



Preservation for People: A Vision for the Future

MAY 2017



National Trust *for*
Historic Preservation®
Save the past. Enrich the future.

The 50th anniversary of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 offered an occasion to both celebrate the many remarkable accomplishments made possible by the Act and to reflect on the past and future of historic preservation in the United States.

As such, the National Trust for Historic Preservation took this golden anniversary opportunity to engage people throughout the country and listen to their ideas for the future. “Preservation for People: A Vision for the Future” seeks to capture those ideas, express an aspirational vision for the future of historic preservation, and give those in and aligned with our field a set of principles for moving forward.

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Vision: A Preservation Movement for People

Fifty years ago, the preservation movement came of age in America. The signing of the National Historic Preservation Act on October 15, 1966, enshrined the values of historic preservation into law, fashioned the tools we still use today, and has guided our important work ever since.

We envision a preservation movement that grounds its work in human needs and aspirations and becomes a prevalent, powerful, and practical force to sustain, improve, and enrich people's lives.

"Down to the Wire" campaign to save the James River. Photo by: Elli Morris.

Yet, while that day was a watershed for our movement, the Act did not arise out of whole cloth. Rather, it was the culmination of several years of deep thinking and intense advocacy by a broad coalition of preservation activists—city mayors, local leaders and municipal officials, artists and architects, ordinary citizens and members of Congress, and even the First Lady.

The law reflected the collective wisdom of preservationists in the 1960s—their experience with landmark laws and district ordinances at the state and local levels. It also reflected their abiding sense of loss over tragedies such as the razing of New York City's Penn Station in 1964. And it carried solutions to address the particular opportunities and challenges of that moment in time.

In the 1960s, as much of America looked to the frontiers of space and dreamt of a better tomorrow, our national past seemed not a roadmap for our future but a burden that must be overcome. Grassroots activists all across the country took to the streets to rally against ill-advised "urban renewal" schemes that threatened to destroy vibrant neighborhoods in order to "save"



This Place Matters campaign at National Treasure San Juan Waterworks.

them. When Jane Jacobs wrote in 1961 that “cities need old buildings so badly that it is probably impossible for vigorous streets and districts to grow without them,” she stated a position that ran completely antithetical to the prevailing belief in urban planning circles.

After 50 years of hard work, we have reached a different consensus. Thanks to the many successes achieved through the Act, the virtues of saving and reusing older places are now much more broadly recognized across America. Nor are we voices in the wilderness anymore: time and again, preservation has proven an invaluable tool in spurring economic growth, meeting critical social needs, and bringing communities together.

In 2017 novel and exciting opportunities beckon. Driven by the changing tastes of millennials and “empty nesters,” cities across America are experiencing a profound revival after decades of suburban flight. Traditional Main Streets are once again generating economic vitality in thousands of smaller towns and communities. We also have tools, technologies, and data sets today that were beyond the imagination of the Act’s creators. The capacity for preservation to enrich and enliven our communities is as potent as it has ever been.

Even more importantly, our understanding of our diverse American past has been tremendously broadened and enriched over the past five decades, informed by new generations of scholars and continuing struggles for racial and social justice. As historian David McCullough well put it, “History is no longer a spotlight. We are turning up the stage lights to show the entire cast.”

At the same time, not all the dogmas of our quiet past are adequate to the stormy present. The 21st century poses no small amount of challenges for today’s preservation movement. While many towns and cities continue to suffer from disinvestment, others face a rapidly escalating affordability crisis marked by widening economic inequality, housing shortages, and fears of displacement. In short, too many neighborhoods are becoming unlivable for all but the wealthiest Americans.

As legacies of injustice and discrimination continue to impact opportunities for Americans today, we have also seen a powerful backlash to rapid cultural and demographic changes. At a time of red states and blue states, the fundamental vision of one American people, united by a common history and joined in common destiny—the vision that the preservation movement has worked to steward since its inception—seems as contested as it’s been in over a century.

In this fraught environment, the political consensus of the 1960s has broken down, and some powerful legislators now question the wisdom of preservation laws and even of public lands. Meanwhile, sedentary lifestyles—exacerbated by a built landscape that has prioritized cars over people for decades—have contributed to a national obesity epidemic that escalates health costs and diminishes quality of life. And as temperatures and seas continue to rise worldwide, citizens are looking for new ways to cut carbon emissions and mitigate accelerating climate change.

