# Progressive Nostalgia in Housing Design:

# The Porosity & Potential of Adaptive Reuse

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**Abstract**

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Through a literature review and review of ten local case studies, this thesis explores nostalgia in the built environment as a tool for overcoming resistance to change, particularly in regard to how adaptive reuse projects can aid in overcoming public opposition to increased housing density. This research was inspired by the critiques of nostalgia and the staunchness of the criteria required for historic landmark designation, the more flexible idea of porosity in adaptive reuse, and the vital relationship between democracy and housing. In pursuit of innovative housing options, I argue that a reframe of nostalgia and a new set of future-oriented criteria and priorities for adaptive reuse housing projects could help advance progressive housing goals like achieving greater housing density, offering more diverse unit types, retaining architectural distinctiveness, and promoting democracy in housing choice and affordability. The variety of Seattle adaptive reuse case studies provide hopeful examples to answer the most simplistic version of my research question: how do we promote new ideas about housing in old buildings?

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## INTRODUCTION

### Context & Objectives

As the nationwide housing crisis intensifies, cities across the United States experiencing rapid population growth and housing costs escalations, like Seattle, are considering and implementing strategies that expand housing supply, including zoning revisions that would allow for greater housing density. My academic, professional, and extracurricular pursuits have coalesced around the dichotomous arguments that frequently surface in conversations advancing progressive housing goals. Whether it be a matter of environmental concerns, infrastructure limitations, or preserving neighborhood character, opponents to expanding housing density frequently structure their opposing arguments around causes they present as being mutually exclusive. In particular, I am fascinated by the conflict between housing and historic preservation, two realms of the built environment that are often pitted against each other. In reality, there is an abundance of overlap, ample potential for achieving common goals, and an array of positive examples of synergy between these fields that can help erode the false binary that has been created and instead view these approaches on a spectrum, focusing on what is possible in the middle ground. Here, in the opportunity presented by adaptive reuse, there is room for a blending of old and new (a concept introduced later as “porosity”), a reverence for the lessons of the past that fosters hope for a better future, and communal touchstones and gathering places to connect over shared stories and a sense of nostalgia focused not only on looking backward, but also ahead. To quote Jane Jacob’s famous observation that “new ideas must use old buildings” (Jacobs, 1961), by reimagining familiar spaces through the lens of new goals, adaptive reuse can help mitigate resistance to change: new models of housing can be built within old walls, and provide skeptics with positive examples of how new housing supply can not only integrate well into existing neighborhoods, but also offer additional benefits.

**Figure 1.1:** A spectrum of concepts in the built environment with associated feelings & psychological experiences.

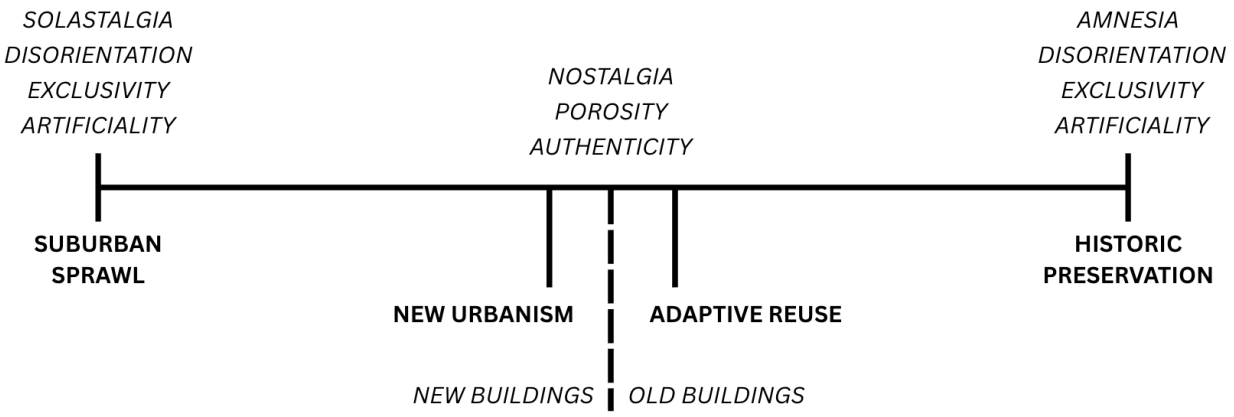



*Diagram courtesy of author*

## Literature Review & Methodology Outline

Beyond simply fulfilling the need for more housing supply, my research and experience working in and advocating for change in the housing sector revealed a need for expanded housing options that increase density while providing more diverse choices to fit more lifestyles, preferences, and budgets while still preserving distinctive neighborhood character and aesthetic appeal. I believed nostalgia was the common thread to illustrate how housing and preservation goals are united through case studies that illustrate density, diversity, and distinctiveness, and thus, my research began with an exploration of nostalgia: how it is defined broadly, and how it is viewed in the context of design. Nostalgia is often derided in the built environment, but I had a hunch that a reframe of a concept that is so universally emotionally resonant could be a key to reframing how we think of housing more broadly. This belief is one of the core tenets of New Urbanism, where we typically see nostalgia used as a design and marketing tool to create communities that can at once feel familiar and timeless, but also artificial, desynchronous, and often devoid of a true sense of community. The latter came up as a recurring theme in my research that I followed as a thread: if New Urbanist neighborhoods take density and design cues from nostalgic ideas of neighborhoods of the past, could nostalgia also play a role in building genuine community, too?

From here, I delved into the principles of both place attachment – a successful and community-driven application of nostalgia – and the idea of placelessness and

alienation – a limitation of nostalgia when it prioritizes authenticity and exclusion over adaptability and inclusion, another spectrum. This avenue led me to the position that adaptive reuse harnesses the best of nostalgia's galvanizing power while also creating spaces that promote democracy, not only through the democratic process of collectively creating such spaces, but how they can continuously adapt to changing community needs into the future. Inspired by this idea, plus the growing polarization of our country and my involvement in the heated debate actively taking place around Seattle's Comprehensive Plan, I added democracy as a fourth potential benefit of new housing models. My research continued into how nostalgia can both help and harm the push for housing density, emphasizing how nostalgic adaptive reuse projects can serve as a catalyst for future developments by advancing the adoption curve for novel forms of housing. My essential argument is that adaptive reuse housing developments make changes to the built environment more palatable when cloaked in the familiarity of nostalgia, and thus can compound the potential for further momentum towards ever expanding housing choice.

**Case Studies & Scope**

To illustrate this argument, I offer ten local case studies of adaptive reuse housing developments in Seattle that feature nostalgic elements while embodying and promoting the key attributes of housing density, diversity, distinctiveness, and democracy. I examined the Queen Anne High School, the West Queen Anne Elementary School, the Urban League Village at the Colman School, the Sanctuary, the Old Rainier Brewery, the Leamington Hotel, the Louisa Hotel, Firehouse No. 25, the Queen Anne Exchange, and (the proposed conversion of) the Mutual Life Building, highlighting each case study for one of the four attributes – though many display multiple attributes. Beyond density, diversity, distinctiveness, and democracy, it's well known within the built environment profession that adaptive reuse offers substantial admirable sustainability benefits. Much has been studied to this effect, and the environmental component is outside the scope of this review. Likewise, case studies profiled will primarily focus on the physical spaces more so than the residents who call them home, as a full demographic study (while a valuable pursuit for future research) also falls outside this scope.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### What is Nostalgia?

The term “nostalgia” was first introduced by Johannes Hofer in his 1688 *Medical Dissertation on Nostalgia* as a disease, though the concept has been alluded to in written records dating back far longer to Ancient Rome (Dickinson & Erben, 2006; Starobinski 1966). From the Latin “nostos”, meaning home, and “algos”, meaning longing, came “melancholia” brought on by prolonged and severe homesickness (Casey, 2000). Symptoms of nostalgia could be physical or psychological, breaking down the sufferer’s ability to differentiate from the past and engage with the present (Boym, 2001). Later, nostalgia would take on a less literal interpretation, and instead come to be known as a sentimental longing for some period in the past – a phenomenon that has been the subject of studies intersecting with a variety of other disciplines. For example, in consumer research studies, Holbrook (1993, 1996) examined the link between nostalgia and age, and posits that while some people are more prone to nostalgia than others, people most generally express preferences towards people, places, or things that were common during their teenage years and their early twenties.

**Figure 2.1:** Holbrook’s consumer research studies focused on participants’s recall of and feelings for movies released during various decades of their lives.


*All images courtesy of Allposters.com*

In their dissertation on the role of nostalgia in product and industrial design, Xue (2017, p. 17) describes nostalgia as a "pervasive collective longing of a generational cohort for

a bygone recent past" that has become more pronounced lately given the accelerated rate of change in modern society. Beyond simply mimicking "retro visual styles" however, nostalgia as a design tool can aim to provoke "nostalgic experiences", particularly when applying concepts from psychology and consumer research. Xue examines the dichotomy of the design profession's view of nostalgia: on one hand, commercial success can be found by capitalizing on this "collective longing"; on the other, many in the profession view nostalgia with derision, condemning such sentimental, regressive tendencies for being antithetical to innovation and modernity. Xue highlights studies in the field of psychology that have drawn connections between nostalgia and wellbeing, highlighting its ability to elevate mood and self esteem, enhance social connection, and create meaning in one's life (Routledge, Arndt, Sedikides, & Wildschut, 2008; Routledge et al., 2011; Routledge, Wildschut, Sedikides, & Juhl, 2013; Routledge, Wildschut, Sedikides, Juhl, & Arndt, 2012; Sedikides, Wildschut, & Baden, 2004; Wildschut, Sedikides, Arndt, & Routledge, 2006). Moreover, nostalgia helps provide balance to members of a society after periods of upheaval and change (Davis, 1977, 1979). In light of this and in spite of the common critiques of nostalgia, Xue asserts that tapping into this longing may allow designers to harness positive social and market outcomes, and outlines three factors that influence whether the experience of nostalgia will be a positive or negative one:

- negative views of the present time in contrast with the past;
- ability to share the nostalgic memory and emotion with others;
- availability of mementos related to the nostalgic memory (Xue 2017).

Xue's three factors resurface throughout the following research into nostalgia's application in place attachment; it's evident that skilled place attachment practitioners consider such elements and work with communities to tactfully address them in adaptive reuse projects, emphasizing the positive and conscientiously addressing the negative. These factors, and particularly nostalgia's role in coping with change, primed me to think of nostalgia as a tool rather than a design or marketing gimmick, and inspired curiosity about the context behind the collective nostalgic memories and mementos I encountered in each of the case studies I examined.

**Nostalgia in the Built Environment**

In the built environment, nostalgia is no less fraught with nuance and contradictions. Historian and geographer David Lowenthal's extensive writings on heritage and nostalgia straddles this dichotomy well, viewing the craze for nostalgia that he observed in the 1980s for decades just past with humor and criticism while making poignant observations about nostalgia's emotional sway and its imprint on our physical landscapes. As a whole, he cautions against the tendency to let nostalgic notions distort an otherwise more accurate depiction of the past, noting that with the use of nostalgia as a design tool comes the potential to manipulate the vision of the past to suit biased narratives. However, he also acknowledges the importance of retaining mementos and souvenirs from the past to remind ourselves of "our enduring identity" (Lowenthal, 1985, p. 9) and societal continuity, a proclivity that has been observed across civilizations and epochs. His observation "we make our environment comfortable by incorporating or fabricating memorabilia, and we feel at home with new products when their camouflage evokes the old" (Lowenthal, 1985, p. 6) explicitly identifies what could equivocally be considered a critique of society's obsession with the past, or a hint at its latent potential to shape consumer preferences and make change more palatable. Where it may be blamed for detracting from innovative product design and distorting hindsight, it could likewise be harnessed for its ability to help ease consumers into familiarity with new ideas.

Today's disdain for and skepticism of nostalgia in the built environment echoes the tension Lowenthal illustrates, and speaks to the parallel conflict between innovation and preservation. The frequent critique of New Urbanist communities offers examples at a small scale: these housing developments that began to crop up in the 1980s often lean on nostalgic forms and marketing strategies that pitch the community-building features of the newly minted neighborhoods. This isn't entirely without merit: the front porch is perhaps the feature of a home that is most evocative of nostalgia. In 1998, Brown's study *Neighbors, Households, and Front Porches: New Urbanist Community Tool or Mere Nostalgia?* conducted surveys and interviews to document the role of the porch from the 1920s to present day, cataloging the myriad functions of this space that is so

loaded with meaning and symbolism. She also outlines potential reasons for the decline of the porch in newer builds (prioritization of garages for cars, prevalence of air conditioning, more enticing entertainment elsewhere, etc) despite being anecdotally known as a tool for community building. These detailed studies aim to back those anecdotes with data, and they do: across all generations and time periods, people report fond memories of porch life, notably due to the casual and unplanned interactions with others that often take place there. The argument is made that rather than the porch being a transition between private and public space as it is often described, it may be more accurate to say it represents a middle ground that provides an ideal balance of solitude and socialization and a degree of flexibility, ambiguity, and porosity that other spaces within one's home do not (Brown et al, 1998). This concept was recently given credence on the world stage at the 2025 Venice Architecture Biennale; the porch was featured as the prominent American contribution to architecture for its blurring of the line between private domain and public space and the implications of this porosity for a more inclusive and welcoming public realm (O'Sullivan, 2025).

**Figure 2.2:** The iconic front porch, a timeless example of nostalgia in housing design

*All images courtesy of author*

However, residents need to actually embrace the ambiguity of the space to reap its community building benefits. This crucial point is called into question in Winstanley's *Nostalgia, Community and New Housing Developments: A Critique of New Urbanism*

*Incorporating a New Zealand Perspective,* a critical look at New Urbanist communities in New Zealand and beyond. New residents of these communities were observed modifying their individual dwellings in pursuit of greater privacy and social distance from their neighbors, presumably antithetical to the vision being sold in the marketing approaches referencing promises of "community" (Winstanley et al, 2003). The same phenomenon has been observed in Seaside, Florida, the first New Urbanist community in the United States by the architects credited with popularizing the concept, Andrés Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk. Hired to evoke tranquil memories of a summer destination from their client's youth, the town's motto is "The New Town – The Old Ways" (Seaside, 2019).

**Figure 2.3:** Plans for Seaside, FL, the first New Urbanist community in the United States

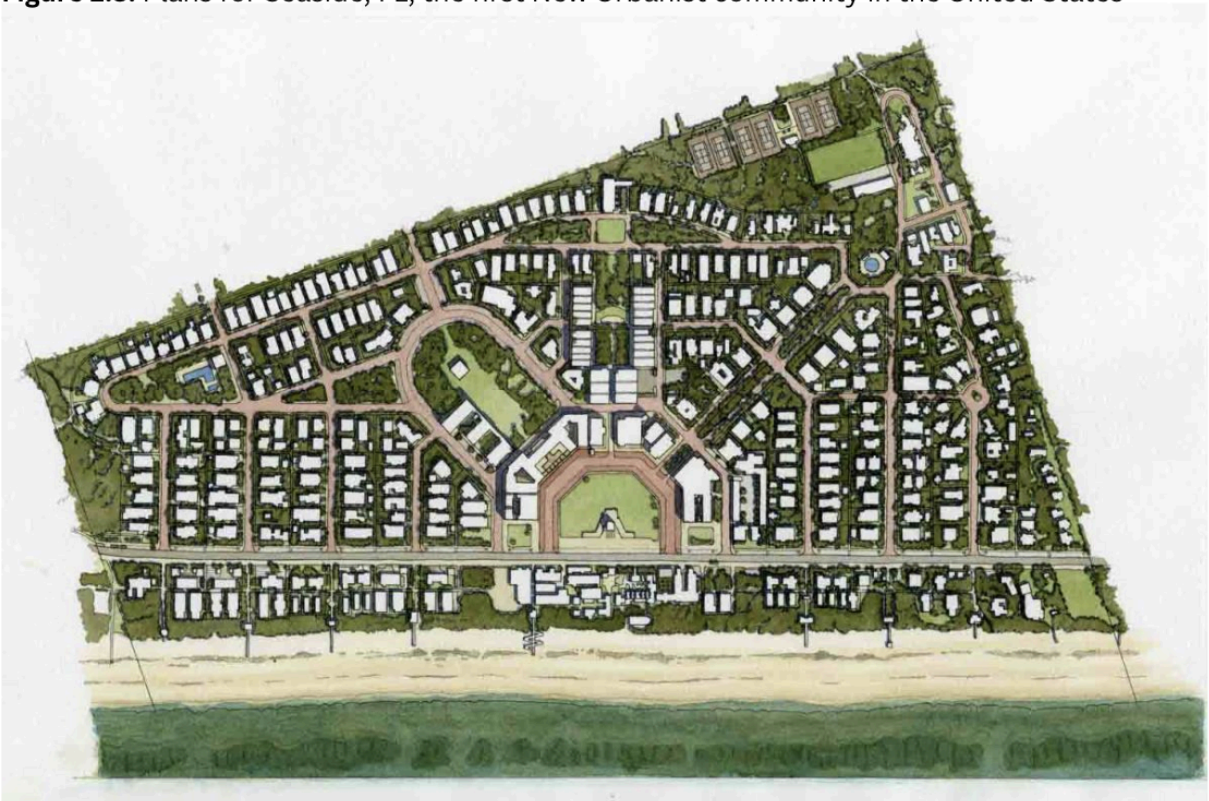


*Image courtesy of Congress for the New Urbanism*

The intention and appeal of Seaside is to blend memories of the past with idealism for the future to bring more meaning to residents' lives through encouraging meeting and interacting with one another (LaFrank, 1997). However, post occupancy observations of the town indicate that very few people use their front porch for casual socializing as was

the hope, and beyond that, Seaside as a whole functions not as a cohesive and holistic town, but as an upscale resort community that has become increasingly exclusive and inaccessible to all but the wealthiest owners of second homes. Tellingly, at the time LaFrank's critique was published in 1998, fifteen years after the town's development, Seaside's home values had increased by over 200%. This begs the question posed by LaFrank as to whether aesthetic choices alone can shape lifestyles in the absence of other more tangible community-building choices and experiences.

