

HISTORIC PRESERVATION IN AMERICA'S LEGACY CITIES WORKSHOP

SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

JUNE 7, 2014

On June 5-7, 2014, more than 270 practitioners, policymakers, scholars, and students gathered in Cleveland to participate in the *Historic Preservation in America's Legacy Cities* convening. The convening sought to inform participants about the significant challenges facing historic resources in legacy cities, provide opportunities to network across cities and sectors, and galvanize the preservation field to more and better strategic action in legacy cities.

The workshop was the concluding event and the most action-oriented portion of the convening. Held for four hours on Saturday afternoon, it provided roughly 50 participants from a diverse range of fields and cities with the opportunity to synthesize ideas and discuss what should happen next. The workshop had two explicit goals: 1) to define a set of priorities for the legacy cities preservation community, and 2) to develop an agenda for collaborative action items moving forward.

To facilitate in-depth conversation, the workshop included small-group and large-group discussions. Five small groups of 8 to 10 people discussed the same three questions about research and data needs, existing and new policies and funding programs to better support historic preservation, and how the preservation community can be more effective in legacy cities. Groups then identified a short list of priority action items, which were shared during a final synthesis session. The cosponsors and larger group worked together to synthesize the lists to create a Priority Action Agenda for preservation in legacy cities.

This summary of proceedings reports on the results of the roundtable discussions and includes the Priority Action Agenda. It summarizes the broad themes and ideas that emerged from the discussion. This document reflects a detailed account of ideas generated at the workshop; a final version of an action agenda is forthcoming.

The results of roundtable discussions fell into seven thematic categories ranging from a bold call for entirely new or revised preservation frameworks to a desire for more innovative and effective financial strategies to broader views aimed at social justice through equitable development. The following categories are listed in order of frequency, beginning with the most commonly discussed theme, and include a representative selection of comments.

1) REVAMP PRESERVATION FRAMEWORKS

Preservation's best-established frameworks came up most frequently in roundtable discussions. Participants felt that rigid criteria and standards fail to account for the specific environments resulting from long-term disinvestment in legacy cities. Some advocated for relaxing the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation (the Secretary's Standards) to fix up houses where meeting the current standards is cost-prohibitive; others called for an alternative to the National Register that emphasizes thematic history and/or has different measures of integrity.

They suggested pragmatic changes to other frameworks as well, some outside the traditional realm of preservation: curtailing or streamlining bureaucracy for historic tax credits; legally facilitating property care and expediting title transfers for vacant and abandoned properties, such as through receivership; and reforming local and state building codes, with several noting form-based codes as a way to facilitate adaptive reuse.

Selected comments:

- Preservationists need to compromise at times and need more flexible standards.
- Reduce administrative regulations and simplify processes so that incentives can be offered more quickly.
- Add teeth to the Community Reinvestment Act.
- All federal standards are outdated, including the Secretary of the Interior's Standards.
- Restructure state and federal agencies and programs such as state housing finance agencies, HUD, Fannie Mae, and Freddie Mac to work more collaboratively with preservation policies and practices.
- Allow homesteading or organized squatting in vacant and abandoned houses.
- Craft a strategic demolition policy that considers historic integrity along with other conditions.

2) MORE INNOVATIVE FINANCIAL TOOLS

There was broad consensus that existing financial tools and incentives are insufficient to meet preservation and community development needs in legacy cities. Participants frequently mentioned the need for improved and expanded financing options, including but not limited to: broadening the federal historic tax credit to support smaller projects and owner-occupied residences; new federal or state tax credits for rehabilitating vacant and abandoned buildings; rehabilitation-focused loan pools or guarantees, particularly in "tipping point" neighborhoods where an infusion of resources could make the difference between prosperity and decline; reallocation of existing funds (such as Hardest Hit Funds and CDBG money) to include preservation efforts; and new funding sources for preservation such as permitting and recorders fees, tax increment financing (TIF) districts, and a local sales tax. Participants also concluded that historic tax credits need to be easier to use (see theme 1, above).

