

## ABSTRACT

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  BETWEEN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
  CORPORATIONS AND HISTORIC  
  PRESERVATION

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The field of historic preservation in the United States has experienced significant growth both in its scope and in the number and character of its allies over the last 50 years. Many of these allies have joined at the local level but lack the resources necessary to carry out their missions. Community development corporations (CDCs) represent a largely untapped resource for supporting these growing local preservation efforts. CDCs vary in capacity and scope, but they share the common goal of building up their communities using a range of pro bono services. The National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP) recently studied the relationship between CDCs and preservation, finding that CDCs are engaging in preservation efforts, but hesitate to take on a larger role in preservation. This paper will assess the NTHP study and compare those findings to the activities of several local CDCs to develop the recommendations for ways to strengthen partnerships between preservationists and CDCs.

STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN COMMUNITY  
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATIONS AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

By

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## Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my family. Thank you for your continued support.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my advisors, Dennis Pogue, Don Linebaugh, and Jim Cohen, for their support, guidance, and patience throughout this process. I am sincerely grateful for their academic mentorship, which has contributed a great deal to my education. Thanks also to all of the University of Maryland faculty and staff who have offered their guidance at various stages throughout my graduate education. I am very appreciative of the School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation community and I would also like to thank my preservation and planning student colleagues for their assistance and encouragement.

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## Table of Contents

Dedication.....	i
Acknowledgements.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
List of Tables.....	iv
List of Figures.....	v
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2: Digging Deeper.....	5
Chapter 3: A Preservation/Planning Alliance.....	9
Chapter 4: Case Studies.....	15
Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations.....	24
Bibliography.....	35

## List of Tables

Table 1: Case Study Matrix with Selected Characteristics.....	22
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## List of Figures

Figure 1: Cumulative Economic Impact of 37 CDC Respondents (5 years).....	11
Figure 2: Map of CDCs Surveyed by NTHP Study.....	12
Figure 3: Challenges with Carrying Out Preservation Projects Cited by CDCs.....	13
Figure 4: Concentration of CDCs Currently Rehabilitating Historic Buildings.....	24
Figure 5: A Selection of Historic Windows Salvaged by Community Forklift.....	32
Figure 6: Community Engagement and Education Led by Greenbelt CDC.....	33
Figure 7: Design Workshop Led by the Neighborhood Design Center.....	34



## Chapter 1: Introduction

Preservation in the United States exists as a partnership between federal, state, and local agencies and a host of nonprofit organizations. It is a balance of private property rights versus public good and federal versus local government. Local governments are the “most important engines of preservation activity” because of their direct connection to historic sites and their surrounding communities. Yet their power and much of their funding and support derives from federal and state programs (Stipe 2003, 117). Early federal support of nationally significant sites was a necessary element in the equation that allowed the preservation movement to gain and maintain momentum in the United States in the early twentieth century. The federal government also played a key role in promoting historic preservation by educating the public about historical significance and the importance of protecting historic resources (Sprinkle 2014, 6).

Over time the number of historic sites at the national, state, and local levels grew substantially, as everyday Americans began to take up the preservation cause. In order to address the growing number of historic sites, preservationists turn to local communities. At the national and regional level there is a sense of logic to the hierarchy of historical significance that has a corresponding hierarchy of responsibility. Sites that are nationally significant demand federal attention and national support. Sites that are regionally significant are often championed by their respective State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) to reduce the load on the federal government. However, sites that are locally significant are often supported by a mix of public-private partnerships and nonprofit organizations (Stipe 2003, 24-29).

There is a lack of clarity regarding responsibility at the local level, because preservation and policies may vary widely from place to place. Sometimes groups with very little capacity are asked to take up the preservation cause in regions that lack a strong historic preservation infrastructure. Many of these local allies do not have preservation backgrounds and lack the resources necessary to carry out their missions. In these cases, preservation often depends on first establishing a sense of ownership or pride regarding local historic resources to inspire community led initiatives or grassroots efforts that focus on preserving local history. Even with limited resources, grassroots efforts can often generate strong public support, which is an essential component for success (Stipe 2003, 28-29).

The expanding scope of preservation creates a recurring cycle with historic resources inspiring local pride, which raises more awareness of historic resources. Thus, the definition of historic significance continues to expand as more of these non-preservationist allies take up the cause. In order to keep pace with the rapidly growing field, preservationists must continue to exploit grassroots efforts and local support. Community development corporations, or CDCs, represent a largely untapped resource for these growing local preservation efforts (Stipe 2003, 15-17).

The National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP) recently surveyed CDCs from across the country to study the relationship between CDCs and preservation. The study identified that a number of CDCs currently are partnering with preservation organizations and are rehabilitating historic properties. This NTHP initiative takes a necessary step towards strengthening relationships between CDCs and preservation, but the study focuses on CDCs that are already involved in preservation partnerships.

The limited nature of the survey meant that it was aimed at contacting a large pool of organizations at the expense of lengthy responses. To gain a more in-depth understanding of the relationship between CDCs and preservation, this paper features three local case studies: the Port Towns CDC, the Greenbelt CDC, and the Neighborhood Design Center, all located in Prince George's County, MD.

By analyzing the NTHP study along with these Maryland focused case studies, this project seeks to understand the nature of the relationship between CDCs and preservation. While the NTHP study identified a number of CDC respondents that were partnering with preservation organizations, respondents also cited concerns about preservation partnerships, including preservation's lengthy process, the high costs of rehabilitation, and scarcity of appropriate materials. The case studies provide an opportunity to better understand what challenges and concerns CDCs might have about preservation partnerships by addressing the following research questions: What is the current role of CDCs in local preservation efforts? What are some of the challenges that prevent CDCs from participating in local preservation efforts? What are some strategies for overcoming those challenges?

