code. The building would then be seized from the original owner and resold to the receiver or a third party for the cost of the repairs.255 The OTRF touted the program as a way to bring buildings up to code and preserve historic neighborhoods and “a very positive change to the neighborhood with no expenditure of City money at all.”256 City Manager Milton Dohoney concurred:

Of all the recommendations, receivership has the greatest likelihood of advancing historic preservation of endangered buildings. However, receivership will also be the most expensive to implement…It is recommended that receiverships be undertaken as full renovations in strategic areas undergoing revitalization with the greatest likelihood of the market supporting re-occupancy.257

The OTRF requested $2.8 million in federal stimulus funding to pay for a receivership program, but its proposal was not successful in securing funding.

The larger plan was met with cautious approval when it was released in summer 2009. The committee agreed that changes to lower the number of emergency demolitions and protect endangered buildings in Over-the-Rhine were important.258 The City initially responded that it lacked the staff

253 “Dohoney: Most OTRF Preservation Recommendations ‘Probably Unfeasible.’”
255 “City, OTR Preservationists ‘Not Far Apart.’”
256 Ibid.
257 “Dohoney: Most OTRF Preservation Recommendations ‘Probably Unfeasible.’”
258 “City, OTR Preservationists ‘Not Far Apart.’”
power and funds to make immediate changes. However, a few months later it indicated that it was open to the plan’s recommendations. “The good news is that I think that we all want the same thing, and that’s to preserve the historic character of our city,” Property Maintenance Code Enforcement Division Manager Ed Cunningham told the committee on behalf of the Department of Community Development. “It’s just a matter of working on these ideas a little more and trying to come up with the best ones that can be implemented.”

The City Council passed a motion supporting historic preservation in October 2009. The motion recognized the growing importance of Over-the-Rhine, as well as the threats to the district:

Each year sees the demolition of more of its historic buildings, the fabric which provides the unique character that people are seeking. Preservation of these historic structures is paramount if Cincinnati is to reap the economic potential of this neighborhood.

The good news is that many of the threats to Over-the-Rhine can be controlled. The major culprits that prevent preservation are: 1) the lack of knowledge by City staff and boards outside their own special purview; 2) confusing and contradictory city codes; 3) the absence of code enforcement with real teeth; 4) the shortage of information about what it takes to rehab the unique mixed-use buildings of Over-the-Rhine, and 5) the absence of a loan product with terms that can actually work with older mixed-use buildings.

The motion stated that demolition funding must be used for stabilization in historic districts as much as possible, given equivalent costs: “At the very least, repair of a building will be funded for the same amount that it would cost to demolish the building.” It also committed to explore other funding mechanisms for historic building repairs, train administrative boards in preservation issues, and establish a Historic Building Loss Task Force of preservationists, planners, code enforcement officials, community housing representatives, and funders to review the code changes proposed in the plan and explore new financing tools for preservation.

In September 2010, the task force produced a list of recommended changes to City policy and programs, which the City Council approved and sent for legal review in February 2011. Recommendations included:

259 “Dohoney: Most OTRF Preservation Recommendations ‘Probably Unfeasible.’”
260 “City, OTR Preservationists ‘Not Far Apart.’”
261 “Motion,” City of Cincinnati, October 13, 2009.
262 Ibid.
• Develop guidelines to make local Historic Conservation Board procedures more clear and consistent for both board members and applicants

• Create a system for uniform training of administrative board members, city staff members who work closely with the boards, and Building Code Inspectors, to ensure correct and consistent application of the law

• Clarify that the Property Maintenance Code Enforcement Division has the authority to correct blighted or unsafe conditions, including emergency repairs, and prioritize repair over demolition of historic properties

• Revise the Vacant Building Maintenance License (see below)

• Hire more staff for the Office of the Urban Conservator

• Identify funding for a receivership program

• Establish a regional land bank in conjunction with county officials

• Support the Historic Stabilization of Structures (Historic SOS) program proposed by the Property Maintenance Code Enforcement Division that would provide funding to stabilize unsafe historic buildings

As preservationists were developing and advocating for the new plan, the city’s Property Maintenance Code Enforcement Division was taking a complementary approach to the vacant building issue. “There are big changes in the offing” in Cincinnati’s preservation scene, Margo Warminski, the Preservation Director of the Cincinnati Preservation Association, said in March 2011.264 She sees the two most significant as adjustments to the Vacant Building Maintenance License process to benefit historic building owners and the Historic SOS program, both initiatives of the City’s Property Maintenance Code Enforcement Division.

The Vacant Building Maintenance License (VBML) is a tool to encourage maintenance and re-occupancy of vacant buildings. Through annual application fees that increase from $900 to $3,500 over a period of five years, the license applies financial pressure to property owners to improve the properties and find tenants or transfer them to someone who can. It also sets different maintenance standards that aim to keep vacant buildings weathertight, watertight, and secure, rather than trying to hold them accountable to higher occupancy standards.265 The City carries out re-

264 Warminski.
265 Cunningham.
pairs itself if the owner is unable or unwilling, then puts a first-priority lien on the property for the cost of repairs. Over 1,600 buildings are currently subject to orders to apply for VBMLs, though half of those building owners have not filed for the license.266

Two changes have been made to the VMBL as a result of the Historic Building Loss Task Force recommendations. Owners can request a waiver of some VBML requirements and two years of application fees with a “legitimate and viable” development plan or if the property is being land banked by a nonprofit redevelopment corporation.267 Additionally, in February 2011 the City Council passed an ordinance that allows the Board of Appeals to indefinitely suspend VBML fees in historic districts, as long as property owners are performing basic maintenance.

Division Manager Ed Cunningham, who also served on the Historic Building Loss Task Force, developed the Historic SOS program, a code enforcement-led effort to stabilize and rehabilitate unsafe “public nuisance” buildings in designated historic districts. There, hazard abatement demolition funds will be redirected to stabilize buildings and bring them into compliance with VBML requirements.268 Historic SOS funds will be used to fill the gap between the demolition funds and cost of stabilization. The City Council and Planning Department approved $350,000 in Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) to fund a pilot program to stabilize four buildings; program implementation is currently pending congressional approval of the funds (Fig. 29).

Additional measures acknowledge the reality of far more vacant properties than demolition funding to knock them down, as well as that of an understaffed Property Maintenance Code Enforcement Division. Cunningham engaged Margo Warminski of the CPA to help evaluate the public nuisance buildings scheduled for demolition hearings.269 Cunningham, Warminski, and another building inspector go into the field and evaluate every building on the demolition list according

269 Cunningham; Harris.
to four categories: hazard to the public from fire or collapse (weighted more heavily); blight from a prominent location in the community and negative impact on neighboring property values; intrinsic value from architectural significance, historical value, contribution to the streetscape, and importance to the fabric of the neighborhood; and obsolescence, which evaluates potential for rehabilitation from an economic and design standpoint (Fig. 30). Warminski offers opinions on the architectural significance of each building, and all three evaluators’ forms are averaged together equally to rank the building for demolition priority.

If this ranking process results in a recommendation to demolish a building, the proposed demolition will most likely go through Section 106 review by the City’s Urban Conservator, Larry Harris. Eighty percent of publicly funded demolitions in Cincinnati are undertaken with federal money and undergo this review to evaluate potential adverse impacts on historic resources either designated or eligible for the National Register. The code enforcement ranking process and Section 106 review do not influence each other.

Cunningham points out that if only safety is considered in carrying out demolitions, the city could lose many historic buildings.271 “The idea is to weed out the junk, and then try to get the other ones fixed,” he says. The Property Maintenance Code Enforcement Division hopes to “use [the ranking process] as a rational basis for tearing down the buildings we have to tear down. By partnering with the preservation community, we hope to get their perspective on it.” Similarly, Warminski sees results from her input: “They take our recommendations very seriously. It doesn’t

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**Figure 30.** Condemned building evaluation form. Source: Ed Cunningham, City of Cincinnati.

271 Cunningham.
mean they always act on them, but we’re happy to provide that information.” Through the evaluation process, CPA also gains earlier warning of demolitions of potentially significant properties, allowing it more time to gather resources and advocate for preservation.

To increase publicity and stimulate interest in historic buildings, a list of at-risk historic buildings was posted on the City’s website in January 2011. The list, created by the City with input from Warminski, names code violations for privately-owned designated or eligible historic buildings throughout the city that are at critical risk for demolition due to neglect, lack of maintenance, and/or abandonment, yet are reasonable candidates for rehabilitation. “The historic structures on this [web]page are, in a sense, on their death beds,” the website explains. “This list is to encourage immediate repair of the properties and to alert the public to the decline of historic resources before they are lost forever.”

The CPA serves as the contact for the at-risk list, helping to guide interested parties through the process of acquiring the property through purchase or receivership and locating rehabilitation funding. “The City cannot stabilize every historic building in danger—there simply isn’t the money or time for it. We hope that by singling out at-risk buildings, someone from the private sector will step forward and take necessary steps to address the immediate repairs required,” Cunningham said.

Warminski sees the at-risk list and Historic SOS as promising steps to reduce demolitions and stabilize neighborhoods. “We think that people are going to want some of these buildings in the future,” she says of the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood, which boasts compact, walkable, mixed-use development, high-quality architecture, transit access, close proximity to major employment centers, and institutional anchors. “If you want people to come back to the city, you want to have something for them to come back to.”

272 Warminski.
275 Ibid.
276 Warminski.
The OTRF’s next steps focus on stopping demolitions in Over-the-Rhine. OTRF staff and supporters hope to accomplish this through pressuring the owners of buildings on the City’s demolition list through publicity and prosecution, identifying experts who can provide technical advice on building stabilization, securing partnerships and funding in conjunction with the Building and Planning Department staff, and increasing publicity for issues and progress through new media.277

At minimum, says the organization, every building in OTR on the City’s list of at-risk historic buildings should have a Vacant Building Maintenance License or waiver.

Bringing People Back: Attracting Residents to Detroit’s Historic Districts

Though this case study focuses on programs that work to attract homebuyers and renters to historic districts in Detroit, it begins with a selective overview of the challenges facing the city and initiatives that aim to address them.

Detroit’s story is familiar. The birthplace of the Model T and the first urban highway, the city had 1.8 million residents in 1950.278 In 1956, the auto industry employed 400,000 Detroiters who earned good wages and drove to work from trim single-family homes around the booming city.279 In the next decades, however, the combined blows of manufacturer outsourcing, suburbanization, and racial tension eroded the city’s prosperity.280 The 2010 U.S. Census shocked Detroit with a count of 713,777 people—a 25 percent decrease from ten years earlier.281 Crime, illiteracy, and unemployment rates are all too high; public school performance remains low.282

The city’s physical fabric bears witness to its issues. Between 1970 and 2010, the city demolished more than 173,600 houses but issued only about 10,000 permits for new residential construction. The recent foreclosure crisis escalated the situation: Detroit saw 55,000 foreclosures in the past five years, and the residential vacancy rate rose from 10.3 percent in 2000 to 27.8 percent in 2010. Nearly 20 percent of lots are empty, and the vacant building count now stands at nearly 24,000. It is a staggering array of numbers.

Ruins and vacancy in Detroit’s historic landscape have become iconic. Susan McBride, a staff member for the City’s Historic District Commission, says that owning a historic property is a matter of stewardship, but also an enormous challenge at present: “Hopefully that property’s going to outlast us. But at the rate things are going, it’s really hard to keep them together.” Downtown contains more than 200 abandoned buildings that are listed in the National Register, most Art Deco and neo-Classical buildings from pre-WWII. “Urban prairie” is a favored term for neighborhoods like the Brush Park Historic District, which contains blocks almost entirely empty (Fig. 31). Karen Nagher, the executive director of Preservation Wayne, the citywide preservation advocacy organization, says that all preservation causes are urgent: “There’s nothing you can take your time about, especially in Detroit.”

