The practice of purchasing a home on a lot, demolishing it, and building a new, larger house in its place.


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TEARDOWNS


The task may seem daunting. Efforts are often opposed by local homebuilders, developers, realty groups and some residents who feel a change in the rules will negatively impact their pocketbook. Local governments may also be reluctant to take action and so drag their feet as they don’t want to do anything that may diminish potential property tax revenue.

But keep in mind that residents concerned about teardowns in their community have proven to be a powerful force. They know the issue intimately, feel passionately about it, and are willing to do what it takes to make their effort worthwhile.

What does your community think about teardowns?

Teardowns are about losing historic architecture and a community’s heritage. They’re also about community character, smart growth, affordable housing, economic and demographic shifts, and ever-changing housing preferences. For the most part, people want to live in distinctive communities. The best way to find out what your community thinks about teardowns is by asking. Communities must decide for themselves the best approach and means for addressing teardowns. But, more often than not, residents are not supportive of the decisions, outcomes or policies that might be driving the teardown trend locally. A grassroots initiative can make a difference by encouraging residents to get involved and recognize their ability to control and shape future growth — rather than have it forced upon them in ways that do not retain community character.

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GETTING STARTED

Finding out what your community thinks about teardowns will shape your advocacy approach and the range of tools that might work best. Are residents upset by the loss of historic homes through demolition? Are they concerned about the design and scale of the large new structures replacing the older houses? Or is it a combination of both factors?

Before proceeding with specific strategies, it is often useful to do two things:

1. Carry out a “poll” through the media, surveys, petition drives, or neighborhood meetings to gain a better understanding of where public opinion rests on teardowns in your community.
2. Conduct an “audit” of current development policies and their effects — positive or negative — on teardowns. Commissions and boards need legal reasons to turn down an application or to require modifications.

This will help identify problem areas and places to focus on before engaging in the debate over specific solutions.

“Teardowns in Historic Neighborhoods” was placed on the National Trust’s 2002 list of America’s 11 Most Endangered Historic Places. The good news is that thanks to the awareness generated from our listing, local governments are increasingly adopting measures to manage teardowns. Despite this warning call, the number of communities addressing teardowns has significantly expanded and the trend is expected to accelerate.
Communities attempting to manage teardowns and their big-house impacts are pursuing a variety of approaches. These tools—some new, others well-tested—generally slow down teardowns in one of two ways: 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 — 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 overlays.

Be proactive and act before teardowns arrive

One teardown can set off a chain reaction that will soon overwhelm a neighborhood or community. Before teardowns arrive and gain a strong foothold in your community, look at your community’s land use policies. Does the zoning encourage and allow for compatible development — or — is it likely to encourage teardowns? Are your historic neighborhoods potential teardown targets? Are small, older houses located on spacious lots? Is your community’s location ripe for this trend to occur? Are property values on the rise where teardowns make economic sense?

Even if teardowns have already arrived, it is not too late for residents to come together and initiate a dialogue about teardowns and the future of their community. In many cases, it is the onset of teardowns and the resulting new houses that drive a community to act.

—Build relationships

Your voice will be amplified and become more credible by forging relationships with other neighborhoods experiencing the same problems and reaching out to existing organizations. Contact groups that are preservation-oriented, such as the local preservation organization or historical society, environmental groups, affordable housing advocates, etc. Enlist the support of these special interest groups to support your cause. Find common ground drawing the connections to their effort/cause and “power of collaboration.” Also consider building support from nontraditional sources with real influence on teardowns, such as the local business community, homebuilders, architects, or board of realtors.

—Get organized as there is strength in numbers

Organize preservation and neighborhood advocates to discuss how you will reach out to be a constructive player in planning decisions. Form an organization or committee to spearhead efforts and make recommendations on controlling teardowns. Start by giving your group a name that will establish a positive identity and credibility in public meetings and through the media. A collective voice can give you clout and leverage when you approach local officials about zoning issues.

