

**The Past and Future City: Remarks by Stephanie Meeks  
SPUR San Francisco Book Talk  
SPUR Urban Center, 654 Mission Street, San Francisco, CA  
12:00-1:30pm, Monday, January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016**



- Thank you, and good afternoon. It is a pleasure to be here in San Francisco, one of America's historic cities, and to get a chance to talk with you about my new book: *The Past and Future City*.
- First, let me thank everyone at SPUR for extending the invitation, and for all the good work you are doing to keep San Francisco more affordable and livable for all its residents.
- And thanks to Island Press for their support of my book, and helping to put together this event as well.



- Let me start with a question: What if I told you there was one simple thing you could do to lose weight, save money, and get more sleep every night?
- You would probably do it, right? Well...unfortunately, I don't know the answer to that one.
- But, now, what if I told you there was one simple way to create jobs, grow the economy, live healthier, make cities more walkable and affordable for everyone, bring people together, and save the planet?
- That I can do. And it's called saving and reusing historic buildings.
- My hope, after you leave today, is that you'll never again look at an old building the same way.
- They're not just pretty edifices. They're economic engines, centers of community, and the foundation for a stronger, more vibrant future.
- Reusing old buildings creates jobs, reinvigorates local economies, and helps small businesses come to life.
- They help make neighborhoods healthier and more sustainable.
- They help us grapple with many of our present urban problems, like affordability and displacement, sustainability and climate change.
- And they can bring communities together.

- So today, I want to make that case to you, through the stories of some remarkable women and men who've shaped the past, present, and future of historic preservation.

## *JANE JACOBS*



- Let me start with an amazing urban activist who would have celebrated her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday this year, and whose writings have molded our field from the start: the one-and-only Jane Jacobs.
- Jacobs was a journalist with no formal training in urban planning. But she was a keen observer of the world around her.
- She cut a fierce figure with her trademark cats-eye glasses and no-nonsense bob. And she was fearless.



- Her nemesis, the Goliath to her David, was New York City’s master builder Robert Moses, an unstoppable force in his own right.
- Over his career, he built more than 600 miles of highways, thirteen bridges and two tunnels, over, across, and through New York.
- Moses believed, in his words, “cities are created by and for traffic.”
- To accomplish his vision, he often ripped out entire blocks and neighborhoods.
- But Jacobs observed a different rhythm of the city – what she called the sidewalk ballet. She believed cities are created by and for *people*.
- So when Moses tried to run a highway through Greenwich Village – where Jane Jacobs lived – she helped form and lead a community coalition to stop him.
- She later prevented Moses from tearing down her block, and from running an expressway through Lower Manhattan that would have destroyed much of SoHo, Chinatown, and the Lower East Side.



- Jacobs didn't win every battle. She was among those who tried – and failed – to save New York's historic Penn Station.
- Its destruction in the mid-1960's galvanized the historic preservation movement helped make the National Preservation Act a reality.
- But she won more than she lost. And, over the years of fighting against her nemesis, she helped articulate, and then promote, a vision that put front and center the many benefits that older places bring to cities.



- In her most-famous book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, she argued that older buildings are a critical and necessary feature of thriving neighborhoods.
- She wrote: “Cities need old buildings so badly it is probably impossible for vigorous streets and districts to grow without them.”
- They provide character and help ensure mixed-use. They offer space for entrepreneurs and local businesses, artists and innovators.

*PGL/OSB/ATLAS*



- Today, fifty-five years after she wrote those words, we now know she was absolutely right. We've seen it in downtowns and Main Streets all over the country.



- And while her intuition has always seemed right to us, we have tools today that Jane Jacobs could only dream of. And using those tools, we at the National Trust have been putting her theories to the test.



- Three years ago, we published our report, *Older, Smaller, Better*.
- It evaluated the age, diversity, and size of *all* buildings – not just historic buildings – in three cities: Washington DC, Seattle, and here in San Francisco.