These shortfalls in the expectations versus reality of community building highlight the gaps inherent in such assertions, namely: how "community" is defined, and whether or not "community" is measured in any tangible way post-occupancy to ascertain the design's influence on social psychology. Put simply by Winstanley et al (2003), expanded opportunities to socialize do not directly equate to fostering a sense of community, and there has not been demographic data collected from residents to ascertain pertinent information about their lifestyles or their perceptions of what community means to them. The need to collect data from residents to fully understand the impact of site design on hypothesized psychological and social benefits to residents is nothing new: in Cooper Marcus and Sarkissian's 1988 groundbreaking *Housing as if People Mattered*, the authors provided extensive recommendations on how to achieve maximum results through site design of such communities to promote socialization, fondness, and nostalgia. The importance of gathering preliminary input, and then feedback, from inhabitants of the community is stressed, and a gap in research was revealed then and echoed in Winstanley's 2003 research on New Urbanist communities in New Zealand: post-occupancy evaluations are not being conducted on a wide-spread level, and when they are, the results are not influencing future developments.

A 2013 study by Jarvis and Bonnett titled *Progressive Nostalgia in Novel Living Arrangements: A Counterpoint to Neo-Traditional New Urbanism?* made some progress in closing that research gap. The authors interviewed residents in co-housing communities, New Urbanist planned developments, and "home zones" (another community-oriented housing model in Europe) around the world about what elements in these communities feel nostalgic to them. The authors acknowledge the tension

between innovation and traditionalism that nostalgia represents in the built environment, but distilling what they heard from residents introduces a much more nuanced understanding of nostalgia. Based on their interviews with residents, they propose reframing nostalgia not as “simply conservative and backward-looking” (Jarvis & Bonnett, 2013, p. 2350), but as a “hopeful, creative and transformative… force for change” (p. 2350), describing observing a dichotomy where alongside a "wistful image of a better past is an equally persistent vision of the necessary pursuit of a radically different alternative future" (p. 2364). In this future, they envision nostalgia playing a ”potentially inspirational role… in mediating alternative visions of home and community" (p. 2351) wherein embracing nostalgic elements of the past can contribute to a more open minded approach toward "novel living arrangements and…refiguring new forms of urban co-existence" (p. 2350).

I began my exploration of nostalgia in the built environment with New Urbanism to understand the critical perspective and distinguish between artificial and authentic experiences of nostalgia. With New Urbanism, new forms of housing at greater densities are introduced via neighborhoods that evoke nostalgic memories of scenes of early, small town Americana – new development takes cues from older forms to introduce communities that deviate from more contemporary suburban subdivisions, but still feel familiar. However, while these communities may look different, critics argue that without authenticity, these nostalgia elements do little to build a sense of community cohesion – though they possess latent potential to do so, as posited by Jarvis and Bonnett. Combining this idea with Jane Jacob’s old adage about new ideas and old buildings, I then pivoted to the other end of the spectrum, exploring more interactive and authentic applications of nostalgia that seek to transform existing spaces already imbued with meaning and community significance.

**Nostalgia vs Place Attachment**

When we see nostalgia being harnessed to inspire collaboration towards visions of the future, we are more likely to see it referenced as a facet of “place attachment”. Memory, nostalgia, and place attachment are frequent topics for scholars at the intersection of

the built environment and sociology, and while there is seemingly a universal and multicultural consensus about the importance of place attachments, the distinction between these terms, their use, and their connotations vary. In my research, I saw nostalgia used more frequently to discuss design techniques and marketing approaches related to the development of new places intended to recall old times, and place attachment and memory referenced in relation to assessments of existing places and efforts to preserve them. Mack and Crinson both examine nostalgic place attachments through the lens of existing social housing projects, dissecting the conflicting narratives of what makes a place valuable from the viewpoint of residents and external observers. While both authors make the argument that memory should be legitimized as a consideration of planning and criteria for preservation, Crinson's 2006 research into United Kingdom developments, titled *The Uses of Nostalgia: Stirling and Gowan's Preston Housing,* asserts that memory is held in higher regard "because it conjures up the metahistorical, offering resistance to both official history and modernist amnesia, while nostalgia is seen as lacking any galvanizing powers" (p. 233). In Mack's 2021 expose *Impossible Nostalgia: Green Affect in the Landscapes of the Swedish Million Programme* on the social housing developments in Sweden, she shares the work of a community organizer determined to galvanize such feelings through collaborative planning to improve the neighborhood with a focus on centering and sharing residents' stories.

Similarly, Hester's work with communities in the United States centered on residents' intuitive feelings about the places that were important to them, which he claims hold the greatest power to positively influence community design. Uncovering the inherent meanings and values ascribed to a place brings community members together, reminding them of what they have in common and their shared futures. This awakens deeper empathy, greater awareness of the environment and infrastructure they are both dependent on and stewards of, and how these shared bonds shape their collective lives and fates (Hester 2020).

**Figure 2.4:** Randolph T Hester was groundbreaking in his community-centered work in urban planning informed by place attachments; this is a map of “sacred places” made in collaboration with a community in North Carolina

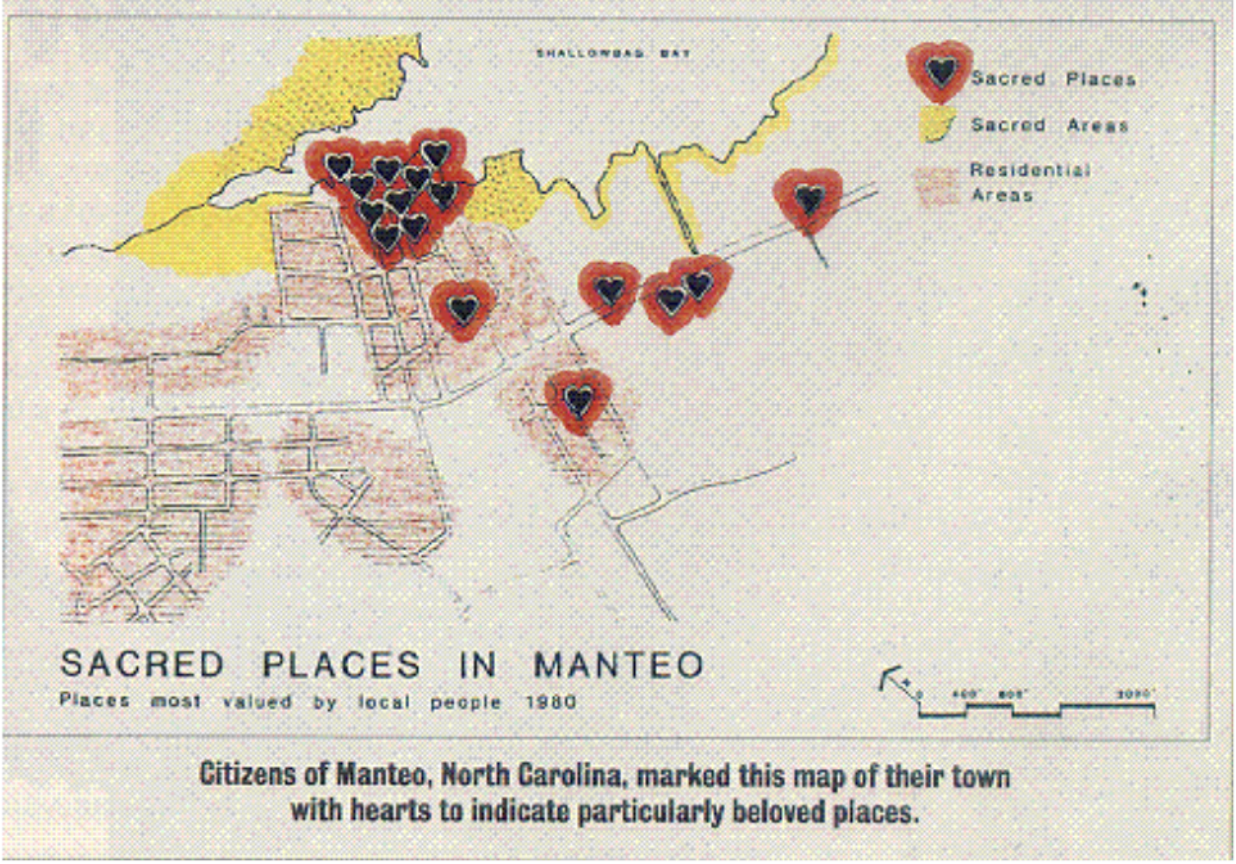



*Image courtesy of City Koh blog*

Alshamari's 2022 study in Iraq is built on this same principle of place attachment and focused on nostalgia’s role in community-centered urban planning. After studying the relationship between nostalgia, social connectedness, and optimism for the future, he interviewed older members of the community about their memories of once bustling hubs of local life that have since become underutilized or obsolete. Their responses informed three options as to how to approach these spaces:

- whether to retain former uses when memories associated with this time period are positive and stronger;
- adapt to a new use when associated negative memories are stronger (a callback to one of the factors Xue (2017) identified);
- or a combination that honors both past and future uses and emotional associations (Alshamari, 2022).

Within this flexible middle ground of emotionally and functionally responsive adaptive reuse lies the most promising opportunity to examine nostalgia's true potential to play an authentic role in shaping progressive places of our future.

**Adaptive Reuse**

The practice of preserving buildings and converting them to new uses has shaped our urban environments long before these fields came to be known respectively as historic preservation and adaptive reuse, but within the context of United States history, both official practices can be traced back to the 1960s. During this time, urban renewal sweeps demolished block after block of urban fabric in favor of building new, making room for highways and changing entire city layouts. Aside from the irreparable social consequences, these drastic aesthetic changes to cities, coupled with the energy crisis of the 1970s, prompted a desire to preserve historic building fabric in a more official capacity with both restrictions and incentives (Lanz & Pendlebury, 2022). The 1966 National Historic Preservation Act accomplished this by establishing a process by which buildings and entire neighborhoods could be designated as historic landmarks, protecting them under law from being demolished or substantially altered in a way that would negatively impact their historic integrity. The act established specific criteria a building must meet in order to be designated as a landmark, a process by which proposed changes to its structure could be approved, and an incentivization program by which historic building owners can be eligible for tax credits by restoring landmark properties – provided they adhere to specific considerations unique to each building, known formally as the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. A building need not be a historic landmark to be converted via adaptive reuse, but conversions of historic buildings that meet the standards are eligible for tax credits, which can help make such undertakings more financially viable.

Because buildings could be protected whilst still being altered to a degree, this opened up a debate into best practices of conservation – some preservationists believe in strict adherence to historic integrity, while some support a building's responsive adaptation to

changing community needs and priorities. The Secretary of the Interior's Standards reflect this with a spectrum of guidelines regarding new uses per each type of treatment:

- Preservation: "a property will be used as it was historically, or be given a new use that maximizes the retention of distinctive materials, features, spaces and spatial relationships. rehabilitation, restoration, and reconstruction";
- Rehabilitation: "a property will be used as it was historically or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces and spatial relationships";
- Restoration: "a property will be used as it was historically or be given a new use that interprets the property and its restoration period";
- Reconstruction would not be considered adaptive reuse as it entails recreating a building that no longer exists either in whole or in part (*Technical Preservation Standards, n.d.*).

The growing field of adaptive reuse emerged from the relative leniency each treatment allows for converting to new uses, but with this flexibility comes the critique that adaptive reuse projects sometimes avail themselves of historic tax credits without preserving much in the way of historic integrity. On the flip side of that critique is the argument that prioritizing the preservation of historic integrity above all else can de-prioritize the other vital benefits of adaptive reuse, namely the sustainability benefits or the ability to showcase different historical narratives over time (rather than adhering solely to one dominant period of significance). Proponents of adaptive reuse have argued that different criteria from preservation criteria should be applied to these projects to recognize the importance of preserving material from a sustainability perspective, even if the material itself doesn't meet integrity standards. Essentially, they caution against perfect adherence to preservation standards standing in the way of the progress that can be realized through more sustainable conversions of existing building stock that prioritize useful and cohesive continuity and evolution. Rather than just adding infill development behind an existing facade and no other tangible reminders of the building's history, adaptive reuse at its highest potential could "offer an alternative

vision of renewal, one that advances a more fluid – and less violent – means by which existing and new material interact to meet our needs" (Kessler, n.d., p. 511).

**Porosity & the Politics of Place**

To better understand the alternative, fluid vision of renewal that adaptive reuse presents, we return to the spectrum of nostalgia and innovation. At its most extreme, there are two different opposing psychological forces: amnesia, embodied in a physical sense by the ubiquitous and forgettable newness of suburban sprawl, and nostalgia, embodied in its most pure form by historic preservation. Present at either end of this spectrum is a disjointed relationship between identity, memory, and place. At one side, curating the built environment to reflect a contrived and specific moment in time past ignores the layers of history and overlapping identities of users over time, typically in favor of a selective and artificial narrative of white male privilege that glosses over human and ecological suffering at the expense of production and accomplishment. This is why critiques that nostalgia helps advance nationalist sentiments are not entirely unfounded. On the other hand, the severing of a totally neutral, wholly uniform place to any sense of the past creates a dystopian sense of alienation and impermanence, legitimizes withdrawal (Sennett, 1990), and limits our collective capacity for imagining a more vibrant, differentiated future. This gets to the heart of why Farrar emphasizes the importance of a third approach toward thinking about memory and place in her powerful piece *Amnesia, Nostalgia, and the Politics of Place Memory*. The placelessness created by sprawl contributes to disorientation and psychological distress, and the exclusivity of preservation can be revisionist and exclusionary; neither environment creates democratic and welcoming spaces where people feel a sense of shared place and time. Hayden (1997) called this concept "the power of place", and it's an essential element in inviting diverse groups to engage with a place or with each other. But what types of places foster this collective power?

**Figure 2.5:** Naples, a city Walter Benjamin described as “porous” in the 1920s for the layered, permeable quality that blurs the lines between old & new, public & private, interior & exterior and creates a vibrant social setting.

*Image courtesy of Mediapolis*

To answer that question, we break away from the unproductive binary of extremes but use the context of this spectrum to position a third, most democratic approach somewhere (intentionally) ambiguously in the middle: that of "porosity". Farrar (2011) describes porosity as an intermingling of old and new, public and private, interior and exterior, each seeping into each other without defined boundaries, and offers case studies of adaptively reused spaces as prime examples of porosity in the built environment. She came upon the term used by Walter Benjamin, a German philosopher and cultural critic, in his 1924 essay on Naples, Italy. As one (local to me) example, she offers the Crossroads Mall in Bellevue (among many other similar post-mall trajectories) as a case where an otherwise ubiquitous structure destined for obsolescence in the face of socioeconomic changes has been revitalized with community-centric spaces far beyond its original intended use. Another (local to her) example is that of Sylvan Island

Park in Moline, Illinois: a man-made island created in the 1870s to situate various industrial plants. After decades of neglect, a community group built up a park amongst (and out of) the industrial rubble, complete with trails and a visitor center.

**Figure 2.6:** BEFORE: Crossroads Mall pre-redevelopment


*Image courtesy of The Sledgehammer Wordpress blog*

**Figure 2.7:** AFTER: weekly Farmers' Markets in the parking lot


*Image courtesy of Crossroads Bellevue Facebook page*

**Figure 2.8:** BEFORE: Sylvan Island's industrial days


*Image courtesy of Retro Quad Cities Facebook page*

**Figure 2.9:** AFTER: well maintained trails through lush woods

*Image courtesy of QC Trails*

Because of the intentionally ambiguous nature of these spaces when created successfully, there is no single "one size fits all" approach to their design, but they must not be nostalgic only at face value in response to their transformation (Farrar 2011). In order to be truly democratic, they need not be inherently political, but they must be

textured and layered with tangible traces of collective memories that are unique to their site and its users. Not only do physical places serve as the basis for civic organization, but Farrar posits that place-embodied memories influence a society's capacity for social cohesion and political engagement. Their use must also prioritize serving the present-day community over serving economic development goals that primarily seek to either attract tourists (a valid critique of preservation) or future more affluent residents (an equally valid critique of sprawl), both of which can alienate community members from a place and its potential gatherings. Put simply: "placeless" places impede our ability to connect with our environment and one another, and thus weaken our shared sense of social obligation. As such, built environment professionals undeniably shape our future by creating spaces that either cultivate or diminish our connection to history and each other – but doing so responsibly and inclusively is why place making, and historic preservation especially, has complicated political implications. Who gets to decide what histories are worth preserving and what stories are worth telling? Who gets to shape our built environment, and who gets to live there?