Selected comments:

- Target funding and incentives to keep people in buildings and keep buildings standing.
- Create viable ways to do preservation projects, not just public relations and advocacy.
- Decouple tax credits and the National Register to make it more feasible to rehabilitate buildings that have been compromised on the interior.
- Expand focus of state and local preservation funds to combating property decay, beyond façade improvements.
- Base loan financing on after-rehab appraisal value to maximize available funds.
- Use funding models that help make ends meet, such as the Heritage Home Program of the Cleveland Restoration Society.
- Use eminent domain to wipe lender from equation, and sell back to same owner but at modified terms.
- Create incentives to bring new residents to focus neighborhoods (e.g., down payment assistance programs and student loan write-offs).

3) COLLABORATION FOR BETTER PRACTICE

Preservation in any city extends far beyond the walls and roofs of historic buildings, and legacy cities are no exception. In recognition of this, developing strong local partnerships and collaborating with preservation advocates across legacy cities emerged as strong themes. Within cities, workshop participants advocated reaching out to land banks, community development corporations, churches, schools and colleges, student groups, the preservation-minded development community, design professionals, environmental groups, and arts organizations, as well as community members. Better training for preservation professionals and historic commission members was also identified as a priority on the local level.

Participants also sought to place their local work within a larger context. They suggested a confederation or "community of practice" of legacy cities (such as the Preservation Rightsizing Network) that could exchange ideas, secure foundation funding for collaborative projects, and meet with national leaders like Stephanie

Toothman of the National Park Service. This group could establish guiding principles, develop a toolkit for rehabilitation, support research to demonstrate the benefits of rehabilitation, and develop new metrics for measuring preservation's impact and evaluating internal effectiveness.

Selected comments:

- Match developers to vacant buildings that fit their needs, as with the Catholic Diocese in Buffalo.
- Build partnerships with STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) programs and job training, student/workforce development, and adult education groups.
- Build long-term relationships by being consistently involved and proactive, rather than reactive; share capacity and power in partnerships.
- Work with window manufacturers directly to create a market for wooden windows and repairs at scale instead of vinyl windows.

4) RESEARCH AND DATA

Participants generally agreed that additional research and data are needed to support preservation efforts. On the ground, data can facilitate historic resource inventories that are integrated with planning, highlight new incentive programs, inform decisions around demolition and rehabilitation, and help measure the impact of those decisions. On a policy level, research is needed to support effective arguments for preservation. Research suggestions linked the need to know preservation's impact on property values and other economic metrics, sustainability measures such as embodied energy, and sprawl with the need to compare those figures for demolition.

Selected comments:

- Seek funding to gather and maintain data.
- Collect data on demolitions and what has been lost over time.
- Incorporate visual data (pictures, visual history, mapping) into existing datasets.
- Make reports and data more user-friendly.
- Collect data on building existence and condition, embodied energy, and vacancy over the long run.
- Aggregate existing data from governments and universities.
- Research how other countries handle historic preservation in a cultural context.
- Case studies may be more effective for some research purposes than others.
- Research programs that allow homeowners to maintain their homes (e.g., Cleveland's Home Weatherization Assistance Program), other than historic tax credits and preservation loans.
- Focus research on historic preservation issues in low-income, low-demand neighborhoods.
- Not every city has GIS.
- Better municipal data is needed.

5) MODERNIZED, MORE EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS

The preservation field has a long way to go toward effective communication, both within the ranks and with the general public. The importance of public relations received a lot of attention. *Make preservation cool!* one table rallied. *Take credit for successes!* Others mentioned the importance of using language and ideas that are targeted to specific audiences. Preservation apps, social media, press releases about rehabilitations, and continued distribution of information about existing programs were highlighted as ways to improve PR, particularly with younger audiences. Visualizing potential preservation successes through pop-ups and the use of Photoshop and SketchUp was mentioned as another powerful tactic.

Better communications with a few groups were specifically mentioned. Meaningful grassroots engagement with community members headed the list: engaging people as integral stakeholders in decision-making around place and gathering stories for public history purposes. Participants mentioned that building and maintaining relationships with political leaders and elected officials—with facts and “hero opportunities”—

was important. Building inspectors and other local government staff were also mentioned as parties that preservationists should have better communication with, in a very literal sense.