Request an opportunity to participate in any committees that will study teardown options or guide the local planning process. Many locales have formed committees to study teardowns and infill construction.

For instance, Westport, CT, established the Planning and Zoning Commission’s Big House Committee. These are often formed by communities after hearing from residents with concerns both for and against teardowns.

Local papers regularly cover planning board meetings, so if not before, tune in at the earliest conversations about planning proposals which might impact the teardowns practice, negatively or positively. Know deadlines, how to get on agendas, and ultimately be invited to the table and become a player. Community agencies and departments often provide timetables and schedules for updating zoning ordinances and master plans.

Timing is everything. When is the best time is to ask for political support? Many elected officials are more responsive to concerns in election years.

—Find your target audience

Instead of trying to reach everyone, concentrate on your target audience. Determine what you need to do to persuade the small group of people who want change or who can actually change things. Identify your audience’s key values and work from there. Think strategically about that audience and the best ways to reach them. It means making your case in a way that will be compelling to your target audience.

Look for sympathizers. People generally will not respond to an issue like teardowns until it affects them directly through a perceived change in their quality of life or through financial implications. Many may not know there is an issue until it is too late, think it will not matter or do not know who to turn to for help. Find out who makes decisions about teardowns in historic neighborhoods in your community. In most instances this is the city council, planning commission and/or preservation board. Professional planning and development staff hold a lot of influence and can be tremendous advocates, sources of information and a resource.
Most likely, teardowns in your community and public infrastructure. About the impacts of teardowns on the community, many different interest groups, you will need to approach the process as a team player and remain flexible throughout. Do not expect to get your way on every issue. It is not uncommon for planning proposals to go through many different iterations even before a legislative body votes. And then, even more compromises may result. Communities often start by adopting small measures before completely overhauling a land use policy. When debating a controversial Neighborhood Stabilization Overlay measure in Dallas, TX, an article in The Dallas Morning News reported former Mayor Laura Miller stated she thought a proposed compromise was "a reasonable place to start."

Although you may not be able to completely stop teardowns, you can minimize how, when and where they might occur. Building support, developing solutions and adopting policies takes time (often months to years). Expect to lose some significant houses along the way, even after having adopted new laws. Plan to use these losses to underscore the need to adopt more comprehensive solutions in the future.

Make the case and evaluate the alternatives

Clearly define the problem associated with teardowns in your community. Each community experiences and responds to teardowns in a different way. Instead of just talking about losing historic houses, expand the discussion and argument to take in the full range of implications. For instance, appeal to the head as well as the heart and do not rely on heritage or "feel good" stories alone to make the case.

Increasingly, communities are talking about the impacts of teardowns on the environment and public infrastructure. Most likely, teardowns in your community will affect its tree canopy, cause more water runoff, and affect water usage, sewage systems, roads (construction traffic), and the power grid (under-sized transformers in older neighborhoods). These issues, as well as the implications for landfills, all should be raised in the process of evaluating impacts and solutions.

Through the publication, Protecting America's Historic Neighborhoods: Taming the Teardown Trend, the National Trust for Historic Preservation outlines the impacts caused by teardowns in four primary ways:

**Loss of Historic Houses:**
Teardowns often destroy older homes that are part of the community’s heritage.

**Loss of Community Character:**
Without proper safeguards, historic neighborhoods will lose the identities that drew residents to put down roots in the first place.

**Loss of Livability:**
Neighborhood livability is diminished as trees are removed, backyards are eliminated, and sunlight is blocked by towering new structures built up to the property lines.

**Loss of Diversity:**
Community economic and social diversity is reduced as new over-scaled houses replace affordable homes. You often lose the ability to have a range of home prices in a community experiencing teardowns.

—Create a clear, simple & concise message
Successful advocacy campaigns have clear goals. Your message should be designed to achieve the goal of putting in place tools that respond to teardowns and preserve community character. It should also be a positive message. For instance, your group is not necessarily against development or growth. Instead you are pro-planning and advocate for development that is compatible with the existing community character.