As examined previously in the critique of New Urbanist communities, doubt is cast on these models being successful at truly bringing diverse communities together, most notably due to the financial barriers to the neighborhoods in question, presenting both a lack of income and life stage heterogeneity. This social homogeneity and exclusion, coupled with the social alienation and isolation of sprawl have made places inherently political, enhancing a sense of rugged individualism, scarcity, distrust, and defensiveness in lieu of collective trust and truly democratic action. Robert Putnman's pivotal 1995 essay *Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital* decried this shift in American society, hypothesized about the sociocultural frameworks that lead to weakened social ties, and laid the foundation for the "loneliness epidemic" under scrutiny today. One need only reflect on the extreme polarization of the political climate in the United States in 2025 to see the toll this renewed sense of xenophobia and nationalism has taken on our fractured democracy, but this has been observed in changing communities around the world, as well. In the Swedish housing developments at the heart of Mack's research on collaborative planning, she uncovered the darker side of nostalgia via the competing narratives about the value of these communities.

While residents fighting to preserve and restore their homes expressed nostalgia and fondness for these places, proponents of demolition were members of nationalist political groups who decried the developments for their lack of aesthetic appeal and their perception as hotbeds of social ills. The fact that the majority of the residents were foreign born is no coincidence: the pessimistic assumptions of life in this particular place reflect a nationalist viewpoint that there is little to no value here, and that demolition and rebuilding is needed to attract the “ideal” residents the opponents had envisioned deserving these subsidized housing opportunities (Mack, 2021). At the interpersonal level, the effects of social isolation may seem less insidious than such broad-strokes xenophobic scapegoating, but they are no less impactful to the wellbeing of our society and our collective political will to make decisions that benefit our community as a whole. At a more structural level, who gets to make these decisions introduces the idea that while housing is inherently political, the decision making process is fraught with power imbalances and not particularly democratic.

**Housing Density & Democracy**

Perhaps nowhere else is this issue so notoriously and contentiously on display in the built environment professions than in the opposition to increased housing density in residential neighborhoods. First, we must examine why housing density is important. A couple interrelated factors have combined to create the current housing affordability crisis that is broadly experienced across the United States, and most exacerbated for those making lower incomes in the highest priced urban markets. The first are the key economic drivers of price: supply and demand. Put simply, the demand for housing has outpaced the supply of housing. The number of households requiring housing has been on the rise due to changing demographic trends (both immigration and differing family formation patterns), and supply has not increased to match the rising demand. This has led to the second pair of factors: because housing demand has exceeded supply, housing prices have risen at all price points, and household incomes haven’t kept up. The typical metric used to compare a stable relationship between housing costs and income is 30% – if a household spends over 30% of their income on housing costs, they are considered to be housing cost burdened. If they spend over 50% of their income on

housing, they are considered extremely cost burdened. According to Harvard's annual State of the Nation's Housing report, as of 2024, one in four homeowner households and half of renter households are cost burdened (The State of the Nation's Housing, 2024).

Given that the root cause of these imbalances is supply and demand, and following the basic tenets of supply and demand's relationship to price, the most logical intervention to decrease price would be to increase housing supply. Adding to the existing housing stock can either happen via infill development that increases housing density in already developed urban centers, or via sprawl beyond urban centers that extend the boundaries of the developed area – there is division in which approach is best. Suburban sprawl has been the answer to overcrowded cities since the dawn of the automobile, but unchecked greenfield development has led to significant environmental consequences. Studies (Zwick, 2021; Thorne et al., 2017) show that adding infill density to existing urban areas creates a much smaller carbon footprint and is therefore the more environmentally responsible approach to accommodating growing populations. Beyond the environmental angle, studies have shown that higher density communities are better for residents' general wellbeing, too. In the 1988 groundbreaking *Housing as if People Mattered*, authors Cooper Marcus and Sarkissian argue that high-density, low-rise housing offers an ideal mix of psychological and environmental benefits to residents, and provide extensive recommendations on how to achieve maximum results through site design of such communities to promote socialization, positive interactions, and fondness for one another. A more recent 2023 study by Chen et al supported this, finding that (contrary to popular belief), when socioeconomic factors are adjusted for, the highest rates of depression are found in low density suburban sprawl environments, and the lowest rates in multifamily dwellings with access to open space.

Thus, the approach favored by a myriad of professions that study the interconnected nature of sociology, urban planning, economics, and the environment are generally in alignment that the best path forward is to increase housing supply in highly productive urban areas via zoning reform that allows building to higher densities in areas that have been constrained to low density, single family housing. In fact, studies show that if just

three of the most productive job markets (New York City, San Francisco, and San Jose) had enough housing to meet their demand, the country's gross domestic product could be 3.7% higher (Klurfield, 2024).

Recently, a promising movement towards exploring the potential of progressive zoning policies has gained traction – but this has come with skepticism and heated opposition, which is where democracy comes into play. While zoning reform centered around densifying historically single family neighborhoods is gaining momentum across US cities in recent years, the staunch defensiveness of opposing such notions is nothing new, and has been studied at length from various angles for decades. Perhaps the first critique of the motivations behind opposing increased neighborhood density was written in 1966 by Richard Babcock, a land use attorney from the mid-twentieth century. In a review of his piece *The Zoning Game: Municipal Practices and Policies,* Robert S. Hunt at the University of Washington's School of Law writes:

> Babcock's frankness is most pronounced when he tells about the way zoning is really used in the suburbs: as a protective device for exclusionary purposes. "The resident of suburbia is concerned not with what but with whom." These are "the whispered reasons" Babcock wrote about in another connection. He is not exaggerating, I suggest. My own experience has been that protestors against multiple family dwellings in suburban areas will do everything but come right out and say that "nice" people simply don't live in apartments. Most of the time the arguments are phrased in terms of increased costs of urban services and impact on the schools. But Babcock points out that at bottom it is a social judgment and not fear of overcrowding the schools that motivates the hostile housewife and her commuting husband at the zoning hearing. (Hunt, 1967)

To echo Hunt, my own experience aligns with his and Babcock's: this take on the public's response to multifamily dwellings in traditionally single family neighborhoods could just as well be written in 2025 as an observation of the public hearings for the Seattle Comprehensive Plan that proposes to eliminate single family zoning.

**Figure 2.10:** The author speaking at public hearings for the Seattle Comprehensive Plan, where on one occasion, about 49% of the 160+ public commenters were opposed to increased housing density for an array of various reasons.


*Images courtesy of Seattlechannel.org*

This dynamic has become familiar to the extent that the tongue in cheek term “NIMBY” – first coined by Bernard Friedan in 1979 (Glaeser & Gyourko, 2018) to describe “the hostile housewife” referenced above – has made its way to mainstream vernacular. NIMBY stands for “Not In My Back Yard” and is an apt way to describe the often contradictory attitudes of (typically) homeowners that frequently have at least surface level good intentions: they may support whatever new development is in question (in this case, housing) with the understanding that it will have a net positive impact on the community, but their support is outweighed by the fear of perceived negative, outsized impacts to them via immediate proximity in their neighborhood. As a result, the benefits that would especially enhance the lives of the community’s most vulnerable by allowing them to move into higher opportunity areas are frequently blocked by those that stand to gain the most from excluding them. To answer the previously asked question “who gets to shape our built environment, and who gets to live there?” Glaeser & Gyourko (2018) point out the conundrum at the heart of the matter: existing homeowners have an outsized influence on land use decisions, and exert this power to block new development; prospective residents who would avail themselves of new housing in these opportunity-rich areas but don’t yet live there are excluded from having a voice in these location-specific debates on expanding housing supply.

Perhaps the most valuable tactic to help communities move towards increased housing density is to critically examine the democratic process of determining local land use by empowering a more representative, diverse body of residents to be a part of these decisions while learning more about the choices that must be made. As it currently stands, public hearings on matters of land use are largely attended disproportionately by members of the community more inclined to represent NIMBY interests: older, more

affluent, white homeowners. Renters and would-be residents who are priced out of the area are underrepresented, despite the fact that they stand to gain the most from having their voices considered in the discourse around future-oriented land use decisions. Particularly when these decisions are made on a site-by-site basis, it's easier for immediately proximate residents to mobilize opposition. Thus, while the goal of these large public hearings is to lean into the democratic process, the lack of balanced representation results in a system that is far from being truly democratic. One of the most promising movements towards more representative, geographically broad decision making shifts the conversation from the individual project level to broader, city-wide zoning reform. Besides broadening the scale of decision making, another tactic seeks to narrow the scope of who is invited to the table through the strategic creation of "mini publics". While this may seem counterintuitive to the nature of democracy, hand selecting a group of people ensures an accurately representative proportionality to the larger population. This smaller group can then be aided by facilitators and subject matter experts to gain a balanced, nuanced understanding of the issue at hand, with opportunities for the broader public to observe the process. Initial trials of this method have resulted in higher quality, better informed discussions that de-center individual narratives and personal priorities in favor of more balanced debates that prioritize community goals and recognize the need for compromise (Hemingway & Pek, 2023).

**Figure 2.11:** Images of different density developments in other US cities were shown to survey respondents as part of a visual preference survey to assess feelings towards density and design.

*Images courtesy of Visualizing Density*

A growing number of studies (Fishel, 2001; Myers & Gearin, 2001; Gyourko & Molloy, 2015; Whittemore & BenDor, 2018; Lewis & Baldassare, 2010), have taken a closer

look at the motivations behind these so-called “democratic” interventions in housing density decisions, attempting to uncover what characteristics residents value in their communities and homes, demographic data about the residents themselves, and the nature of their concerns about density. Using visual examples of different housing densities, survey respondents were asked about preferences in their choice of housing and neighborhoods, and asked how they would weigh trade offs between features. While opposition to density is varied and complex, and these studies uncovered puzzling and insightful contradictions, a couple themes emerge. Most broadly, anti-density arguments are centered around fear that property values will decline as a result of any of the following reasons: concerns about specific externalities like increased pollution or traffic; the limitation of existing infrastructure to meet increased demand; skepticism that new supply will actually impact affordability (Been et al, 2024); “the whispered reasons” as alluded to by Babcock, which are racially motivated prejudices masquerading as other concerns; or concerns about detrimental impacts to existing neighborhood character (Whittemore & BenDor, 2018). The latter is where nostalgia comes into play, for worse – as we often see on display in NIMBY rhetoric about loss of neighborhood character – or for better – as I would argue is possible with a more progressive, productive approach towards the galvanizing power of nostalgia in housing design and decision making.

**Housing Diversity & Distinctiveness**

If taken at face value, concerns about the loss of neighborhood character are not entirely unfounded. Beyond the more intangible benefits of an aesthetically pleasing built environment, places marked by distinct and varied architecture are often bastions of economic vitality, typically highly desirable both as neighborhoods to reside in or lively shopping districts that attract tourists and foster a variety of commercial tenants. To quote David Lowenthal: “if the past is a foreign country, nostalgia has made it the foreign country with the healthiest trade of all” (Lowenthal, 1985, p. 4). Economic data across the nation proves this. Historic preservation creates jobs through rehabilitation activities and tourism in historic districts; revitalizes downtowns of both big cities and smaller towns with pedestrian-scale, mixed use districts beloved by tourists and locals

alike; provides year round tourism; increases property values and resulting municipal tax revenues; provides reasonable rents in attractive, well-trafficked spaces for small businesses; and are home to the cultural and social hubs of most cities – among other myriad economic and community development benefits (*Twenty-four Reasons Historic Preservation is Good for Your Community*, 2020).

**Figure 2.12:** Historic Districts like Pioneer Square are frequently hubs of social & cultural activity, with economic benefits like tourism & community development.

*Image courtesy of author*

Similarly to maintaining diverse architectural character, offering a diverse mix of housing types is important as it expands the potential audience for a housing development and meets a wide range of demand and preferences. While examining resident diversity is outside of the scope of this exploration, the ability to accommodate a wide range of residents in a given area makes the community more resilient, fosters a healthy and diversified economy, and ensures equitable investment in and access to infrastructure. A greater range of housing types means a greater range of price points are

represented, catering to a greater range of residents – this is important at all points along the spectrum. Smaller units are typically more affordably priced, and the smallest and most affordable units are typically found in older buildings (*The YIMBY Movement: Historic Preservation's Response*, 2024). This logic applies to commercial spaces as well: the smaller storefronts common in historic buildings are typically some of the only options affordable to new business owners just finding their footing or those that have been deprived of the same economic opportunity, such as BIPOC and/or women owned businesses (*Twenty-four Reasons Historic Preservation is Good for Your Community*, 2020). On the other hand, a common issue in urban environments is that the majority of available units are studio or one bedrooms, with fewer options in the two bedroom and up range, making options suitable for families extremely scarce.

**Figure 2.13:** The consequences of a lack of housing diversity in Seattle: a city once known for its vibrant counterculture is now out of reach for budding artists and musicians (left); protesting public school closures due to low enrollment (right).


*Images courtesy of Sad Shop Co (left); The Urbanist (right).*

This recently came to a head in Seattle: dwindling enrollment in public schools in the city's most expensive neighborhoods where families with young cannot afford to live has led to school consolidations and closures (Cruickshank, 2025). Housing needs, preferences, and budgets change throughout our life stages, and having ample opportunities to move into different unit types within the same neighborhood helps ease

those transitions by keeping residents in their communities, preserving community ties and building resiliency. Particularly as the nuclear family has evolved into different forms and the nation's demographics shift generation by generation, we need innovative forms of housing to meet the evolving demand.

Innovation in housing typologies offers a unique opportunity for two novel ideas in housing to come together in the spirit of economic and community resiliency: new housing models in old buildings, to echo Jane Jacobs's famous phrase. One of the hot topics in today's built environment zeitgeist and the field of adaptive reuse specifically is the allure of office to residential conversion projects, and their potential to both revitalize downtowns in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and help alleviate the housing shortages that many US cities, Seattle prominently among them, face. In fact, in a 2024 study by the Urban Institute that ranked US cities by which would reap the greatest benefit from allowing office to residential conversions based on office vacancy rates and housing need, Seattle was rated second place in the nation, with the most to gain after only the Bay Area (González-Hermoso, 2024). Historically, antiquated and inflexible zoning regulations would generally have made any development other than commercial or retail use illegal, and the cumbersome change of use process would typically be enough to keep such conversion initiatives from gaining traction. However, given current real estate market conditions (a distressed office space market plus a housing market in crisis), many cities are looking for creative ways to resurrect the many vacant or under-utilized office buildings after a slow return from remote work. Seattle and other cities in similar positions are exploring allowances and incentives to make the regulatory part of the equation more streamlined given the other infrastructure obstacles inherent in changing use from office use with minimal plumbing and ventilation requirements to residential with more extensive code requirements.

The most cost effective and creative adaptation to this logistical puzzle requires us to view residential units in a new way – but one that would actually be a return to old ways. Single room occupancy hotels (SROs) or apartment hotels used to be very common throughout the United States, and especially in Seattle, until the mid 1900s when suburbanization and a growing middle class lured people with greater options financially

out of the city (Durning, 2024). Small units like a basic hotel room would provide just the bare minimum: basic furnishings, electricity, heat, a television and a phone, and shared bathrooms per floor – this last feature being the unique attribute that could circumvent the need for cost prohibitive expanded plumbing infrastructure in an office to residential conversion. These housing types – today, we might refer to them as micro housing, small efficiency dwelling units (SEDUs), or congregate housing – provided the most affordable of all affordable housing, and while they typically were temporary, transitional housing for people new to the area, between living situations, they also served the most vulnerable: seniors, or those on fixed incomes who otherwise would not be able to afford shelter. Due to a web of complicated reasons including social forces, zoning changes, and financial feasibility, this form of housing became essentially extinct, creating a void in the affordable housing market and contributing to our region's crisis of homelessness. However, renewed interest in these concepts – as we'll explore in the case studies that follow – may be indicative of a shift towards embracing innovative, diverse, nontraditional, community-oriented housing models that have long been more common in other parts of the world, particularly design-centric and communally-minded Scandinavia. To draw on the wisdom of David Lowenthal and Jane Jacobs, if these "new ideas" are "camouflaged" in "old buildings", this is a real opportunity for nostalgia to work hand in hand with innovation to advance the adoption curve for new forms of housing.

**How Nostalgia Can Harm**

Herein lies the irony of the nostalgia versus innovation argument: historic districts are often bastions of housing density, democracy, diversity, and distinctiveness (*The YIMBY Movement: Historic Preservation's Response*, 2024) – yet often historic preservation is used as an obstacle, rather than a catalyst to innovation, typically by non-experts in the field. But within this tension lies the proof that sentimental feelings towards old buildings that bestow character on their neighborhood can be galvanized into tangible community action. As with studies on motivating factors of NIMBYism and studies on the detrimental effects of suburban sprawl, much has been written about how historic preservation is often weaponized as a form of exclusionary zoning to block new

development (Kazam, 2017). Height, form, and massing restrictions, along with designating individual structures as historic landmarks or entire neighborhoods as historic districts all can serve to limit demolition and redevelopment. Blocking new supply of housing keeps density low and prices high, serving to both preserve existing property values and prevent residents of lower means from moving into the area – motivations of NIMBYism that can be neatly camouflaged by an intent to preserve neighborhood character. While there is ample evidence of preservation and housing at odds, I would argue that this narrative is yet another example of a false binary of extremes that can be avoided. In reality, when it comes to land use reform and creative approaches to housing density, we need not choose between adding housing supply and preserving old buildings. In fact, we need only look to the past to draw inspiration as to how to meld these two initiatives in creative ways that honor the character-rich fabric these historic buildings add to a neighborhood. For generations, people have been finding creative ways to repurpose buildings for new uses, housing being chief among them, to accommodate change.