Michigan Central Station, a grand National Register-listed building constructed in 1913, has been waiting for rehabilitation or demolition since it closed in 1988. The building rises above the surrounding residential neighborhood and low-rise commercial buildings “like a tombstone from an urban meadow,” wrote a preservation advocate from the National Trust.

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284 Saulny, “Razing.”
286 Susan McBride, staff member, Detroit Historic District Commission, interview with Cara Bertron, March 22, 2011.
287 Saulny, “Seeking a Future.”
which owns the 500,000-square-foot station and office tower, says it favors preserving the building—perhaps for reuse as law enforcement or judicial offices—but past adaptive reuse proposals have floundered for lack of funds, and the company says it requires a committed anchor tenant or a “critical mass” of committed businesses prior to rehabilitation.291

Detroit’s narrative of decline has drawn widespread attention. Time Inc. bought a house and sent “Assignment Detroit” journalists to saturate the city for a year. A host of powerful funders with local ties, such as the Kresge, W.K. Kellogg, and Ford foundations, are pumping large amounts of funding into local organizations and the municipal government.292 The city’s needs are enormous and compelling: “The tragedy of Detroit has been a slow-motion disaster over many years,” according to Detroit Free Press journalist John Gallagher.293

291 Schwartz; Saulny, “Seeking a Future”; Berke.
Yet there is more to Detroit. The city is home to a host of creative people, big plans, and dedicated organizations. Cheap real estate, the pull of a challenge, and opportunities born of a last-chance mentality have attracted a wave of artists, urban farmers, and other would-be visionaries who are making the city a testing ground for urban agriculture and art projects like the house-scale Heidelberg Project. Indeed, some see Detroit as a potential model for adapting cities to other types of large-scale shifts, for crafting “a new paradigm based on new economic and physical realities,” as well as local assets.294 “Detroit right now is just this vast, enormous canvas where anything imaginable can be accomplished…In a way, a strange, new American dream can be found here, amid the crumbling, semi-majestic ruins of a half-century’s industrial decline,” wrote an author who moved from Brooklyn to Detroit.295

The city also holds a diverse array of dogged, optimistic organizations—1,200, according to a 2010 count.296 They focus on citywide community economic development, art, preservation, and more. Many community development corporations and other organizations work on initiatives at the fine grain of the neighborhood or block. Some like Community Legal Resources—which administers the Detroit Vacant Property Campaign, among other functions (vacant property plans, legal assistance, local and state policy work)—cover the entire city.297 Data Driven Detroit (D3) collects and analyzes data on housing vacancy, property values, population losses and gains, jobs, crime, and other indicators at the parcel level within a citywide database, and uses the results to advise foundations and nonprofit consortiums in targeting resources and to informally help with City planning efforts.298 Preservation Wayne aims to “preserve, promote, and protect the neighborhoods and structures that define Detroit” through tours and educational forums, awards to local preservation successes, and advocacy campaigns.299

Group.
297 Detroit Vacant Property Campaign fact sheet, Detroit Vacant Property Campaign, n.d.
298 Gregory Parrish, Data and Technical Manager, Data Driven Detroit, interview with Cara Bertron, March 22, 2011.
Some of these organizations have proposed their own plans for re-visioning Detroit. The Community Development Advocates of Detroit (CDAD), for example, produced a “Neighborhood Revitalization Strategic Framework” advocating classification of neighborhoods into eleven typologies; Data Driven Detroit assisted with data analysis.\textsuperscript{300} The Detroit Land Bank Authority acquires, manages, and resells properties in the city’s NSP target areas with the goal of stabilizing neighborhoods and stimulating economic growth.\textsuperscript{301}

Major anchor institutions, foundations, and developers share in the efforts. In 2011, the Kresge Foundation, Hudson Webber Foundation, and Wayne State University launched the Detroit Revitalization Fellows program to attract talented young professionals interested in “creating the Detroit of tomorrow” through jobs in city government and local organizations.\textsuperscript{302} All three entities are also engaged in the Live Midtown initiative, along with two major medical institutions, and the Hudson Webber Foundation has proposed the 15x15 strategy (Live Midtown is discussed later). The historic downtown Book Cadillac Hotel was rehabilitated as a hotel and condominium building in 2008 with federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits; the 1928 Broderick Tower is another downtown historic tax-credit project slated for rehabilitation in 2011-12 (Fig. 32).\textsuperscript{303}

At the municipal level, Mayor Dave Bing is championing the Detroit Works Project as “a roadmap from the Detroit of today to our future.”\textsuperscript{304} Though the project is technically a supplement to the city’s master plan adopted in 2009, it has much larger rhetorical ambitions.\textsuperscript{305} It is touted as “a project that is critical to the future of our city” and aimed at engaging a broad swath of residents. Its stated goal is to face urgent common problems and use existing assets—the city’s

\textsuperscript{300} Saulny, “Razing”; Parrish.
\textsuperscript{305} John Baran, Executive Manager, Planning Division, City of Detroit Planning and Development Department, Talk given to University of Michigan students and author at City of Detroit, March 22, 2011.
inexpensive housing and real estate, anchor institutions, close proximity to Lake Huron and the Canadian border, rich culture, and history of innovation—to reinvent Detroit in a very big, very visible way. This might include relocating residents from sparsely populated areas to more viable neighborhoods—an expectation that has generated both applause and resistance—and it will almost certainly entail decisions about which neighborhoods to invest resources in (Fig. 33). The City expects recommendations by November 2011. To date, the Detroit Works process has not involved the Historic District Commission in an official capacity, but Planning Division Executive Manager John Baran anticipates that a public meeting focused on arts and culture will also include historic resources.

Marja Winters, deputy director of the City’s Planning and Development Department and one of the leaders of the Detroit Works Project, is emphatic that the project will produce a land use plan and investment “blueprint,” not a plan for forced relocation. It is closely linked to Mayor Bing’s “Mayor’s Message.”

306 “Mayor’s Message.”
309 MacDonald, “Summit”; Marja Winters, interview with Nate Berg in “Right Size Fits All,” Next American

Figure 32. Downtown Detroit, with the Westin Book Cadillac Hotel at the far right (2011).
plan to demolish 10,000 buildings in his first term, beginning with 3,000 in 2010.\textsuperscript{310} An April 2011 audit of potential policy changes that could result from the project was unmistakable in one of its messages: The City needed a new “clarity of mission for citywide land development” to direct its ownership of 12,000 acres and the dire situation of many struggling neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{311}

The orchestrators of Detroit Works hope to direct residents and investment to strong neighborhoods to make them even stronger, “high quality-of-life neighborhoods that are affordable and walkable and have modern amenities that support 21st-century living.”\textsuperscript{312} Many of Detroit’s historic neighborhoods offer these qualities: affordability, a pedestrian-friendly scale, proximity to neighborhood commercial corridors, and a unique character valued by potential buyers.\textsuperscript{313} A \textit{Time} article from Assignment Detroit noted:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{City}, Fall 2010.
  \item \textsuperscript{310} Laura Berman, “Abandoned Houses Fix Hasn’t Come,” \textit{The Detroit News}, March 30, 2010.
  \item \textsuperscript{311} “Audit Details Pros, Cons.”
  \item \textsuperscript{312} Toni Griffin, Lead planner for Detroit Works Project, in interview with Nate Berg, “Right Size Fits All.”
  \item \textsuperscript{313} Brent Snavely, “Experts: Detroit’s Real Estate Options Appealing,” \textit{The Detroit Free Press}, January 21, 2011.
\end{itemize}
Even after decades of abandonment and decay, Detroit's housing is one of the city's greatest assets. Handsome, well-preserved homes in viable neighborhoods like the University District, Rosedale Park and the Villages, near the east-side riverfront, are among the greatest housing bargains in America: you can buy a four-bedroom Tudor in move-in condition for less than $100,000. But on a far larger scale, the modest bungalows and red bricks and half capes that have long housed most Detroiters comprise a compelling incentive to pull people... out of neighborhoods marked for abandonment.\(^{314}\)

Planning based on preservation is a concept advocated by preservationists and real estate agents as well as reporters. Francis Grunow, the former Executive Director of Preservation Wayne, asserted that "enough urban fabric exists, though tattered and severely endangered, to concentrate and incubate a smart, strategic planning initiative that begins in Detroit's heart and organically grows out."\(^{315}\)

However, Michigan governor Rick Snyder is currently proposing to eliminate the state's Historic Preservation Tax Credit, a 25% tax credit available to both owner-occupied and income-producing properties in local historic districts.\(^{316}\) This move has encountered resistance from preservation advocates across the state who see the historic tax credits and brownfield tax credits (also threatened) as critical drivers of development activity in a struggling economy. Gregory Parrish of Data Driven Detroit recognized the tax credits' role in stimulating development:

> That has been an economic development engine for the city. It's something that has stabilized it in ways that it wouldn't have been stabilized... I would love to have [the tax credits] as a resource that buttresses [other] economic development.\(^{317}\)

In interviews for this thesis, Susan McBride of the City's Historic District Commission, Susan Mosey of Midtown Detroit Inc., Karen Nagher of Preservation Wayne, Parrish, and Diane Tuinstra of the Michigan SHPO all acknowledged the negative impact that the loss of historic tax credits would have on historic rehabilitation. The governor's proposal has also drawn criticism from the

**National Trust.**\(^{318}\)

317 Parrish.
318 Diane Tuinstra, HUD Project Review Coordinator, Michigan SHPO, telephone interview with Cara Bertron, April 21, 2011.
Live Midtown

Live Midtown is one strategy to concentrate resources and people in relatively stable areas: a homeownership-based initiative focused on one of Detroit’s most vibrant and historic neighborhoods. Located north of downtown along the Woodward and Cass corridors, Midtown contains several major anchor institutions—Wayne State University, Detroit Medical Center, and the Henry Ford Hospital, among others. It also has a high population of students, artists, and young professionals; burgeoning art and restaurant scenes; 10 theaters and 9 museums; preservation-savvy developers working in 14 locally and nationally designated historic districts; and plans for a new light rail extension down Woodward Avenue. Its office vacancy rate in early 2010 was just over 8 percent compared to downtown’s 20 percent vacancy rate during the same period. “Midtown packs the best of our history and the power of our future all into two square miles,” boasts the website of Midtown Detroit Inc., a local nonprofit planning and development organization. “It’s one of the few neighborhoods [in Detroit] that actually has a market,” adds Sue Mosey, Midtown Detroit’s director. She goes on to explain:

Typically, in any large urban city, your historic districts are where you have the best property, and [they] typically remain among the most stable, even in the face of severe disinvestment. In Detroit, it really isn’t any different… The historic districts generally do better.

Midtown Detroit spearheads revitalization initiatives in Midtown and New Center, to the north. The organization formed in April 2011 from a merger of the University Cultural Center Association (UCCA) and the New Center Council, a nonprofit business organization focused on the neighborhood directly to the north. UCCA had been a key broker for development in Midtown, helping to remake the neighborhood’s image and catalyzing change with a redevelopment plan for housing development, both rehabilitation and infill; the creation of the Sugar Hill Arts District; street beautification; greenway development; and neighborhood park improvements.

