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Changing Landscapes: Redefining Preservation for Legacy Neighborhoods

Kaitlyn Levesque

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Changing Landscapes: Redefining Preservation for Legacy Neighborhoods

Abstract
This thesis offers a critical examination of traditional preservation policies and practices, which have long prioritized the physical form and fabric of heritage places over other values. This disproportionately favors dominant cultures in historic narratives and perpetuates harmfully narrow definitions of significance, authenticity, and integrity.

With a specific focus on legacy neighborhoods, urban areas suffering from sustained disinvestment and widespread vacancy, a more equitable preservation process is proposed. One which views the preservation of a neighborhood’s existing social fabric (its health, culture, and connectivity) as essential to the that of its physical fabric (both built and natural). Grounded in a cultural landscapes approach and fortified with ideas of resiliency, peacekeeping, and values-centered preservation, this process is ultimately applied to the North Philadelphia neighborhood of Strawberry Mansion; a community—for better or worse—poised for change.

Keywords
legacy cities, cultural landscapes, resiliency, placekeeping, values-centered preservation

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CHANGING LANDSCAPES:
REDEFINING PRESERVATION FOR LEGACY NEIGHBORHOODS

Kaitlyn Danielle Levesque

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To my parents, your unyielding praise and support has instilled in me a level of self-confidence far greater than that of my given ability.

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INTRODUCTION

*The North Philadelphia Neighborhood of Strawberry Mansion*

Strawberry Mansion is a vibrant North Philadelphia neighborhood nestled against the sprawling green of East Fairmount Park—just three miles from the city’s center. Though a cluster of commercial spaces sits buried within the community’s core, row upon row of residential housing dominates the landscape. The majority of these homes are rowhouses—quintessentially Philadelphian and only two or three-stories tall—the neighborhood is
intimate. There are trends and rhythms to the built fabric: larger, taller structures along the periphery; smaller, shorter ones filling in subdivided parcels over time. The neighborhood originated at the end of the nineteenth-century, a residential enclave for an industrializing city.

Figure 2: 1910 Bromley map of Philadelphia, with Strawberry Mansion outlined in blue. George W. & Walter S. Bromley, Civil Engineers, Atlas of the City of Philadelphia (Philadelphia: G. W. Bromley and Co., 1910).

Presently, Strawberry Mansion is 95 percent Black—one of the many deeply segregated neighborhoods in Philadelphia.¹ The community began to shift from majority-white and

Jewish to majority-Black and Christian in the mid-twentieth century, a typical example of white flight and the structural racism embedded in our public policy. The neighborhood continues to experience a steady loss in population, a contrast to the marginal growth Philadelphia, on the whole, has recently seen. It should come as no surprise that its parcel vacancy and poverty rates are significantly higher than that of the city average. Patterns of vacancy and deterioration have recently overwhelmed Strawberry Mansion, a visual manifestation of sustained disinvestment and economic distress. Like missing teeth, voids where homes once stood now carve haphazard networks of open space across the neighborhood.

Figure 3: 2017 map of Strawberry Mansion, the North Philadelphia neighborhood has a parcel vacancy rate three times that of the city average (Julia Cohen, 2017).
In addition to these internal neighborhood pressures, the external threat of unrestrained new development sits palpably on the horizon. The twenty-first century has brought renewed investment and growth to Philadelphia. But when such processes are allowed to run unchecked, they have the ability to decimate the city’s existing communities—displacing the residents who weathered generations of disinvestment and dismantling the diverse identities cultivated in the face of such adversity.

Framing the Problem

The case of Strawberry Mansion is far from unique. Across the nation once thriving industrial cities have experienced significant population and job loss. Neighborhoods within these “shrinking cities,” often referred to as legacy cities, continue to face substantial, multidimensional and interconnected problems—stemming from long-term disinvestment and discriminatory practices. Among the results: degraded housing stock, hyper vacancy, legacies of demolition and abandonment, diminished environmental health, depleted economic corridors, and concentrated poverty.

In the second half of the twentieth century the majority of America’s most populous cities began to empty.\(^2\) Spurred on by a post-industrial economy and suburbanization, the racially charged realities of this exodus and its consequences cannot be ignored. Technological

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advances and the decline of manufacturing enabled white wealthy and middle-class residents to flock to newly constructed suburban enclaves. However, discriminatory practice (redlining, restrictive covenants, limited access to educational or employment opportunities, indiscriminate demolition initiatives, and concentrated public-housing) denied many minority residents the same ability. This resulted in highly segregated cities and ultimately, as these practices persisted, deeply concentrated pockets of urban poverty.3 With cities hemorrhaging residents, industry, and revenue, they were unable—and often unwilling—to adequately care for the more vulnerable populations who remained. This neglect fueled further abandonment.

Beset by fragmented blocks; scarce public-sector resources; disaggregated, single-issue policies; and diminished organizational capacities—planning and preservation for legacy neighborhoods must be reimagined. Current tactics (most prominently “rightsizing” efforts) rarely endeavor to treat problems, or their solutions, holistically; despite the fact that the social, natural, and built components of these neighborhoods are inherently linked.4 Traditional preservation approaches prioritize the built form above all else, but it is the broader social contexts and cultural networks that endow spaces, buildings included, with their very significance. This paper tests the assumption that the implementation of integrated, holistic planning and preservation strategies—employing a cultural landscapes

3 Ibid, 40.
approach, enhanced by complementary ideas of resiliency, peacekeeping, and values-centered preservation—can provide a successful means of equitably and sustainably revitalizing legacy neighborhoods.

Cultural landscape theory, which views heritage places as dynamic, connected geographies capable of evolving over time, has gone underutilized in preservation practices—particularly with respect to urban contexts. It is my assertion that a cultural landscapes approach allows the preservation of a neighborhood’s existing social fabric (its health, culture, and connectivity) to be seen essential to that of its physical fabric (both natural and built). In legacy neighborhoods this translates to the retention of a community’s social capital, alongside the systematic rehabilitation of existing structures, and the redevelopment of open-space resources in ways which acknowledge the full spectrum of their values—not just vacant land’s economic value for redevelopment purposes, but its cultural, social, and ecological values as well.

Only by understanding the social, natural, and built environments of legacy neighborhoods as a connected system, can these communities be preserved and revitalized in an equitable and sustainable fashion. This paper will ultimately propose new ways to define preservation, particularly within the context of disinvested, urban neighborhoods, that support diverse depictions of heritage and call for the construction of new professional frameworks.
Methodology

To provide the appropriate foundations for these assertions, this paper will first explore the historical context and contributing factors for disinvestment and the geography of “shrinkage” in American cities from the mid-twentieth century onward. It will then establish an overview of cultural landscape theory as it has evolved within the field of historic preservation specifically. Following this overview, the philosophies of resiliency, placekeeping, and values-centered preservation will be put forward to strengthen current cultural landscape practices and contribute to the holistic, equitable preservation of legacy cities. Because resiliency, placekeeping, and values-centered preservation are not the central focus of this paper their histories and wide breadth of practice have not been fully expanded upon. The literatures of these fields are extensive, and the potential contribution of each to preservation theory (or vice-versa) are in themselves worthy of individual study.