Neither preventing change, nor limiting autonomy to dictate how that change might take place is a productive way to confront the reality that environmental change causes real distress in communities – and it's not just affluent white homeowners who are impacted. In her 2009 piece *Devastation but also Home: Place Attachment in Areas of Industrial Decline*, Mah shines a light on communities often overlooked in the typical conversations about the nuance of language and complexity involved with place attachments. Mah observed how nostalgia can represent an obstacle to change when socioeconomic factors like deindustrialization force evolutions in the built environment. The idea of nostalgia as a romanticized concept is critiqued for not encompassing a diverse picture of community, as it is often associated with homogenous groups in easily delineated geographical areas (Mah, 2009). Diverse, underprivileged communities that may lack officially recognized claims to the land they inhabit still experience nostalgia, place attachments, and negative consequences when those places change. One need only reflect on the experience of indigenous peoples in the US to understand the vast narratives that are excluded when only the nostalgic longings of affluent white homeowners are actionable. As another example, in her observations of patients in

psychiatric settings whose hospital environments had changed, Wood (2015) used the term “solastalgia” to describe the resulting psychological impact. Her work focused on discerning which facility design elements might influence the recollection of positive memories, and deprioritize negative associations. In particular, the findings emphasized layout features that contributed towards nostalgia for a sense of community. Her research also lends credence to the idea that memory is a collective experience which can be at once past, present, and future oriented (Blunt, 2003), and result in productive engagement with places and others (Bonnett & Alexander, 2012).

**How Nostalgia Can Help**

Herein lies the opportunity for planners and those tasked with the push to densify residential neighborhoods without facing opposition from existing residents: in getting residents to engage productively with places they feel emotionally attached to. Manzo and Perkins (2006) collected numerous case studies showcasing this power of communal action in their book *Place Attachment: Advances in Theory, Methods and Applications* where lessons from practitioners like Hester emphasize collective empowerment and cooperation to share histories, values, memories, and responsibilities in order to push for community improvement. Revisiting the spectrum of amnesia to nostalgia, we may find the antidote to isolation in these nostalgia-invoked common identities, shared fates, and collective stories. Stories have been recognized by many in the field as having power and potential to espouse “urgency; hope; anger; solidarity; and the belief that individuals, acting in concert, can make a difference…to stem the tides of apathy, alienation, cynicism, and defeatism” (Ganz, 2011, p. 288-289). Stories about shared places specifically can help communities feel empowered and build resilience, particularly through participatory processes to preserve collective place memories while promoting civic engagement and embracing diversity, equity, and inclusion (Avrami et al., 2018).

This approach to preservation and the motivations behind neighborhood groups coalescing to protect their interests highlights a different angle of the NIMBY narrative. In their piece *Reassessing NIMBY: The demographics, politics, and geography of*

*opposition to high-density residential infill,* Whittemore and BenDor (2018) point out that such collective and defensive action by residents can be a crucial form of activism and the sign of a healthy democratic society. Reactionary and conservative NIMBYism by affluent white homeowners focused on blocking density is one thing; environmental and social justice initiatives led by BIPOC groups standing up against inequitable concentrations of locally unwanted land uses with high externality costs in their communities is another. Put simply: it's not a bad thing for communities to come together around land use issues in their neighborhoods, but all narratives of the various storylines intertwined with any given place must be considered, and all voices must be amplified (going back to Mah's observation about how nostalgia is simply an ineffective, polarizing, and romanticized concept when it does not encompass a diverse picture of community). This is particularly important in the context of debating increased housing density, as marginalized communities are both the most likely to be supportive of the development of these new environments, the most likely to stand to benefit (Lewis & Baldassare, 2010), and the most likely to be left out of these decisions (Glaeser & Gyourko, 2018). de Benedictis-Kessner et al's 2023 examination of who gets to make housing policy decisions expands on this, offering evidence that it's often not enough to simply reside in a jurisdiction to participate in local democracy – status as a property owner with tenure in the community is a prioritized indicator of expertise, investment, and opinions worth being reflected in land use policy. This underscores the importance of creating more diverse and attainable housing opportunities for more potential residents to become invested and rooted in their communities, through secure tenure, ownership, and involvement in democratic debates on land use compromises.

**Adaptive Reuse & Progressive Housing Models**

In the housing versus preservation debate for example, there is plenty of room for compromise. Advocates of housing density who acknowledge the value of preserving the heritage of the built environment suggest the idea of localized, neighborhood-level "housing budgets" (Bertolet, 2017). Similarly to the structure of the housing preference studies that ask residents about trade offs they'd be willing to make in housing choices, a housing budget would stimulate healthy, democratic debate amongst residents of a

neighborhood to collectively take agency over land use decisions that directly impact them. If residents want to preserve a building that would otherwise be demolished to build a certain number of housing units, they need to allow that same number of units to be built elsewhere in the community – or better still, allow for adaptive reuse to retain the existing structure and convert it to housing. This would also serve to reframe the future of preservation in a growing, evolving city like Seattle: less rigidity, more hybridization of old and new, more "porosity" in the built environment fabric to create vibrant, architecturally diverse communities. Going back to the science of place attachment, studies show that retaining ties to the past and continuing to steward shared stories and legacies through environmental continuity fosters thriving communities. According to Cooper Marcus, a pioneer in the field of place attachment, finding solace, continuity, and connection to people, places, and memories from the past is an essential facet of coping with change whilst remaining emotionally resilient (Marcus, 1992).

**Figure 2.14:** The Highline & Chelsea Market in New York City's Chelsea neighborhood are exceptional examples of porosity: existing physical features reinvented, blending seamlessly with changes & additions that blur the line between old & new.

*Images courtesy of Journal/Brian Rose blog (left) & STUDIOS Architecture (right)*

Place attachment-sensitive, democratic community planning is becoming an increasingly common practice in other fields of the built environment. According to the authors of *Landscape Architecture as Democratic Practice: Learning from participatory methods and motivations in community-engaged design*, success in a truly democratic project with ongoing community involvement is measured not by the final product alone, but also by the process itself: the sharing of stories, responsibilities, and agency; the capacity building; the social capital and civic engagement – all of which help to combat isolation and alienation (Yang et al., 2024). Such processes also help residents bridge the gap in cognitive dissonance observed in the aforementioned housing density preference surveys: while people report favorable opinions of walkable communities sited to reduce their commute times and car dependency, they don't necessarily act accordingly when those developments are sited near them. The task before planners and advocates of increased housing density is to help Americans understand their impact as housing consumers and voters, and their impact to either enable or impede infill development that leads to the kind of compact, walkable, vibrant communities they report as preferable (Lewis & Baldassare, 2010)

**Figure 2.15:** Culdesac Tempe, a car-free take on New Urbanist communities that emphasizes distinctive design & promotes social interaction; positive reception has proven the demand for environments like this can be replicated.

*Image courtesy of Culdesac Tempe*

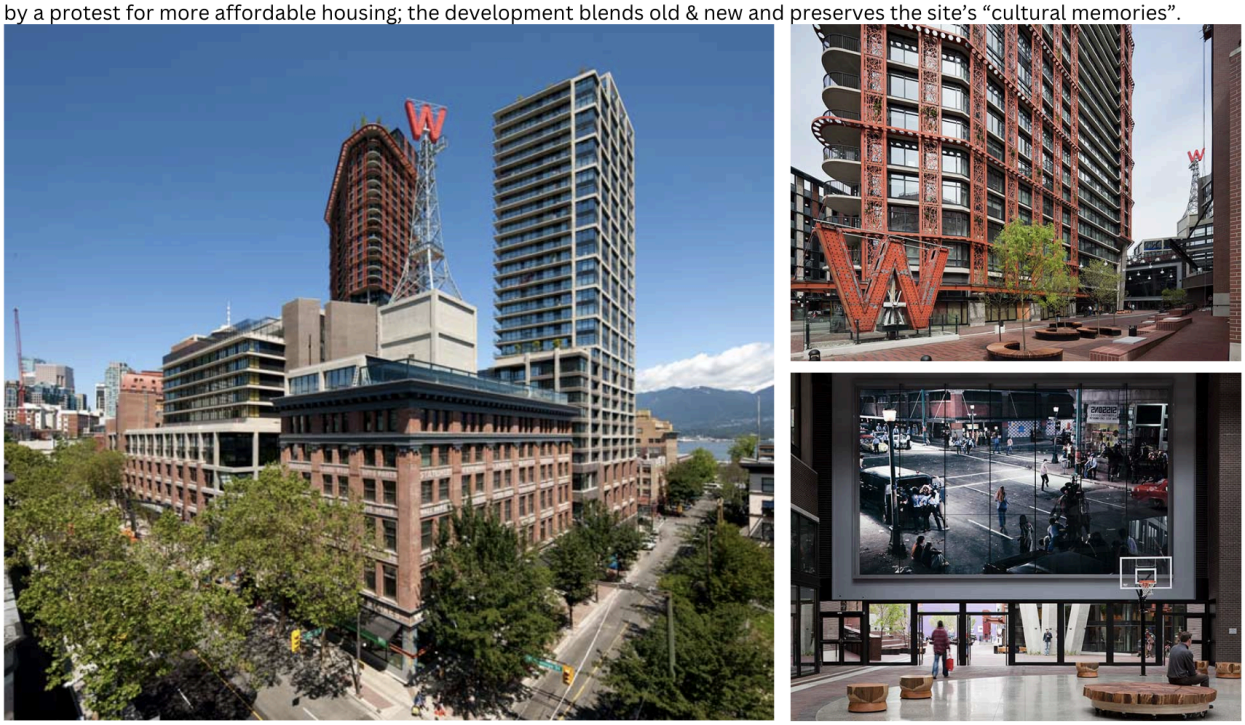
A key component of enabling new living environments is providing more evidence, education, and awareness of their existence. As suggested by housing preference survey data showing that higher levels of education are more likely to correspond to greater support of higher density housing developments, negative positions towards such development likely stem from resistance to change, prejudice, and a lack of familiarity with how density can look and feel outside of a traditional very high-density urban environment (Whittemore & BenDor, 2018). This suggests that part of the opposition to non-traditional, higher-density housing environments is the dearth of positive examples of models that successfully blend consumer preferences and straddle the line between density with a more residential feel that doesn't drastically contrast with the existing neighborhood, often referred to as "gentle density". In Myers' & Gearins' 2001 study, they discuss the effect of conflicting housing preferences in detail, emphasizing the need for nuance in housing choice that balances multifaceted preferences and falls between the two extremes of suburban low-density and urban high-density. Crucially, they hypothesize about the compounding impact this exposure (or lack thereof) has on supply of new, alternative housing models. They theorize that housing preferences, and the resulting supply of housing options that accommodate those preferences, follow an "S-shaped adoption curve" (Myers & Gearin, 2001, p. 633). Beginning with positive exposure to successful alternative, higher density housing environments, this leads to increased awareness and demand. Early adopters buy in, and the ripple effect of exposure and awareness then results in increased demand; success of a proven concept then results in increased supply. In 2001, they observed that preferences and demand for more walkable communities had outpaced supply, and that more people would choose to live in these environments should they be made available, and that if supply increased to accommodate this demand, demand would in turn continue to grow. In the absence of alternative housing environments, consumers' choice is constrained to what already exists, and developers build more of the same by default, leading to a perpetual cycle where supply is never interrogated because demand continues to remain strong (Myers & Gearin, 2001).

Here is where adaptive reuse comes into play as perhaps the most powerful tool for compromise and bridging the gap between nostalgia for the past and optimism for the

future. Adaptive reuse occupies a hallowed middle ground between housing development and preserving neighborhood character, imbuing it with potential to break through the psychological inertia of resistance to change. Converting an existing building into dwellings creates housing density and provides housing typology diversity without compromising neighborhood distinctiveness or losing beloved physical landmarks. Rather, building conversions breathe new life and relevance into old building fabric that gives the area identity, rooting people to their shared past while creating future-oriented opportunities for growth. Adapting an existing building to a new community-centered use integrates past and present communal identities, values, and stories – as embodied by the existing structure – with investment and new purpose into the future (Leonard, 2024). A focus on involving the residents as stakeholders in this transformation process is paramount to reap adaptive reuse's fullest potential as a participatory, neighborhood-wide catalyst for positive change and community building, from the concept's inception through final end use and programming. The concept and resulting use should reflect a sense of community-wide ownership and cultural evolution, and offer spaces to connect with each other and a shared heritage, while encouraging investment in local businesses and community events (*Adaptive Reuse: Bridging the Gap Between Historical Preservation and Modern Architectural Practices*, 2025)

Going back to the idea of porosity and the integration of tradition and innovation, this is an old solution to a modern problem – we've been creatively carving out homes and gathering spaces from old buildings for generations, but because these transitions are so often organic, gradual, and under the radar, they don't capture the type of attention that can galvanize a broader movement towards more untraditional housing options. Examples of non-traditional housing that add density and retain neighborhood character can produce a compounding effect, paving the way for less resistance to future housing while meeting unmet demand for those that want living situations that offer greater community ties and opportunities for more democratic living.

**Figure 2.16:** Woodward's is a mixed-use, urban redevelopment project in the Gastown neighborhood of Vancouver, BC spurred by a protest for more affordable housing; the development blends old & new and preserves the site's "cultural memories".



*Images courtesy of Paul Warchol & Bob Matheson*

One notable case study that exemplifies this is the success of the Woodward's development in Vancouver, BC that makes use of historic buildings and cultural mementos at the scale of entire city blocks. Seattle has smaller scale examples of adaptively reusing old buildings (whether designated as historic landmarks or not) into dwellings that deserve a spotlight for their incorporation of nostalgia to expand housing density, diversity, distinctiveness, and democracy – the four factors that I contend are critical to increase exposure to and demand for innovative, alternative housing typologies.

## METHODOLOGY

### Literature Review

My research began with a review of existing literature on nostalgia and its perception as a tool in the design fields, specifically in the built environment and housing design. I explored different attitudes towards nostalgia in design, with a particular interest in studies that sought to understand what feels nostalgic to consumers, what those

feelings evoke in them, and how a connection to the past can inspire action for the future. These studies and thought pieces, coupled with a morbid fascination in the ever-polarizing political climate of the US and the local debate about housing density, revealed a connection between nostalgia and political engagement that intrigued me. As nostalgia is typically denounced for its role in fostering nationalist views, I took an interest in evidence to the contrary and uncovered authors who viewed nostalgia as an integral aspect of place attachment and an antidote to the alienation that can come with sprawl and “placeless” suburban communities. The idea of various psychological experiences and attachments to places and housing along a spectrum became central to my thought process and research goals. Without leaning too heavily into the other extreme, historic preservation in its purest form, I sought out literature and case studies that explore the middle ground on that spectrum, where nostalgic place attachments are harnessed to create meaningful community bonds through sharing stories and maintaining a productive connection to the past.

**Case Studies & Themes**

Exploring this “middle ground”, porosity, and the blending of old and new intersects naturally with my interest in adaptive reuse housing developments, which I see as the ultimate evidence of successful compromise in the tension between preservation and increased housing density. Research into the opposition to housing density supported my belief that density alone is both a tough sell to existing communities and not enough to shape actually connected, resilient communities. Beyond just density and nostalgic design features like front porches, I was inspired by the gaps in research revealed by the shortcomings of New Urbanist developments in actually building and measuring community to explore what other ingredients are needed to really set new housing models apart. Inspired by the idea of porosity embodied by adaptive reuse projects, I considered what other elements make these dwellings so compelling and, in my eyes, an important piece of expanding housing choice. After researching different adaptive reuse housing case studies in the Seattle area, I kept returning to a few key themes: density, diversity of housing types (known as unit mix) that would appeal to a more varied range of residents, architectural distinctiveness that reinforces neighborhood

character rather than detracting from it, and elements that support and promote democratic function. I believe that emphasizing these factors not only helps increase positive awareness of and exposure to alternative housing models that break the mold, but also have potential to play a key role at the start of the “S-shaped adoption curve” to play a compounding role in expanding demand and increasing supply.

I used selective sampling to choose case studies that I felt employ nostalgia to a degree more authentic than simply a design or marketing gimmick – in most cases, actual relics of the building’s history are seamlessly integrated into the experience of the building in the present to create a sense of porosity, a blurring of the lines between new and old, and authentic historic integrity. In all but one case, the buildings are registered historic landmarks, so such retention of original elements is required in order to satisfy at least one of the National Register’s six criteria for historic integrity: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association (*How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation,* 1995). I used details from the official landmark designation documents to reference what incentives and controls were formally in place to specifically preserve these elements of historic integrity, and essentially layered my four themes – density, diversity, distinctiveness, and democracy – on case studies that I felt were superlative enough examples of historic integrity to evoke genuine feelings of nostalgia. Just as not all of the case studies meet each of the National Register’s criteria, not all case studies embody my four themes. However, together they illustrate a different standard that adaptive reuse housing conversions could be held to – perhaps another set of criteria for a conversion to be considered truly successful if the goal is to further housing choice and affordability.

While I tried to select a variety of different adaptive reuse projects with a diverse mix of original uses, researching potential case studies emphasized the reality that some pre-existing building types are just better suited for residential conversion than others – for example in Seattle, school and hotel conversions are far more common than office conversions. Had I expanded my case studies outside the Seattle area and included examples from the midwest and east coast, office conversions would have been better represented. I also tried to find a variety of housing product types, ensuring that units for

rent and units for sale are represented, along with other occupancy models like live/work spaces, low income housing, and co-housing. Finally, I tried to find case studies across a variety of Seattle neighborhoods, though this was a bit more challenging and as a result, only a handful of neighborhoods are represented with some redundancy.

