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Summer 2019 – IN THIS ISSUE

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Imagining a new future for Hawthorne Hall
Drawing Credit: Alex Bruce, @sketch_phl
Photo Credit: Kat Kendon, Kendon Photography

Suggestions? Comments? Questions? Tell us what you think about the latest issue of CONTEXT magazine by emailing context@aiaphila.org. A member of the CONTEXT editorial committee will be sure to get back to you.
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EDITOR’S LETTER

PRESERVATION IN CRISIS?

ELI STORCH
Architect at LRK, Steering Committee member of the Design Advocacy Group and CONTEXT Editor

For too long, a preservation crisis has raged in Philadelphia. On occasion, the stories make the news. Whether it is the heavily publicized demolition of the Boyd Theater, or the even more contentious fight for the future of Jewelers’ Row, the loss of our city’s historic fabric garners sporadic headlines while a far greater emergency roils below the surface.

Historically high rates of demolition have seen not only significant architectural monuments suffer the ignominy of the wrecking ball. Swaths of our less considered, yet no less important, neighborhoods are consistently razed with little public outcry.

In the documentary created to commemorate the historic designation of Philadelphia as the First World Heritage City in the United States, architectural historian, David Brownlee, reminds viewers of the importance to “remember that our heritage is not a thing of the distant past, or just a list of handsome old buildings. We admire and protect those physical reminders because of what the people who lived in them, and made them, did and thought.”

While this statement is profoundly true, it stands in stark contrast to the current state of affairs in the city. For Philadelphia to live up to its promise, change is needed. It is for this reason that this edition of CONTEXT is devoted to the analysis of “Key Recommendations of the Philadelphia Historic Preservation Task Force,” the final report of the 18-month long Philadelphia Historic Preservation Task Force, convened by Mayor Kenney in May 2017.

Following an opportunity to hear from task force chair, Harris Steinberg, FAIA, and co-chair, Dominique Hawkins, FAIA, Julie Donofrio’s feature on Education and Outreach tackles the challenging task of connecting with, and defining what matters to, the diverse citizenry of our city.

Next, Starr Herr-Cardillo dives into the positives of district designation, and the reasons it has been an underused tool in recent years, before Joshua Castaño, Director of Community Engagement Services for Partners for Sacred Places, connects with developers, exploring how preservation might be better incentivized, in terms of time, process, and of course, money. Completing the four features on the major tenets of the task force, Dana Rice reframes the conversation about historic survey and proposes tactics to allow everyone a seat at the table in service of a truly equitable inventory of historic buildings and places.

For many of us within the design community, the results of the task force were eagerly awaited, yet for the majority of Philadelphia, it failed to register. It is my hope that these thoughtful pieces can advance dialogues for those who want to do something about this crisis. Find that which resonates in these articles, and the final report, and carry that section, or idea, or detail, forward by continuing conversations in communities already fighting these battles and beginning them anew with those who are engaging with the material for the first time.

Citations:
1. worldheritagephl.org
Hello Friends and Colleagues:

Happy Summer! I hope you enjoy this issue of CONTEXT. This July I will celebrate my fifth anniversary of working here at AIA Philadelphia and the Center for Architecture and Design. One of the first decisions that I made was to bring back the publishing of CONTEXT. I have to admit – I was concerned about the decision. Publishing a magazine is hard to do – and it’s even harder to do with a completely volunteer editorial committee and one Communications Director (who also has all of that AIA and Center news/social media/websites to contend with). But I will say, thanks to the incredible leadership and support of Todd Woodward, AIA and Harris Steinberg, FAIA, co-chairs of the Editorial Committee of AIA Philadelphia, all of the generous issue editors, and my amazing staff, especially Liz Paul and Tiffany Mercer-Robbins for pulling this publication together. I believe bringing CONTEXT back was a great decision for our chapter. I am proud of the exceptional content this publication has each and every issue. Congratulations to Eli Storch, AIA for a terrific Summer 2019 issue.

Looking forward to a blockbuster fall for the AIA Philadelphia community: The Forum on Architecture and Design will be back in Center City in October, DesignPhiladelphia is filling Cherry Street Pier with lots of design installations and programming, and in December, AIA Philadelphia is throwing a big Design Awards Celebration at The Fillmore in honor of our 150th Anniversary. I hope you will attend all or some of these activities and celebrate AIA Philadelphia’s 150th Anniversary.

Hope you enjoy your summer!

Sincerely,

Rebecca Johnson
Executive Director
AIA Philadelphia
Center / Architecture + Design

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**DAG PHILADELPHIA**

**DESIGN ADVOCACY GROUP**

Historic preservation is a foundational aspect of the Design Advocacy Group’s (DAG) mission. Early this year, DAG issued extensive comments on the Mayor’s Historic Preservation Task Force and will continue to advocate for a comprehensive citywide survey, a short-term index of buildings in jeopardy and other recommendations that it supports. Preservation is also the focus of one of DAG’s four standing task forces. The DAG Preservation Task Force, headed by architect and planner Eli Storch, hosts the ongoing Preservation Pints series of free neighborhood events focused on critical preservation issues. Learn more at designadvocacy.org.

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**AIA Philadelphia**

Save the date. Join us at The Fillmore on December 5, 2019 and celebrate the announcement of the 2019 Design Award winners and the outstanding design accomplishments of our distinguished Chapter over the years.
AIA Philadelphia's Forum on Architecture + Design is back this year on October 2-4 and at a new location right in Center City. Convene CityView will play host to this year’s conference. Located in the Duane Morris building at 30 South 17th Street, this state-of-the-art facility offers floor to ceiling windows with sprawling views of Philly’s cityscape.

The Forum provides opportunities to earn CES through educational programming sessions, an interesting expo hall, tours, and keynote sessions. The full program is still being finalized, but we are proud to announce this year’s keynote speakers.

**Bryan C. Lee Jr**  
Director of Design, Colloqate  
Bryan Lee is the Design Director of Colloqate and a national Design Justice Advocate. Lee has a decade of experience in the field of architecture Lee is the founding organizer of the Design Justice Platform and organized the Design As Protest National Day of Action. Bryan has led two award-winning architecture and design programs for high school students through the Arts Council of New Orleans and the National Organization of Minority Architects.

**Julie Eizenberg, FAIA, RAIA**  
Founding Principal, Koning Eizenberg  
Julie Eizenberg, FAIA, RAIA teaches and lectures around the world, has been a frequent advisor to the U.S. Mayor’s Institute on City Design and on the board of Public Architecture and the School of Architecture at Taliesin. Her most recent book, titled “Urban Hallucinations,” offers more insight into the philosophy and work of a practice that aligns humanist values with inventive architectural form making. Under her leadership, Koning Eizenberg has earned over 150 design and sustainability awards and been widely published. The practice has been honored as AIA California’s Firm of the Year and was awarded the 2012 AIA Los Angeles Gold Medal in recognition of a lasting influence on the theory and practice of architecture.

**Eric Höweler**  
Associate Professor in Architecture, Harvard Graduate School of Design  
Eric Höweler is currently Associate Professor in Architecture at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. His design work and research explore the relationships between architecture and building technologies with a focus on envelopes and material systems. Prior to forming Höweler + Yoon Architecture in 2005, Höweler was a senior designer at Diller Scofidio + Renfro in New York. Höweler has been widely recognized for his innovative and interdisciplinary work. He is author of Skyscraper, Vertical Now (Rizzoli/Universe 2003) and co-author of 1,001 Skyscrapers (Princeton Architectural Press 2000).

**J. Meejin Yoon**  
Dean, Cornell University’s College of Architecture, Art, and Planning  
Co-founding Principal of Höweler + Yoon Architecture  
J. Meejin Yoon is an architect, designer, educator, and co-founding principal of Höweler + Yoon Architecture, a multidisciplinary architecture and design studio that has garnered international recognition for a wide range of built work. Her design work and research investigate the intersections between architecture, technology, and public space. Yoon received the New Generation Design Leadership Award by Architectural Record (2015), the US Artist Award in Architecture and Design (2008), and the Rome Prize in Design (2005). She is the co-author of Public Works: Unsolicited Small Projects for the Big Dig and Absence. New Orleans and the National Organization of Minority Architects.

**Nader Tehrani**  
Dean, Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture at the Cooper Union  
Principal of NADAAA  
Nader Tehrani is Principal of NADAAA, a practice dedicated to the advancement of design innovation, interdisciplinary collaboration, and an intensive dialogue with the construction industry. Tehrani’s work has been recognized with notable awards, including the Cooper Hewitt National Design Award in Architecture (2007), the United States Artists Fellowship in Architecture and Design, and the American Academy of Arts and Letters Award in Architecture. Over the past six years, NADAAA has consistently ranked as a top design firm in Architect Magazine’s Top 50 U.S. Firms List.
The 2019 DesignPhiladelphia festival takes place October 2 – 13 and for the third straight year Jefferson is poised to have a tremendous impact as the presenting sponsor. This year’s festival is jam packed with your favorite traditions and exciting new additions.