By going beyond the surface to better understand the relationship between CDCs and preservation, it seems clear that despite major challenges CDCs are willing to partner with preservation organizations. Thus, this paper also sheds light on the potential for CDCs to take on a larger role in preservation and recommends ways to further strengthen the relationship between CDCs and preservation organizations. While each case study cited logistical concerns, they also identified deeper issues rooted in negative perceptions and differing ideologies between community planning

and historic preservation that they are eager to address. Although some CDCs lack capacity and support, their prevalence across the country makes them an appealing partner for preservation activity at the local level. There are logistical and educational challenges that must be overcome to strengthen partnerships between CDCs and preservation, but by promoting interdisciplinary collaboration and providing CDCs with more resources, preservationists may be able to tap into this broad pool of grassroots planning and development expertise.

## Chapter 2: Digging Deeper

The field of historic preservation in the United States has experienced significant growth both in its scope and in the number of sympathetic organizations from other fields since the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966. Like our nation, historic preservation is a relatively young but rapidly expanding and evolving field. Preservationist Robert Stipe, writing in 2003, called preservation “an evolving phenomenon.” The early American preservation movement of the nineteenth century was “led by elite individuals” who were propelled by a quest to preserve Revolutionary War icons. This early period in the preservation movement provided the foundation for what would evolve into “a national effort to preserve community history and identity” through government programs in the twentieth century (Stipe 2003, 1). What began as a socially exclusive movement preserving nationally and architecturally significant, primarily white narratives, has evolved into an increasingly inclusive field of local landmarks, untold narratives, and intangible heritage. The traditionally elite field of preservation has given way to a local movement that not only recognizes but celebrates the everyday individual, site, and community. This shift towards inclusion also reflects changing demographics in the United States (Stipe 2003, 15-17).

Three decades after the passage of the NHPA, Michael A. Tomlan’s collection of essays by noted preservationists, *Preservation of What, for Whom?: A Critical Look at Historical Significance*, reflected on these “changing demographic patterns of the nation, current development patterns, the debate between the common good and

individual property rights, the trend toward devolved authority from the federal government, and ‘less government’ at all levels” (Tomlan 1998, 6). It is difficult to say whether the expanding scope of the field of preservation began as a societal shift, a revelation of the vast degree of untold narratives, or a reaction against the field’s traditional exclusionary practices; or simply as a practical response to a growing list of historically significant sites. In reality it was likely a combination of these factors (Tomlan 1998).

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s began to uncover the systematic racism, discrimination, and disregard of African Americans that had been ingrained in the American psyche, and is reflected in the “white washing of American history” that drove what was deemed significant in the early years of the American preservation movement (Goldstone 2005). In response to these social movements, the earlier focus on the elite, high style material culture of “the original nineteenth-century preservation paradigm” has been broadened to include more marginalized groups by promoting the notion that “preservation offers opportunities for a better life for all Americans” (Stipe 2003, 462). Yet the long struggle for equality fought by African Americans, women, the LGBT community, people with disabilities, and each subsequent wave of immigrants tells us that equality for all remains a struggle and an unfinished task. The process of recognizing these untold stories as part of American history sometimes leads to tension or push back when accommodating different narratives at the same site or interpreting sites differently based on different perspectives.

A well-known example of a historic site that has experienced and responded to the evolving preservation movement is Mount Vernon. As the home of the nation's first president, Mount Vernon is arguably one of America's most significant and popular historic sites, with "roughly 1 million visitors a year" (Milloy 2016). In the early years of the American preservation movement, the efforts of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association in the 1850s "inspired the formation of other groups [that] saved countless historic homes and public buildings" (Stipe 2003, 2). More recently, Mount Vernon is also one of a number of well-known historic sites that have begun to interpret untold narratives, many in the form of newly interpreted slave quarters at house museums.

Although it is undoubtedly more inclusive to portray the story of the enslaved workers who built Mount Vernon alongside that of George Washington, there is also a sense that Washington as president and slaveholder are conflicting interpretations. "The more we learn about the reality of their lives, the more difficult it will be to continue seeing Washington as a man of unqualified courage and principle" (Milloy 2016). Beyond the controversy of interpreting presidential slaveholding, simply the act of recognizing the humanity of a population that was once considered property, adds new layers to the American narrative that comes with a host of new historic individuals, sites, and communities that were not previously recognized.

The contentious and expanding scope of preservation is demonstrated by the efforts of citizens living in towns across the country who seek to preserve their own untold narratives, whether for tourism or purely for its own intrinsic value. That said, "one must ask whether preservation in America is becoming *too* inclusive, with

something for everyone” (Stipe 2003, 464). Ultimately, every local site cannot be significant, much like historic house museums, of which “there are simply too many” (Graham 2014).

Yet this is where preservation appears to be headed, particularly as we begin to accept that everyone has a story to tell. In this technological age where everyone seems to be connected, Americans are becoming more aware and more interested in those new and untold stories. In addition, preservation brings financial benefits, whether through sustainability, tax credits, or tourism, and this also expands the field. Each of these elements has contributed to the increase of attention to a wider range of historic properties. The field’s perspective on historical significance has not shifted but rather expanded, particularly at the local level.

In a country that has faced a series of recessions and is still burdened by significant debt, preservation advocates must work continually in the current “budget fight” to maintain funds and justify their relevance (Johnson 1982). Inevitably the top-down model of federal funding for preservation is neither sustainable nor even ideal. “In light of [these] mounting threats” there has been a greater push to recruit new allies and alternative, more creative funding streams -- something local preservationists have in common with their local planning compatriots. In a recent effort to address these concerns, the NTHP advocated for a “unified voice coming from those who understand the empowering qualities of revitalizing existing properties and from those who value the socioeconomic networks they support” declaring that “these two communities —preservation and community development — can and should be considered as one” (Gunther and Cowan 2015, 3).