**Figure 3.1:** A summary of the 10 case studies profiled, with a snapshot of their history, use, historic designation & how significantly they exemplify one of the four factors: density, diversity, distinctiveness & democracy (green indicates significant attributes featured through in depth case studies; yellow indicates attributes not extensively featured).

| BUILDING | NEIGHBORHOOD | YEAR BUILT | ORIGINAL USE | YEAR CONVERTED | CURRENT USE | HISTORIC DESIGNATION | DENSITY | DIVERSITY | DISTINCTIVENESS | DEMOCRACY |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Colman School** | Central District | 1909 | Primary School | 2003 | Low income rental housing | Seattle Criteria D & F | | | | |
| **Firehouse 25** | Capitol Hill | 1909 | Firehouse | 1980 | Condominiums | Seattle Criteria D & F | | | | |
| **Leamington Hotel** | Downtown | 1916 | Hotel | 1995 | Low income rental housing | National Criteria C & Seattle Criteria D | | | | |
| **Louisa Hotel** | Chinatown - International District | 1909 | Hotel | 2014 | Low income rental housing | Seattle Criteria D | | | | |
| **Mutual Life Building** | Pioneer Square | 1890 | Office | N/A | Co-housing & retail (proposed) | Contributing to Pioneer Square Historic District | | | | |
| **The Old Rainier Brewery** | SODO | 1878 | Brewery | 2008 | Mixed-use: artist live/work; studios; retail; commercial; storage | N/A | | | | |
| **Queen Anne Exchange** | Queen Anne | 1921 | Telephone Operator | 2015 | Apartments | Seattle Criteria D | | | | |
| **Queen Anne High School** | Queen Anne | 1909 | High School | 1985 | Condominiums | National Criteria C & Seattle Criteria D & F | | | | |
| **The Sanctuary** | Capitol Hill | 1906 | Church | 2009 | Condominiums | Seattle Criteria D & F | | | | |
| **West Queen Anne Elementary School** | Queen Anne | 1896 | Elementary School | 1984 | Condominiums | National Criteria C & Seattle Criteria D & F | | | | |

*Table courtesy of author*

## Field Observations

As a licensed real estate agent, I have access to the Northwest Multiple Listing Service with a full database of all published records of for sale (and some for rent) listings. This was immensely helpful in researching for sale properties from afar, as it gave me access to listing descriptions and photos of buildings and individual units beyond those actively listed for sale. This allowed me to not only compare all units within a given building to assess unit mix and diversity, but also provided a point of comparison for other units built around the same time period in order to reflect on how adaptive reuse housing types differ from newly built inventory. My profession also allows me access to tour actively listed units for sale, and thus I was able to tour several homes in the Queen

Anne High School, Queen Anne West Elementary School, Firehouse No. 25, as well as the buildings themselves. I took many pictures and made observations, particularly focusing on nostalgic mementos of the buildings' history and any common areas for potential resident gatherings and community building.

I also made an appointment to tour the Old Rainier Brewery to see the live/work spaces and overall building layout, as many different uses are housed in one iconic building I've long been curious about as I pass by. To my surprise, and immense gratitude, I was offered an extensive tour of the facility – beyond just a couple units available for lease, I got to explore the interstitial spaces of the 25 unique buildings that make up the complex, even going up to the roof overlooking I-5 under the iconic "R". My tour guide, an employee of the building tasked with various restoration projects and facility management, shared extensive history and insider knowledge on what it takes to maintain this uniquely Seattle space. I visited the Northwest African American museum that occupies the Colman School along with the Urban League Village, and while I wasn't able to see any of the residential areas associated with the latter, I gained a deeper understanding of the building's history and how residential use was established here as a result of community activism, as well as how the space continues to build community through events educational, celebratory, and everything in between. I also had the unique opportunity to climb the scaffolding on the Leamington Hotel up to the roof, learning about the facade repair work underway from the construction team tasked with the historic building's rehabilitation, though we weren't able to go inside.

I wasn't able to access The Sanctuary, the Louisa Hotel, or the Queen Anne Exchange, or Mutual Life Building, but visited all of them and conducted research online. I explored their histories and original uses, their conversions and any relevant public discourse surrounding community involvement or response, and their current uses, paying particular attention to nostalgic elements both physically displayed in the buildings themselves and used in their marketing. For the Mutual Life Building, I focused my exploration on the innovative proposal by Hybrid Architecture that reimagines the historic building as co-housing. This proposal won Seattle's Office of Planning & Community Development's 2023 Call for Ideas for Office to Residential Conversions,

and featured wonderfully inventive renderings and floor plans of what the building might look like in this new use, as well as a proforma to illustrate how it might be economically feasible.

## DENSITY

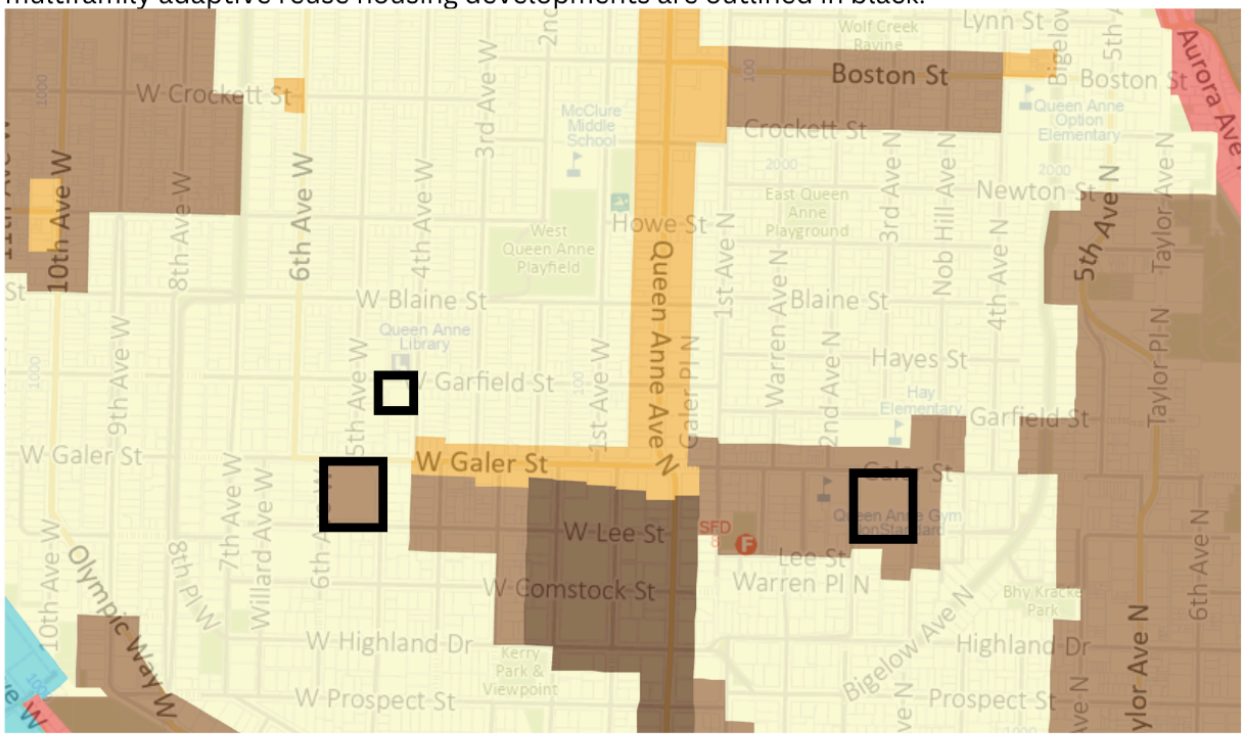
### How is Density Measured?

Adaptive reuse housing developments' potential to provide dwellings at a greater density than the immediately surrounding area is perhaps the most impactful consequence, as density is so often met with contention. Utilizing existing building form, siting, and massing to increase dwellings per acre is a crucial way to soften the blow of density, in line with the idea of "gentle density": introducing new dwellings in a manner that is cohesive with the form of existing structures. Despite the frequent and long standing opposition, there have been equally established studies on the benefits of density – beyond the reasons addressed previously related to walkability, increased opportunity, high-density, low-rise housing in particular also offers psychosocial benefits like greater opportunities for socialization, and positive emotions like fondness and nostalgia (Marcus & Sarkissian, 1968).

Density is measured by dwelling units per acre, and dictated by zoning code. Adding density is particularly impactful in neighborhoods that have historically only allowed for low density development of single family homes. This scarcity plays a significant role in keeping the home values of these neighborhoods high, and they typically offer desirable and attractive amenities as a result. In Seattle, Queen Anne is an example of a high-priced, exclusive neighborhood where the majority of parcels are currently zoned Neighborhood Residential, allowing only one single family dwelling unit with two attached/detached accessory dwelling units per the minimum 5,000 square foot lot allowed per today's zoning code (Seattle Department of Construction & Inspections, 2023). Exceptions to this are strips of Neighborhood Commercial, Lowrise Multifamily, and High-Density Multifamily along arterials with retail and other commercial uses – these areas allow a range of other housing typologies beyond single family dwellings.

However, thanks to adaptive reuse, Queen Anne offers a couple notable examples of higher density housing that has been permitted despite deviating from the parcel's existing non-residential use: the Queen Anne High School, the West Queen Anne Elementary School, and the Queen Anne Exchange.

**Figure 4.1:** Most of Queen Anne is zoned Neighborhood Residential (in pale yellow); the three multifamily adaptive reuse housing developments are outlined in black.




*Images courtesy of Seattle Department of Construction & Inspections GIS map*

**Case Studies: Queen Anne High School & West Queen Anne Elementary School**

At the turn of the 20th century, Seattle experienced a massive increase in population, resulting in an expansion of the early settlements and efforts to make initial infrastructure more permanent and supportive of continued growth. Early lumber barons especially, among other scions of fledgling Seattle industries, began establishing grand estates on Queen Anne's hill, and needed services befitting of the city they envisioned growing into. Thus, two grand schools were established on Galer Street in Queen Anne at this time: West Queen Anne Elementary School in 1896, followed by Queen Anne High School in 1909, originally called Jefferson High School (Demers-Changelo, 2018). The architectural splendor, grand positioning on the hillside, and modern amenities of

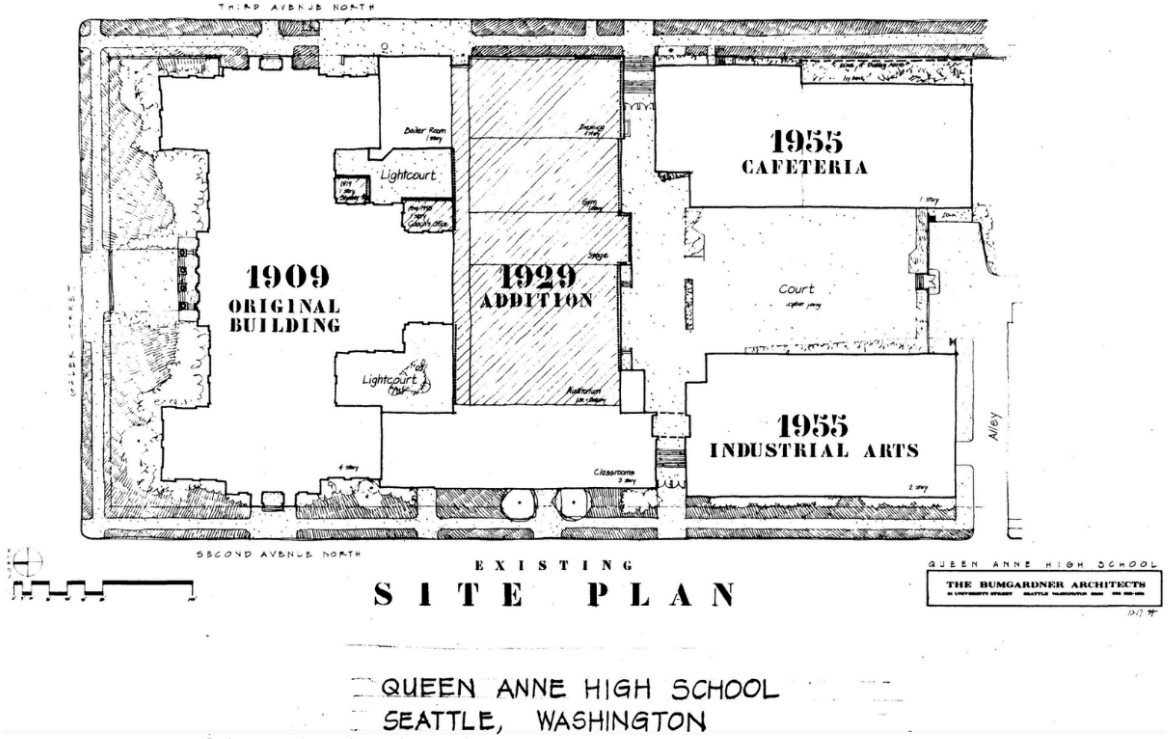
these buildings was integral to establishing Queen Anne as a prominent, affluent neighborhood in a new but prominent, affluent city, and to the ideals associated with education at the time. The buildings were, and continue to be, a source of pride for students and community members alike – this admiration for the grandeur and craftsmanship of the schools allowed the buildings to continue to exist as prominent landmarks of the neighborhood even after they ceased to function in their original capacity. In 1981, the schools were both closed as a result of low enrollment and students were consolidated to nearby schools. Very quickly, the community and a coalition of organizations came together to envision a next chapter for the structures, resulting in them sitting vacant for only three years. Both schools have been designated Seattle Historic Landmarks, and both are now condominium buildings. Queen Anne High School contains 137 units for a density of 47.57 dwelling units per acre, and West Queen Anne Elementary School contains 49 units for a density of 28.99 units per acre – by contrast, a single dwelling on a 5,000 square foot lot has a density of 9.09 units per acre.

**Figure 4.2:** Queen Anne's stately & imposing turn-of-the-century schools are perhaps the premier example of iconic, character-defining buildings contributing to housing density in an otherwise low density neighborhood.


*Images courtesy of author (left) & NWMLS (right)*

Despite the change of use and the significant increase in residential density as a result, both buildings lean heavily on nostalgic mementos of their former life as schools. Much of this is owed to the historic preservation guidelines in place that prevented significant change to the exteriors – particularly crucial in the case of Queen Anne High School, as its prominent massing and siting at the crest of Queen Anne hill make it quite literally a landmark visible from across the city. Here, the exterior of all buildings (except the 1929 addition containing the auditorium), the site itself, and the Galer Street entrance foyer and interior "decorative features" of the auditorium (that have been removed and are displayed elsewhere throughout the building) are designated protected via landmark controls (*Ordinance 112274* 1985). The controls imposed on the West Queen Anne Elementary School are far less specific, simply stating that "the entire structure" is to be preserved (*Ordinance 106146* 1977).

**Figure 4.3:** The Queen Anne High School Site Plan showing additions over the years; the 1929 addition was exempt from preservation controls & was demolished to make way for the parking court & Third Avenue entrance.

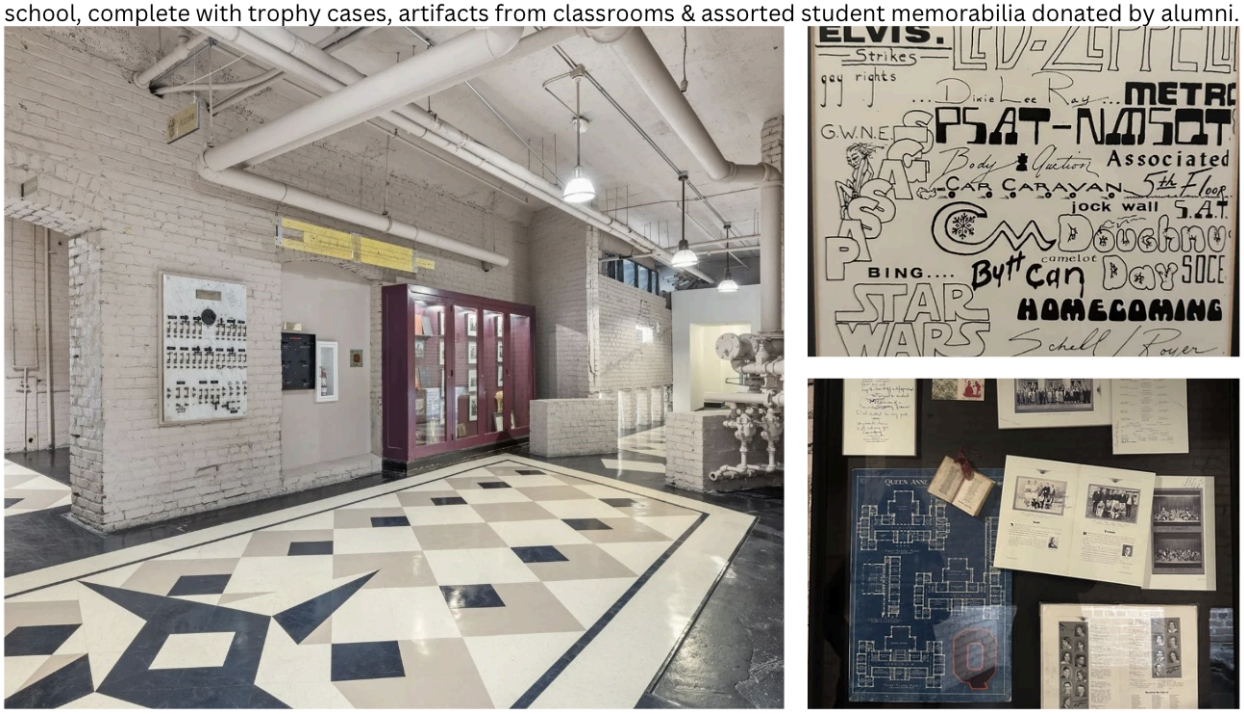



*Images courtesy of the National Park Service*

Inside, residents step back in time as they make their way home, passing by pieces of history in the corridors. Both schools-turned-condos have framed photographs lining the walls, depicting pioneer-time children dressed in turn-of-the-century school uniforms

taught by stern looking school teachers with elaborate bouffants and impeccable cursive on display on the chalkboards, all in the very same high-ceilinged classrooms that now are residences – some with the very same century-old chalkboards! In Queen Anne High School, placards indicating what purpose the residences once served as classrooms remind residents they may be living in what was once the chemistry lab, and display cases in the main hallway contain artifacts from said lab, in addition to yearbook pages, cheerleading uniforms, blueprints, and various other memorabilia in the old trophy cases. This curated collection, a true testament to the power of mementos to generate a sense of pride and belonging to a place throughout time, were donated by former students and members of the community excited to see their history live on inside the walls here.

