



SUMMARY REPORT  
HISTORIC PRESERVATION IN 2020  
A STRATEGIC VISION AND  
STRATEGIC INITIATIVES  
PRESERVATION ALLIANCE FOR GREATER PHILADELPHIA  
JULY 2009

# **HISTORIC PRESERVATION IN 2020 A STRATEGIC VISION AND STRATEGIC INITIATIVES**

## ***SUMMARY REPORT***

Written by John Andrew Gallery and Randall Mason  
For The Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia  
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### **INTRODUCTION**

Although Philadelphia is widely recognized as a city with abundant historic buildings and neighborhoods, there has never been an historic preservation plan or a citywide survey of historic resources. There was no historic preservation component of the 1960 Comprehensive Plan because, at the time, historic preservation as a field of activity and public policy was just emerging. Although since that time plans have been made for Center City that included historic preservation concepts (the 1988 Center City Plan in particular) and plans have been made for many neighborhoods, no new comprehensive plan or independent preservation plan has been created.

Equally surprising, no citywide survey of historic resources has ever been undertaken. According to a report prepared for the Preservation Alliance by the Cultural Resources Consulting Group, only 4% of the properties in the city have ever been evaluated for their historic significance. Data about historic resources in Philadelphia is woefully inadequate for setting preservation priorities and integrating historic preservation into planning and development decisions and neighborhood revitalization.

Recognizing these issues, the Preservation Alliance began in 2006 to explore the idea of creating a preservation plan for Philadelphia and undertaking a citywide survey of historic resources. A research study of preservation planning and survey work in other cities, under the direction of Randall Mason of the Graduate Program in Historic Preservation of the University of Pennsylvania, found that there were many preservation planning and survey efforts underway. Of particular interest was the citywide survey being planned for Los Angeles, with funding from the Getty Foundation, and the Charleston SC preservation plan.

This research regarding other preservation planning efforts suggested that a preservation plan for Philadelphia should have two principal components: 1) a strategic vision for the future, with strategic actions to achieve that vision, and 2) a citywide survey of historic resources. In 2008, with grants from the Heritage Philadelphia Program of the Pew Center for Arts and Heritage, the Barra Foundation and the William Penn Foundation, the Preservation Alliance organized a consulting team and partnerships with the Philadelphia

Historical Commission and the Philadelphia City Planning Commission and began a first phase of work on these two ideas.

This report describes a strategic vision for historic preservation in Philadelphia in 2020 and actions necessary to achieve that vision. A separate report summarizes the work undertaken to develop and test a methodology for conducting a citywide survey, guided by historic context statements. Both summary reports are supported by a number of independent reports produced by the consulting team.

This document is intended as a basis for discussion. The Preservation Alliance and its partners in this effort will continue to consult, adjust and improve on the Strategic Vision even as parts of it are beginning to be implemented over the next couple years. New partners and sources of energy and resources are a welcomed and necessary part of this process.

This report contains the following sections and is supported by the following independent reports:

- Part One: Preservation planning in other cities*
- Part Two: Why is a Strategic Vision needed? Relationship to other Activities*
- Part Three: Assessment of current state of historic preservation*
- Part four: A Strategic Vision and Strategic Initiatives*
- Part Five: Recommendations for Next Steps*

*Appendix*

Survey of Citywide Preservation Planning in American Cities, Graduate Program in Historic Preservation, University of Pennsylvania

*Supporting Reports*

Focused Conversations, Heritage Consulting Inc.

Follow-Up Focus Conversations, Heritage Consulting Inc.

Summary of Online Survey, Survey Monkey

Economic Impact of Historic Preservation in Philadelphia, 1998-2008, Econsult, Inc.

## **PART ONE: PRESERVATION PLANNING IN OTHER CITIES**

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When the Preservation Alliance began to explore the idea of a preservation plan for Philadelphia it was clear that a survey of historic resources would be a necessary component of such a plan. However, it was not clear what form a “plan” itself should take, whether as an independent plan for preservation or as a component of a new comprehensive plan. The City’s 1960 Comprehensive Plan was primarily a land use plan later supported by more detailed plans for key districts such as Center City and West Philadelphia. From the outset it seemed that a preservation plan should not just be a document stating that preservation is a good idea and listing the sites and districts of the city to be preserved. **A plan should articulate a vision for the role of historic preservation in the city’s future—a role in economic development, neighborhood revitalization, and the accommodation of new activities and needs—and elaborate on strategies for achieving that vision.**

In order to broaden the understanding of what a 21<sup>st</sup> century preservation plan might be Randall Mason of the University of Pennsylvania Graduate Program in Historic Preservation, conducted a survey of preservation planning in the United States. (See Appendix A.) The key idea emerging from this survey was that the more interesting preservation plans were ones that were aimed at better integration of historic preservation with broader planning efforts and development activities. This included not only integration with comprehensive and neighborhood planning, but a re-examination of regulatory structure to include both revision of preservation ordinances and the inclusion of historic preservation objectives in new zoning codes.

One further idea emerged from reviewing the plans of other cities. Most addressed policies about historic resources and about public policies. But few addressed the role of the non-profit preservation community in their city or education and community engagement to develop a constituency for preservation. This seemed a clear deficiency and one that needed to be considered in a plan for Philadelphia.

The approaches and deficiencies found in examining these other planning efforts encouraged the Alliance and its consultants to take a broad view of what a preservation plan might be and to deliberately include ideas about education, public engagement and organizational capacity.

## **PART TWO: WHY IS A PRESERVATION PLAN NEEDED? RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER ACTIVITIES**

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In a city with such an abundant inventory of historic resources as Philadelphia, a preservation plan would obviously help to establish priorities for the designation and protection of historic landmarks and districts. Philadelphia has such wealth of historic

resources that it would be possible to list 50,000 properties on the Philadelphia Register and designate 50 local historic districts. However, it is unlikely that resources would be available to support the permitting process generated by the listing of such a large number of resources. Setting priorities is difficult because there is insufficient information to know which are the most important resources and districts to protect or how historic districts and landmarks fit into a large vision of the growth and development of the city. A first reason why a preservation plan is needed is to help establish priorities for what needs to be protected and preserved.

Priorities for preservation also need to be examined in relation to new development and to other changes shaping the city economically, socially, environmentally and culturally. The city must be able to adapt to new and changing needs, not every place can or should be preserved exactly as it is.

In addition to assistance in setting priorities a preservation plan could help address such other issues as an often negative and inaccurate perception about the historic preservation field, the lack of capacity of preservation organizations and their inability to improve due to lack of resources, and a growing realization that historic preservation contributes a lot to the quality of life in Philadelphia.

However, there are three specific factors that suggest why a preservation plan is needed now.

#### **A. COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING**

The City Planning Commission intends to create a new comprehensive plan for the city and new district plans. It envisions historic preservation being an explicit component of a new comprehensive plan. Its general view is that a new comprehensive plan will not be a land use plan as was the case in 1960, but will take more of the form of a policy statement and vision for the future, with long term and short term strategies to achieve that vision. The City Planning Commission further sees preservation as not simply a function of the Historical Commission, but one that should pervade many areas of city government.

Clearly, it is important for historic preservation to be represented in a new comprehensive plan for the city. Since the City Planning Commission is just beginning the development of an approach to a comprehensive plan, now is the appropriate time for the historic preservation community to develop its ideas and contribute them to the City Planning Commission's work.

#### **B. ZONING REFORM**

The City has also made a commitment to reforming the current zoning code. A zoning Code Commission has been established, consultants and staff hired and it is anticipated that a new code will be presented to City Council by the end of 2010. One of the key ideas that have emerged from public discussions about zoning reform is the desire to create a code that will help to preserve the existing character of Philadelphia, particularly at the

neighborhood level. Such a code would be of great benefit to historic presentation. Recent work on zoning reform in Denver, Colorado, has suggested that certain types of “form-based” zoning codes can be helpful to historic preservation and provide for strategic relationships between zoning, historic districts and conservation districts. The implementation of a new code through a neighborhood based re-mapping program would also benefit from historic data about neighborhoods generated by a citywide survey of historic resources.

### **C. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

In 1999, the Preservation Alliance commissioned a report of the economic impact of historic preservation in Philadelphia. This was part of an effort to encourage public policy makers to view historic preservation as a more important area of interest than merely preserving distinctive architecture. As a component of the current work on a preservation plan, the Alliance commissioned Econsult, Inc. to update this previous report for the period from 1998 to 2008. Their report concluded that over the ten year period over \$4.7 Billion dollars had been spent on historic preservation activities generating over \$70 million in tax revenues to the city and over \$257 million in tax revenues to the Commonwealth.