- Neighborhood Design Crawls featuring curated dining experiences
- Kickoff party at Cherry Street Pier
- Two festival hubs featuring experiential exhibits
- AIA Philadelphia’s 150th Anniversary exhibition
- 2nd Annual Best in Design Showcase
- Special DesignPhiladelphia issue of CONTEXT magazine

How can you get in on the action?

**Host an event, open house, or design display.**

*Deadline to be included in the printed handouts June 30, digital events can be submitted through September 22.*

Join us and 100+ other design organizations in hosting an event during our 10-day festival. Let us be your megaphone and bring the public to your space. Pair your creativity, your brilliance, your stories with our marketing muscle and wide-reaching connections to make your event a success. With several levels of partnership to choose from, you decide what kind of promotion is right for your event.

**Advertise in the Context DesignPhiladelphia special edition.**

*Deadline to reserve your spot, June 30.*

Advertising on the DesignPhiladelphia website or in the DesignPhiladelphia CONTEXT magazine issue shows you value the design/maker community here in Philadelphia while putting your brand in front of thousands of design industry professionals daily.

**Sponsor the festival.**

*Deadline to be included in the printed handouts June 30, sponsorships can be submitted through September 22.*

Sponsoring the DesignPhiladelphia Kickoff Party or individual programs is an excellent opportunity to gain brand exposure and recognition within Philadelphia’s design world. Join the community of contributors who have supported DesignPhiladelphia in the past and connect with thousands of people here in Philadelphia.

**Volunteer.**

*Volunteer trainings will be held between August and September.*

We need your help to make the festival a success! DesignPhiladelphia volunteers help distribute marketing materials, get the word out about the festival using social media, support event hosts during the festival, and collect demographic information from participants during the festival. Stay tuned for the volunteer sign-up link coming soon!
This year, the Community Design Collaborative’s Sacred Places / Civic Spaces initiative brought congregations, communities, and designers together to re-envision underutilized religious properties as community hubs. They collaborated on three real-life religious sites—The Philadelphia Masjid in Mill Creek, Wharton-Wesley United Methodist Church in Cobbs Creek, and Zion Baptist Church in Nicetown Tioga.

The programming and design strategies that came out of Sacred Places/Civic Spaces will help these sites (and others) open their doors still wider to the community, keep their congregations vital, and generate revenue to preserve their remarkable heritage and architecture.

Each Sacred Places/Civic Spaces design team included architects, engineers, cost estimators, and preservationists. Kate Cowing, AIA, an architect and preservationist, sat down with us recently to talk about her work with Zion Baptist Church.

“My favorite part of this project was learning more about Reverend Leon Sullivan,” says Cowing. Sullivan gained national and international recognition as a leader in human and civil rights movements. He expanded opportunities for education, entrepreneurship, and employment for African Americans and authored the Global Sullivan Principles, a code of human rights that played an integral role in ending Apartheid in South Africa.

“Zion Baptist Church and its Annex are located at North Broad and Venango Streets. Our work focused on the Annex [a former Presbyterian church directly across the street from the main church building.] The Annex was built in the 1910s and had a major addition in the 1920s. The sanctuary is a unique space—two stories high with beautiful stained glass, classical plaster columns, a dome, and an interesting octagonal roof.” Cowing adds, The main entrance is on the corner, which is also unusual. “Right now, the sanctuary is only accessible from a shared side entrance. When the new design comes into play, this will become a prominent entrance again.”

Cowing crawled up on roofs and inspected masonry, standard fare in her business. “The Annex has some bad roofs, a lot of water infiltration, and deteriorated stained glass… all pretty common to buildings of this age.” Design team leader Studio 6MM was able to assure the congregation that the Annex could be fixed, thanks to input from Cowing along with Keast & Hood, Burns Engineering, and International Consultants. Refocusing on the “good bones” and history of the building changed the conversation about its future.

“The reuse of the Sunday School classrooms for education was a given. It just makes sense. The sanctuary is actually one of the challenges,” says Cowing. “Every single window is stained glass. One of the ideas is to turn the sanctuary into a grocery store. A grocery store with this elaborate stained glass might seem pretty odd, but one of the architects had just been to Italy and had seen exactly that.”

“Reverend Sullivan was such an amazing man. Martin Luther King, Jr. used Sullivan’s ideas [for his March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom]. Many of the people we were working with knew Sullivan. That’s one of the reasons they felt so strongly that they wanted to use the Annex to reintegrate similar programs back into the community.”

“I can’t believe there hasn’t been more focus on these two church buildings. There’s no question that the Zion Baptist Church and its Annex could be on the National Register of Historic Places.” Plans to pursue designation is one of the outcomes of the Sacred Places/Civic Spaces initiative.

“We can’t just keep demolishing things because it will take away our sense of place,” says Cowing. “These buildings are our heritage, they’re our people, and we need to take care of them.”

See the initiative’s designs and findings at www.sacredplacescivicspaces.com
PHILADELPHIA HISTORIC PRESERVATION TASK FORCE

WITH CHAIR, HARRIS STEINBERG, FAIA, AND CO-CHAIR, DOMINIQUE HAWKINS, FAIA

BY ELI STORCH
After an 18-month process led to the April 4th, release of, “Key Recommendations of the Philadelphia Historic Preservation Task Force”, the future of the document no longer rests with members of the task force. As the general public begins to read through, absorb, and begin the arduous task of turning these proposals into practice, I had the opportunity to sit down with task force chair, Harris Steinberg, FAIA, Executive Director of the Lindy Institute for Urban Innovation at Drexel University, and co-chair, Dominique Hawkins, FAIA, Managing Principal of Preservation Design Partnership, to reflect on the process, the final product, and on where they hope their efforts will lead the conversation and policy on historic preservation in Philadelphia.

Our conversation, edited lightly for length and clarity, follows.

**Eli Storch:** Now that the final report has been released, what is your “call to action” for Philadelphians?

**Dominique Hawkins:** My call to action will be to look at the plan and see where you can input, and what’s of interest. I think from an organizational standpoint, the AIA Historic Resources Committee will have a different answer than the Design Advocacy Group, for example, or the Preservation Alliance, but there are lots of community groups, historical societies, and other people who will plug in, in different ways. I think anyone can not only be interested in the history of their neighborhood; they can promote their neighborhood. They can do research. They can advocate to city council or the mayor’s office to get stuff done.

**Harris Steinberg:** I think that’s a great way to think about this and certainly as we were releasing it, that was really the strategy. You can say whether we did a good job or not, but we’ve done our job. It’s now going to take a whole lot of players to really move this. In many ways it’s going to be, “let a thousand flowers bloom.”

On the other hand, the fact that the mayor has said that he is going to convene the internal task force is an important first move, because we realize that without the city organizing for success there’s not going to be any chance of this moving. We’ve got to be moving at both levels. I think some of the big pieces are starting to come into play, one of them, of course, being the internal leadership structure. The interest in moving the survey along and looking at what it’s going to take to do that is another important first move. There are signs from Councilman Squilla that council is potentially interested in some of the incentives and some of the differentiating districts. All of these are positive movement but none of them, in and of themselves, make for any outright moving of the ball, so that’s where the advocacy groups, and the community groups, and the preservation groups are going to be absolutely critical to getting this right.

I think if I were to give my top priority, my wish in terms of a big move, would be to create the index, to really commit to doing it. That would go a huge way to showing the public that the city is serious, because that was a backdoor way of addressing the demolition delay request from the advocacy community. We knew we couldn’t just outright suggest a demolition delay, but a number of folks on the task force, Dominique included, came up with what we think is a really thoughtful, sensitive, and clever way to address the crisis, but also in a way that’s time manageable.

**ES:** When I have heard presentations about the task force in broad terms, there is a focus on balancing the preservation focus and the development focus. Given the benefit of hindsight, do you feel that you achieved that balance?

**DH:** I think everyone who was on the task force was passionate about the city of Philadelphia and loves the city. I think that’s the one common thing we had. One of the things that I was pleasantly surprised by were those who we may not think of as preservationists, but because of their love for the city were willing to put aside perhaps the potential for a financial gain, or balance that more towards the preservation side of their love for the city. I think that’s the one thing we had. One of the things that I was pleasantly surprised by were those who we may not think of as preservationists, but because of their love for the city were willing to put aside perhaps the potential for a financial gain, or balance that more towards the preservation side than I would have expected.

**HS:** I was extremely pleased. I have done a number of these large-scale public processes where you just don’t know what you’re going to get out of it because there are so many passionate viewpoints that often don’t meet in the middle. In this case, focusing particularly around the intersection of preservation and development, in light of Jewelers’ Row, which was in some ways a flashpoint for the work, we really didn’t know where we were going to come out on the other side. But, from the beginning, Dominique and I were clear that we wanted to try to get through this process without taking a vote, that this had to be something that everybody believed in and if we could get to that place in a Quakerly way and ultimately pass this by acclamation we would have succeeded, and we did. So, I feel like you can pick apart the recommendations. Folks can say whether we went too far, or not far enough, but that this truly does represent the consensus of a very disparate group of people who came together around the common good, however we defined it for Philadelphia, and I think that in my mind that was our biggest achievement.