## Chapter 3: A Preservation/Planning Alliance

The NTHP's 2015 National Preservation Conference, held in Washington, DC, focused on the question of creating new allies to meet the demands of a growing preservation field. One of the conference sessions included a report on the results of a recent study, *Strengthening the Connection: Historic Preservation and Community Development* (Gunther and Cowan 2015). The study was a collaborative effort conducted by the NTHP, in partnership with Savannah College of Art and Design and with funding support from the 1772 Foundation. Their efforts to survey CDCs nationwide provided the framework for the analysis to follow.

The term CDCs refers to community development corporations, defined as “nonprofit, community-based organizations focused on revitalizing the areas in which they are located” (Commonwealth.org). Their portfolios can include a range of project types, such as: affordable housing, economic development, education, health and wellness, beautification, and community planning initiatives. The unifying trait is the predominant focus on providing services to low- to moderate-income, underserved, urban areas.

Although slow to be accepted by Congress during the Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush administrations, CDCs were popularized during the presidency of Bill Clinton. Responding to early efforts to limit government involvement in state and local planning, CDCs were increasingly viewed as essential for their “flexibility and adaptability to local needs and initiatives” providing important services, such as land acquisition, rehabilitation, and new construction (Cullingworth 2014, 384-385).

The NTHP study provides strong justification for strengthening partnerships between CDCs and preservation, having “recognized community development agents and their noteworthy preservation work...demonstrating the intersection between historic preservation and community redevelopment” (Gunther and Cowan 2015, 3). At the local level preservation and planning share commonalities in their emphasis on economic development and place-based identity, or placemaking. Preservationists have long fought to protect historic sites, landscapes, and communities by seeing “beyond the aesthetic of historic buildings to the empowering effect of rehabilitation and its proven ability to keep socio economic power within a community” (Gunther and Cowan 2015, 3). CDCs serve as a catalyst for community-driven revitalization and growth, often through economic development. The emphasis on vitality has an “out with the old and in with the new” connotation that “seems to be at odds” with preservation. Yet there has been a resurgence of historic preservation as it has become marketable to the millennials that flock back to cities and towns in search of “the authentic” that has led CDCs to preservation (Marcavitch 2016). CDCs have begun to “value the practice of reusing the existing built environment to harness a community’s identity, continuity, and memory” (Gunther and Cowan 2015, 3).

Efforts to build an alliance between planning and preservation at the local level have targeted CDCs on the basis of their substantial numbers nationwide, successful track records, and emphasis on meeting community needs. With approximately 4,600 community development corporations estimated to be operating in the United States, targeting CDCs could bring a wave of new allies to preservation. “According to community-wealth.org, these mission-based community organizations

produced 96,000 units of housing and 7.41 million square feet of commercial space in 2010 alone” (Gunther and Cowan 2015, 3).



Figure 1: Cumulative Economic Impact of 37 CDC Respondents (5 years).

The NTHP study partnered with over 100 umbrella organizations to survey CDCs across the country, breaking them up into four regions: the West, Midwest, Northeast, and South (Figure 2). They successfully targeted 140 CDCs that were known to be doing historic preservation in the form of rehabilitation of historic structures (Gunther and Cowan 2015, 3). The research team then distributed a survey that consisted primarily of 19 multiple choice questions, and was designed with ease of completion in mind. They received responses from 47 CDCs. Although smallest in geographic size, 26 responses (55%) came from the Northeast region. The Midwest had the second largest response rate with 10, while the South and West regions had only 6 and 4, respectively (Gunther and Cowan 2015, 60).

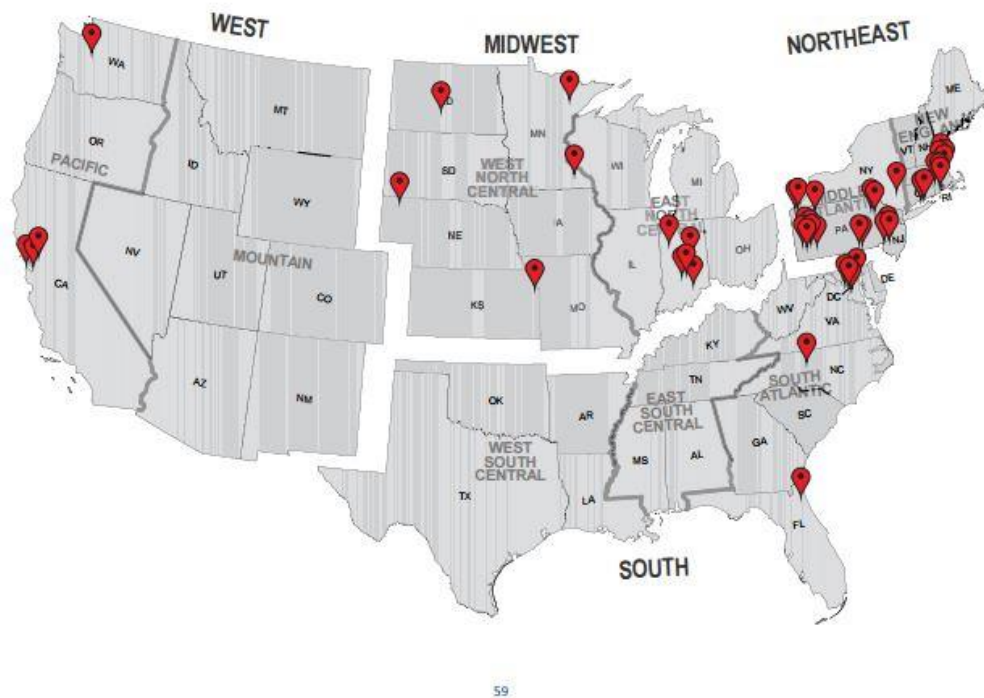


Figure 2: Map of CDCs Surveyed by NTHP Study.