Situated amongst these contexts, a handful of neighborhood revitalization initiatives will be discussed with the purpose of illustrating current practices seeking to incorporate innovative, holistic planning and preservation approaches into their work. Though none of the highlighted examples can be viewed as complete approaches in and of themselves, each contributes meaningfully to the conversation around equitable revitalization. This paper will conclude with a set of recommendations for a process—importantly not a model—that prioritizes the equitable preservation and revitalization of legacy neighborhoods. Said

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5 Cultural landscape theory spans a multitude of disciplines in which scholarship has periodically manifested itself differently.
process will ultimately be applied to the North Philadelphia neighborhood of Strawberry Mansion, a community—for better or worse—poised for change.
URBAN “SHRINKAGE”

And why isn’t it for you?

-James Baldwin

Legacy cities are defined as older, industrial urban areas that have experienced significant population and job loss throughout the latter half of the twentieth-century, resulting in diminished resources and wide-spread vacancy. The most emblematic examples of these cities are located throughout the rust belt. However, the systemic social and political issues responsible for this phenomenon—often characterized as urban shrinkage—can be found to varying degrees in almost any American city. Even cities which have experienced overall growth or stabilization in recent years may still possess pockets of substantial disinvestment and abandonment stemming from the same root causes impacting so-called legacy cities.

A Note on Terminology

The term “shrinking city” is problematic for a multitude of reasons. Firstly, it often perpetuates a false understanding of the transformative processes at play in such cities. Cities “cannot and do not shrink spatially (reducing the size of all of their parts in unison);”

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7 Ibid.
instead they lose jobs, residents, and resources, not in any orderly fashion, but in uneven patches and phases. “Shrinking” is also passive. It removes the burden of responsibility from liable parties, framing these losses—of people, of industry—as the problems plaguing cities, not merely the visible manifestations of more sinister and complex issues.

Perhaps most significantly, a shrinking city is often thought to be a declining city, a decaying city, a failing city. This associative way of thinking implies that the only way in which to rectify this is to recapture what has been lost (grow or die) and effectively ignores the residents who have remained within shrinking cities—whether by choice or inability to leave—and their efforts to sustain and revitalize their disrupted communities. In light of these issues, the term “legacy city” has gained popularity and is meant to draw attention to a city’s assets instead of its deficits. However, this term too fails to recognize the nuances of urban shrinkage and the responsibility that social and governmental systems must bear for such phenomena. “Legacy” has also become conflated with “industrial”, which often pigeonholes this typology of neighborhood or urban problem to a limited set of cities. This can hinder progress around widespread implementation of holistic approaches.

Regardless of the terminology used, we must situate our solutions in the understanding that these problems are the manifestation of decades of disinvestment and discriminatory practices and cannot be boiled down to the decline or influx of jobs and residents in any

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single geographic region. Imperfect as it may be, the term “legacy” will be the one used for the purposes identifying those cities and neighborhood that have experienced the previously described phenomenon of disinvestment and population decline.

A debate surrounding proper terminology is not meant to be the focus of this paper. It is brought up to recognize that while “shrinking,” “right-sizing,” and “legacy” have been useful in helping us recognize the physical changes and patterns impacting our cities, these terms can be problematic or at the very least lacking—often removing nuance, agency, and responsibility from the conversation. Moving forward we must continue to be critical of how we label and discuss the physical manifestation of systemic practices of disinvestment and discrimination; it will become important to develop new terminology that evolves beyond these passive ways of seeing.

**Contributing Factors**

Factors contributing to urban shrinkage are many, complex, and long-standing. No single policy, action, or social trend can be found solely responsible for the ongoing urban crisis of the last seventy years. While greatly exacerbated by suburbanization, declining household sizes, a post-industrial economy, and recent economic recessions, the origins of this phenomenon (and the declining quality of life it has brought to many communities) are
unquestionably rooted within the racist and discriminatory planning practices of the previous century.10

The mid-twentieth century saw an influx of African Americans moving into midwestern and northern cities, a move spurred by shifting agricultural practices and escalating Jim Crow laws in the south. They were met with pervasive racial discrimination.11 Housing segregation was actively supported by the Federal government, whose policies sanctioned discriminatory real estate sales and bank lending practices—including racial covenants, block busting, and most notoriously redlining. Starting in the 1930s the Home Owner’s Loan Corporation (HOLC) began rating and mapping neighborhoods based on physical attributes and demographic makeup, an effort to steer investment away from “risky” areas.12 Those neighborhoods in which black residents lived automatically received the worst rating, articulated on HOLC maps in red. This severely impacted not only where black residents could live, but the very capital (such as loans and mortgages) to which they had access.13

These exclusionary practices have created unequal and unjust geographies of opportunity along racial lines, still very much visible on the modern landscape.14 “Jobs left the neighborhood, as did capital, as did ambition, as did public order, [but they remained]. They became the Abandoned.”15 Generations of predatory, social and political discrimination

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13 Sugrue, Origins of the Urban Crisis, 43-44.
depleted these communities, the effects of which are still being realized. Such communities are often most vulnerable for displacement, brought about by a new wave of unrestrained development. Black Americans have disproportionately—and continuously—born the impact of the economic inequality generated from our capitalist society and its governments.  

In Search of a Meaningful Response

Planning solutions have been piecemeal, often aimed at treating individual symptoms rather than root causes. The complexity and pervasive nature of the issues plaguing legacy cities have long been overlooked. Regardless of whether this is due to ignorance or negligence, it has resulted in the isolation of both problems and solution which, unsurprisingly, has brought about little success in achieving equitable, sustainable change.

Twentieth-century urban renewal practices were planning’s first attempt to stem the tides of America’s “shrinking” cities. Desperate to recapture residents lost through white-flight and suburbanization, policies of this era enabled the indiscriminate clearing of minority occupied neighborhoods under the guise of modernization and “blight” removal. Such actions further destabilized already vulnerable populations and intensified the problems of urban disinvestment through hyper segregation along racial and class lines.  

In response to disastrous urban renewal efforts and pervasive race riots, the 1960s and 1970s brought

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16 Sugrue, Origins of the Urban Crisis, 5.
forward a string of federal policies (mostly oriented around housing) that sought to transfer revitalization-oriented decision making to local leaders.\textsuperscript{18,19} These initiatives were often poorly executed, failing to connect residents with their communities or address any of the social-political factors contributing to the increased need for affordable housing.

Community Development Corporations (CDCs), grass-roots organizations designed to fight neighborhood decline, also emerged during this period. Many CDCs were initially founded to pursue economic development opportunities, but their locations—in distressed, high-poverty communities—resulted in limited success.\textsuperscript{20} As cities continued to lose residents, housing vacancies skyrocketed, and city resources grew scarce. Instead of searching for comprehensive, sustainable solutions, many municipalities turned again to demolition (or in the case of the Bronx, fire); acts which served to physically and emotionally fragment urban communities.\textsuperscript{21} The large swaths of open land created through demolition have, in many neighborhoods, been left unmanaged and inactive.\textsuperscript{22}

The preservation field has long associated itself with urban revitalization. While initiatives like the National Trust’s Main Street Program or the federal historic tax credit have undoubtably contributed to the successful revival of urban districts, the field’s role has been largely prescriptive, in both location (historic cores) and scope (architectural conservation.)

\textsuperscript{18} These federal initiatives include, though were not limited to: the Model Cities program, Urban Development Action Grants (UDAG), and Community Development Block Grants (CDBG).


\textsuperscript{20} Alan Mallach, \textit{The Divided City} (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2018), 183-188.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid, 175.