Your message should resonate with your target audience. As soon as possible, develop a clear case statement of goals and arguments. Supplement it with supporting documents as the issue develops but maintain consistency in the basic case, what they can do, and how to do it. Help your target audience and the public understand why managing teardowns is important. Why is it important now? The public wants to understand this, what they can do, and how to do it.

As a community, ask yourself the following questions and decide what factors are most important:

— Are teardowns destroying architecturally and historically significant properties?
— Are teardowns resulting in a loss of community character?
— Are real estate prices rising so high that it precludes low-to-moderate income residents from entering the housing market?
— Are the sizes of new houses too large and adversely impacting the livability of a neighborhood?
— Is the increase in real estate taxes attributed to teardowns and, if so, how is it impacting residents on fixed incomes?
— Are teardowns creating environmental impacts, from storm water drainage and flooding, to the disposal of hazardous materials?
— Are teardowns a sustainable long-term building practice for the community?
— Are there ways to better manage teardowns that allow for new infill construction but also preserve our community’s character?
—Stay focused on the goal
Pursue communications activities that move you closer to your goal of managing teardowns. Ask yourself with each strategy and decision: does this move us closer to the stated goal?

Present a well-developed argument that includes relevant statistics and figures to back it up. For instance, how many houses are demolished as teardowns in your community? Is the list growing annually? When did teardowns first start? What is being torn down? Does it have any value? What is being torn downs first start? What is being torn down? Does it have any value? What is being replaced it? Is the neighborhood or area experiencing teardowns historic, eligible for listing or listed at the local, state or national levels? By asking these questions you will begin to develop a better understanding of teardowns and their impacts in your community.

Build your arguments by quantifying what’s been happening to date and what is at risk. Document where teardowns are occurring in your community; show before and after pictures; and explain why your historic neighborhood is important, what tools are available and how they can help.

—Use technology to build community support
Ongoing and immediate contact with supporters is essential. At critical times, it may be necessary to urge supporters to attend a public hearing or send letters or e-mails. This job can be made a little easier and be more effective by developing phone and e-mail “trees” with a variety of individuals to support your effort. Create a listserv to keep everyone “in the loop” on the latest news and upcoming events to avoid time-consuming meetings. Use e-mail strategically to rally and involve more people. Focus on up-to-the-minute updates and briefs to advocates stressing why right now is important, why their support is needed, what they can do, and how they can do it.

Most likely, you will find computer-literate members within your group. Do a quick scan of your group to see who is “computer friendly” and use their talents to get the job done. Usually there is someone who would rather help by designing a web page or e-mail network, than getting involved in nitty-gritty negotiations.

—Use the web to keep supporters informed
To make the case about teardowns, and keep supporters informed throughout the process, maintain a simple web site. Invite others to join the cause.

In Salt Lake City, UT, a web site is credited with ensuring the public was fully included in a process on teardowns and new tools addressing infill housing. The Greater Avenues Community Council and its Avenues Housing Compatibility Committee created an online portal to communicate about upcoming meetings, the latest status of proposals and a place to post all relevant documents. With this information readily accessible to everyone, it has proven to be an effective use of a web site to public inclusion and gaining input from the community.  www.slc-avenues.org/housing.htm

Citizens of the Village of Kenilworth, IL, created www.KeniilworthMatters.net to help keep residents informed about meetings, teardown tools and the status of homes demolished and those currently pending. With a variety of resources, the web site also includes sections on the Village’s architectural and landscape history and a link to what other nearby communities are doing about teardowns. E-mail alerts are regularly sent to residents who have registered on the site or through events.

—Respond to analyze solutions
The growing roster of houses lost to teardowns and stalwart advocacy efforts are increasingly spurring local officials to do something. That “something” will depend upon the range of tools available and the level of sophistication and ability of a local government to act. Advocates need to become sophisticated in their response, knowing not only what other communities have done, but more importantly, what solutions would work in their own community.
With every proposed measure having a consequence, whether it is establishing new infill guidelines or tweaking the underlying zoning for a neighborhood, it is important to be at the table from the start of this analysis to the finish. It is best to be an appointed member of an ad hoc committee called together for this purpose.