There were several times where I, as chair, and Dominique as vice chair, had to say, “Time out. We’re going to talk about this until we get to a place where we can move forward, because otherwise what are we doing here? We are on the clock. It’s very clear from the mayor that
this is about balancing preservation and new construction." That took diplomacy, and dialogue, and patience. It was a challenge on a lot of levels so the fact that we came through this clean at the end with a lot of passionate voices on both sides of the ledger is a testament to the strength of the process and ultimately, hopefully, the product.

DH: I think in talking to everyone, even those who perhaps I had different views from at the beginning, everyone’s really proud of it. I have heard nothing negative from anyone who has been through it. And while everyone in the public is a little unhappy about something, that means we actually hit it just right.

ES: How do you get the task force’s message out to all of Philadelphia, not just the neighborhoods closest to Center City? For communities that have not been engaged historically, how do you achieve buy-in and acquire the necessary information for a complete survey?

HS: The Philadelphia 2035 process really was the foundation for that, because from the start, this was meant to be something that was democratizing. It wasn’t just for the elites, and it wasn’t just for Center City, or Old City, and the current historic districts. So, we thought about Mayfair, we thought about the Northeast, we thought about the middle neighborhoods as very important constituents in the process. Our message hopefully was that it’s not just about the building, it’s about the community narrative. It’s really about what’s important to you as a place. Buildings can be an important piece of that.

DH: They’re the back drop to that, right? I’ve done work outside of the traditional historic preservation neighborhoods, and the thing is, every place is really prideful of their history, and they want to make sure that their history gets told in the way they want it told. And there are groups, and individuals, in each neighborhood in Philadelphia that are conscious of collecting that data and mining their own family histories and their own connections, to tell their own story.

HS: And many of these communities have self-appointed historians, who are keepers of these stories even though they might not have proper historic societies.
ONE OF THE REASONS I THINK PRESERVATION HAS A BAD NAME IN THIS CITY IS THE COST OF COMPLIANCE IS REALLY HIGH, SO EVERYONE TENDS TO SHY AWAY FROM IT, [INCLUDING] DEVELOPERS.

ES: For design professionals who are interacting with developers and the city, how can we be more thoughtful about our work and active in this discussion?

DH: One of the reasons I think preservation has a bad name in this city is the cost of compliance is really high, so everyone tends to shy away from it, [including] developers. I think looking at preservation as a framework to maintain neighborhood character, instead of stringent rules to comply with, would be a good shift in terms of thinking. I think the additional historic districts that we are proposing, the preservation light district, or the additional conservation district, would be a good framework to start thinking about saving neighborhood character, without that higher cost of compliance.

HS: I come at it a little differently given that I haven’t really practiced architecture for about 20 years. I still proudly consider myself an architect, but my work has become more planning and large-scale public conversations. So, for me as an architect, what I love about the report, is that it is more about place than building. It really reframes the discussion that preservation is about culture. It’s about how we relate to our communities and the stories we tell and that we’re passing down. That, I think, opens up the field in a way that’s much more nuanced and accessible, and I think it’s an opening for architects to become bigger players.

DH: Look at it from the neighborhood perspective. If you take this and - flip it. The developer is coming into a neighborhood to do something, preservation is really the only tool in the city that gives you a voice in what happens in your neighborhood, if a zoning variance is not required.

HS: The other thing about Philly, which we strove to protect from the get-go, and this was from both sides of the aisle, developer as well as preservationist, is that anybody can nominate a building. You don’t have to be a building owner. That puts Philadelphia in an incredibly unique position in terms of the role the individual can play in the discussion about preservation. Not that it’s easy to make a nomination, but anybody can nominate. I think the barrier is as much psychological as anything, and the hope is that the report, the recommendations, as well as the advocacy push, will encourage more folks to get in the game.

Eli Storch is an architect at LRK and chairs the Design Advocacy Group’s Historic Preservation Task Force.
When the Mayor’s Task Force on Historic Preservation was mobilized in 2017, the preservation and design community was energized, ready to seize the day, dig in, and create the set of robust preservation policies and processes that would be up to par with the level of historic integrity present throughout Philadelphia. But did the rest of Philadelphia take notice?

The Task Force was assembled, and the professionals, advocates, city employees, consultants and community representatives got to work, organized into the four categories that shaped the working groups (subcommittees) and eventually the recommendations: Survey, Incentives, Regulatory, and Education and Outreach. From the very beginning, it was acknowledged that outreach and education was a pivotal piece of reforming how preservation functions in Philadelphia, equal to the other, more “technical” counterparts.

The recommendations that were released in April 2019 reflect over a year’s worth of work by the Education and Outreach committee to pull together the research, institutional knowledge, and varying perspectives represented around the table. The work built on concerns expressed at the opening workshop in October 2017, and subsequent conversations of the Task Force.

The primary concerns facing the committee from the beginning were that:

1. Philadelphia does not have enough resources dedicated to building a constituency for historic preservation.
2. Current historic preservation education and outreach efforts do not sufficiently recognize the city’s diverse cultural heritage and proactively engage Philadelphians in historic preservation in their neighborhoods.
3. Outreach does not reach all Philadelphians.

BRINGING THE COMMUNITY IN

A challenge from the outset, was that the voice of the community was not easily built into the task force model. Task Force leaders did a good job making sure that community representatives were included in all the groups (about eight were included overall), and there was opportunity for community participation in the large public events included at key milestones of the process. However, deeper community engagement was more challenging due to the accelerated schedule, and unfortunately was not included in the initial Task Force scope and schedule.

Thankfully, Task Force organizers saw this gap early on and sought
outside assistance. That assistance came in the form of PennPraxis and the Historic Preservation Citizen Engagement Project, enabled by additional funding and advisement from the William Penn Foundation. PennPraxis was brought in to do supplemental engagement that could inform the Task Force, while not being officially a part of the group, which was important for creating a distinction from those actually creating the policies. The project would also create a resource that could be used to accomplish the Task Force’s goal of broadening the constituency for preservation across the city beyond the lifespan of the Task Force itself.

PennPraxis mobilized in March 2018, right around the time the meaty work of the Task Force began. Project leaders, Molly Lester and I, attended the monthly meetings of the Education and Outreach committee, which was co-chaired by Trapeta Mayson, formerly of Historic Germantown, and Laura Spina, of the Philadelphia City Planning Commission. Other members of the committee included: Lou Iatarola, community representative from Tacony/ Historical Society of Tacony; Julia Gutstadt, representing the Urban Land Institute; Patrick Grossi, of the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia; Bob Jaeger of Partners for Sacred Places; Elhadji Ndiaye, Neighborhood Program Coordinator for the Department of Housing and Community Development; and Denise Gilmore and Rob Nieweg of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, who were working as consultants for the Task Force. This group represented a wide range of professionals and community representatives who have been cumulatively working for decades on a range of advocacy issues and leading the charge on the neighborhood-focused preservation efforts that already exist.

The work of the National Trust was instrumental in understanding what Philadelphia could do better based on case studies from other cities. The Trust brought in examples of best practices for preservation-based community engagement in all forms, from New Orleans’ resource center, walking tours, and engaging/user-friendly social media and website, to Atlanta’s targeted outreach to neighborhood and community organizations. Many great examples exist of ways that information can be better shared, to get the general public excited about historic buildings, neighborhood history, and demystifying preservation processes—provided sufficient resources are identified and allocated to provide these services. Successful programs already exist in Philadelphia too, thanks to the steadfast work of the staff of the Philadelphia Historical Commission, the Preservation Alliance, and neighborhood groups as far flung as Tacony and Chestnut Hill, and through grassroots programs like Jane’s Walk, and Philly Love Notes. All of these programs depend on narrow, and oftentimes ephemeral, funding sources, or rest on the shoulders of unpaid, and sometimes fleeting, volunteers. If the city’s policymakers and partners could tackle the issue of funding (at multiple scales), then this strong community of advocates are well-positioned to make major strides in building a broader constituency of preservation enthusiasts and programs to support them.

BUT FIRST, WHAT MATTERS HERE?

Truly, this was the crux of the issue that was most important to unpack as part of PennPraxis’ work. Yes, funding is always a challenge, and always will be, as well as access to other less tangible resources (time, education, power, trust, etc.). But in Philadelphia, the biggest challenge facing preservation in Philadelphia is a shared understanding of what preservation actually means. Preservation as a term and a profession has suffered from a bias that it only deals with buildings in which privileged individuals were born, died, or did something important, or that are of a particular architectural style or merit. From this perspective, it’s easy to think that the only people equipped to discuss these terms possess a master’s degree on the subject or come from a place of privilege where their historic homes or neighborhoods are of greater value than others, due to their physical beauty, location, and upkeep. Some preservationists have been trying to break down these perceptions for years, to strive to expand the conversation; others might be unaware,
or perhaps even deserve such criticism. If the work of the Historic Preservation Citizen Engagement Project was to be any different, it had to shift this dialogue, these definitions, and the voices leading the conversation.

