



ACTION AGENDA FOR

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

IN LEGACY CITIES

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COVER PHOTOGRAPHS Emilie Evans and Prashant Singh



How do we preserve the stories of places and communities? How can we keep the legacy in legacy cities?

A NEW APPROACH TO PRESERVATION IN LEGACY CITIES

HISTORY IS BEING REMADE in the Rust Belt, and historic preservation can play an indispensable role. From Cleveland to Birmingham, St. Louis to Buffalo, Detroit to Newark, legacy cities face unprecedented challenges in pervasive disinvestment, widespread abandonment, demolition by neglect, and extraordinarily limited resources. Yet they offer diversity, affordability, and irreplaceable urban character. To be effective here, preservationists must present new strategies for protecting cultural heritage when traditional growth-driven approaches fall short.

How to preserve the stories of these places and communities—how to keep the legacy in legacy cities—is one of many urgent questions.

How can cities stabilize themselves after they have lost 20 to 65 percent of their residents and with population counts still falling? How can communities become more equitable and sustainable in the face of cataclysmic economic shifts and entrenched poverty? How can people's needs be met as municipal services are slashed and budgets crippled? How can ubiquitous vacant and abandoned buildings be transformed into local assets in a real estate market with weak demand? How can policies, tools, and incentives designed for growing cities be adapted to very different circumstances? And how can hundreds of millions of dollars targeted at struggling cities be distributed in a balanced and strategic way despite tremendous time pressure?

ACTION AGENDA

THIS ACTION AGENDA asserts that historic preservation should dare to join many other fields in answering these questions, and that new preservation strategies are needed for this work.

The agenda proposes nine action items for preservation in legacy cities as part of a comprehensive and effective approach. The action items are grouped under three themes: shaping a new approach to preservation, adapting existing preservation tools and policies, and supporting place-based collaboration. Each theme acknowledges that historic preservation is not the foremost concern in distressed neighborhoods. Each emphasizes that limited resources require setting practical priorities. And each recognizes that the preservation field has substantial work to do: in

listening to communities, collecting and using data, providing useful tools and policies, and working with a broad range of partners who share the goal of building stronger communities.

The agenda is an invitation for people who care about the built legacy of American cities to strategically collaborate as these places are reshaped over the next months and years. Advancing the agenda will require the active participation of preservationists and allied stakeholders across multiple disciplines. It will require creative thinking, innovative partnerships, and the prioritization of funding to meet pressing needs. And it will require all these things now—or yesterday—or ten years ago. There is no time to lose.



The action agenda was developed by a group of preservation professionals, planners, land bank staff, and local, state, and federal officials who gathered in Cleveland in June 2014 for the Historic Preservation in America's Legacy Cities convening.

The Levin College of Urban Affairs at Cleveland State University and the Cleveland Restoration Society organized the convening, which attracted more than 270 people from 40 cities. Two days of thought-provoking panels, tours, and speakers culminated in an intensive closing workshop, where 50 participants strategized the future of preservation in legacy cities.¹ The results of that workshop laid the groundwork for this action agenda.

¹ For an account of workshop discussions, please see the Summary of Proceedings (bit.ly/LegacyCitySummary).

If you would like to partner in moving the ACTION AGENDA forward, please contact:

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ACTION ITEMS

THIS AGENDA PROPOSES nine action items to make preservation a more effective partner in strengthening legacy cities. Organized in three themes, each item suggests practical next steps that align with potential partners at local, regional, and national levels.

SHAPE A NEW APPROACH TO PRESERVATION IN LEGACY CITIES

1. Recognize unique legacy city challenges
2. Engage and listen to local communities
3. Use data to support and improve good practices

ADAPT PRESERVATION TOOLS AND POLICIES TO MEET LEGACY CITY NEEDS

4. Create a toolkit for preserving the built environment
5. Develop new financing mechanisms for building stabilization and rehabilitation
6. Reform local policies to encourage preservation
7. Align federal programs and policies to better support legacy cities

SUPPORT PLACE-BASED COLLABORATION

8. Build local coalitions
9. Participate in the broader community of legacy city thinkers



**SHAPE A NEW
APPROACH TO
PRESERVATION IN
LEGACY CITIES**

1 RECOGNIZE UNIQUE LEGACY CITY CHALLENGES

LEGACY CITY PRESERVATION operates in a very different context from the growth-driven preservation in much of the United States. Weak markets are not guaranteed to absorb costly rehabilitation projects—or any sales at all—and time frames for decisions around building stabilization, rehabilitation, reuse, and demolition are frequently foreshortened. Often, keeping buildings standing is more pressing than completing painstaking restoration projects.

