a national trust publication

Protecting America's Historic Neighborhoods: Taming the Teardown Trend

by Adrian Scott Fine and Jim Lindberg

Protecting America's Historic Neighborhoods: Taming the Teardown Trend

by Adrian Scott Fine and Jim Lindberg

A disturbing pattern of demolitions is approaching epidemic proportions in historic neighborhoods across America. In two neighborhoods just outside downtown Dallas, more than 1,000 early 20th-century homes have been purchased, bulldozed, and sent to the dump, making way for the construction of luxury homes of up to 10,000 square feet each. In Denver, some 200 homes—most of them brick bungalows from the 1920s and 1930s—were demolished in 2001 and replaced with stucco-clad houses three times their size.

What is behind this rush to demolish historic houses? It is the teardown trend, a real estate development practice that is devastating historic neighborhoods across the nation. Over the past year, the National Trust has documented more than 100 communities in 20 states that are experiencing significant numbers of teardowns, and that number is climbing fast. To draw attention to this disturbing practice, the National Trust listed "Teardowns in Historic Neighborhoods" on its 2002 list of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places.

The term "teardown" refers to the practice of demolishing an existing house to make way for a dramatically larger new house on the same site. While teardowns are sometimes acceptable, preservationists across the country are specifically concerned about those that are wreaking havoc in historic neighborhoods, whether they are officially designated historic or are potentially eligible for such designation at the federal, state, or local level.

An Alarming Epidemic

Until a few years ago, the "teardown" was a relatively isolated phenomenon, occurring most often in the country's wealthiest communities—places like Aspen, Nantucket, and Beverly Hills. Elsewhere in America, the term was largely unknown—but not anymore. Articles about controversial teardowns appear regularly in newspapers around the country. On the tree-lined streets of once-quiet older neighborhoods in scores of communities, bulldozers are moving in and battles are erupting between developers and neighbors. Teardowns, in short, have reached crisis proportions.

Evidence of the teardown trend can be found among the older, inner-ring suburbs surrounding Chicago and Boston, in desirable urban neighborhoods in Atlanta and Denver, in the "techno-boom" towns around San Francisco and Seattle, in conveniently located commuter suburbs in New Jersey and Maryland, and in historic resort towns from Palm Beach to Palm Springs. In some communities the practice is just beginning. In other places, the trend has become so firmly entrenched that it is not uncommon to see older homes demolished almost daily.

Once teardowns start, they proliferate. "It's a trend that keeps on rolling," says a New Jersey builder. "Builders used to be afraid to be the first person in a neighborhood to tear a house down. But now they're looking around and saying they don't mind taking the risk." [1]

Historic homes in desirable neighborhoods, such as this summer cottage in Ocean City, N.J. are demolished to make way for much larger structures.

— Photo by David Swift

Here's how the teardown practice typically works: Developers look for properties in established neighborhoods where there is a potential to build far more square footage than is contained in the existing home. The existing house is purchased and bulldozed, the lot is scraped clean, a much larger new house is erected, and

Cover: The scale of these new replacement houses is simply too large for the site and is incompatible with neighboring houses.

— Photo by Adrian Scott Fine

Teardown Terminology

A variety of names are being used to describe the teardown trend around the country, some focusing on the almost violent change that teardowns bring to neighborhoods and others indicating the overwhelming size of the new homes being built. The list of terms includes:

- "Bash and Builds" and "Bigfoots" (often heard in northern New Jersey)
- "Scrape-Offs" and "Pop-Tops" (common terms in Denver)
- "Knockdowns," "Bulldozers," "Scrapers"
- "Snout Houses" (garage-oriented new homes in Portland, Ore.)
- "Trophy Homes," "Starter Castles," "Big Box Victorians" and "Pink Palaces"
- "Tara on a Quarter-Acre"
- "Monster Homes" and "McMansions"

the completed project is offered for sale. Variations exist: In some cases, large estates are leveled and subdivided to make way for two or more new homes, while in other instances several smaller houses are cleared to provide space for one massive, single-family home. In most teardown situations the existing house is removed completely, though occasionally a small portion is left standing, engulfed by new construction. As more houses are purchased and demolished and massive new homes take their place, the character of a neighborhood is permanently changed.

Historic Neighborhoods Are Teardown Targets

The impact of teardowns is especially disturbing in historic neighborhoods, whether these areas are officially designated historic or are potentially eligible for such designation at the federal, state, or local level. Built before the automobile became dominant in American cities, these urban neighborhoods and inner-ring suburbs are highly prized for their pedestrian orientation, convenient location near mass transit lines, attractive tree-lined streets, historic architecture, public amenities such as parks and libraries, local shopping districts, and good schools. Many of them are stable and nearly built out, with relatively few houses for sale and even fewer lots available for construction of new homes. With many people wanting to move into such desirable areas but also preferring large new houses, the pressure for teardowns can be intense.

It is common to find teardowns concentrated in areas where the homes are relatively small, typically featuring two or three bedrooms and ranging from 1,000 to 1,800 square feet. Many of these homes were built in the early 20th century, when a growing economy and more accessible lending policies allowed large numbers of city-dwellers to buy private homes for the first time. Lot sizes in these areas vary from 5,000 to 10,000 square feet, with the house typically covering only 20 percent of the lot. With today's preference for larger homes, many older neighborhoods are considered underbuilt.

The Impact of Teardowns on Historic Places

As cities evolve and grow, the periodic replacement of outdated and inefficient structures is both inevitable and desirable. Tearing down an older building that lacks historic significance or architectural distinction can be appropriate and positive, especially in areas that are not historic. Even in historic neighborhoods, structures that do not contribute to the overall character of the area may be candidates for replacement with higher-quality, better-designed buildings. In recent years, however, demolitions have often been as hasty and ill-considered as in the heyday of urban renewal in the 1950s and 1960s. Today's teardown trend is another example of how we sometimes carelessly throw away our valuable heritage in the name of progress and change.

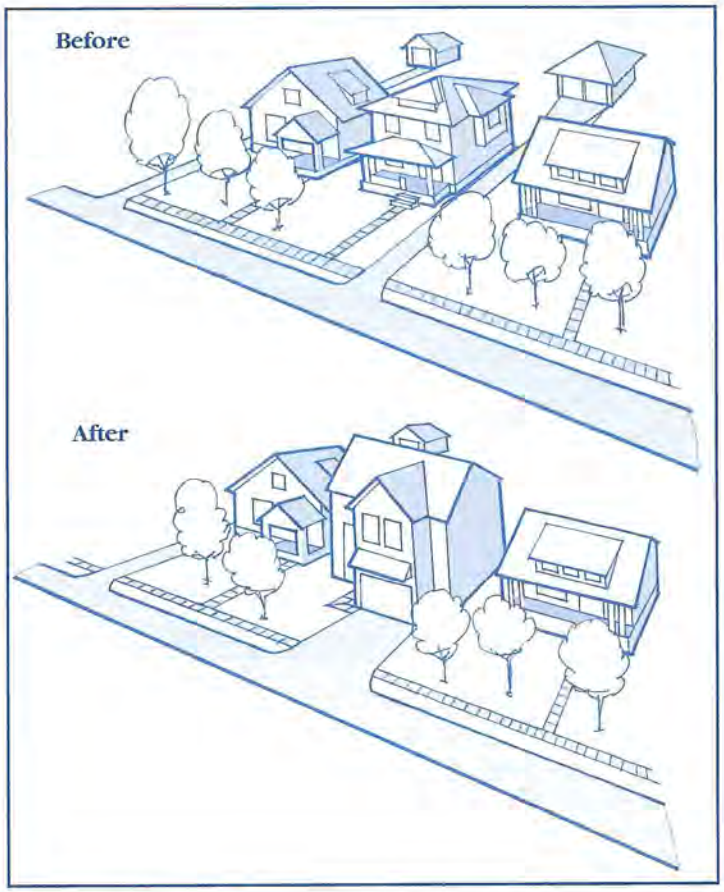
Teardowns' impact on historic neighborhoods is twofold. First, as fine historic homes are reduced to rubble to make way for much larger new houses, the architectural heritage of our communities is eroded. Second, the massive, out-of-scale structures that are built to replace older homes do not fit well in historic neighborhoods and threaten the very qualities that make these neighborhoods attractive and desirable.

Aren't Historic Properties Protected from Teardowns?