To this end, PennPraxis’ project sparked conversations that would ultimately tell us what Philadelphians outside of the “traditional” (e.g., affluent and highly-educated) preservation sphere saw within their neighborhoods:

- What mattered?
- What was worth preserving?
- What had been lost?
- What were the challenges faced?
- How could the system work differently?

In order to be candid, the conversations had to be intimate and led by an individual who made residents feel at ease, or someone with whom they already had a relationship. These small group conversations were led by graduates of the Citizens’ Planning Institute (CPI), as well as other leaders from the neighborhoods in which the meetings were held. The 21 participating neighborhoods represented a diversity of people, backgrounds, geographies, and neighborhood types—even some preservation skeptics. The word “historic” was rarely used in any of the question prompts.

So what does matter to Philadelphians? The information shared at the small neighborhood meetings, which all took place between April and May 2018, was staggeringly similar, despite the wide range of viewpoints represented. People care about places, not just buildings. They care about the fabric that ties their neighborhood together—the people and institutions that comprised it in the past and those that survive today. They care about design quality—new development is fine if it is well-constructed and respects the voices and lives of those currently residing there. Several participants demonstrated a high degree of understanding of zoning and regulations, but even the most knowledgeable find the decision-making around these policies to be opaque and imbalanced. Many community participants argued for adequate funding and incentives to level the playing field between preservation and new development, in order to keep the existing buildings, places, and institutions that matter to their neighborhoods. They care about sharing the many stories of the past, especially those less-celebrated, and about passing on an appreciation of these stories to future generations, newer residents, and renters. This information was shared with the full Task Force at a public meeting in May 2017.

**THE NEIGHBORHOOD PRESERVATION TOOLKIT**

In response to the project’s many community conversations and concerns, PennPraxis created the Neighborhood Preservation Toolkit as a guide for accomplishing these goals, overcoming these obstacles, and demonstrating how to get them done—using the tools of preservation. Framed around “neighborhood preservation” rather than “historic preservation,” the toolkit aims to be a more inclusive resource for community members who think that their neighborhood isn’t necessarily “historic” (even if it is old!). The toolkit includes an eye-catching poster and a more in-depth guidebook, which seeks to make a clear link between the fabric of a neighborhood (including its older buildings, parks, and streetscapes) and the overall character and quality of life of its neighbors.

The sections—or perspectives—within the guidebook include guidance for caring for an older home, improving design quality and character, supporting commercial corridors and small businesses, learning and sharing neighborhood history, and creating change and influencing policy. A lot of the ideas stem from tried and true preservation techniques and resources, but others are plain and simple civic duties like voting. After all, accomplishing the goals of preservation rely on a well-functioning government and engaged citizens who care about the city.

The Neighborhood Preservation Toolkit is available for free download on phlpreservation.org, the website dedicated to the Task Force. It will also be available in hard-copy at community resource centers across the city, neighborhood branches of the Free Library, and through civic associations. The Toolkit is available in English, Spanish, and Chinese. Ultimately, we hope that the poster and guidebook together will attract community members who see their “perspective” represented and realize that the tools provided may help them accomplish those goals, as individuals or together with their neighbors. The toolkit can be printed out in sections, like a workbook, so it can be used, get dirty, and function as a tool to learn and share with others.
The Education and Outreach recommendations included in the Final Report from the Mayor’s Task Force on Historic Preservation are a valuable list of ideas for how to better share information and engage residents in the decision-making around preservation. The recommendations were drawn from the knowledge bank of the subcommittee members, informed by the in-depth research of the National Trust, and reinforced by the on-the-ground engagement of PennPraxis through the Historic Preservation Citizen Engagement Project.

Some recommendations are easier to accomplish than others. It’s likely that the website will be enhanced, and more and better resources can be created to explain how preservation functions, in a user-friendly manner. The Final Report rightly points out that each recommendation hinges on three things: Staffing, Changing the Rules, and Resources. It won’t be easy to align these three factors, and it will take time. However, the real challenge that lies ahead is not just improving outreach efforts and materials, and enhancing staff time for dedicated neighborhood support, but making sure that big game-changers like incentive programs and appropriate designation measures are created by, and with, community members, and with their interests in mind. Philadelphia must take a stand that everyday homeowners, renters, and small businesses are just as deserving of financial incentives to maintain their properties, as a developer for building income-producing properties under the tax abatement. If the designation process changes, community members must have a say in how those decisions get made, with ample time to participate beforehand, and notified about opportunities to take action. Finally, regulation, designation, and enforcement must be taken seriously, or else the hard work of residents to advocate for their neighborhoods will be for nothing, and the distrust of preservation and the development process will eclipse any present or future outreach efforts meant to build that broader support and constituency. The tools will get lost if the toolbox is broken.

If the work of the Historic Preservation Citizen Engagement Project, and the resulting Neighborhood Preservation Toolkit, had one goal, it was to unite those who think that neighborhood preservation and historic preservation are at odds. They are not. Historic preservation is neighborhood preservation, with the goal of keeping people in their homes, and keeping the fabric of Philadelphia intact. If neighborhood preservation is the term to unite them all, then let the Toolkit be the guide, to deepen our collective understanding, and get everyone to participate in maintaining that which represents the many layers and values of this wonderful, complex, and diverse city.

Julie Donofrio is the managing director of PennPraxis, where she specializes in planning and engagement, and teaches in the Department of City and Regional Planning at the University of Pennsylvania Stuart Weitzman School of Design.

Citations:
More Districts Equal More Protection:

Task Force Recommendations Would Ease District Designation, but Only with Adequate Support

By Starr Herr-Cardillo
Wayne Junction, just south of Germantown, was once a factory hub for Philadelphia’s “Workshop of the World.” The area certainly feels like an industrial relic and, due to a push by developer Ken Weinstein to reimagine the region as a fresh transit hub, a cluster of old brick complexes are now being rehabbed and converted to new uses, including office space and apartments.

Weinstein saw potential in the area and understood that it was tied to its historic charm. In the summer of 2018, a cluster of eight historic properties, including the Wayne Junction Station and large Wayne Mills complex, was minted an official local historic district, joining the very select few districts to have been designated in nearly a decade. Weinstein, who owns several the properties that comprise the district, was an outspoken supporter of designation. But this is not typically the story. At least not in Philadelphia.

In general, regulatory oversight tends to be nobody’s favorite part of preservation, and that is particularly true of developers. The process can feel drawn out, abstruse, frustrating, and inaccessible to the average person. To those trying to maximize profit, it often represents the ultimate obstruction: unpredictability, design constraints, and limits on ultimate profit.

But local ordinances are what provide legal “teeth” to protect against demolition and alteration. And in Philadelphia, where only around 2% of the city’s historic building stock is protected by historic designation, it is an underutilized tool. Fortunately, as Wayne Junction illustrates, this doesn’t have to be the case. And, if some of the modifications suggested by the Mayor’s Task Force on Historic Preservation are incorporated into the local ordinance, making the case for more districts may become much easier.

Broadly, Philadelphia’s Ordinance, established in 1955 and revised in 1984, authorizes the Philadelphia Historical Commission to designate buildings, structures, sites, objects, and districts to the local historic register. Once a property is listed, any alterations, additions, or modifications to it must undergo review by the Commission.

Historic districts are really the most efficient way to list buildings on the local register, and while there are a number of National Register Districts in the city, there are relatively few local ones. And contrary to popular perception, listing a building or district on the National Register only provides formal recognition of a site’s history. It does nothing to restrict alteration or demolition. Listing on the National Register does qualify property owners for federal incentives, including the Historic Preservation Tax Credit, and may also come with benefits at the state and local level. But legal protection only occurs at the local level.

Overall, the Final Report issued by Philadelphia’s Mayor’s Task Force on Historic Preservation, released in early April of this year, presented a number of useful regulatory recommendations for bolstering the Philadelphia Historic Preservation Ordinance. If enacted—a big “if,” considering that that most of the recommendations would require some form of financial backing or legislative action—many would streamline the designation process, reduce some of the more burdensome restrictions associated with historic designation for property owners, and embolden the City’s most under-utilized regulatory tool: historic districts.

Throughout the Report, the Task Force points out that the existing ordinance is actually quite generous compared to others in the United States. It provides ten criteria (compared to the National Register’s four) to which nominators can attribute significance of a place or building, allowing room to accommodate structures of more modest architectural significance, or, places that have high cultural value, but lower architectural value. It also gives any citizen the power to nominate a building or district to the Philadelphia register without requiring owner consent, an asset which is both liberating and intimidating as it can come with aggressive pushback, sometimes in the form of legal action.
The five properties that Toll Brothers is seeking to demolish on Jewelers’ Row are included in the East Center City Commercial Historic District, a National Register district that does not offer protection against demolition. A new local district that would protect the area was submitted in 2017 and is pending review by the Historical Commission.

The Task Force concluded, however, that despite its inherent strengths, the Philadelphia ordinance isn’t being utilized or interpreted to its full potential, noting that it “has more flexibility than is understood.” In particular, although the Commission has always possessed the power to designate districts, they are only recently being considered.