This is reflected in contemporary critiques that characterize historic preservation as an expensive, elitist practice.23 It should thus come as no surprise that, until recently, preservation had been largely omitted from conversations concerning the revitalization of legacy cities.24 This is changing. The Preservation Rightsizing Network (PRN) and the Lincoln Institute have both highlighted preservation as an important tool to be utilized by legacy cities. While these initiatives are commendable, they lack innovation. Both prioritize the built environment over other heritage values, and firmly frame their approaches within traditional preservation practices.25, 26

These initiatives have been drawn in broad brush strokes. They are the thirty-thousand-foot view of preserving in the face of disinvestment, and fail to bring comprehensive, innovative, interdisciplinary approaches to the community level. Cities do not “shrink” consistently. Social and political factors have shaped the landscape of legacy cities over generations, creating pockets of concentrated disinvestment. Sprinkling preservation initiatives throughout the city, instead of concentrating on holistic neighborhood revitalization, does little to bring about equitable or sustainable solutions and can often fail to preserve the heritage of the most vulnerable communities.

Generations of oppressive, discriminatory practices have constructed landscapes and histories that prioritize white citizens above all others. The planning and preservation

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24 Ibid, 125.
26 Mallach, Regenerating Legacy Cities.
professions must bare culpability for this reality. We can no longer be complacent to search for equitable solutions within outdated, harmfully ignorant frameworks. The time has come to stop asking “why” this is our reality, and instead to ask “how” we can sustain meaningful change.
Unless we reconsider our attitude towards landscape resources, and our professional and intellectual boundaries, we will continue to be limited in land management and preservation potentials.

-Robert Melnick²⁷

Cultural landscape theory posits that heritage places (both natural and constructed) do not exist in static isolation. Rather, they function as dynamic geographies, reliant on evolving connections between people, social structures, and land.²⁸ Emerging in the 20th century from the field of cultural geography, cultural landscape philosophies have contributed to modern preservation approaches—an acknowledgement that we derive values from (and add values to) our landscapes precisely because we interact with them over time.²⁹ However, the preservation field has struggled to adequately adapt its practices and belief systems to fully support the diverse and fluid depictions of heritage that cultural landscapes recognize. Regarding “all landscape as symbolic, as expressions of cultural values, social behavior, and individual actions worked upon particular localities over a span of time” is

essential for developing holistic heritage management and preservation strategies.\textsuperscript{30} However, such interpretations have failed to materialize as viable tools or substantive policies. Cultural landscape theory must be fortified with lessons learned from complementary fields—resiliency, placekeeping, and values-based conservation—to be realized as a compelling foundation for the equitable and sustainable revitalization of legacy neighborhoods.

\textit{Cultural Landscape Theory}

The story of America has largely been one of conquest. This has contributed to the construct of the American “wilderness” and a long-held separation of people from nature among our nation’s dominant ideologies.\textsuperscript{31} The notion of “wilderness” quickly became linked to religious dogma and real-world manifestations of the sublime. These philosophies informed our land conservation practices, built on the erroneous foundation that land altered by humans is less valuable than pristine “wilderness” and thus less worthy (or in need) of preservation. Such complete separation of the natural and built environments has perpetuated distorted narratives of history. “People have been manipulating the natural


world on various scales for as long as we have a record of their passing,” nature does not exist externally from humans or our heritage.\textsuperscript{32}

Cultural landscape theory, first proposed by Carl Sauer in the 1920s, is a response to the nature-human binary. Sauer introduced the term cultural landscape as part of a response to environmental determinism. He held the belief that “people had as great an effect on the physical environment as it had upon them,” viewing landscape as material objects possessing a multitude of layers (both natural and human in origin) that could be visually observed, mapped, and read as histories of place.\textsuperscript{33} In the following decades, J.B. Jackson expanded the study of cultural landscapes to professions grounded in history and design. Such shifts advanced perspectives that considered urban districts, small towns, and rural landscapes appropriate scales and foci for preservation—embracing the importance of the everyday.\textsuperscript{34} Landscapes became recognized as texts, “reflections of our tastes, our values, our aspirations, and even our fears, in tangible visible form.”\textsuperscript{35} The 1970s brought forth a necessary questioning of landscapes as material objects, interjecting politics, ideology, and multiplicity into conversations of place. Denis Cosgrove asserts that in acknowledging the complexity of landscapes we are obliged
to pay greater attention to them than we have done in the past, for it is in the origins of landscapes as a way of seeing the world that we discover its

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid, 80.
\textsuperscript{35} Meinig, “Axioms for Reading the Landscape,” 12.
links to broader historical structures and processes and are able to locate landscape study within a progressive debate about society and culture.36

This evolving perspective allowed landscapes to be recognized as stewards of culture. Not merely the static backdrops for our heritage and identity, but active participants in our human existence.

Critique of Practice in Preservation

Cultural geographers have contributed greatly to the understanding of nuance and multiplicity in recognizing the significance of place, but their scholarship “rarely makes the leap to questions of managing landscapes and implementing preservation measures.”37 This burden is not theirs alone to bear. Preservation professionals and governing institutions—which often utilize an archaic form of cultural landscape theory, devoid of modern reevaluations crucial to equitably supporting diverse depictions of heritage—have themselves made little effort to expand upon existing interpretation or management practices.

Historic preservation, influenced most heavily by architectural history and art conservation, has traditionally focused on the physical conservation of individual elements of the built

environment. Stubbornly rigid definitions of *significance, authenticity,* and *integrity* have hindered the field’s ability to adequality incorporate modern cultural landscape scholarship into its practice, resulting in harmfully narrow interpretations of heritage as built and curated. While there are increasing conversations around multiplicity, intangible heritage, diversity, and sense of place, preservation policy and practices are still firmly rooted in notions of stasis. They convey a desire to arrest decay, which consequently arrests change. Such notions are outdated and give truth to the claim that the preservation movement is a social construct designed to exclusively serve dominant cultures and ideologies. Priority is still given (in terms of finances, capacity, and protections) to architecturally charismatic displays of heritage, which have disproportionately served to tell the stories of the most privileged, powerful communities. Not only must we continue to expand our ways of seeing, knowing, and valuing; we have a social and moral responsibility to translate these insights into practice. To adapt is not to admit failure, but rather to show strength and intelligence.

While definitions of cultural landscapes have expanded to be encompassing of vernacular and associative landscapes, the preservation profession has shown limited willingness to devise new ways of identifying and managing these more malleable examples of heritage places, which often exist outside of (and potentially in opposition to) dominant cultural ideologies. UNESCO, for example, defines cultural landscapes as such places that are “illustrative of the evolution of human society and settlement over time, under the influence of the physical constraints and/or opportunities presented by their natural environment and of successive social, economic and cultural forces, both external and
internal.” Under this definition UNESCO recognizes and protects three main categories of landscapes: clearly defined landscapes designed and created intentionally by humans, organically evolved landscapes (either relics or continuing), and associative landscapes.

The first and third categories are narrowly defined, appropriately so, but the second category leaves room for interpretation. The neighborhoods of legacy cities (or any urban environment) can easily be defined as a continuing, organically evolved landscapes. The cultural practices of existing residents retain an “active social role in contemporary society,” while the abundant—originally unplanned for—open space “exhibits significant material evidence of its evolution over time.”

Modern scholars have shifted to embrace wilderness, countryside, suburbs, and cities alike as cultural landscapes. All are human constructs, all bare the legible impacted of our interventions. But paradoxically, urban spaces are seldom designated or protected as cultural landscapes. The illogical separation of the natural and built environments has proved harder to overcome in practice than in theory.