These types of processes can take a long time, in some cases years, before a proposal reaches a governing body for a review and vote. In Atlanta, GA, a committee is looking at infill practices. Citizens have been at the job for more than two years. Sometimes this is the nature of the task — or — an intentional goal in order to buy time as a stall tactic. It allows local leadership to respond to the community and say it is seriously looking into the issue. Keep this in mind as you advocate for meaningful actions on teardowns.

Be prepared to hire your own expert. Depending on the process, input from residents, and results of the study, it also may be necessary to go for a second opinion and hire your own experts. Local officials may not be vested in developing a solution or may be responding to misguided advice. Outside experts may be able to develop solutions not considered or explain a proposed solution is flawed. They can also be helpful in explaining alternative proposals and their implications.

— Present public forums
Create a public forum to present your research on the impact teardowns have had on your neighborhood as a slide show. Visuals are critical to illustrate the number of houses that have been lost, where teardowns are occurring, and the impact of replacement houses on the community. To help, a PowerPoint presentation on teardowns is available from the National Trust for Historic Preservation (contact your regional or field office).

For instance, in Barrington, RI, a panel discussion and forum was sponsored by Preserve Rhode Island, the Barrington Preservation Society and the Barrington Neighborhood Coalition. Forum sponsors decided to take the issue to the public following no action after meeting with the Barrington Town Council. With representatives from the National Trust for Historic Preservation, a real estate developer and appraiser, and professional preservation planner, the forum presented a national perspective on the teardowns trend and multi-viewpoints on strategies.

—Bring in the experts
For newly formed groups with little credibility or track record, enlist help from more established organizations, through site visits, presentations, and advice. The outside expert can often say the same thing as you but know that their credentials can sometimes get more attention from the community leaders, residents and the media. They might also find an outside expert more persuasive and trustworthy. Strategically call on the National Trust for Historic Preservation, your statewide preservation organization and state and local historic preservation office for help. At key times, such as a large public meeting, experts can provide testimony and bolster your local efforts. They can also meet with planning and elected officials, talk with the media, or write letters of support.

Get Out the Vote. A recent election in Rehoboth Beach, DE, was centered on the development and teardowns issue.

NEW JERSEY
Teardown Target. The c. 1730 Luke Miller House in Madison, NJ, was saved through local government intervention.

In a state where teardowns are topics of dinner conversation, communities are finding unique solutions.

A public outcry helped save the mid-18th century Luke Miller House in Madison, NJ. “At the very top of Madison’s list of historical properties at risk,” Mayor Ellwood “Woody” Kerkaslager said local zoning would have permitted the site to be carved into three lots.

In a gutsy move by the Mayor and Borough Council, an innovative plan was developed to purchase the house, place protective easements on it, and resell it as a single-family residence.

Negotiations to save the property required the Mayor to obtain the full cooperation of the contract developer, the current owners, the Borough Council and the public. According to the Mayor, “the support of numerous volunteer organizations and the local newspaper were critical to the public buy-in.”

Preservation New Jersey
Preservation Perspective
Winter 2004-2005
Are you effectively responding to arguments in favor of teardowns?

“TEARDOWNS ARE SMART GROWTH.”

Proponents of teardowns say they represent smart growth ideals because it directs growth to already developed areas, increases density and prevents suburban sprawl.

RESPONSE: tearing down a smaller existing house to build a larger new one simply adds square footage, not population density. In addition, teardowns affect livability, reduce affordability, and send thousands of houses and materials to landfills each year. That does not sound like smart growth.

Communities need growth and new investment in existing neighborhoods but it should not come at the expense of the community’s heritage and character. Instead, today’s teardown trend is an example of how we sometimes throw away our valuable heritage in the name of progress and change.

For there to be smart growth, there also needs to be well thought out land use controls. You cannot have one without the other.