These challenges require pragmatic preservation priorities. Since keeping people in buildings keeps buildings standing, addressing abandonment and demolition by neglect must be a priority. Preservationists need to pursue strategic efforts in foreclosure prevention, down payment assistance,

homesteading, code enforcement, and strategic property acquisition and disposal. Working with community development organizations and block groups to board up vacant buildings should take precedence over historic house tours in many areas. And—since not every building can be saved—preservation professionals and advocates must proactively help direct strategic demolition planning and identify catalytic rehabilitation targets. This is particularly true in “tipping point” neighborhoods where focused investment can make a critical long-term difference in preserving local character and integrity. These practical shifts are already occurring within many communities out of necessity. Now, the broader preservation field should recognize and enhance them with fresh ideas, new tools, supportive partnerships, and specialized financing and technical assistance.

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS

- Adopt a set of guiding principles for preservation in legacy cities based on the Preservation Rightsizing Network’s Mission, Goals, and Principles.
- Organize a second Historic Preservation in America’s Legacy Cities convening.
- Convene smaller multidisciplinary workshops on common challenges and potential solutions at the local, regional, state, and national levels.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

- Local preservation organizations
- Preservation Rightsizing Network
- Legacy Cities Partnership (The American Assembly)
- National Trust for Historic Preservation



*Local heritage and quality of life
are as significant as architecture.*

2 ENGAGE AND LISTEN TO LOCAL COMMUNITIES

PRESERVATIONISTS MUST LISTEN to local needs and priorities and develop new forms of community engagement informed by diverse communities and youth. Creative visualization of preservation's potential—pop-up shops in vacant storefronts, art installations in empty houses, and collective daydreaming like artist Candy Chang's "I wish this were" walls—can share important community stories, underscore the importance of place and community, and spur real action to revitalize both vernacular and high-style neighborhoods.

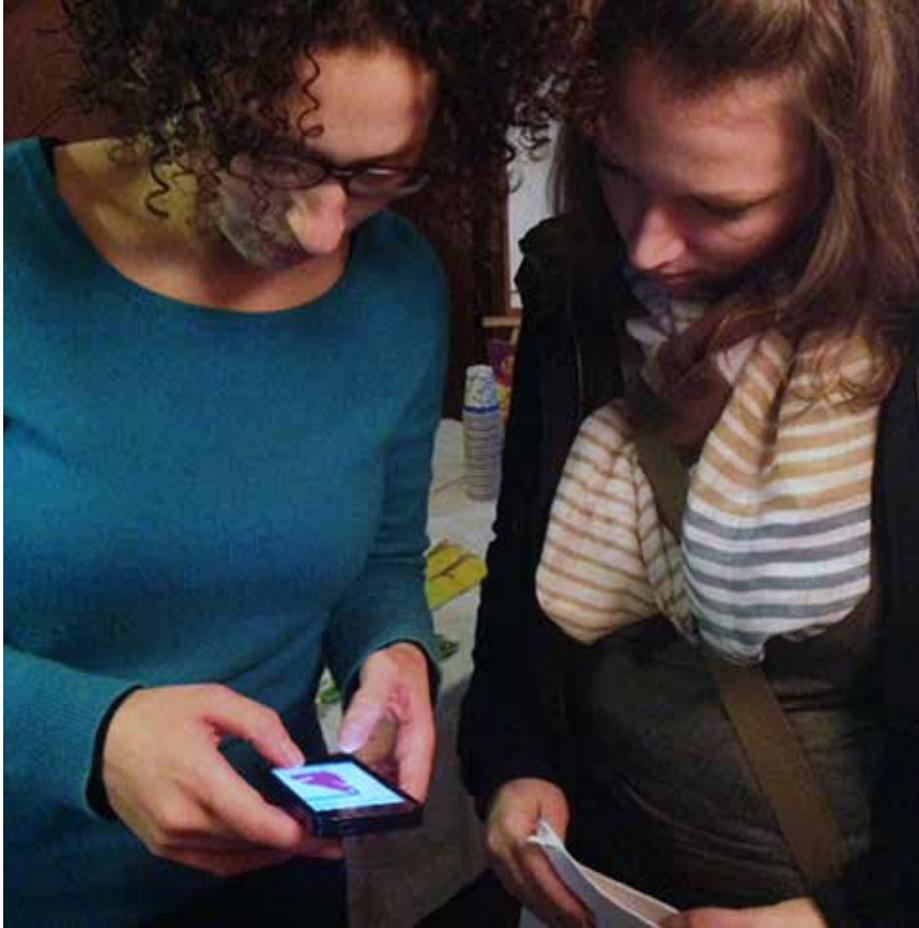
Legacy city preservation practice must hold local heritage and quality of life as significant as architecture. Intangible heritage and culture—the stories that make a community what it is—should be recognized and preserved through oral histories, community storytelling events, and in other ways. This is especially important when demolition is necessary and in neighborhoods that have been shaped by long-term disinvestment and systemic racism.