Although it is frequently assumed that properties and districts that are designated "historic" are protected from demolition, this is often not the case. Historic designation at the federal level, through the National Register of Historic Places, offers recognition and some financial incentives for preservation, but such listing does not prevent private owners from demolishing their homes. The same is generally true for properties listed in state registers of historic places. Real protection for historic properties comes with local designation, typically through historic preservation ordinances that have been enacted in some 2,300 communities around the country. The level of protection provided by these ordinances varies greatly.

Many ordinances are simply advisory or can only delay proposed demolitions temporarily, and their effectiveness may be compromised by shifts in the local political climate.

Although many of the neighborhoods threatened by teardowns are considered historic, most of these areas currently lack designation of any type. There are many reasons for this, including the fact that some of these areas have not been adequately studied and documented.[2] Historic designation is often not seriously considered until a threat emerges and demolitions begin to occur. In addition, many local governments are stretching their resources to manage existing historic districts and have not had the time, funding, or staffing needed to survey and designate additional historic neighborhoods. As a result, great numbers of historic places—ranging from Victorian neighborhoods in Staten Island, N.Y., to Craftsman-style bungalow enclaves in Santa Monica, Calif.—are essentially unprotected and vulnerable to future teardowns.



The greatly increased square footage of teardowns results in tall, bulky houses that break with the neighborhood's established building pattern.

— *Drawings by Adrian Scott Fine*

Teardowns Are Destroying Architectural Heritage

As the teardown trend continues, increasing numbers of historic properties are being lost to the wrecking ball. The losses usually start slowly, with the demolition of a few homes scattered through the neighborhood. If teardowns are allowed to continue, a domino effect often takes over, and entire blocks of smaller historic homes can disappear in the course of a building season. Lost in the process are the types of houses that define the common, vernacular architectural heritage of a community. These include early 20th-century lake cottages in Minneapolis, Queen Anne homes in Seattle, Prairie Style bungalows in the Chicago suburbs, Colonial Revival houses near Washington, D.C., and early Modernist designs in Connecticut and California.

In addition, many noteworthy landmarks have been demolished and replaced:

- In Palo Alto, Calif., an 1899 Craftsman-style house designed by Julia Morgan, architect of San Simeon and California's first woman architect, was demolished.
- In the Main Line suburbs outside of Philadelphia, a 1905 home that was one of the finest remaining residential structures designed by Horace Trumbauer, architect of the Philadelphia Art Museum, was bulldozed.
- In the Chicago suburb of Winnetka, a rare pre-Civil War house was purchased for $12 million and leveled by a new owner who planned a vast luxury home but has since moved to California.
- In North Hempstead, N.Y., the Tristram Dodge House, built in 1719 and once owned by members of the Astor family, is proposed for a "scrape-off."
- In Tenafly, N.J., the historic 1909 Hensel House was demolished in 2000. This American Foursquare-style house on a one-acre lot was considered one of the most significant in Tenafly, but a local newspaper article quoted the developer as saying, "I don't look at this house as being historic. I look at it as being a potentially unique situation for subdividing that is allowable by ordinance."[3]

Teardowns can snowball their way through the community. Losses start slowly, and then entire blocks can disappear in the course of the building season. These three Denver bungalows are targeted for demolition.

— Photo by Jim Lindberg

Teardowns also are seen in residential areas developed after World War II. Early postwar homes were fairly small and located on spacious lots—perfect teardown targets in today's real estate market. While the vast majority of homes in these areas are not yet considered historic by most people, an increasing number of neighborhoods and individual homes from the 1950s and 1960s are being recognized for their architectural and historic significance. In California, homes in 1950s subdivisions built by postwar developer Joseph Eichler are now coveted like classic cars. These homes are fairly small by today's new home standards, however, and controversies have erupted over recent teardowns and large additions in Eichler neighborhoods. "In the next five years, a lot of this 50s stuff will be gone," says Kevin Tremble, chair of the Tenafly [N.J.] Historic Preservation Commission.

Modern homes designed by some of the 20th century's best-known architects have been lost to teardowns. For example:

- In New Canaan, Conn., more than a dozen classic 1950s Modernist homes designed by architects such as Marcel Breuer have been razed and replaced by sprawling new homes.
- In Rancho Mirage, Calif., a museum-quality, 5,000-square-foot home designed in 1962 by famed architect Richard Neutra was demolished without warning by its new owners, who plan to build an even larger new home.
- Even the work of Frank Lloyd Wright is at risk. In the close-in Chicago suburb of Bannockburn, a spacious house designed by Wright in 1956 was purchased last year by an owner who announced plans to demolish it and build new. Fortunately, the ensuing public outcry resulted in the sale of the house to a preservation-minded buyer.

How Oversized New Houses Are Damaging Historic Neighborhoods

The damage caused by teardowns in historic neighborhoods only begins with the demolition of historic houses. What comes next can be even more destructive: the construction of new, oversized structures that disrupt architectural character, diminish livability, and reduce economic and social diversity throughout the neighborhood.

In neighborhoods experiencing teardowns, it is not uncommon for small, older houses to be demolished and replaced with new houses three times the size of any existing home on the block. This greatly increased square footage frequently results in tall, bulky structures that loom over adjacent houses and break the established building patterns of the area. "When you inject one of these McMansions into the middle of this otherwise homogeneous neighborhood, it sticks out like a sore thumb," Robert Griffin, former president of the Bergen County Historical Society, told

The layout of this historic Los Angeles neighborhood encourages walking and socializing. The new mini-castles are often more isolated and discourage neighborhood interaction.

— Photo by Adrian Scott Fine

The Bergen Record in a story about teardowns in New Jersey, a state where homes are 25 percent larger than the national average.[4] The size of these new homes reflects American consumers' appetite for more and more special amenities, greater interior space, and bigger garages. Though it may not last indefinitely, the current trend toward larger homes is difficult to accommodate in historic neighborhoods where space is limited.

The livability of historic neighborhoods is eroded when new houses are built out to the lot lines, all but eliminating side and back yards. In many cases, mature trees and landscaping are cut down to make way for these massive new houses, which block sunlight to neighboring yards and cast permanent shadows onto adjacent homes. When one homeowner learned that a large new structure was proposed next door to her home outside San Francisco, she said to the developer, "What you're telling me is that the rear of my house, my deck and garden will effectively become the lightwell for your building."[5]

The new mini-castles often seem like stand alone developments, their plans oriented to private interior spaces and lacking such community friendly features as front porches and sidewalks. A report on teardowns prepared for the City of Geneva, Ill., noted that large replacement homes "tend to be somewhat isolating, like fortresses...in some instances, they may actually discourage neighborhood interaction."[6]

The automobile orientation of many of these homes is particularly damaging to neighborhood character. In many older neighborhoods, garages and driveways are located off rear service alleys; front yards are kept free of driveways and cars, creating a pleasant environment for porch-sitting, walking, and socializing. All too often, the new homes being built in historic neighborhoods today are designed in accordance with car-oriented subdivision formulas: Front yards are given over to driveways, and house facades are dominated by garage doors rather than porches. Some communities have taken steps to address the effect of front garages on historic neighborhoods. In Portland, Ore., the so-called "snout" house, with its protruding, front-facing garage doors, was banned from the city's older neighborhoods in 1999. "We are not anti-automobile so much as we are pro-pedestrian," explained a Portland city planner in an April 2000 *New York Times* article.[7]

Teardowns Reduce Affordable Housing and Community Diversity

In addition to their negative impact on architecture and neighborhood character, teardowns can greatly alter the economic and social balance of historic communities. One of the great attributes of older neighborhoods is that they are built in a way that encourages people of different ages, household types, income levels, and cultures to live together. The existence of small homes, "granny flats," basement apartments, and carriage houses fosters diversity in historic neighborhoods. Without careful integration into an established neighborhood, teardowns eliminate many of these housing options. Most important of all, teardowns remove the affordable

houses that previously allowed many young families a chance at homeownership. Once known as "starter homes," these modest but sturdy bungalows, Cape Cods, Colonials, ranchers, and other all-American house types are now seen as "teardown targets." In some communities experiencing teardowns, the starter house has become an endangered species.