322 Susan Mosey, President, Detroit Midtown Inc., interview with Cara Bertron, March 24, 2011.
323 Preservation Shore to Shore.
UCCA—and now Midtown Detroit—has a strong preservation ethos based on local assets. “It’s inherent in our whole work,” says Mosey, who previously directed UCCA. “Everything we do ties back to preservation.” Many of UCCA’s development projects included rehabilitations of historic buildings for condominiums and retail/office use, and it played a leading role in designating much of the neighborhood as local and National Register historic districts in the late 1990s (Fig. 34). National Register listing creates eligibility for historic rehabilitation tax credits for income-producing properties (federal and state tax credits) and owner-occupied houses (state tax credits); local listing ensures that the local Historic District Commission reviews exterior changes for compatibility with the district. (See Appendix for local and National Register historic districts in Midtown.)

The organization currently is expanding some historic districts, a project initially intended to make more tax credits available, but now—as the Michigan Historic Preservation Tax Credits are threatened—aimed at protecting exterior historic fabric. Midtown Detroit also works with a group of private developers who see potential in local historic assets. As one architect and restoration specialist said, “For a long time, there was a big effort to tear things down in Detroit. But if we have all these great historic buildings here, why not take the historic tax credits and reuse them? Plus, it’s a greener, more sustainable form of development.”

Midtown Detroit is the administrative hub of a new anchor-driven, demand-side homeownership and rental program, Live Midtown. The program promotes a “live local” approach, offering a $20,000 to $25,000 forgivable home purchase loan and up to $3,500 of rental assistance to employees of Wayne State University, Detroit Medical Center, and the Henry Ford Hospital who move to the neighborhood (Fig. 35). Participants locate a property, then apply to their institutional employer and Midtown Detroit for funding approval. Funding comes from several sources: the anchor institutions each contribute $200,000 annually, and the Kresge and Hudson Webber foundations and the Michigan State Housing Development Authority provide matching funds. Midtown Detroit is administering the program, which is anticipated to run for five years.

324 Mosey.
326 Mosey.
327 Gregor.
329 Darrell Dawsey, “A Tale of Two Relocation Plans,” MLive.com, February 16, 2011; Mosey.
Institutional employees already living in the neighborhood receive benefits, too. Existing home-owners can apply for matching funds of up to $5,000 for visible exterior improvement projects. Midtown Detroit will review proposed improvements for the value they will add to the neighborhood, whether through landscaping, fencing, painting, or another project.\textsuperscript{330} The City’s Historic District Commission will also review proposed improvements to buildings in local historic districts. Existing renters receive $1,000 for renewing their leases for another year.

The program has seen high interest since it was announced in mid-February.\textsuperscript{331} Of approximately 400 telephone inquiries from prospective participants, half are serious. About fifty people have been pre-approved by Midtown Detroit and Wayne State University and the Henry Ford Hospital—Detroit Medical Center launched its program in late March—and are moving toward a final sale or rental contract. Only a few current residents have expressed interest in exterior improvements.

\textsuperscript{330} Mosey.  
\textsuperscript{331} Ibid.
Live Midtown is not targeted particularly at historic districts, but rather at high-density areas with a variety of available housing types. Mosey emphasizes the importance of diverse housing types to cater to all housing preferences and retain the neighborhood’s diversity of incomes and demographics, which she calls “far more important than the building stock.” Still, the neighborhood’s dense concentration of historic districts means that homebuyers interested in distinctive historic housing have many options, and developers’ use of federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits has increased the available supply of rehabilitated residential units for renters in historic districts.

**Figure 35.** Map showing Live Midtown’s sponsoring institutions and program area (dotted line) (2011). Source: Midtown Detroit.
Project 14

The City is promoting another homeownership-based strategy that includes historic districts. Project 14—named after the police code for “return to normal operations”—aims to attract 200 Detroit police officers to live in two of the city’s stronger neighborhoods.332 The initiative asserts that police officers can help deter crime and improve police-community relations, even as they increase the city’s tax base, leverage federal resources, and encourage other people to “live local.”333 Announced in early February 2011, the program is still in the organizational stages. The Detroit Land Bank Authority, which is administering it, owns 13 houses in the target neighborhoods and is actively working to acquire more.

Focus neighborhoods for Project 14 are Boston-Edison, a local, state, and federally designated historic district, and East English Village, a neighborhood eligible for National Register listing.334 Both have historically been stable neighborhoods. Recently, though, East English Village has been threatened by a high number of foreclosures, while Boston-Edison has seen many foreclosures and increasing levels of property abandonment.335 Both are NSP target areas, and Project 14 is one attempt to return them to stability in a difficult housing market.

Police officers will apply to the program through the Land Bank, select a house from a list of Land Bank-owned properties, and choose desired renovation features.336 The Land Bank will then rehabilitate the houses selected by officers. The Land Bank is drawing on Neighborhood Stabilization Program funds to support the initiative. NSP2 dollars will cover rehabilitation costs up to $150,000, and an NSP2-funded second mortgage covers up to 20 percent of the home value and closing costs.

332 “Project 14,” City of Detroit, n.d. (ca. February 2011); Dawsey.
333 “Project 14.”
334 Though East English Village and Boston-Edison are the focal areas, Land Bank-owned properties throughout the city can be purchased through the program.
336 “Project 14.”
With a $1,000 down payment and completion of eight hours of homeownership counseling, officers can move into the rehabilitated house. Total home prices are anticipated to range from $40,000 to $80,000, depending on the house, with a monthly mortgage payment of $500 to $1,000.

Project 14 heavily advertises the historic nature of the target neighborhoods and houses. Exhibiting “high quality renovation work and restoration of grand architectural features,” the houses also have modern floor plans, garage, and modern appliances (Fig. 36). An Acquisition Strategy Team contracted to the Land Bank identifies houses to be offered through Project 14 and also oversees rehabilitation of the properties.

Mosey sees Boston-Edison’s historic nature as a major contributor to its inclusion in Project 14:

> It’s like, “Well, there are middle-class folks there, there’s some economic base there, and we have a chance of attracting a new market there and stabilizing the market we have”—because you have this housing stock you can’t get anywhere else in a location on a future rail line [the Woodward Light Rail project] which is close to downtown.

Mayor Bing focuses on neighborhood stability but also acknowledges the value of the houses. “The neighborhoods that we’re focusing on are stable neighborhoods with empty homes,” he said. “And nice homes. So we want to make sure we fill up as many of those homes as we possibly can.”

Police officers have expressed great interest. In the first few weeks after Project 14 was announced, about 150 officers inquired about it. However, others met the announcement with widespread suspicion and even hostility. Many people initially understood that houses would be sold for only $1,000. Others asked why police officers were privileged in the program. Some public employees who have lived in Detroit for years felt slighted, seeing the program as a reward for people who had fled to the suburbs. One columnist wondered what other neighborhoods could benefit from targeted investment:

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338 “Project 14.”
339 “Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP): Acquisition Services Request for Proposals #06-10-005.”
340 Mosey.
341 Qtd. in Oosting, “Code 14.”
342 Ibid.
343 Dawsey.
Although East English Village and Boston-Edison are great examples of solid-but-struggling neighborhoods desperate for an influx of new homeowners, it's worth it to ask whether the administration has at least thought through any real plans for communities that carry less “cache.”

The mayor’s office hastened to clarify the mortgage requirement, and assured people that, though Project 14 is limited to police officers, anyone can apply to purchase a home with a $1,000 NSP-enabled down payment.

Press coverage has since been more favorable. An ABC correspondent discussed the alternatives:

…When your city is looking at bulldozing some sections that are so pocked with vacancies it’s no longer cost effective to bring services to them; when your foreclosure rate is dire; when your tax base needs a boost; when you need police on the beat (and living next door), what have you got to lose? The one thing Detroit does have is a city full of gorgeous architecture. You’ve gotta be creative to save it.

Programs like Live Midtown and Project 14 are not seen as panaceas. A lack of services and retail, an underperforming school system, and high home insurance rates remain barriers. Still, such programs build demand, attract residents, increase the tax base, and focus revitalization efforts.

344 Ibid.
346 Brent Snavely, “Experts.”
Capacity-Building

Building preservation capacity is a central step to effectively incorporating preservation priorities into larger decisions about cities’ futures. It may consist of recruiting more preservation advocates from the community by connecting preservation with quality-of-life issues. With a larger, more active base, preservation has greater leverage to incorporate preservation considerations into local governmental and organizational policies and programs. On a more fundamental level, strengthening preservation capacity may—in many cases—consist of educating preservationists. Historic district commissions, which play a critical role in safeguarding locally designated resources, may be unfamiliar with basic preservation standards or apply those standards inconsistently, and consequently be seen as unprofessional and peripheral to planning decisions. In Saginaw, Michigan, an on-the-ground initiative of the National Trust aims to begin building capacity.

Building Preservation Infrastructure: The National Trust in Saginaw

Saginaw first boomed in the second half of the 19th century, when the lumber industry established 23 sawmills in Saginaw County and drove up the county’s population from 2,609 to 75,813 in fewer than 35 years. Soon after the white pine forests were exhausted, the automobile industry began its ascendancy, with the first car produced in Saginaw in 1905. The city bolstered its production capacity during World War II with manufacturing military vehicle parts, and was a General Motors powerhouse by the 1960s. That decade, Saginaw’s population topped 100,000.

As in other cities with automobile-based economies, Saginaw felt the impact of the 1970s energy crisis. Auto plant layoffs through the 1980s and 1990s drove up local unemployment, poverty, and crime rates and spurred residents to seek jobs elsewhere. Between 1960 and 2000, Saginaw lost 37 percent of its population. Among other effects such as a shrinking tax base and reduced city services, a growing number of vacant and abandoned buildings were tangible evidence of the population decline. Between 2005 and 2010, approximately 950 houses were knocked down in an

348 Schilling and Logan.
accelerated demolition push; still, the city held an estimated 800 abandoned buildings in January 2010.\textsuperscript{349} As one observer wrote:

The austerity of Saginaw is not just a trick of the [winter] climate. It also arises from the built landscape. The streets are lined with monumental buildings, both residential and commercial. A few of these buildings—lovely Queen Annes, big-shouldered Prairie Four-Squares, Italian villas, Kahn steel-framed office blocks—are well-kept. Many, however, are not. They linger sadly, everywhere, in various stages of decay. Ostensibly, this is a human environment and yet one sees so few people as one explores the neighborhoods. This is what disinvestment and economic collapse look like… This is what a shrinking city feels like.\textsuperscript{350}

In late 2009, the City of Saginaw joined a consortium of twelve municipalities led by the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) to apply for NSP2 funds for the New Michigan Urban Neighborhood Plan. The plan, which MSHDA touted as “an unprecedented effort to remove blight and revitalize neighborhoods,” sought to acquire and redevelop more than 6,000 foreclosed, abandoned, and vacant properties; demolish 2,500 buildings; and rehabilitate or construct 1,500 houses in target neighborhoods across the 12 member cities.\textsuperscript{351} The consortium was successful in its application, and Saginaw received $17.4 million in what the local newspaper called “blight fight” funds.\textsuperscript{352}

The City is partnering with the Saginaw County Land Bank on a two-phase program of demolition and rehabilitation in three priority areas, using a block-by-block revitalization strategy that utilizes broad-brush demolition in highly distressed areas, followed by stabilization and/or renovation of a few deteriorated houses in more stable neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{353}

The two stable neighborhoods receiving NSP2 dollars include the Cathedral District and Covenant HealthCare neighborhood, both adjacent to the Saginaw River. Both suffer from high vacancy rates but are home to government buildings, schools, and health care institutions that are major local employers.\textsuperscript{354} Planners expect NSP2 funds to help implement a 2008 revitalization plan for the Cathedral District and carry out improvements—mostly renovations—in the Covenant HealthCare neighborhood.