“RESTRICTING TEAR-DOWNS TAKES AWAY PRIVATE PROPERTY RIGHTS.”

Advocates of property rights claim controls that limit or restrict how and where teardowns can occur is a taking and reduces their financial return on the sale of an existing house. They say they are entitled to develop their property to its highest and best use.

RESPONSE: communities routinely make investments and create land use policies that affect property rights and changes in property values for the greater good. Regulating teardowns is no different because they affect the quality of life and character of the community at large. Although some may frame the issue as an intrusion on the property rights of the owner who wants to sell or knock down their house and build something new, it’s important to remember that it works both ways. Teardowns affect the property rights and investments of neighbors who have to live with the results.

The highest and best use does not always mean the most profitable use imaginable.

—Maintain civility

Understand and acknowledge that elected officials and professional planners are trying to do the right thing. Acknowledge their efforts and articulate your case for preservation without denigrating their performance. Maintain a civil and polite demeanor at all meetings and in all conversations. “Hysterical Preservationists” will not win favor.

Be realistic and learn to find the “win-win” solution by sounding credible and understanding of multiple perspectives and viewpoints. Advocates should listen, seeking first to understand, and then to be understood. Keep in mind that communities will not remain the same forever as change is inevitable. The growth of teardowns as a viable real estate practice is occurring in response to current market conditions. As this trend is likely to continue, we need to find ways to live with teardowns and make them more palatable. It’s not that change and growth is bad. It just must be managed.

Also, not every older home can or even should be saved. Teardowns are sometimes an acceptable approach for redeveloping existing areas and increasing density. They can be a part of a positive renewal and help build tax revenues in areas that are land locked and already built out. In short, neighborhoods can be improved on through the years and adaptations may be necessary.

Your solution to teardowns may also be limited as the issue plays out differently depending on your community and state. While there are a wide range of tools that help and address teardowns, not all may be available to you. For instance, the issue of Home Rule may allow some communities greater authority to enact measures than others. Highland Park, IL, has established a $10,000 demolition permit fee that supports its affordable housing programs. Other communities may only be able to charge what it actually costs to issue a demolition permit.

Your state’s enabling legislation for land use and historic preservation may also restrict the range of possible solutions. In Montgomery County, MD, for example, municipalities found it necessary to turn to their state legislators to obtain a broader range of authority to address teardowns. To find out your full range of options, consult a professional experienced with the rules, such as an attorney or preservation planner specializing in teardowns in your state.

—Recognize the homeowner’s perspective

Neighborhood activists will be focused on developers and builders who do teardowns. While they are rightly concerned about the loss of historic houses to teardowns, consider the multiple viewpoints. There are homeowners that choose to stay and those that leave a neighborhood as a result of this practice.

No one would reasonably argue that a homeowner should not be able to profit from the sale of their house. It is the single greatest investment for most Americans. The issue is, what is reasonable and best, long term, for a neighborhood and community? In most cases, the homeowner that chooses to sell a house as a teardown is leaving the community, downsizing to another area or forced to sell as they no longer can afford the upkeep and/or rising property taxes.

Some homeowners advocate for the right to achieve the maximum profit from the sale of a house as a tear-
down in order to “cash-out.” But where will they go? Isn’t this an artificial windfall? The profit usually will not allow them to reinvest in the same neighborhood or community as they may be “out priced” and even unable to afford the property they just sold. Homeowners that sell are in most cases leaving the community. Those that choose to stay lose as the historic character and feel of the neighborhood is eroded one house at a time.

—Consider the builder’s point of view

The people who do teardowns — most often, independent homebuilders — do not see the issue the same way some residents do. There is a temptation to claim that if existing older homes are good enough for us, they should be good enough for everyone. Instead, recognize that the expectations of our homes have changed dramatically over the last 30 years. People want more out of their house today, in terms of size and amenities offered. While builders are simply responding to the market, they must understand that residents have legitimate concerns. The character of their neighborhood is changing around them, and not always for the better. One person’s dream house may be the next door neighbor’s nightmare as it impacts their privacy, access to light and shade, and exposes them to construction nuisances.

