



PlaceEconomics

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RIGHT SIZE, RIGHT PLACE: A NEW ROLE FOR PRESERVATION

GRAY AREA Preservation Provocateur series

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Thanks to all of you for coming. I lived in Philadelphia for three years. I liked the city while I lived here, but since I moved away it's become one of my favorites. I tell everyone who's thinking about moving anywhere to move to Philly: "I'll meet you there," I say. "There are great things happening."

The city is an especially exciting place to be right now. There's the new land bank, the Philadelphia 2035 comprehensive plan and rezoning, the new Young Friends of the Preservation Alliance, the population growth after 50 years of shrinkage. Philly's on an upswing, and it's likely to continue.

To start, I want to tell you something really cool that underscores why we should care about—and be actively involved in—rightsizing. As part of our Rightsizing Cities Initiative, PlaceEconomics is doing a research project to look at the neighborhoods within cities that are gaining population. We took the list of the 100 most populous cities in 1950, added any cities that climbed into the 100 biggest in 1960, and so on. We ended up with a list of about 160 cities. Then, we sifted the list for the cities that experienced population declines and then started to grow again. That list includes 39 cities. Now, we're looking at where exactly those cities are growing.

We just finished Philadelphia, with some exciting results. Philly's population increase between 2000 and 2010 wasn't a big increase, but it made big news. The city grew by just over 8,400 people.

Now, a *very* interesting thing emerges when we look at where that growth happened. How much do you think happened in historic districts?

Well, if you're thinking 100 percent, you're almost right—but not quite. Actually, *150* percent of this growth happened in National Register historic districts. Historic districts gained about 12,000 people. The city outside historic districts *lost* 3,700 people.

I could spend the whole evening talking about reasons that historic districts saw this population gain, but I'm really here to talk about the process of rightsizing and how preservationists can play a role. I've been charged with being provocative. I'm not sure if what I'll say next will be appropriately incendiary; at any rate, I hope no one brought matches.

But I hope you will find something to dig into, and perhaps to argue with; because this is one of the biggest issues—perhaps the biggest one, period—facing historic communities today. And it presents a unique opportunity to expand and redefine the role of historic preservation. So I hope you care enough to engage with it—and to act on it. We are here, and we need to be way over there. There's a lot of work to do.



So: rightsizing. I'll start at the beginning, so we're all on the same page. As many of you know, rightsizing is defined as the process of reshaping a city's built fabric to meet the needs of its current

and anticipated populations. It's like tailoring a suit for someone who has lost a lot of weight, though not in the straightforward ways you might imagine: taking in a seam there, cutting off a neighborhood here. Population loss happens spottily.

Because it's complicated, rightsizing is still very much a verb, an action, under discussion. To put it in perspective, the city of Youngstown, Ohio, made planning headlines in 2005 when it produced a comprehensive plan that acknowledged that the city's population loss was final, and that it needed to plan accordingly. 2005: that's pretty recent.

Youngstown went through a planning process that involved much of the community to arrive at its announcement, but in other communities 'rightsizing' remains a politically fraught idea—not surprising for a concept whose most visible effect has been widespread demolition.

Now, Youngstown has designated highly distressed neighborhoods where it will not make additional public investments. For example, if homeowners in those areas apply for weatherization funds from the City, they won't get them—but they will be offered assistance with relocation to a more robust neighborhood. No one is being forced out, but there is a public statement that scarce public resources should not be used in neighborhoods that are largely vacant. Saginaw, Michigan, has designated a 'Green Zone' where the City is strategically purchasing and demolishing properties as they become vacant. And Flint, Michigan, just adopted a master plan that designates 'Green Neighborhoods,' where current residents are allowed to remain but no new building permits will be issued.

And these cities are ahead of the curve. Even when rightsizing or 'long-range planning' is not discussed, decisions are being made. I want to stress this: decisions are being made. They are being made when building permits are issued or when the Streets Department decides to repave roads in one neighborhood and not another. They are being made when CDBG funds are allocated, when water mains are repaired, when buildings are demolished—with or without a plan. Failing to make strategic plans for rightsizing will not make the problems go away.

So where is rightsizing happening? As you would expect, the communities facing rightsizing challenges are clustered in the Rust Belt (or Great Lakes region). But they're *not* limited to legacy cities. Between 2000 and 2010, 454 cities in 41 states all over the country lost population.