For communities that are concerned only with the bottom line, the teardown trend may have a short-term payoff in that property tax revenues often increase temporarily. These higher taxes, however, can be enough to drive out many single households, moderate-income families and older homeowners living on fixed incomes. When an Englewood, N.J., resident saw her property taxes rise 40 percent in a single year, she had to sell the Victorian home she had lived in for years—only to see it to become a teardown. A Palisades Park, N.J., developer finds this process beneficial, providing a kind of social service. "The old people can get a good price and move somewhere else where they can afford to live," he says.[8]

Many long-time residents of historic neighborhoods are afraid that teardowns will turn formerly mixed-income communities into homogeneous, upper-class enclaves. In the Boston suburb of Arlington, Selectman Charles Lyons proposed a task force to look at teardowns and affordable housing, saying, "Down the road, I don't want my children and their children raised in a community where you have to be upper middle-class to live."[9]

Losing Control of the Neighborhood

As teardowns advance, property owners may feel powerless to intervene or have a say in how their historic neighborhood changes. Often it seems that the developers and builders have taken control of the community. In neighborhoods where the home market is extremely tight, houses simply transfer quietly to developers instead of going up for sale. Some owners are solicited through mail and telephone by real estate agents encouraging them to sell to a developer who plans a teardown. A Chicago builder says, "We do everything imaginable, including scanning the classified pages of newspapers, driving around neighborhoods, and knocking on doors."[10] A resident of Chevy Chase, Md., remembers when teardowns first arrived. "As the real estate market took off, several agents began their assault on our neighborhood. Our smaller houses came down and Big Box Victorians sprouted up all over the place." She adds, "I am saddened that it is the realtors/developers dictating the size, scale, and massing of these new homes and shaping the future of our community, and not *we* the community who are determining our own future."[11]

Without careful management and planning by residents and government leaders who have a long-term investment in the community, the teardown epidemic threatens to destroy the very qualities that have made historic neighborhoods so attractive over the years. Unfortunately, some places have already passed the point of no return. In these communities, streets are cluttered with a jumble of oversized monster houses sitting uncomfortably next to forlorn-looking older homes waiting for the wrecking ball. Increasingly, historic houses look out of place in these neighborhoods, whose character and charm have been irreparably damaged. Most long-time residents have left.

The good news is that in most communities it is not too late to stop teardowns. Residents and community leaders still have a chance to develop alternatives to teardowns, to guide development and change in ways that respect the historic character and diversity of their older neighborhoods, and to ensure the long-term sustainability of their communities. The following sections are intended to help arm neighborhood residents, preservationists, and local government officials with information and tools to stem the teardown epidemic.

What Has Caused the Teardown Epidemic?

What caused the teardown trend to spread so quickly across the country over the past few years? Is it likely to continue, or will it slow down? The answers to these questions are still being sorted out, but it is clear that several major economic, demographic, and market trends have conspired to bring intense development pressure to certain older neighborhoods. A better understanding of these trends may lead us to solutions that encourage investment in historic neighborhoods without sacrificing their historic character, diversity, and affordability.

Here are some of the factors influencing the teardown trend nationally:

Rising Real Estate Prices

Perhaps the key factor contributing to the teardown trend has been the booming economy, which took off in the early 1990s and helped spark a rapid rise

in real estate prices. Increased demand and historically low interest rates also helped keep home prices moving up. According to a 2001 report from the Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University, housing prices have outpaced inflation by 16 percent since 1993.[12] In some of the hottest metropolitan markets, home values have doubled and even tripled over the last decade. Even during the recent economic slowdown, housing prices have continued to climb.[13]

Rising residential real estate values have led developers to look for "undervalued" properties, including those that are located in stable, older neighborhoods in urban centers and inner-ring suburbs. Many of these undervalued properties are teardown targets. In addition, sellers in the current hot market are pocketing considerable capital gains to invest in their next home. With extra cash in hand, many people are buying as much house as they can afford, hoping to ride the "equity wave" that has been so powerful in recent years. This increases the demand for larger homes.

Public amenities, pedestrian scale, and convenient location make historic neighborhoods like this area of Wichita, Kans., increasingly desirable.

— Photo by Jim Lindberg

The Supersizing of the American House

Like almost everything else in today's society, American houses are getting bigger. In 1950, the average new home incorporated 1,000 square feet, including two bedrooms, one bath, a small living room, dining room, and kitchen. In 1970, the size of new homes had jumped to 1,500 square feet. Last year, the average new home measured 2,265 square feet and included three bedrooms, two baths and a two-car garage.[14] While that is the average size of new homes, many houses are being built at a far grander scale. According to the National Association of Homebuilders, 18 percent of the houses built in 2001 (more than 200,000 houses) provided at least 3,000 square feet of living space. New subdivisions of luxury homes reaching 5,000 square feet and up are commonplace on the edges of most cities. The list of desired features in new homes has changed as well, and now includes amenities such as great rooms, kitchen islands, spa bathrooms, his-and-hers walk-in closets, home offices, nanny suites, media rooms, and multi-car attached garages. Seventeen percent of American homes now have garage space for at least three cars.[15]

Recent experience in many communities shows that it is the larger homes—3,000 square feet and more, with plenty of amenities—that are typically being built on the site of teardowns. Many older homes do not meet today's average new-home standards and few offer the amenities of the large new luxury houses. Will American houses keep getting bigger? Perhaps not. "America's long-running love affair with big houses may finally be fizzling," notes a recent *Wall Street Journal Online* report on how homebuilders are beginning to offer smaller designs that are more compatible with older neighborhoods.[16] The popularity of Minneapolis architect Sarah Susanka's book, *The Not So Big House*, is another indicator that bigger is not better for every household today.[17] And it shouldn't be forgotten that historic homes, including small ones, maintain a strong market appeal of their own. Architectural detailing, high-quality materials, craftsmanship, historic character, charm—these qualities still matter to many buyers looking for homes in historic neighborhoods.

Back to the City (and Older Suburbs)

After years of losing residents to the suburbs, some of the nation's

Replacement houses are often more automobile oriented, with front yards given over to driveways.

— Drawing by Adrian Scott Fine

largest cities experienced net population increases during the last decade, many for the first time since before World War II. Census figures from 2000 show that 35 of the 50 largest American cities gained residents between 1990 and 2000.[18] The potential significance of the urban market is indicated in recent study by the National Association of Homebuilders. *The Next Frontier: Building Homes in America's Cities* cites a number of reasons for the interest in city living: "Some are looking to cities again because of their proximity to jobs, shopping, and urban amenities. Some are looking to cities because of the great energy, history, and sense of place. And some are looking to cities to escape the long commutes associated with suburban living. Regardless of the reason, it is clear that the market for urban housing is gaining momentum."[19]

The influx of new residents to cities is surely a welcome trend to preservationists. But unless it is managed well, this trend may also increase the pressure for teardowns in convenient, established urban neighborhoods and close-in suburbs. A key question is whether those people who are moving into historic areas will insist on incompatible, out-of-scale suburban building styles or adapt to the traditional patterns of older neighborhoods. To make the most of the emerging "back to the city" movement, local governments and nonprofit groups must encourage the rehabilitation and development of additional urban and inner-suburban neighborhoods. This would provide more housing choices for future buyers and take away some of the pressure for teardowns in established neighborhoods.

The Attraction of Historic Neighborhoods

Almost without exception, population increases and urban revitalization are happening in exactly those places where local residents and preservationists have been successful in protecting the high-quality architecture, mature landscaping, and pedestrian orientation of traditional, historic neighborhoods. "The most important factor in urban revitalization [is] the folks of all ages and social classes who never gave up on their old neighborhoods, who rolled up their sleeves to hold the line on urban decay, and who ultimately brought real improvements to their communities," notes Peter Katz, a real estate consultant and writer on urban development.[20] In those historic neighborhoods where teardowns have now begun, residents and preservationists must feel like victims of their own success.

As residents come back to many cities, historic neighborhoods without adequate protections in place will continue to be teardown targets. Along with stronger protections to prevent demolitions and out-of-scale additions, preservationists must seek "win-win" solutions by identifying appropriate infill sites and developing flexible guidelines to encourage compatible new construction.

What Baby Boomers Want

Members of the massive baby boom generation (born between 1946 and 1964) head 40 percent of American households and control 70 percent of the nation's wealth. The tastes and preferences of this generation will certainly influence housing trends in coming years. Last year, the first group of baby boomers turned 55; by 2010 there will be an estimated 37 million "boomers" 55 or older.[21] Their children, the "echo boomers," are now becoming young adults and are expected to be starting families during this same period.

The Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University predicts: "With many of the baby boomers becoming empty-nesters and their children start-

ing to marry, the fastest growing household type will be married couples without minor children living at home."[22] For these empty-nesters, housing choices will be determined less by factors such as school districts and yard size and more by convenience, weather, and proximity to cultural and recreational amenities. Attractive urban neighborhoods and lively downtown areas are likely to become preferred home locations for many empty-nesters in coming years. Many of their children, meanwhile, will be seeking starter homes in older suburban areas. If not managed carefully, the teardown trend threatens to have a negative effect on both of these potential future markets.