The survey had a good response rate for a study of this kind, but it only represents 33% of the CDCs that were initially identified for their preservation work and less than 1% of all the CDCs that are estimated to exist nationwide. Therefore, the responses are not representative of CDCs as a whole. Similarly, the wide disparity in the number of respondents meant that regional comparisons could not be made.

Although the CDCs differed by location, budget, and initiatives, the study uncovered a number of commonalities, several of which are notable for this paper. Of the 47 respondents, the research team found the most consistency with respect to their experiences with preservation partnerships. While all of the respondents were known to participate in rehabilitation projects, many experienced a variety of associated challenges, and most did not engage in such projects through preservation partners because they were unaware of nearby preservation organizations.

Of the challenges cited, most were logistical, including the cost of rehabilitation, the time required, and the scarcity of building materials (Figure 3). Respondents also cited restrictive guidelines, noncompliance issues with handicap accessibility and sustainable practices, lack of funding options, and limited access to preservation contractors. CDCs also referenced little incentive to partner with preservation organizations, either because there was no “clear reason” to do so or from a lack of opportunity (Gunther and Cowan 2015, 66).

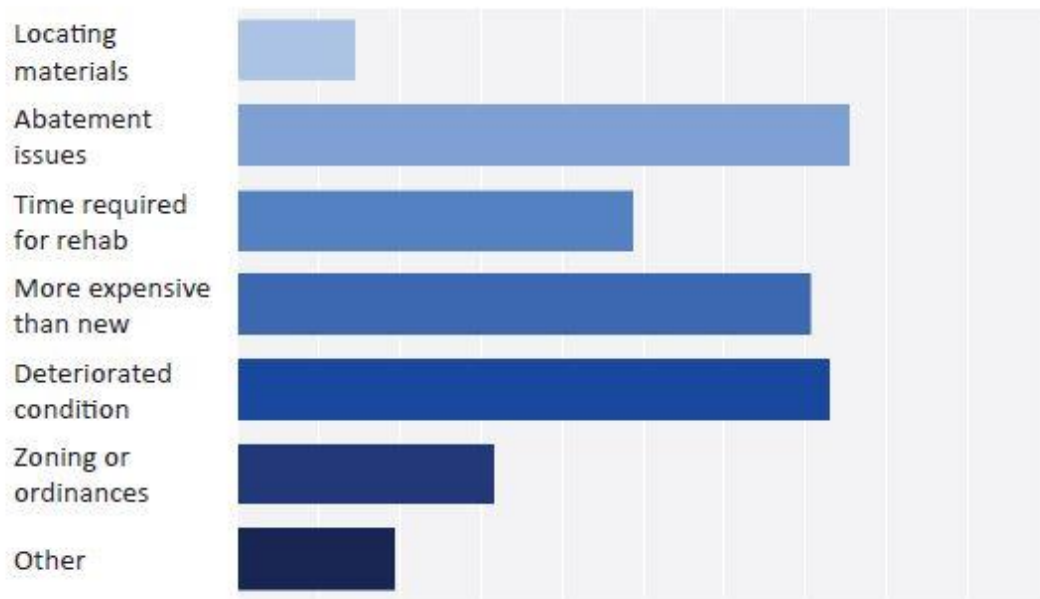


Figure 3: Challenges with Carrying Out Preservation Projects Cited by CDCs.

The research team also found that most of the CDCs served neighborhoods and communities in urban areas, primarily focusing their rehabilitation efforts on residential and commercial properties. Respondents took advantage of the spectrum of incentive programs that are available, including: Low-Income Housing Tax Credits, Federal and State Historic Tax Credits, New Market Tax Credits, as well as state-run neighborhood partnerships, affordable housing, and energy-efficiency grant

programs. About half of the CDCs stated that they adhered to the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation* (Gunther and Cowan 2015, 66-67).

The NTHP study is both strengthened and limited by its wide pool of respondents. By looking at CDCs across the country, the Trust was able to collect data on how CDCs operate, what types of projects they focus on, where their funding comes from, and what their budgets are, while also asking a few key questions about CDC partnerships with preservation. Yet the study is limited in its assessment of what prevents CDCs from partnering with preservation organizations. Because of the nature of the survey and its broad national coverage, the study could only touch upon the factors that impact a CDC's decision to partner with preservation organizations.

## Chapter 4: Case Studies

To better understand why more preservation and planning partnerships do not operate at the local level, three organizations were selected as case studies to provide insight into the factors that impact a CDC's decision to partner with preservation organizations. By exploring these factors, the objective is to recommend ways to address them so as to strengthen existing partnerships between CDCs and preservation organizations while encouraging new planning and preservation partnerships. To do so, this paper draws on two of the study's most pertinent questions: what are some potential challenges associated with rehabilitation and other preservation projects for CDCs, and what are some reasons CDCs have not partnered with preservation organizations.

To address these topics, three local organizations were selected as case studies because of their past success in instigating community-led initiatives. Two of the organizations, the Port Towns CDC and the Greenbelt CDC, are traditional CDCs, while the Neighborhood Design Center is a community development group that functions much like a CDC. As with the survey respondents, all of the case study organizations provide a variety of services in urbanized communities that have an interest in historic preservation.

After researching potential local organizations, identifying the case studies, and conducting initial interviews in person or over the phone, additional individuals who were independent of the three case study organizations were identified and interviewed as well. Notes on the interviews were written out and have been saved, but no audio recordings were made. During these interviews, respondents were asked

to complete the NTHP survey in order to place the organizations and individuals within the context of NTHP's broader findings. They were then asked to elaborate on their experiences with preservation, particularly on any challenges or opportunities regarding preservation projects and ultimately their reasons for or against partnering with preservation organizations.