Perhaps this unwillingness to change is born out of an innate desire to organize and simplify, to parse everything into discrete, easy to understand packages. But such practices are ideologically flawed. We can no longer afford to function in this manner. In failing to recognize and actively preserve the evolving cultural landscapes that exist in our urban environments—which include legacy neighborhoods—we are perpetuating “an apolitical

aesthetic [that serves] to mask or hide or normalize potentially racist social and cultural ideals and practices.”40 Cultural landscapes are messy, and complicated, and political. They are palimpsests of humanity. By overlooking the need to adapt modern preservation practices to better protect and manage these very real instances of heritage, we are in danger of losing the detail, color, and diversity that constitutes our human existence.

While I utilize UNESCO’s definitions of cultural landscapes to highlight fallacies in our field’s current practices, what is desperately needed is an expansion of local recognitions and management plans that can directly inform planning and preservation decisions. The process by which we identify and protect culture is inherently flawed. One way to combat this is to integrate and prioritized diverse and sliding scales of preservation at local levels, where they have the greatest potential to impact local residents. Cultural landscape theory has much to contribute to current preservation practices, but it is still lacking. Models must be holistic, dealing forthrightly with politics, inequity, and fragmentation as systemic factors. By fortifying cultural landscape theory with the philosophies of resiliency, placekeeping, and values-based conservation, a sustainable management plan can be realized for the equitable preservation of legacy neighborhoods.

Strengthening Cultural Landscape Theory

Resiliency:

Resilience is “the capacity of any entity—an individual, a community, an organization, or a natural system—to prepare for disruptions, to recover from shocks and stresses, and to adapt and grow from a disruptive experience.”41 When we speak about resiliency, we speak about the resilience of the natural environment (where such philosophies originated), the resilience of the built environment (ever pressing in the face of rapid climate change), and the resilience of human beings (most notably for preservation, our social communities and cultural identities). Through systems thinking we have come to acknowledge that these three elements are interconnected and interdependent.42 This recognition, that we cannot divorce our social well-being from that of our environmental well-being, can support new planning and preservation initiatives within historically disinvested neighborhoods.

Resilience thinking is itself still struggling to define and codify solutions that are truly holistic (let alone ones which outright prioritize cultural resilience); but by strengthening the connection between the fields of preservation and resiliency we can move toward the creation of a more sustainable future, without surrendering our past.

Recognizing urbanity as a part of the human environment and social connections—including those to heritage—as vital to human existence has provided the catalyst for resiliency

41 Ibid.
thinking to be expanded beyond the “natural” world. While vocally supportive of comprehensive solutions, resiliency approaches have traditionally prioritized a connection between the natural and built environments above others; much in the same way cultural landscape approaches have prioritized a connection between heritage and the natural environment. By drawing these two bodies of scholarship into a substantive conversation with one another around preservation—a field that has historically prioritized a connection between the built environment and heritage—we can truly begin to put holistic approaches into practice. The addition of resiliency thinking to a cultural landscapes approach is particularly significant for legacy neighborhoods, which possess both environmentally and culturally vulnerable populations. These problems are inherently connected.

Environmental resilience advocates for diverse, complex ecological systems, capable of sustaining shocks (which due to changing climates, spurred on by our disaggregated urbanization policies, are ever increasing in frequency and intensity) and thus navigating adaptation more successfully. For centuries, dominant cultural ideologies have viewed the environment as other, as something to conquer, control, and dominate. Landscapes and their ecological processes were, until very recently and to much detriment, largely ignored within urban environments. Changing social and political attitudes around such practices has proven to be a challenging and arduous endeavor; environmental resiliency remains underdeveloped as an integral component of preservation. Robert Melnick concedes,

I am impatient with those who cannot see that landscape—the landscape around us, the landscape we have all shaped, the landscape we all
inhabit—is every bit as important as the archeology, artifacts, and associations that we also cherish.43

If we fail to preserve and prioritize healthy environments we will be unable to nourish the preservation of heritage in any form—tangible or intangible. There is latent environmental value in the high percentage of vacancy inundating legacy neighborhoods. This land is an asset. When properly planned for, treated, and maintained, this land is an opportunity to combat the environmental, urban ills (heat islands, flooding, pollution, etc.), which have disproportionately impacted poor and minority communities.

As we prioritize the preservation and revitalization of long ignored communities, we must be cognizant of how easily these efforts can lead to additional disruptions. Urban greening efforts, when executed without fully understanding the context or vulnerabilities of a community, have in some cases acted as catalysts for the rapid displacement of long-time residents. In an effort to prevent this displacement, there has been an emergence of a “just green enough” intervention strategy. The motivation behind this strategy is to provide some level of environmental improvements to marginalized, disinvested communities, but nothing too charismatic, less it draws the attention of speculating developers who see well maintained green space as a beacon for wealthier communities.44 Productive green spaces contribute to the physical, social, and economic well-being of urban neighborhoods.

Strategies that see a deliberate maintenance of inequality as the only solution to keeping vulnerable communities in place are ignorant and lazy. There are predictable patterns to the cycles of predatory development and ensuing displacement characteristic of our neoliberal society. Obtaining sustainable change requires proactive, not reactive, responses. The onus rests on our professions to prioritize human resilience, to safeguard against the disruption of existing residents’ social and cultural networks, to make sure such philosophies remain an active part of the conversation. The key to achieving holistic implementation of resiliency approaches is social cohesion.\textsuperscript{45}

Social cohesion strengthens a community’s ability to persist and thrive, it does the same for the preservation of their heritage. Social cohesion directly supports resiliency, it allows for communities to build and sustain individual identities, granting them agency and power. However, the built environment has long dominated our collective attention; we have consistently failed to adequately address people related vulnerabilities. This is perhaps due to the fact that human vulnerabilities are often chronic; in other words, they lack the visible shock value of built and natural infrastructures compromised by sudden disturbances.\textsuperscript{46}

When Paris’s Notre-Dame Cathedral was recently engulfed in flames, it captivated the world’s attention. The image of the iconic structure ablaze was physically stunning and undeniably impactful. Outpourings of support—in the form of media coverage, personal remembrances, and financial donations—were monumental. In two days one-billion dollars

\textsuperscript{45} Rodin, \textit{The Resilience Dividend}, 61.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid, 111.
had been pledged for the restoration of Notre-Dame. Prompting many to question why the preservation of single building is more worthy of philanthropic spending than initiatives to address social inequality.\(^{47}\)

Older literature took for granted that urban shrinkage was bad for social equity; desperate to reverse decline, planning initiatives saw growth as the only possible solution.\(^{48}\) In understanding legacy neighborhoods as resilient cultural landscapes we can devise new policies and practices that recognize these communities as platforms on which to nourish productive ecosystems, fight heat island effects, manage flooding, and foster an improved quality of life for all citizens. That deepen the connection between both tangible and intangible heritage to the natural environment. That value these neighborhoods as places where (bio)diversity can thrive.

Placekeeping:

Placemaking strives to amplify community identity by claiming public spaces through diverse displays of cultural and artistic expression. It is a way to outwardly communicate the social, often intangible, meanings associated with a particular location.\(^{49}\) Though this practice—of creating place from space and supporting organic, meaningful expressions of identity—is far from a new concept; it has gained momentum and widespread recognition


in the last decade largely due to the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA).\textsuperscript{50} The NEA built this most recent iteration of placemaking (which it branded \textit{creative placemaking}) on the foundational belief that increasing a neighborhood’s cultural capacity can contribute to an increase in its prosperity, social well-being, public safety, and stability.\textsuperscript{51} However, the NEA has been criticized for failing to adequately acknowledge the long and rich history of similar practices within marginalized communities, which are often given little to no support from political or philanthropic entities to sustain cultural practices or claim space within cities.\textsuperscript{52} This criticism has sought to shift the conversation from instances of placemaking to those of placekeeping. Making can remove a sense of agency and ownership from communities, implying that before calculated interventions there was no value ascribed to the place. Keeping acknowledges the preexisting values latent within a community, empowering residents to claim shared ownership over and bring heightened visibility to their heritage.