- Using GIS mapping technology and innovative data sources like cellphone usage patterns, we examined how each block in these cities performed according to different economic, social, cultural, and environmental performance metrics.
- What we found is exactly what Jane Jacobs predicted.



- Neighborhoods with a mix of older and newer buildings tend to have more small business jobs and more diversity in housing costs, meaning more opportunities for families of all incomes.



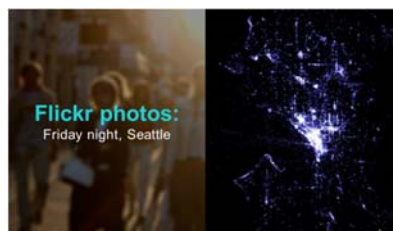
- They have “hidden density” – more people and businesses per commercial square foot than areas with just new buildings.
- They are more walkable and have more creative jobs.



- They have more new and women- and minority-owned businesses.



- They have more non-chain businesses.



- And they show more activity on evenings and weekends.
- Since publishing *Older, Smaller, Better*, we have since documented the same benefits at work all across America.



- In Baltimore and Philadelphia. Louisville and Chicago. Tucson and Houston. Again and again, the same findings held.





- This past November, our Preservation Green Lab released what we are calling the Atlas of ReUrbanism.



- This atlas applies the same *Older Smaller Better* methodology to fifty more cities across the US.
- Once again, what we found is remarkable. Across all fifty cities in the atlas, and when compared to areas with just new buildings, areas with a mix of old and new buildings have:



- 33 percent more new small business jobs, and 46 percent more small business jobs overall.



- These older areas have 60 percent more women and minority owned businesses, and more diverse populations in general – 75% more Americans of color live in these older areas.
  - There are 27% more affordable housing units than in newer areas.
  - And in every city in the Atlas, there is greater population density and greater density of housing units on blocks with older, smaller, mixed-aged buildings.
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- So we like what we're seeing. And we hope this Atlas, and our ReUrbanism work in general, will help more cities recognize the remarkable powers of older buildings on behalf of their streets and neighborhoods. This is something we are very excited about.
  - So Jane Jacobs' arguments are no longer just theoretical. We now have hard data, and case studies all over America, that prove preservation is the path to a richer urban future.

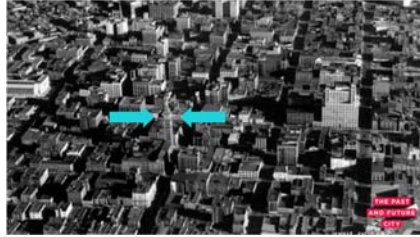
*DANA CRAWFORD*



- One case that I know very well is Denver, Colorado.
- When I was growing up in Loveland, seventy miles to the north, Denver was my first “big city.”
- Today, Denver is a national leader in almost every way that counts.
  - Its population has been growing at double the national rate.
  - Its unemployment rate is only around 3%.
  - And, thanks to its thoughtful infrastructure, Denver is continually named as one of America’s Fittest Cities.
- So, how has Denver become such an urban powerhouse? One big reason is another fearless and visionary woman: Dana Crawford.



- Around the same time Jane Jacobs was going toe-to-toe with Robert Moses in New York, Crawford was giving Denver a head start in using preservation to remake cities for the better.
- She began her work in the Larimer Square neighborhood, which at the time was a pretty scary and down-at-the-heels part of the city.
- As with so many other “urban renewal” plans of the 1960s, Denver was planning to revitalize Larimer Square by tearing it down.



- Already, nearly thirty blocks of the historic downtown had been destroyed. Keep your eye on the bell tower in this slide here. This is Denver's downtown before “urban renewal”...



- And here it is after.



- Larimer Square, in the top right corner of this picture, is one of the few places that survived the wrecking ball.



- That's because Dana had a different vision: She believed people would much rather live in a Larimer Square that kept its historic character.

- So, with her friends and neighbors, she began buying older buildings in the Square, often for little more than the price of land they were on.
- By 1965, her company had acquired most of the 1400 block. To give you a sense of how she operated, she announced a press conference for the mayor to endorse her vision, and *then* invited the mayor.