The Economics of Teardowns

At first glance, the idea of a teardown defies common sense. Why would someone pay hundreds of thousands of dollars—in some cases even millions of dollars—to buy a house, only to tear it down? The answer is that the buyers of these properties are not buying houses, they are buying land—or "buildable lots," to use real estate terminology. The existing houses on these lots become almost incidental when the value of the land is actually higher than the value of the house that sits on it.

Lot values are determined in part by physical features and size, but even more by location. In real estate, the most important quality of a property is how things look next door and across the street. We all know that waterfront properties command greater prices than lots a block or two away. Similarly, a quarter-acre lot in a conveniently located, well-kept neighborhood with good schools is worth more than a similar lot in a neighborhood that does not have those qualities. Add amenities such as historic architecture, mature trees, and traditional pedestrian-oriented streetscapes, and the land value goes even higher. The final factor in determining land values is how a site is zoned: what size and type of structure can be built on the property.

If the value of the land exceeds the value of the house that sits on it, then a teardown scenario begins to make economic sense. "A house is most likely a goner if the property it's on is worth far more than the structure," says a recent *BusinessWeek Online* article on the teardown trend.[23]

The Rule of Three

Real estate agents and developers talk about the "Rule of Three" when it comes to teardowns. If you can sell a finished new home for about three times what you paid for the property, the conventional wisdom goes, then a teardown will pay off. Consider a hypothetical "hot" neighborhood where houses are selling for $200 per square foot. Average new construction costs in the same neighborhood are $100 per square foot. A developer finds a 1,350-square-foot 1920s house and purchases it for $270,000. He then pays $30,000 to demolish the house, spends another $400,000 to build a new 4,000-square-foot house and sells it for $800,000—just about three times what he paid for the property. After deducting $700,000 for the costs of acquisition, demolition, and construction, the developer is left with a handsome $100,000 profit.

The Rule of Three is particularly important for communities to keep in mind when thinking about how to slow the teardown trend. Using various tools to limit house sizes to less than

Speculators will be drawn to a neighborhood if they can sell a new house there for at least three times what they paid for the property. The new replacement houses are often three times the size of most existing homes.

— Photo by Marcel Quimby

Sensitive infill construction can help knit neighborhoods together, such as these new houses located in the Midtown neighborhoods in Memphis.

— Photo by Adrian Scott Fine

three times the size of existing homes will make teardowns far less attractive economically, especially for speculators.

The Influence of Speculators

"People have a right to tear down their house if they want to," is one comment often heard when the teardown issue is discussed. But that is not what is really happening. Only a tiny fraction of teardowns are carried out by the long-time owners of the houses being demolished. A somewhat larger number of teardowns are "custom" jobs, paid for by new residents who have recently purchased an existing home and have hired a contractor to tear it down and build a new house for them before they actually move into the neighborhood.

The majority of teardowns, according to many sources, are the work of speculative developers. This comes as no surprise. Once a few people started making money doing teardowns, it didn't take long for the real estate and construction industry to catch on. The speculators are often fairly small operators who have finally found a way to get into the homebuilding game. Building homes in new subdivisions takes major financial backing and is generally carried out by large corporate builders. Teardowns are different. The necessary infrastructure is in place and developers can take on one house at a time, building capital as they go. Still, the profit margins from teardowns can be so appealing that larger entities are starting to get involved. For example, in the Dallas suburb of Highland Park, a local builders' association recently purchased 30 large historic homes and has begun tearing them down to make way for even larger new luxury homes of 5,000 square feet and more.

When the Ride is Over

"If you see a wave of teardowns in your area, enjoy the ride, because it may not last," warns a *BusinessWeek Online* report. "In such neighborhoods, builders often do the teardowns and put up new houses on spec. To make money, they have to build houses that are more expensive than others in the area. As long as those new houses keep selling, they pull up prices of existing properties. But when the market says enough already, builders pull out and the merry-go-round stops."[24]

This is the economic downside of the teardown trend. Once the houses in a neighborhood are seen as mere buildable lots rather than homes, the tendency is for people to move out of older properties as quickly as possible. Prices for viable historic homes usually hit a ceiling at this point or even start to decline, and properties once praised by real estate agents as "charming and historic" are now described as "older home on expansive lot"—real estate code for a potential teardown. "Any historic house that comes on the market now has a deep discount because it is old," said Jean Follett, a historic preservation commission member in Hinsdale, Ill., where teardowns have consumed 20 percent of the historic housing stock.[25] The attractiveness and lasting economic value of historic neighborhoods can be permanently lost if the teardown syndrome is allowed to progress beyond the point of no return.

The boom-and-bust cycle of teardown zones stands in marked contrast to the steady appreciation of property values seen in neighborhoods protected by local historic district designation. Dozens of economic studies have shown that property values in historic districts consistently increase—and moreover, they rise at a faster rate than properties in similar, but unprotected, neighborhoods nearby.[26]

Are Teardowns Smart Growth?

Some have argued that teardowns represent a kind of "smart growth" strategy that brings density back to cities and helps prevent suburban sprawl, but this is often not the case. Tearing down a smaller existing house to build a larger new one simply adds square footage, not population density. In fact, as increasing numbers of modest, affordable homes suitable for young families are removed from the urban inventory, densities in some neighborhoods may actually be decreasing due to teardowns.

There is no question that the revitalization of existing urban areas is one of the most effective weapons in the fight against sprawl, since re-densifying cities reduces the pressure to continually expand the suburban frontier. Cities need new residents and new investment to stay healthy, but new investment in existing neighborhoods need not come at the cost of the community's heritage and character.

Compatible Infill: the Win-Win Solution

Often, a teardown is a missed opportunity for true smart growth. Rather than demolishing older homes, new infill development can be inserted sensitively into the urban fabric. As the National Association of Homebuilders states in *The Next Frontier: Building Homes in America's Cities*:

> "Revitalizing older suburban and inner city markets and encouraging infill development is universally accepted as good public policy. Infill development, done wisely, can take advantage of existing infrastructure; provide higher densities in locations where mass transportation is already in place; and integrate new housing into the fabric of the community."[27]

The promise of infill development is based on the recognition that open land and development opportunities abound in most cities. Potential infill sites range from scattered individual parcels and old parking lots to large swaths that were cleared as part of urban renewal in the 1960s—such as the Midtown neighborhoods in Memphis, where hundreds of new houses are now being built. Obsolete freeways are being removed to make way for new infill development in places such as Boston, Milwaukee, and San Francisco. In Denver, two old airfields within the city limits—Lowry Air Force Base and Stapleton airport—are being redeveloped as urban neighborhoods, each with thousands of new homes, schools, offices, and businesses.

Brownfields are another major infill opportunity. These include sites of old gas stations, dry cleaners, and larger industrial operations that can be cleaned up and made ready for new uses, including housing. A survey by the U.S. Conference of Mayors reported that there are more than 18,000 brownfield sites covering 81,000 acres with potential for urban redevelopment.[28] In Pittsburgh, for example, a former industrial site is being redeveloped to create a new urban neighborhood of 700 homes and apartments.

Such large urban infill parcels provide opportunities for the construction of entire new neighborhoods to help knit cities back together, increase urban densities, provide more affordable housing, and add vitality and activity. Typically there are fewer large parcels of open land available in older suburban areas. In these areas, the challenge is to insert well-designed individual infill housing into the existing neighborhood fabric and to encourage sensitive additions to existing properties.

Typical modern suburban building formulas don't make sense in historic neighborhoods because they break with the pedestrian orientation of communities that were laid out before cars began to dominate the landscape. Along with maintaining a pedestrian-friendly appearance, neighborhood infill must also conform to the scale of surrounding buildings. No amount of period detailing can lessen the impact of a new home that is simply too big for its site. Building height, width, setback, lot coverage—these are the elements that must be in keeping with existing patterns. New architectural styles and innovative designs can often fit in well among older homes if the scale and orientation are compatible.