Since around 2002, the Commission had operated with an unofficial moratorium on reviewing and designating historic districts, supposedly due to staffing and capacity issues. Councilmanic pushback and threat of legal action also likely played a role in the decision. This left a backlog of around a dozen districts in legal limbo, representing hundreds of properties awaiting review, some for nearly a decade. Recently, the Commission has initiated and supported several smaller districts, including the Ridge Avenue Historic District, Wayne Junction, a thematic district for historic subway entrances, and a handful of one-block districts in West Philadelphia. But huge swaths of the city still sit unprotected.

Now that this critical tool is slowly getting back up and running, it’s hard to imagine how the staff would handle a flood of new district proposals, even if regulation and oversight requirements were lighter.

Part of the pushback to districts in the past has been the perception that they impose onerous restrictions on property owners. But the Task Force’s recommendations propose a broader approach to designating historic districts that would incorporate an intermediate level of designation, falling somewhere between the rigidity of typical landmark regulations and the very lenient restriction placed on contributing properties in Neighborhood Conservation Zones. They also vouch for giving the Historical Commission stronger authority over design review for new construction within districts.

Recognizing that imposing the highest level of regulation isn’t appropriate for all property types, the Task Force suggests introducing new designation levels in the form of additional district types. These would be coordinated with documentation requirements and incentives so that areas receiving higher levels of protection would qualify for more substantial incentives, offering the proverbial carrot in exchange for stricter regulation. Doing so, however, would require that an amendment to the Ordinance first be drafted and then adopted.

Implementing more lenient districts could have a positive impact on the way they’re perceived by property owners and inspire new projects. According to Ken Weinstein, creating the Wayne Junction District was “absolutely an asset to our Wayne Junction revitalization project.”

Weinstein has been recognized for his commitment to more creative adaptive reuse projects. One of the benefits of reuse, he says, is that it results in “more unique and interesting properties that appeal to a wider variety of tenants.” Weinstein also believes this approach gives him a competitive advantage among other developers, who “tend to be afraid of the risk and unknowns associated with adaptive reuse.”

He also sees preservation as a means for community buy-in. By helping ensure that the character of an area is appreciated and respected, he has been able to build trust among people who feel passionately about retaining their neighborhood’s feel. “By preserving the buildings in and around Wayne Junction, we are able to keep the fabric of the community intact which buys us support amongst nearby neighbors and long-time residents who came out to RCO meetings and got behind our projects.”

On the business side, an appeal to the community also makes sense. “Preservation is not just good for people who appreciate history, it also has good PR value.” Historic properties also provide spaces that vary in size and cost, making them accessible to tenants within a broader range of incomes. Weinstein’s project at Wayne Junction also incorporates low income housing.

“The reuse of properties generally costs less to renovate than new construction,” he points out, which allows for more flexibility with how the numbers shake out. “Overall, this provides tenants with a more affordable rent, reducing risk for developers, like me, who operate in middle neighborhoods.”

Of course, navigating the unknowns and possibilities of adaptive reuse requires a certain level of creativity and savvy. But pre-emptively designating districts and coordinating varying levels of regulation with incentives for adaptive reuse and rehabilitation is exactly the framework that will encourage this kind of thinking.

As pointed out in the Task Force’s report, the current pace of designation is far too reliant upon individual nominations and volunteer labor and is not keeping up with the rate of demolition. Designating
one building at a time, especially in a city that is as under-protected as Philadelphia, is wildly inefficient. Nominations take substantial amounts of time and research to prepare and even more to review and revise.

A shift towards creating more districts would certainly help Philadelphia play catch up. Implementing a clearly defined timeframe to expedite the turnaround time on nomination review, another recommendation from the Task Force, would keep the process moving and prevent backlogs.

Though the suggestions do feel optimistic and like a meaningful step in the right direction, most will require additional work on the part of the Historical Commission and its staff, which is already strapped for funding and manpower. It seems safe to say that the recommendations alone won’t make any impact without a substantial increase in funding to support their implementation.

At present, there’s also no guarantee that they will be enacted—some will require amendments to the ordinance and the promulgation of new regulations.

If nothing else, it’s important to begin maximizing options available under the existing ordinance and continuing to push for more districts. And if the Mayor is serious about making sure the efforts of the Task Force result in meaningful action, he should provide the Commission with the necessary support and resources it needs to step up and realize its full potential.

Starr Herr-Cardillo is a preservationist and writer working in Philadelphia and Arizona in the nonprofit sector. She writes regularly about local preservation issues in Philadelphia and holds an M.S. in Historic Preservation from PennDesign.
MAKING OLD PHILADELPHIA NEW:
INCENTIVES AND CHALLENGES TO DEVELOPING PHILADELPHIA’S OLDER AND HISTORIC PROPERTIES

BY JOSHUA CASTAÑO

The F.A. Poth Brewery (1871), will be home to 135 residential units and about 20,000 square feet of commercial space when the project is completed.
The release of the final report of the Historic Preservation Task Force has catalyzed new discussion city-wide on the tools and resources that will encourage preservation and prevent the ongoing demolition crisis that in part impelled the formation of the Task Force. In its report, the Task Force acknowledged that the introductory wording of the city’s 1985 historic preservation ordinance “focused entirely on development.” In those years, the report goes on to mention, “development, enabled by the federal legislation that, for qualifying historic properties, unleashed the power of the Historic Tax Credit in Philadelphia – as much as, if not more than, any other city in the country.” Today, development across Center City and adjacent neighborhoods has become a defining feature of the city’s rapidly changing streetscape. The pace of development has put pressure on Philadelphia’s inventory of historic and older properties, and too many significant and reusable assets have been overlooked. In response to an inquiry for this article, preservationist and Task Force member, Oscar Beisert, estimates that at least 8,000 historic properties have been demolished in the past eight years.

In light of these trends, and the increased awareness of a need to support Philadelphia’s historic and older building stock, ongoing questions about development incentives, and how these might specifically apply to older properties are crucial. Some developers, like David Waxman of MM Partners, think that historic buildings offer unique value that younger, contemporary markets find attractive. “Much of the newer stuff being built is not as interesting and often lacks the same quality – well-built structures and great details -- that historic buildings have. And unless someone is really constructing high end, it’s typically about doing the minimum and the quality just doesn’t match.”

MM Partners have been responsible for a number of exciting adaptive reuse projects in the past few years, from the AF Bornot DyeWorks (1901) in Fairmount, and the Pyramid Lofts (1922) in Brewerytown. Many of the firm’s projects have made use of the federal Historic Tax Credit program.
Waxman would also love to see other financial incentives. A robust statewide historic preservation tax credit would be a good start. He's now advocating for one in Harrisburg and hopes that the state legislature will be able to support and enact a statewide preservation tax credit that would help to eliminate some of the risk that makes these projects less appealing to many developers.

For Waxman, this highlights one of the most difficult areas of encouraging development of historic buildings. While financial incentives for the project have been strong, including both the federal Historic Preservation Tax Credit and the location of the building within an Opportunity Zone, other issues have added complexity. There are significant gaps in enticements that could persuade other developers to take on projects that are often “harder to do, more expensive, with lots of unknowns, and overall riskier,” as Waxman puts it.

Getting the project through the licensing and permitting phase, turned out to be one of the biggest obstacles to the redevelopment of property like the Poth Brewery. For Waxman, the system seems built to automatically disadvantage historic buildings. Because of strict code requirements, which reflect assumptions about new construction and are often difficult to apply to the myriad and complex details of historic buildings, the challenge of developing a historic building can be daunting for a developer who sees clearer paths to profit in new construction. Even with such a major, multi-million dollar investment undertaking, it “would have been easier to demo the property in a week,” Waxman laments. This could have been accomplished with a counter visit while the rest of the necessary permitting work and coordination with L&I took “the better part of a year.” Some issues that were originally meant for late in the process, like installing custom, wood-frame windows that matched historic lights, had to be discussed earlier and with difficulty because of existing codes about fenestration, originally meant to deter absentee and neglectful owners. The Task Force has recommended expedited permitting for historic projects, which might go far in situations like the one Waxman described.

These kinds of issues point towards the overall difficulties that Waxman feels seriously discourage many developers. The environment around permitting and compliance makes it tough to avoid risk and the kind of taxing complexity that many developers feel makes historic projects less desirable. One of Waxman’s suggestions is the creation of a liaison within the city, beyond Philadelphia’s current Developer Services Team. In this case, the liaison would help interface with inspectors and other permitting and code officials specifically to assist with the unique and complicated questions that arise in trying to redevelop a historic building. Waxman’s suggestion isn’t that far from the Task Force’s recommendation to create a Historic Preservation Policy Team following a federal model. Departments throughout city government would include an official charged with coordinating historic preservation issues within that agency or department’s ongoing work, along with a city-wide approach.