The third NSP2 priority area is the First Ward in the city’s Northeast Side, a 344-acre area that planners propose to turn into a “Green Zone” cleared of all buildings.\textsuperscript{355} There, modest autoworkers’ housing abuts the once-bustling Potter Street commercial corridor and National Register-listed Potter Street train station (Fig. 37).\textsuperscript{356} Though the neighborhood contains two districts on or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, its buildings have suffered from decades of neglect, and most are vacant.\textsuperscript{357} “It’s pretty desolate out there,” said Marvin D. Hare, Saginaw County Treasurer and chairman of the Saginaw County Land Bank Authority. “We want to let it grow back into trees” until a future use arises.\textsuperscript{358}

The first phase of Saginaw’s NSP2 plan implementation included demolition of over 500 houses in 2010 and ignited a local controversy around the Northeast Side.\textsuperscript{359} The Michigan SHPO repeatedly denied the City’s request to demolish 53 condemned buildings located in designated or eligible historic districts, based on a lack of information.\textsuperscript{360} The City sent a list of code violations as proof, but SHPO officials requested thorough condition reports, rehabilitation estimates, and market value evaluations according to Section 106 requirements. No blame was assigned: a SHPO employee noted that a staff shortage at the City led to the lack of sufficient documentation. SHPO officials eventually visited Saginaw and gave approval to demolish 49 of the 53 houses.\textsuperscript{361}

\textsuperscript{354} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{356} Ibid.; Engel, “Officials Set for Next Stage.”
\textsuperscript{358} Engel, “Saginaw Blight Plan Includes Sword, Scalpel.”
\textsuperscript{359} Engel, “Officials Set for Next Stage.”
\textsuperscript{360} Burns, “Red Tape Delays Using a Back Hoe”; Tuinstra.
\textsuperscript{361} Burns, “Saginaw Gets Approval To Raze ‘Historic’ Homes.”
The incident raised the hackles of many Saginaw residents and City officials against preservation. Dangerous buildings inspector Scott Crofoot called historic designation a bureaucratic “monster.”362 “We wouldn’t schedule [the buildings] for demo if they were repairable,” said Hare. “It’s the bureaucratic stuff that makes me angry. If you’re a preservationist, everything is savable.”

Figure 37. Potter Street train station (2011). Source: Brenna Moloney, PreservationNation Blog.

The second phase of NSP2-funded work focuses on renovation, with a goal of rehabilitating 138 empty houses in 2011-12 (Fig. 38).363 The “updated” houses will be sold to low- and medium-income families at subsidized prices. Though the city’s Development Director estimated that rehabilitation would cost $60,000, five demonstration rehabs each cost more than $100,000 and yielded houses valued from $34,000 to $58,000.364 The high rehabilitation costs stemmed from federal requirements to abate hazardous materials like lead paint and asbestos, which involved the removal of flooring, roofing, walls, wiring, plumbing, and appliances, and reconstruction of the house around reinforced framing and foundations.365 Though some in Saginaw questioned the high cost

362 Burns, “Red Tape Delays Using a Back Hoe.”
363 Engel, “Officials Set for Next Stage.”
365 Gus Burns, “Reseeding Saginaw: 15 Saginaw Homes Each To Receive $100,000-Plus in Renovations
of rehabilitation, city officials asserted that the funds were accomplishing their purpose: to return vacant and abandoned houses to the housing market and to generate local construction jobs.\textsuperscript{366} By early 2011, 45 houses had been rehabilitated in the priority areas.\textsuperscript{367} 

In addition, the City purchased Saginaw’s first apartment building, the Jefferson Apartments in the Cathedral District, with the goal of rehabilitating it using federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits.\textsuperscript{368} Chief inspector John Stemple said that the 1925 building “was constructed to last. It just needs to be spruced up.” He added, “We want to create a situation…where people can live and feel good about where they live.”\textsuperscript{369} The cost of rehabilitating the 40-unit building is currently estimated at $3 million.\textsuperscript{370}

Figure 38. House to be rehabilitated with NSP funds (2011). Source: Brenna Moloney, PreservationNation Blog.

In addition, the City purchased Saginaw’s first apartment building, the Jefferson Apartments in the Cathedral District, with the goal of rehabilitating it using federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits.\textsuperscript{368} Chief inspector John Stemple said that the 1925 building “was constructed to last. It just needs to be spruced up.” He added, “We want to create a situation…where people can live and feel good about where they live.”\textsuperscript{369} The cost of rehabilitating the 40-unit building is currently estimated at $3 million.\textsuperscript{370}

\textsuperscript{366} Burns, “Reseeding Saginaw: 15 Saginaw Homes.”

\textsuperscript{367} “What Is the NSP?”

\textsuperscript{368} \textit{Ibid.}; Brenna Moloney, Preservation Specialist, National Trust for Historic Preservation, telephone interview with Cara Bertron, March 29, 2011.


\textsuperscript{370} Burns, “Reseeding Saginaw: 15 Saginaw Homes.”
Meanwhile, an additional preservation resource had been inserted into Saginaw. The National Trust had been considering an on-the-ground, community revitalization-focused demonstration intervention in a Rust Belt community for a while. “We learned from experience that one cannot do community revitalization from afar or by proxy,” wrote the National Trust’s Midwest Office director Royce Yeater. “We need to have someone with preservation and revitalization skills on the ground and at the table.”

The National Trust proposed to create a three-year Preservation Specialist position to “work more intensely and holistically” in a community that met four criteria developed by Yeater:

1. A small size to enable measurable results in a relatively short time and a weak preservation organization and/or preservation commission
2. City leadership that publicly embraced rightsizing
3. A welcoming attitude toward the National Trust and its intentions
4. Foundation funding to support the Preservation Specialist

Initially proposed in May 2010 as an intervention in Youngstown, Ohio, the project included three components: technical assistance, organizational capacity, and global marketing. Technical assistance included strengthening the city’s preservation planning infrastructure through historic resource surveys and designations, development of a citywide preservation plan, and classification of neighborhood districts according to significance. It proposed to explore the potential of starting a Main Street Program, revolving loan fund, and preservation-focused capital investment program in Youngstown; and to provide and produce “Historic Preservation 101” talks and tax credit workshops to local groups and developers, training for the local preservation commission, and educational materials linking past resources to sustainable future prosperity. The organizational capacity component focused on strengthening or creating a citywide preservation advocacy organization. The final “global marketing” component involved the dissemination of results from Youngstown to other communities working to implement rightsizing. “The idea here is to provide

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371 Royce Yeater, Director, Midwest Office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, email to Cara Bertron, April 4, 2010.
372 Ibid.
three years of intensive and largely onsite support to help the community come to understand the power and processes of preservation and apply its ethic as at least one organizing principle to the process of shrinking the city,” wrote Yeater.\footnote{374}

However, funding came first for Saginaw. A grant from the Americana Foundation provided the financial means for a part-time position, and Saginaw’s mayor invited the National Trust to establish the position in the city.\footnote{375} In late 2010, the National Trust partnered with the Michigan Historic Preservation Network to hire Brenna Moloney as the Preservation Specialist in Saginaw.\footnote{376} The National Trust’s Midwest Office predicted that Moloney would act as a catalyst to “increase public involvement, strengthen alliances and collaborative efforts, and improve preservation policy adoption and implementation in Saginaw.”\footnote{377}

Moloney has adopted a multi-pronged, interpersonal approach aimed at increasing perceptions and knowledge of preservation and improving or creating preservation resources. She utilizes a combination of relationship-building, structured training, information-gathering, and advocacy, essentially acting as a bridge and a translator between city officials, preservationists, and other Saginaw residents.\footnote{378}

One of the biggest challenges is to shift people’s perception of preservation. Moloney sees it as a tool rather than an obstruction, but past experiences with demolition delays due to historic designation—such as the one in early 2010—have left some local officials and residents frustrated with what they see as the “obstructionist” tendencies of the SHPO.\footnote{379} Preservation tenets, incentives, and regulatory requirements like Section 106 are unfamiliar to city officials and planners from development and building inspection backgrounds, who see preservation as a hobby rather than a profession. The local Historic District Commission has pursued its review duties with commit-

\footnote{374}{\textit{Ibid.}}
\footnote{375}{Moloney, “A Thing of Beauty Is a Joy Forever.”}
\footnote{376}{Gus Burns, “As Abandoned Homes Fall, Preservation Saginaw Aims To Ensure History Is Left Standing,” \textit{The Saginaw News}, January 14, 2011.}
\footnote{377}{“Finding the ‘Right Size’ in Saginaw,” \textit{2010 Annual Report, Midwest Office}, National Trust for Historic Preservation.}
\footnote{378}{Moloney, telephone interview.}
\footnote{379}{\textit{Ibid.}}}
ment and passion but incomplete knowledge of preservation policies and standards, reinforcing officials’ impressions, undermining legal credibility, and leading to what Moloney calls “public relations” problems in the community. The commission also has difficulty recruiting new members: of the nine member slots, only four are currently filled.

To increase knowledge about preservation, Moloney conducted a training for the Historic District Commission in which she explained the Secretary’s Standards. The NSP Board—which makes decisions about how to allocate NSP funding—also received a “crash course” in historic district legislation and architecture, and Moloney works with planners on preservation projects.

These projects cover a range of activities, but all are directed at strengthening the city’s preservation infrastructure. Moloney is helping city leaders fulfill preservation-related requirements for the demolition and rehabilitation of historic houses. She has developed design compatibility guidelines for new infill houses in historic districts. She updated the City of Saginaw’s GIS maps to reflect accurate historic district boundaries. In spring 2011, she will work with SHPO historians on a windshield survey to evaluate and update designated and eligible historic districts that have changed dramatically since most were designated in the 1970s, consider potential new historic districts, and ensure that the updated information is reflected in the City’s GIS database.

Moloney also aims to increase public involvement in preservation. She started Preservation Saginaw, a group that meets monthly to discuss local preservation concerns. Its mission is “to strengthen neighborhoods, share resources, communicate, connect and educate on the importance of historic preservation to Saginaw’s future.” Recent discussions included incentive programs for homeowners in local historic districts and how to encourage a citywide preservation ethos.

380 Ibid.
382 Burns, “As Abandoned Homes Fall.”
383 Moloney, “Saginaw: City of Contrasts.”
385 Burns, “As Abandoned Homes Fall.”
“Faced with a crumbling housing stock, a diminished population, and high foreclosure rates, demolition seems all but inevitable,” Moloney wrote in a National Trust blog post. Working with local residents through Preservation Saginaw and neighborhood-focused interventions is one way to empower them to preserve important local buildings.

Advocacy and educational work takes place citywide, but Moloney is focusing her on-the-ground efforts on several neighborhoods with a range of physical and political conditions. She describes her focus as on “areas of crisis where there’s an intersection of government money…and an impact on historic fabric.” Focus areas include the three NSP2 priority areas—the Cathedral District, the Covenant HealthCare neighborhood, and the Northeast Side—and Old Saginaw City.