And even growing cities have neighborhoods that have seen extended disinvestment and depopulation and could use rightsizing strategies and tools.

In a best-case scenario, rightsizing is a way to face long-term challenges head-on, build on assets, and emerge with smaller, stronger communities. In a worst-case scenario, it's urban renewal 2.0: messy, disenfranchising, and crippling for cities.



I want to step back for a brief, broad survey of what rightsizing looks like on the ground.

I joined PlaceEconomics in 2011 to direct our new Rightsizing Cities Initiative. As our first project, we did some research for the ACHP. It was a learning experience, and tremendously helpful in understanding the landscape of rightsizing in the United States. We surveyed the 20 U.S. cities with the highest proportional population loss between 1960 and 2000. We spoke with preservationists from all 20 cities and got planners from 16 of the cities to complete surveys, with follow-up interviews with half of the planners. At the same time, we conducted interviews with five people who had really dug into the intersection of preservation and rightsizing at the state and national levels—our "focus group."

The interviewees identified a range of problems in the built environment that stemmed from long-term population loss: a glut of vacant buildings and scattered vacant lots, low-quality or obsolete housing—and limited and diminishing resources for cities to address these problems. The funding that is available is largely focused on demolition.

That’s a lot for cities to deal with—and this is really just the built environment. Almost all cities were taking steps to respond.

The top actions are actually positive and growth-oriented. Demolition includes both scattered and (less commonly) focused demolition. More than half of the cities have or were forming land banks to manage and dispose of vacant land and buildings—Philly is in good company. Not quite 40 percent of cities are focusing their resources, which we thought was odd given the magnitude of the challenges and the lack of resources.

In all of this, the Advisory Council was very interested in what federal resources were being used for rightsizing, since those can be linked to Section 106 review—a process of assessing whether projects adversely impact potential or actual historic resources that’s triggered by the use of federal funds. Staff identified 25 funding programs from 10 federal agencies that could conceivably be used for rightsizing, and we asked planners which of those programs their cities were using to support rightsizing or “long-range planning” activities. A pretty good list, right?

Well, of those 25 programs, a handful of cities were using five—*five!*—of them for rightsizing. Now, it’s conceivable that the planners we spoke with were not completely familiar with the funding sources used. But these were the people who were identified as leading rightsizing efforts in their communities. They included 6 planning or community development directors, as well as long-range planning staff. Even if they were a bit off here or there, they weren’t missing the whole boat. Particularly relevant for preservationists: that means that Section 106 isn’t being used.

Of the 20 cities most in need of resources for rightsizing, only *seven* are using any federal programs for that purpose. And those 7 cities are only using 5 programs of 25 that are available.



So where do historic preservation and preservation planners and advocates fit into rightsizing now?

In short, they really don’t. In the 20 cities we surveyed, preservation’s role was negligible. Sometimes people showed up; often they didn’t. When they did show up, it was in the form of public meetings or education and advocacy—not game-changing roles.

All this means that preservation is not a guiding principle as cities think about their futures. Preservation has made great strides in recent years: federal and state historic tax credit projects that catalyze other work around them, often in concert with community development tools like low-income housing tax credits and New Markets Tax Credits; designation of historic districts and conservation districts to promote and protect character; very successful commercial revitalization work in Main Streets all over the country; and much more. *But* that progress does not translate to being at the table when cities are making major, *major* decisions about what their futures will look like. And that’s a problem.



I hope you’re asking, where *should* preservation fit into rightsizing? That’s the question we have to answer seriously, and to answer it last year. Or tomorrow. Or this year, or the next: soon. There is so

much at stake. Great cities are being eroded every day: my colleague Emilie Evans in Detroit calls it “a lot of tiny pieces lost.” And those pieces add up.

And again, rightsizing is happening even if communities are not doing it consciously. These cities are not static. As I mentioned earlier, roughly 450 U.S. cities lost population between 2000 and 2010. The jobs that are leaving and the residents who follow them aren’t tracking planning progress in City Hall. They’re just going. And cities will continue to move down one road or another. As people who think cities, especially historic cities, are important, we have to pay attention, roll up our sleeves, and work to make some really good roadmaps.



That brings us to my central argument for tonight: That this situation—where cities are not only struggling but desperate—creates the opportunity for a much bigger vision and manifesto for our field. Preservationists—especially, but not only, in legacy cities—need to think about moving neighborhoods and cities forward and really being a shaping force.