While the study examined such activities as heritage tourism and the benefits of the film industry, it was clear that the economic benefits of historic preservation are closely linked to a variety of different forms of real estate development and the construction and permanent jobs generated by that activity. For the most part, these economic benefits have been achieved through the actions of individual private developers rather through a deliberate strategy to use historic preservation to support economic development. However, in instances where historic preservation has been the deliberate focus of economic development policy the results have been impressive. The designation of Old City as a National Register District and of Main Street in Manayunk made the rehabilitation of properties in those areas eligible for federal investment tax credits. This led to the transformation of Old City into the vibrant urban neighborhood it is today and to the revitalization of Main Street. The creation of a 10-year tax abatement for existing properties in 1997 led to the rehabilitation of older buildings for nearly 7,000 units of housing in and adjacent to Center City. Clearly, historic preservation has the potential to be a significant factor in the economic development of the city and a preservation plan would help to guide such efforts.

## **PART THREE: ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT STATE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION**

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A variety of different approaches were used to obtain views about the current state of historic preservation, its strengths and areas in need of improvement. Focused conversations and interviews engaged a broad cross section of individuals in architecture, planning, community development, preservation, real estate development and public policy. An online survey provided insights into concerns and priorities about preservation

and also provided a perspective on the type of individuals in Philadelphia for whom preservation is an important concern.

Summaries of these information gathering activities are contained in separate reports on the *Focused Conversations*, *Follow-Up conversations* and the *Online Survey*. However, it is useful to briefly outline the key ideas from these information-gathering efforts.

#### **A. CITY PLANNING COMMISSION PRESERVATION ROUNDTABLE (2007)**

- 75% to 80% of the city is already built out in a desirable form. The primary issue is how to retain this character and make sure that new construction in those areas augments the existing character.
- “Development” is often understood to mean only new construction; it needs to combine the idea of new and preserving existing.
- Preservation should be used as a stronger tool for commercial corridor revitalization—not just individual properties, but urban form.
- Regulations such as zoning need to be re-shaped to reflect an emphasis on preserving neighborhood character. A new zoning code should promote preservation, not just regulate it.
- There needs to be greater government support for preservation in making development decisions.
- Existing incentives should be retained and new incentives established to promote preservation.

#### **B. ONLINE SURVEY**

- 366 persons responded to the online survey in 2008-09; 51% were female, 49% male; 90% were Caucasian
- Respondents identified their preservation interests as being the city as a whole, Center City and then specific neighborhoods such as Old City, the Northeast and Northwest.
- The most often mentioned preservation success was Society Hill. Other successes identified individual historic buildings.
- The primary reason for being interested in historic preservation was the desire to sustain the city’s built heritage for future generations.
- Respondents felt that preservation had been most effective in the areas of preserving neighborhood character and regulating changes to historic buildings.
- Respondents felt that preservation had not been effective in the areas of public education, providing financial support to homeowners, and for commercial corridor revitalization.
- Challenges to preservation included the impact of new development, lack of support and the cost of historic preservation, and lack of public awareness and education. In order for preservation to be more effective public education and community engagement were considered to be the greatest needs.
- Important issues for Philadelphia as a whole included aging infrastructure, sustainability, transportation, zoning and protecting neighborhood character.

## C. INTERVIEWS

- The preservation community lacks a broad vision; preservation is narrowly conceived and often focuses on details rather than larger issues.
- Preservation decision-making often seems uncertain and subjective with conflicting points of view from public agencies engaged in preservation and development decisions.
- There is a need to give greater attention to neighborhoods, not just to individual historic landmarks.
- While there are opportunities for alignment with other planning and development fields (affordable housing, community development, environment/ sustainability) the preservation community needs to strengthen itself first.

## D. FOCUSED CONVERSATIONS AND COMMUNITY MEETINGS

By far the most comprehensive comments came from the Focused Conversations and from information gathered in the Preservation Alliance's general meetings with community organizations. These comments addressed the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that key participants in historic preservation community and closely associated fields perceive in the current situation.

### 1. Strengths of Historic Preservation in Philadelphia

- *An active historic preservation community.* Philadelphia has many organizations with long traditions of stewardship of historic resources. The result of this work is a legacy of sites and buildings that continue to define and nourish the city's identity.
- *A rich array of historical and architectural resources.* The collection of resources reflects the city's political history, its social evolution from leading colonial town to industrial "workshop of the world," and a leader in the urban renewal movement of the mid-20th century. In virtually all periods Philadelphia was an important center of architectural design.
- *Reputation as an "historic city" that preserves important sites.* Philadelphians take pride in the history of the city and are actively engaged in preservation of historic sites and neighborhoods. This enables visitors to experience a well-preserved and well-interpreted urban environment.
- *Well-established legal, administrative and organizational structures for preservation.* The Philadelphia Historical Commission is long-established as a separate governmental agency, dating back to 1955. The authority to create both historic districts and conservation districts provides the key tools to preserve the character of distinctive neighborhoods. In addition, there are numerous nonprofit organizations that manage historic sites and advocate for preservation.

- *A recent revitalized interest in historic preservation.* Within recent years there has been a revitalized interest in historic preservation represented by both public and non-profit efforts. The Philadelphia City Planning Commission's *Row House Manual* draws attention to the potential of the rowhouse as a 21<sup>st</sup> century resource. Partners for Sacred Places' Philadelphia Regional Fund provides valuable training and preservation grants to religious institutions. Historic Germantown unites the efforts of a number of historic sites and engages public schools with those sites. The Preservation Alliance's Old House Fair, homeowner workshops and grants to low and moderate-income homeowners provide encouragement and resources for maintaining individual historic properties. Through the Preservation Alliance's efforts there has also been a renewed interest in creating historic districts and adding key individual properties to the Philadelphia Register. The Alliance has also made special efforts to reach out African American communities.

## 2. Weaknesses of Historic Preservation in Philadelphia

- *Lack of broad public support for historic preservationists across racial, geographic, and socio-economic lines.* The preservation community does not reflect the demographics of the larger city well; it is dominated by wealthier, professional, largely white residents of Center City and selected neighborhoods. As a result preservation is still viewed as an "elite" activity of interest to only a small part of the city's population.
- *Geographical imbalance.* Historic preservation attention is focused on Center City and only a few other areas that are designated as historic districts. There is less attention to preserving the character of or historic resources in other neighborhoods, especially those neighborhoods that have experienced population loss and disinvestment.
- *Reactive approach to preservation.* Preservation advocacy reacts to threats facing historic buildings with less emphasis on proactive measures to preserve landmarks and neighborhoods.
- *Weak arguments for supporting preservation over new development.* Preservationists lack forceful and compelling arguments to counter proposals where new construction threatens historic resources. Economic arguments for preservation are a challenge, partly because success is measured primarily in dollars and in a very short-term outlook. Stronger, more robust arguments appealing to the long-term economic and cultural benefits of preservation are too seldom heard.
- *Lack of coordination and capacity among historic preservation organizations.* There are a great many organizations engaged in historic preservation activities in Philadelphia from the National Park Service down to non-profit and volunteer organizations managing house museums. However, there is little coordination and cooperation among these organizations. Many non-profit organizations have

problems with organizational capacity and lack both adequate operating and capital funding.

- *Lack of engagement with other organizations and fields.* Preservation organizations are generally unrelated to the larger non-profit community, to community development corporations engaged in neighborhood revitalization or commercial corridor revitalization, or to organizations concerned with environmental or sustainability issues.
- *Lack of comprehensive information about the city's historic resources.* The absence of a unified, integrated, comprehensive information base about the city's historic resources leads to difficulties in establishing priorities and predicting problem areas.
- *Lack of local-government commitment, capacity and resources.* Historic preservation has lacked strong support from recent Philadelphia mayors and from City Council members. The city government itself lacks a "preservation ethic" for its own resources. The Philadelphia Historical Commission lacks capacity and barely has enough resources to keep up with current demands on its staff. Moreover, the Commission has inadequate resources to introduce appropriate computer based technology to streamline its processes and maintain its records.
- *Few local historic or conservation districts or incentives.* Philadelphia's small number of historic districts vis-à-vis other major cities and lack of conservation districts makes it difficult to maintain community character. There is a lack of incentives for preservation that would encourage individuals or neighborhoods to create historic districts.
- *Preservation is influenced by the larger economic and demographic factors shaping the city.* The population of Philadelphia has been shrinking in the last fifty years. Shrinking has particular effects on the geography of development and preservation across the city. It highlights the realities of abandonment in some places and concentration of development in other places. Economic development increases the pressure to tear down and undermine the existing built environment and historic resources in areas where market strength and potential is perceived. In other areas population decline and disinvestment threaten historic resources leading to neglect or demolition.