Selected comments:

- Develop a set of guiding principles for preservation in legacy cities.
- Proactively work to save historic structures – school closures are an especially common example.
- Rule enforcement often gets more attention than big-picture goals. Change that!
- Hold community meetings at reasonable times so the public can attend.
- Identify historic resources and help people understand how history is shaped within the context of their own communities.
- Engage younger generations through preservation apps.
- EPA and environmental justice use an approach to educate the community and get feedback – would be good to emulate for HP.
- Educate community on matters like lead, asbestos, and wood windows.
- We need to focus on the community's needs and not our own. By listening to those in the community, we will gain more allies.
- Engage local residents through churches and schools.
- Formalize a new generation of thinking by actively diversifying the preservation movement; break stereotypes of preservationists.

6) PRESERVATION BEYOND BUILDINGS

Participants generally concurred that the preservation movement in legacy cities has to consider equity and local culture in addition to buildings. Directing resources to low-income homeowners and smaller projects, partnering with organizations working to increase equity, and making existing housing safe and livable were mentioned as important strategies. Participants also recognized the value of local culture and advocated boosting local pride, engaging people in shaping place, and preserving history, not just buildings. This topic was important to most people, but was spoken of in broad terms.

Selected comments:

- Investigate how to promote social justice and affordable housing in Legacy Cities.
- Address decent housing, social barriers, and regulations that affect demand for historic buildings.
- Recognize cultural intangible heritage and make it into asset-based plan.
- Ramp up the ability to create cultural change through education, neighborhood-level advocacy, pride, and intangible heritage.
- Encourage energy retrofits through funding and policy.

7) PRESERVATION AS A TOOL FOR SUSTAINABLE PLANNING

Participants also thought big about preservation's role in shaping more sustainable communities. They pointed out that sprawl-friendly policies continue to draw jobs and residents out of historic urban cores, and recognized that monumental shifts in transportation culture and policies are needed in the long run. Partnering with transit agencies and elected officials is essential, with the goal of institutionalizing changes in the long term. Urban agriculture was also mentioned as a practice worthy of support.

Selected comments:

- Develop a master plan for historic preservation using GIS, market studies, transit planning, land use regulation, and development incentives.
- Align policies that jointly support historic neighborhoods, parks, transit, and jobs.
- Advocate against policies that make sprawl easier (lower gas prices, more highways); support arguments with data on fuel prices and housing and commuting costs.
- Support transit-oriented initiatives.

- Connect preservation policy to sustainability and climate change.

PRIORITY ACTION AGENDA

This priority action agenda was developed as a joint exercise in the workshop, with the goal of moving the themes of the larger convening and the workshop discussions into collaborative action. In dialogue with the larger group, workshop organizers identified ten priority action items from common themes in small groups’ priority action lists. Participants also recommended organizations or other stakeholders who might take the lead in implementing each action item. Some of the named stakeholders were present; others were not.

ACTION ITEMS	WHO
1. Create a toolkit	National Trust, Preservation Rightsizing Network (PRN), local organizations
2. Reform federal policies	National Trust, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP), State Historic Preservation Officers (SHPOs), the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Preservation Action
3. Reform local policies	National Alliance of Preservation Commissions (NAPC), Urban Land Institute (ULI)
4. Develop new vehicles for finance	Cleveland Restoration Society, NeighborWorks (to approach Treasury and Rockefeller Foundation)
5. Create and refine education and communications strategies	NeighborWorks, National Trust, universities and students, statewide preservation organizations
6. Make the case for preservation	National Trust/Preservation Green Lab, Center for Community Progress, academics, ULI
7. Organize preservation field internally	Local preservation organizations, PRN
8. Build institutional capacity (think tank/working group/community of practitioners)	PRN, Legacy Cities Partnership, academics
9. Set common data sets and metrics	Michigan SHPO, Preservation Green Lab, universities, National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership
10. Build coalitions and collaborations	PRN, National Trust, NeighborWorks, Federal Reserve Banks, Center for Community Progress, The American Assembly, Legacy Cities Partnership, big organizations in legacy cities, the Shrinking Cities International Research Network

WORKSHOP ORGANIZERS

The Historic Preservation in America’s Legacy Cities workshop was co-organized by representatives of The Levin College of Urban Affairs at Cleveland State University, the Cleveland Restoration Society, the Preservation Rightsizing Network, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, The American Assembly at Columbia University, and the Center for Community Progress.

This summary of proceedings was prepared by Nicholas Emehiser and Kathleen H. Crowther, revised by Cara Bertron and Emilie Evans, and reviewed by the other workshop organizers.