We have to do much more than think. Our job as preservationists is to proactively argue for rightsizing as a way to make places healthier, using both additive and subtractive approaches. It means making real plans at the neighborhood and citywide levels that balance imagination and pragmatism, past and present and future.

We have to get beyond historic buildings and historic districts to healthy neighborhoods and cities. This isn’t a new argument, and I know many of you spend your days, evenings, and weekends fighting for cities as living organisms.

In lots of ways, the preservation field is moving this way already. Philadelphia 2035 calls for revamping and expanding the city’s Neighborhood Conservation District program to preserve neighborhood character while keeping design review standards commensurate with the level of significance, integrity, or community interest. The National Trust’s Preservation Green Lab has developed a data-based metric for measuring the vitality of fine-grained, mixed-use, mixed-age neighborhoods—a metric that’s not at all limited to historic districts. Michael Holleran at the University of Texas is proposing a “public health paradigm” to steward older buildings as a class with general measures like downzoning and hazard mitigation: cost-effective measures for preservation that try to minimize losses through broader policies. The field of community development overlaps with preservation in some pretty exciting ways when it comes to affordable housing and commercial district revitalization.

I think we need to follow that model and really redefine preservation: what it is, what it does, and why it matters. We have to be champions of cities—*good* cities—and towns, rural areas, neighborhoods, and the scales in between—of real places. We have to define what a ‘real place’ is, and what ‘good’ looks like.

We’ve all heard about the placemaking movement—totally in vogue right now. Placemaking is creating public places where people want to be—places that feel real—whether by adding benches, planters to define parklets, art, or something else.

Preservationists? We’ve been placemaking for decades, on a much larger and more ambitious scale. Preserving buildings is usually a project in the private realm, but it significantly shapes the public urban living room. Designating historic districts, developing design guidelines, revitalizing Main Streets—all that makes places in a fundamental way.

I want us to claim that role, and to stick our elbows out and take more ground. We are—we have to be—narrators and advocates in shaping older and historic neighborhoods and communities. If we

want to matter, we have to claim those roles and act like we mean it. We have to position ourselves as partners and leaders in placemaking and planning.

That is especially important in the context of rightsizing. I've talked about how we don't have any time to lose. Cities that are making plans are making them quickly—and almost always leaning heavily on blight removal, which means demolition. Cities that are not making plans are not doing any better in terms of preserving their assets or making themselves stronger. There is no time, and there are very few experts.

That leaves a space for us. Previous GRAY AREA conversations have noted preservation's role in managing change in the built environment. That's true: we have *invaluable* experience in managing change. We have *critical* experience. We need to be a major shaping force in cities.



So how do we begin?

I hope many of you are generating ideas right now—or thinking of things that you already do. As a field, we have a great toolbox for managing change, whether in growing, thriving communities or in communities that are struggling after long-term population loss. Because I'm here to talk about rightsizing in legacy cities, I'm going to focus on 13 things we can do in the second type of community, though nearly everything on my list can be applied to growing places as well.

1. The first one is easy: strengthen neighborhood commercial corridors and local businesses. We have an outstanding model in Main Street for doing this. You might say, "Well, sure, Main Streets are great for residential neighborhoods, but why are they important for legacy cities as a whole?" Well, local businesses and commercial corridors create jobs and generate sales taxes for cash-strapped cities. They also help define distinct, character-filled neighborhoods and make those neighborhoods walkable. Both of these things draw new people in, which is a major priority for cities—legacy and otherwise. People who are moving into a city don't want suburbia with a different ZIP code: they want communities that feel unique, and where they can walk places. And the Main Street program not only supports commercial corridors. It engages community members, builds relationships, and strengthens social infrastructure in a way that can go well beyond just where dollars are spent.
2. Like volunteer-driven Main Street, this also draws on our historic strength: getting people engaged for a good cause. Volunteers are essential to getting things done in cities where the scope of the problem far exceeds the capacity of paid staff, and where cities definitely aren't hiring more people. Volunteers can do very practical things that make a big difference: boarding up houses, mowing vacant lots, and—for more skilled volunteers—fixing up houses. In Youngstown, a local community development corporation organizes monthly workdays that include boarding up houses; in Detroit, volunteers boarded up houses and cleaned up lots to celebrate MLK Day last month.
3. Residential areas often get the most press: vacant and abandoned houses and empty lots are clear signs of a long-gone population and distressed market. Brad White of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation says that legacy cities don't have a vacancy problem—they have an occupancy problem. We can do something about this by helping attract new residents to historic districts and older "character neighborhoods." This can be through publicity, or financial incentives.