### **3. Opportunities for Historic Preservation in Philadelphia**

- *Popular importance of neighborhood "character."* Residents across the city identify with the character of their neighborhoods more readily than with "historic preservation" or "historic landmarks" per se. This concern with preservation of neighborhood character has been a central theme at the City Planning Commission's *Imagining Philadelphia* meetings and at community meetings of the Zoning Code

Commission as well as outreach efforts by the Preservation Alliance and its consultants.

- *Proposed reforms in planning and zoning.* Efforts to reform zoning, renew the city-planning infrastructure, and create a citywide sustainability agenda are underway. All of these efforts present opportunities to integrate preservation into larger public policies.
- *Innovative existing programs to build on.* There are many innovative preservation programs underway that could be expanded to have greater impact. These include the religious property programs of Partners for Sacred Places, the coordination and education programs of Historic Germantown, the Preservation Alliance's neighborhood preservation programs and African American initiative, and the innovative programs of the University Historical Society to name only a few.
- *The recent economic downturn.* The recession should have a salutary effect on preservation by reducing market-driven threats to historic buildings and making investment in existing assets more desirable.

#### **4. Threats to Historic Preservation in Philadelphia**

- *Other needs of the city are becoming more acute.* As fiscal, social, political and other issues continue to demand public attention and draw down government resources and energy, little attention or funding will be left for preservation.
- *The current economic recession.* The current recession has brought most real estate development to a halt. Property owners may decide that the cost of preserving historic properties is too great and may seek permits for demolition or defer maintenance and investment. Individual homeowners may not have resources to devote to property maintenance.
- *Marginal status of historic preservation.* Historic preservation continues to be marginalized in discussions of the city's future and minimized as a way to strengthen the city and its neighborhoods in the short term. Preservation is not widely regarded as a useful part of economic development strategies.
- *Isolated nature of preservation activity.* Historic preservation continues to be isolated as a concern distinct from planning, design, economic development and the city's overall social well being.

#### **SUMMING UP THE CURRENT SITUATION**

These information-gathering efforts indicate that the preservation community does not view a "preservation plan" as merely being a document that identifies sites and potential historic districts, nor a document that solely addressed the policies of city government and public agencies. Rather all of the discussions focus on broader issues of public education

and coordination of skills and resources. The following eight ideas emerge as primary influences on the content of a plan or vision for the future:

- ❖ A large portion of the built environment of the city is of appropriate scale and character. These areas need to be identified and policies adopted to preserve their character. Zoning reform is key to creating citywide policies that will preserve existing character and insure new development augments that character.
- ❖ Historic preservation needs a broader base of support, one that includes residents from all sections of the city and representative of all of its populations. The development of such a constituency should begin through the engagement of neighborhood organizations and homeowners.
- ❖ Public education is essential to develop a broader preservation constituency. In addition to engaging neighborhood organizations and residents in learning about the history of their communities, students in all educational institutions in Philadelphia—including public high schools— should be offered a course on the history of the physical development of the city that uses the physical evidence of that history as a learning resource. Such educational efforts could help develop an ethic of stewardship—a desire to pass on to future generations the heritage of the distinctive city that has been passed down to us.
- ❖ Preservation needs to be understood as a critical component of economic development and of sustainability. Explicit economic development strategies based on preservation could access funding through federal and state historic tax credits and help revitalize key economic areas such as commercial corridors. The concept that “the greenest building is an existing one” provides the basis for a strong preservation component in sustainability plans and policies.
- ❖ Much better coordination and cooperation is need within the non-profit preservation community with a clear sense of partnership roles with one another, with public agencies and with organizations in related fields.
- ❖ Historic preservation deserves a higher priority in city government, in public policy and development decision-making beginning with the mayor and City Council. Preservation needs to be an integral part of city planning, economic development and policies for sustainability and the creative economy.
- ❖ Preservation of the character of Philadelphia neighborhoods is a high priority for city residents. Preservation of the institutions and services that support neighborhoods, themselves often located in historic properties, is equally important.

## **PART FOUR: THE STRATEGIC VISION AND STRATEGIC INITIATIVES**

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### **Introduction**

A vision for the role of historic preservation in shaping the future of Philadelphia must be sufficiently long range to promote ambitious ideas and inspire Philadelphians to strive to achieve them. At the same time a vision must not be of such a distant future that its goals seem unattainable. A vision for 2020—approximately ten years hence—balances long-term planning and achievable results.

This vision is based on two overarching ideas that emerged from the information gathering sessions: first, the development of a **stewardship** approach to the historic character of the city; and second, and a focus on **preserving community character**.

### **A Stewardship Approach To Preservation**

A majority of respondents to the online survey indicated that their reason for being interested in historic preservation was the desire to pass on to future generations the heritage of a distinctive city that had been passed down to them. This is the essence of the concept of stewardship. Stewardship requires a long-range view and the understanding that our enjoyment of the environment in which we live is temporary and our responsibility is to pass it on in better condition than we received it.

An attitude of stewardship applies at all levels of our society, but it must begin with political and civic leaders, and with major institutions. The mayor and members of City Council can provide the leadership through their public statements, public policies and allocation of the City's resources. Educational and cultural institutions can demonstrate leadership in the maintenance and preservation of their historic facilities and include concepts of stewardship in their educational programs. Neighborhood organizations and individual homeowners can demonstrate stewardship as advocates for the character of their neighborhood and in maintenance of their own properties

A pervasive attitude of stewardship of the historic resources of the city requires a broad educational program to increase public awareness of the value of the city's historic character and its individual historic resources. While most Philadelphians clearly value the city's history and its historic landmarks, many associate these values with the major landmarks of interest to tourists and don't always appreciate the equally important value of neighborhoods and local landmarks that embody cultural and ethnic history. These resources need to be clearly identified and supported by a broad educational program at the neighborhood level if a citywide stewardship attitude is to be created.

This concept of stewardship is broader than the typical idea of historic preservation. Stewardship does not amount to simply preventing unwanted change to already recognized historic resources; it also requires new development that enhances the value of historic places and recognition that a place's value is determined from within as well as by

citywide standards. It will require the preservation community to clearly articulate its values and to relate those to the values of new partners and embrace concepts of stewardship that encompass the values of those partners as well.

## **Preserving Community Character**

In all discussions of zoning remapping or imagining a future Philadelphia as the basis of a comprehensive plan, the preservation of the existing character of the city—particularly at a neighborhood level—has emerged as a high priority. Participants in these discussions are more comfortable using the phrase “preserving community character” to the term historic preservation, but the underlying concept is the same.

“Character” is defined by a combination of factors—the building types, uses, development patterns, and other physical characteristics of a neighborhood (such as predominant building materials, urban design features, architectural styles, landscape elements such as parks, lawns or street trees). These factors are legacies, strongly shaped by the historical period in which a neighborhood was originally developed. They also bear the marks of subsequent periods of the neighborhood’s evolution. And they are apparent and meaningful to contemporary communities as the most recent inhabitants of Philadelphia’s historic places.

It is incumbent on the preservation community to embrace this populist definition of historic preservation and unabashedly take up the cause of protecting “community character”...going beyond the traditional focus of preservation on architectural landmarks to protect aspects of community character deriving from urban patterns, uses of buildings and streets, and landmarks of cultural and ethnic identity. A focus on preserving the character of Philadelphia neighborhoods will allow the historic preservation community to connect with the quality-of-life issues that are important in the popular mind and connect with other planning, zoning and development agendas that focus on neighborhoods.

### **A. THE VISION**

Actions during the next ten years would be designed to carry out activities that will allow the following statements to be true about historic preservation in 2020:

- **Preservation of the distinctive physical character of Philadelphia and its neighborhoods is widely valued and supported by all segments of the Philadelphia community.**
- Governmental bodies, civic institutions and community organizations across the city value neighborhood character, understand its history, and are actively engaged in stewardship.
- Residents value the character of their neighborhoods and individual properties, and actively maintain their historic character.

- Historic and cultural significant sites, events and people of all racial and ethnic populations are recognized and honored for their contribution to the history and character of the city.
- **Historic landmarks and neighborhood character are identified and protected through a coordinated system of zoning, historic districts and conservation districts.**
- The citywide survey of historic resources is complete.
- The zoning code is rewritten in a manner that recognizes the historic character of the city's built form and is designed to preserve it. Zoning remapping of all neighborhoods is complete and local character incorporated into new zoning plans.
- Neighborhoods with special character are designated as conservation districts or historic districts with special design guidelines in addition to the zoning code.
- Archaeological resources are acknowledged as cultural resources warranting protection and interpretation.
- **Public and non-profit organizations work cooperatively to educate, preserve, protect and manage historic resources.**
- The complementary roles of public agencies and non-profit organizations are defined and coordinated to achieve common preservation objectives.
- An attitude of stewardship is found in all government agencies.
- Public agencies and non-profit organizations provide educational programs about the physical environment and its history.
- Public schools, colleges and universities educate students about the history of the city and use the physical forms that embody that history as learning resources.
- A well-coordinated network of historic-resource-related organizations exists and forges partnerships with allied interest groups and agencies in fields such as affordable housing, community development and sustainability
- **Preservation of landmarks and neighborhoods is an important component of planning, economic development and sustainability policies and programs.**
- Public planning and development agencies and citywide organizations are aware of historic resources and consider them as new projects are planned.
- The heritage tourism industry encourages visitors to explore broader aspects of the city's history.
- The city's arts and culture community encompasses preservation.