The Cathedral District boasts City Hall, St. Mary’s Hospital, and 19th-century lumber barons’ grand homes—but it also has a 70 percent "blight" rate (vacant lots, vacant structures, and occupied but blighted properties). The City is working to implement the 2008 Cathedral District Neighborhood Revitalization Plan, which proposes to transform the neighborhood with a suburban model, closing off streets and demolishing buildings for green space. Moloney believes that these changes would negatively impact the integrity of a local historic district and the marketability of the neighborhood as a compact, walkable, historic area. She is working with an architect to create an alternative neighborhood plan.

At a very local scale, the City is planning extensive work—including many demolitions—around the Jefferson Apartments rehabilitation project. Moloney is partnering with city officials to develop a fuller understanding of the Secretary's Standards (required for the proposed use of federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits), including the importance of historic context, and to identify potential rehabilitations in the area. At the same time, she is also trying to involve neighbors in advocacy and preservation by building relationships, promoting preservation, and identifying grant money for them to rehabilitate houses that might otherwise be demolished.

386 Moloney, “A Thing of Beauty Is a Joy Forever.”
387 Moloney, telephone interview.
388 Cathedral District Neighborhood Revitalization Plan, prepared by Capital Access, June 2008.
389 Moloney, telephone interview.
390 Ibid.
Moloney also works in the Northeast Side, the area proposed for the Green Zone. Planners say they want to preserve churches in the neighborhood, but most other buildings will be demolished eventually.\(^3\) Moloney says that the neighborhood holds “incredible buildings.”

To date, Moloney remains the National Trust’s only on-the-ground staffer. Royce Yeeater is still seeking funding to place preservation specialists in Youngstown and Flint, which have received more media attention for their rightsizing practices, as well as a few other small Rust Belt cities.\(^2\)

“Saginaw has worked well,” he says, “but it is a bit in the shadows.”

\(^3\) Engel, “Saginaw Blight Plan Includes Sword, Scalpel.”
\(^2\) Yeater, email, April 4, 2010.
Comparative Analysis

This analysis examines the policies, initiatives, and partnerships in the Preservation Planning Survey chapter through the filter of the research questions:

1. What is happening in older industrial cities at the intersection of preservation and rightsizing, either planned or de facto?
2. Is preservation incorporated into the decision-making process of municipal agencies, land banks, and community planning and development organizations?
3. How are priorities determined for rehabilitation and demolition?
4. How do traditional preservation tools such as historic designation fit into rightsizing plans, policies, and programs?

The chapter does not evaluate the surveyed initiatives for effectiveness in the sense of a traditional analysis, as most are still very new or only now beginning to be implemented. Rather, it highlights common themes and unusual approaches to the integration of preservation into planning and development in older industrial cities.

These programs employ both “small-p” and “big-P” preservation. Big-P preservation is traditional preservation, whether designating a historic district or engaging in brick-and-mortar restoration of a landmark building. Small-p preservation is a bigger, looser idea. It values vernacular community character: not distinguished mansions and skyscrapers, but rather ordinary landscapes whose scale and rhythm define the feeling of a street, neighborhood, and city. This small p is at the core of exciting new ideas about integrating the preservation ethos about the value of existing fabric into bigger planning, development, and sustainability projects. It contributes to discussions about how to reshape entire cities and expand preservation’s base of support to reflect a community’s diversity. It speaks in language like “high quality of life” and “good housing stock.” Designated landmarks and historic districts are still important representations of a place’s identity and history, but small-p preservation expands the local story to include and value much more.

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393 Urek.
General Comparison

The seven case study cities vary widely. Though they have similar goals of neighborhood stabilization, their strategies are diverse: improving the physical environment, creating new plans, stepping up code enforcement, acquiring and disposing of land strategically, rehabilitating and demolishing buildings, and adding residents. Some work toward physical improvements, such as those valued by Neighborhood Progress, Inc., Midtown Detroit, and the land banks; others focus on advocacy, as in Saginaw and Cincinnati; still others such as Syracuse, Philadelphia, and Cincinnati engage in planning processes, both traditional and new.

The political context of each city is also quite different, as might be expected. Though all the case study cities contain significant amounts of vacant and abandoned properties and have high vacancy rates, only four—Detroit, Saginaw, Cleveland, and Flint—are pursuing deliberate rightsizing. The topic is not being discussed in Cincinnati and Syracuse. Margo Warminski cites political reasons—“it’s too much of a political hot potato”—while Syracuse’s vacant properties are scattered throughout the city.394 Philadelphia has more promising prospects than the other cities—including projected growth of 100,000 new residents by 2035—but its comprehensive plan still does not address what to do with the approximately 4,000 acres of underutilized property that will remain after the anticipated growth.395

The politics of preservation also vary among the case study cities. In Cleveland, preservation is popularly cast as an elite, moneyed pursuit. In Saginaw, many city staff members see preservation as obstructionist. In Flint, many residents assume that the Genesee County Land Bank is on the opposing side in regard to preservation.

These views roughly correspond to the strength of the local preservation organization. Flint does not have an active citywide preservation organization, and Preservation Saginaw only formed in late 2010. Cleveland stands out as the exception, with a strong, effective citywide preservation

394 Warminski; Wright, March 30, 2011.
395 Urek and Spina.
organization. However, the Cleveland Restoration Society's programs are largely contained within the organization; it does not generally participate in rightsizing efforts.

The stakeholders and playmakers of the examined initiatives also varied between the cities. Many, as in Cincinnati, Cleveland, Flint, and Syracuse, were initiated by public agencies and officials and implemented within the structures of municipal or county government. Cleveland's Strategic Investment Initiative (SII) and the Live Midtown program in Detroit were driven by foundations that wanted to focus their philanthropic dollars. A couple were primarily initiated and/or carried out by one person, as with Brenna Moloney in Saginaw in Detroit. In Syracuse, Mayor Stephanie Miner's favorable view of preservation—and the hiring of Katelyn Wright, a land use planner with a preservation background—catalyzed a series of preservation initiatives that look to have long-standing impact on the city.

The preservation community was involved in most—but not all—of the case studies. This is partly due to this thesis's focus on initiatives within the planning realm that incorporate the preservation ethos rather than preservation programs that link to larger planning efforts. The Cincinnati Preservation Association and Over-the-Rhine Foundation took advantage of the Vice Mayor's interest to develop and advocate for a new preservation plan, which was then implemented by the City. Similarly, the Philadelphia Preservation Alliance conceived and piloted the citywide survey, which has since been endorsed by the City and continued by the University of Pennsylvania. The Cleveland Restoration Society, while not engaged in the SII priority areas, is partnering with the Cuyahoga County Land Reutilization Corporation.

Four of the case studies—about half—explicitly focused on designated historic resources or survey efforts to identify potential historic resources. Two case studies focused on target neighborhoods that happened to be historically designated, and so engaged in preservation as a related activity. The remaining two studies, both in Cleveland, were not focused on historic resources, whether by chance (SII) or by intention (the Cuyahoga County Land Reutilization Corporation).
Yet the case studies, even for their different contexts and players, share common goals and themes:

- All aim to stabilize neighborhoods by protecting and improving the built environment and/or attracting new residents
- Five involve focusing efforts in stronger neighborhoods, or laying the groundwork for that type of prioritization
- Nearly all the case studies combine perspectives on the finest grain of preservation planning—that of the single building—with the broad sweep of the city and county
- Most do not focus exclusively or at all on designated historic resources, but rather on retaining quality existing building stock in strong neighborhoods
- Survey work was a relatively consistent focus, appearing in 3 of the case studies as a contributor to planning efforts

None of the case studies addresses fundamental barriers to urban living such as the lack of services and retail (like grocery stores), low-performing public school systems, high crime rates, and high homeowner insurance rates. These issues are intimately tied to the case studies’ central goal: to stabilize neighborhoods by protecting and improving the built environment and attracting new residents. Neighborhood stabilization and reinvestment raise property values, attract new businesses to serve the growing population, and infuse public education and law enforcement with more tax dollars. Insurance rates fall with crime rates.

But it is a catch-22. Until a critical (and undetermined) amount of investment and people commit to revitalizing older industrial cities, improvements will be incremental and perhaps not have the necessary large-scale effects of building retail demand and improving urban school systems.

Many also share consistent themes, as noted in the following sections.

1. **Rethinking and Connecting Preservation**

As noted in the Findings chapter, a variety of programs and initiatives are occurring at the intersection of preservation and rightsizing in older industrial cities. The most common themes are connecting preservation to planning efforts and vice versa. Initiatives driven by planners and community development organizations recognize existing buildings as important contributors to

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396 Brent Snavely, “Experts.”
community wellbeing, though preservation is not always explicitly mentioned. In other initiatives
driven by preservation advocates, these new or intensified connections have prompted expanding
ideas about the role, focus, and structure of preservation in relation to other fields.

1.1 A New Responsibility for Preservation

Saginaw presents the clearest example of rethinking preservation's role with regard to large-scale
planning efforts like rightsizing. There, the National Trust preservation specialist Brenna Moloney
employs a range of traditional preservation tools and tactics—surveys, historic district updates,
preservation education, design guidelines, and community advocacy—within the context of right-
sizing. Her position blends the duties of a preservation advocate with those of a proactive com-
munity organizer, educator, and planner: a combination that may become increasingly necessary
in other cities where the scale and complexity of rightsizing demands a level of commitment and
expertise beyond volunteer-based preservation organizations’ capacity.

Moloney’s role as a bridge between preservationists, planners, and other citizens evidences a larger
shift in the preservation field. Paul Miller, executive director of the Cincinnati Preservation As-
association, speaks of it as removing preservation from under a glass and taking it into the world to
help communities address problems.397 The National Trust for Historic Preservation is considering
that shift with its name, moving from Trust (bank), Historic (backwards), and Preservation (don’t
touch) to a more inclusive moniker that better reflects its expanding concept of preservation’s role
in community engagement and place-based revitalization.398

In Cleveland, the situation is different, starting with a primary actor focused on planning and
community development. Neighborhood Progress, Inc. does not name historic preservation as a
goal of the Strategic Investment Initiative (SII). Still, SII’s goal of stabilizing strong neighborhoods,
historic or not, closely follows the small-p preservation model of investing in physical improve-
ments in strong target areas to retain and enhance community character and maintain or improve
property values and conditions. Similarly, the Cuyahoga County Land Reutilization Corporation

397 Paul Miller, Executive Director of Cincinnati Preservation Association, telephone conversation with
Cara Bertron, March 9, 2011.
398 Ibid.
(CCLRC) avoids acquiring designated historic properties, but asserts that a goal of rehabilitating non-historic properties is to retain neighborhood character.

Syracuse’s Mayor Stephanie Miner proposed myriad improvements to historic landscapes in her 50 Point Plan. Economic development, downtown redevelopment, improvements to neighborhood commercial corridors, crime reduction, and increasing the urban population are all stated priorities that are not preservation per se, but are closely linked to existing built landscapes.

1.2 Preservation—Planning Connections

Perhaps because of preservation’s traditional focus on preserving specific structures, preservationists are not always invited to participate in planning and development processes. The time for that exclusive focus has passed. If preservationists are not invited participants in rightsizing (and other) discussions, they need to invite themselves to the table. Furthermore, bringing a preservation viewpoint is not enough: they need to educate themselves about other fields and priorities, and to propose creative solutions to balancing and reconciling preservation with those priorities.

Some case study cities are making efforts to connect large-scale planning efforts to preservation. In Syracuse, the proposed form-based zoning and Syracuse Urban Redevelopment Authority design guidelines will embed preservation goals in planning strategies and require new development compatible with existing neighborhood development. This approach is similar to the City of Cincinnati’s Historic SOS program, which aims to stabilize visible buildings in historic districts with funds formerly allocated to demolition. Both recognize the existing built landscape as an essential feature in establishing local character and incorporate preservation into the structure and day-to-day functions of municipal departments.

