

Thinking Ahead: Forum Members Share Vision for Preservation's Future

ELIZABETH BYRD WOOD

Last June, in anticipation of this issue of the journal, we asked Forum members to tell us about their hopes and dreams for the future of historic preservation. We posed the following question: “What is your vision—your wish—for an ideal preservation world?”

Some three dozen Forum members responded with thoughtfully written emails about their vision for the next 50 years of the preservation movement. Not surprisingly, several common themes emerged.

BROADEN PRESERVATION'S OUTREACH

The need for preservation to broaden its reach and engage new audiences came through clearly in many of the responses. Brittany V. Lavelle Tula, owner of BLV Historic Preservation Research and adjunct professor of historic preservation at the College of Charleston, writes that we need a “young army of motivated, inspired Americans, who not only understand the importance of preservation as seen through historic materials and cultural heritage, but also as it relates to urban planning, community pride and a healthy future for our country.” “Keep [preservation] relevant and necessary!” she says.

Sarah Marsom, historic preservation advocate for the German Village Society in Columbus, Ohio, writes: “[We need] creative and inspiring engagement to catapult unique projects and minority interpretation...Whether we are teaching people traditional trades, promoting tax credits, or advocating for structures to be saved, marketing preservation through new methods that resonate with broader audiences is at the forefront of importance for a positive preservation-focused future.”

Educating all Americans about historic preservation and the tools used to protect our heritage will be important to achieving

this goal. Raina Regan, a community preservation specialist with Indiana Landmarks, writes: “With a common understanding of preservation vocabulary, Americans will understand the significance of our built heritage and the importance of its continued use to building sustainable communities.” Jim Bertolini from Carson City, Nevada, agrees. He writes: “I hope the next half century is defined by strengthening the outreach and preservation programs that focus more on *why* we preserve, not just how.”

Other respondents suggest that we try to do a better job of engaging politicians. Kendra Parzen, a conservation intern working in Washington, D.C., writes: “My hope for the next 50 years is that we will finally be able to convince the majority of politicians to support preservation efforts and incentives. Extensive research clearly demonstrates that preservation is the right move to rejuvenate communities, attract businesses, generate jobs, and foster creative environments...Yet preservation offices and programs are facing cuts across the country! I’d like to see more of the government working with preservationists, not against them.”

EXPAND TRAINING IN TRADITIONAL BUILDING METHODS

Several respondents commented on the need to train more people in traditional building methods and crafts. Katie Totman, a recent graduate of the historic preservation program at the University of Texas in San Antonio, says she would love to see more trade-based professionals sharing their knowledge with younger preservationists. Dena Kafallinos, an architectural conservator in San Francisco, hopes that preservationists will spend more time researching technical

means and methods to preserve. She writes: “The destruction and sometimes mediocre

Training more people in traditional building trades and crafts will prepare workers for skilled employment, promote greater respect for those specialties and for good stewardship, and make restoration work more affordable. Shown here, a worker tests a mockup of a new cornice section for the 1860 Iron Block Building in Milwaukee.

PHOTO BY MARK DEMSKY, AIA-DENTAL ASSOCIATES.



restorations of historic resources are often due to the fact that historic preservation treatments are still in their infancy.”

“If we make it more affordable to repair historic materials such as windows, homeowners will not be ‘forced’ to replace the historic materials,” writes another respondent. She explains that where she lives, there are only a handful of window restoration specialists, and they charge approximately \$1,000 per window for a repair. Many homeowners would not be able to afford that expense, she notes.

Elizabeth Hallas, AIA, an architect with Anderson Hallas Architects in Golden, Colorado, agrees: “Rather than have the latest and greatest zippy ‘green’ products which are processed and chemically infused and require complete replacement with the slightest wear and tear, let’s have materials and assemblies that are durable, repairable and readily available. Let’s train our next generation in preservation, conservation and stewardship. Let’s foster a genuine

respect for the talent of our craftspeople. Let’s not allow these skills and trades to perish. That which we can sustain, we can preserve.”

UTILIZE NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Rebecca Fenwick, historic preservation specialist with Lominack Kolman Smith Architects in Savannah, Georgia, says

she appreciates the value of new technology but at the same time worries about the cost. She writes: “I wish to see preservation technologies—such as laser scanning, 3D modeling, total station, and photogrammetry—

This 3-D visualization created with GIS technology enabled Mount Vernon to analyze potential threats to its viewshed—information that was used to put development restrictions on nearby land.

PHOTO COURTESY OF GEORGE WASHINGTON'S MOUNT VERNON.



more accessible and affordable. These technologies save time in the field, improve accuracy, and offer a great visualization tool for illustrating preservation possibilities.”