In addition to making redevelopment of historic buildings less complex, Waxman would also love to see other financial incentives. A robust L&I CODE EXPERTISE + COORDINATION AS INCENTIVE

Waxman’s latest project, the F. A. Poth Brewery (1871) in Brewerytown will eventually provide 135 residential units and about 20,000 feet of commercial space. It’s an incredible building, with eye-catching Rundbogenstil-style details, and one of the last major nineteenth century brewery complexes extant in the city. The building’s history is as fascinating as its architecture, which includes Quaker’s prohibition, latter day revival-brewers, and finally a string of developers who owned the city-block sized complex, but were never able to make a project happen. Waxman says that when he and his company got to the building, “it already had a thick L&I file.”

Shift Capital is currently redeveloping 956 Erie Avenue, a 19 acre site with nearly 800,000 square feet of space.
This puts buildings in a perilous situation in two ways. The first is where the cost of acquisition reaches a level where most developers prefer demolition to offset the substantial purchase price. By starting from scratch, they can maximize the new building’s envelope, achieving higher density and bigger returns, in part driven by the initial higher acquisition costs. On top of the higher acquisition costs are the prohibitive costs of repair and restoration. For a developer already unfamiliar with the unique efforts required by a historic property, these challenges often make a seemingly insurmountable case for demolition.

Sourbeer wonders “why couldn’t there be a city incentive for owners to sell earlier?” She explained further that this might be a subsidy, a waiver of the transfer taxes, or other opportunity that encourages owners who have stopped investing in their property and are looking for a major increase in value, to sell properties earlier.

ACTIVATE COMMUNITY-ENGAGED PROBLEM SOLVING

The Community Design Collaborative’s recent project with national nonprofit, Partners for Sacred Places, in Sacred Places / Civic Spaces, points to the kind of creative solution that Sourbeer thinks communities, planners, and the city might embrace which allows an owner to collaborate with developers and designers ahead of the curve, before the change in a neighborhood or the needs of a building threaten its opportunity for reuse and development. The Sacred Places / Civic Spaces project allowed three historic religious congregations, Wharton Wesley United Methodist and Philadelphia Masjid, both in West Philadelphia, and Zion Baptist on North Broad, to pair with a community developer and an architecture firm in order to take part in a design study that results in plans for developing new opportunities for under or unused portions of their properties.

Along with policies and incentives that might encourage property owners to turn over buildings before options for reuse decrease, “people should be out investigating their neighborhood.” They “need to find out what’s going on,” and seek out ways to participate and learn more about what they can do in their own neighborhoods. Sourbeer also points towards community education models around development, such as Jump Start Germantown, founded by developer Ken Weinstein and supported by Philly Office Retail, where he serves as President. Jumpstart Germantown provides a training program and supports a developers’ network in order to share information about community-oriented development and encourage local development entrepreneurs.

While Philadelphia continues to face significant challenges to reusing historic buildings, some creative ideas could stimulate interest for adaptive reuse. Working with L&I and other city agencies to encourage reuse instead of demolition, along with making the permitting and approval process more expedient will hopefully entice developers who are traditionally wary of the complexity in adaptive reuse. Economic incentives and creative partnerships could encourage current property owners to unload their buildings before they’ve become too burdensome and expensive for reuse. While the last recommendations may go far to protect buildings, there is still work to be done to incentivize historic preservation and adaptive reuse, making the possibility of giving a historic building new life as attractive as replacing it.

Joshua Castaño is Director of Community Engagement Services at Partners for Sacred Places. He works directly with religious communities and community leaders across the nation to make the most of historic houses of worship as community assets.
INCLUSIVITY FOR ALL COMMUNITIES:

AVOIDING ERASURE IN PHILADELPHIA’S HISTORIC SURVEY PROCESS

BY DANA RICE
"backlash and bullshit
his’try erased
fed on a spoon and shoved in my face
the trees remember" - "the rubble of progress" by i am intisar

Erasure is an apt term for what’s at stake for Philadelphia and the Mayor’s Historic Preservation Task Force. With a record high number of demolitions in 2018, the loss of historic building fabric is an almost daily occurrence in the city. Here, the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places serves as the local list of historic properties to be protected under the Historical Commission. However, there are gaps in this inventory, and just as the addition of properties to the historic register constructs a narrative of our city’s heritage, so too does their destruction.

One major priority that most preservationists agree on is the need for citywide survey. The Philadelphia Historical Commission (PHC) has never had the financial or staff capacity to achieve this despite it being part of their directive. It’s because of this that Philadelphia lags far behind its peer cities in terms of the number of resources protected and documented, as the National Trust for Historic Preservation reported to the Task Force. Of the city’s nearly 500,000 buildings, only 2.2% are protected on the Philadelphia Register, almost half the average of the 50 other US cities surveyed of 4.3%. This is despite the average age of the building stock being significantly lower at 1925 compared to 1952. Because both the PHC and L&I’s current policy rely on the Philadelphia Register to regulate historic properties, many potentially significant sites remain vulnerable.

While this alone is problematic, what complicates it further is that this limited inventory is not evenly distributed across the city. Most of the properties on the Philadelphia Register are concentrated in and around Center City with pockets in affluent areas to the north like Mt. Airy and Chestnut Hill. Due to this fact, the areas that have the least protection like north central and lower south Philadelphia are also the places that have the most contentious histories. They are the same place that have historically struggled with poverty and decline. They are the same places that have recently seen spikes in demolitions, either by L&I or developers. They are the same places that historically have been fraught by discriminatory lending practices, declining economic conditions and were the backdrops for large scale redevelopment projects like public housing or university expansion. At the same time, they are the same places where Pearl Bailey and John Coltrane got their start; They are the same places where MLK came to speak, and where a thriving arts and culture scene grew to rival Harlem. They are the places with some of the most dynamic historical narratives, yet are the most vulnerable to being wiped out.

On the ground, the experience of the long-term residents is not loss, but erasure. At the former Pyramid Club at 1517 Cecil B. Moore Avenue, artist i am intisar is exhibiting photographs documenting the recent changes in her neighborhood. The exhibit featured photographs of the former Blue Horizon boxing venue on north Broad, which is currently being converted into a luxury hotel chain catered towards millennials, the vacant lot on Ridge Avenue where the former “Ridge Home Furnishings” used to be, and the fences that line the crumbling Pruvus House, a former stop on the underground railroad. This is juxtaposed by photos of boarded up row houses, vacant lots full of debris, and 2x framing and zip sheathing seen through chain link fences that signal the rise of “progress”. Through the lens of these changes the artist says, “the lie gets to be told that it’s better”. Her work illustrates not organic growth, but a calculated and carefully constructed narrative that “anything is better”. This narrative serves to undermine the people and histories that came before and justify the actions that are leading to their displacement. It provokes the question of whether progress can happen without erasure.

The issue at hand is not just inequities in the historic inventory but the systematized erasure that’s threatening the diversity of historic narratives in the city. How can a citywide survey aid in an effort for a more inclusive historical inventory?

While erasure is a pervasive narrative that’s characterizing development in the city, it doesn’t always have to come at the expense of progress. For i am intisar that means having a voice in the debate, “I’m all for the new and the next; I just want to be a part of it”. The difficulty comes with engaging developers in open and honest conversations regarding their projects. As architects we are in a unique position to facilitate those conversations with our developer clients, however we often fall short of this. In February, Penn Professor Aaron Levy and Architect Eduardo Rega Calvo spoke at a Design Advocacy Group meeting about equity in architecture. In a follow up, Rega noted that “[architects] are not questioning their clients; are not questioning the processes that they are a part of” and this has led to their complacency in acts of erasure. What’s needed is for a shift in thinking about their role in these systems, “where goals are set in partnership and so you have agency to be critical of, or even refuse to participate in exploitative processes”.

“homes for the new” from “RUBBLE OF PROGRESS” exhibition
A comprehensive historic inventory could serve as a vehicle for those conversations and critiques. In his seminal book on inclusivity in historic preservation “Place, Race, and Story”, published in 2009, Ned Kaufman correlates the preservation movement with that of affordable housing; he notes that while designation does not prevent such social upheaval it does force a “public debate about their history and its importance to the city”⁴; it would make apparent the struggle that communities are facing and create a platform for their inclusion in the conversation.

While conducting a city-wide survey is a step in the right direction, how this is conducted can also have an impact on the inclusivity of the results. Capturing these types of narratives and resources would require, as Kaufman suggests, looking at cultural significance first and the buildings second, expanding our perception of the built environment. Kaufman writes “Architecture...as the physical shaping of space and place...is both the container of stories and their embodiment.”⁵ At issue in the creation of any survey then, is that some of the most culturally significant places are not the most architecturally noteworthy.