To further inject the preservation ethos into daily municipal operations, the City of Cincinnati also requires preservation training for code enforcement officers and administrative boards. This expands awareness of and responsibility for historic resources and preservation tenets beyond preservationists, an increasingly important expansion in a time of limited resources. Christine Capella-Peters of the New York SHPO agrees that increased awareness is necessary, and not just
for designated historic resources. Cities need to “engender in non-planning and design [municipal] staff… a sense of urgency regarding the care of the physical environment,” she says. “There has to be a more widespread acceptance of the importance of planning and design and existing fabric.” Increased education for staff members and the general public will raise the level of public conversations around the future of a city and make preservation—and planning—easier.

Where preservationists have initiated case study programs, they have looked to planning priorities to guide their efforts. From a practical standpoint, this makes sense: Initiatives like NSP have significant, long-term impacts and are often directed at historic areas that are more stable to begin with. Saginaw’s NSP2 target areas are receiving the most funding and seeing the most change, making Moloney’s focus on them natural. The City of Cleveland prioritized SII neighborhoods when selecting initial target areas to apply for NSP2 funding; all were selected to receive funding. Several years later, when Neighborhood Progress, Inc. expanded SII to three additional neighborhoods, it chose existing NSP2 neighborhoods. This confluence of focus enables layering code enforcement with funding to catalyze large developments, housing rehabilitation, demolition, streetscape improvements, and more: in short, to bring an impressive bundle of resources to bear on strengthening target areas.

In Philadelphia, preservationists are thinking like planners in terms of logistics and output. The character studies will inform district plans, so must necessarily be produced in the same sequence that those plans are produced. The studies’ GIS-based products are intended to merge seamlessly with planning technology, making historic resources a straightforward factor in making data-based plans and decisions. Randall Mason acknowledges that the results will not meet strict preservation standards for historic context statements or district nominations, but argues that they will provide “the level of detail that is pragmatic and useful” for planning applications.

In Cincinnati, preservationists who made the case that accrued Vacant Building Maintenance License (VBML) fees discouraged the purchase and rehabilitation of historic properties won

399 Capella-Peters.
400 Mosey.
401 Mason, interview.
agreement from the City to waive the fees for property owners who have redevelopment plans or are maintaining a vacant property in a historic district. This agreement engages an existing code enforcement tool in prioritizing preservation over demolition: an important step when preservation oversight resources are scarce.

Sometimes preservationists need to make less obvious connections between preservation and other programs and priorities. In Saginaw, Brenna Moloney is looking to measures like Covenant Hospital’s Walk to Work home buying program (similar to Live Midtown in Detroit), sustainability, and nearby commercial corridors to make preserving historic neighborhoods more attractive. The Genesee County Land Bank sees investment in the historic Carriage Town neighborhood as a smart growth strategy that will help persuade people to move to rehabilitated buildings close to downtown rather than to new houses outside the city. Syracuse’s 50 Point Plan presented high downtown vacancy rates as an opportunity to increase economic and environmental sustainability by enticing businesses to locate in existing buildings in the central business district. These measures begin to articulate preservation’s broad benefits beyond heritage tourism and to position it as an integral part of the local economy, sustainability, and quality of life.

When preservation-driven programs are self-contained, they limit themselves. While it is important to advocate for preservation values, preservationists should look to planning, economic, and community development programs for input on setting geographic priorities. Focusing preservation efforts on strong neighborhoods that are receiving resources and attention from other quarters will result in even stronger, better preserved neighborhoods.

Preservation has much to offer the planning and community development spheres. It is a tool to help reduce vacancy, raise property values, stabilize markets, and improve property conditions. It can also be an organizing force for community members who care about the ongoing history and physical character of their neighborhoods. Royce Yeater, the Director of the National Trust’s Midwest Office, calls preservationists “a value-added component to someone else’s program.” The National Trust is working to support the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), Neighbor-

402 Royce Yeater, telephone interview with Cara Bertron, March 2, 2011.
Works, and Habitat for Humanity—letting those groups do “the heavy lifting” of housing rehabilitation while assisting them in doing that sensitively.

2. Bringing Preservation to the Table

Preservation cannot operate in isolation, says Yeater: “We have to do that [connect with other efforts]—otherwise we’re dealing with preservation in a vacuum. [Rightsizing] is not a crowded field, but there are other people in there with ideas… We have to be engaged with those people.”

The case studies indicate that preservation is successfully incorporated into the decision-making process for large-scale planning and reinvestment when preservation allies are in positions of authority or close partnerships exist between preservationists and planners, community development officials, and other decision-makers.

2.1 Prominent Supporters

Bringing preservation to the table is much easier when local authorities are already supportive. Cincinnati’s Vice Mayor Roxanne Qualls initiated and supported the process that resulted in the preservation plan and Historic Building Loss Task Force. Ed Cunningham, the manager of the Property Maintenance Code Enforcement Division, participated in that task force and recognizes preservation as a cornerstone of future growth and development. Mayor Stephanie Miner of Syracuse voted in favor of pro-preservation policies as a member of the Common Council, then made it part of her mayoral campaign pledge.

In both cities, the support of prominent officials put preservation on the agenda. Preservation advocates’ follow-through—enabled by continuing support—resulted in significant changes to code enforcement practices in Cincinnati and an extensive preservation planning process in Syracuse.

2.2 Close Partnerships

Partnerships between preservation advocates and planners, funders, and institutions appear to be effective at furthering preservation goals within larger planning processes and programs. The Preservation Alliance of Philadelphia took on the task of citywide survey work because the Philadel-

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Ibid.
phia Historical Commission, the city’s official preservation agent, is chronically understaffed and has very limited capacity to undertake new projects. In turn, the Preservation Alliance’s partnerships with the Planning Commission and the University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate Program in Historic Preservation meant that, when the Preservation Alliance was not able to sustain the effort, the other two entities stepped in to formalize their partnership and implement the character studies.

In Saginaw, Brenna Moloney’s relationship with City planners has resulted in a similar ability to step up and fill in gaps. The City’s Planning and Zoning Division is understaffed, and Moloney supplements planners’ efforts by correcting historic district boundaries, updating local surveys, and developing design guidelines for infill construction in historic districts.

The Cincinnati Preservation Association also supports municipal preservation-friendly measures like the at-risk historic buildings list with staff time. Because CPA serves as the contact for the list, helping interested parties to acquire property and locate rehabilitation funding, the City is able to acknowledge the importance of historic buildings and publicize critical cases without adding to staff workloads. The Historic Building Loss Task Force, whose members are drawn from many disciplines, is another example of partnerships. Preservationists, planners, code enforcement officials, community housing representatives, and funders worked together to review the code changes proposed in the preservation plan and explore new financing tools for preservation.

Detroit’s Sue Mosey and Midtown Detroit Inc. represent a different situation. Mosey and the organization stand at the center of neighborhood planning and development efforts in Midtown. Close connections with major foundations and anchor institutions, as well as significant in-house development capacity, enable Midtown Detroit to catalyze large-scale developments and coordinate programs like Live Midtown that impact historic districts. In a climate where funding is scarce, Midtown Detroit’s relationships with funding sources has proved invaluable in spurring development, including many rehabilitation projects.
The Cleveland Restoration Society’s nascent partnership with the Cuyahoga County Land Reutilization Corporation involves time, not money. Because the CCLRC recognizes neighborhood character as a significant aspect of neighborhood stabilization, the Restoration Society was able to align the restoration of the Upson House with CCLRC goals. This enabled preservationists to restore and market the house while adding a preservation-centric dimension to the CCLRC’s work—a dimension that both parties are interested in exploring in future work.

2.3 Continuing Education

On a basic level, raising the level of awareness and education about preservation is still important: for local residents, planners and politicians at all levels of government, and even landmarks board commissioners. An active, informed constituency is central to ensuring that preservation is included in discussions about rightsizing and making sure that it contributes effectively once it is at the table. Brenna Moloney established Preservation Saginaw to bring together concerned citizens and works with local planners to raise awareness about legal requirements for demolishing historic properties. She also organized training for Historic District Commission members when she discovered that they lacked familiarity with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Rehabilitation of Historic Properties—a cornerstone of preservation.

Optimally, raising awareness and conducting public education expands both the preservation community and ideas about what should be preserved. For the most part, designated historic districts and landmarks are grand residential neighborhoods and monumental public buildings. Designations, often prompted by passionate individuals or demolition threats, mean that designated resources are concentrated in certain areas of the city and fail to reflect the full range of community history. The overwhelming historical focus on traditionally wealthy white neighborhoods can limit the diversity in today’s preservation movement, as ethnically, racially, and economically diverse stakeholders may not feel welcome. Recognizing and working to preserve the diverse stories woven into a city’s history can broaden the preservation constituency to better reflect the general population, leading to better-supported, more representative preservation.
Diane Tuinstra, who works for the Michigan SHPO, sees education as preservationists’ most powerful tool. She cites Michigan’s imperiled historic preservation tax credits as an example where political education is especially necessary. Informing property owners and communities about the benefits of historic tax credits opens the way for increased application and more popular support. On a larger level, she sees political lobbying as a necessary tool to educate policymakers about the benefits of tax credits and other preservation incentives.

For all aspects of education, it is important to think beyond traditional arguments for preservation and draw connections between historic resources and other items of concern such as sprawl, the tax base and school quality, and the local economy. As Preservation Wayne's Karen Nagher says, “It may be about old stuff, but you always have to have new ideas to try to engage people about what it means.”

### 3. Determining Priorities

In cities with high housing vacancy rates, determining priorities for preservation, rehabilitation, and demolition is essential but hardly straightforward. A tangle of politically and emotionally charged issues comes into play when making these decisions. Preservation has the ability to offer a perspective on architectural, historical, and contextual significance, help focus resources on strong neighborhoods, complete survey work to determine what resources exist, and engage in regional planning to determine priorities on a larger scale.

#### 3.1 Preservation Input

Preservation advocates in Cincinnati and Syracuse have a voice in deciding which buildings should be demolished with limited funding. In Cincinnati, architectural “intrinsic” value and likelihood of rehabilitation are weighed in demolition decisions alongside public safety and the impact on surrounding property values. While City planners with preservation backgrounds evaluate Syracuse’s buildings, Cincinnati preservationists are engaged in an official capacity as an “interested party” in Section 106 reviews.

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404 Tuinstra.
405 Nagher.
Preservation advocates can also provide input to community development projects like Cleveland’s Strategic Investment Initiative, which is designed to be a comprehensive, replicable approach to stabilize and strengthen urban neighborhoods. SII’s approach already includes improvement of existing buildings; incorporating preservation more explicitly can add value to a strong existing program. While focusing exclusively on historic districts is not a realistic vision for the SII, it can be one consideration in selecting target areas and Model Blocks.

3.2 Survey Work

The planning departments in Syracuse and Philadelphia are proactively seeking information about potential historic resources and neighborhood character to inform planning efforts. Kate lyn Wright’s 2009 report clearly established what had been surveyed in Syracuse and recommended priorities for future surveys based on demolition and redevelopment pressures. She was hired in 2010 to keep the ball rolling for a systematic citywide survey. In Philadelphia, a much larger city, planners and preservationists are reinventing survey procedures to meet time and budgetary constraints. Their solution – character studies that utilize a multi-layered, technology-based evaluation to identify “hot spots” of potential historic resources – will allow surveys to be scaled to citywide proportions and inform district plans as they are produced.