While newcomers may want to live in attractive, inner-ring communities, many older homes do not meet today’s average new-home standards and expectations. Help highlight what historic neighborhoods of older homes do offer, how they can be successfully adapted through compatible additions, the inherent charm of intact historic neighborhoods, and promote the values of the growing movement associated with architect Sarah Susanka’s book, The Not So Big House.

—Recognize the human factor

Know that “burnout” is likely, especially considering that many efforts to advocate for policies to address teardowns take time to settle, sometimes years. When Lewes, DE, leaders started to feel the threat of teardowns they sprung into action, little knowing it would take more than three years to develop a solution. An ad hoc committee set up by the City of Lewes began exploring a local historic district and drafting an ordinance and guidelines. Politics slowed the process, some fearing nothing would result of the effort. But all good things take time and in 2004 an ordinance was passed creating a local historic district that encompasses most of the historic parts of the community.

Avoid burnout and loss of momentum by shifting roles and responsibilities. Over time, leaders will come and go, impacting your group’s enthusiasm, commitment and general effectiveness. Tag team members as group leaders and continually rotate members. Find your talent pools and plug into the needed roles (ex. graphic designer to help with the newsletter, fliers). Put a team together and start by identifying the roles of who will do what in the process.

Connecticut

Westport has seen more than 200 houses demolished as teardowns in the last few years. But when plans surfaced to demolish the 1800 Amos Bradley House, residents said enough is enough. In 2004, a local developer bought the property and announced plans to raze the house and replace it with a 5,000-7,000 square foot Colonial-style house.

A savvy group came together called the Coalition for Preservation of the Bradley House and, for almost a year, they lobbied tirelessly for the house’s preservation. Working under a demolition delay measure and tremendous media coverage, others signed on to the effort. A petition drive collected more than 100 signatures in a single weekend. National Public Radio featured the story on their “All Things Considered” program. Even local celebrities joined the cause with Martha Stewart contributing $10,000 to the Coalition.

There is a happy ending to this teardown. A compromise was reached, with the developer agreeing to save the Amos Bradley House and incorporate an addition at the rear instead.

Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, Connecticut Preservation News
Get the word out

Ideally, participation in the planning process will yield a proposal and the adoption of tools which address and appropriately respond to teardowns. Be prepared to get the word out in a variety of ways as it is key to keep people up-to-date on the efforts, understanding the issues, and sources for the facts. Do this through:

1. A listserv, blog and web site
2. Community forums
3. Op Ed pieces
4. Awards programs
5. Home tours
6. Letters to the editor
7. Yard signs. For instance, show solidarity and get the public’s attention through visible tactics such as “This is NOT a Teardown” or “Control Teardowns” signs.

—Cultivate a relationship with the media

Media coverage can help your efforts to advocate for managing teardowns. Do not be intimidated by the media and instead cultivate relationships with reporters. Designate a good media spokesperson from your organization. Select someone who is articulate, up-to-speed on the issues and available when the media calls. Make it easy for the media by feeding them facts and information and working around their deadlines. Be sure to thank the media, recognize their efforts when they write favorable articles and invite them to your meetings. Timing is everything. Know what will get the media’s attention (ex. stage a protest/march, create posters for visual effect, etc.).

—Seek funding to support your effort

Rarely is such an advocacy program fundable from outside the constituency. Make it clear to all who share concerns for teardowns that it will take a financial commitment as well as a personal commitment to make a difference. Use such funds to defray out-of-pocket expenses of the advocacy effort. Some funding may be available from philanthropic sources to publish surveys and to help explore alternative planning studies if the local government is not approaching that process evenhandedly or stalling.

In West Cape May, NJ, the National Trust for Historic Preservation provided a small grant to the Historic Preservation Committee of West Cape May. Used to initiate a historic property survey, the grant is helping also to build credibility for a new, start-up organization. It has lead to bigger things too. Following the loss of a landmark house as a teardown, the community was galvanized to come together and begin talking about a preservation ordinance. A Town Hall meeting sponsored by the Committee invited local leaders to hear from representatives of the National Trust for Historic Preservation and Preservation New Jersey.

