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NEWS

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CITYSPACE

Future Perfect



Phoenix Rising: Reusing old buildings, like this one that houses the new Phoenix apartments, is a multibillion-dollar business in Philadelphia and a great way to build a better city. Photo By: Michael

T. Regan

preservation issues.

Historic preservation as economic development.

by John Andrew Gallery

Each May, the National Trust for Historic Preservation encourages cities and towns across the country to set aside a week to celebrate historic preservation accomplishments in their communities. May has been designated Historic Preservation Month in Philadelphia by Mayor Street, and the Preservation Alliance and other organizations have planned many events to enable the public to experience and learn about historic resources in the city and region. (For a list of more than 100 events in May, go to

www.preservationalliance.com.) Through the generosity of *City Paper* and the Design Advocacy Group, these Cityspace columns in May will be dedicated to historic

Most of the time historic preservation is in the news, it is the result of efforts to save a historic property from demolition. This important focus on struggles to save individual buildings often prevents us from seeing that historic preservation is a factor in the economic development of the city. Are you aware that in the past 20 years more than \$1.5 billion has been invested in converting historic properties to contemporary use, ranging from housing to hotels to cultural facilities? And that investment has also produced more than 55,000 jobs. Even more remarkably, most of this has been accomplished through private investment with relatively little public funding. Here are some recent examples of historic preservation as economic development in four specific areas that are important to the future of Philadelphia.

Residential Development in Center City

The 2000 Census indicated that Center City was one of the few areas of the city where population actually increased. Much of the new housing to support this growing downtown community has been achieved through the adaptation of historic properties to residential use. Old City is one of the great examples of creating an almost totally new residential community through historic preservation. But there are lots of other interesting projects happening right now. The Phoenix luxury apartments at 16th and Arch is a conversion of the historic INA office building, the Grande apartments at 15th and Chestnut is a conversion of the Packard Building, and just a few years ago, both Locust on the Park and the Left Bank were created by converting historic properties on either side of the Schuylkill River. There are new condominiums as well: 1010 Race Street in Chinatown was once a bentwood rocker factory, and historic buildings at 1737, 1920 and 1930 Chestnut Street are all condominium projects that bring people into the heart of Center City.

Support for Tourism

We all know that Philadelphia's tourist industry is based on the abundance of historic sites in the city and region. But a strong tourist industry needs more than historic attractions; it needs places for people to stay, shop and eat. Historic preservation has been a major contributor to creating these support facilities. Take hotels for example. More than \$500 million has been invested in converting historic properties to hotels. Marriott has done three -- the Reading Terminal



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recently completed Residence Inn in the former One East Penn Square Girard Bank building and Loews in the PSFS office building, both restaurants and stores that have been developed in historic properties and other projects such as Tony Goldman's use of historic properties to

Homes for Cultural and Educational Institutions

Most of the city's cultural institutions are located in important historic buildings. But what is more significant is the extent to which historic properties are providing opportunities for those institutions to grow and expand. The Art Museum has recently indicated its intent to add space in the art deco Reliance Insurance Company building nearby; PAFA is expanding into a building just north of the Academy; the High School for the Creative and Performing Arts found a great home through the conversion of the historic Ridgeway Library on South Broad Street; and just recently the Fairmount Park Commission announced its support for the Please Touch Museum to create its new home in Memorial Hall. That's not all: Chestnut Hill Academy has recently renovated the exterior of its home, the historic Wissahickon Inn, and the Library Company has made a wonderful contribution to Locust Street through its restoration of the Cassatt House.

Preserving Neighborhoods

Many of Philadelphia's neighborhoods derive their distinction from the historic character of housing in those neighborhoods. This is not just true of Society Hill, Rittenhouse Square and Chestnut Hill, but is also true of Tacony, the Girard Estates, Overbrook, Mt. Airy and many, many other neighborhoods. New residents moving from the suburbs to Philadelphia are twice as likely to choose a historic neighborhood to move to as other sections of the city, and people coming from other parts of the country are three times as likely to do so. Historic residential properties are a real key to neighborhood revitalization. One can see this taking place in North Philadelphia through the work of the Advocate CDC along Diamond Street, in West Philadelphia through the Partnership CDC's work along Sansom Street and through Pennrose Properties' renovation of historic properties for low- and moderate-income housing in Strawberry Mansion, not to mention the ways in which conversion of historic commercial properties have contributed to the transformation of Old City and Northern Liberties.

These efforts to adapt historic properties to the needs of today are pervasive; they are not confined to Center City but are occurring all over Philadelphia. They demonstrate that historic preservation is not only about preserving the past, it's a vital component of building the future.

John Andrew Gallery is the executive director of the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia.



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