PLAN FOR EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Recognizing that preservationists will need to spend more and more time dealing with the effects of climate change, Jen Sparenberg, the hazard mitigation officer with the Maryland Historical Trust, proposes that we expand the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards to include appropriate approaches for flood mitigation. She also suggests modifying tax credit programs to allow mitigation action as an eligible expense. She writes: “By making mitigation part of the national preservation policy, preservationists will be on the front lines of protecting historic properties from climate change and natural hazards.”

TAKE A LEADERSHIP ROLE IN SUSTAINABILITY

Others commented on preservation’s role in the sustainability movement. Margaret O’Neill, a landscape preservation associate with the National Center for Preservation Technology and Training in Natchitoches, Louisiana, sees collaboration with other organizations working for sustainable and healthy communities as critical. She writes: “For the next half century, the goal of preservationists should be one of compromise and accessibility, especially when considering cultural landscapes and clean energy development. By working jointly with groups to pursue this goal, we can move preservation from being an afterthought to a leader in sustainability.”

PROMOTE PRESERVATION AS AN URBAN STRATEGY

We need to do a better job of making the case that older and historic buildings contribute to the sustainability and livability of cities, according to some respondents. “To be effective, we must better demonstrate the power of preservation for city rebuilding as a tool for both economic and social development,” suggests Dan Rose, member of the City of Edmonton Historical Board in Alberta. This applies to smaller towns too, notes Ellie Isaacs, Historic Preservation/Designer at Taylor Kempkes Architects in Hot Springs,



In the ideal future, conservation, rehabilitation, and continued or adaptive use of existing built heritage would be widely recognized as the preferred option for the renewal of cities and towns. One model project is the revitalization of the Union Block Building, a prominent building in the downtown square of Mount Pleasant, Iowa.

PHOTOS COURTESY MAIN STREET MOUNT PLEASANT

Arkansas. She writes: “We need to move back into downtown areas from the suburbs.” Isaacs

urges us to create thriving, mixed-use neighborhoods; support local businesses; use mass transit; and promote the adaptive use of old buildings. She ends her comment by quoting Jane Jacobs: “You can’t rely on bringing people downtown, you have to put them there.”

MAKE PRESERVATION THE FIRST-CHOICE OPTION

Claire VanderEyck, who works for Dominion Development in Minneapolis, writes that the future of preservation lies in demonstrating that preservation is economical and sustainable, preservation is trendy, and preservation creates positive outcomes. “The key is to stop harping on the times we fail and start celebrating the times we succeed,” she adds.

Deborah Kent, an architectural designer with Bonstra/Haresign Architects in Washington, D.C., looks forward to a time when rehabilitation is the obvious choice for owners, developers and architects. She envisions a world 50 years from now when “people understand that rehabilitation is more sustainable, often cheaper, and less disruptive to infrastructure and cultural continuity. It is universally accepted that quick and thoughtless construction and knee-jerk demolition leads not to enrichment and progress, but rather to feelings of loss and regret.”

INSPIRE COMMUNITIES TO PRESERVE THEIR OWN HISTORY

Denyse C. McGriff, National Trust Advisor from Oregon, would like far more people to “be able to have an understanding of what heritage means to them and their place in it. This awareness would translate into the preservation of places throughout the country that matter.”

Cayce Lee, owner of Leeuta Original Designs in Athens, Alabama, agrees, writing: “The masses need to be given access to the stories to move them to action and generate the passion to keep their history alive. The idea that preservation is an unattainable hobby or activity of the elite or solely the responsibility of the government or an organizational body needs to be demolished and replaced with the understanding that preservation is for the people and possible by the people.”

Amber Rojas, Historic Preservation Officer in Tyler, Texas, wants people to view preservation as an “honor, not a hindrance.” She explains: “A community that respects its history respects itself. Communities should encourage each generation to understand the historic importance connected to its culture and to embrace contextual, contemporary design living alongside the historic places to help tell the entire history of the community.” “Preservation equals identity,” she says.

Ann Waigand, a researcher and writer in Herndon, Virginia, shares an anecdote about a neighbor in her condo building, a rehabbed and repurposed 1908 African American church, who “restored” one of her stained-glass windows by replacing the central panel, an image of a chalice that she didn’t care for, with family initials. “My hope is that, in 50 years, this [sort of disregard for historic fabric] will be unthinkable. My dream is that it will take less than 50 years for the public to recognize the importance of conserving the heritage that surrounds us, and that preservation will become not the work of a few, but the commitment of many.”

Great thoughts, everyone. Let’s get to work. **FJ**

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