Engage local leaders and elected officials

Teardowns can be political as you advocate for good local policies. You cannot avoid it if you hope to accomplish something meaningful. Translating and integrating preservation goals into good policy requires residents, developers and local officials to all work collectively. Successful advocates for tools to manage teardowns have done this by being good allies with politicians, getting themselves involved in planning studies if the local government is not approaching that process evenhandedly or stalling.

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SPOT LIGHT

RECENT PAST

Split Decisions. This c. 1960s split-level from Seattle, WA, is the type of house often first to go.

Postwar homes are perfect teardown targets. Showing signs of age, homes from the 1950s and 1960s tend to be small by current standards and are often located on large lots. While some may view these houses as dispensable, that is not always the case. Certain houses from the era are gaining recognition for their architectural and historic significance and should be preserved. Moreover, as teardowns take hold, redevelopment of our nation's postwar housing most likely will exacerbate an already shrinking affordable housing base.

In a San Francisco Chronicle article, Ken Bernstein, formerly with the Los Angeles Conservancy states, "it’s tough to educate politicians and homeowners to even accept the idea that the 1940s or 1950s can be looked at through a preservation prism… but there is a growing recognition that we are losing the very best examples."

Before it is too late, build awareness about your community’s recent past and identify postwar neighborhoods that should be preserved. In Houston, TX, an architecture group sponsored a tour called “Rancheros Deluxe” to highlight the best of the city’s ranch houses. The Lower Merion Conservancy in Pennsylvania added ranch homes to its Top 10 Threatened Historic Structures listing.
appointed to key city boards and commissions, and, when necessary, being willing to run for higher office.

Utilize the political forum
Residents should work to elect officials who understand the long term value of protecting community character. When electing new leadership, engage the candidates by asking them to respond to the issue through forums or specific questions about teardowns and policies. Publicize the responses. Consider posing the following questions to all your elected officials and every candidate running for office:

— What do you think about teardowns?
— What policies or programs would you adopt (ex. as mayor or city council member) to address teardowns and their impacts?
— Are you supportive of measures such as local historic and conservation districts to manage teardowns?

As an organization, you may need to develop a position platform on teardowns, outlining your recommendations for change. Depending on your status as a 501 (c)3 nonprofit organization or an ad hoc group, you may also become involved in helping to elect preservation-friendly candidates. You may need to respond to candidates and their positions through a point-counterpoint debate.

In Glen Ellyn, IL, the Citizens for Glen Ellyn Preservation hosted a forum in 2005 to hear the viewpoints of three candidates running for Village President. “A program that would educate and strongly promote the landmarking of homes, a move that prevents them from becoming torn down in the future, would allow the village to help itself,” were remarks from candidate Vicky Hase, says a Daily Herald article.

Form community networks

Chicago Suburban Alliance
The Chicago metro region has a high concentration of communities experiencing teardowns in the nation. As the number of communities continues to grow, an effective informational network has formed in response.

Crossing city limits, with residents and local officials benefiting from sharing resources, strategies and providing mentoring, the Chicago Suburban Alliance is an informal membership of 20-plus Chicagoland community groups. Since its first meeting in August, 2003, the Chicago Suburban Alliance has offered a venue for a variety of grassroots community groups to meet and educational forums and panels to be held.

Even though these communities are different in many ways they all share the characteristics that make them targets for developers. They are land locked, they are desirable places to live, and developers are willing to speculate that new, much larger structures will bring three times the value of an older or historic home. In addition, many of them have city governments that are struggling or reluctant to do anything about teardowns.

The Chicago Suburban Alliance has become a network for information and personal contacts. The group gathers at least quarterly. They meet to discuss common issues, and to learn what has been proposed in other communities to help protect historic structures and manage infill development.