- It was not always an easy lift. But she was right. By the 1980's, Larimer Square was on its way back, and a powerful example of what could be accomplished elsewhere.
- With important advocacy and assistance from our Denver field office, the City then created a Lower Downtown Historic District, put a moratorium on the demolition of historic buildings, and pushed Colorado to pass the third state historic tax credit in the nation.
- Lightning struck twice. Today, LoDo, as it is now known, is considered the heart of the city, with the lowest commercial vacancy rates around.



- Union Station, one of Dana's more recent projects, has been a centerpiece of LoDo's revitalization.

- One of the many business owners who flocked to the area was John Hickenlooper.



- Before he was Denver's mayor and Colorado's governor, he opened up a brewery in LoDo with three friends.
- They bought space in the historic Mercantile Building in 1988 for just \$6 a foot. Within ten years, their investment was already worth 100 times that.



- Today, the same preservation-minded spirit is remaking Denver neighborhoods like Capitol Hill, Uptown, Highland, and River North.
- We now have the tools and the data to replicate Denver's success all over America. And we have an amazing opportunity.





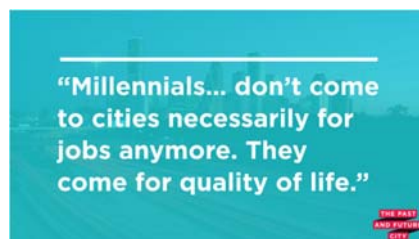
- Because preservation isn't just for grand mansions. It can benefit most every neighborhood.
- No matter how modest, every community has places that define them and stories to tell. And every city's future is connected to its past.

### *MILLENNIALS/HAPPINESS IS AN OLD BUILDING*

- And right now, the largest and most diverse generation in American history is leading a drive back into cities.
- One of the main reasons people are coming back is historic buildings.



- As one young engineer in Baltimore said: “People want a lot more authenticity – in what they wear, in what they eat, in where they live.”



- Or, in the words of Anne Olson, president of the Buffalo Bayou Partnership in Houston, Texas:
- “Young millennials...don't come to cities necessarily for jobs anymore. They come for quality of life” – the quality of life older places provide.

- Research bears this out. In 2014, the architectural firm Sasaki Associates conducted a survey in six cities: Austin, Boston, Chicago, New York, San Francisco, and Washington DC, to determine exactly what residents loved about the cities they lived in.



- They were surprised to discover one of the most popular answers was historic buildings.
- Nearly two-thirds (57%) of city residents said they like to stop and admire historic buildings while walking around, far more than those who said the same of modern buildings (19%) or skyscrapers (15%).



- When asked how architects could best improve the city's character, the most popular answer by far, at 54%, was renovating "existing historic buildings to retain character while making them more useable."
- By contrast, fewer than one in five, 17%, "felt their city was too quaint and would like to see more skyscrapers and iconic buildings."



- These findings accord with other studies. A 2007 Gallup poll on urban life found the strongest positive correlation between happiness and those who felt they lived in a beautiful place.



- Many have noted the connection between age and beauty in our landscape.
- As author Stewart Brand put it, quote, "Something strange when a building ages past a human generation or two. *Any* building older than 100 years will be considered beautiful, no matter what."
- In fact, one of the ironies of our preservation work today is communities are now fighting to save the same idiosyncratic modernist and brutalist buildings of the 1950s and 1960s that, when they were built, were protested as futuristic eyesores!



HOW TO FIX CITIES

- So by now, you may be asking: This is all great. But what can we do, exactly, to help unleash all these many benefits of older buildings in our community?
- As you might imagine, I go into this at length in the book! But in short, there are many sound and effective public policies that help put vacant and underutilized buildings to work.
- These policies can make the difference between stagnant, at-risk neighborhoods and thriving and growing communities.
- Over the past few years, we have partnered with the Urban Land Institute to figure out exactly what these policies are, and how they can be best promoted and implemented.
- As part of this work, we talked with city officials, property owners, developers, and community organizations in various cities to examine specific problems and obtain specific recommendations.