This type of survey work acknowledges very real limitations and urgency. This also recognizes the prevailing system of planning based on solid, geographically linked data. Presenting preservation information that can be weighted as a factor in complex information systems like NEO CANDO (Ohio), The Eye (CCLRC), Data Driven Detroit, or similar GIS programs is a critical step in facilitating its inclusion in larger planning decisions.

3.3 Regional Thinking

Thinking regionally helps to distribute resources strategically across a large area and avoid some of the political fragmentation inherent in multiple levels of government. It also recognizes the reality of mobile resident and jobs, as well as the fact that cities’ strongest competitors are their suburbs.

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406 Wright, “2009 Historic Properties List Update.”
SII is an initiative within the city of Cleveland, but it focuses on competing for residents and investment in regional markets.

Countywide land banks are an effective way to allocate resources, consider short-term and long-term resident and business needs, and develop strategic plans to foster thriving communities. The Genesee County Land Bank and Cuyahoga County Land Reutilization Corporation have the ability to distribute resources to viable areas and plan strategically on a large scale. In Flint, the Genesee County Land Bank decided to invest in a few priority areas, including downtown and the Carriage Town Historic District, because of a sustainability goal of mitigating or stopping sprawl.

4. Preservation Tools and Rightsizing

Many case studies involved strengthening traditional preservation tools such as preservation plans, code enforcement, education, and historic resource surveys (discussed in 3.2). Some case studies also used preservation to help stabilize markets and create market demand.

4.1 Strengthening Preservation Tools

Cincinnati preservationists leveraged Vice Mayor Roxanne Qualls’s interest in the Over-the-Rhine Historic District to develop a neighborhood preservation plan with recommendations for the entire city. Syracuse is in the process of initiating its own preservation plan. The Over-the-Rhine Plan for Preservation and subsequent report of the Historic Building Loss Task Force recommended changes to code enforcement practices, including increased enforcement and follow-up, early and aggressive intervention, and empowerment of administrative boards to mandate repairs.

4.2 Preservation as Market Stabilizer

Detroit’s Live Midtown and Project 14 and Cleveland’s SII all select strong neighborhoods and work to make them stronger. Whereas the Detroit projects aim to stabilize neighborhoods by attracting new residents to historic properties or neighborhoods (demand), the SII uses a combination of physical improvements, code enforcement, and strategic demolition to stabilize older neighborhoods’ physical fabric and thus strengthen real estate markets (supply).
4.3 Creating Demand

Increased market demand makes buildings viable. It is simply not possible or desirable to preserve a building indefinitely without an occupant, especially when cities are struggling to maintain basic services. Demand also makes traditional preservation tools like historic designation (and consequent eligibility for federal and state tax credits) make sense.407

In Flint and Detroit, the Genesee County Land Bank, Live Midtown, and Project 14 seek to use historic houses to attract a specific market of renters and homebuyers. Cast as unique buildings with high-quality workmanship and architectural features, the sponsoring agencies expect the historic houses to appeal to a certain type of homebuyer who is also interested in living in a walkable neighborhood close to cultural amenities. The Cleveland Restoration Society used a similar, though more in-depth, strategy with the Upson House. Its marketing publication positioned the house’s history and significance as part of a rich ongoing story awaiting the next owner/steward of the house.

As these case studies repeatedly demonstrate, preservationists have the ability to help create demand by telling compelling stories about a place, highlighting its unique past and physical reminders of that past. They can assist in efforts to brand a neighborhood or city based on architectural qualities, neighborhood layout, and local history. Articulating the practical benefits of historic buildings—sturdy construction, high-quality materials and workmanship, location near jobs and shops, and sustainable retention of materials, to name a few—in conjunction with a good marketing plan has the potential to raise demand, thus leveraging private funding and interest to save significant buildings.

Preservationists can also play a practical role in stimulating private investment in historic buildings and neighborhoods. Funding market studies, proposing or commenting on viable rehabilitation plans, and identifying private investors are all ways to encourage investment in very real ways without playing the role of developer.

407 Federal historic rehabilitation tax credits are available to income-producing properties listed in the National Register individually or as a contributor to a historic district. State historic rehabilitation tax credits are often available to homeowners in addition to income-producing properties.
4.4 Building Hope

Within larger planning and community development initiatives, preservation can also be a symbolic gesture of reinvestment and hope in the community, like the Land Bank's rehabilitation of the Durant Hotel, Berridge Place, and the Tinlinn Building. Though these buildings helped strengthen the surrounding neighborhoods and attracted new residents and customers, their primary role was to signal that the Carriage Town neighborhood and downtown Flint were changing for the better.

This thesis does not examine rehabilitation and reuse of historic buildings in depth, but historic resources are powerful symbols. Empty landmarks like Michigan Central Station, or nondescript derelict factories, make statements about the communities in which they sit. Conversely, successful rehabilitations reflect positively on the current and future health of a place.
Manifesto

It is incredibly difficult to hone the issue of preservation in shrinking cities down to a single point. The focus could be as small as a brick-and-mortar building, which can be preserved or not. It could be expanded to the scale of a neighborhood or historic district, related assemblies of buildings and vacant lots in varying conditions. Or the focus can encompass a city—its history and outlook, shape and condition, people and politics, market dynamics and money. It is tens or hundreds of thousands of buildings spread across more square miles than you would care to count. Each building has its own story; each neighborhood its own flavor and nuanced prospects for the future.

This thesis has attempted to tackle the third scale—preservation at a citywide level in cities that are stressed and burdened with an unthinkable quantity of vacant land and buildings. These are cities where the capacity of the built landscape exceeds the needs of the current population to an almost staggering degree, where historic skyscrapers and landmark houses—along with more humble vernacular buildings—sit empty for lack of occupants. It is not a tenable situation from any perspective, and decision-makers from all quarters are asking how to cut the fabric of the city down to a size that makes sense for the needs of current and future populations. They may not be calling it rightsizing or thinking of it as a comprehensive process, but they are asking questions about what to knock down and what to save, and about what should inform those decisions.

This thesis does not ask whether or how these cities should be tailored—which buildings should be demolished, rehabilitated, or mothballed—but rather how preservation should play a role in the measuring and fitting. Cities should make comprehensive, strategic plans for reshaping themselves as smaller, nimbler, more functional places that better serve their citizens, instead of demolishing properties reactively and haphazardly. And preservationists should help, armed with knowledge of the city’s character-defining features, major built resources, and historical evolution.

Seven cities in planning-focused case studies provided specific answers to preservation’s role in rightsizing, ranging from the very traditional—educate community members, municipal staff, and elected officials about the value of preservation in hopes that later decisions will include historic
resources—to the relatively controversial—helping to decide what to demolish. The playmakers varied, along with the definition of preservation. Many ideas were put forth, but no one had a single answer.

The theme that permeated the case studies was the need to fundamentally rethink preservation. Many of the organizations and agencies engaged in active preservation work would call themselves preservationists only after a list of other roles: community developer, planner, code enforcement official. The preservation they are doing is occasionally that of the old guard—community organizing and painstaking rehabilitation and restoration of designated historic properties—but more often it is that of a newer, savvier set facing tough realities head-on. This preservation includes long-term mothballing of historic properties, quick and dirty survey work where entire districts are distilled to a few areas for further study, and a pragmatic ranking of historic significance alongside physical condition to determine which buildings will be knocked down. Often, it does not speak in the language of individual landmarks at all, but rather to the reality of neighborhood or district viability.

Words matter, for preservation—like anything not vital to basic survival—is fundamentally a sales job. This can be literal marketing of unique built assets and walkable historic neighborhoods, but it is also part of a larger truth. Effective preservationists are storytellers about the past and the future, connecting the two with a compelling narrative thread. The pressing challenge in shrinking cities is telling stories that balance a proud history with a clear-eyed account of the current urban situation and tying both to a realistic vision for the future.

The challenge is compounded by the fact that these local stories are inextricably linked to regional, state, and national themes. For the past sixty years, suburbs have swollen from an exodus of city residents and businesses driven in part by federal transportation and infrastructure policies and tax incentives. More recent state and federal policies on topics as diverse as regional government, smart growth, and tax credits steer decisions about investment in buildings, blocks, neighborhoods, and cities. Deindustrialization and financial markets are ongoing international stories,
and the federal government’s response has determined many of the available funding, goals, and parameters for counties, municipalities, and community-based organizations.

On the ground, this translates to a long list of elements linked to physical landscapes: struggling schools, reduced city services, violent crime, public transportation improvements, vandalism, vacant lots, stripped houses, rehabilitation projects, streetscape improvements, empty factories, foreclosure and for-sale signs. It’s a mixed bag, like any story worth listening to.

At its heart is community identity. Flint is not worth saving as a generic reflection of another city. There is no point in reinventing Cleveland to mirror one of its suburbs, even if that were possible. The argument for adapting older industrial cities to new economic and physical realities rests on their own merit. They serve as records of historical events and trends, but—more importantly—they continue to be home to small and large businesses, educational institutions, community groups, and tens or hundreds of thousands of residents. Detroit is still the 19th largest city in the United States, with a population bigger than Boston, Seattle, Washington, D.C., Denver, and Las Vegas. Some Detroiters are bound to the city by limited opportunities; others have actively chosen to come or stay and make, or remake, the city as their own.

Preservation has a role to play for both groups in Detroit, in other older industrial cities—shrinking or not—and in cities that are experiencing population growth and prosperity. This chapter describes a variety of ways that preservation can be used by those who seek to help cities transition to new realities. Preservation offers a back story to build on and fodder for new ideas and approaches. It helps preserve neighborhood character and draws new residents and businesses that value that character. It highlights buildings with the potential to generate jobs and income, and brings incentives that can make those jobs happen. It sparks imagination as to what a downtown or neighborhood was like in its heyday and what a new reality might look like. It adds one voice in making decisions about where to reinvest and where to cut—or bulldoze—losses. It brings people together to talk about what’s important to them and how quality of life relates to where they live. It speaks to a place’s identity and helps manage change to maintain that identity. It is a tool for visionaries and pragmatists alike.
Increasingly, preservation must also be useful to planners and social activists. The physical city cannot thrive without residents who occupy homes and commercial buildings. It needs prosperous citizens who can afford to maintain buildings and support businesses. It needs a healthy tax base to finance the quality public schools, municipal services, and public spaces that prospective residents seek. It needs economic growth and diversification and jobs, as well as people with the education to fill those jobs. It needs low crime rates and high levels of civic engagement. Without these measures of urban health, preserving any type of buildings or local character is a tenuous short-term project.

How can preservation(ists) respond to big-picture concerns like crime, unemployment, and public education?

First, they can continue to raise awareness of existing preservation tools, especially those that contribute to bigger solutions. Labor-intensive rehabilitation creates more jobs than the same amount spent on new construction and more money to the local economy. Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits offered at the federal level offset the cost of rehabilitating income-producing buildings by 20 percent; historic tax credits in many states add additional savings for homeowners as well as income-producing buildings. When tax credits are on the chopping block, as in Michigan, or programs that promote visible preservation are threatened, as with the Preserve America and Save America's Treasures grants or National Park Service funding, preservation advocates should raise hell, and invite their family, friends, coworkers, and neighbors to come along.
Next, they can continue the long work of connecting preservation with other good ideas. Smart publicity, prominent political figures, drastic weather events, and rising fuel costs have made sustainability a national priority. The National Trust for Historic Preservation has asserted for years that the greenest building is one that is already built. Preservationists should join the Trust in extending this idea to champion older communities as hubs of transit, walkability, and embodied energy—then support improvements in public transportation, additional pedestrian amenities (streetscaping) and necessities (public safety), and the market for older buildings by living and doing business in historic residential neighborhoods, downtowns, and commercial corridors. Smart growth advocates, land banks, and regional government proponents are important allies in shifting the balance of funds and attention back to urban areas and existing assets, and preservationists need to outline complementary goals to build those relationships. When developers or New Urbanists propose new Wal-Marts, subdivisions, or planned communities outside city limits, preservationists must say no loudly and clearly, holding up the need to reinvest in older communities and preserve rural character where it still exists.