The Tradition of Additions

Americans have a long history of altering the homes they live in to meet changing needs. The option to expand an older house can be a deciding factor in whether a family stays in an older neighborhood

or moves to the far suburbs. As with new infill projects, the key to achieving compatible additions is scale. Additions that triple the size of existing houses are difficult to do well. Usually the older home is left standing in front, practically a facade, while the new addition looms behind. In Aspen, where massive, high-ceilinged additions stick out behind tiny old miner's shacks, these are called "bustle houses" for their resemblance to the large, padded dresses that women once wore. A compatible addition is usually not larger than the size of the existing house and should be designed to avoid the appearance of adding one large mass. Thousands of compatible additions have been completed in historic districts around the country in the last few decades, guided by the advice of citizen commissions, professional architects, and planning staff.

Tools to Tame the Teardown Trend

Those who live in neighborhoods affected by the teardown trend often feel powerless. How can private homeowners stop the developers and contractors who roam their streets, looking for their next "teardown target?" How can residents speak out against the size of houses that their new neighbors have chosen to live in? Local government leaders are also torn. What is the right balance between protecting historic character and respecting private property rights? What is the best way to limit the size of new homes without turning away new investment?

Planning Ahead

An important first step is to initiate dialogue about the future of the community and what residents want it to look like. Opinion surveys, town meetings, focus groups, and interviews with key leaders and neighborhood representatives are some of the ways to build consensus about the future. The goal is to develop a common vision. "We're an old community that has been rediscovered," said an Oak Park, Ill., village trustee at a recent meeting about the teardown trend. "We have to decide what we like about the community, what character the village should protect."[29]

Ideally, these conversations about the future occur as part of a comprehensive planning process, but that is often not possible in a reasonable time frame. In places where the pace of teardowns has already reached a crisis point, it may be necessary to provide a "cooling-off" period by imposing a temporary moratorium on teardowns, to allow time for the community to develop a consensus about what to do. Some local governments have appointed task forces or committees to look at the impact of teardowns and possible solutions. To help build trust and ease the tensions that typically arise over the teardown issue, it is important to involve a range of stakeholders in these discussions, including neighborhood groups, preservationists, architects, builders, developers, and real estate agents.

Some cities have responded to the teardown threat by organizing community design "charrettes" and "visioning" workshops, where architects and planners help sketch out alternative development scenarios for residents to consider. It may be helpful to use models or computer simulation software to prepare a "build-out" diagram showing the extent to which each property could be developed under the current zoning regulations. These diagrams can be a shock to long-time residents and often lead to calls for more careful management of future development.

Before proceeding with specific strategies, it is often useful to conduct an "audit" of current development policies and their effects—positive or negative—on the teardown trend. This will help identify problem areas that need to be addressed before engaging in the debate over specific solutions. Many zoning codes include language that was developed in the 1950s and 1960s to guide the development of booming postwar subdivisions. These codes often contain outdated construction standards that may allow or even encourage design that is not compatible with the character of historic neighborhoods. Revisions to these standards can help make new construction more compatible and prevent some teardowns.

Communities across the country are using a variety of specific tools—some new, others well-tested—in their efforts to tame the teardown trend. These tools generally slow teardowns in one of two ways:

1) by reducing or eliminating the economic pressure for teardowns through changes to zoning regulations that limit the square footage that can be built on a given lot, or

2) by encouraging compatible design through various means, including new construction standards, design review procedures, special neighborhood "overlay" districts, financial incentives, and education programs.

These tools can be combined and packaged for implementation on a citywide scale through zoning code revisions or improved development standards, or at the neighborhood level through targeted zoning overlay districts of various types.

Following are descriptions of some of the most common responses to the teardown trend, along with brief commentary on the effectiveness of each tool. Because there is no "magic bullet" that will stop teardowns, communities should expect to use a variety of strategies, perhaps combining several of the tools described below.

Demolition Moratoriums and Delays

It is particularly upsetting to longtime residents when a historic home is demolished without warning. Left behind is a lingering sense that the house might have been saved—if only there had been adequate notice and more time to develop alternatives. A demolition moratorium makes it illegal to demolish properties in the community or neighborhood during a defined period, usually from six months to a year. This buys time for residents and local governments to develop permanent policies to better manage development and limit teardowns. Demolition-delay ordinances establish a required waiting period (90 days up to one year is typical) before demolition permits are issued for specific properties. This allows time for community input and the development of alternatives. In Newton, Mass., a one-year demolition delay period was instituted to slow the pace of teardowns. In Highland Park, Ill., the delay period is specifically used to determine whether a property is historic and merits preservation.

This approach is most appropriate in communities where the pace of teardowns is accelerating and few, if any, management tools are in place. Moratoriums and delays must have defined and reasonable time frames to avoid legal challenges. The definition of "demolition" must be clear so as to avoid "alterations" where all but a few exterior walls are bulldozed. Penalties must be severe enough to discourage violations.

Moving Threatened Homes

Moving threatened historic homes is a last resort that should be considered only when all other options have failed to protect the property. If possible, endangered homes should be moved to nearby lots within the neighborhood that are similar to their original location in setting, orientation, and surrounding architectural character. Examples of successfully moved historic houses may be found in the Munger Place Historic District in Dallas.

Moved homes can make attractive, compatible infill projects if handled sensitively. If employed too often or easily, however, this option can become a habit and the re-shuffling of properties eventually creates a confused and false sense of neighborhood history.

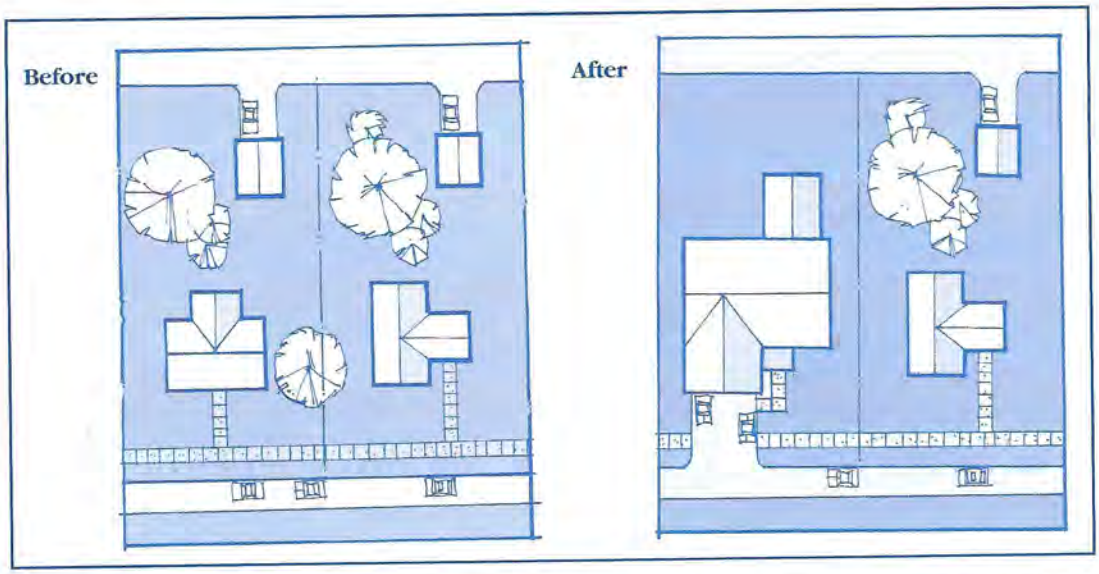
Historic Districts

First enacted in the 1930s, local historic districts have now been established in more than 2,300 communities across the nation to protect historic sites and neighborhoods from demolition, insensitive alterations, and out-of-character new construction. About 75 percent of local historic district ordinances include design guidelines that provide specific information on how to build compatible, appropriately-scaled additions and infill structures. Many historic district ordinances in large cities include the authority to deny demolition of significant structures. In many suburban communities, however, ordinances are simply advisory or provide only temporary demolition delays. Historic districts are a type of zoning overlay, meaning that they are added to the underlying zoning regulations, which remain in effect. Well-known historic districts include Georgetown in Washington, D.C., Society Hill in Philadelphia, and the Garden District in New Orleans.

This approach can provide the most complete protection for historic properties, including the power to deny demolition as well as mandatory review and approval of all exterior alterations, additions, and new infill construction—but it requires significant staff resources to administer effectively, especially in large neighborhoods. In many older neighborhoods, all blocks may not meet eligibility standards, resulting in a patchwork of protected and unprotected properties. Considerable time will likely be required to research eligible properties, establish proposed boundaries, and win political approval.

This Denver neighborhood is one of more than 2,300 communities across the country that has established a historic district to protect against demolitions, insensitive alterations, and out-of-character new construction.

— Photo by Jim Lindberg



New houses being built on the site of teardowns are typically 3,000 square feet or larger.