- Speaking in general terms, we encourage property owners to maintain the unique and distinctive facets of their historic buildings.
- Increasingly, this authentic character is seen as a market asset for a range of housing, office, and retail uses.

- In addition, zoning and building regulations should be modernized and more flexible to facilitate the reuse of historic buildings.
- Often regulations are geared toward single-family, residential use homes, making it hard to reuse the type of multi-family apartment building with a first-floor commercial space that was once the norm.
- Sometimes when I tell people about the work we are doing, they blink and ask me – aren't you the preservationists? I thought you *enacted* codes and regulations, not relaxed them!
- I know preservationists sometimes have a bad reputation as “the Paint Police.” But that is not at all what we are about.
- Preservation is about keeping buildings alive, in active use, and relevant to the needs of the people and the cities that surround them.



- With that in mind, other regulatory barriers need to be re-evaluated as well. With millennials forsaking car ownership at historic rates, do we still need the same parking ratios for downtown businesses?
- So for example, instead of maintaining rules and parking requirements that encourage parking lots...



- We want to encourage pedestrian-friendly, character-rich streetscapes.
- Getting rid of empty parking lots can instead create new opportunities for sensitive in-fill development to meet the housing crunch we are seeing in America's hot markets, especially here in San Francisco.
- In his book *The High Cost of Free Parking*, author Donald Shoup offers a statistic you're probably familiar with.



- The mandated one-parking-space-per-unit requirement long required here in San Francisco, he writes, increases affordable housing costs by 20 percent, and getting rid of it, by his math, would make it more feasible for 24 percent more residents to buy their own homes.
- Over the past few years, we've seen some San Francisco neighborhoods abandon these onerous requirements, and try out other innovations to reduce the high cost of so many parking spaces.

- We're also seeing other very practical solutions across the country to help developers unlock the potential of older fabric.



- In Philadelphia, the city introduced a new sidewalk seating ordinance and saw a 73% increase in outdoor seating since 2010. Lively streets are vibrant streets that attract more walkers, residents, and tourists.



- And in Seattle, the city created a new outcome based energy code to establish goals for actual use rather than projected use.
- This allows developers to take advantage of the characteristics of historic buildings that make them naturally energy efficient, such as thicker walls, deeper eaves, and natural siting.
- One particularly powerful preservation policy that I encourage you to take advantage of is the historic rehabilitation tax credit.



- Since it was signed into law by President Reagan, the federal credit has created more than 2.4 million jobs, leveraged \$117 billion in private investment, and transformed more than 40,000 unused or underused buildings for new and productive uses.



- These credits also return more to the Treasury than they cost. The Treasury makes a \$1.25 on every dollar invested.
- And even better, 75 percent of the economic benefits of these projects stay on the ground, in state and local communities.
- That is why 34 states across the country have moved to further spur private and federal investment in our communities by creating their own state historic tax credits.
- Here in California, a 20% credit passed the legislature unanimously, before being vetoed by Governor Brown.

- We hope he reconsiders. Because, in total, each dollar of state tax credit leverages four additional dollars.
- Some cities have gotten in the game as well. Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Buffalo for example, have passed property tax abatements or similar financial incentives to help fuel downtown investment in creative adaptive reuse.
- There are many other tools, which I go into in my book. But here are two main takeaways.



- First, building reuse should be the standard in our cities, and demolition should always be the option of last resort.



- And second, above all else, we should reuse older buildings so they are filling the needs of today's citizens.
- These buildings shouldn't be trapped in amber or sequestered behind velvet ropes – they should be centers of 21<sup>st</sup> century community.



- Some of the most exciting projects I see are when theaters become churches, churches become restaurants, warehouses become art spaces, and hotels become affordable housing and senior living.



- At scale, these transformations add up. To give you one particularly striking example from the West Coast, consider Los Angeles.
- 17 years ago, a partnership between neighborhood groups, city leaders, developers, and preservationists led to an Adaptive Reuse Ordinance.
- It removed regulatory barriers like burdensome parking requirements, and helped make it possible to repurpose more than sixty historic buildings as apartments, lofts, and hotels – many of them early 20th century buildings which had sat vacant for decades.