Preservationists should also say yes to services and amenities that benefit everyone, and back advocacy with action. Vocally calling for smaller class sizes, more resources, better management of urban public schools, and restructuring tax systems to allow regionally funded schools is important. Working to improve school facilities in historic buildings is an equally necessary, specialized tool that preservationists can bring to the educational melee.408

Identifying historic buildings that could be adaptively reused for a grocery store is a start; doing the market analysis and pro forma, securing funding, and engaging partners or forming a development entity to rehabilitate the building can create real change. Rehabilitating historic buildings as affordable and workforce housing—particularly in cities with high or rising housing costs—or

408 The 21st Century School Fund (21CSF) works “to build the public will and capacity to improve urban public school facilities.” In practice, this translates to advocacy, technical advice, policy analysis, and public engagement tools; partners include educational reformers, community development professionals, social justice advocates, academics, philanthropists, and historic preservationists. Past papers have included “Replace or Modernize?: The Future of the District of Columbia’s Endangered Old and Historic Public Schools” (Mary Filardo and Jason Franklin, 2002) and “School Construction and Renovation Spending: Who’s Benefiting?” (Jeff Vincent and Mary Filardo, 2007). (21st Century School Fund, www.21csf.org)
aiding developers in streamlining rehabilitations and compatible infill construction demonstrates the confluence of affordable housing for everyone and preservation.409 Similarly, partnering with a community land trust, which guarantees long-term affordability while allowing a modest rate of return on homeownership, is an opportunity to marry preservation and community development goals. Offering rehabilitation grants or low-interest loans, providing assistance with tax credits, and publicizing successful projects are several ways preservationists can nudge preservation-friendly projects toward reality—but more creativity is necessary. Partnerships with lenders, advocacy for tax credits for homeowners (offered in some states) and smaller commercial projects, and other creative financing and development tools must be explored and enacted.

Preservationists must be tireless, reasonable advocates for cities. Touting quality of life and emotional connection to place can be effective in mobilizing community support and crafting a marketing campaign for city living. However, cities’ economic importance as regional business centers, heritage tourism draws, and sustainable multi-use centers should be emphasized when arguing for urban-friendly federal policies and funding. Data support is key.

Political relationships are also essential. The goal of thriving places is common to many fields, and preservationists must seek overlapping interests and common goals with other people working to make stronger cities and towns. Community development corporations and land banks are just two examples of organizations working to stabilize and strengthen communities. Though funding is limited, preservationists should join forces, employ creative thinking, and combine resources with these organizations to strengthen people and buildings in historic communities. This can be exponentially more effective than projects conceived and executed within the slim silo of Historic Preservation.

409 The National Trust has produced a toolkit for use by Habitat for Humanity, which includes seven case studies of rehabilitations and an extensive list of frequently asked questions; the Trust is also encouraging local preservation organizations to team with local Habitat projects to provide technical assistance and guidelines for rehabilitation work. (Habitat for Humanity Preservation Toolkit, National Trust for Historic Preservation, www.preservationnation.org/resources/habitat-for-humanity; Yeater, telephone interview, March 2, 2011)
This process of recognizing shared interests and building bridges also expands the constellation of preservation supporters. Though it has been a long time since preservation was the exclusive realm of blue-haired ladies in tennis shoes, the field still does not mirror the diversity of the general population. Partnering with community developers and planners to holistically improve communities is a powerful tribute to the importance of existing fabric, designated or not, and a step toward recasting preservation as an inclusive field that cares about neighborhood residents’ quality of life just as much as (or more than) mansions.

This is small-p preservation, driven by community needs and drawing on community assets. For cities with hot real estate markets, it means preservation of long-term resident groups and local built character; for older industrial cities, it can equal self-preservation.

Traditional big-P landmarks preservation also has work to do in bringing the preservation field to a place where it can participate effectively in making cities more vital. Fundamentally, most local preservation infrastructure is outdated. Historic preservation ordinances passed in the 1960s and 1970s should be modernized and streamlined to reflect changing realities, both in prosperous and struggling cities. Design guidelines and clear explanations of historic commission approval should be provided to the public to reduce confusion, time, and costs—particularly in communities that are not Certified Local Governments. More power to approve routine changes should be given to trained preservation staff, leaving historic commissions free to consider bigger projects.

If preservation is to be taken seriously, preservationists acting in any official capacity must be professional. Volunteer commissioners in local preservation commissions are not always familiar with basic preservation standards or tenets; this puts their judgments on shaky legal ground and hurts the perception of preservation in the community. Better training for preservation commissions and municipal staff members who deal with designated and eligible historic resources should be a priority for local preservation advocacy organizations and city governments alike. Consistency in historic review is absolutely necessary, both to make preservation judgments credible and projects feasible. Lengthy, unpredictable application of standards causes higher costs due to delays, makes investors and developers reluctant to undertake preservation projects, and increases opposition to
local historic designation. “The preservation delivery systems are broken—we need to rebuild all the preservation delivery systems,” says Royce Y eater, pointing to obsolete survey data, unwieldy preservation ordinances, and some cities’ lack of local preservation expertise.410

Developing incentive programs for locally designated historic resources would also be helpful. Though National Register-listed historic buildings are eligible for federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits, listing on local historic registers is generally not associated with incentives—though proposed projects are subject to historic district commission review. (Some states like Michigan have state-level rehabilitation tax credits for properties listed at the local level.) This imbalance between incentives and regulation may make existing and potential property owners leery of local historic designation. For example, the Cuyahoga County Land Reutilization Corporation avoids acquiring designated or potential historic resources because of the standards and costs associated with rehabilitation and maintenance. This may cause historic buildings to remain vacant and become further deteriorated, particularly in weak-market cities. Creating incentive programs such as tax abatements (for purchase and/or rehabilitation of historic properties) is an important step toward easing the local designation process and encouraging people to invest in locally designated historic resources.

On a more basic level, ways to lower the cost of preservation should be explored. It is a nearly incontrovertible fact that locally designated historic resources carry higher rehabilitation costs, and that rehabilitation of any building is not as incentivized as new construction (though rehabilitation tax credits help to offset costs for income-producing buildings). A large part of this is due to higher standards and labor-intensive practices. These should be maintained, but other cost-adding aspects can and should be addressed. A more predictable, better-communicated review process reduces the time and money that homeowners or developers need to spend on a project. Preservationists need to address external requirements that add significant costs to rehabilitation, such as HUD’s hazardous material abatement requirements. These encourage wholesale removal of materials like lead-based paint and asbestos, a time-consuming and expensive process in historic properties. Preservation advocates can also help lower financial barriers with tools like low-interest

410 Royce Yeater, interview with Cara Bertron, October 14, 2010.
loans, grants, a willingness to invest equity in strong projects, and continued or expanded federal and state rehabilitation tax credits. Rehabilitation should be prioritized over demolition in historic districts—and indeed, in well-built neighborhoods throughout the city—but preservationists need to step up and help lower or absorb some of the higher associated costs.

Finally, data collection and analysis are increasingly necessary to support preservation arguments in a time of limited funding. President Obama’s 2011 budget request noted, “The programs [Save America’s Treasures and Preserve America] lack rigorous performance metrics and evaluation efforts, so benefits remain unclear. At least half of SAT [Save America’s Treasures] funding is provided without using merit-based criteria.”411 Participants at the Economics of Historic Preservation conference held at the University of Pennsylvania in February 2011 noted the need to establish well-defined metrics and collect longitudinal data on the economic impacts of preservation.412 Within the planning realm, some of the case studies utilized GIS as a tool to incorporate historic resources into a planning framework. This trend should be continued: GIS can be used to examine historic resources in relation to a host of socioeconomic and physical factors, such as foreclosure rates.413

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This manifesto is directed at the preservation field, but it ends with attention to the crux of the thesis: the issue of older industrial cities with long-term and seemingly irreversible population loss. The challenges in shrinking cities are enormous, and almost everyone should care about how they are addressed. Stakeholders can be anyone who lives or works in an older industrial city; people who like cities; history buffs; planners; politicians; recyclers and reusers; smart growth advocates; those who live in places that might grow smaller in the future; and those who no longer use these places: suburban residents, mall shoppers, people who buy goods made overseas.

412 Economics of Historic Preservation conference at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, February 8, 2011, Author’s notes.
The rightsizing policies and plans crafted in municipal offices, institutional boardrooms, state and federal agencies, and preservation advocacy meetings will have long-term impacts on the shape of the city and the lives of countless individuals. It is appropriate that rightsizing the city is an open and ongoing conversation—an unfinished story that preservationists must be involved in telling. It is my hope that this thesis will contribute a clear and useful voice.
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Appendix

For Future Study

This thesis surveys a range of planning-oriented initiatives and programs in seven older industrial cities. It does not attempt to evaluate the success of these initiatives; this should be addressed in future research. The intersection of preservation and planning in shrinking cities is a new area—albeit one that weaves together diverse lessons from other fields—and it contains a plethora of important questions to consider. Some potential topics for future research include:

1. Historic resources in older industrial cities
   How do designated historic resources and older buildings compare to other buildings in the same city in terms of property values, vacancy rates, building conditions, building and demolition permits, and homeownership rates?
   The quantitative aspect could be immensely helpful in identifying older, potentially historic areas and considering how those areas are impacted by plans and programs. GIS should be used to combine geographically-linked data: historic resources (landmarks, districts, and non-designated older buildings), population loss, poverty levels, property values and conditions, vacancy rates, demolitions, and allocation of federal and local funds. The data can then be analyzed for basic and more advanced correlations.

2. Preservation-focused programs in older industrial cities
   How do entities like the Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation approach preservation and rightsizing? What other preservation organizations are engaging in rightsizing in a citywide scale? (This thesis has focused chiefly on planning approaches that incorporated preservation.)

3. Older industrial cities' self-perception
   How do elected officials, city staff, tourism promoters, and residents in older industrial cities see those cities? How much do history, culture, and physical fabric contribute to local identity?

4. Federal and state initiatives for rightsizing and revitalization
   What impact do proposed programs like the Community Regeneration, Sustainability, and Innovation Act of 2009 have on historic resources?

5. Preservation and demolition
   What preservation infrastructure and tools facilitate the inclusion of historic properties in demolition decisions? Is Section 106 effective?
5. Rightsizing overview

What’s happening on the ground across the United States? Surveying a broad sample of older industrial cities about their approaches to rightsizing and views on preserva-

**Figures A1-A2.** Population density by Census Tracts (1950 and 2000). Density ranges from zero people per square mile (yellow) to 7-4,999 (beige) to 10,000-17,115 (dark green). Source: Wayne State University.

of older industrial cities about their approaches to rightsizing and views on preserv-
Figure A3. Historic districts in Midtown Detroit. Blue denotes National Register-listed properties, green indicates locally designated properties, and orange shows properties listed at both levels. Source: Midtown Detroit.
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