Advocacy strategies, zoning ordinances, flood control, landmark designation, community surveys and downtown commercial redevelopment are just some of the topics that have been discussed by the group.

The Alliance has set up a listserv to promote communication on a regular basis and to share documents. Future plans include collaborative educational forums, and inviting experts to discuss real estate marketing, environmental impacts and other areas that need to be explored and understood. To connect to the listserv: http://groups.yahoo.com/group/chicagolandcitizens/.

Membership in the Chicago Suburban Alliance is growing and currently includes approximately 25 community groups representing inner-ring suburbs and neighborhoods within the city of Chicago.

One member of the Alliance, Kenilworth, IL, just north of Chicago, was placed on the 2006 list of America’s 11 Most Endangered Historic Places." Teardowns can radically change the face and personality of any neighborhood, but the impact is especially devastating in a historic community such as Kenilworth, said Richard Moe, president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. For more information, go to www.PreservationNation.org/11Most/.

Nuisance Factor. Increasingly communities embrace policies that respond to neighborhood disruptions caused by teardowns.

Tracking Teardowns. In Westport, CT, the community website, WestportNOW.com, keeps tabs on teardowns through interactive mapping.
The Village of Glen Ellyn, IL, is no stranger to teardowns. Building awareness about the built history has become one of the primary goals of the Citizens for Glen Ellyn Preservation. In response to this need, an annual, one-day preservation seminar and historic house tour has been conducted for the last three years. The group uses this to showcase alternatives to teardowns and the great value in their existing building stock.

— Preservation Seminar
A two-hour morning seminar presents a preservation expert(s), economist, architect, historian or author who addresses topics such as the historic resources survey of the Village, economics of historic preservation, restoration and renovation, smart growth and environmental issues. Ticket holders are provided with a packet of information that includes articles, reading lists and resources on historic preservation. Also included are illustrated articles on each home that will be visited during a historic house tour.

— Historic Home Tour
During the afternoon, six Glen Ellyn homes are open for tour by seminar ticket holders. These homes represent a cross-section of the architectural variety of the Village. Built primarily from the late nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century, the most prevalent house styles are Victorian, Craftsman Bungalow or Cottage, Prairie, Four-Square, Tudor, Colonial and Ranch. In addition, unique architect-designed homes from the recent past dating to the 1950s and 1960s are also included.

In selecting buildings to be toured, the Citizens for Glen Ellyn Preservation consider the following questions:
- Is this structure representative of a particular style of architecture?
- Does either the building, its first owner or its architect have special historical significance?
- Has restoration or renovation to the exterior or interior been sensitive to the original architecture?
- Do modern additions harmonize with the materials, scale and details of the original structure?
- Is the building well integrated with its surroundings, including neighboring structures, greenscape and streetscape?
- Does the inclusion of a structure help create variety in the buildings toured, or as an alternative, does it reflect a particular trend or theme?
Historic preservation helps people protect, enhance and enjoy the places that matter to them. No place is more personal than where you live, your home, and neighborhood. As teardowns impact our communities, the National Trust for Historic Preservation is here to help.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation provides leadership, education, advocacy and resources to a national network of people, organizations and local communities committed to saving places, connecting us to our history and collectively shaping the future of America’s stories. For more information visit www.PreservationNation.org

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**RESOURCES**

**PRESERVATION BOOKS**

In addition to the resources available through the online Tear downs Resource Guide, check out these publications as you make a case and advocate for alternatives to teardowns in your community.

www.preservationbooks.org


— Blueprint for Lobbying


— The Community Design Assessment: A Citizen’s Planning Tool.

— Design and Development: Infill Housing Compatible with Historic Districts.


— Getting to Know Your 20th Century Neighborhood.

— Historic Homes Tours: Showcasing Your Community’s Heritage.

— Maintaining Community Character: How to Establish a Local Historic District.

— Protecting America’s Historic Neighborhoods: Taming the Teardown Trend.

— Protecting Older Neighborhoods Through Conservation District Programs.

— Reviewing New Construction Projects in Historic Areas.