- Preservation is a leading factor in economic development through adaptive reuse of historic properties, including industrial properties no longer suitable for that function, and revitalization of commercial corridors.
- The existing physical fabric of the city is a central component of sustainability plans and policies.
- **Adequate funding is available to support preservation activities and organizations.**
- Expanded City and state financial incentives are provided for preservation and adaptive reuse of historic properties
- The City maximizes the use of state and federal preservation funds, and facilitates developer access to National Register district designation and its associated tax benefits
- Stable funding is available for the preservation field’s core institutions, such as the Philadelphia Historical Commission, publicly relevant historical sites and museums, and non-profit organizations.

## **B. ACTION INITIATIVES**

The actions necessary to achieve the vision for historic preservation in 2020 consist of four initiatives that span the spectrum of issues and opportunities represented in the vision statements. The four initiatives are intended to be a network of connected and coordinated activities—each one related to and reinforcing the others. Progress on each of the initiatives is therefore expected to proceed in parallel with the others. The four initiatives are:

- INFORMATION, EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION
- NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION
- ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY
- ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY AND MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

### **1. INFORMATION, EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION**

The leading initiative aims to build a base of information about the city’s historic resources and to build a broad constituency of support through educational programs and improved communication about preservation priorities and means. This information initiative therefore consists of two distinct efforts: a long-term project to gather intelligence about the city’s historic assets, in the form of surveys and context statements; and an assertive and creative educational and communications strategy to articulate the preservation message to officials, fellow professionals, and the general public.

#### **a. Information Initiatives**

- Undertake a citywide survey of historic resources guided by historic context statements describing the history of the physical development of the city, its

neighborhoods and factors that have shaped growth and change. The process for such a survey is described in a separate summary report on Historic Context Statements and Survey.

- Engage community organizations and residents in providing information about historic resources and landmarks of their neighborhoods, especially those that reflect popular culture and the history of racial and ethnic populations, and in carrying out certain aspects of the survey itself.
- Make information about the history of the development of the city's neighborhoods and the architectural landmarks that embody that history widely known via websites and publications, including neighborhood architectural guides.
- Create a coordinated resource center through interconnected websites to provide comprehensive information about the history of the built environment, designated landmarks and districts, resources and regulations for preservation. This system of resource centers could emerge from a coordination of such current websites as that of the Preservation Alliance (and Preserve Philadelphia), the Historical Society of Pennsylvania's PhilaPlace, the Athenaeum of Philadelphia's GeoHistory site, and a reactivated Philadelphia Historical Commission website.
- Establish a publicly accessible database that is a repository for all data collected in the citywide survey that is integrated with City property data files.

#### **b. Education Initiatives**

- Develop a broad marketing campaign to instill the concept of stewardship of historic resources and character among all components of the Philadelphia community.
- Encourage public schools, colleges and universities to include a required course on the history of the city and use the physical environment that embodies that history as a learning resource.
- Support neighborhood historical societies and encourage the formation of neighborhood history committees in all neighborhoods of the city.
- As historic context statements are developed for each section of the city publicize them in local media and by engaging community organizations in history fairs, tours and other events.
- Provide educational opportunities for elected officials to learn about the historic assets of the districts they represent.

### **c. Communication Initiatives**

- Improve communication within the preservation community by continuing “roundtable” discussions of preservation organization leaders, by annual focused conversations of a wide range of preservation and community interests as was begun for this planning process in 2008 or by convening an annual or bi-annual preservation conference to stimulate communication within the preservation field.
- Establish a Historic Districts Council to advocate for and promote local and National Register districts and as a network to share common issues and concerns.
- Create an annual report on accomplishments in the preservation field, on the status of the citywide survey and implementation of ideas in this preservation plan.

## **2. Neighborhood Revitalization**

The underlying goals of stewardship and preserving the existing character of the city require a stronger focus on the role of historic preservation in neighborhood revitalization. Historic preservation should reach all parts of the city. All parts of the city are not alike, and the role of historic resources and their preservation will change from neighborhood to neighborhood. A focus on neighborhood preservation builds on the efforts of long-standing community-based planning and development organizations. It also engages residents, community leaders and other stakeholders from throughout the city in historic preservation and increases the base of support for and involvement with historic preservation.

### **a. Neighborhood Preservation Initiatives**

- Form an ongoing, collaborative working relationship among the Philadelphia City Planning Commission, the Philadelphia Historical Commission and the preservation community to incorporate an attitude of stewardship and preservation of community character into a new comprehensive plan, new zoning code and a zoning remapping program.
- Organize an annual or bi-annual conference on neighborhood preservation similar to that begun by the Preservation Alliance in 2008 that brings together public and non-profit organizations active in community development, commercial corridor revitalization, historic preservation, sustainability and economic development to share concerns, accomplishments and opportunities.
- Encourage the City Planning Commission to identify the distinctive physical characteristics of each neighborhood as part of its zoning remapping and incorporate those characteristics into the zoning plan. For neighborhoods with a

more distinctive or cohesive architectural character develop more specific character plans to serve as the basis for design guidelines for neighborhood conversation district designations.

- Obtain funding to develop a model “neighborhood character study,” in partnership with the City Planning Commission, to assist with zoning remapping.
- Encourage the creation of new historic districts of varying sizes where concentrations of resources or uniqueness of character justifies such districts.
- Provide small seed grants to encourage neighborhood organizations to develop preservation-oriented projects that engage community residents in a broader understanding and appreciation of the history and resources of their neighborhood in a manner that allows for sharing of such knowledge with other neighborhood organizations, residents and visitors.

### **3. Economic Development and Sustainability**

In the coming decade, Philadelphia will continue to face considerable economic development and fiscal challenges such as the need to stimulate real-estate development, maintain and create jobs, improve housing options, and provide city services while managing the tax burden on residents, businesses, and workers. Econsult’s 2008 report on the economic impact of historic preservation outlines the ways in which historic preservation activity—taken by itself—contributes directly and positively to the city and regional economy. To take greater advantage of the actual and potential economic benefits of historic preservation specific strategies and incentives need to be in place.

At the same time, Philadelphia, like other American cities, will strive to place a greater emphasis on sustainability and the conservation of natural resources. Historic preservation has a role to place in this as well. Maintenance and adaptive re-use of historic properties is itself a sustainable activity and should be explicitly reflected as such in the City’s sustainability policies, plans and incentives. However, sustainability and conservation of natural resources needs to go further by incorporating energy saving design solutions in historic properties including green roofs, weatherization of individual homes, and use of solar energy where feasible and appropriate.

#### **a. Economic Development Initiatives**

- Publish an annual report on the economic benefits of historic preservation and the city’s historic assets that includes the benefits from real estate activities, heritage tourism, increased property values in historic districts and other factors.
- Increase the number of National Register Districts thereby making more properties eligible for state and federal historic tax credits. For each district

create and make accessible to real estate developer and investors an inventory of buildings suitable for adaptive re-use and eligible for tax credits.

- Include information on incentives, grants and financing for historic preservation as a component of the web-based resource center on historic preservation.
- Create a stronger engagement between historic preservation and commercial corridor revitalization including designation of appropriate commercial corridors as National Register Districts so as to make the benefits of federal tax credits available.
- Maintain and expand incentives for historic preservation and preservation of community character including the following:
  - Retain tax abatement for conversion of older buildings to residential use and for rehabilitation of single-family residences, with more favorable terms than for new construction.
  - Support continuation of and expansion of federal tax credits for historic preservation.
  - Support a state tax credit for preservation of investment properties and grants for rehabilitation of historic owner-occupied properties.
  - Provide incentives in the form of public improvements to neighborhoods designated as historic districts or conservation districts.
  - Continue to provide the ability to donate preservation easements and obtain tax benefits.
  - Continue to provide grants for historic preservation to low and moderate-income property owners.

#### **b. Sustainability Initiatives**

- Develop a partnership between agencies providing weatherization grants and assistance to homeowners and preservation organizations to insure that sustainability efforts respect historic character.
- Encourage public utilities such as PECO to give special consideration to energy efficient approaches for historic properties.
- Support the creation of simple guidelines by the Philadelphia Historical Commission to allow sustainable alterations to be made and approved for properties in historic districts in an efficient manner.
- Encourage city government to demonstrate creative sustainability solutions for publicly owned historic properties.