A term Dr. Jacqueline Taylor, Detroit’s lead historian and cultural landscape specialist, has been using to describe this work is “daylighting”.\textsuperscript{53} Daylighting traditionally refers to the practice of uncovering urban waterways, buried by previous planning decisions. For Taylor it means amplifying neighborhood identities that at first glance may no longer be visible,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Jane Jacobs, Kevin Lynch, Dolores Hayden, and many others have utilized such thinking in their works.
\item Ibid, 16.
\end{enumerate}
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though are nonetheless still very much present; it is an apt and poetic way to describe a cultural landscape approach informed by placekeeping.

Values-centered preservation:

Traditional preservation approaches, those focused on physical form and fabric, disproportionately favor dominant ideologies and cultures. They perpetuate the telling of fractured histories through the omission of marginalized communities who, due to prolonged, systematic discrimination, have not been afforded the same opportunities to express their heritage and identities through physical permanence. Preservation has long avoided confronting these imbalances; there has been general disagreement between “preservation agencies that prize historical and structural integrity on the one hand and historians interested in vernacular and ethnic histories on the other.”54 A compromise will not be reached overnight, but values-centered preservations—which prioritizes social, intangible components of heritage—can begin to bridge this fissure at long last.

The prioritization of historic and aesthetic significance has led us to objectify and scientize our understanding of heritage.55 A practice harmful not only to our profession, but to our collective humanity. While values-center preservation provides an alternative to traditional models, its adoption from theory into practice has been slow to progress. This is because notions of “scientific” expertise are what fostered the professionalization of the field that

there has been such resistance (or in actuality, little effort) to redefine sanctioned practices of preservation—lest the whole profession be invalidated. But it is a fallacy that acknowledging the existence and significance of multiple forms of heritage comes at the expense of others. Our heritage is diverse, so should be our practices of sustaining and preserving it.

Values-centered preservation is premised on the idea that any given place possesses multiple values (historic, aesthetic, economic, cultural, ecological, social) that together contribute to its significance. These values must be assessed and prioritized before preservation interventions can be implemented. Such thinking is particularly pertinent for approaching legacy neighborhoods, which seek to balance the preservation of complex histories and identities with the need for economic and environmental revitalization. Because values-centered preservation recognizes the existence and importance of heritage values beyond those emphasized by traditional preservation approaches, it provides the opportunity to further the dialog around cultural landscapes. Current cultural landscape scholarship has done much to advance our understanding of the layered significance of place but has offered little in the way of management practices to sustain such multiplicity. This must be the contribution of values-centered preservation.

By recognizing the landscapes of legacy neighborhoods as interconnected systems, a sum of parts not isolated objects, sustainable solutions that cater to the bespoke values and needs

56 Ibid.
of individual communities can take form. Together, values-centered preservation and cultural landscape theory can reduce redundancies, prioritize key interventions, and assess a community’s threshold for change without compromising identity.

Conclusions:

The twenty-first century has seen the emergence of cultural landscape philosophies applied to urban environments. The Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach to planning and preservation, codified by UNESECO in their 2011 Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape, successfully draws attention to the perplexing reality that cultural landscape work had previously failed to focus on the urban sphere or connect with planning and development policies. Unfortunately, the application of these endeavors have been primarily limited to “historic cities”—a problematic moniker used to characterize pre-industrial, historic city cores—and the need to balance heritage retention with the demand for modernization and growth in such places. Little attention has been given to the utilization of cultural landscape theory as a basis for intervening in vernacular, urban neighborhoods, which despite lacking any official decry as “historic” are still in possession of rich histories. In these contexts, fortified by resiliency, placekeeping, and values-based conservation, cultural landscape theory can not only be utilized for the preservation of both tangible and intangible heritage, but also as a driving force to promote equitable and sustainable development within communities desperately in need of such processes.

ILLUSTRATIONS OF PROGRESS

The question comes up again: who is going to devote time and energy to helping the neglected landscape?

-J. B. Jackson

Across the nation, legacy neighborhoods are striving to foster sustainable and equitable revitalization. Fitzgerald, Detroit and Lindsay Heights, Milwaukee provide compelling illustrations of the recent progress made towards advancing holistic approaches to such efforts. Additionally, practices in Gentilly, New Orleans and Chicago’s South Side respectfully work to highlight the importance of resiliency and peacekeeping in neighborhood revitalization. Because each neighborhood has embraced less conventional planning practices, all contribute to the conversation around values-centered preservation.

Exemplifying the trends and conditions laid out in section II of this paper; the following case studies are primarily residential communities, possessing richly layered tangible and intangible heritage and threatened by decades of disinvestment and abandonment. Most critically this has strained residents’ quality of life, most visually it has resulted in widespread demolitions and vacancies. Each neighborhood, and their governing cities, have approached revitalization differently, exposing the limits of standard preservation and planning conventions. Their priorities, progress, success, and short comings will be

identified and discussed in order to inform a proposed, equitable process for the preservation and revitalization of legacy neighborhoods.

_Fitzgerald, Detroit_

Detroit—navigating historic inequity, disinvestment, and abandonment—is often singled out as the quintessential example of a legacy city. A staggering twenty square miles of land is reported to be sitting vacant, the most visible result of the exodus of 60 percent of Detroit’s population over the last seventy years.

As new investment and redevelopment slowly creeps back into the city, neighborhood specific revitalization plans are striving to combat the notion that there are two Detroits: the downtown where innovative development has been aggressively prioritized, and the surrounding neighborhoods which have largely been left to fend for themselves (a criticism levied against many legacy cities). The Fitzgerald Revitalization Plan, a public-private partnership spearheaded by the city, has become Detroit’s test case for approaching holistic—land and building—neighborhood scale planning as a new way to tackle the pervasive problems impacting many of the city’s remaining residents.

The plan concentrates on one quarter square mile of the Fitzgerald neighborhood (located in northwest Detroit) and aims to address every city-owned vacant property within its

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designated radius—some 100 vacant buildings and 200 vacant lots. The proposed project, which broke ground in 2017, included the rehabilitation of the majority of city owned vacant buildings, demolition through deconstruction of a handful of unsalvageable buildings, the creation of a two-acre park centering the community, a connective biking and walking path, and the instillation of both productive and ambient landscaping. The completion of this proposed redevelopment project was projected to take two years; it is already more than a year behind schedule and facing criticism from residents.

Revitalization efforts are being led by the Detroit-based, black owned housing developer Century Partners. The company’s mission, “to facilitate holistic revitalization through sustainable residential housing development that embraces grass roots community outreach and the power of creative place-making,” aligns strongly with the goals of the Fitzgerald project, but their small size and relative inexperience (they were founded in 2015) has possibly contributed to the projects delays and engagement shortcomings. This is not to suggest that Century Partners were an inappropriate choice to execute the Fitzgerald Revitalization Plan. Supporting local, minority talent is an important component for achieving equitable revitalization, but if local talent does not have the same capacity as larger national firms, cities must reevaluate timelines and project phasing to reflect this reality.

