How Preservation and Building Reuse Foster Walkability and Economic Vitality

AMERICA WALKS : A GOOD INVESTMENT – THE BENEFITS OF WALKABLE COMMUNITIES

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The **Preservation Green Lab** promotes the conservation, reuse, and retrofit of existing buildings and neighborhoods as a powerful strategy for supporting community health, equity, and resilience.
“The greenest building is one that already exists.”
- Carl Elefante
“Cities need old buildings”

Jane Jacobs
Older, Smaller, Better

Project Overview

• **OBJECTIVE:** Test Jane Jacobs’ hypothesis that diverse city fabric supports greater vitality and opportunity

• Used newly available data to assess the social, cultural, and economic value of older, smaller buildings

• Focused on Seattle, San Francisco, and Washington D.C.
Linked diverse datasets to test statistical relationship between built character and performance

- Spotrank cell usage intensity data
- Yelp, Flickr, Craigslist, Walk Score
- U.S. Census Bureau, ACS
- LEHD LODES
- City permits
Takeaway #1: Older commercial corridors can be anchors for walkable, economically thriving neighborhoods.

- Blocks of older, smaller, mixed-age buildings…
  - Are more walkable

Photo: Jim Lindberg, NTHP
Takeaway #1: Older commercial corridors can be anchors for walkable, economically thriving neighborhoods.

Older, smaller, more age-diverse buildings

Average Walk Score = 83.6

Newer, larger, less age-diverse buildings

Average Walk Score = 78.1
Takeaway #1: Older commercial corridors can be anchors for walkable, economically thriving neighborhoods.

- Blocks of older, smaller, mixed-age buildings…
  - Are more walkable
  - Have higher proportions of non-chain businesses, small businesses, and women and minority-owned businesses
  - Attract more nightlife with more sidewalk cafes and more arts and culture spaces

Photo: Jim Lindberg, NTHP
Takeaway #2: Policies supporting walkable, vital neighborhoods may not be obvious.

• Strengthening older commercial corridors and neighborhoods bolsters walkability and economic vitality.
  – Adaptive Reuse Ordinances (Ex: Los Angeles)
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- Strengthening older commercial corridors and neighborhoods bolsters walkability and economic vitality.
  - Adaptive Reuse Ordinances (Ex: Los Angeles)
  - Façade improvement programs
  - Programs matching vacant buildings to entrepreneurs (Ex: Detroit’s Motor City Match)

Photos: Jim Lindberg, NTHP (top) Shawn Lee, Motor City Match (right)
Takeaway #3: Building on old bones offers best path to walkability and a resilient local economy.

- Infill development offers additive potential, without demolition.
  - Ex: Little Havana, Miami
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- Infill development offers additive potential, without demolition.
  - Ex: Little Havana, Miami

FACT: Little Havana can be home to new residents and greater economic opportunity without sacrificing its character and cultural vitality.

**HOW?**

1. Identify existing vacancy.
   - Little Havana contains...
   - 550 vacant lots
   - 99 parking lots
   - 28 vacant buildings

   **4,600,000 square feet of vacant space**

2. Activate and add infill.
   - Craft new policy that incentivizes infill and eases restrictions around building reuse.

3. Welcome new residents and economic opportunity...
   - By building neighborhood-scale infill development on vacant lots and parking lots, and activating vacant buildings, Little Havana can incorporate...

   - **+2,500 new jobs**
   - **+10,000 new residents**
   - **+550 new businesses**

   ...without demolishing a single building.
Takeaway #3: Building on old bones offers best path to walkability and a resilient local economy.

- Infill development offers additive potential, without demolition.
  - Ex: Little Havana, Miami
- Scale and granularity deserve care and attention.
Conclusion

1. Older commercial corridors can be anchors for walkable, economically thriving neighborhoods.

2. Policies supporting walkable, vital neighborhoods may not be obvious.

3. Building on old bones offers best path to walkability and a resilient local economy.
Thank you!

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