**Figure 4.4:** The halls of Queen Anne High School are laden with nostalgic mementos from its prior use as a high school, complete with trophy cases, artifacts from classrooms & assorted student memorabilia donated by alumni.




*Images courtesy of NWMLS (left) & author (right)*

**Case Study: Queen Anne Exchange**

Because these conversions happened at the same time, it is likely that shared momentum and excitement helped bring these projects to completion, and even more likely that they generated enthusiasm and support for future adaptive reuse of historic

buildings – as just one block north of West Queen Anne Elementary School are two more notable projects, albeit on a smaller scale. One of those, the Queen Anne Exchange (formerly known as the Pacific Telephone & Telegraph Garfield Exchange), also leveraged preservation to add density to a lot zoned Neighborhood Residential, taking advantage of the following incentives:

**Figure 4.5:** The following preservation & change of use incentives approved via the City of Seattle helped make this residential conversion project feasible.

Section 3. INCENTIVES: The following incentives are hereby granted on the features or characteristics of the Pacific Telephone & Telegraph Garfield Exchange that were designated by the Board for preservation:

A.Uses not otherwise permitted in a zone may be authorized in a designated landmark by means of an administrative conditional use permit issued pursuant to SMC Title 23.

B.Exceptions to certain of the requirements of the Seattle Building Code, SMC Chapter 22.100, and the Seattle Energy Code, SMC Chapter 22.700, may be authorized pursuant to the applicable provisions thereof.

C.Special tax valuation for historic preservation may be available under RCW Chapter 84.26 upon application and compliance with the requirements of that statute.

D.Reduction or waiver, under certain conditions, of minimum accessory off-street parking requirements for uses permitted in a designated landmark structure may be permitted pursuant to SMC Title 23.

*Image courtesy of City of Seattle: Office of the City Clerk*

**Figure 4.6:** Queen Anne Exchange, a former telephone switchboard operation facility turned storage, now provides 25 stylish apartments laden with vintage charm and nostalgic reminders of its 1920s origin.


*Images courtesy of Queen Anne Exchange*

Built in 1921, this handsome yet understated brick building was home to a telephone switchboard operation facility until technological advancements rendered the need for such a space obsolete in the 1970s (Zabalza-Winn, 2022). The building was then

donated to the Seattle Public Library system, who used it for storage. In 2015, the building was designated as a Seattle historic landmark, which allowed for a successful change of use from storage to multifamily use, which would otherwise not be permitted for new construction. While only the site itself and the exterior of the building are designated and subject to controls, the fully stabilized and restored building retains many original interior elements, adding nostalgic character to the 25 market rate apartments representing a density of 89.29 units per acre (*Ordinance 125214* 2016).

## DIVERSITY

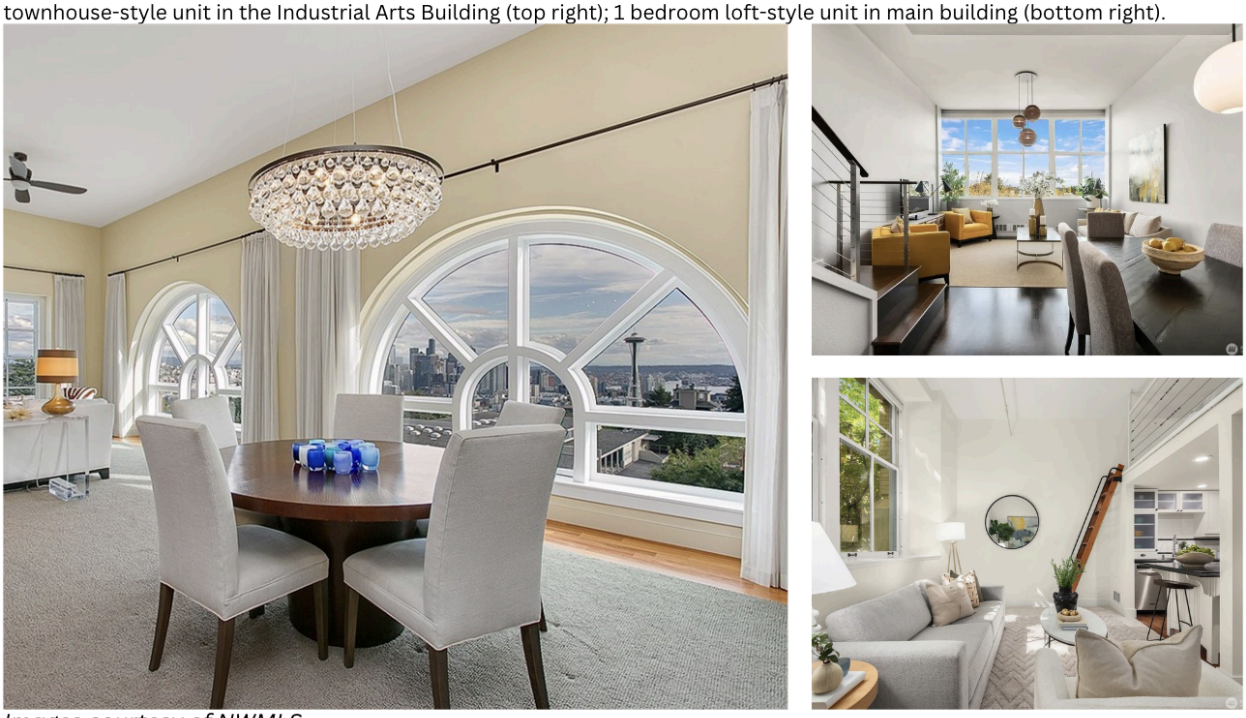
### How is Diversity Measured?

Diversity in housing can refer to diversity of architectural styles, diversity of residents, or diversity of housing typologies, otherwise known as unit mix in the context of multifamily housing: how many studios, one bedrooms, two bedrooms, three bedrooms, etc. Unit type diversity can also refer to the different models of housing: for rent, ownership, or non-traditional models like cohousing or live/work spaces. For the context of this research, case studies that offer a diverse mix of housing models and unit mixes are profiled. Offering a wide array of unit types and sizes that would appeal to a wide array of lifestyle preferences, housing needs, and budgets also contributes to democracy in housing by ensuring a diverse mix of occupants, as well. While a profile of the occupants and their housing costs would add rich data to this study, that falls outside the scope – further research could explore these avenues, but this study is focused primarily on the physical spaces themselves rather than the residents who occupy them. Because adaptive reuse projects often must get creative to maximize and divide these existing spaces into individual dwellings, this can lead to varied floor plans with more drastic size and shape differences between units than might exist in new construction where each unit type can be planned and allocated with more uniformity.

## Case Studies: Queen Anne High School & West Queen Anne Elementary School

Such variance in unit size and style is another unique feature of the Queen Anne school conversions. In the Queen Anne High School, condos range from 520-1,630 square feet in a mix of loft-style studio, one, and two bedroom homes. Some units (those located in the 1955 Industrial Arts building addition) are two-story townhouses with exterior access and private patios, some on the top floor are spacious penthouses that combine multiple classrooms and offer sweeping views of the city and beyond.

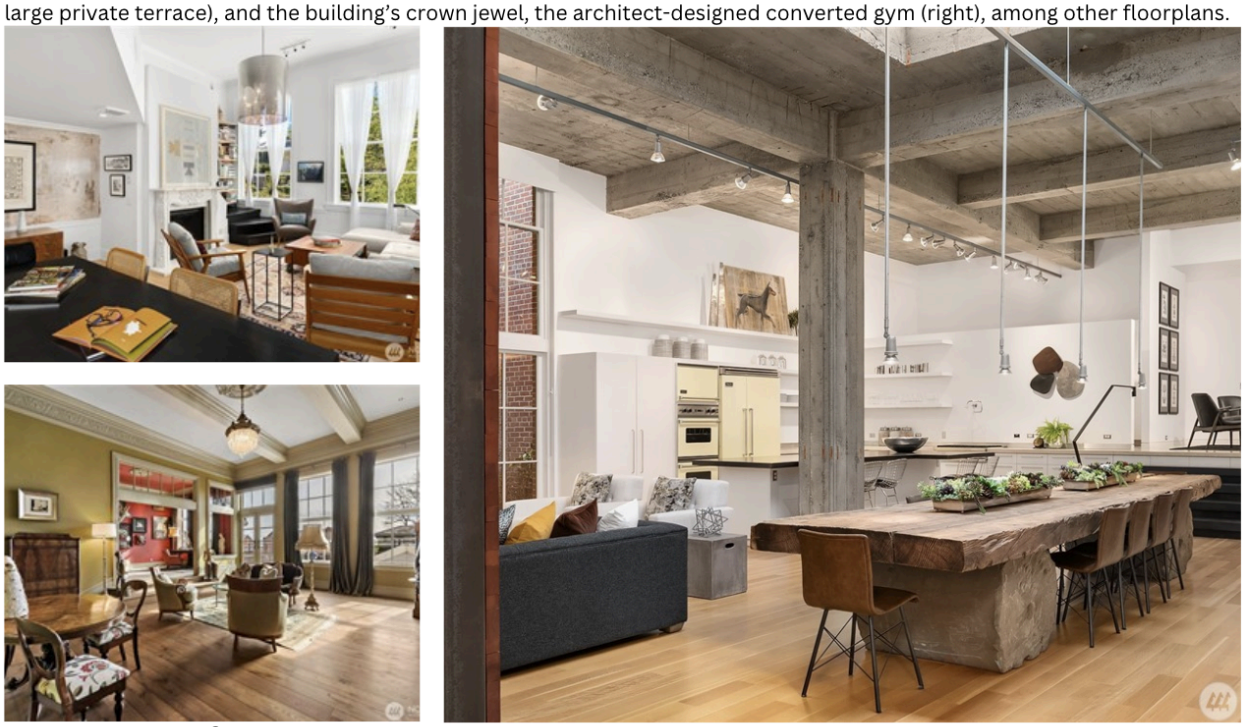
**Figure 5.1:** One of the penthouses in the Queen Anne High School main building with unique original windows (left); 2 bedroom townhouse-style unit in the Industrial Arts Building (top right); 1 bedroom loft-style unit in main building (bottom right).



*Images courtesy of NWMLS*

In the West Queen Anne Elementary School, condos range from 540-2,980 square feet in a mix of loft-style studios, one, and two bedrooms; many have private patios or gardens, and a couple are two-story townhouses with interesting architectural elements that accommodate the building's angles while offering subtle reminders of the purpose the spaces used to serve. The largest is an impressive, two-story work of modernist architectural art housed in the school's former gym, with a private entrance and multiple private patios.

**Figure 5.2:** In the West Queen Anne High School, there are 1 bedroom lofted units (top left); 2 bedroom units (this one has a large private terrace), and the building's crown jewel, the architect-designed converted gym (right), among other floorplans.



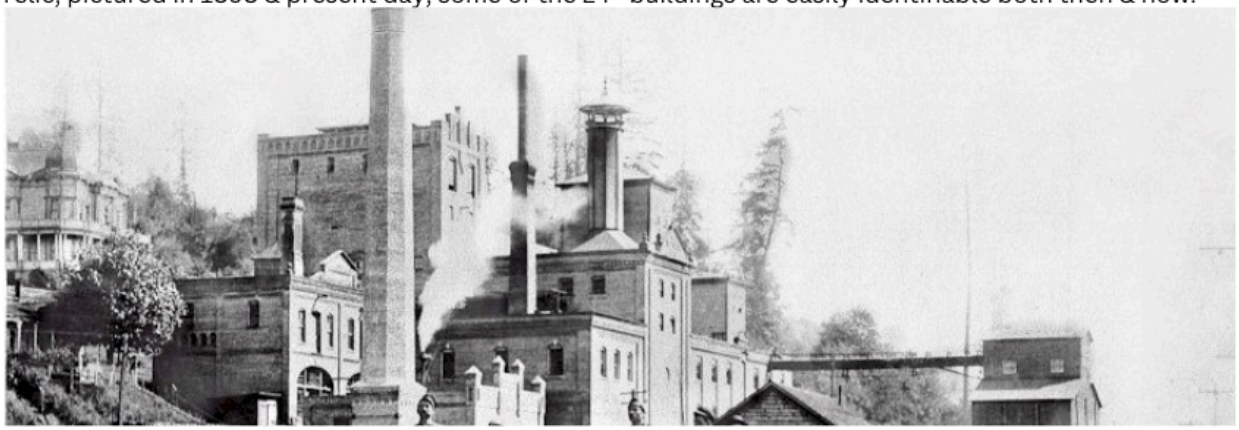
*Images courtesy of NWMLS*

## Case Study: The Old Rainier Brewery

Beyond simply offering an array of floor plans and unit sizes and styles to choose from, another important element of housing diversity is to have non-traditional housing options that accommodate different lifestyles, budgets, and preferences. Like the iconic Queen Anne High School, the Old Rainier Brewery is another instantly recognizable and nostalgic converted (unofficial) historic landmark that defines Seattle's skyline as you approach the city from the south, but that may be where the similarities end: the brewery caters to a very different market in a very different neighborhood, and is the only case study herein that is not officially designated as a historic property at the national nor local level. The original elements of the brewery were built in 1878, with a hodgepodge of other structures added in the decades that followed until a restoration in 2008 allowed for residential use, initially as a cooperative model. Today, the sprawling facility is made up of twenty five individual buildings that have been added on to and modified over the years, resulting in a fascinating network of 220,000 leasable square feet. There are 40 artist studio dwellings (with another 16-18 under construction), 76

rehearsal spaces, and 140,000 square feet of other office spaces in all varieties and configurations. As of this writing, there are three live/work spaces available to rent, ranging from 932 to 1,204 square feet, all with soaring 19-foot ceilings, full kitchens and bathrooms, and unique industrial features.

**Figure 5.3:** The incomprehensibly zany, incomparably unique Old Rainier Brewery, a singularly Seattle relic, pictured in 1898 & present day; some of the 24+ buildings are easily identifiable both then & now.





*Images courtesy of BreweryGems.com (top); The Old Rainier Brewery (middle & bottom)*

Tenants represent an array of different industries, many niche or fringe or true examples of the grunge culture Seattle was once known for: artists, musicians, glass blowers, “adult entertainment” spaces, tattooists, clothing designers, florists, and toy makers occupy studio spaces alongside publishers, architects, therapists, creative agencies, and more. Spaces are available for rent both as strictly commercial – as rehearsal spaces, studios, or offices – or as live/work spaces, taking advantage of a land use covenant that allows residential use despite the industrial/commercial zoning as long as the dwellings’ occupants are artists producing art for sale. The diversity of spaces available to rent is staggering, given the building’s immense size, the complexity of individual structures within it, and the relative free reign given to tenants to make virtually any improvements they deem necessary to utilize their rented space as they see fit – there is a bit of a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy that allows the artists quite a bit of freedom. Roofs are unofficial patios – the most sanctioned one is used as a central gathering courtyard where graffiti and mural artists are invited in to create a rotating series of artwork. One of the tenants with the longest tenure, a capoeira studio, will be celebrating twenty years in the building with a party on the rooftop courtyard this spring. Their length of tenancy is not particularly unique for the building, as it offers a degree of customization, discretion, and character one would be hard pressed to find elsewhere. One of the long time anchor tenants, a day spa with a particularly sultry vibe, has housed in the Old Rainier Brewery since 2007, and likely couldn’t exist anywhere else given the nature of its business and the fantastically unique suites it operates.

Exploring the multiple buildings and the network of spaces that hold them together is a journey through Seattle’s different periods of history, with nostalgic mementos around every corner. The structure itself tells a story: the original brickwork features ornate patterns and a mosaic of bricks and mortar of all different colors representing repairs over the years, with specters of windows and doorways that have since been filled in. The newer concrete sections are painted in a distinctly vintage color scheme that pays homage to the original design of Rainier beer cans, and of course the crowning “R” that is synonymous with the brand has been restored at the structure’s highest point. Ghost signs and more modern murals display the brewery’s 1878 origin, and many of the windows and doors are original. Inside, porosity is on full display, as it is often hard to

tell if you are inside or outside, with all the originally exterior brick walls that are now interior as sections were added on. Many hallways are evocative of the city's grunge era, with band flyers plastered on the wall over graffiti, stickers, and peeling paint. The Old Rainier Brewery is at once truly unlike anything else in Seattle, but also perhaps the most quintessential example of the vestiges of "old Seattle" that still remain, if you know where to look.

**Figure 5.4:** Details from the diverse spaces represented within the 25 buildings of The Old Rainier Brewery, offering something for everyone across its 220,000 square feet of unique residential & creative spaces.