A very successful organization called Midtown Detroit brokered a partnership between several major institutions headquartered in the Midtown neighborhood. It mimics a Philly success story: homebuyer incentives offered by Penn and Drexel to faculty and staff who move to the neighborhoods around the campuses. It's a win-win-win: individuals get a leg up in buying a home,

institutions increase staff loyalty, and the neighborhood gets a boost. Midtown Detroit goes even further in offering incentives to potential renters. The result? The neighborhood is at 100% residential capacity for available residential properties. That's no small feat anywhere, and runs radically counter to the prevailing Detroit narrative. I should also mention that a significant strategy of Midtown Detroit has been to designate National Register historic districts, which make the neighborhood much more attractive to developers.

4. Supporting current homeowners is equally or more important. The Preservation Alliance has done this through its Vital Neighborhoods Initiative. In Cleveland, the Heritage Home Program is run by a fabulous local nonprofit, the Cleveland Restoration Society. It assists owners of older houses in fixing up their homes. Houses don't have to be listed in the National Register or located in a historic district; they just have to be old—built before 1964. The Heritage Home Program offers low fixed-interest loans and technical advice. And it funds almost any type of project, from HVAC to kitchen renovations to roof repairs—though it does *not* fund incompatible additions, vinyl siding, or vinyl windows. Here, preservation isn't a hammer—it's a resource that brings tangible assets to the table.

5. On a larger scale, we need to work with neighborhoods to plan their futures. The National Trust's This Place Matters campaign is a great start to this, in that it recognizes and celebrates the uniqueness of places that are both monumental and everyday. In Dayton, Ohio, planners use a spectrum of neighborhood typologies to help community members envision what less dense development might look like. That's one type and level of tool we need.

6. We can provide information to decisionmakers to identify existing assets. Historic resource surveys are critical here, particularly where demolition (by neglect or enthusiasm) is a threat, as you can't protect what you don't know you have. One model for fast, cheap, large-scale historic resource scans is being pioneered here in Philadelphia with character studies. (Full disclosure: that's a project Randy Mason and I worked on.) Character studies collect a few pieces of focused data using remote data collection and targeted fieldwork—very quickly. In the Lower Northeast neighborhood, we covered 6 square miles in 5 days with just 5 surveyors. That's 32,500 properties in the time it would take a traditional historic resource survey—even a fast one—to collect data on just 500. That's the type of survey we need: something that can flag areas of potential significance across an entire city and doesn't take years or hundreds of thousands of dollars.

7. We need to go one step beyond surveys to figure out how to transform potential assets into actual assets. The Cincinnati Preservation Association helps prospective buyers to navigate the purchase and rehab processes for vacant buildings that have been identified as significant and seriously threatened. While a determined, experienced buyer could navigate the process with time and money, CPA's work could make the critical difference for a buyer who is purchasing a house to live in, not as an investment property.

8. We can have more skin in the game. We know how to do this. Revolving loan funds are a terrific example: providing people with the means to do good preservation projects. We can also roll up our sleeves and pick up a hammer. In Buffalo, a couple of young preservationists have gotten great press for their work rehabbing historic houses as 'microdevelopers.' They're not motivated by money, but by the love of buildings and their belief in what Buffalo is and can become.

9. We can partner with major players who are making lasting decisions about where and how to reinvest in cities. Our role should be to advocate for strategic, holistic decisions with the end goal of creating sustainable, healthy, vibrant neighborhoods—not just historic buildings that are still standing. There are some really exciting examples of local preservation organizations working with land banks. Right now, the Cincinnati Preservation Association is identifying good candidates for building stabilization, at the request of the Cincinnati land bank. And in Detroit, preservationists

completed a survey of nearly 19,000 buildings in National Register-eligible districts—a survey that will feed into the Detroit Land Bank Authority’s decisions about where to demolish properties.