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63 “Fitzgerald Revitalization Project.”
The emphasis placed on funding the rehabilitation of existing structures (over knee-jerk demolitions or new construction) is significant for acknowledging the value of historic, vernacular buildings. Not only do they contribute to a neighborhood’s sense of place and identity, their retention contributes to practices in sustainable planning. However, the rehabilitation process has been slow moving; by the spring of 2019, only five of the nearly one hundred designated homes were completed and sold. Additionally, while the Ella Fitzgerald Park—boasting a full-sized basketball court, new play equipment, and community constructed mural, has officially opened—little landscaping of environmental remediation has been completed elsewhere in the neighborhood.

Residential complaints and the alteration of some of the stated plans have drawn attention to the project’s shortcomings to appropriately prioritize social resiliency within the Fitzgerald neighborhood—a crucial component of equitable and sustainable revitalization. One example of this is the decision to forego demolitions by deconstruction. Not only does deconstruction have a significantly smaller health impact on the neighborhood and provide opportunities for material recycling, this process would have supplied workforce development opportunities to residents.64 Community members have been vocally critical about the lack of communication, the availability of information around the project, and the setbacks experienced at every phase of the project.65

64 Guillen, “Detroit’s Showcase Neighborhood Project”.
65 Ibid.
To some residents, the revitalization plan feels disconnected, prioritizing visible outcomes over socially impactful ones, and glossing over the human details that are necessary to support truly holistic, equitable initiatives. Neighborhood HomeBase, a shared community space, has recently opened in Fitzgerald. It is being lauded by city officials and residents alike as an important neighborhood addition. While there is hope this space will alleviate some of the skepticism the community has experienced around the feasibility of the proposed revitalization plan, its opening comes two years after the project broke ground. In communities which have been repeatedly scorned by promising city initiatives, it is vital to prioritize constant, sustainable engagement before tackling physical interventions.

The Fitzgerald Revitalization Project is commendable, and certainly ambitious, but holistic might prove to be an overly ambitious moniker. The project is still ongoing—which makes it difficult to speak in terms of success, and impossible to discuss sustainable impacts—but it is already apparent that the touted holistic revitalization plan was perhaps more superficial than substantive. In addressing both the natural and built environment on a neighborhood scale, a cultural landscape approach does begin to take shape but, as has been outlined and called for in the preceding sections of this paper, such interventions require far more nuance, multiplicity, and time than was offered in Detroit’s first attempt for comprehensive revitalization. This is not to say that the project does not possess potential, or that it has failed to contribute to the conversation around the need for holistic intervention when

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tackling the complex and interconnected issues facing legacy neighborhoods. Merely that thus far, it has not been as innovative or progressive as it was promised to be, particularly where social capital and preservation are concerned.

Lindsay Heights, Milwaukee

The story of Lindsay Heights is by now all too familiar. Once a thriving working-class community, the neighborhood suffered at the hands of deindustrialization and institutional racism. During urban renewal, entire sections of the neighborhood were cleared for interstate construction—an action that splintered the community and further contributed to an already declining population. By the close of the twentieth century, Lindsay Heights was among Milwaukee’s most impoverished neighborhoods. But unlike other neighborhoods highlighted, Lindsay Heights’ holistic, equitably driven revitalization has been in large part driven by a single, grass-roots neighborhood association—the Walnut Way Conservation Corporation.

Walnut Way was founded in 2000 by a coalition of like-minded neighbors who wanted to bring lasting change to their community through civic engagement, environmental stewardship, and economic diversity. The newly formed neighborhood association started

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with single house renovations and small-scale planting and beautification initiatives. Over twenty years—and with the generous support of both public and private partners—Walnut Way has grown to be “a multifaceted agency that is part housing developer, part neighborhood center, part job trainer, part urban agriculturalist, and part wellness educator.”69 Currently, Walnut Way is focused on bringing investment back into the neighborhood’s historic commercial corridor (now served by a business investment district), employing residents in jobs with green impacts, transforming unused spaces into productive gardens and parks, working to improve neighborhood soil quality, and providing health and wellness benefits to the long-underserved community.

The revitalization of Lindsay Heights has been a gradual, ongoing process as Walnut Way slowly expands its capacity, projects, and reach. Operating under the philosophy that a stable, connected, healthy community is the only way in which to sustainably support economic development, the neighborhood has prioritized building resilience (both social and environmental) above all else. There is no quick way to build this resilience; Lindsay Heights still has poverty and unemployment rates significantly higher than the national average, but the important thing is that these numbers have gone down. Alongside slowly declining poverty and unemployment statistics, community health has improved, neighborhood investments are increasing, and crime is declining.70 Recently, this progress

69 Ibid.
70 “Lindsay Heights: Quality of Life Plan Update” (Zilber Family Foundation, 2017).
has led to rising concerns around displacement in Lindsay Heights, a thought far from residents’ minds when they first took community improvements into their own hands.\footnote{Andrea Waxman, “Decade-Long Zilber Neighborhood Initiative Changes Trajectory of Lindsay Heights,” September 19, 2018, https://www.milwaukeeenns.org/zilber-initiative-in-lindsay-heights/}

Displacement caused by new development, itself the latest manifestation of the systemic discrimination that isolated minority communities in legacy neighborhoods to begin with, is a difficult phenomenon to prevent. But as we work to redefine what preservation can and should be, as we seek to develop new strategies and approaches that foster diverse communities and depictions of heritage, we must see combatting such displacement as a necessary responsibility of the profession. Lindsay Heights is proof positive that throughout Milwaukee systemic and holistic thinking is picking up, but preservation has been stunted; with much of the advocacy work still focused on high profile cases and the conservation of physical fabric, preservation’s role in social resiliency remains eclipsed.

Supporting Examples

My search for neighborhood level best practices prioritized communities who championed holistic responses to the myriad issues of disinvestment and abandonment they face, acknowledging that the built, social, and natural environments are irrevocably interlocked. While Fitzgerald and Lindsay Heights were ultimately identified as compelling examples of such philosophies, both possess weaknesses and should not be viewed as complete
approaches in and of themselves. The Gentilly district in New Orleans, Chicago’s South Side, and the Anacostia neighborhood of Washington D.C. provide additional ways to present progressive ways to think about discrete components of a holistic approach and are meant to expand upon lessons learned from the so-called holistic approaches Fitzgerald and Lindsay Heights have undertaken.

Environmental sustainability and resiliency have been grossly overlooked within both the planning and preservation communities. Neighborhoods experiencing high levels of vacancy provide an opportunity to incorporate new environmental initiatives into our professional practices. It is a fallacy that the built and natural environments exist in opposition to each other. Perpetuating this binary jeopardizes both our health and our heritage. By strategically incorporating green and blue networks into cities—and recognizing the value of such systems—we can safeguard existing structures from environmental hazards, promote renewed connections between people and place, and most importantly, bring about a better quality of life for urban communities.