The Port Towns CDC is a nonprofit organization that since 1996 has served the four communities of Bladensburg, Colmar Manor, Cottage City, and Edmonston. Their community development initiatives cover a little bit of everything, but their primary focus is on fostering sustainability and small business growth. They operate with 11 volunteer board members and about 15 additional volunteer staff. The chair of their board provided responses to the NTHP survey and additional questions. Most of their limited budget of about \$250,000/year goes to their numerous community initiatives, and their funding is a mix of private donations, augmented by county and state government grants. Although a number of local historic properties over 50 years old have been identified and are in need of rehabilitation, the Port Towns CDC has limited their preservation work to façade improvement projects on commercial properties. Of the challenges listed in the survey, they highlighted zoning ordinances as a "big issue" due to contradicting sector plans and changing zoning codes (Meyer 2016).

Contrary to the other CDC respondents, the Port Towns CDC did not take advantage of any incentive programs. This is primarily because their mission does not include making a profit, but Meyer also related her perception that such programs



are “a lot of extra trouble” and “too cumbersome for little projects.” Although they did not indicate any partnerships with preservation organizations, their chair is also the CEO of Community Forklift, a nonprofit that promotes sustainability and business growth by hiring local employees to collect and resell old building materials, furniture, and other household objects. According to Meyer, although Community Forklift is not a preservation organization, preservation is inherently “built into” their mission (Meyer 2016).

While the Port Towns CDC expressed an interest in partnering with preservation organizations in the future, they were unaware of any such organizations in the four towns they serve. The CDC is located in a particularly low-income community and there is a perceived “lack of concern for historic preservation” combined with a long list of other community needs that remain unaddressed. With little access and more pressing concerns, the CDC’s interest in preservation has not overcome the lack of opportunity to partner with preservation organizations (Meyer 2016).

The Greenbelt CDC is a relatively new nonprofit organization, founded in 2005. As the number of grassroots organizations in Greenbelt grew and split to focus on specific issues, Greenbelt CDC was started by local residents to bring an overall structure to their community development initiatives. For this reason, the CDC is open to almost any type of project, but they have focused their limited funds and manpower primarily on education and collaboration within their existing community. Responses to the NTHP survey and other questions were provided by a local

Greenbelt resident, artist, and activist who also serves as the president of the CDC (Simon 2016).

To date Greenbelt CDC has limited its efforts to educational programs that focus on capacity building, fostering community relationships, and raising awareness about preservation by promoting their shared history and the importance of the community's historic resources. Moving forward they intend to foster relationships with their city and county representatives in order to secure grant money and permits to rehabilitate their commercial town center, portrayed as the "historic and communal heart of Greenbelt." The CDC has expressed interest in partnering directly with local preservation organizations to carry out those restorations (Simon 2016).

Although they represent the entire community, the CDC is located in Old Greenbelt, which was built in 1937 and is well preserved today under the umbrella of the Greenbelt Historic District. With a clear interest in preservation projects, the CDC has taken on the role of facilitator between preservation organizations and community groups as well as city and county representatives. The Greenbelt CDC is also an example of pooling resources to get things done. They have worked to build ties across their community organizations and other constituents, while relying on their own partnerships with other CDCs in the area. While they have experienced the time investment and costs of preservation projects, the challenges for them have been absentee landlords, the difficulty of purchasing properties for rehabilitation, getting the community united under the preservation cause, and the slow process of building relationships and achieving legitimacy as a new organization (Simon 2016).

While the NTHP study focused on CDCs, there is also opportunity to expand beyond CDCs and shed light on the challenges that impede other planning organizations from building partnerships with preservation organizations. Therefore, the final case study featured is the Neighborhood Design Center (NDC), which is technically not a CDC but which functions like one. This additional research began by reaching out to NDC members, past and present, via email correspondence, conversations via telephone, and in person interviews. Responses to the NTHP survey and other questions were provided by the current NDC Executive Director, a former program coordinator, and a current program manager.

NDC is an independent organization that serves Prince George's County and Baltimore City. Like the CDCs, NDC works in underserved communities that contain considerable heritage and historic resources. Their mission focuses on creating collaborative partnerships with communities while initiating public participation, promoting volunteerism, and providing design services to better position grassroots revitalization that strengthens communities (Goold 2016).

NDC is also an affiliate of the Association for Community Design (ACD). ACD is made up of community design centers from across the nation and brings a similar type of structure and operational consistency to these organizations as exists with CDCs. Although these community design centers vary in capacity and scope, they share the common goal of building up their communities using a range of pro bono services related to architecture, landscape architecture, and planning. ACD recognizes community design centers that are "dedicated to the provision of planning,

design and development services in low- and moderate- income communities” (<http://www.communitydesign.org>).

NDC is an example of an organization that is doing more with less. Though also small in numbers, over time this organization has built a name for itself by cultivating the sort of relationships that are essential for community-led development and could prove to be a new partner for preservationists. They have worked with communities on over 3,000 projects in 48 years, providing many of the same services as those listed by the CDCs surveyed for the NTHP study. But the focus of NDC is on consulting with communities on projects rather than taking on the projects themselves, especially by providing design services so that their community partners “can seek funding options.” Although most of the NTHP survey respondents related that their total annual budgets ranged from between one million and five million dollars, NDC just reached the million dollar milestone this past year (Goold 2016).