*Images courtesy of The Old Rainier Brewery (top right) & the author*

**Case Study: Mutual Life Building Proposal**

In 2023, the City of Seattle's Office of Planning & Community Development (OPCD) issued a Call for Ideas centered around creative office to residential conversions (*Office to Residential Conversion Program*, 2023). Of the fourteen designs submitted to OPCD, the proposal by Hybrid Architecture was awarded first prize for their creative reimagining of the Mutual Life Building, an office building built in 1890 with ground floor retail in the Pioneer Square Preservation District. As a contributing historic resource to the district, strict controls are in place to retain the architectural integrity of the facade, so Hybrid's proposal focused on interior modifications only. Hybrid's design drew

inspiration from the limited plumbing of the building and communal living quarters of the past, minimizing costs and maximizing living space by only proposing minimal additional plumbing stacks, clustered wherever possible to reduce cost. Their proposed changes to the interior were relatively minimal to reduce demolition and waste, and keep as much of the historic building's nostalgic features intact as possible. The ground floor retail plan keeps an existing tenant in place and otherwise provides amenities for both residents and the public alike, emphasizing the connection to the streetscape outside and providing mixed use spaces on site, another essential component of housing diversity.

**Figure 5.5:** Hybrid Architecture's winning proposal reimagined the Mutual Life Building as 80 co-housing units with shared bathroom & kitchen facilities that utilize the existing plumbing stacks & add minimal additional infrastructure.


*Images courtesy of Hybrid Architecture*

The five upper floors utilize existing wall partitions and expand upon them to carve out 80 units with a shared communal kitchen, dining, laundry, and living space per floor. The proposed co-housing units are on average 400 square feet each, sharing bathroom facilities in clusters of two or three units each. Thus, each resident only shares a bathroom with at most two other occupants, and shares kitchen, dining, laundry, and living (aside from a small living space in their own dwelling) facilities with 15 other occupants. In addition to the design itself, Hybrid's team also drew up a proforma of

how this might make financial sense for both the building owner and the residents themselves. By their calculations, each tenant would pay only $900/month (making these units affordable to people making 40% of area median income) with a $300/month subsidy (*Co-living in Pioneer Square,* 2023). Even if funding for such a subsidy didn't materialize, a $1,200/month payment would still be affordable to an occupant making just 55% of area median income, and such a payment would feel reasonable in comparison to the dignified and design-forward proposal to live in such a beautiful historic building in a vibrant, well-positioned neighborhood.

## DISTINCTIVENESS

### How is Distinctiveness Measured?

By virtue of their vintage date, any and all of the adaptive reuse housing developments referenced here as case studies can accurately be described as distinctive, particularly in comparison to contemporary, completely new construction housing stock. All of them bring a flavor of architectural interest and contrast to the neighborhood context they occupy, and while aesthetic preference is subjective, distinctive landmarks create a timeless and nostalgic sense of place, contribute to a unique neighborhood identity and history, and provide a source of local pride – all of which help combat the alienation that can accompany placelessness. Perhaps the most formal measure of distinctiveness is a property's status as a historic landmark, particularly if it meets National Register Criteria C: "embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction" (*How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation* 1995) or Seattle City Landmark's Criteria D: "embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or a method of construction" (*City Landmarks*, n.d.) or Criteria F: "prominence of spatial location, contrasts of siting, age, or scale, it is an easily identifiable visual feature of its neighborhood or the city and contributes to the distinctive quality or identity of such neighborhood or the City" (*City Landmarks*, n.d.). Of the ten local case studies profiled here, nine are landmarks at either the national or local

level for their distinctive physical characteristics. Through the lens of their contribution to a distinctive, dynamic environment, we will examine two examples in Seattle's Capitol Hill neighborhood.

**Case Studies: Fire Station No. 25 & The Sanctuary**

When Fire Station No. 25 was built in 1909, it was the first brick firehouse in the city, and the first to have motor powered fire engines (*Fire Station No. 25,* 2019). After it ceased operation as a firehouse in 1970 it was designated as a Seattle landmark, with specific protections granted to the distinctive exterior ("including its painting, brickwork, and details"), the original front doors, the tile roof, and "those parts of the interior of the building, which if changed would affect the exterior appearance of the building" (*Ordinance 106054* 1976). Utilizing historic tax credits, it then underwent substantial rehabilitation to be converted into residential use in 1980.

**Figure 6.1:** Condo units in Fire Station No. 25 are replete with period charm: exposed brick, arched windows & doorways, plus other mementos from the 116 year old building's past as an essential landmark in a growing city.

*Image courtesy of NWMLS (left & bottom right) & author (top right).*

Today, the 16 units are condominiums, ranging from 720 to 2,307 square feet in one, two, and three bedroom configurations; some are two-story townhouse units with private

exterior entrances and patio spaces at the ground level or rooftop. The building maintains period architectural charm and nostalgic nods to its past: tall ceilings, arched windows and doorways, industrial details, exposed brick interior walls, historic photos and even an old firehose evoke images of the turn of the 20th century rather than the 1980s when the building welcomed its first residents. Comparatively, other new options for Capitol Hill condo buyers in 1980 had a drastically different look and feel – most were instantly ubiquitous and bland then, and even more so now. Several have had to undergo extensive re-cladding with more modern, durable exterior materials, compared to the timeless durability of the firehouse's brick cladding.

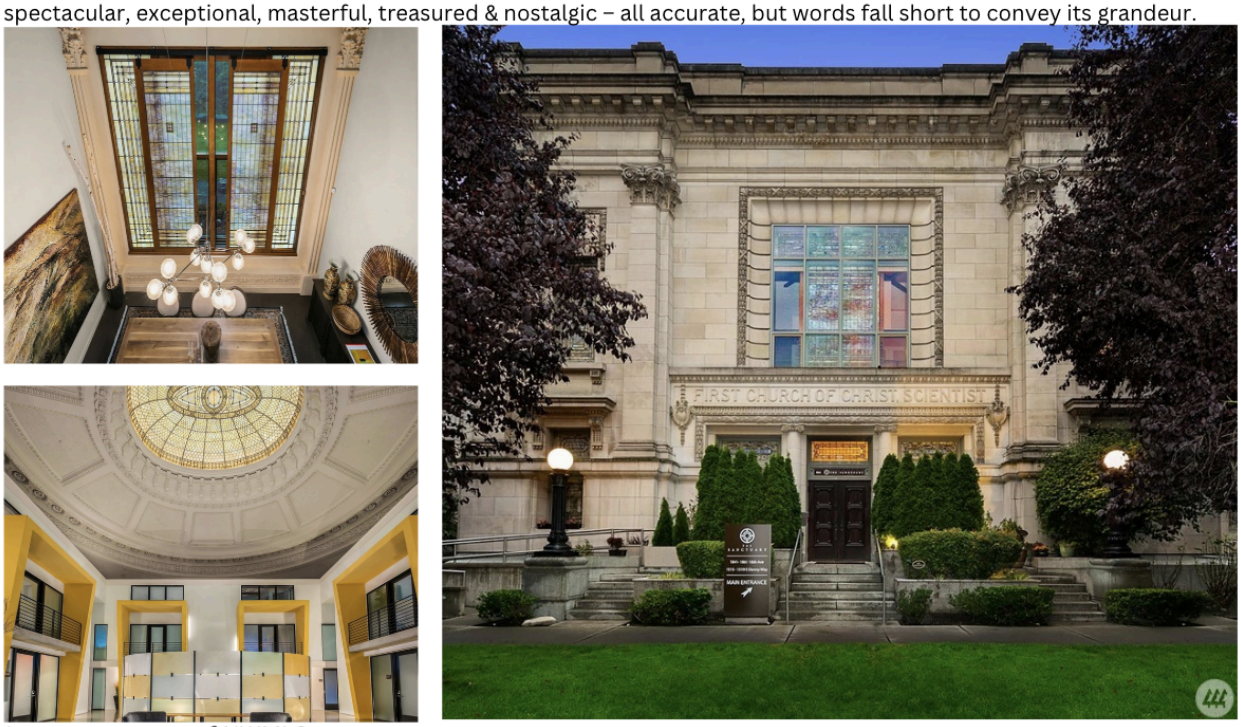
**Figure 6.2:** In contrast to the timeless elegance & durable brick of Fire Station No. 25, other new condo inventory that came on the market for the first time in 1980 is ubiquitous, bland & dated by both condition & aesthetic standards.


*Images courtesy of NWMLS*

Just a couple blocks to the northeast is another distinctive Capitol Hill landmark residence built three years prior to Fire Station No. 25, the former First Church of Christ Scientist, now known as The Sanctuary. This stunning Classical Revival building was home to its religious congregation until their move to South Lake Union in 2006, at which point the local landmark was sold and converted to residential use in 2009 (Goyer, 2009). While "the entire church structure" is protected under the Seattle City Ordinance that designated it as a landmark (*Ordinance 106145* 1977), the interior has

been cleverly divided up into twelve unique condominiums that are the epitome of luxury and distinctive style.

**Figure 6.3:** The Sanctuary on Capitol Hill: marketing remarks over the years have described this landmark as distinctive, spectacular, exceptional, masterful, treasured & nostalgic – all accurate, but words fall short to convey its grandeur.




*Images courtesy of NWMLS*

Ranging in size from 1,543 to 3,515 square feet, all of the homes are two-story townhomes that face an interior courtyard under the stained glass domed cathedral ceiling. The largest home occupies all four stories of the structure, from the below grade level to the peak of the dome, but all boast stunning architectural features like double height original stained glass windows that slide along tracks, exquisitely ornate molding, and industrial-inspired floating staircases. For context, townhouse developments were cropping up left and right around the neighborhood in 2009, but to call The Sanctuary residences mere townhouses by comparison drastically belies their grandeur and distinction as they bare little resemblance to the new construction of the same decade.

**Figure 6.4:** The typical new construction townhouse in Capitol Hill, circa 2009.

*Images courtesy of NWMLS*

## DEMOCRACY

### How is Democracy Measured?

Access to stable, equitable, and affordable housing that meets a variety of needs and preferences is an integral component to a functioning, participatory, and responsive democratic society. Having reliable and decent shelter and the dignity that private space affords allows residents to engage in their communities and build ties to the environment they call home. The 2021 study *Eviction and Voter Turnout: The Political Consequences of Housing Instability* by Slee & Desmond traces the clear and substantial link between housing instability and decreased voting activity and civic engagement. Particularly in the case of the most vulnerable populations – including African Americans who have been purposefully excluded from accessing the opportunities of homeownership for decades – the right to shelter is a political matter, and the affordability crisis in the United States is evidence that our democratic system is not serving many households who are struggling to remain housed, or are unhoused.

How democratic a given housing environment is could be measured in a number of different ways through a variety of different approaches. One could assess the physical conditions of the space for its ability to promote democratic function: are there public or semi-public spaces for residents and members of the community to gather and discuss common interests or activate around shared goals? Here, one might simply make an assessment of the public space and its inclusivity, versatility, usefulness, as well as measuring how frequently and effectively it is used, and to what end. In the case of multifamily communities with common areas and common interests and systems and processes for discussing and maintaining them, are residents actively and consistently participating in these processes? In these scenarios, one might gather data on homeowners' or renters' association meeting attendance, or participation in shared upkeep like in a cooperative model. Similar studies may take a broader reach and survey residents about their civic engagement beyond their immediate environment, perhaps designed to assess patterns between housing preferences and political ideology (as Whittemore & BenDor's 2018 study explored) or involvement in local politics, activism, or volunteering. Studies of this nature may reveal interesting correlations, but also would need to acknowledge the self selection bias – people with ample choice and different expectations of privacy and socialization in their domestic sphere may choose to live in more communally-oriented environments – though this is still relevant, as the very principle of having greater options for more lifestyles is inherently democratic.

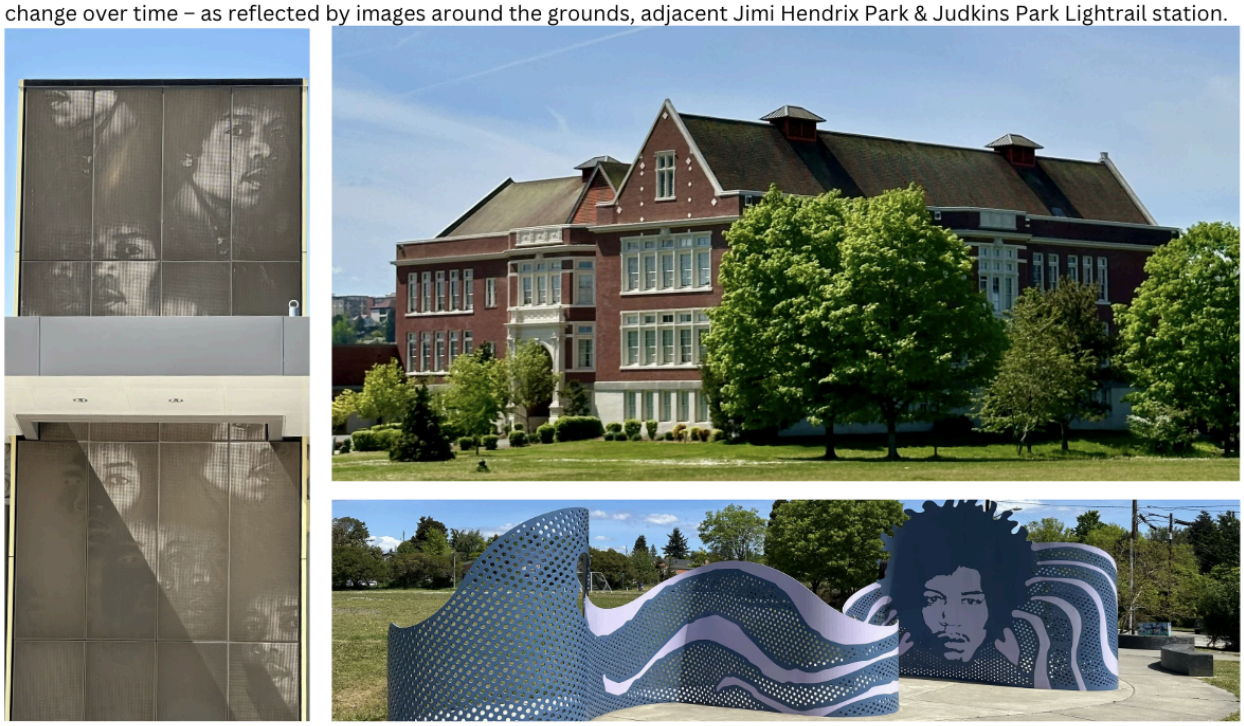
For the purposes of assessing nostalgia and adaptive reuse in the context of creating democratic living spaces, I focused on the findings of de Benedictis-Kessner et al's 2023 *Who Should Make Decisions? Public Perceptions of Democratic Inclusion in Housing Policy* study on whose opinions deserved prioritization at a public forum on housing development. Out of twelve categories of hypothetical meeting participants, over 75% of respondents chose "a long time homeowner in the neighborhood" as highest priority; lowest on the list was "a person who grew up in the neighborhood and would like to move back to the neighborhood", "a homeless person who would like to live in the neighborhood", and "a resident of a nearby city who hopes to move to the neighborhood". One can assume that these three categories of would-be residents do

not have viable options to move into the neighborhood, likely due to affordability, and are thus excluded from decisions related to housing affordability and likely do not have their needs advocated for as a result. The following case studies are products of such advocacy, and foster further inclusivity in the democratic process by providing low or no cost housing options in Seattle to those at the margins of society left with fewer resources and even fewer choices.

**Case Study: Colman School**

Perhaps the most boldly dramatic success story is that of the Colman School transformation, an empowering adaptive reuse project that resulted from a group of activists determined to create opportunity for their community. Built in 1909 at the south end of what is now the Central District, the stately Colman School followed a similar trajectory to its contemporaries on Queen Anne and closed in the mid 1980s (*Urban League Village,* 2025). From here, the story diverges: after the closure, four community activists occupied the abandoned building with the vision to reclaim it for the African American community. Black Seattleites have a long history in the Central District, but during the years of urban renewal, their primary neighborhood in Seattle was under threat by gentrification and the development of I-5 and I-90, displacing alarming numbers of Black families who had called the area home and established a thriving community. The school was set to be demolished to construct I-90 – the school is just a stone's throw from where the east/west highway disappears under the Mt Baker tunnel – but the visionary activists took over the property, seeking to save the building and establish an African American museum and cultural center within it. This began the longest occupation of a public building in the country's history, beginning in 1985 and lasting eight years. During this time, despite having power but no running water, the activists hosted benefit events like concerts, exhibits, pick up basketball games, and more community events to activate the space and raise money, awareness, and support for their cause. Finally, in 1993, Seattle's first African American Mayor agreed to establish the museum, though it remained Seattle Public Schools property until it was sold to the Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle in 2003.