These challenges before us as a nation are daunting. And yet, over the past 50 years, historic preservation has proven a valuable tool in responding to all of these thorny issues. Saving and reusing older buildings is a demonstrated community investment strategy that creates jobs and generates economic growth while keeping neighborhoods dense and affordable. By facilitating smart growth and walkable communities, preservation promotes healthier lifestyles for all. By keeping the landmarks of our memory and identity, preservation also provides a sense of continuity that promotes emotional and mental health. We now know for a fact that “the greenest building is the one that is already built,” and that building reuse cuts energy and carbon costs for cities. And we’ve all seen how sites that tell our stories promote understanding and bring citizens of widely different outlooks together as Americans.

For all of these reasons and more, we have sought to follow the example of the National Historic Preservation Act’s creators and to think deeply and critically about the future of preservation—what we must do and where we need to go to build on five decades of success and to keep moving forward.

We have enlisted hundreds of preservationists and preservation allies in this effort by holding meetings and symposia across the country (see Appendix 1). We found that, even despite the diverse backgrounds and careers of the people involved, and the many aforementioned opportunities and challenges of today, there was a surprising unanimity about the direction we must take in the next half-century.



Painters restore the Star Bedroom ceiling at Lyndhurst with gold leaf stars in Tarrytown, New York.

A future preservation movement centered in people:

- **Honors the full diversity of the ever-evolving American story.**
- **Nurtures more equitable, healthy, resilient, vibrant, sustainable communities.**
- **Collaborates with new and existing partners.**



Ideas competition at New York State Pavilion.
Photo by: Duncan Kendall.

Preservation must put people first.

This insight may seem simple and even obvious to many. And yet it carries profound implications for our movement going forward. While preservationists of 50 years ago often framed their work—our work—by explaining the impact places have on our spiritual, social, and economic well-being, our federal preservation infrastructure—regulations, funding priorities, documentation, survey directives—have tended to focus almost entirely on the built environment, and especially buildings.

Restoring people's needs and desires to the center of preservation realigns our priorities; gives us renewed focus, flexibility, and energy going forward; and will help re-galvanize our movement in this new era.

Our work empowers all people to share the stories and meanings of the places and traditions that matter to them and to play an essential role in determining the future of their communities. Keeping older and historic places alive, vibrant, and responsive to contemporary needs through continuous use and reuse is recognized as a way to achieve substantial ecological, economic, health, and sociological benefits and create more sustainable, equitable, and healthy communities.

Three key concepts support the vision of a future preservation movement centered in people.

A people-centered preservation movement hears, understands, and honors the full diversity of the ever-evolving American story.

A people-centered preservation movement creates and nurtures more equitable, healthy, resilient, vibrant, and sustainable communities.

A people-centered preservation movement collaborates with new and existing partners to address fundamental social issues and make the world better.

These three concepts will be discussed in the pages to follow. Going forward the National Trust intends to use this document to guide our work. We also hope that other preservation partners and allies will incorporate the aspects here that align with their own missions. In this way, we hope the document will be reflected, in greater and lesser ways, in the critical preservation work carried out over the next 50 years and beyond.



First key concept:

A people-centered preservation movement hears, understands, and honors the full diversity of the ever-evolving American story.

The recognition of our stories—and our capacity to see both ourselves and others in the American narrative—has a profound impact on our sense of identity and well-being. It secures everyone’s stake in their communities and in the country. Current preservation approaches, including the National Register of Historic Places, state registers, locally designated districts and landmarks, and historic site interpretation, have not fully represented the stories of all Americans. A preservation practice more firmly rooted in people can be more inclusive in the identification, understanding, and protection of historic places. It can democratize the process so that all Americans are empowered to share the stories and meanings of the places and traditions that matter to them.

Corpsmember Monica Uvalde and Phoebe Smith working of the Tufa House Project at Mission San Juan. Photo by: Leah Overstreet.

First key concept: A people-centered preservation movement hears, understands, and honors the full diversity of the ever-evolving American story.

If realized, this concept will lead to a future where:

- People share the stories of places that matter to them, using both traditional techniques like oral history and evolving digital tools.
- People hear each other's stories of places that matter and gain a greater understanding of the full American experience.
- People are empowered with financial and human resources to identify, recognize, nominate, and designate the places that matter to them.
- The National Register, state registers, and local designations contain places that are meaningful to all Americans, including currently underrepresented groups: African-Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, differently abled people, Hispanic and Latino Americans, LGBTQ people, Native Americans, women, and working people.
- Historic sites tell their full stories to broader and more diverse audiences, allowing them to engage people with the complexity of the past to understand the present and shape the future.
- Intangible heritage—such as festivals, music traditions, foodways, and legacy businesses—is recognized, nurtured, and preserved as a living tradition through government and private support.
- The people who work in preservation and support preservation as volunteers represent the full diversity of Americans.