- As a result, the population in these neighborhoods tripled, and downtown L.A. is now a thriving residential and commercial hub with an astonishing 14,000 new housing units in older buildings.



- And it's important to keep in mind. Preservation can benefit everyone. It's not just about new arrivals and hot markets.
- Preservation is also rejuvenating existing urban communities. All over America, older buildings provide affordable housing, mitigate displacement, and bring people together.

### *MTAMANIKA YOUNGBLOOD*



- Let me tell you about Mtamanika Youngblood, yet another fearless woman who helped revitalize her neighborhood through preservation.
- In the early 1990's, Mtamanika and her husband bought a house in the Sweet Auburn area of Atlanta's Old Fourth Ward.



- Sweet Auburn was once known as “the richest Negro Street in the world.” It is where Martin Luther King grew up, led his flock, and where he and Coretta Scott King are now buried.



- But it fell on hard times over the years. In fact, soon after Mtamanika moved in, she saw a bus of foreign tourists turn onto her street.
- She later described how they had this “look of horror on their faces...They looked as if they were in the “wild, wild, West.”
- Mtamanika said to her neighbor: “We have got to do something. This is not who we are.” And so she did.
- She became the executive director of the Historic District Development Corporation (or HDDC), to preserve and revitalize Auburn Avenue.
- She worked with banks, developers, and community agencies to renovate historic homes throughout the Sweet Auburn neighborhood, and to build compatible infill homes on nearby vacant lots.



- And through this work, HDDC has redeveloped or preserved 110 single family homes, constructed nearly 500 units of multi-family housing,

and added more than 40,000 square feet of commercial space in the old Fourth Ward.

- This way, HDDC revitalized Sweet Auburn and created affordable housing for a range of incomes, without displacing existing families.
- Today, Mtamanika is applying the same principles of preservation and adaptive reuse to drive renewed commercial growth along Auburn Ave.
- You can see the progress at the re-opened *Atlanta Daily World* building, once home to America's first black-owned daily newspaper.
- And the Atlanta streetcar – an early 20<sup>th</sup> century idea finding new life in the 21<sup>st</sup> – connecting Sweet Auburn to other Atlanta neighborhoods.
- Mtamanika's good work demonstrates how history, sustainability, fairness, and economic vitality can all go hand-in-hand.



- There are similar stories all over. In Houston, for example, artist Rick Lowe worked to renovate and transform 22 shotgun houses in the Old Third Ward to better meet the needs of the neighborhood.
- His work has revitalized this historic area of Houston, And Rick has since brought the same model – fusing historic preservation, art,

community service, and revitalization – to North Dallas, to Watts, to New Orleans after Katrina.



- In Macon, Georgia, the Historic Macon Foundation has been combining preservation with a number of historic financing tools to revitalize the Beall's Hill neighborhood around Mercer University.
- With a total investment of roughly \$5.8 million, they will transform about 475 buildings in the historic neighborhood.
- Since they began these efforts, the total property tax revenue in the area has increased by nearly \$1 million, much of it from rehabbing abandoned houses and building on empty land.
- Historic Macon never displaces landowners by acquiring occupied houses. They counter gentrification in other ways too, like recruiting low-income homeowners and advocating for property tax freezes.
- The result is a diverse and thriving neighborhood, where longtime residents and new arrivals alike rave about the impact of HMF's work.
- In chapter six of my book, I address the issue of affordability and displacement, a particularly sensitive issue here in San Francisco.