In regard to preservation projects, NDC echoes some of the same concerns that were highlighted by the CDCs surveyed in the NTHP study. Although NDC does not undertake rehabilitation themselves, they sometimes “partner with communities that are involved with rehab and adaptive reuse,” and their adherence to the *Secretary of the Interior Standards* depends on the funding and whether the project is seeking tax credit status. When asked to identify potential challenges to their participation in rehabilitation projects that might deter NDC from doing more preservation work, the Executive Director provided a long list of concerns, ranging from the unavailability of appropriate properties, to funding and time constraints, hazardous materials,

zoning restrictions, and the unpredictability of the preservation process regarding the “instability of the tax credit and additional time for review” (Goold 2016).

Further interviews uncovered additional challenges and negative perceptions that have influenced NDC’s involvement with preservation. Since NDC does not directly rehabilitate historic structures, their perspective is through the lens of their collaboration with non-preservation organizations that themselves deal with historic properties. This provided an opportunity to inquire further about why NDC was not partnering with preservation organizations or participating in preservation projects as part of its range of initiatives to strengthen local communities (Goold 2016).

The former NDC Program Coordinator reflected on three main reasons why their organization has hesitated to collaborate with preservation organizations: 1) ADA accessibility which is required for any community use and raises issues with historic structures; 2) site constraints when working with historic structures that can restrict sustainability improvement projects such as storm water management and alternative heating/cooling systems; and 3) small groups attempting to renovate historic structures often lack experience with the preservation, grant, funding, or tax credit process. This exchange also prompted a key realization, “...partnership and involvement with Parks and Planning has been really important for the history of the county but we work so closely with a community that is largely African American and their story is not being told” (Townshend 2016).

<b>Organization Details</b>	<b>Port Towns</b>	<b>Greenbelt CDC</b>	<b>NDC</b>
Organization Type	Nonprofit CDC	Nonprofit CDC	Pro-bono Community Design Center
Yearly Budget	\$250-320,000	\$5,000	\$1,000,000
# of Staff	15 (volunteers)	6 (volunteers)	15
Preservation Work	Salvaging Historic Materials	Education/Awareness	Rehab/Façade Improvement
Total Preservation Projects	20-25	3	3000
Logistic Challenges	Zoning Codes	Building Acquisition	Site Conditions
Negative Perceptions	Time & Money	Costly/Unsustainable	Exclusive Field

Table 1: Case Study Matrix with Selected Characteristics.

Although their experiences and concerns with preservation vary, each case study cited some type of logistical challenge regarding preservation projects and similar sentiments regarding a lack of “shared interest and knowledge of historic preservation” by and for their constituents (Meyer 2016). This could be attributed to their location more than anything else. When it comes to preservation, there is a perception of ignorance and disregard of local communities in low-income, underrepresented neighborhoods (Okleson 2016). For the Port Towns CDC, this is reflected by a lack of preservation opportunities in their communities, while neighboring communities like “nearby Hyattsville” have similar historic properties but “plenty of preservation interest and organizations” (Meyer 2016). The Greenbelt CDC has also experienced a disconnect between their historic district and the low income families that live there. This is why they “spent their first few years educating residents and local organizations” about the importance of preservation to their shared

community identity and future community development (Simon 2016). NDC also has had difficulty promoting preservation to their majority African American communities when “so much of what is preserved is from white history” (Okleson 2016).

A preservation field that seemingly ignores such a large portion of its constituents, particularly at the local level, is problematic for fostering interdisciplinary partnerships with organizations that fight to “serve older, lower-income communities [with an] inclusive community driven process” (<http://ndc-md.org/>). Historic sites in areas like Prince George’s County, which is often viewed as glorifying architecture and the wealthy elite, may not be outwardly malevolent or harmful toward their surrounding communities, but they may conjure up painful reminders for their majority African American neighbors, and confirm that their histories have been white washed or forgotten and their current needs remain unmet. These perceptions, possibly more so than logistical challenges, could help explain why some local community organizations, particularly CDCs in low income areas, avoid preservation language and shy away from preservation projects (Okleson 2016).

## Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

The NTHP study creates the foundation for this paper, by investigating planning and preservation partnerships and providing justification for targeting CDCs as potential preservation partners, given their site specific community development work and large presence across the country. After identifying 140 CDCs that are already participating in preservation work and collecting data from 47 CDCs about their different community initiatives, budgets, funding, and other day to day operations, the study asked critical questions about the nature of CDC partnerships with preservation. The NTHP study provided three key insights moving forward: that CDCs exist in great numbers across the country, that they are already engaging in preservation projects like adaptive reuse, and that they have challenges and concerns that limit their involvement with preservation organizations (Gunther and Cowan 2015).

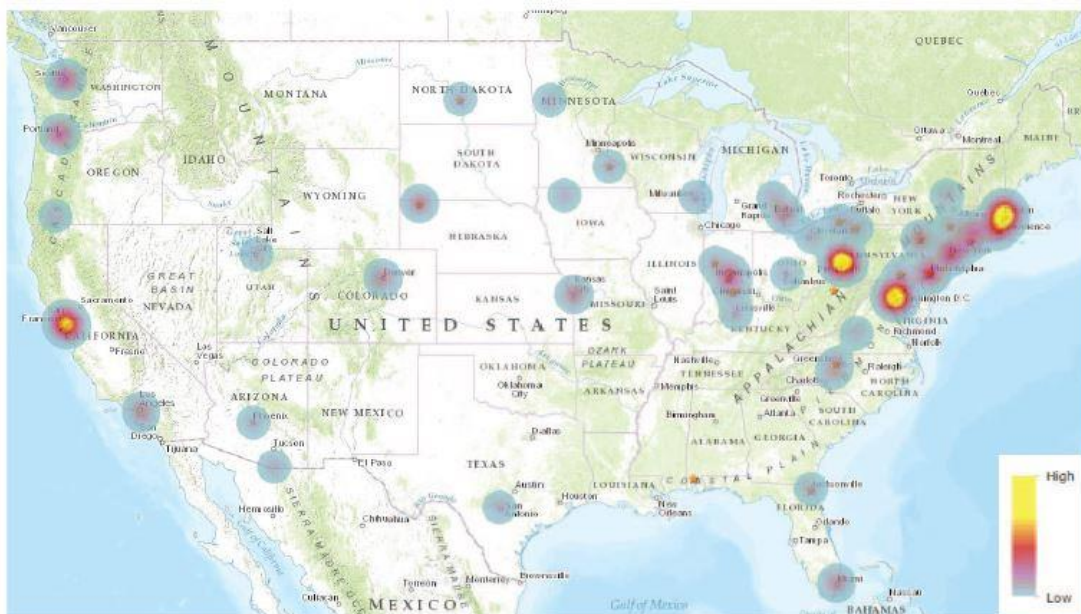


Figure 4: Concentration of CDCs Currently Rehabilitating Historic Buildings.