Today's preservation movement can begin to achieve this future by taking the following actions:

- Identify, create, and provide financial, human, and technical resources that empower people to tell the stories of the places that matter to them and to determine the future of those places.
- Review and modify practices that impede the identification, nomination, and designation of places meaningful to all Americans—specifically:
 - the concepts of integrity and period of significance, as well as the living-architect and 50-year rules, as used in the National Register; and
 - the complexity and cost of preparing and submitting forms for National Register, state, and local designation.
- Harness technology and social engagement to help communities identify the places they consider worthy of preservation and to tell more complete stories.
- Embrace evolving technologies, new research, and social media to expand the stories that historic sites tell and encourage visitors to interpret their own experiences and perspectives.
- Affirm the importance of intangible heritage such as language, festivals, food and music traditions, and legacy businesses.
- Develop and implement new tools for the identification and continuation of intangible heritage.
- Enlarge preservation practice to connect people and their stories with place, and continue programs—like the current “This Place Matters” campaign—that easily and directly engage people in preservation advocacy activities.
- Support the efforts of sites to preserve both the places and stories that tell the full American story.



Second key concept:

A people-centered preservation movement creates and nurtures more equitable, healthy, resilient, vibrant, and sustainable communities.

A people-centered preservation movement creates and nurtures healthy and equitable communities for all people. It recognizes that older and historic places are essential to physical and psychological health; to fostering a creative, fair, sustainable, and entrepreneurial economy; to conserving land and habitat and avoiding carbon emissions; and to encouraging tolerance and social cohesion. It seeks to eliminate or avoid practices that intentionally or unintentionally lead to unaffordability, inequality, displacement, or the cultural homogenization of communities. Instead, it values older and historic places as assets that serve individuals and communities. These places provide stable and affordable housing, give time and space for older and existing businesses to operate successfully, and offer opportunities for business startups. By using and reusing historic and older buildings, we lessen the environmental impacts of demolition and new construction and take advantage of existing streets, sidewalks, and public transit to create healthy, walkable neighborhoods. Altogether a people-centered preservation movement empowers citizens to manage change in their communities whether through stabilizing existing neighborhoods and communities, revitalizing Main Street commercial corridors, or boosting the economies and livability of entire cities.

Second key concept: A people-centered preservation movement creates and nurtures more equitable, healthy, resilient, vibrant, and sustainable communities.

If realized, this concept will lead to a future where:

- Older and historic places are used and reused to achieve the health benefits of stable neighborhoods, including walkability, as well as the stabilizing psychological benefits of belonging, continuity, identity, beauty, and memory.
- Older and historic places are used and reused to grow and sustain the economic vitality of communities.
- Social networks, businesses, cultures, and communities are nurtured as a critical aspect of preservation practice.
- People are not involuntarily displaced as a result of either rehabilitation or continued use and reuse of existing buildings and neighborhoods.
- Buildings are used and reused for their environmental benefits—including the conservation of land and habitat and combating climate change—and those benefits are widely understood.
- Historic sites and other places are increasingly centers of community life where people play, learn, and create and where hearts and minds are changed, healed, and inspired.
- Reuse is the default, and demolition is a last resort.
- Demolition only occurs after the environmental, social, and cultural costs are taken into account.

Today's preservation movement can begin to achieve this future by taking the following actions:

- Support and publicize research on the health, economic, community, and sustainability benefits of preservation.
- Pilot projects to demonstrate the critical role of older and historic places in sustaining our cities.
- Identify and remove impediments to preservation's ability to play a beneficial role in cities.
- Evaluate and, whenever appropriate, increase flexibility in all preservation practices, including the application of the "Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation."
- Retain existing—and create additional—incentives that encourage people to choose preservation as an alternative to demolition.
- Continue to encourage historic sites to engage the public in contemporary issues and contribute to livability, creativity, new understandings, and social cohesion.
- Identify, publicize, and use tools to avoid displacement and gentrification as a result of preservation.
- Develop, publicize, and use tools to reduce energy consumption in older and historic buildings.



Third key concept:

A people-centered preservation movement collaborates with new and existing partners to address fundamental social issues and make the world better.