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS

- Convene a working group to define the role of intangible community heritage in historic preservation.
- Facilitate discussions among diverse stakeholders on how preservation frameworks can better preserve community history and meet current community challenges.
- Develop accessible materials on preservation that address the concerns and needs of all, including communities of color.
- Source creative new technologies and strategies for preservation education, engagement, and empowerment from universities, students, and practitioners.
- Expand local workshops on DIY preservation, oral history, etc.; share workshop curricula across communities.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

- Preservation Rightsizing Network
- Local preservation organizations



Good data can inform strategic decision-making and help refine practices and tools in challenging legacy city contexts.

3 USE DATA TO SUPPORT AND IMPROVE GOOD PRACTICES

PRESERVATIONISTS NEED DATA that goes beyond the facts of buildings, styles, and architects. Good data and layered multidisciplinary analysis can inform strategic decision-making on the ground, prioritize limited funds, support coalition-building with organizations in allied fields, direct preservationists in refining practices and tools in challenging legacy city contexts, and shape effective advocacy efforts. In particular, rigorous analysis should examine how reinvesting in older and historic buildings and neighborhoods compares to demolition with regard to social, economic, and environmental outcomes such as community stability, foreclosures, and property values.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

- Preservation Green Lab
- Vacant Property Research Network
- Michigan SHPO and other SHPOs
- Center for Community Progress
- Urban Land Institute
- National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS

- Conduct surveys of available data and review existing research.
- Form cross-sector working group to establish a standard set of data and metrics.
- Seek funding to aggregate existing data, gather new data, and maintain datasets; and for research projects.
- Hold an interdisciplinary forum to articulate pressing research questions that can support legacy city preservationists' work; set a collective research agenda.
- Widely publicize and disseminate in-progress and completed research to policymakers, planners, academics and other researchers, and a range of practitioners.
- Promote development of historic data layers for local and state GIS databases.



**ADAPT
PRESERVATION
TOOLS + POLICIES
TO MEET THE
NEEDS OF
LEGACY CITIES**

4 CREATE A TOOLKIT FOR PRESERVING THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

AN ONLINE TOOLKIT will serve diverse legacy city stakeholders who have a common interest in preserving older and historic buildings to reduce vacancy, produce affordable and market-rate housing and commercial spaces, generate jobs, save historic architecture, and maintain a tangible record of local history. The toolkit will collect practical strategies, tactics, and tools for preservation advocacy, research and oral history, public policy, collaborative partnerships, technical assistance, funding, strategies for preserving and reusing particular building types, and more.

The toolkit will be housed on the Preservation Rightsizing Network website and regularly updated and expanded. It is the goal to cross-reference toolkits from the Center for Community Progress, the Greater Ohio Policy Center, and the Project for Public Spaces.

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS

- Gather tools and best practices from local, state, and national preservation organizations; land banks; community development organizations; and academic institutions.
- Assemble and publicize toolkit.
- Continue to update and add materials.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

- Preservation Rightsizing Network
- National Trust for Historic Preservation

5 DEVELOP NEW FINANCING MECHANISMS FOR BUILDING STABILIZATION & REHABILITATION

BOLD AND CREATIVE FINANCING TOOLS are needed to make rehabilitation projects viable in weak real estate markets. Financial tools that already exist—historic tax credits at the state and federal levels, New Markets Tax Credits, local tax abatements, façade improvement programs, revolving loan funds, linked-deposit loan programs, brownfields cleanup funds, and various grants—are not universally available, nor are they always sufficient to overcome challenging market conditions. For example, a property owner may have difficulty getting a loan to rehabilitate a building when the property value is less than the project cost.

Financing tools that improve the economics of small-scale rehabilitation projects should be developed. Federal urban investments should be more plentiful, and financing should focus on structural stabilization rather than aesthetic improvements. Preservationists and other community stakeholders should work with local banks to develop post-rehab valuations, as it is difficult to secure loans when the pre-rehabilitation value of the building is low. Also, working to ensure compliance with the Community Reinvestment Act will help legacy city property owners gain more access to private capital for preservation projects.