While the NTHP study provides preservationists with a preliminary assessment of the role of CDCs, the study is still limited in its investigation of CDCs that are not carrying out preservation projects and their reasons for not partnering with preservation organizations. With 4,600 CDCs operating across the country and only 140 identified for their preservation work, the majority of these organizations remain a largely untapped resource for potential partnerships.

The goal of this project has been to build on the NTHP study using three additional case studies, to better understand the challenges and concerns that have kept CDCs from partnering with preservation organizations. According to the survey respondents and additional case study interviews there are a number of specific reasons why some CDCs are not partnering with preservation organizations that go beyond the choices available in the survey. Across the range of reasons provided, the following appear to be the most common deterrents: 1) logistical issues with sites that make it difficult to implement handicap accessibility, fire protection systems, and sustainable practices; 2) lack of opportunity to participate in preservation projects due to limited funds for rehabilitation particularly for smaller projects, access to preservation organizations or resources, or knowledge of preservation process; and 3) lack of incentive to partner with preservation organizations because of a range of negative perceptions. These challenges and concerns boil down to two main issues, logistical concerns about the preservation process and negative perceptions of preservation.

While the evidence from the NTHP study and the additional case studies show that partnerships currently exist between community development and preservation

agencies, logistical concerns can lead to negative perceptions that create barriers against strengthening and creating new partnerships. CDCs currently play a supporting role in preservation, but with the appropriate resources these organizations could take on a larger role and apply their knowledge of the local community and experience with grassroots initiatives to preservation projects that can in turn help strengthen their local community's sense of identity and place. If CDCs were better equipped with the knowledge and training, as well as the resources and strategies, necessary to overcome some of their challenges and concerns that prevent them from expanding their services, they could make a significant impact on local preservation efforts.

Unfortunately, the NTHP study and case studies have shown that these organizations are understaffed and overworked. When new opportunities are presented, these organizations simply “do not have time to take advantage of the resources” (Meyer 2016). Umbrella organizations like the NTHP and ACD should take a more hands on role in providing training options and resources for the leaders of these organizations (Marcavitch 2016). Some resources that could be provided to help address their logistical concerns, include: 1) lists of regional consultants that can address site issues, 2) suggestions for working with historic and hazardous materials, and 3) guidelines for grant writing, tax credits, and permitting process. The National Park Service's *Rehabilitation Standards and Guidelines* provide crucial advice and are easily accessible online. These address many of the challenges cited by CDC staff, including: historic materials, handicap accessibility, sustainable upgrades, and design guidelines for rehabilitation (National Park Service 2016).

Some of the deterrents that respondents cited go beyond logistical concerns, however, registering a bias against preservation that may be causing CDCs to disassociate from preservation organizations for fear of jeopardizing the rapport they have built with their local communities. This includes either linking their work to preservation through partnerships or even simply in name. There is a sense that “[CDCs] are doing preservation, even though few of them would say that” (Adams 2016). Funding or lengthy process aside, there is a notion that preservation will be seen by clients as out of step with their grassroots initiatives and the real needs of the community, because preservation is exclusive and out of touch with community needs. Other respondents labeled preservation as arbitrary, risky for redevelopment projects, more restrictive, more expensive, and a hindrance to creative design (Gunther and Cowan 2015).

While the market may have led planners and developers to tap into the rehabilitation of historic properties, they have not exactly taken up the cause of preservation. There is still a perception that economic development and historic preservation are in opposition of one another (Marcavitch 2016). Non-preservationists perceive preservation as stagnant and unchanging, rather than the “evolving” field that preservationists perceive (Stipe 2003, 1). Despite their aligning missions, unaddressed negative perceptions will continue to hinder potential partnerships between CDCs and preservation. After all “a house divided, even if only in perception, cannot stand” (Gunther and Cowan 2015, 3).

Beyond addressing their logistical concerns, the key element in strengthening partnerships between CDCs and preservation organizations comes down to

identifying and combating negative perceptions through education and outreach. Not all CDCs and their local communities, particularly in underrepresented, low-income areas, have seen the expanding scope that has swept the professional and academic realms of historic preservation. Despite recent efforts to tell new, diverse stories and reinterpret historic sites in a more inclusive manner, many local communities have little experience with preservation. What contact they have had is likely limited to guidelines that are perceived to make necessary home improvements too costly to manage and house museums that at best do not reflect their community history and at worst are dedicated to white slave owners and portray African American history as one of bleak servitude.