#### **4. Organizational Capacity and Management Systems.**

Implementation of a comprehensive program to preserve historic resources and neighborhoods is dependent on having organizations with the capacity to preserve and manage historic sites and public agencies with appropriate regulatory procedures and the resources to implement them. Both non-profit and public agencies need improvements in capacity and management systems. Regulation needs to be simplified to ease the burden on such agencies as the Philadelphia Historical Commission and lend clarity and credibility to the preservation process from the perspective of owners. Non-profit organizations managing historic properties need to explore cooperative programming, marketing and shared services.

##### **a. Organizational Capacity Initiatives**

- Provide adequate resources for the Philadelphia Historical Commission to support and expand staff and operating programs. The Historical Commission's capacity is key to the entire historic preservation system. Without the ability to receive and organize data, review and approve permits for historic districts, and engage in public education many of the items in this vision plan will be difficult to accomplish.
- Provide capacity building assistance for non-profit organizations using such existing entities as LaSalle's non-profit center, Leadership Inc. or by capacity building grants from the Pew Center for Arts and Heritage. Special consideration is needed for organizations managing smaller historic sites such as those related to African American history.
- Explore opportunities for shared services or the provision of common administrative services for the large number of house museums and historic sites in Philadelphia.
- Provide core operating support for historic preservation organizations responsible for citywide initiatives, long term planning or coordination functions.

##### **b. Management Systems Initiatives**

- Philadelphia's historic preservation has not been comprehensively re-examined since 1984 and the Historical Commission's Rules and Regulations have not been comprehensively revised since their adoption in 1990 (with the exception of minor amendments in 1997). Each deserves to be re-examined and brought into compliance with preservation needs of today and a new relationship between zoning, historic districts and conservation districts.

- Revise the Conservation District Ordinance to address more broadly the issue of preservation of community character, not limited to new construction or solely to residential areas.
- Explore the management system used for historic property review by some other cities that establish a separate review process or separate review boards for districts and for individual landmarks.
- Develop regulations that incorporate archaeological into the range of regulated cultural resources that are preserved and protected.

## **PART FIVE: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT STEPS**

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The ability to proceed with the implementation of strategic activities is dependent on securing additional funding to continue the preservation plan project. Activities suggested for the remainder of 2009 are ones the Preservation Alliance feels it can undertake with existing staff and resources. Activities proposed for 2010 outline the priority issues for which the Preservation Alliance will seek funding. Activities for later years will be defined during 2010.

### **A. PHASE TWO: REMAINDER OF 2009**

- Distribute copies of the Strategic Vision report to participants in the discussion groups, to the Philadelphia City Planning Commission and the Philadelphia Historical Commission and get comments and suggestions.
- Form an advisory committee to assist with implementation of the strategic activities.
- Encourage individuals and organizations to participate in the fall community meetings expected to be held by the City Planning Commission and the Zoning Code Commission and to contribute ideas about historic preservation and preserving community character. Make the Strategic Vision report easily accessible on the Preserve Philadelphia website.
- Distribute the Historic Context Statement for Cluster #1 to the community organizations in the cluster and ask for comments and submission of photographs of historic resources.
- Distribute the Thematic Context Statements to historians from review and comment.
- Review and comment on materials distributed by the City Planning Commission and the Zoning Code Commission.
- Continue Preservation Alliance programs of workshops for homeowners, training and technical assistance for African American historic sites and religious organizations.

## **B. PHASE TWO: 2010**

### **1. INFORMATION, EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION**

#### **a. Information initiatives**

- Begin next phase of historic context statements and survey as outlined in implementation methodology in *Historic Context Statements and Survey Summary Report*.
- Encourage community organizations in neighborhood clusters to be studied in 2010 to submit photographs of historic resources and popular landmarks.
- Initiate discussions with the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Athenaeum of Philadelphia, and Philadelphia Historical Commission about coordination of websites to form a web-based preservation resource center.

#### **b. Education initiatives**

- Convene a meeting of representatives of public relations firms to develop ideas about a marketing campaign for historic preservation.
- Contact historians at schools, colleges and universities to see if a course on the history of the development of the city exists. Use existing materials or engage historians to create a curriculum for such a course that could be used by a number of educational institutions.
- Organize history fairs of events in the neighborhoods included in cluster studies in 2010.

#### **c. Communication initiatives**

- Organize preservation leaders roundtable.
- Convene at least one Focused Conversations meeting.
- Continue dialogue with City Planning, Historical Commission and Zoning Code Commission.

### **2. NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION**

#### **a. Neighborhood initiatives**

- Continue Preservation Alliance's Old House Fair, homeowner workshops and African American outreach program.
- Hold second neighborhood preservation conference fall 2010.
- Begin documentation process for one large and one small historic district.
- Expand program of small seed grants to community organizations to promote history and preservation projects.

### **3. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY**

#### **a. Economic development initiatives**

- Complete inventories for selected National Register Districts and make inventory list of buildings suitable for adaptive reuse with federal tax credits available to developers and investors.
- Support efforts to pass a state historic tax credit bill and obtain changes in federal legislation.
- Continue to promote easements in National Register Districts.

#### **b. Sustainability initiatives**

- Seek opportunities to introduce historic preservation considerations to agencies managing weatherization funding.

### **4. ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY AND MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS**

#### **a. Organizational capacity initiatives**

- Continue Preservation Alliance work with African American historic sites and Partners for Sacred Places work with religious congregations.
- Assist Historical Commission seek funding to maintain staff capacity.

#### **b. Management system initiatives**

- Assist the Historical Commission to begin a process to revise Rules and Regulations by providing a consultant to conduct background research (funded and initiated in 2009).
- Work with City Planning Commission and Historical Commission to revise Conservation District Legislation and promote one new conservation district.

## **CONCLUSION**

The confluence of a lull in real estate activity combined with City initiatives to create a new comprehensive plan and a new zoning code make this both an ideal and a critical time to initiate activities to advance a broad agenda of improvements in the historic preservation field in Philadelphia. The Strategic Vision for 2020 establishes ambitious goals, but ones that are appropriate to Philadelphia's position and significance as American's most historic city. The proposed initiatives have the potential to engage the entire public and non-profit preservation community and create new partnerships within the community as well as new relationships with other organizations.



Survey of Citywide Preservation  
Planning in American Cities

PREPARED BY RANDALL MASON  
FOR THE PRESERVATION ALLIANCE FOR GREATER  
PHILADELPHIA  
MAY 2008

# **SURVEY OF CITY-WIDE PRESERVATION PLANNING IN AMERICAN CITIES**

Prof. Randall Mason  
Graduate Program in Historic Preservation, University of Pennsylvania  
For the Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia

## **INTRODUCTION**

Many American cities have developed a thriving historic preservation infrastructure: robust historic preservation policies, a variety of organizations and agencies working to advance preservation, and any number of successful building-scale restoration projects and historic districts. Historic preservation activity has become a key ingredient of successful cities and city planning. Yet distinct, free-standing preservation plans—providing guidance for linking and expanding the different parts of this infrastructure—are rare. Too often, historic preservation planning is pursued as a separate activity, not linked to core planning and development functions, and relegated as an adjunct to urban planning policies dominated by economic development concerns.

The purpose of this report is to survey patterns and trends in preservation planning at the city-wide scale in U.S. cities. (A few Canadian cities were included, despite the different governmental structure and planning traditions in Canada.) It presents an overview of recent practice and draws on contemporary efforts to implement city-wide preservation planning in larger American cities. To collect data, information and personal contacts were sought via on-line searches, other desk research, academic literature, and interviews to identify cities undertaking city-wide preservation planning efforts.

## **THE IDEAL**

The ideal situation for citywide preservation planning—which rarely exists in all its aspects—is worth contemplating at the outset. Ideally, up-to-date physical survey and historical research provide a knowledge base about resources to preserve; a range of preservation planning and policy options are available to support actual preservation activity (historical designation/listing, design guidelines, area plans, financial incentives for rehabilitation, and so on ); and deliberate preservation planning organizes and integrates these two levels of preservation activity. Further, preservation planning ideally works hand-in-hand with the overarching planning, zoning, economic development and other built-environment functions of the city government. Preservation plans are not managed by historic preservation professionals alone: the work of government agencies is supported by politicians, a range of nonprofit organizations (preservation advocacy groups, community groups, educational and cultural institutions like museums and universities), and a knowledgeable public. Successful preservation plans enable continues economic growth and revitalization while also creating and sustaining the cultural benefits the are the core purpose of historic preservation.