10. We can help appropriately focus resources in neighborhoods. We already have experience seeing potential in places: that’s the spark for historic district designation. Now, we need to look carefully at where we put our resources and advocate for others to do the same. This doesn’t mean abandoning distressed neighborhoods. I’m going to say that again, because it’s important: This doesn’t mean abandoning distressed neighborhoods. It does mean using different tools for them. One neighborhood that is losing population rapidly may need more demolition funding to clear out vacant houses, develop strategies for vacant land, and improve the quality of life for the residents who remain. Another more stable neighborhood may need incentives for appropriate infill housing.

11. We can also advocate for *increasing* resources through federal, state, and local policies that support cities and older neighborhoods in particular. The National Trust, Donovan Rypkema, and other prominent preservation advocates are speaking loudly and clearly about the importance of saving the federal historic tax credits. We can bring additional assets to the table by advocating for a historic tax credit for homeowners at the federal, state, and local levels, and for general historic tax credits at the state level. We can push for the use of Community Development Block Grant funds for rehabilitation instead of, or balanced with, demolition. We can help cities to find and creatively use other available resources, too. Remember that list of 25 federal programs? None of those is focused on preservation stuff, but they all have the potential to help plan for and shape healthier cities. And *that* should be our goal. So helping cities to access those funds could be a role for preservationists.

12. We have to prioritize buildings to save. A really exciting example of this that didn’t result from a grand proclamation or policy breakthrough at the federal level happens in Cincinnati, where a staff member from the Cincinnati Preservation Association goes out in the field with a couple of City building inspectors. They go around and look at buildings on the demolition list. And they rank them for a number of factors: public safety, impact on neighboring property values, architectural significance, and potential for rehabilitation. Public safety is weighted more heavily, but architectural significance is in there. I wish we had more preservationists like the manager of Cincinnati’s Property Maintenance Code Enforcement Division, Ed Cunningham, who might not even call himself a preservationist. He’s not passionate about historic buildings like some of us here tonight. But he’s extremely pragmatic. In Cincinnati, that means he’s a preservationist. He says that if he only has enough funding to knock down a portion of the potentially dangerous buildings, he wants to ‘weed out the junk and try to get the other ones fixed.’ And the other ones, the best stuff? Those are historic buildings in historic neighborhoods.

13. Finally—realistically—we have to help prioritize demolition. To be effective—and to make cities healthier—we have to advocate for strategic, targeted investments in both demolition and reinvestment.



I want to dig into that a little more, because it’s important. What is the preservation field’s role when it comes to demolition?

First, we have to acknowledge that *strategic* demolition is necessary. Legacy cities have an overstock of buildings and an undersupply of people. Philly’s gaining population, but it still has over half a million people fewer today than it did at its peak. That’s a lot of extra physical fabric.

As I said before, we have to fight for and participate in a holistic planning process that thinks through what long-term population loss looks like on the ground. Where rightsizing is not being considered, we need to be the advocates for thoughtful planning and strategic decisions. Because if demolition

and reinvestment aren't planned, demolition, at least, will still happen—and it won't result in stronger cities.

Often decisions about demolition are made outside a comprehensive planning process. Then, we should make sure data on older and historic buildings and neighborhoods is accurate, digitized, and in planners' hands when they need it. This is where surveys should come in, whether they're detailed National Register-level surveys or scans like character studies.

Past providing that data, we need to help prioritize buildings for demolition. Basically, we need to help decide what gets knocked down. We can frame it as prioritizing what stays up—but we should probably be honest with ourselves. I mentioned the good work being done in Cincinnati, where a preservationist adds a preservation variable to properties on the dangerous buildings list. The Detroit survey that happened last month will be used in conjunction with a citywide blight survey—basically evaluating building conditions—to target demolitions. These aren't purist preservation advocates who run screaming from—or to—any possibility of demolition. Nope: they're in the trenches, willing to broker unconventional partnerships and negotiate unorthodox solutions. And they're getting things done because of it.

At the same time, we must fight for rehabilitation, mothballing, and moving buildings as viable alternatives to demolition, particularly when it comes to funding. JP Morgan Chase agreed to a \$13 billion settlement with the Justice Department late last year. Of that, \$4 billion has been earmarked for a set of activities that includes “curbing urban blight.” That certainly includes demolition—and what else? That's where we need to come in. A group of preservation stakeholders including Preservation Action and the National Trust are in conversation with Chase to advocate using preservation as a practical tool to curb blight. Those are exactly the conversations we need to be in, with practical tools in hand.