One correspondent, who has worked with NDC and has both preservation and architecture experience from working with nonprofits in DC, shared their frustrations with the way colleagues and clients from different disciplines perceive preservation. "If you're a preservation 'insider', everyone talks about all the things that preservation has become or what we would like it to become, but if you're not on the inside there is still a strong sense that it is all about rich old white guys...The question is whose history is it that we're preserving?" Having worked for the NTHP in DC for a number of years, the interviewee recently switched to nonprofit advocacy through design work, and is now employed by the Washington Architectural Foundation (WAF) in DC. Their time at the Trust and WAF has allowed them to bridge the widening gap between preservation, planning, and design. Their insight into the perceptions across these fields helps make sense of CDC resistance to preservation partnerships. This notion of "insider versus outsider" affects the way that preservation

is perceived by a very interdisciplinary professional and academic environment. "There is also the issue of lots of nonprofits whose mission is something other than preservation, perceiving that preservation is more expensive and about saving frivolous things. It is complicated figuring out how to change that perception in the face of diverse missions and limited resources" (Adams 2016).

These comments may seem discouraging, but by collaborating more closely with our interdisciplinary partners, particularly CDCs, preservationists may be able to overcome these negative perceptions by taking a different approach. The NTHP has taken an important step towards strengthening partnerships between planning and preservation by reaching out to CDCs with its survey and using their findings to raise awareness with its study. To address these negative perceptions moving forward, the first step should be building partnerships with umbrella organizations from the planning field. However, because the nature of this issue is place-based, with policies that vary by state and region, these should be state or regional organizations.

Organizations like the NTHP and ACD, in partnership with SHPOs and regional planning agencies, can better equip their affiliated organizations to combat negative perceptions by holding joint conferences that help eliminate barriers and build collaborations at an organizational level. This type of joint conference can also address the challenges and concerns uncovered through recent research by promoting interdisciplinary training sessions for individuals and organizations that are only trained as planners or preservationists, and sharing current issues facing community planners and historic preservationists as well as insider tips and tricks of the trade. Joint conference sessions could better equip local planners and preservationists to

serve their communities by creating a platform for an innovative, multi-disciplinary planner/preservationist professional.

Meetings like the annual National Trust for Historic Preservation Conference and the Association for Community Design Conference already provide a platform for sharing new ideas in their fields while bridging gaps between academics and professionals. This type of educational awareness must not be limited to separate conferences, but instead should be promoted as educational exchanges at interdisciplinary gatherings. This would provide each umbrella organization the opportunity to represent their respective fields and highlight similarities to promote more interdisciplinary cooperation. Sessions could focus on quick tips and tool kits that could give organizations in related fields an opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns. Ultimately, these joint sessions could provide more platforms for promoting informed and systematic ways to combat negative perceptions about preservation, educate CDCs about potential benefits of providing preservation services, and encourage the strengthening of partnerships that are critical for local preservation and planning efforts.

Joint conferences are a logical next step for disciplines that have such a clear connection in missions, projects, and communities, but even with joint conferences, the specialization of planning and preservation as distinct disciplines fosters discontinuity from the community's perspective. Planning and preservation, particularly at the local level, are more related by their communities than they are divided by their disciplines. In order to move forward these organizations must make an effort to limit their distinctions. CDCs and preservation organizations that work in

low-income neighborhoods share similar goals and objectives. If their communities begin to see these groups as interchangeable then there is more potential for sharing resources, funding, services, volunteers, etc. Therefore, the second step should be a campaign to encourage CDCs to include preservation in the language of their mission statements, and preservation organizations to include community development in their own language as well. This initiative could be promoted at joint conferences as an act of solidarity and interdisciplinary collaboration.

While each community will have its own set of unique challenges and opportunities, these types of top-down strategies implemented by umbrella organizations can be applied at the regional level with adjustments on a case by case basis. The third step should be a simultaneous bottom-up approach that considers the lessons learned from CDCs that are already engaged in local preservation. There are some things CDCs are already doing that preservationists need only tap into. Each case study provides an example of other roles for CDCs to play that could make a large contribution to local preservation efforts.

One of the challenges echoed across the NTHP study respondents and the additional case studies was a scarcity of historic materials. With limited resources and a strong commitment to sustainability, the Port Towns have found ways to address this issue. While the Port Towns CDC has not partnered with preservation organizations specifically, their partnership with Community Forklift, to “salvage historic materials” when they cannot save a history property, has tangible preservation benefits (Meyer 2016) (Figure 5).



Figure 5: A Selection of Historic Windows Salvaged by Community Forklift.

One of the more difficult challenges that impede potential planning and preservation partnerships is negative perceptions. CDCs that work in historic communities have an opportunity to combat these perceptions simply by prioritizing preservation alongside other community issues. The Greenbelt CDC was created as an “umbrella group...that would see the community as one moving forward” and would address “any and all” community interests. Because of their strong ties to historic Greenbelt, the community saw to it that preservation was built into their mission and the CDC has spent their first few years simply educating the public about the importance of preservation and planning (Simon 2016) (Figure 6).





Figure 6: Community Engagement and Education Led by Greenbelt CDC.

Another challenge has been a lack of capacity at the local level, something that preservation, planning, and other nonprofits face. Though not explicitly mentioned in the NTHP study, many of the issues that were highlighted, such as limited time and money, really boil down to a lack of capacity. Ironically, CDCs primarily work to build capacity in underserved, urban areas. In response to the need in their community, their mission of creating community-led initiatives, and their lack of capacity, NDC takes a different approach than most CDCs. Instead of fully taking on community projects, they help community members build necessary partnerships and consult on projects in a design role (Figure 7). In communities that lack support from nearby preservation organizations, this is the type of consultation that is needed for the smaller preservation projects like private home rehabilitations and small business façade restorations.



Figure 7: Design Workshop Led by the Neighborhood Design Center.

When resources are limited and communities are in need, planning and preservation partnerships at the local level should be prioritized. CDCs and other community development organizations present an opportunity for creating and strengthening such partnerships. They are established organizations, they exist in great numbers, and with a bit of creativity their services can easily be applied to preservation. We should fight the hesitancy to merge planning and preservation efforts. They are not contradictory but complimentary; simply different steps towards the same goal for revitalization.

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