



It might be paradoxical to think of historic preservation as an evolutionary field, but that is exactly what is occurring in today's environment. A recent post on nextcity.org defines the two faces of historic preservation: the traditional role of an advocate-historian saving historic structures from demise, and the more evolved preservationist of today who works to stabilize neighborhoods.

Perhaps nothing illustrates this shift in approach more aptly than HCF's recent work in the North Central Neighborhood, which the Foundation is using as a prism to look at affordability and preservation issues across the entire peninsula. With funding provided by the 1772 Foundation, HCF contracted with local community relations expert, Karen Harvey and czb, to embark on an in-depth initial study of North Central, and more specifically, how it may be "preserved," not only the architecture, but also the culture and character that are woven into the fabric of the neighborhood.

According to czb, "There was a time when the challenge facing the City of Charleston was the work of revitalization, the work of rebuilding a market, the work of stimulating demand and the work of addressing blight." The consultants note that this time has passed. "The combination of limited developable land, limited appetite for height and density and a national demographically powered appetite for urban living has resulted in Charleston's peninsula joining the elite company of Aspen (CO), Santa Fe (NM), Park City (UT) and a few others among the most desirable places to live in the US."

Today's challenge is in balancing desirability and affordability.

Unchecked, the escalating prices resulting from a favorable real estate market and quality-of-life improvements will lead to gentrification. Eventually, the area will experience a demographic consequence as the "working-class" - teachers, administrative personnel and city workers, - will end up commuting which causes an additional range of livability issues including traffic, the lost time in commuting, and changes in the character of the neighborhood.

"Our approach to the historic preservation of the North Central neighborhood has been an interdisciplinary one from the start," says Winslow Hastie, HCF's Chief Preservation Officer. "We know that to truly preserve an area, we need to be working to keep residents in their homes and protecting the urban fabric of that neighborhood. That's why our relationships with the neighborhood organizations are vital to a successful outcome."

Hastie adds that preserving an entire neighborhood is larger than one organization. "We know that the key to success is in leveraging the services of many different organizations. We know that residents will

need low-interest loans to fix up their homes, additional opportunities for residential engagement to support a healthy urban cultural fabric, an acquisition plan for the protection of strategic properties, proper code enforcement, and in this particular neighborhood, assistance with addressing heirs' properties."

According to Hastie, HCF is culling through recommendations from czb and identifying initial strategies and community partners who have the interest and resources to engage with HCF on addressing neighborhood stabilization issues. "We can use the lessons we're learning from our current work in North Central, such as the renovation of the houses at 159 and 218 Romney Street, the establishment of the Romney Urban Garden and continued outreach to the neighborhoods to address the affordability issue across a broader spectrum. Affordability and escalating real estate prices will have an impact on all historic neighborhoods."

Hastie says that over the next couple of months, the Foundation will determine a direction, begin officially bringing partners to the table and promoting the initiative to the broader Charleston community."