While it is extremely difficult to pull together all these factors, a number of cities have made substantial progress toward this ideal. In nearly every large city, basic historic preservation functions are in place: a local preservation ordinance, district and landmark listings, an appointed commission with some staff, some survey, some kinds of integration of preservation into master plans or area plans. In a few cities, strategic plans with a strong base of knowledge and data have yielded much stronger results than a mere collection of individual preservation activities are likely to bring. Cities sampled in this survey included Charleston (SC), Los Angeles, San Francisco, Fort Worth, Phoenix, Kansas City, Seattle, and Salt Lake City (many others were investigated, but those listed here stood out as leaders).

What are the biggest obstacles to achieving the ideal? The primary obstacle is marshaling resources enough to build a strong base of information as well as support a strategic planning process among the many partners contributing to a city's preservation infrastructure. People, time, money and influence need to be dedicated to the purpose. Though preservation planning is not about survey for its own sake, nor is historic designation and protection an end in itself, surveys and historical research provide an essential base for any policies or decisions. Surveys are time and resource-intensive, and seldom keep up with the demand for information. At the same time, changing historical canons, public awareness and historic preservation methods highlight the need to make surveying and historical research an ongoing affair—not a one-time product.

The second substantial challenge for preservation planning at the city-wide scale is making connections between preservation and other urban planning, land-use regulation and governance activities—economic development, urban planning/zoning, community development and other processes. The danger for historic preservation planning is in being marginal and separated from the planning mainstream. In these instances preservation too often becomes an activity only for a preservationist audience. The goal of city-wide planning is broadening the audience and constituency of preservation. Preservation planning driven by survey alone, or concerned with isolated monuments or districts without being connected to overall decision-making about a city's economic development, public investment and urban form, is less effective. Cities with massive amount of survey data that is never consulted are a disappointment. When preservation planning is connected to the mainstreams of development and planning policy, the results are notable (consider Providence's College Hill or Philadelphia's Society Hill plans from the late 1950s, or the emergence of adaptively reused loft districts in most cities).

A preservation plan is not a document merely arguing the preservation is a good idea and listing the sites to be preserved. It should articulate a vision for the role of historic preservation in a city's future, and elaborate on strategies for achieving this vision. Historic preservation is just one among many "public goods" that city planning (writ larger) is intended to provide. (Some preservation plans explicitly describe the "public value" of preservation as a prelude to the policies, plans and projects they suggest to realize the public benefits of investing in historic preservation.) Going beyond advocacy, preservation plans take on the additional challenges of confronting trade-offs between economic development, community desires, environmental sensitivities and other public

goods. Preservation plans engage in the nitty-gritty of reconciling conflicting processes and integrating the work of preservation with the other planning measures necessary for urban growth and change. Such plans may take an advocacy ethic and prosecute it strongly, but they go beyond mere advocacy to specify modes and means of realistic implementation. They also abide by the basic city-planning logics of basing decision on research and analysis of options, and that public engagement results in better decisions.

## **WHAT KINDS OF PLANS ARE BEING DONE?**

Having sampled the 100 largest cities in the U.S. (as well as others that came to our attention), there are four types of city-wide preservation plans being done today: free-standing plans; chapters of comprehensive plans; efforts organized around neighborhood- or area-planning; and survey driven plans. (Arguably, a fifth type of plan exists, consisting of a city's variety of preservation efforts—surveys, histories, regulatory efforts, commissions, incentives, and the like—collectively referred to as “historic preservation plans.” Even more narrowly, some cities publish catalogs of surveyed buildings and call this a plan. This report does not focus on such plans, instead dwelling on more deliberate, forward-planning efforts.)

### Free-standing plans

Few cities have undertaken freestanding preservation plans: they are rare but not unknown. Less than a dozen examples exist, including Charleston (SC), Los Angeles, Fort Worth, and Salt Lake City. (Other large cities have extensive preservation infrastructure and strong preservation policies and processes, ongoing survey programs, and certain roles for preservation in the ongoing management of the city—New York and Chicago, for instance—without relying on preservation plans, per se. These cities are of less interest to this study specifically concerned with the tool of the city-wide preservation plan.)

It is worth noting that a few smaller cities have commissioned freestanding preservation plans, including: Waterloo, IA; Franklin, TN; Abingdon, VA. Methodologically, these plans marry a strategic approach (articulating a vision for the community's continuing emphasis on historic preservation as a local planning tool) with selective survey and historic context writing. A number of small cities in California and Texas have also formulated preservation plans, owing to state-level programs to help fund these activities. In practice, these plans tend to be straightforward summaries of local history, historic preservation tools and policies already in force (Burbank, CA, for example).

Stand-alone preservation plans demonstrate a higher level of commitment to preservation as part of a city's approach to planning and development—to its future. The driving forces behind such plans are strongly motivated, politically influential preservation constituencies within the communities. These preservation plans increasingly are designed to be strategic—that is, setting out a number of goals beyond survey and regulation, aimed at better integration of preservation with broader planning frameworks

and development activities. And the cities undertaking these plans are places with broadly recognized historic resources and long traditions of preservation/stewardship. Even when preservation plans are freestanding they need to be closely tied to existing planning structures and institutions in order to influence urban development.

### Comprehensive plan “chapters”

The majority of cities undertaking preservation planning pursue it as part of a comprehensive plan (Atlanta, for example). This takes the form of a “chapter” of the comprehensive plan—in some cases because it is recognized by political or planning authorities that historic resources are a significant aspects of planning/built environment issues; in other cases, because of state-level legal and policy requirements.

When historic preservation plans are simply folded into to comprehensive planning efforts, it is easy to under-value and undermine the contributions preservation makes to urban development. Even though a range of tools are available and a modest level of survey and designation are carried out, preservation remains on the sideline of debates over—and efforts to actively shape—the character of the city. Preservation runs the danger of warranting only pro forma mention, getting framed as an optional “amenity,” getting reduced to regulation, or traded off against other aspects of the plan.

### Neighborhood-driven or area-planning approaches

Some cities apply preservation as a community building and planning strategy, employing an approach to preservation planning aimed at strengthening communities and organized at the scale of the individual neighborhood. In many instances, the choice of which neighborhoods get preservation planning attention is fairly ad hoc—chosen opportunistically, rather than according to strict criteria. Surveying historic properties and writing context statements are regarded, in these cases, as part of a strategy of process of framing community goals and vision. In cities pursuing this model—examples include Seattle, San Francisco, Phoenix and Indianapolis—somewhat decentralized, neighborhood-level preservation plans are used to gradually extend the reach of preservation across the city. To different extents, these efforts are supported by citywide regulatory and contextual frameworks; while they may lack in strategic, city-wide vision, such efforts seem better suited to solving more immediate threats to historic communities. Arguably, this is a more pragmatic approach to preservation planning, particularly in a time when resources to mount preservation planning efforts are scarce, targeting areas under acute threat or where political leverage is greatest.

### Survey-driven plans

Though they were once the standard of preservation planning (in the mid-to-late 20<sup>th</sup> century), efforts driven by survey are more rare these days—partly because surveys are regarded as expensive, time-consuming undertakings; partly because the more ambitious outlook and sophistication of the preservation field’s leaders, these days, is more attuned to making an impact on the whole of the city (not just those precincts deemed “historic”

by consensus) which requires a strategic approach. In these cases, the plan revolves around a future-oriented vision of the city and the role historic buildings/places are desired to play in that future (generally, this role is conceived as a combination of both cultural/memorial/visual/identity-building functions as well as economic expectations held for redevelopment/revitalization).

Even in the most strategy-oriented plans, survey data still serves as a critical foundation for planning efforts. And some cities focus their resources on extending survey—or revising criteria for surveying and listing—because it is simply easier politically, pragmatically, and legally to build on the long-standing tools, policies and institutions. Explicit contexts—statements about the thematically important aspects of a place’s narrative, which essentially serve as a way to prioritize preservation attention—are more and more common. A context should be a critical, early part of the survey process. Creating context statements/studies are a prelude to survey is an increasingly common practice (San Francisco, Los Angeles, Charleston, and it is common in Canadian practice too). And this aligns very clearly with the push for more strategic preservation plans: context statements give preservation leaders and staff a more solid base on which to make decisions on the allocation of scarce resources (for survey, for investment, for manpower). Many surveys/registers are acknowledged to not be representative (vis-à-vis ethnic groups, historic periods, geographic areas of a city) and therefore in need of revision and updating. Carefully done context statements help reveal past biases and gaps.

(Baltimore presents another model of city-wide preservation planning. The Baltimore City Heritage Area, created in 2001 by the Mayor’s Office under the auspices of a state heritage areas program, constitutes an additional layer of the City government’s preservation planning activity. Heritage areas, as a type of preservation policy, do not rely on public ownership or regulation; rather, they are entrepreneurial, partnership-based strategies for integrating development and preservation efforts (often across political jurisdictions) to broaden public access to historic and natural resources (both for residents and visitors). The Commission for Historical & Architectural Preservation is the City’s lead agency for historic preservation survey, listing, and regulation; the Heritage Area complements these traditional preservation activities by organizing heritage development efforts (particularly tourism) taking advantage of the city’s historic resources and requiring extensive cooperation of private and public-sector partners.)