We also have to ask hard questions about market demand with regard to rehab and mothballing. Where is mothballing appropriate? At what scale, for what length of time? What about moving buildings? If rehabilitation is more expensive than demolition in the short run and the market can't guarantee occupancy, when should we promote it over demolition or mothballing? These are fundamentally questions about the market, and we need to know what we're talking about in terms of the economics of vacant buildings. It does not always make sense to rehab a building. In some markets, it can cost \$150,000 to rehabilitate a building that might—*might*—sell for \$60,000. Sometimes that's all right, given funding sources and priorities and building significance, but sometimes it just doesn't pencil. We have to be optimistic, but realistic.



So: pragmatism, strategy, participation. What's next? Where do we go from here?

At PlaceEconomics we've come up a set of six implementation principles. They shape our approach to rightsizing, though they can be applied in healthy cities and neighborhoods too. I'm going to finish up by digging into these a little.

First, **preservation as a means**. Historic buildings are lovely in themselves, but their greater value comes from their roles as vital parts of dynamic, living cities. One implication of this is that we need to get beyond citywide preservation plans, where preservation is put in its own box and only applied to historic resources. Instead, preservation should be integrated into 'regular' plans, seen as a tool for planning and economic development and transportation and sustainability. We're doing a study in Raleigh right now that looks at the impacts of historic preservation in the city. We're framing that study in terms of how preservation relates to the six vision principles of the comprehensive plan. This type of approach recognizes that preservation is an integrated means to other goals.

Another implication—perhaps a more important one—is that preservation for preservation’s sake is not that strong of an argument for people who aren’t already ‘in the club.’ Architecture is great, but it can’t compete with economic development or blight removal, particularly in highly distressed cities. The good news is that it doesn’t have to compete: it can reinforce economic development or anti-blight strategies through job creation, small business incubation, rehabilitation, resident attraction—lots of things. But to be taken seriously, it’s critical that we remember that. We can’t box ourselves in by thinking of preservation as the end goal.

Rightsizing also brings the opportunity to rethink the purpose of bigger preservation frameworks and how they facilitate those means. What does Section 106 look like now, and what should it look like? Could it be recast as an effective community-based planning process? What should be the roles of historic district commissions and local preservation organizations? ...These are all huge questions that I don’t have the time to dig into—but I hope you will think about them and discuss them and come up with answers or more questions. These have been important, established frameworks for a long time, but if they stay static they may not be relevant for much longer.

We need to **set priorities**. All the strategies I’ve mentioned this evening need to be focused to make a difference. If we try to meet every need, or allocate resources toward rehabilitating every building, we won’t make enough of a difference to notice. One exciting thing that PlaceEconomics has developed is a tool called ReLocal that’s grounded in data and community priorities, highly practical, and isn’t exclusively focused on preservation. It’s based on the assumptions that very limited resources must be focused to make a difference, that different neighborhoods have very different types of long-term potential, and that vacant and abandoned properties should be treated differently depending on the neighborhood context. That’s one practical tool.

We also have to be focused in our advocacy. In some cases, we should absolutely be hellraisers. Sometimes this applies to specific buildings, but I’m going to give a quick and shocking example at a higher level. In 2010, the Hardest Hit Fund was established to help prevent foreclosures. Last year, it was expanded in Michigan to include demolition as a foreclosure prevention strategy—a huge shift. Michigan was given \$100 million for demolition, with \$52 million going to Detroit alone. This is not a bad thing in itself, though it would be terrific to have more flexibility with those funds for strategies like rehabilitation or mothballing, where appropriate. The real travesty is that that money is not subject to Section 106, with the spurious argument that it’s an investment, not typical government spending. And Michigan set precedents. Ohio subsequently got permission to reallocate \$60 million of its Hardest Hit Fund dollars to demolition—with no Section 106 review required. Earlier this month, Indiana followed suit with \$75 million of Hardest Hit Funds—and no Section 106 review. That’s a total of \$235 million for demolition with no Section 106 review, so far. More will follow.

You might ask, where are preservationists while this is happening? That’s an excellent question. The National Trust does not appear to be filing any lawsuits. Preservation Action has issued alerts, but has not engaged in a formal challenge. The Advisory Council for Historic Preservation—the federal body charged with overseeing and spearheading Section 106 review? It appears to be doing—nothing. This, I think, is where we as grassroots preservationists have to come in and say, THIS IS NOT OK. This is worth fighting for. Section 106—a bedrock in preservation planning—gutted. This is outrageous.