The Gentilly district of New Orleans, is an important example of such practices. Supported by a $141 million grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Gentilly Resilience District has outlined a dozen projects to reduce flood risk, slow land subsidence, and promote neighborhood revitalization in an area of the city which experienced some of the worst Katrina induced flooding. In addition to hard and soft

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landscaping interventions, the plan seeks to create workforce development opportunities for local residents to build skills in water infrastructure development and maintenance; promote environmental learning and sustainable stewardship practices, particularly amongst neighborhood youth; and provide long-term health benefits for the community.73 While it is too early to know the full impacts of these interventions as projects are not scheduled to be completed until 2022, it must be noted that there has been little discussion around equitable housing or economic development opportunities. A cause for alarm considering the development induced displacement that has rapidly overwhelmed New Orleans in the decade following Katrina.74 Nonetheless, the Gentilly Resilience District, the first of its kind in New Orleans, marks an important divergence from how the city has traditionally approached water management, sustainability and community revitalization.75 Suffice it to say most urban environments are not facing threats as catastrophic or complex as New Orleans has seen, but climates are changing and with each successive year an increasing number of communities are at risk for climate related disturbances. A cultural landscape approach to preservation and revitalization can provide opportunities to mitigate these disturbances. Artistic interventions and adaptive reuse projects on Chicago’s South Side emphasize the importance of placekeeping initiatives in legacy neighborhood revitalization efforts. Central

75 Rodin, The Resilience Dividend, 235.
to the South Side’s placekeeping initiatives is the Rebuild Foundation; created by artist and urban planner Theaster Gates. The foundation’s mission is to support and strengthen marginalized communities by providing free arts programming, creating new cultural amenities, and developing affordable housing, studio, and live-work spaces. South Side neighborhoods have been fragmented (physically and emotionally) by prolonged disinvestment and discriminatory practice, but the Rebuild Foundation sees arts and culture as essential for developing sustainable solutions. Central to their work is the notion of ethical redevelopment: which seeks to shift the value system away from conventional financial and development practices to conscientious interventions that reimagine “the politics of spatial and social governance with the intention to create new forms of equity [and expressions of life] in a place.” The Rebuild Foundation’s most publicized intervention has been the Stony Island Arts Bank. In 2013 Gates purchased the long vacant bank building from the city of Chicago and has since turned the historic property into a community space that empowers residents to preserve, access, reimagine, and share their heritage.

Placekeeping provides the physical space necessary to sustain the more intangible aspects of heritage and community identity. This fosters social resiliency and neighborhood revitalization. It also demonstrates the power of values-centered preservation. While traditional, fabric centered preservation practices have been used to revitalize “historic

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77 “Ethical Redevelopment” (The University of Chicago, n.d.), 3.
78 “Our Story,” Rebuild Foundation.
districts,” they have had limited success in supporting stable, equitable communities.\textsuperscript{79} Only when preservation is viewed as more than architectural conservation, when it is used to support diverse expressions of heritage and culture, is it capable of sustaining a community’s identity.

In challenging traditional frameworks and value systems we can diversify our professional practices and embrace holistic interventions, necessary for the sustainable revitalization and preservation of legacy neighborhoods. While such multifaceted approaches often support equity, equity—in and of itself—must be purposefully planned for alongside physical interventions and development initiatives. The Anacostia neighborhood in Washington D.C. is one community which has worked to keep equity at the forefront of conversations concerning revitalization, which has been accelerated by the 11th Street Bridge Park Project. Scheduled to open in 2023, the Bridge Park will directly connect Anacostia to D.C.’s wealthy Capitol Hill district.\textsuperscript{80} A major component of the Bridge Park is the project’s Equitable Development Plan, which aims to secure jobs, small business opportunities, affordable housing, and most progressively cultural heritage for current and future residents with lower incomes.\textsuperscript{81} Recognizing how destructive charismatic infrastructure projects can be to low-income neighborhoods, the Equitable Development Plan safeguards against displacement and empowers long-time residents to actively take part in (and benefit from)

\textsuperscript{80} Mary Bogle, Somala Diby, and Mychal Cohen, “Equitable Development and Urban Park Space” (Urban Institute, March 2019), 1.
\textsuperscript{81} “11th Street Bridge Park’s Equitable Development Plan” (Building Bridges Across the River, 2018).
revitalization efforts. Heritage and history have played an increasing role in the project’s Equitable Development Plan, as Somala Diby of the Urban Institute notes, “It’s difficult to talk about achieving equity in the present day without taking a nod to the way that structural racism has manifested.”

Context is so vitally important for understanding the complex issue affecting legacy cities, and ultimately for supporting solutions that respect the experiences and values of long-term residents who have weathered such disinvestment.

How do we implement the ideas put forth by these communities? How do we more fully integrate these attitudes into the preservation and planning professions?

We make changes to the ways in which we practice. We make changes to the policies that govern our interventions.

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At its bright core, historic preservation is about the meaning of that past in our contemporary lives; it is about taking explicit human actions to ensure that we do not forget what we did yesterday.

-Robert Melnick83

A New Preservation Perspective

Cultural landscape theory employs systems thinking, positing that landscapes (or neighborhoods) are dynamic, connected environments, incapable of being reduced to discrete components. Such thinking also acknowledges (even encourages) change over time—a concept that seems to alarm a good deal of preservationists. It is perhaps for this reason, that while cultural landscape theory has indeed infiltrated the preservation field, practitioners have sought to apply it in very limited context. It is a distinction primarily reserved for rural environments, purposely designed landscapes, or “historic city” centers. An adoption of cultural landscape practices for the preservation and revitalization of legacy neighborhoods demands the construction of new professional frameworks and better integrated policies; we cannot find success by working within the limitations and biases of extant ones.

83 Melnick, “Are We There Yet?”, 201.
The past has not been fair, it has not been equal, it has not been equitable. If we continue to pursue an uncritical preservation of the past, we risk reinforcing and sustaining these imbalances.\(^8\) Adapting our professional practices and guiding philosophies in no way delegitimizes the field of preservation. Rather, such actions bring new validation and purpose to our work.

There will, of course, always be a time and place for traditional preservation practices, but there is also a time and place for innovation. The application of an expanded cultural landscape approach for the preservation and equitable revitalization of legacy neighborhoods is an opportunity to address this responsibility. To move beyond unimaginative landholding strategies that do little to find permanent solutions for distressed communities and fail to recognize that prosperity is so much more than an economic bottom line.

But equitability is complex, let us not pretend otherwise. This is because it rests directly on the principles of justice, not equality; which requires those who hold the most power to recognize this privilege and surrender some degree of it to make space for others (a wholly un-American concept).\(^8\) Equitability is thus easy to demand, but much harder to achieve.

Key factors to consider are:

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Engagement: This is the foundation on which an equitable approach must be constructed. If residents are not actively participating in the planning of their future (which also means the preservation of their past) than equitability has already failed. Holistic approaches to preservation and revitalization—which require active dialogs across myriad disciplines including, but not limited to, public history, architectural conservation, environmental protection, economic development, and public art—can experience success “if, and only if, they are complemented by a strong community process.”86

Interpretation: Our definitions of preservation must be expanded, informed by and adapted to each individual community. There is a world of difference between empowering and imposing—perhaps it is a wise decision to routinely remind ourselves of this distinction and to consider carefully why and for whom we preserve.87

Economic Inclusion: Inequality is at once the premises and product of capitalism.88 It thus follows that true economic inclusion must be continuously planned for and actively protected if it is to exist in any sustainable form. This means prioritizing the presence of affordable housing and diverse economic opportunities as vital components of a preservation plan.

Design Interventions: Neighborhoods are dynamic systems—the social, natural, and built components of which are inherently interconnected. This reality necessitates that design
interventions be approached holistically. Any physical alteration (big or small, acts of preservation or instances of new development) has the potential to impact the health, well-being, and resiliency of the whole system. Plan accordingly.