## **COMMON ELEMENTS OF CITY-WIDE PRESERVATION PLANS**

Cutting across the different approaches to organizing preservation planning, several common elements are shared by most of these recent efforts.

The basic historic preservation planning infrastructure is assumed to be in place: an ordinance and a few organizations (public and nonprofit). Further it is assumed that some level of survey, historical context, listing, and mechanisms for regulating listed properties exist.

Community participation is a part of most preservation plans, even though preservation plans are seen as mostly the province of professionals. What public involvement exists tends to be formulaic: public meetings and consultative committees drawn from civic leadership, political, and business circles. The urgent discussion about building a public constituency for historic preservation is too rarely heard or creatively approached.

Some preservation planning efforts are explicitly aimed at revising existing legislation, policies or regulations. In Fort Worth, for example, the revision of the preservation ordinance is a specific goal of the plan. Since many ordinances were created a generation ago (or more), it is sensible to think about revising them. Plans also commonly aim to expand the kinds of resources considered for listing and protection—the two most frequently cited kinds of resources are recent past/Modernist resources and places associated with ethnic histories. Vancouver, British Columbia, is undertaking a notable effort to “upgrade” and extend its historic properties list (“heritage register”) in both these directions. Because their list was last reviewed in 1986, they recognize that heritage priorities and interests have changed and are deliberately launching a multi-year, theme-based survey (beginning with post-1940s properties) aimed at bringing new and more-publicly relevant properties and districts in to the historic preservation planning regime the city already has firmly in place.

More and more often, specific efforts are made to articulate the economic benefits of historic preservation as part of the rationale for doing preservation planning. This is the most promising and prominent issue tying historic preservation to the mainstems of urban governance, and preservation plans, it follows, are pressed to link preservation efforts to direct economic benefits (profiting from preservation). Sometimes in the guise of protecting assets important for heritage tourism (Franklin, Charleston); in other cases citing the evidence supporting the idea that historic preservation regulation increases property values. In some cases, planning efforts are focused on making economic arguments for preservation and stimulating use of financial incentives.

## **KEY VARIABLES**

Looking across the kinds of citywide preservation planning efforts currently (or recently) being undertaken, and interviewing a variety of staff and consultants involved in devising some of the plans, seven key variables emerged. These variables are not promoted here as essential ingredients for successful preservation plans, but rather as issues addressed in some way by most efforts.

- Driving issue

Preservation plans are motivated usually by a driving issue—sometimes reactive, sometimes proactive. This issue is sometimes the loss of an important resource (a common occurrence in preservation history of many cities); more often, preservation plans are longer-term, thoughtfully designed responses to the lack of strategic vision for preservation in the broader scheme of a city’s growth. Thus,

the driving issue for many city-wide preservation plans is a cumulative frustration with failure to include or support preservation in everyday planning decisions. In other cases, the opportunity presented by a pro-preservation political regime, a mandated periodic updating of the comprehensive planning, or a state program to enable municipal-scale preservation planning stimulates a planning effort.

• The driving organization

While multi-sector partnerships are the norm in most planning and preservation efforts these days, one organization often takes the lead in city-wide preservation plans. In most cases, this is an agency of the municipal government. Historic preservation agencies are most often organized as sub-groups within planning departments, though there are many variations on this theme as well as a number of exceptions (in which case the preservation agency reports directly to the executive—the mayor or city manager). Another common source of leadership is the nonprofit preservation community; and, more rarely, (regional) foundations.

• Organizational structure of the city's preservation community

In most cities, the public preservation agency takes the lead, and some government staff are devoted strictly to preservation. This staff is most often a department or sub-group of the planning department. In addition, other, somewhat independent centers of leadership in the preservation and civic communities play some role in most of the efforts (whether it is the leading nonprofit preservation group, a local foundation, downtown business/owner's group, or university). As with most preservation or planning efforts nowadays, partnership is the rule.

• Integration of preservation with other planning/development processes

Whatever the institutional arrangements of a city's preservation agencies, a key variable—perhaps the key variable—affecting the efficacy of preservation planning is how well it is integrated with broader urban planning, economic development and political priorities and procedures. To the extent that historic preservation is isolated from these broader processes, it loses its potential to influence the city at large (though it may still be quite successful on certain site or areas of the city). Sometimes the difficulties of integration is expressed in conflicts or contradictions between zoning and preservation regulations, lack of administrative collaboration between departments with related responsibilities (building inspection, zoning, economic development, and historic preservation, for instance), or competition over the emphasis of project plans or area/neighborhood plans (in which preservation often is pitted against development).

• Survey vs. strategy

The balance between emphasizing survey (gathering and organizing information) versus emphasizing strategy (influencing and shaping future decisions through analysis or through forming partnerships) is a key differentiating factor between different types of plans. Good survey is a foundation for good strategy and

decision-making, but not a substitute for them. Survey is expensive and time-consuming, and is (or should be) in a state of constant revision and addition. Collecting data is difficult in itself; making it useful and accessible requires great effort in itself. Even the most exhaustive surveys rarely yield any sensible result to the public (Chicago's extensive survey, accessible online, is an exception); yet a reliable and reasonably comprehensive survey is an essential basis for policy and development decisions. As a complement to survey, strategy means shaping policy decisions, designing the processes of implementing and supporting preservation (politically, administratively, financially), and thinking about systemic change as well as project-, site-, or resource-specific outcomes. Both survey and strategy are essential to an effective preservation plan, though neither should be allowed to dominate the planning.

#### • Funding sources

Funds to do the planning itself is a necessary issue, of course. This can come from many different sources. Funds from operating budgets rarely suffice to maintain any level of proactive survey as well as routine administration of preservation ordinance responsibilities. Therefore bond issues, foundation grants or other special sources of funding are used for preservation planning. The second funding issue is securing funds to carry out provisions of the plan and staff/monitor/implement the measures called for in the plan (i.e., additional survey, design review). Better integration of preservation activities with mainstream planning and development processes (as opposed to sowing conflict between preservation and development) should increase the availability of implementation funds.

#### • Constraints

Ambitious efforts like city-wide preservation plans require risk-taking on the part of supporters and advocates. Framed another way, preservation planning faces a number of pragmatic obstacles and constraints alongside the strategic and intellectual challenges. Lack of political support both within the planning apparatus and more generally in the civic sector is a common obstacle. Closely related, weak public support for preservation—or rather, over-reliance on a small, highly committed cadre of preservation supporters—is a problem in nearly every city (Charleston is a possible exception). More practically, Staff capacity was commonly heard as a limiting factor in cities undertaking preservation plans.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

City wide preservation planning seems to be undergoing a mild boom. As historic preservation gains greater, gradual acceptance as a tool for urban development as well as a memorial and artistic activity, the perceived need for preservation planning increases. In varied forms, preservation planning is gaining acceptance as an essential function of city governance.

As outlined here, there are many ways to organize preservation planning. There is no one best model; it should respond to the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats specific to each city. A number of good models and best practices are out there. The best preservation plans expand on traditional preservation planning tools (survey, regulation, incentives) and work to transform the city's use of preservation to be more forward-looking, more publicly engaged and integrated with other urban planning and development processes. The framework described here (key concepts and plan types) will ideally support critical thinking about doing more citywide preservation planning and doing it better.

This report is a preliminary analysis of a national survey; comments, suggestions and leads to be explored in our continuing research are greatly appreciated. Please contact [rfmason@design.upenn.edu](mailto:rfmason@design.upenn.edu).

**APPENDIX: Brief summaries of a selection of cities currently or recently undertaking preservation plans.**

**Los Angeles**

Supported by the Getty Foundation, the City of Los Angeles has undertaken a massive survey effort—SurveyLA—to build understanding the resources needing protection as well as managing the information better, integrate preservation better into city planning and development decisions, and enable a more proactive approach for the city’s preservation community. Initial studies led to the creation of a new Office of Historic Resources in the city’s Planning Department to spearhead the context-building and survey work, and advanced the complex partnerships needed to support such an ambitious effort in so large and complex a city. This is an especially daunting and impressive effort, given the scale of the city (at 465 square miles, Los Angeles is about three and a half times the area of Philadelphia, at 135 square miles) and the growth dynamic of the region, and the accomplishments of the city’s preservation community.