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS

- Conduct a survey of best practices in financing and incentives.
- Convene a team of experts from financial and policy backgrounds, the preservation field, land banks, and national intermediaries to develop new tools.
- Form a working group to shape an advocacy platform and ask the Department of the Treasury and national foundations to financially support rehabilitation.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

- NeighborWorks
- Enterprise Community Partners
- Local Initiatives Support Corporation
- Cleveland Restoration Society
- National Trust for Historic Preservation
- Urban Land Institute

6 ENCOURAGE PRESERVATION THROUGH LOCAL POLICY REFORM



DETROIT Emilie Evans

MUNICIPAL POLICIES ARE NEEDED to encourage the preservation of historic assets in weak markets and to realize their significant community benefits. Residential neighborhoods urgently need both regulations and incentives to stabilize vacant buildings and ultimately reduce vacancy via new occupancy.

For the most part, local policies that can achieve these goals are not explicit “historic preservation” policies. They extend far beyond historic building codes and historic designation to context-sensitive zoning, property tax abatements, homesteading programs, targeted code enforcement, receivership statutes, rehabilitation as a land bank action, vacant property registration and maintenance requirements, moving buildings to consolidate neighborhoods, and strategic demolition that considers building character and neighborhood intactness.

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS

- Engage local preservation organizations, governments, and others to gather model policies and collaboratively shape new policies.
- Collect model policies and protocols in the toolkit.
- Develop and share materials to support local education and advocacy efforts.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

- Local preservation organizations
- Municipal governments
- Community development organizations
- National Alliance of Preservation Commissions
- National Trust for Historic Preservation
- Urban Land Institute
- Preservation Rightsizing Network



Federal historic preservation standards must be thoughtfully updated to meet the needs of legacy cities.

7 ALIGN FEDERAL PROGRAMS AND POLICIES TO SUPPORT LEGACY CITIES

FEDERAL AGENCIES MUST COORDINATE programs and initiatives to improve outcomes in high-need, low-resource communities. Preservationists are needed advocates for this change. Programs that support the use of historic buildings will reinforce affordable housing goals, promote transit-oriented and walkable neighborhoods, encourage energy efficiency and other sustainability measures, and facilitate economic development. Direct federal funding—the lion’s share of which has recently gone to demolition—is of immediate and critical importance.

Federal historic preservation standards must be thoughtfully updated to meet the needs of legacy cities. Buildings suffering from long-term disinvestment often fail to meet the threshold for integrity required for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Federal historic tax credits could be expanded or amended to better support reinvestment in older buildings, perhaps with a tiered credit system or decoupling from the National Register. And application and enforcement of Section 106 review—as required by the National Historic Preservation Act when federal funds are involved—could be improved, particularly around federally funded demolition.

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS

- Assess policy platforms of other organizations focused on legacy city challenges and draft a policy platform for preservation in legacy cities.
- Convene a working group of local governments, preservation organizations, land banks, and other identified relevant parties to vet the platform.
- Set an advocacy calendar and goals.
- Engage State Historic Preservation Officers and federal agencies such as HUD, EPA, DOT, USDA, and NPS through the Advisory Council and the National Council of SHPOs.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

- Advisory Council on Historic Preservation
- National Trust for Historic Preservation
- Preservation Action
- SHPOs and the National Council of SHPOs
- Related federal agencies



SUPPORT PLACE-BASED COLLABORATION



BUILD LOCAL COALITIONS

PRESERVATIONISTS MUST PARTNER in productive coalitions of community groups, agencies, and other constituencies with an interest in revitalizing legacy cities. Identifying common goals and collaborative opportunities among preservation, community and economic development, affordable housing, social and environmental justice, and sustainability can strengthen all these efforts and lead to more vital neighborhoods.

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS

- Provide clear, step-by-step information to on-the-ground decision-makers on local preservation processes and options, including guidance on when to demolish, stabilize and mothball, and rehabilitate.
- Support the development of property information systems.
- Collect and share data on potentially significant buildings using new models for quick, low-budget historic resource surveys.
- Develop and disseminate preservation materials for local preservation organizations to build coalitions with land banks and other allied organizations.
- Publicize successful partnerships through the Preservation Rightsizing Network.

For example, preservationists can support organizations working in hard-hit neighborhoods by offering additional financing tools for stabilizing older and historic buildings and helping buyers navigate acquisition and rehabilitation.