Financing, policy, governance: How can we support and sustain these changes? Management and maintenance are the most unglamorous and overlooked part of almost any intervention. Bar nothing, we need a cultural shift. One that fosters a collective responsibly and empathy for the creation of a diverse, equitable, and sustainable future. This is by no means a task for the preservation and planning fields alone, but it is one in which we must be active participants. Challenging antiquated laws and regulations will allow us to create new policies and financing structures that recognize the value of qualitative, not merely quantitative, results for sustaining inclusive and diverse communities. Such initiatives can re-orient government funding and philanthropic grant opportunities to support project maintenance and nurture a culture of proactive investment over defensive spending.

Time: It takes time. Time to gather information, to collaborate, to build trust, to invest in people, to see growth, to obtain meaningful results. The present urban crisis did not materialize in a day; we cannot expect it to be undone in one. We must acknowledge and respect this reality for social change to take hold.
Strawberry Mansion Redux

Attached to a telephone pole is a yellow sign, alerting drivers to watch for horses. It is perfectly ordinary in every way, except perhaps for its location: an intersection in the North Philadelphia neighborhood of Strawberry Mansion.

![Image](image-url)

*Figure 4: A repurposed city block, the Fletcher Street Riding Club’s pasture (photo by author).*

Half a dozen horses graze in what was once a built-out city block; today serving as a pasture for the Fletcher Street Riding Club, an urban horse community with a century-long tie to the neighborhood. The first time you encounter Strawberry Mansion it can be hard to register
anything beyond the immense amount of vacancy—vacant buildings, vacant lots, vacant blocks—but look a little closer and you’ll notice the life that persists through decades of disinvestment and abandonment, as residents find new use and new meaning in a changing landscape. People spill out onto porches, stoops, and street corners, blurring the line between private and public space. Colorful murals splash exposed walls. Vegetables ripen in community gardens. Desire paths reveal the networks created from new open spaces. And yes, horses roam the streets.

This is not to say that Strawberry Mansion is thriving—it faces a long, challenging road to sustainable revitalization, that is the honest truth—but rather to acknowledge that the neighborhood is a vibrant one, dealing in assets and opportunities, not merely deficits and weakness. Such realizations are leading to increased attention for Strawberry Mansion; community members, local development groups, and non-profit organizations are all undertaking new initiatives within the neighborhood. However, neighborhood issues of vacancy, affordability, economic stimulation, placekeeping, and environmental improvements are still being addressed separately. Because solutions have yet to be aggregated into a cohesive whole, an essential step for achieving equitable revitalization, the community is increasingly vulnerable to predatory developers. Like most legacy neighborhoods, Strawberry Mansion is limited by a lack of coordination, capacity, and capital. Updated preservation and planning approaches, as outlined above, can help ensure instances of investment (both monetary and social) are connected—designed to work in concert with and build off one another. These holistic approaches also act to amplify and
protect the community’s multiplicity of voices and values, guaranteeing that new investments are not realized at the cost of displacement or environmental degradation.

First and foremost, the neighborhood of Strawberry Mansion must be understood in its totality; this includes the evolution and current condition of its built environment, its relationship to the natural environment, and, most vitally, the local assets (both tangible and intangible) that residents’ value. Understanding the interconnected layers of a neighborhood’s landscape requires traditional mapping and robust data gathering, but also

Figure 5: In Strawberry Mansion, porches often function as gathering spaces (photo by author).
necessitates meaningful discussions with diverse selections of community stakeholders. In 2018 Strawberry Mansion residents participated in an asset mapping process to identify the places, people, stories, and practices the community considers most important to their shared identity. Very few of the assets are tangible places, fewer still structures eligible for individual listing on an historic register. A clear signal to our field that preservation can and should take many forms.

Before implementing physical interventions, we must engage in conversations about what equity looks like, specifically for this community. This is hard work. If done properly it will be a significant commitment of time, energy, and resources. But this upfront investment is crucial for sustainable, holistic revitalization. In recent years, organizations working within Strawberry Mansion have been better about acknowledging the importance of these foresight driven approaches, but there is undoubtedly work to be done. Because each intervention is being independently implemented, there is an immense amount of redundancy in both the variety and depth of conversations being held. Meeting fatigue and general skepticism, byproducts of fumbled revitalization initiatives, can make it difficult to capture a diverse chorus of neighborhood voices. Spending the time and resources to foster meaningful community engagement, which requires respecting and compensating residents for their time and expertise, is a necessary first step for any holistic approach. Equity cannot be retrofitted into a revitalization plan, it must be present from the start. Human interaction and knowledge transfers are in themselves acts of preservation. The process of planning for revitalization is just as important, sometimes more so, than the finished product; it deserves
to be viewed as such. The qualitative information gleaned from these dialogs, in combination with more traditional, quantitative data, can then be used to inform a sliding scale of preservation interventions (conservation vs rehabilitation vs demolition vs development) across the neighborhood as a whole.

Advocating for these foundational steps have proven difficult territory to navigate. The corresponding solutions (which work to safeguard against an existing community’s physical and cultural displacement) are often difficult to quantify and may leave little physical traces. The problem? They are preventative rather than reactionary. When an intervention is designed to reduce disruptions or shocks to a system, success is achieving some level of stasis over time. Such initiatives go undervalued in our society because they are designed to offset future costs—economically, environmentally, and socially—and can take significant time to be fully realized. We must continue to push for policy and financing reforms that recognize the importance of qualitative results collected over longer timeframes.

Strawberry Mansion is a cultural landscape. Its social, built, and natural environments are interconnected, creating a palimpsest of history and heritage. It is from this multiplicity, not any singular period of significance, that its value is derived. Because cultural landscapes recognize and support the need for living systems to change, new interventions can be framed as additive rather than subtractive to the overall integrity (that is to say, its sense of identity and health) of Strawberry Mansion. With this frame work, values-centered preservation provides a way of evaluating the potential impacts of interventions and determining how to best support the equitable revitalization of the community.
Placekeeping practices provide innovative ways to communicate and display local heritage in a changing environment. And planning for resiliency (through the diverse and constructive uses of “vacant” land) contributes to the overall quality of life for residents. This is preservation.

Figure 6: Longtime residents are both frustrated with the neighborhood’s high levels of disinvestment and nervous about recent development trends (photo by author).

A Final Word

Integrity, in the context of preservation, is meant to convey a sense of intactness, some degree of material or spatial authenticity physically linking an object to history. It is the
standard by which any given place is evaluated for significance and thus potential for protection. But there is another, more common definition of integrity—that of moral uprightness. Perhaps we should be evaluating significance with this metric, not the degree to which any given place has remained physically unchanged, but its potential to honestly contribute to diverse conversations of heritage and history (including those of less savory origin). If our professional practice sterilizes history or allows heritage to lie stagnant on the premise of integrity—we have failed.

Throughout legacy cities, preservation advocacy remains focused on obtaining register listings for high profile, architecturally charismatic cases—continuing to send the message that the everyday is less significant, that some histories are less important, that intangible heritage is less vital to the identity of a city.

We are right to see the heritage of legacy neighborhoods as different—it is worn and lived, hard-fought and personal. But in recognizing this difference, it becomes our responsibility not to discount it, or avoid it, or excuse it as unworthy—as in any way lacking integrity—but to develop better ways to sustain and support this unique heritage. Our professional practice might be outdated, but our mission is far from obsolete. In the age of social justice, climate change, political unrest, and mass migration preservation is needed more now than ever.

We need only be willing to evolve.
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