— Drawing by Adrian Scott Fine

Conservation Districts

Like historic districts, conservation districts are usually a type of zoning overlay, with boundaries that define a specific area or neighborhood that exhibits certain shared physical characteristics and development patterns. Conservation districts generally provide for review of demolitions and other major changes to existing properties, such as large additions. Conservation districts can be tailored to meet individual neighborhood needs and typically include design guidelines for front and side setbacks, building height and width, roof pitch, and garage location. Generally not included in conservation district ordinances are the "fine grain" design review items that appear in traditional historic district ordinances, such as windows, doors, trim, building materials, etc. About two dozen cities around the country have active, well-established conservation district programs. They are known by a variety of names: "Special Planning Districts" in Phoenix, "Neighborhood Conservation Overlay Districts" in Raleigh, N.C., and "Historic Conservation Districts" in Memphis, for example.

Conservation districts address issues such as demolition and oversized new construction with less administrative burden than historic districts. Boundaries and eligibility criteria can be more inclusive in a conservation district than in traditional historic districts. While it is likely to encounter less political resistance than historic district designation, this approach may lead to calls for loosening of design review in nearby traditional historic districts.

Design Review

Several communities have tried to address the impact of oversized new houses by imposing a design-review zoning overlay that is not necessarily tied to the historic character of the neighborhood. "Urban design districts" or "design overlay districts" allow staff to review major development proposals and suggest ways to improve their appearance and compatibility with existing structures. Design review may be triggered when projects exceed a certain size, or it may be required in exchange for allowing slightly larger square footage. The suburban community of Park Ridge, Ill., developed an "Appearance Code" that applies design review criteria to all new home construction in the community.

While this approach can lead to significant design improvements and compatibility, it does not change the underlying zoning, so size and scale may not be affected. It requires significant administrative resources and staff with design training.

Floor Area Ratios and Lot Coverage Requirements

Traditionally used in commercial districts, the floor area ratio (FAR) concept is increasingly being applied in residential areas to limit the size of homes relative to the lots they occupy. Floor area ratios regulate the amount of buildable floor area in relation to the size of the lot. For example, a .6 FAR would allow a builder to cover up to 60 percent of a lot with a one-story structure or 30 percent of the lot with two stories. FAR definitions may be included as part of citywide zoning changes or written into overlay district language for specific neighborhoods. Some cities have used maximum lot coverage formulas to get at the same result as FARs. These tools are most effective when used in combination with other building standards, such as setback requirements and height limits. To address oversized new construction, the town of Gulf Stream, Fla., developed the Gulf Stream Design Manual, which combines FAR requirements and detailed design standards.

These regulations directly address the problem of overscaled new construction and can eliminate the economic incentive for teardowns by limiting new square footage, but they do not directly prevent demolitions. Formulas for determining FAR

ratios can be cumbersome and difficult to calculate, and a high level of administrative staff review is needed.

Setbacks and Open Space Standards

Most city zoning codes stipulate a minimum distance that new houses must be set back from the street. These standard setbacks may not be in keeping with historic patterns, however, allowing new construction to break with the established line of older houses on a block. Defining side and rear setback lines can also limit the mass of new houses. Along with setbacks, many communities require that a certain percentage of a lot be maintained as "open space." Often, clarifications are needed to define whether driveways, garages, window wells, and porches qualify as open space. As part of setback or open space requirements, many zoning codes include language regarding garage and driveway size and placement, landscaping and tree preservation—all of which can be written or revised to be compatible with historic development patterns.

Like FARs and lot coverage ratios, setbacks and open space requirements can be effective ways to limit the scale of new construction and maintain basic neighborhood building patterns. They may create "nonconforming" properties, meaning that owners of properties that do not meet standards in their current state cannot make changes without violating the zoning code.

Bulk Limits

Some communities have developed standards to establish maximum "bulk planes" or "encroachment planes" to limit the scale of new construction, lessen impacts, and insure that adequate air and sunlight reach neighboring properties ("solar access ordinance" is another term used). The formulas used to determine bulk planes can be fairly complex, but they generally work by defining the allowable dimensions of exterior walls, roof heights, and roof pitches.

Bulk limits can reduce the scale of new construction and impacts on neighboring properties. However, these limits do not insure compatible design and may lead to awkward attempts to "build to the rule" without considering historic patterns. For instance, Denver's current standards encourage pitched roofs, but in doing so also prohibit the traditional two-story, flat-roofed "Denver Square"—one of the city's most common historic house types.

Development Incentives and Bonuses

A variety of incentives can be developed to encourage compatible design and direct new construction toward appropriate areas. Often, square footage bonuses are provided for projects that include particularly compatible features, such as front porches, detached garages, or the use of exterior brick. Incentives to allow detached garage apartments (also known as "Accessory Dwelling Units") offer a number of advantages for most historic neighborhoods: They increase square footage in a way that maintains historic building patterns, provide a potential source of income for the owners of the primary dwelling on the lot, and increase the diversity of housing options in the neighborhood. Seattle recently passed an ordinance allowing Accessory Dwelling Units for single-family homes. In Portland, Ore., a higher density of development is allowed on lots that have been vacant for five years or more.

Incentives can be packaged to help make other, more restrictive development standards politically palatable. Experience in most cities suggests that developers will use all incentives available to achieve greater square footage.

Downzoning

In many historic neighborhoods, a blanket of highly permissive zoning was applied years ago to account for the fact that older neighborhoods typically included a mix of uses and building types. Where still in place today, such blanket zoning allows "by right" a density of development that is far greater than currently exists. For example, a wall of large new duplexes might be allowable on blocks that are currently all single-family. Perhaps the quickest way to stop this is to change the zoning to eliminate certain uses.

Downzoning reduces or eliminates the economic incentive to demolish older homes for large, multi-unit properties. It may create numerous non-conforming properties, and may reduce traditional neighborhood economic and architectural diversity by eliminating rental and mixed-use properties. It may be difficult to accomplish politically, though prospects improve if downzoning is part of comprehensive, citywide zoning code revisions.

Easements and Covenants

Not all solutions require local government action. In some communities, organizations have protected key historic properties through easements and covenants. These tools can prevent demolitions or overscaled additions by

attaching permanent deed restrictions that are monitored by qualified easement holding entities such as local preservation groups. Easements are voluntary and therefore must be acquired one property at a time, either through purchase or donation. (This is in contrast with many new residential subdivisions and gated communities where strict covenants are put in place on all properties immediately after construction.)

Easements provide permanent protection, can be tailored to the needs of an individual property, and do not require governmental involvement. Because easements are voluntary, protection may be limited and piecemeal. An effective easement program requires strong local organizational capacity and expertise.

Community Land Trusts

The land trust concept, most often used as a way to protect open space and rural landscapes, has been used in some communities to maintain a stock of affordable housing. Typically, a house is donated to or purchased by the land trust, which then re-sells it, retaining the rights to the land on which the house sits through permanent easement. By controlling the development rights for the land, the trust can effectively set the resale price of the house. Prices are managed to allow for modest appreciation while preventing speculation. Examples include the Burlington Land Trust (Vermont) and Durham Land Trust (North Carolina).

This approach eliminates the economic incentive for teardowns through purchase of development rights, maintains the stock of affordable housing, and does not require government involvement. However, not all land trusts are set up to monitor changes to building exteriors. Strong local organizational capacity and a voluntary donor or seller is required.

Historic Real Estate Marketing and Education Programs

Educating the people who buy and sell homes about the advantages of maintaining historic neighborhood character is another strategy to prevent the negative impacts of teardowns. Preservation groups or other local organizations can offer a variety of programs, including historic home tours, training for real estate agents, classes in home rehabilitation techniques, and awards programs to publicize good examples of rehabilitation and compatible new construction. Neighborhood marketing centers, such the Intown Living Center operated by Preservation Dallas and the New Orleans Preservation Resource Center, provide information to potential homebuyers on neighborhood characteristics, available properties, rehabilitation techniques, and financial incentives.

This approach can help build long-term public support for neighborhood conservation. Such outreach can also bring visibility and credibility to the preservation cause and increase political support for further protection measures. It is most effective if combined with other tools such as financial incentives and design review.