- Over the past few years, the number of new housing units in the Bay Area is just not keeping pace with the number of new jobs.
- Those that are being built too often focus on the luxury market, and as many as a quarter of San Francisco's neighborhoods, according to one study, are at risk of mass displacement. 1-bedrooms are going for \$3500 a month. That is not sustainable for far too many families.
- Too often, free-market economists like to blame preservation for this affordability crisis. But our research suggests that's just not the case.
- As I said, neighborhoods with older buildings tend to have more small businesses and diversity in housing costs. They are also often built for density, much more so than single-family homes.
- Along with creative infill and altering parking requirements, repurposing older buildings for housing can help mitigate this issue.
- I also talk about other possible tools in the book, like community land trusts and heritage business laws, like the one that recently passed here, and the National Trust supported, here in San Francisco.

- The fact is, in cities big and small, the best preservation projects are creating opportunities for community residents at all income levels, while retaining the local history that ties generations together.

### *CLIMATE CHANGE/GREENEST BUILDING*

- At a time of accelerating climate change, they are also helping us to reduce carbon emissions and achieve more sustainable neighborhoods.
- I want to close with this because the changing climate is an increasingly frightening problem, and one that, given the current political environment, cities may have well to take more of the lead on.
- I know, in some quarters, the existence of climate change is still being debated. But many cities and historic sites don't have that luxury. They are already experiencing and grappling with it in very concrete ways.



- Consider, for example, the historic city of Annapolis, Maryland, along the Atlantic coast.
- In the early sixties, Annapolis experienced nuisance flooding 3 days a year. Because it itself is sinking while water levels are rising, today it is 30-40 days a year.





- The trendline is getting worse. By 2030, it is expected to flood every other day. By 2045, it will flood *every single day*. Annapolis calls itself the Sailing Capital, but this is not what they had in mind.
- So the threat is very real. And it's not just Annapolis. Coastal cities all over America are threatened, from Miami to New Orleans, New York City to Norfolk, Virginia, and Seattle to San Francisco.
- To grapple with these transformations, we all know that we will need to reduce our carbon costs. And reusing buildings is one of the best ways to go about it.



- In our profession, there's a saying – “The Greenest Building is the One Already Built.” And it's true – our research has found it take decades

for even the best new, LEED-certified buildings to make up the energy and environmental costs of demolition and new construction.

- In fact, the average 50,000 square-foot commercial building embodies about 80 billion British Thermal Units (BTU's) of energy.
- That's roughly equivalent to 640,000 gallons of gasoline. And when a building that could be reused is demolished, all this energy is wasted.
- More than just the energy is lost. As I noted earlier, many older buildings are inherently energy efficient by design.
- They reflect the wisdom – wisdom that has sometimes been lost – of earlier generations to keep places naturally warm in winter and cool in summer.



- Encouraging building reuse and retrofits is a proven and effective way to reduce energy costs and mitigate further environmental damage.
- And given that, according to the Department of Energy, building operations account for 41% of America's energy consumption, reusing buildings is the only way we're going to get to true carbon neutrality.



- We recycle newspapers and cans, and I argue that we should be recycling buildings as well. To really come to grips with climate change, we'll have to.
- Moving forward, our organization –the National Trust – will be working to help cities unlock all these many benefits of older buildings:
- To create jobs. Reduce energy costs and carbon emissions. Help us come to terms with the difficult chapters of our past. Keep cities affordable, sustainable, healthy, and dynamic. And make us happy.
- We have built up a lot of research that makes this case. But ultimately, we do this for all the people who benefit from older buildings.



- People like Erin Losie, who recently opened a gym with her brother on H-Street in Washington DC, and saw it become an immediate success.
- That historic corridor saw 250 new businesses and more than 3000 jobs in just over a decade.



- Or Elizabeth, a formerly homeless Detroit resident who has found a home in the Michigan Bell building, an old office complex reconverted into apartments and a resource center for those in need.
- Elizabeth is now taking GED classes at the Bell, so she can have the skills to get back on her feet.



- “I thank God every day for this place,” she says. “It’s a blessing for me – a roof over my head where I have the opportunity to achieve.”



- Old buildings don’t just connect us to our past. They are the cornerstone of a brighter future.
- The best part is: they are already right here, among us. And we are richer and stronger when they remain.
- All we need to do to transform our lives for the better is unlock their amazing potential.

- Thank you, and thanks for having me here today.