Other essential partnerships include code enforcement officials, land bank staff, and planners. All of these groups are responsible for ensuring public health and safety, facilitating neighborhood reinvestment, spurring revitalization, and targeting demolition funding. They are key players, and working with them can ensure that data on significant buildings is factored into plans and strategic demolition decisions. It can also feed valuable information back to preservationists about new tools and data that could support preservation goals.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

- Local preservation organizations
- Preservation Rightsizing Network
- Greater Ohio Policy Center
- National Trust for Historic Preservation
- Legacy Cities Partnership
- Center for Community Progress
- NeighborWorks
- Federal Reserve Banks



Community stories and historic buildings are major assets for the present and future.

9 PARTICIPATE IN THE BROADER COMMUNITY OF LEGACY CITY THINKERS

A STRONG COMMUNITY OF PRACTITIONERS who value the rich heritage and built environment of legacy cities must engage in dynamic discussions, planning, and action around challenges and opportunities. This community should include thought leaders, academic researchers and students, and people working on the ground in preservation and allied fields—people who see the historic buildings and community stories in legacy cities as major assets for the present and future.

Some work has already been done on this front. The Legacy Cities Partnership (led by The American Assembly), the Center for Community Progress, and the Vacant Property Research Network offer resources and drive research at the national level around vacant property innovations like land banks. The J. Max Bond Center at the City College of New York has convened the Legacy Cities Design Initiative to examine common practices and challenges. While none of these groups holds preservation as a central priority, all are dedicated to strengthening legacy cities, including the use of existing assets. Convening multidisciplinary collaborations that include preservationists and many others, finding common ground, and working to advance legacy cities as a whole will be a tremendous step forward.

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS

- Convene legacy city strategists and resource organizations to become familiar with each other's work.
- Organize cross-sector dialogues about legacy city challenges and opportunities at roundtables, workshops, and Historic Preservation in Legacy Cities conferences—both broad and focused.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

- Preservation Rightsizing Network
- Legacy Cities Partnership
- Center for Community Progress
- Vacant Property Research Network
- J. Max Bond Center
- National Trust for Historic Preservation

The Historic Preservation in America's Legacy Cities convening was organized by the Cleveland Restoration Society (Kathleen Crowther, President) and the Levin College of Urban Affairs at Cleveland State University (Stephanie Ryberg-Webster, Assistant Professor).

The convening's closing workshop was organized by a multidisciplinary group that continued to meet to develop and refine this action agenda. Workshop organizers included:

Cara Bertron Preservation Rightsizing Network (principal author of action agenda)

Kathleen Crowther Cleveland Restoration Society

Emilie Evans Michigan Historic Preservation Network, National Trust for Historic Preservation, and Preservation Rightsizing Network

Nicholas Hamilton Legacy Cities Partnership (The American Assembly)

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The Maxine Goodman Levin College of Urban Affairs offers a graduate certificate program in Historic Preservation. The program is central to the College's mission to provide academic and professional education, expertise, and research capabilities to enhance the quality of life in urban communities. At the Levin College of Urban Affairs, we are *Changing America's Cities, One Graduate at a time*. Join Us.



Founded in 1972, the Cleveland Restoration Society uses historic preservation to revitalize the diverse communities, strengthen the regional economy, and enhance the quality of life in northeastern Ohio. CRS's programs reach a regional constituency of more than two million residents and are at the intersection of preservation and economic revitalization.



The Preservation Rightsizing Network works in legacy cities to preserve local heritage and revitalize the built environment. It provides ways to engage, share best practices, and develop new tools to strengthen communities for the future.



The Legacy Cities Partnership is a network of leaders, practitioners, researchers, and advocates who are working to provide better economic opportunity for current and future residents. We promote knowledge sharing and network building, and develop practical policy recommendations for legacy city revitalization.



The American Assembly is a public policy institute founded by Dwight D. Eisenhower at Columbia University. Since 1950, The Assembly has worked across sectors and party lines to foster practical public-policy recommendations through convening, research, and publication.



The Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative is the outreach division of the College of Architecture and Environmental Design at Kent State University, dedicated to addressing emerging issues and expanding the ideas, energy, and resources for making better cities.

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COMMUNITY STORIES AND HISTORIC

BUILDINGS ARE MAJOR ASSETS

FOR THE PRESENT AND FUTURE



*Maxine Goodman Levin
College of Urban Affairs*



PRN



THE AMERICAN ASSEMBLY
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