Financial and Technical Assistance

Many local governments and preservation organizations have developed financial incentives to encourage rehabilitation of historic homes and neighborhoods. Small grants, low-interest loans, property tax abatements, and freezes are the most common incentives. These are usually combined with some level of technical assistance, such as financial guidance for first-time homebuyers or referrals to experienced craftspeople and contractors. Examples include the Cleveland Restoration Society's Heritage Home Loan Program, the Providence Preservation Society's Revolving Loan Fund, and the City of Chicago's newly established Bungalow Initiative, which provides low-interest loans to help with acquisition and rehabilitation of historic bungalows.

Some of these programs have targeted neighborhoods "at risk" due to disinvestment and may need to be re-packaged and marketed specifically to meet the needs of neighborhoods experiencing teardowns. They can be combined with protection tools—such as historic districts, conservation districts, or easement programs—to ensure that investments will have lasting impact.

Conclusion

Residents have worked for decades to protect and nurture the slow, incremental revitalization of many historic neighborhoods across the country. Now, suddenly, some of these very same places are threatened—not by people leaving the neighborhood, as was often the case in the past, but by newcomers wanting to move in on their own terms. The challenge today is to manage this new investment so that it respects the character and distinctiveness that makes these neighborhoods so attractive, desirable, and livable.

How the Teardown Trend Is Affecting Five Communities

Chicago, Illinois

Demolition dust is flying in the Chicago area, with at least 20 inner-ring suburbs and several urban neighborhoods currently dealing with teardown threats. The western suburb of Hinsdale is the most heavily affected: Since 1986, Hinsdale has seen more than 1,200 homes—20 percent of its housing stock—demolished.[30] Approximately half of the homes torn down were historic, including 19th-century Victorians, Sears "kit houses," Prairie Style bungalows and Tudor Revival homes designed by local architects. "A certain amount of change is inevitable, I know, but you get too many teardowns and you start losing the character of your community," said Brian Norkus, a planner in the northern suburb of Winnetka, where dozens of older homes have been demolished in recent years.[31]

The teardown trend has even begun to affect Oak Park, a turn-of-the-century suburb just west of Chicago that is internationally renowned for its historic architecture. Oak Park residents became alarmed last year when several historic homes were gutted and then rebuilt at a much greater scale. "It doesn't seem possible that could happen in Oak Park," said one resident. "You're ruining the historic district that countless people have invested fortunes in improving."[32] Oak Park community leaders are looking at ways to tighten the local historic preservation ordinance.

Other Chicago-area communities have scrambled to put in place new planning and zoning measures. For example, Park Ridge established an "Appearance Code" requiring review of proposed new projects, Highland Park added a demolition-delay ordinance for historic structures, Glencoe defined house bulk limits, and Lake Forest set maximums for garage size.

Denver, Colorado

At least a dozen historic neighborhoods in Denver are experiencing significant numbers of teardowns. Last year, some 200 homes, many of them brick bungalows from the 1920s and 1930s, were demolished and replaced with stucco-clad houses three times their size. "People want to live in old neighborhoods because of their charm and amenities and accessibility," Realtor Deborah Hart told Denver's *5280 Magazine*. "But they also want a lot of floor space."[33]

Beginning in the early 1990s, large second-story additions or "pop-tops" became common in several historic neighborhoods as owners sought ways to expand the typical two-bedroom Denver bungalow. Recently, however, teardowns have become a more common practice. Developers have found profit in demolishing older single-story bungalows and replacing them with massive two-story structures, often called "long houses," that stretch from the

"Pop-tops" have changed the historic character of several Denver neighborhoods.

— Photo by Jim Lindberg

front yard all the way to the rear alley. Neighbors are upset. "When you have a peach orchard and you plop a giant sequoia in the middle of it, some people don't like it," said a Denver city councilman.[34] The loss of sunlight, privacy, mature trees, and historic neighborhood character are common complaints among residents.

Several groups are working to establish new local historic districts, which would prevent the demolition of historic homes and require design review of all construction in designated neighborhoods. The research and approval process for new historic districts can take several years, however, so Denver's Community Development and Planning Agency has convened the so-called "Quick Wins Committee" to look at tools that could be put in place quickly. The committee—which includes representatives from Historic Denver and numerous neighborhood organizations as well as several architects, developers and real estate agents—hopes to forward its recommendations to the city council sometime this summer.

Dallas, Texas

More than 1,000 homes have been demolished in the historic Highland Park and adjacent University Park neighborhoods, developed in the early 20th century as the area's first fully planned suburbs. Large Colonial Revivals as well as relatively modest Tudor-style cottages are routinely torn down and replaced by new houses ranging from 6,000 to 10,000 square feet. To date, nearly 50 percent of the original housing stock has been lost. If past experience is any indicator, residents can expect to see an average of 130 homes demolished each year. In May of 2002, five homes were demolished over a ten-day period, despite community protest and and despite the fact that the homes were some of the best examples of Arts and Crafts architecture in northern Texas.

"You do not have to tear old houses down to maintain property values or to have modern amenities," says Ron Emrich, a Dallas-based preservationist. "Many of these houses can be expanded, adapted for modern living—people can have substantially higher square footage and still protect the historic architecture of the house."[35]

"This is a real tragedy," says Mike Mathews, president of Preservation Park Cities, an organization formed in 2001 in response to teardowns. "You never want to see a historic home come down without a rational reason. Here perfectly good houses are being demolished solely to build a house three times as big, for three times as much money." With approximately 650 members, Preservation Park Cities is advocating for tools to help slow the pace of demolitions.

New Jersey

Teardowns are happening all across the state, from historic Cape May, America's oldest seashore resort, to the architecturally rich bedroom communities of Bergen County, just outside New York City. In the historic shore community of Ocean City, entire neighborhood blocks are being transformed, with more than 300 small bungalows and cottages demolished in recent years. In the local historic district, an 1885 residence that was originally a life-saving station has been tangled up in a legal battle for several years as its owner proposes to demolish it and subdivide the lot for three new houses. In most instances, the scale of new construction is visually jarring, as replacement houses are built high off the ground with raised basements and two or more garages per house fronting the street. A group called Citizens for Historic Preservation has formed to advocate on behalf of Ocean City's historic architecture, but a preservation consultant says, "If the teardown trend continues as it has been, it may be too late."

In the Bergen County community of Tenafly, an 1840s frame house believed to be one of the oldest in town was demolished in April of 2002. In the mid-1990s, a 1901 five-bedroom Colonial Revival house was torn down in Ridgewood. An outraged neighbor said at the time, "If you start tearing down the old homes, we're going to be like anybody else. How much of the town are we willing to let go?"[36] Teardowns in these and other affluent communities are on the rise in Bergen County, which saw a 45 percent increase in demolition activity between 1995 and 1999.[37] One of these controversial teardowns was enough to convince Tenafly residents to take action, resulting in the creation of the Magnolia Avenue Historic District in 1999.

Newton, Massachusetts

Close-in communities just outside Boston, such as Lexington and Winchester, are fertile ground for teardowns. In Newton, good schools, convenient location, and historic character are qualities that make this community attractive. In the early 1990s, the historical commission reviewed about 20 to 30 demolition requests per year. In recent years, it has become common for the commission to review more than 100 demolition requests annually.

Teardowns are happening mainly in neighborhoods of small

homes around 1,200 square feet each. Not all are historic, but the Oak Hill Park neighborhood certainly is. Built between 1947 and 1949, this community of 412 veterans' houses is noteworthy as one of the first planned developments in Newton. It is also considered historically significant for its unique internal pathway system, which reduces the visibility of streets and automobiles. For years, the neighborhood's modest three-bedroom houses have been starter homes for first-time homebuyers. This practice continues today, although about a quarter of the old houses have been demolished and new houses are dramatically driving up the neighborhood's median home price. The character of Oak Hill Park is changing, as two-story houses with raised basements replace the older single-story homes. House by house, the historic pattern of Oak Hill Park is also being altered, with new houses turning their backs to the pathway system and oriented completely opposite from the original homes.

Resources

National Trust for Historic Preservation Regional Offices provide services to state and local organizations and individuals. These services cover all preservation activities, including field visits, advisory assistance, conferences, and special projects on issues of particular concern to each region. Contact your regional office first if you have questions about preservation issues in your community. Regional office addresses are listed on the inside back cover of this booklet.