Preservation will only achieve its full potential to sustain and improve people's lives through collaboration with existing and new partners. The critical importance of preserving our older and historic places is made manifest to other fields when preservation works in tandem with them to make communities livable, equitable, sustainable, and vibrant. Forging and expanding working partnerships with organizations and agencies in other disciplines greatly broadens the impact of our work and the work of our partners. We recognize and welcome that partnerships and collaborations may challenge preservation assumptions and shape preservation practice. In order to play an effective role, the movement must increasingly work to demonstrate the benefits that flow from preservation, understand the relationship of preservation to other societal goals, and revise our practices and tools to most effectively assist in achieving those goals.

March for Birmingham volunteers in front of 16th Street Baptist church following the walk. Photo by: Mark Sandlin.

Third key concept: A people-centered preservation movement collaborates with new and existing partners to address fundamental social issues and make the world better.

If realized, this concept will lead to a future where:

- Preservation is more fully incorporated into the work of related fields, such as affordable housing, art, building trades, conservation, economic development, education, environmental justice, health and welfare, planning, social justice, sustainability, and urbanism.
- Older and historic places fulfill the goals of existing and new partners in meeting fundamental human needs.
- Preservation practices are more flexible and nimble as a result of new partnerships.
- Older and historic places—including historic sites—are used by communities to promote positive civic discourse, create opportunities for social intercourse, and advance the idea of a shared future.
- Preservation is viewed as an essential tool in achieving a broad range of societal goals.

Today's preservation movement can begin to achieve this future by taking the following actions:

- Build relationships in existing communities to encourage and celebrate the everyday preservation activity of maintenance and care.
- Foster greater cooperation and collaboration with developers.
- Demonstrate cooperation by practicing solutions-based advocacy encouraging the reuse of older and historic resources.
- Publicize the positive and collaborative aspects of preservation.
- Examine practices that contribute to negative perceptions by potential collaborators.
- Review whether the application of standards by federal, state, and local commissions are contributing to negative perceptions; determine whether those practices can be modified; and make the necessary modifications.
- Collaborate with other fields, such as affordable housing, art, building trades, conservation, economic development, education, environmental justice, health and welfare, planning, social justice, sustainability, and urbanism, to understand and demonstrate the impact of preservation in those fields.
- Partner with entities performing research in environmental health to study the impact of older and historic places on human health.
- Facilitate partnerships between federal agencies and private entities, and increase flexibility—such as with the leasing of historic government facilities—in order to ensure the success of those partnerships.
- Examine and modify impediments to stronger partnerships between the public, nonprofit, and private sectors, and determine how preservation tools and practices should be refined.
- Support historic sites in developing and expanding experiential programming that creates connections between the past and present and meets community needs.
- Increase capacity and training for certified local governments and other local commissions to strengthen decision-making.
- Examine and develop local tools to integrate preservation into larger societal goals.
- Collaborate with educators to include preservation in curricula at all levels.
- Increase preservation trades training.
- Facilitate greater collaboration between practitioners and academics in preservation.



Conclusion:

Fifty years ago, when historic places were being lost and destroyed with virtually no consideration for their importance to communities, the drafters of the National Historic Preservation Act envisioned a future where historic places are a living part of our community life. In celebrating the many successes of the Act, we have the opportunity not only to revisit the visionary goals of 1966 but also to forge our own vision of the future 50 years from now.

Based on nearly two years of discussions with people throughout the country, we envision a future preservation movement that centers its work in human needs and aspirations and becomes a more prevalent, powerful, and practical force to sustain, improve, and enrich people's lives.

A people-centered preservation movement empowers people to tell their stories and to engage in saving the places that matter to them; plays an increasingly important role in creating sustainable, resilient, equitable, and livable communities; and works collaboratively with a wide range of other fields to fulfill fundamental human needs and achieve essential social goals.

A people-centered preservation movement has the potential to sustain, improve, and enrich the lives of people through the places where they live, work, worship, and play.

A jazz performance in the Lyndhurst greenhouse in Tarrytown, New York.



Appendix 1

Background and Process for Developing the Vision

“Preservation for People: A Vision for the Future” is the outcome of conversations that the National Trust held across the country in 2015–16 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the National Historic Preservation Act. The Act, signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson on October 15, 1966, expressed a vision of historic places as a living part of our community life and development in order to give “a sense of orientation” to the American people.