Next, we need **different levels of standards** that recognize the nuanced needs and priorities of different places. The Trust recently ran a great interview with a developer from St. Louis named Jason Deem. He closed with a call for flexibility: “It is necessary to have standards, but flexibility invites creativity and growth. An overly strict interpretation of preservation can sometimes make a project not worth doing.” (*Repeat last sentence*) This discussion was a conversation starter at the Trust conference in Indianapolis last fall: what do significance, standards, integrity, and designation

criteria mean, and how can they be adjusted? These questions are being discussed at many levels right now, which is great. They are especially pressing in legacy cities and distressed neighborhoods, where—to give one example—rehabilitation work ‘by the book’ may be prohibitively expensive given market conditions.

Whatever we do should be **data-driven**, grounded in reality. This holds true for planning processes, for prioritizing demolition, for considering rehabilitation. We’re not going to win every battle using numbers—but we’re not going to win any without them. Perhaps ‘winning’ isn’t the right term to use when talking about individual buildings. Particularly in legacy cities, our definition of success needs to focus on the neighborhood level. ‘Winning’ might mean losing several significant buildings, but ending up with a neighborhood that’s healthier and more sustainable in the long run. And that’s what we really need.

Practical tools will enable us to help neighborhoods win. I’ve spent a lot of time this evening talking about a range of tools that we already have, as well as some we still need to work on. As you know, it’s not enough to say that we should be at the table when big plans and a host of small incremental decisions are being made. We have to earn it. As Randy mentioned, I co-founded the Preservation Rightsizing Network last year. It’s been a very exciting group to be part of, mostly because of the level of enthusiasm we’ve gotten. So many preservation advocates, planners, practitioners, land bank officials, and others working on the ground recognize that there are large needs, that preservation can help meet those needs, and that there are programs and policies happening around the country that could be models for best practices. One of the PRN’s current projects is to compile a practical toolkit of good practices that will be freely available to people facing similar challenges—and updated as we learn about more and more innovative tools and creative ways to apply existing tools.

Finally, we can’t do this on our own. The Preservation Rightsizing Network is one example of a way to share collective knowledge between preservation advocates, practitioners, and others working on this issue outside the preservation field. The PRN and PlaceEconomics are both sponsors of a multi-disciplinary conference happening in Cleveland this June called Historic Preservation in America’s Legacy Cities. It’s the first convening at the intersection of preservation and legacy cities, and I think it will lead to some great conversations, new partnerships, and potentially big leaps forward.

On the local level, partnerships are equally critical. For example, land banks are an immensely powerful tool for strategically turning vacant and abandoned properties into real assets. I hope that preservationists get in on the ground floor of the Philadelphia land bank, either as part of the land bank staff or as serious partners. Syracuse offers a great model for a recently formed, preservation-focused land bank; its executive director has formal preservation experience and training. The grandfather of land banks, the Genesee County Land Bank in Flint, Michigan, uses preservation as a key catalytic strategy in Flint’s downtown and local historic district. In other cities, preservation organizations have successfully partnered with land banks to identify historic properties, purchase and hold them, and find new buyers—preservationists in Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Detroit are all doing this, and are worth emulating.



Now for the rousing conclusion! I want to emphasize that rightsizing can be seen as an opportunity for preservation to think bigger and engage new partners. It could be a game-changer for the field. In a broader sense, it can help strengthen preservation’s role in place-based planning as a holistic look at healthy places.

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This, of course, is contingent on rightsizing not being equated with demolition only. I showed this picture earlier as a best case/worst case scenario, but we really need both sides for successful, realistic rightsizing. Strategic reinvestment in strong and transitional neighborhoods, commercial corridors, and downtowns creates healthier communities. And strategic demolition is a necessary way to remove excess urban fabric and open new possibilities for land. We cannot ignore demolition, and we cannot condemn it wholesale and still be heard as effective participants and potential partners.

I think I've said this at least three times already tonight, but I'll say it again. The exciting thing with rightsizing is that it's still in the formative stages. In engaging with and advocating for strategic, balanced rightsizing, we can really claim a role as city-shapers, as fighters, as people who are at the table saying, "Here are the assets these cities have, here's how they will make cities stronger, and here are the tools for getting there." I think we can do it. And really—we have to do it.

Thank you.

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