**Charleston, SC**

Charleston’s 1974 plan set the standard for the preservation plan as architectural survey. Cataloguing the historic architecture of the city’s core, it built upon and extended the city’s legacy as one of the most thoroughly preserved cities in the U.S. When Charlestonians recently launched an effort to revise and extend their preservation, their approach was strategic. The current planning effort epitomizes the current state of best-practice preservation planning—extensive public involvement, strategic integration of a wide range of preservation planning measures, and selective survey and documentation to broaden the geographic scope of areas coming under the purview of preservation planning and cultivate a forward-looking preservation planning (“stewardship”) ethic. It builds on an extremely strong base: years of preservation advocacy, implementation, strongly integrated preservation, city planning and economic activities, and very strong political support.

**San Francisco, CA**

A new initiative of historic survey work has recently been launched by the Neighborhood Planning group of the city’s planning department. Beginning in 2000, the work responded to the city’s aggressive pursuit of area plans and up-zoning, often done in areas without historic resource surveys.

Though there is no official preservation element in the General Plan, a citywide preservation policy document being prepared. Preservation, meanwhile, enjoys strong political support right now, supporting efforts to make preservation planning more proactive. With funding from a number of sources (CLG, state cultural funds, a special “trust fund” and a foundation), a program of widening survey is underway in areas such as Market-Octavia, Japantown, and Balboa Park. The survey methodology calls for

context statements and reconnaissance surveys as preliminaries to more detailed work, and they have looked to Los Angeles' efforts as a model.

### **Salt Lake City, UT**

Salt Lake City has recently embarked on a preservation plan aimed at revisiting the preservation and zoning ordinances, and perhaps extending (geographically) the standard preservation tools of listing buildings, creating historic districts, and advocating the use of economic incentives. The plan is following a typical planning process: forming an Advisory Committee to help identify goals, policies and support for the plan; holding open houses and other meetings to gather public input; stakeholder interviews (people who have dealt with the ordinance and program to get their insight); the writing of a plan outlining general strategies and specific implementation steps.

Salt Lake City has a fairly standard array of preservation policies, tools, organizations and partnerships. The Preservation Program for Salt Lake City is run out of the Planning Division, with two preservation staff positions supporting a nine-member appointed Commission. The City's Planning office has elements in each community plan dealing with historic preservation (the City does not have a city-wide land use master plan). The new Preservation Plan will be one of several topic-based city wide plans similar to our Transportation Plan and Open Space Plan to help bridge the gaps left by community-by-community planning efforts.

Salt Lake City seems typical in many ways: in the range of ongoing preservation efforts; the modicum of political support for preservation; and the current effort to elevate preservation thinking about the ad hoc and community specific efforts to a city-wide and future-oriented scope. The plan reaches out to non-preservation sectors as potential partners, embraces public outreach, and regards the relationships between preservation and planning as a central issue.

### **Kansas City, MO**

In 1997, the FOCUS Kansas City Master Plan, a 25 year strategic and comprehensive plan, was completed. (FOCUS stands for "Forging Our Comprehensive Urban Strategy.") This vision-centered effort was widely inclusive of different parts of the city's leadership and citizenry. A city-wide Preservation Plan was identified as one of seven Phase II elements of FOCUS; the goals included: accelerating the survey of historic resources; utilizing preservation as an economic development strategy, including tourism; improving regulatory processes; and increasing public awareness.

The City's preservation processes and organizations seem typical: the city's planning department serves as a small staff to an appointed Landmarks Commission. Financial and manpower constraints have prevented implementation of many FOCUS ideas, leaving the Commission and its survey efforts more reactive, not proactive. A new zoning code, under review, promises to integrate preservation with zoning, subdivision regulation and other land-use tools.

Overall, there is a sense that there is not an ideal climate for preservation in Kansas City, so implementation of new plans (no matter how good or visionary it may be) will be difficult. Denver is the model cited by some local officials, and indeed a loft/arts district (the Crossroads) is emerging.

### **Phoenix, AZ**

Phoenix has made a strong efforts to survey and designate its many post-WWII neighborhoods in advance of development pressures. Not driven by a plan per se, the 45 local historic districts extend the application of their preservation ordinance. Survey efforts appear to be the vanguard of Phoenix preservation planning efforts. The Historic Preservation Office organizes survey by theme and geography, in pieces that are more doable financially and physically than a city-wide survey. The post-war residential landscape is a time-sensitive priority for them, but thematic areas constitute the largest gaps in research. Pro-active thematic surveys on ethnic themes have recently been undertaken: an African-American survey is complete; Asian-American and Hispanic-American are underway.

The preservation infrastructure of Phoenix is typical: a volunteer Commission; Historic Preservation program staff of six. Historic Preservation Ordinance: creates Historic Preservation Commission (appointed by City Council, volunteer). The Historic Preservation Office houses the professional staff for the Commission, and, reports directly to the City Manager (not to the planning office). The Commission and Historic Preservation Office work in partnership with local preservation groups, Arizona heritage foundations, and the SHPO, and homeowners. Modest financial incentives support model projects.

Among the Commission's responsibilities is creating and implementing an historic preservation plan, which has not taken the form of a free-standing plan. Rather, guidance for the general policy of extending the reach of local historic districts comes from the city-wide preservation element included in comprehensive plan—"Conservation, Rehabilitation, and Redevelopment Element of the General Plan"—the goals of which are quite broad. Most funding comes from the City budget; bond grants sustained them for long time.

Public support for residential historic districts seems strong. Such a large number of historic districts can only happen with accepting communities. Local officials report generally good results from their public involvement activities, which include presentations to village councils as well as citywide bodies like the planning commission and city council. Proactively, they hold workshops at beginning of context and survey studies.

### **Fort Worth, TX**

The Fort Worth Citywide Historic Preservation Plan, completed in 2003, is a notable example of a free-standing preservation plan. The plan analyzes existing surveys, historical research/context studies, and economic studies, and bases its recommendations on community input and visioning exercises as well as analysis of existing policies, tools and data. It seems empirically strong and strategically sound.

The main goal of the Plan was to build a consensus between business development and preservation interests. To this end, significant effort was made to consult widely. Local officials report that the public is very aware of preservation in the city. Most people relate historic preservation with core areas of the down town, but efforts are being made to raise awareness about other, less recognized historic areas.

The plan also gathered basic information about existing preservation programs, policies and surveys, and analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of the various aspects of Fort Worth's preservation infrastructure. The plan did not involve extensive survey work; a large survey of the surrounding county (including Fort Worth) had previously been done. Rather, this plan identified gaps and priorities for ongoing survey, including post-1945 communities and ethnic theme studies.

A brief historic and development context was included in the plan, as well as a section on the "public value" of preservation highlighting the economic benefits of historic preservation. This clearly identified the Plan with constituency building rather than simply cataloguing existing surveys and research.

Meetings were held city wide to gain information about the public's view of historic sites and preservation efforts. The planning effort was led by the city's historic preservation program, which is housed in Planning and Development Division. Funding for the Plan came from a variety of sources: City, state, and CLG funds, as well as private donations from targeted fundraising efforts. Interestingly, the financing, planning and implementing of the plan was done independently from the Texas Historical Commission's efforts to stimulate preservation planning.

The plan has been running successfully and smoothly. In the beginning of July 2007, revisions to the preservation ordinance were made, implementing the largest portions of recommendations of the plan. At that point, the majority of the plan will be implemented.

## **Seattle, WA**

Seattle's city wide preservation infrastructure is very complete. Most of the preservation planning activity seems focused on a robust neighborhood-based planning system to complement citywide preservation policies.

In addition to typical preservation policies and tools (a landmarks ordinance, 350 designated landmarks, seven historic districts, and a landmark TDR program), there is an impressive list of 38 Neighborhood Plans in which preservation is integrated, often as a

leading concern. These plans are managed by the city with significant community participation. The expansion of neighborhood preservation surveys has been preceded by the development of context statements, that are both area-specific and thematic.

Seattle's strategy of pursuing neighborhood-scale preservation planning, as opposed to city-wide, is mirrored in the organization of city agencies and responsibilities. The Historic Preservation Program is located in the Department of Neighborhoods, which leads the Neighborhood Plans. The Department of Neighborhoods is parallel to the Department of Planning and Development and the Department of Economic Development, which have city-wide responsibilities.

### **Arlington, VA**

A large county jurisdiction (effectively though not literally a large city), Arlington's historic preservation staff has developed an extensive database of survey information accumulated over years of effort. Though housed within the planning agency, the challenge faced by preservation has been utilizing this information base (and the strong preservation ethic driving over the years) in the planning, regulatory infrastructure, public attitudes toward development and neighborhood protection of a fast-growing county.

From a large base of National-Register districts, authorities have been searching for ways to include preservation-supportive planning in other tools—not just local historic districts, but form-based zoning and special district plans. As with many other jurisdictions, the relationship between preservation staff/agency/leadership and planning staff/agency/leadership within the government apparatus has been an obstacle. As has the management and utilization of a wealth of historic survey data collected in non-digital formats.