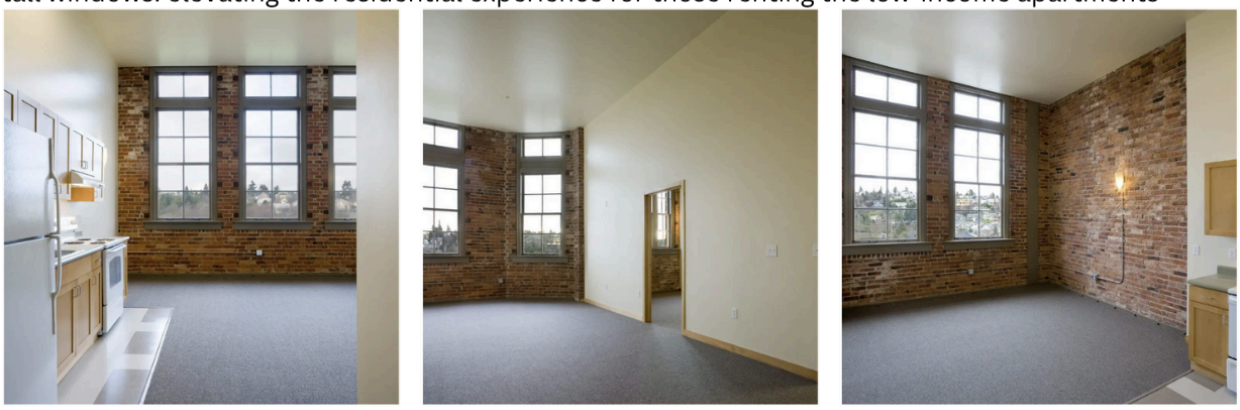
**Figure 7.1:** The Colman School's stately presence anchors residents in a neighborhood rooted in culture & history despite change over time – as reflected by images around the grounds, adjacent Jimi Hendrix Park & Judkins Park Lightrail station.



*Images courtesy of author*

At this point, the transformation to its current use began: the two upper floors were converted to 36 affordable apartments, known as the Urban League Village. Low-income residents can lease studio, one, and two bedroom apartments, and avail themselves of the community spaces throughout the building and the adjacent Jimi Hendrix Park. Due to the long period the building sat in wait, the interior was severely damaged and much of it needed to be removed – permissible by the 2009 City of Seattle ordinance that declared the exterior of the building and the site itself a designated historic landmark (*Ordinance 122950* 2009). Many nostalgic elements were able to be saved, however: the brick facade was restored, and over fifteen exterior doors and 250 existing windows were refurbished, including several ten foot tall windows (*Colman School Apartments* 2025). These grand elements of the former classrooms provide exceptional character, natural light, and sweeping views of the skyline to the residents of the low income apartments.

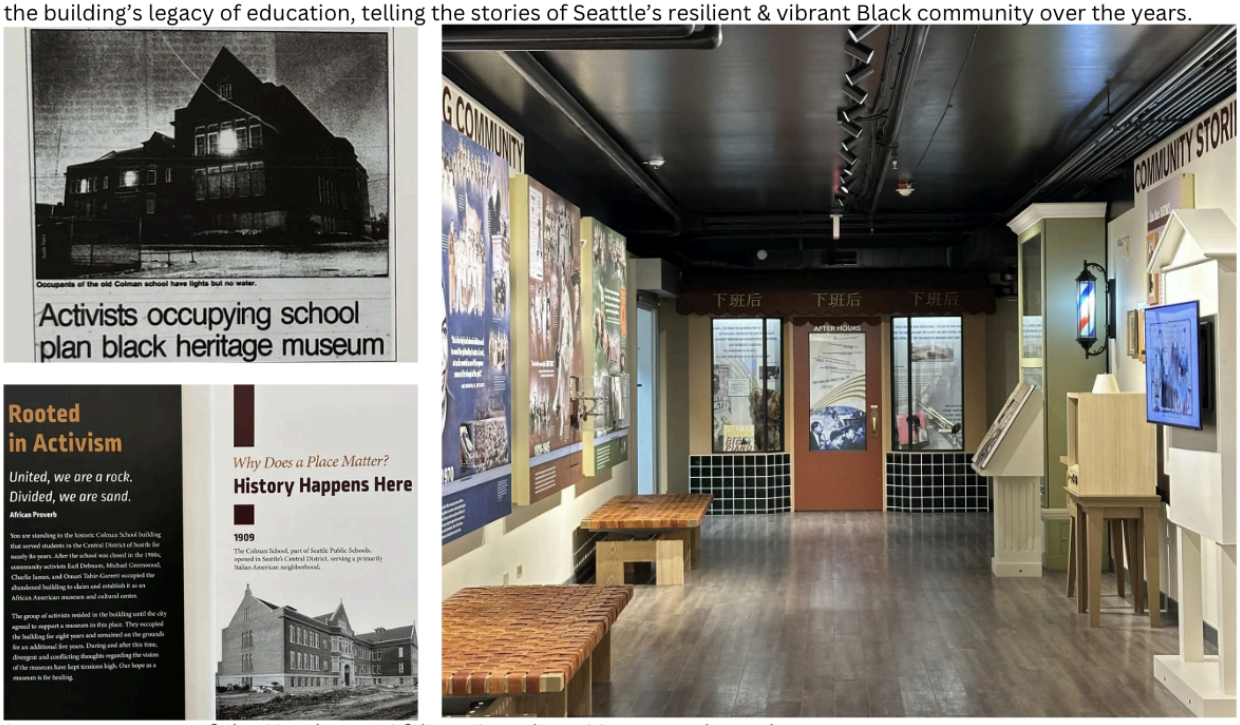
**Figure 7.2:** The renovated classrooms feature nostalgic original elements like exposed brick walls & tall windows. elevating the residential experience for those renting the low-income apartments



*Images courtesy of Rafn*

The lower floor was converted to the Northwest African American Museum (NAAM), which charts the story of Black Americans who came to the Northwest after the Civil War to escape the legacy of slavery in the South. While far from perfect, Black settlers found greater respect and opportunity in the Northwest, and established communities in new cities like Seattle. The Central District and Chinatown–International District (CID) in particular fostered community, opportunity, and intermingling with other new residents who came to Seattle seeking similar new beginnings. The NAAM displays mementos and narratives from individuals – some famous, some extraordinary in their lifetime for their courage and grit but otherwise unknown – who were integral to the neighborhood's history, the school's history, and the history of Black culture in America overall, with a particularly wonderful exhibit on how jazz culture in the CID was foundational to both Black and Asian Americans in Seattle's early years. Both groups tenaciously charted their own course, advocating for their rights to opportunity and dignity, and fighting to make their voices heard in the spirit of pursuing the promises of the American Dream, an ideal wherein democracy and housing are inextricably intertwined.

**Figure 7.3:** The exhibits in the Northwest African American Museum in the ground floor of the Colman School continue the building's legacy of education, telling the stories of Seattle's resilient & vibrant Black community over the years.




*Images courtesy of the Northwest African American Museum, via author*

## Case Studies: Leamington Hotel & Louisa Hotel

For the final case studies, we revisit the single room occupancy (SRO) model mentioned previously. Beyond offering the most affordable and flexible types of housing available, this model played a crucial role in the women's suffrage movement. Thanks to the socioeconomic changes surrounding World War II that allowed them to enter the workforce, single women were also allowed to rent their own apartments for the first time, and these new housing typologies allowed them to live separate from men in a manner that society deemed respectable (Sodt, 2017). These dwellings, from apartment hotels at the higher end of the spectrum to SRO hotels at the lower end, were critical settings for women to develop lives and identities outside of their families of origin or husbands. As noted in the National Trust for Historic Preservation's *Where Women Made History* in a piece connecting the rise of SROs to the women's suffrage movement, this offered women unprecedented discretion over how to spend their time and money (*The Role of SROs in Women's Suffrage*, n.d.). In some buildings, women represented half or more of the overall tenant population, which likely fostered a sense

of community and provided a forum to share ideas, such as the radical notion of women's rights.

Many of these buildings remain today throughout Seattle and most function as apartments, not a far cry from their original use in most cases. Many retain a good deal of their original charm and quirks, with ornate terracotta details on the exterior, illustrious names, unique floorplans, and elegant lobbies with vintage features that evoke nostalgia and curiosity about the early Seattleites who called them home some 100+ years ago. Because they frequently feature smaller individual units (compared to modern standards) and sometimes decades of deferred maintenance, rent prices are often lower than newer buildings. When conditions deteriorate significantly, these buildings often get bought by public or nonprofit organizations to be rehabilitated and used as low-income housing.

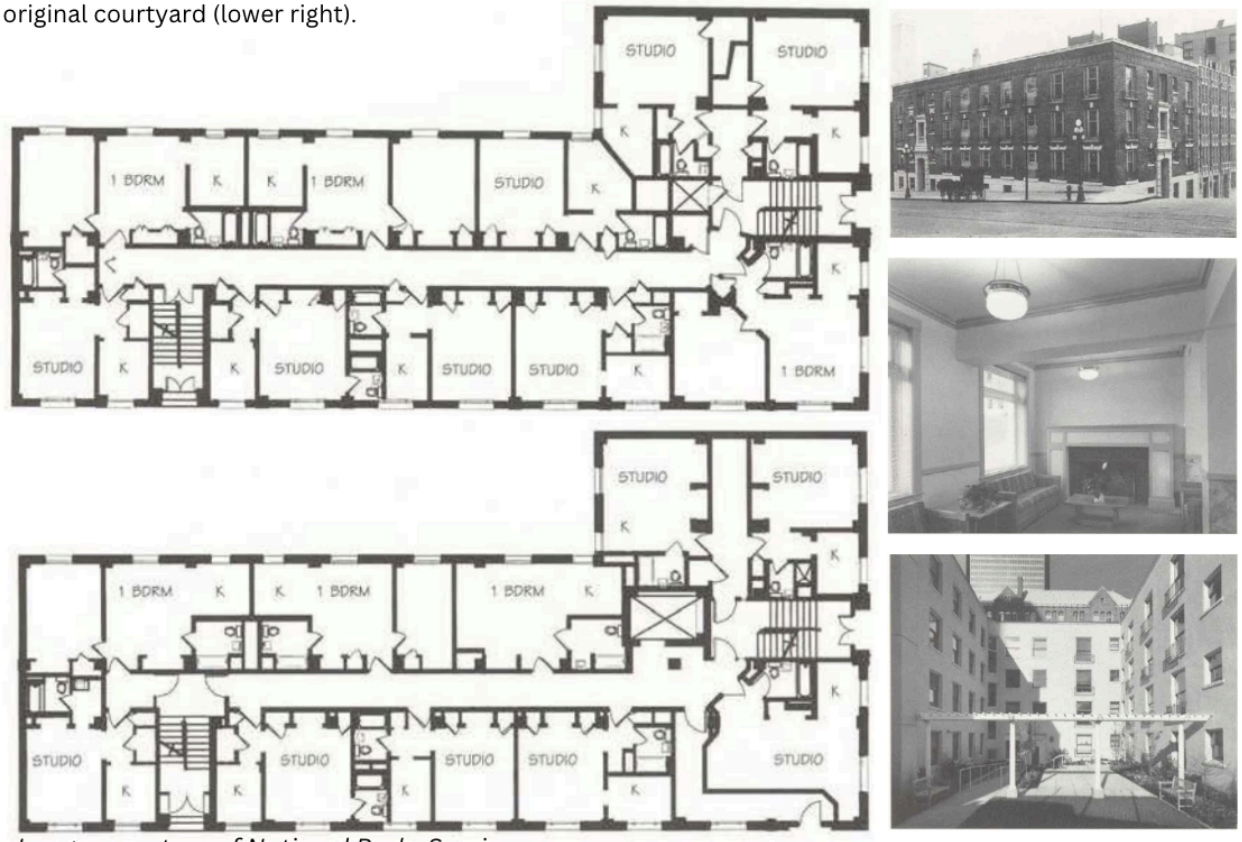
**Figure 7.4:** The Leamington Hotel's exterior, with its elegant terracotta detailing, belies its humble interiors – today it houses some of Seattle's most vulnerable populations. At left, on the scaffolding during rehabilitation work.


*Images courtesy of author (left) and International Architectural Database*

Such is the case with the Leamington Hotel and Apartments, now known as the Pacific Hotel though it went by many other names during its century-long history. Built in 1916 to offer both short and long term accommodations primarily to new members of the

young city's growing workforce, the hotel closed in the 1980s (Sullivan, 1998). In 1995, low-income housing developer and operator Plymouth Housing purchased the landmarked building and restored it, using both the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit program (LIHTC) in conjunction with the Federal Historic Tax Credit program to fund the renovations. Twenty years later, the building is currently undergoing additional rehabilitation, but will soon reopen and welcome residents back to a building that looks as it did at the turn of the 20th century, thanks to landmark controls that apply to the building's entire exterior including the roof (*Ordinance 117398* 1994).

**Figure 7.5:** Before (above) & after (below) floorplans show how the 1995 rehabilitation utilized the historic floorplan with minimal changes; historic photo (top right); lobby with original trim & fireplace (middle right); original courtyard (lower right).




*Images courtesy of National Parks Service*

The rejuvenated Pacific Hotel will once again offer a mix of lightly furnished studios and one bedroom apartments all for low-income residents, along with outdoor garden space and other common areas – all in the heart of downtown with views of Elliott Bay. The exceptional location and exquisitely restored building offer dignity, stability, and security in a neighborhood typically only available to those with the greatest means. As

Plymouth's team describes this win-win for historic preservation and affordable housing: these historic buildings "act as windows into our city's past, as well as doors to brighter futures for our residents" (*Historic Preservation,* 2020).

The Louisa Hotel shares a similar history and timeline: built in 1909 in a neighborhood that would come to be known as Chinatown – International District, it quickly became a hub for Asian immigrants who arrived in Seattle to work in growing maritime industries like fishing and canning. The neighborhood was a true melting pot, and home to a lively jazz scene where a multitude of races and ethnicities came together after long days of work to unwind – this shared history was also documented in the Northwest African American Museums' exhibits on the multicultural nature of jazz in the CID. The Louisa Hotel building has been owned by the same immigrant family for generations, but it had fallen into major disrepair and became a public safety hazard after a fire in 2013 (West, 2020). After that, efforts to renovate and modernize the building began.

**Figure 7.6:** The Louisa Hotel offers affordable rentals in a neighborhood with a century-old reputation for bringing together immigrants & opportunity seekers; relics of their lives are displayed on the walls & on the landmarked Chinese bulletin board hanging on the east facade.


*Images courtesy of Historic Seattle (top left); Apartments.com (center); Seattle Department of Neighborhoods (right top & bottom)*

This work included restoring original doors, windows, trim, and even furniture; workers also uncovered Prohibition-era murals from the building's ground floor jazz club. But the most significant piece of memorabilia that has been retained is on the side of the building itself, the landmarked Chinese Community Bulletin Board. Despite the influx of immigrants from China and other Asian countries, Seattle did not have a Chinese language newspaper for several decades, which essentially deprived newcomers of a

way to engage with their new city, limiting their ability to find jobs or housing (*AAPI Heritage Month: Chinatown Community Bulletin Board* 2023). In the absence of this, this homely bulletin board became an essential lifeline and still displays notable updates and neighborhood news to this day after being landmarked in 1976 for its significant contribution to the city's cultural heritage (*Ordinance 106072* 1976). Other similar nostalgic artifacts of the neighborhood's early years also line the interior walls of the Louisa Hotel, offering glimpses into the thousands of stories of immigrants seeking better lives and greater opportunity – stories that continue to play out today in the last bastions of affordable housing options. Staying true to its original use as workforce housing for a diverse population starting out with little more than hope and hard work, the Louisa Hotel now offers 84 studio or one bedroom apartments with affordable units based on residents' income.

## CONCLUSION

### Reflections

Nostalgia's place in the built environment is overdue for a reframe. Tapping into the productive and progressive potential of nostalgia leverages the power of place attachment and community activism to create places that blend old and new, weaving shared stories and interconnected histories into new housing typologies that offer residents greater choice. Adaptively reusing historic buildings for housing offers housing density and diversity without compromising neighborhood distinctiveness – creating mutual successes across the often adversarial fields of housing and historic preservation. Involving community members that stand to most benefit from expanded housing choice and affordability promotes democratic involvement in land use decisions and makes the field of historic preservation more equitable and responsive to changing community needs.

In the same vein, a more future-oriented approach to preservation could introduce additional criteria such that adaptive reuse projects aren't held to rigid standards that promote historic integrity above all other benefits. Similarly to the push for adaptive

reuse's sustainability benefits to be recognized on par with the current criteria for landmark designation, adaptive reuse housing conversions could be incentivized to promote housing density, diversity, distinctiveness, and democracy, the way that historic landmarks are incentivized for adhering to standards that promote integrity – essentially shifting the goal from simply honoring the past to also providing opportunity for the future. It is worth noting that the case study that best embodies each of these four themes – the Old Rainier Brewery – is the only one that is not officially designated as a historic landmark. Its success by each of these metrics is undoubtedly owed to the laissez faire approach towards the building's myriad uses and reinventions over the years – which perhaps would not be the case if it were held to the standards of rigid historic preservation controls. On the other hand, there are likely many other underutilized buildings where conversion to residential use would be possible through the help of incentives like the historic tax credit program and deviations from zoning or building codes that landmarks are afforded.

The opportunity I see is three-fold:

- Leveraging nostalgia and community members' attachments to distinctive buildings in their neighborhoods is a mutually beneficial way to retain these character-contributing structures while repurposing them for a new use (housing) that serves the community
- Using these old repurposed buildings to promote new ideas in housing (including density, diversity, distinctiveness, and democracy) will help in the adoption of novel housing concepts by expanding options and exposure, producing a compounding effect
- Recognizing the value of preservation beyond just historic integrity standards could expand criteria for adaptive reuse projects to receive the benefits of historic preservation and make conversions more feasible, again with a compounding effect

## Further Research

This research's limited scope sets the stage for further research with a greater focus on the people, not just the places. Post occupancy evaluation surveys, with in-depth interviews and narratives from residents of the buildings profiled, would add crucial context to the demographics and first hand experiences of who is living in these dense, diverse, distinct, and democratic housing styles. Such perspectives would help inform future progress in the field of adaptive reuse, centering people at the heart of these transformative projects.

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