Placing cultural significance requires the use of survey tactics that focus on people rather than physical building characteristics. Cities across the US are experimenting with different ways to integrate these principles into their survey methodology. In the second white paper released by the Task Force on Best Practices, the National Trust identified the culture mapping strategy being used by the San Antonio Office of Historic Preservation. Their process begins by taking oral histories from community participants and then asking them to draw a map of their story. The goal is to eventually translate this data into GIS to be used by urban planners, although one could also perceive its usefulness as a launch point for neighborhood surveys. For San Antonio, cultural historian, Claudia Guerra, writes that “Engaging the public in the process of identifying cherished resources, rather than leaving that to a so-called expert, not only advances a democratic process but also is likely to reveal resources that would otherwise go unnoticed.”⁶

The survey methodology proposed by the Task Force is architecture first and cultural significance second. Their final report recommends splitting the survey into two phases, the first being Identification/Planning, which will look primarily at buildings physical features i.e location, style, function, form etc. and the second phase being Intensive/Evaluation which will include aspects of significance such as narratives and cultural affiliations. This creates a huge gap where properties that do not have historic integrity or are not architecturally significant could get lost in the survey process. Kaufman critiques this focus on physical building qualities as a barrier towards diversity in preservation. He suggests instead an emphasis on “storyscapes”, places that are significant for their ability to “convey history, support community memory, and nurture people’s attachment to place”.⁷

While the term “storyscape” hasn’t exactly caught on, the concept has. In an article for Forum Magazine, Keilah Spann noted that for many cultures, particularly African Americans, the cultural memory of a place is privileged over aesthetic merits and the importance of including narratives and histories in public programming even when no tangible resource exists.⁸ This is particularly important in Philadelphia since disinvestment and citywide demolition campaigns have preceded the work of developers, and many culturally significant structures have been razed or are significantly deteriorated.

To compensate for the ongoing losses, many histories are being expressed through murals. Like the buildings themselves, these are also vulnerable to development pressures. The Dox Thrash mural, celebrating the life of the acclaimed artist and printmaker, has undergone several iterations. Initially completed in 2001 by artists Eric Okdeh and Calvin Jones, the mural was painted over in black after it was tagged in 2012. In 2015, Okdeh was given the opportunity to paint a new mural near the Pyramid Club in commemoration of the artist. Today however, that mural has been obscured by the development of new luxury apartments in the adjacent vacant lot. The mural still peaks out from behind the party wall and the name “Dox Thrash” can be read on the side of the building. In an article with Billy Penn, Mural Arts director Jane Golden estimated that 3-5 murals are lost to development every year. If informed, they negotiate some restitution to reinstate the mural elsewhere, but they have no ability to prevent private developers from building on private property, regardless of what cultural resources exist.⁹ For residents of the neighborhoods it heightens the sense of erasure as any and all sites of memory are at stake with the growing development trends.

The Trust noted in their report to the Task Force that “community history and cultural significance require community participation.” ¹⁰ If the Task Force’s protocol is to be implemented then it must be supplemented with real acts of listening. While the Task Force’s report...
does make hints at including community participation in the final survey, it falls short of developing a fully democratized survey process, and it leaves it open ended whether the implementation will include any public process at all.

By framing the goal as a fight against systematized erasure and using the inventory as a tool to bring communities into discourse with developers, it becomes crucial that their voice is heard during the survey process itself. Otherwise the survey will only serve to further the “anything is better” narrative. Together with a historic resource inventory, architects and preservationists alike can work together to chart a different narrative of progress; one that accepts the stories, networks and legacies of communities.

Dana Rice is an Architectural Designer at CICADA Architecture/Planning, inc. with a background in historic preservation. Her professional work focuses on affordability and regeneration in urban communities. In her spare time, she is a contributor to Hidden City Daily focusing on issues related to preservation policy.

Citations:
3. Briggs, 2018
9. Winberg, Michaela “One of the biggest threats to Philly murals? New construction”. Billy Penn 06/25/2018
10. National Trust for Historic Preservation “HISTORIC / CULTURAL RESOURCE SURVEY: BEST PRACTICES RESEARCH” January, 2018
Publicly funded archaeological investigations in Philadelphia have uncovered a wealth of sites that contribute to the city’s history, especially the histories of people who did not leave written records and are not among the famous and powerful. During the Independence Mall renovations in the early 2000s, excavations uncovered part of the foundation of the kitchen where enslaved members of George Washington’s household worked; these remains provided a touchstone for discussions of slavery and its aftermath on the viewing platform the National Park Service built above the excavation. Artifact assemblages recovered from privies near where the Liberty Bell Center and Independence Visitor Center now stand revealed the values, tastes, and economic wherewithal of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century households of artisans, merchants, bureaucrats, and land developers who are otherwise absent from the historic record. On the block where the Constitution Center now sits, excavation of an ancient, buried ground surface revealed a small campsite associated with a Native American occupation dating ca. 1000 BC, about 2,500 years before European colonization (Yamin 2008). Evidence for the use of the local, pre-contact landscape has also been found within the I-95 corridor; under a nondescript, 1950s railroad platform in Port Richmond, archaeologists found over 3,500 artifacts that reveal how Native American people lived along the banks of the Delaware River for over 3,350 years (AECOM 2014).

All of these excavations were done in compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), which requires archaeological evaluation and mitigation when a proposed construction project is on federal property, requires federal permitting, or is built with federal funds. The Pennsylvania History Code requires a similar process for projects that have state funding or permitting. However, Philadelphia needs a mechanism for evaluating and mitigating damage to sites that are not covered by these laws. This problem was brought starkly into focus when ongoing private construction activities in 2017 began to turn up human bones associated with an early eighteenth-century burial ground at the corner of Arch and Second streets. The Orphans’ Court, which oversees unmarked graves and cemeteries, was approached by representatives of the Philadelphia Archaeological Forum and the developer ultimately paid for excavating the remaining
CLEARLY, PHILADELPHIA IS BEHIND IN TAKING ITS ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES SERIOUSLY. THIS IS PARTICULARLY SHOCKING CONSIDERING THE REGION’S HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE.

burials. Analyses of the burials and associated materials are being conducted through Rutgers University-Camden and the College of New Jersey prior to reburial (Arch Street Project 2019).

The unmitigated disturbance of these remains would not have happened in cities where regulations are in place that require archaeology before undertaking private construction projects. In New York City, the City Environmental Quality Review Act, passed in 1977, requires all construction projects requesting a variance from a city agency—e.g., City Planning, Board of Standards and Appeals, Parks, Environmental Protection, Sanitation—to be reviewed by archaeologists at the Landmarks Preservation Commission. This four-person staff reviews between 300 and 400 projects a year, requiring archaeology on about ten percent of them and full mitigation on about one percent (personal communication, Amanda Sutphin, April 4, 2019).

In New Orleans, a historic preservation specialist and archaeologist were hired to oversee work associated with the massive post-Katrina infrastructure program funded by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). While FEMA-funded projects fall under the NHPR, the archaeologist was also charged with developing a database of cultural resources identified on public and private projects, including number and type of sites, age, and data sets obtained, and creating a GIS map containing information from archaeological fieldwork and historic maps (McCarthy 2019). In Alexandria, Virginia, a 1989 ordinance provides for the study and preservation of archaeological resources threatened by development. Three city archaeologists (along with a curator and educational coordinator) review all construction and demolition permits and oversee private archaeological work on development sites. In 2018, they reviewed 280 projects and called for major mitigation on about seven percent of them (personal communication, Garrett Fesler, April 9, 2019); four eighteenth-century ships used to create new land along the Potomac were recently discovered as a result of this ordinance.

Clearly, Philadelphia is behind in taking its archaeological resources seriously. This is particularly shocking considering the region’s historic significance. Existing code gives the Philadelphia Historical Commission (PHC) a mandate to nominate and preserve archaeological sites, but there is no regulatory and oversight framework in place to do it. If public money is not involved in proposed construction, archaeological issues are not automatically considered during the permitting process. In other words, the trigger for archaeological review used in New York since 1977 and Alexandria since 1989, i.e., the application for a variance of some kind, does not apply in Philadelphia. Moreover, there has been no archaeologist on the PHC staff since 1989. Finally, with the exception of the historic burial places database recently developed by the Philadelphia Archaeological Forum, a non-profit, volunteer organization with no governmental affiliation, there is no ongoing effort to inventory sites or potentially sensitive areas for archaeological resources in the city. There is a dire and immediate need to rectify these deficiencies.

Philadelphia needs to appoint at least one archaeologist, if not more, to the PHC. This person must be familiar with both historic and pre-contact sites. An ordinance needs to be drafted that allows the mandate for nominating and preserving archaeological resources to be realized; connecting archaeological review to the permitting process seems like the most obvious and tested approach. As elsewhere, it is likely that a small fraction of sites would require full mitigation, interpretation, and reporting; however, the benefits would be enormous. Moreover, maintaining a database of sites identified through that process as well as those that still fall outside of it (i.e., by-right projects) would greatly enhance the potential preservation of these valuable cultural resources. Just as publicly funded projects have provided new insights into Philadelphia’s history and prehistory, privately funded projects would add immeasurably to our understanding of the city’s past.

Rebecca Yamin, Ph.D. served as a Principal Archaeologist with John Milner Associates from 1992-2016 and has authored works on urban archaeology including Digging in the City of Brotherly Love, Stories from Philadelphia Archaeology.

Megan C. Kassabaum, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor of Anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania, as well as the Weingarten Assistant Curator at the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

Citations:

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DESIGN PROFILE

THE MET PHILADELPHIA

ATKIN OLSHIN SCHADE ARCHITECTS
Opened in 1908 by the legendary Oscar Hammerstein, what was originally known as the Philadelphia Opera House was one of the grandest performance spaces ever constructed in the city. Unfortunately, opera began to wane in popularity by the 1920s and the building eventually became used for less artistic purposes, including as a boxing ring and basketball court. The auditorium most recently functioned as a church, leaving much of the remainder of the building vacant.