The National Trust's **Preservation Books** catalog lists publications that provide concise and practical information on a variety of topics, including several that relate to the teardown issue. Specific titles include *Buyer's Guide to Older and Historic Houses; Design and Development: Infill Housing Compatible with Historic Neighborhoods; Design Review in Historic Districts; Establishing an Easement Program to Protect Historic, Scenic, and Natural Resources; Getting to Know Your 20th Century Neighborhood; A Layperson's Guide to Preservation Law: Federal, State and Local Laws Governing Historic Resources*, and *Maintaining Community Character: How to Establish a Local Historic District*.
All are available from:
Preservation Books
1785 Massachusetts Ave., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036
phone: (202) 588-6296
fax: (202) 588-6223
www.preservationbooks.org

American Planning Association
The American Planning Association (APA) is a nonprofit public interest and research organization representing 30,000 practicing planners, officials, and citizens involved with urban and rural planning issues. APA educates policy makers on land-use planning issues and advocates policy changes to incorporate planning principles at all levels of government. APA conducts extensive research on planning topics, including research projects sponsored by agencies and other associations. APA publishes *Planning*, a monthly magazine; *Zoning News*, a monthly newsletter on local land-use controls; the *Journal of the American Planning Association*, a quarterly journal; and *Land Use Law & Zoning Digest*, a monthly law journal. APA also publishes the quarterly newsletter, *The Commissioner*, for planning officials.
American Planning Association
122 S. Michigan Avenue
Suite 1600
Chicago, IL 60603
phone: (312) 431-9100
fax: (312) 431-9985
www.planning.org

National Alliance of Preservation Commissions
The National Alliance of Preservation Commissions (NAPC) is a national, nonprofit network of more than 2,000 landmark, historic district commissions, and architectural review boards. The Alliance is dedicated to educating commissions by exchanging the ideas and experiences of local communities working to protect historic districts and landmarks through local legislation. NAPC hosts a biennial national conference; publishes *The Alliance Review* newsletter; organizes tailored, regional training seminars; offers an annual meeting and workshops held in conjunction with the National Trust for Historic Preservation's annual National Preservation Conference; maintains an information resource center and a database of historic preservation commissions in the United States; and provides a voice for commissions in Washington, D.C.
National Alliance of
Preservation Commissions
Post Office Box 1605
Athens, GA 30603
phone: (706) 542-4731
fax: (706) 583-0320
napc@uga.edu
www.arches.uga.edu/~napc/

Acknowledgments

Adrian Scott Fine is the senior program officer for the National Trust's Northeast Field Office. Jim Lindberg is the assistant director of the National Trust's Mountains/Plains Office.

National Trust staff who contributed significantly in the writing of this report include: Constance Beaumont, Megan Brown, Julia Miller, Anthony Veerkamp, and Dwight Young. Peter Brink provided overall guidance and support.

Other National Trust staff who assisted with this project include Kathy Adams, Mike Buhler, Daniel Carey, Greg Coble, Amy Cole, Hap Connors, Marilyn Fenollosa, Mary Ruffin Hanbury, Kitty Higgins, John Hildreth, Alicia Lay Leuba, Wendy Nicholas, Beth Newberger, Barbara Pahl, Jim Peterson, and Royce Yeater.

Others who contributed information, photos, or stories of teardowns and solutions include:

Simeon Bankoff, Dan Becker, William L. Bruning, Meredith Arms Bzdak, Boyd Coon, Alice DeSouza, Laurie deVegter, Jean Follett, Betsy Friedberg, David Goldfarb, Bridget Hartman, Dwayne Jones, George Kramer, Lara Kritzer, Bruce Kriviskey, Patricia Lake, Meg Lousteau, Weiming Lu, Amy Lucas, Mike Mathews, John McCall, Vincent Michael, Richard Michaelson, Marya Morris, John Payne, Marcel Quimby, Sue Scherner, Gretchen Schuler, Ellen Shubart, Christopher Skelly, David Swift, Kevin Tremble, Steve Turner, and Nore Winter.

The following organizations provided information for this report: American Planning Association, Atlanta Preservation Center, Citizens for Historic Preservation (Ocean City, N.J.), City and County of Denver Community Planning and Development Agency, Historic Districts Council of New York City, Massachusetts Historical Commission, National Alliance of Preservation Commissions, Preservation League of Staten Island (N.Y.), Preservation Park Cities (Dallas, Tex.), and the Preservation Resource Center of New Orleans.

Endnotes

1 Candy Cooper, "Gigantic new houses have fans and foes," *The Bergen Record*, November 26, 2000.

2 For example, only 15 percent of the city of Los Angeles has been surveyed, according to *The Los Angeles Historic Resource Survey Assessment Project*, The Getty Conservation Institute, November, 2001.

3 Candy Cooper, "The economics of demolition," *The Bergen Record*, November 27, 2000.

4 Ibid.

5 Jeannene Przyblyski, "Monster homes creeping into Noe," *The Noe Valley Voice*, April 2000.

6 *Report and Recommendations on Incompatible Teardown and Infill House Construction in the City of Geneva, Kane County*, Illinois, Mayor's Task Force on Teardown/Infill Development, City of Geneva, Illinois, February 2002.

7 Timothy Eagen, "In Portland, Houses Are Friendly. Or Else," *The New York Times*, April 20, 2000.

8 Ann Hall, "Affordability in area housing is worth saving," *NorthWest Weekly*, February 7, 1999.

9 Bill Lurz, "Interesting infill, Baby boomers are moving back to the city, joining the younger set. They are wanting to be where the walking is easy," *HousingZone*, July 1, 1999.

10 Ibid.

11 Bridget Hartman, e-mail correspondence, April 5, 2002.

12 Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University, *State of the Nation's Housing: 2001*, p. 6.

13 "Going Through the Roof," *The Economist*, March 30, 2002.

14 National Association of Homebuilders, *Housing Facts, Figures and Trends, 2001*, p. 2.

15 Ibid.

16 June Fletcher, "Buyers Are Choosing Modest Over Massive," *Wall Street Journal Online*, 2002.

17 Sarah Susanka, *The Not So Big House*, Taunton Press, 1998.

18 Cities that gained population from 1990-2000 include Atlanta, Boston, Charlotte, Chicago, Denver, Houston, Indianapolis, Los Angeles, Memphis, Minneapolis, New York, and Seattle. The exceptions to this trend were primarily older urban centers located in the Northeast and Midwest, such as Hartford, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Detroit, and St. Louis. Source: Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University, *State of the Nation's Housing: 2001*, p. 30.

19 National Association of Homebuilders, *The Next Frontier: Building Homes in America's Cities*, 2000.

20 Peter Katz, "Great American Cities: Five that are getting it right," essay for Elm Street Writers Group, Michigan Land Use Institute, July 20, 2001.

21 National Association of Homebuilders, *Housing Facts, Figures and Trends, 2001*, p. 53.

22 Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University, *State of the Nation's Housing: 2001*, p. 10.

23 "Should You Tear the Darn Thing Down?" *BusinessWeek Online*, June 25, 2001.

24 Ibid.

25 Jean Follett, phone conversation with author, May 7, 2002.

26 See Ann Bennett, "The Economic Benefits of Historic Designation, Knoxville, Tennessee," Knoxville Knox County Metropolitan Commission, 1996; Jo Ramsey Leimenstall, "Assessing the Impact of Local Historic Districts on Property Values in Greensboro, North Carolina," University of North Carolina at Greensboro; and "The Economic Benefits of Preserving Community Character: A Case Study from Galveston, Texas," Government Finance Research Center.

27 *The Next Frontier: Building Homes in America's Cities*, National Association of Homebuilders, 2000, p. 2.

28 *Recycling America's Land: A National Report on Brownfields Redevelopment*, U.S. Conference of Mayors, February 2000.

29 Cheri Bentrup, "OP looking for way to control teardowns," *Oak Leaves*, April 10, 2002.

30 Charlotte Cooper, "Officials watching teardown activity," *Oak Leaves*, June 27, 2001.

31 Ibid.

32 Cheri Bentrup, "Teardowns raise residents' ire," *Oak Leaves*, February 13, 2002.

33 Jennie Shortridge, "Preservation Blues," *5280 Magazine*, December 2001/January 2002.

34 Ibid.

35 Leif Strickland, "Demolitions dishearten local preservationists," *The Dallas Morning News*, May 15, 2002.

36 Lisa Prevost, "Teardowns, trophies and angry neighbors," *The New York Times*, September 27, 1998.

37 Candy Cooper, "The economics of demolition," *The Bergen Record*, November 27, 2000.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation provides leadership, education, and advocacy to save America's diverse historic places and revitalize our communities.

Support for the National Trust is provided by membership dues; endowment funds; individuals, corporate and foundation contributions; and grants from state and federal agencies.

NATIONAL TRUST
for HISTORIC PRESERVATION

1785 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20036
202.588.6296