In marking the 50th anniversary of the Act, the National Trust heard from constituents and partner organizations, including state and local preservation organizations; academics in preservation; state historic preservation officers; historic site directors and volunteers; local preservation commission staff and members; and National Trust Advisors, Trustees, and staff. These groups identified an urgent need to consider the future of historic preservation based on present and future conditions such as the impact of increased technology, democratization, income inequality, and climate change. Most shared the view that we needed to chart a path forward that would more completely fulfill the vision of historic places as a living part of our community life.

This vision was crowd-sourced through a series of more than two dozen listening sessions held by the National Trust that included a variety of people who work in preservation and people who may not think of themselves as preservationists but whose work sometimes involves preservation. The intention was to hear a wide range of voices from across the country. For many of the sessions, we invited people who work in preservation on a daily basis, including the executive directors, advisory councils, boards of directors, and staff of National Trust Historic Sites; statewide and local preservation partners; staff from the National Park Service; state historic preservation officers; preservation planners; Main Street program organization staff; and National Trust Advisors and Trustees. In addition to the meetings at our national conference in Washington, D.C., in 2015, the National Trust convened meetings in a variety of locations in order to be accessible to as many people as possible and to capture perspectives from different regions. Meetings were held in Tarrytown, New York, on April 12, 2016 (hosted by Lyndhurst, a National Trust Historic Site); Chicago, Illinois, on May 5, 2016 (co-hosted by Landmarks Illinois); Seattle, Washington, on June 7, 2016 (co-hosted by Historic Seattle); Atlanta, Georgia, on June 15, 2016 (co-hosted by the Atlanta History

Luftwerk’s 2014 INsite installation at the Farnsworth House in Plano, Illinois. Photo by: Kate Joyce.

Center); Houston, Texas, on June 21, 2016 (co-hosted by The Heritage Society); and Los Angeles, California, on July 27, 2016 (co-hosted by the Getty Conservation Center).

The National Trust also convened two meetings of people who do not necessarily consider themselves preservationists, but whose work sometimes involves historic building and places. These meetings were held at The Pocantico Conference Center in Pocantico Hills, New York, on May 28–29, 2015 (co-sponsored by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund) and in Los Angeles, California, at the Getty Conservation Center on July 28, 2016 (co-sponsored by the Getty Conservation Center).

The vision is also informed by other conferences and meetings held or sponsored by other organizations or agencies to discuss the future of historic preservation, including: the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation in Washington, D.C., on July 14, 2016; Preservation50 (a coalition of groups commemorating the Act), ongoing throughout 2016; University of Massachusetts Amherst on June 19, 2015; Morven Park in Leesburg, Virginia, on June 12, August 7, and November 19, 2015; Goucher College on March 17–18, 2016; American Architectural Foundation in Washington, D.C., on July 15, 2016; a series of lectures in Annapolis, Maryland; and a conference session at the American Alliance of Museums in Washington, D.C., on May 28, 2016. In addition, the National Trust held internal discussions with Trustees, Advisors, historic site directors and staff, field staff, legal staff, the leadership team, and the full staff. The vision incorporates ideas and thoughts from all of these meetings.

This vision was drafted internally by National Trust staff based on the notes from the meetings and was reviewed by a sounding board of people who are neither staff nor management of the National Trust, including Kathleen Crowther, president of the Cleveland Restoration Society in Cleveland, Ohio; Edgar Garcia, preservation planner at the Department of City Planning for the City of Los Angeles; Max Page, professor of architecture and history at the University of Massachusetts Amherst; and Mtamani-ka Youngblood, president of Sweet Auburn Works in Atlanta, Georgia, chair of the Historic District Development Corporation, and a Trustee Emerita of the National Trust.

We deeply appreciate the work of the host organizations and participants in the meetings, the members of the sounding board, and all of the people who have given their time and thought to “Preservation for People: A Vision for the Future.”

Appendix 2

Background readings provided to meeting participants

“A Future for Preservation”—a 2015 speech to the Longwood Fellows by David J. Brown, chief preservation officer at the National Trust

Excerpts from *With Heritage So Rich*

Morven Park Future Values Statement

[Spring 2014 Forum Journal: Imagining a More Inclusive Preservation Program](#)

[Spring 2015 Forum Journal: Why Do Old Places Matter?](#)

[Fall 2015 Forum Journal: Looking Forward: The Next Fifty Years of Preservation](#)

[“Commemorating 50 Years of the National Historic Preservation Act: Preservation50 Future Public Policy”](#)

“Setting the Context” by Susan West Montgomery



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