Eventually, the Met became a symbol of urban decline. Despite its deteriorated state, the building remained a landmark on North Broad Street, earning designation to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places in 1971 and National Register status in 1972.

After decades of decline and deterioration, the neglected façade is now secure and has regained its prominent place in the historic streetscape of North Broad Street.

While preserving the Met’s most significant architectural features was a primary goal, making the building functional as a twenty-first century venue was also critical. To that end, completely new mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems were installed. The auditorium itself was revamped with new seating, lighting and sound systems, as well as a variety of bars and gathering spaces for concert-goers, not to mention back-of-house spaces for performers and staff. Notably, ADA upgrades have made the interior fully accessible. The result of this work combines the sensitive preservation of a highly significant interior space with upgrades that allow it to function as any newly built venue would.

**PROJECT:** The Met Philadelphia  
**LOCATION:** Philadelphia, PA  
**CLIENT:** EBRM / Live Nation  
**PROJECT SIZE:** 3,000 SF (seat renovated concert hall)  
**PROJECT TEAM:**  
Atkin Olshin Schade Architects (Architect)  
Concord Engineering (MEP/FP Engineer)  
David Chou (Structural Engineer)  
Bohler Engineering (Civil Engineer)  
Domus Construction (Construction)
DESIGN PROFILE

PLAY ARTS
Bright Common Architecture & Design

PROJECT: Play Arts
LOCATION: Philadelphia, PA
CLIENT: Burkey Holdings & Steve Yutzy-Burkey
PROJECT SIZE: 4,025 SF
PROJECT TEAM:
Bright Common Architecture & Design (Architect)
Burkey Holdings / Steve Yutzy-Burkey (Contractor and Owner)
Kristen Zubriski (Photographer)
Originally built in 1907, this former public bath house sits at the crossroads of three neighborhoods: Fishtown, South Kensington, and Northern Liberties. Closed as a public pool in 1960 and abandoned in 1992, it quickly fell into disrepair. A number of local residents fondly remember the local pool from its 1950s, and, with this community spirit in mind, the beautiful brick building was reimagined for a similarly civic-minded community organization.

PlayArts, a Passive House guided, deep-energy retrofit, hosts art and music instruction, adventure-based play, and a small café. Using minimal, careful alterations to the original facade, its beautiful brickwork and arch entry were thoroughly cleaned and refurbished. The project respects its roots by carefully, thoughtfully renovating the exterior, interior, and wall assemblies. PlayArts represents a return to an era of holistic community thinking while advancing healthy building restoration in Philadelphia.
DESIGN PROFILE
LINODE HEADQUARTERS
Ballinger
Linode, a growing cloud hosting company, chose a historic Philadelphia building as their new headquarters. Ballinger was selected to renovate the 22,300 SF former bank and transition Linodians from suburban offices to Philadelphia’s emerging N3rd Street tech and design hub.

Built in 1902, the former Girard Corn Exchange National Bank was also the set of MTV’s Real World Philadelphia. The limestone façade features colossal engaged limestone columns and a granite stoop with wood, bronze and glass sliding pocket doors. The building’s character-defining features were retained and rehabilitated, including the exterior, a double-story banking hall and board room.

The interior is designed to reflect Linode’s innovative culture. Ubiquitous transparency and a variety of collaboration spaces support Linode’s goals to improve communication between teams and retain talent. A hub on the first floor serves as a commons for gatherings and special events.

The building has enhanced recruiting efforts and enabled an increase in staff numbers. In 2019 Linode was named a Delaware Valley Top Workplace by The Philadelphia Inquirer.

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**PROJECT:** Linode Headquarters  
**LOCATION:** Philadelphia, PA  
**CLIENT:** Linode / Atlantis Investments, LLC  
**PROJECT SIZE:** 22,300 SF  
**PROJECT TEAM:**  
Ballinger (Architect, Historic Preservation, Structural Engineer)  
HPE Group (MEP Engineering)  
C. Erickson and Sons, Inc. (General Contractor)  
The Lightin Practice (Lighting Designer)  
Materials Conservation Co., LLC (Conservation Consultant)
DESIGN PROFILE

SMITHSONIAN, NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN, NEW YORK

EwingCole

The Smithsonian, National Museum of the American Indian, New York, the George Gustav Heye Center, is located within the historic Alexander Hamilton U.S. Custom House, designed by Cass Gilbert and completed in 1908. Mr. Heye’s collection of more than 800,000 artifacts forms the basis of the Museum in New York, its original location, and the main Museum on the National Mall in Washington, DC. Since 1992, the New York museum’s permanent and temporary exhibitions—as well as a range of public programs, including music and dance performances, films, and symposia—explore the diversity of the Native people of the Americas. A permanent exhibit, called Infinity of Nations, features historic and contemporary artifacts and works of art by native peoples throughout the Americas.

For more than 20 years, the Museum Store of the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian, George Gustav Heye Center, has served as New York City’s premier destination to purchase authentic Native American merchandise. Recently expanded and relocated, as designed by EwingCole and Bergmeyer Architects, the store now features more items from a wider representation of Native groups than ever before, offering apparel, art, literature, jewelry, food, and more for all ages.

The new Museum Store’s space historically served as the Cashier’s Office of the Custom House. In the early 20th century, revenue from the Custom House served as one of the largest funding sources for the federal government. From 1992 on, the Cashier’s Office served as Museum’s Resource Center and Library, which has evolved into a digital and web-based service.

The renovation of the 9,500 SF space preserves original details like the bronze screens for the cashier’s cages, and two pairs of intricately adorned oak doors with bronze screens and hardware. The architects restored original decorative details such as intricate crown molding, and marble wainscoting, and updated the grand chandeliers and sconces with LED lamps. Juxtaposed with the beautifully restored room are modern store fixtures and display cases, conceived by Bergmeyer’s designers and executed by EwingCole, who were also responsible for the historic restoration, new track lighting and all engineering, including an appropriate and subtly integrated HVAC system.

PROJECT: Smithsonian, National Museum of the American Indian, New York, the George Gustav Heye Center Museum Store
LOCATION: New York, NY
CLIENT: The Smithsonian Institution
PROJECT SIZE: 9,500 SF
PROJECT TEAM:
EwingCole (Architect, Engineer, Interior Designer)
Bergmeyer Architects (Architect, Designer)
5 Arborcrest is a 203,048SF three-story Class A Office Space underwent a comprehensive adaptive reuse bringing new life to the shell of a 1970s Pharmaceutical Headquarters. Designed in an era that saw the invention of the office cubicle, 5 Arborcrest was designed 40 years ago as a large box, with quadrants of desultory offices and “watercooler” common spaces. The deep floor plates and tinted windows gave the building a fortress-like appearance, reducing the amount of light and views available at the core of the building.

The renovation of 5 Arborcrest has resulted in a modern, attractive building with an industrial vibe. Selective demolition of the building left large parts of the original building intact and allowed the owner to keep tons of construction waste out of landfills. Inside the building, the core was reconfigured to locate utilities and building services more strategically for site and environmental benefits. The underutilized mechanical penthouse was recaptured into a prime office space and the parking lot was redesigned to connect back to the natural wooded landscape surrounding the building.

An expanded two-story lobby with a grand stair clad in custom terrazzo was introduced at the heart of the building, to connect tenants through an active central core. The original dark tinted punched windows were replaced with full-height glazing, providing expansive views of the entire office park, landscaping and picnic terrace. Multiple tenants are served with a range of modern office amenities, including a full-service café, fitness center, yoga room, basketball court and lounges throughout the building.
Located adjacent to the Museum is the Perelman Building, formerly the headquarters of the Fidelity Mutual Life Insurance Company, designed in 1927 by Zantzinger, Borie, and Medary, and considered today as the most significant example of Art Deco style architecture in the city.

The design concept is to create a singular space as an insertion of contemporary elements within the richly detailed historic building. Like objects in a gallery, these elements are assembled to create spatial relationships between each other and the defining walls of the space. There is a terraced podium of seats that gathers the audience, a tech cube that composes the space, a proscenium frame that focuses the room, a textured scrim that adjusts the ceiling plane, and new acoustic wall panels that redefine the enclosure.

With transparency restored between the urban park setting and the gathering within, the space is repurposed to become a room that reconnects to the City.
The building presented significant challenges in its reuse: how to convert the open-air observatory space into a climate-controlled space that would be compliant with energy codes, how to provide accessibility between floors without sacrificing too much floor area, and how to introduce an energy-efficient HVAC system into a building that had no space for ductwork or mechanical equipment. This project made the most of the large spaces of the former Observatory. This space hosts yoga classes, banquets, open mic nights, dance classes, and panel discussions. While idiosyncratic buildings like this present modernization challenges, they can be repurposed to provide a sense of pride and tradition that can celebrate individuality, support emotional health, and sustain the spirit of a community and its growth.
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