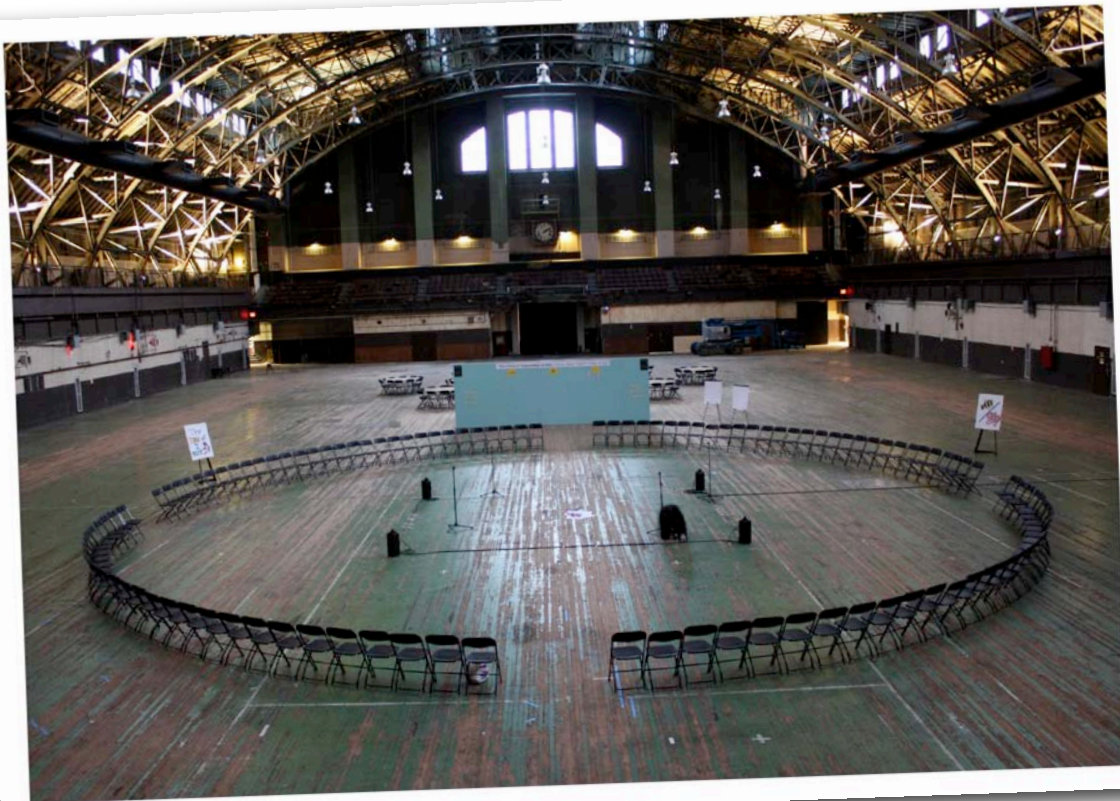


PRESERVATION VISION: NYC

FINAL REPORT

MAJOR FINDINGS + THE IDEA BANK + OBSERVATIONS



27 February 2009

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DISCLAIMER & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report is only a partial summary of discussions hosted and feedback received by the *Preservation Vision: NYC* project. Every attempt was made to convey the breadth and content of these exchanges between participants, but brevity demanded that many useful contributions were simplified, combined, or left out altogether. In no case are the assertions and assessments summarized here a reflection of the organizers' opinions or best knowledge; they belong only to the participants and contribute to an open process of deliberation.

We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of the project steering committee, comprised of financial supporters and advisors, who provided oversight for the project:

Anthony C. Wood, foundation executive, Chair

Lisa Ackerman, World Monuments Fund

Leah Krauss, New York Community Trust

Anne Van Ingen, New York State Council on the Arts

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Minerva Partners is extremely grateful to all the members of the steering committee, and especially to Anthony C. Wood, who provided founding leadership, inspiration and unwavering commitment to the goals of the *Preservation Vision: NYC* project.

Nearly 500 individuals participated in this project. It is with much gratitude that we acknowledge their contribution. Their energy, generosity, and insights went beyond expectations and were a forceful demonstration of the ongoing passion and dedication of the preservation community.

This report was written by Kirstin Sechler and Jon Calame for Minerva Partners.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of the *Preservation Vision: Planning for the Future of Preservation in New York City* project was to arrange a bank of chairs, free to all interested parties, in front of a window. This was a window looking in at the habits and aspirations of the profession, it was a window looking out at New York City as it will be in 2030, and it was a window of opportunity for collaborations, actions, and policy changes.

Preservation Vision: NYC invited interested citizens and preservation practitioners to think about the future of historic preservation practice in relation to the future of the city, creating a temporary forum for the profession to think concretely about its long-term goals. This project asked members of the preservation community in New York to submit, discuss, and develop their most compelling ideas to position historic preservation for substantial, lasting contributions to the most pressing issues facing New York City while anticipating new collaborations and increased threats to the city's historic resources.

This project imposed few requirements on participants, with two exceptions. Firstly, participants were asked to think beyond the pressing issues, realities and limitations of today to consider the broad goals and possibilities of tomorrow. Secondly, participants were encouraged to contribute as individuals, not as institutional representatives answering for, or advocating on behalf of, their organization or group.

To maximize inclusion, glean “big picture” insights, and encourage candor, many conduits for exchange were created -- an anonymous survey, a series of roundtables, a professionally facilitated weekend retreat, and a professionally facilitated one-day workshop. Between January 2008 and January 2009, nearly 500 participants contributed their thoughts. No effort was made by the project coordinators to predict, edit or improve what emerged.

Across all phases of this project, 10 key categories emerged as areas in need of an active, strategic response from the preservation field in New York City over the next 25 years. Those categories, in order of priority, are:

1. address environmental sustainability
2. undertake serious research
3. expand incentives
4. implement more land use regulations
5. strengthen the Landmarks Law
6. contribute to community livability
7. focus messaging & branding
8. expand alliances & diversity
9. identify new sources of funding
10. enhance education

In the [findings section](#) of this report, recommended action items are summarized under these major categories to comprise a Preservation Vision “idea bank” of 102 items. These ideas -- some new, some updated versions of familiar ideas, some already embraced by existing groups or individuals -- were gathered directly from participants as recommendations to generate forward momentum.

Having synthesized all the discussions and contributions made through this project, the authors of this report made several general observations of the preservation field and its prospects.

The preservation community now lacks the capacity to address needs, opportunities, and trends that will be increasingly central to quality of life for New York City residents. Even if that capacity existed, it is a profession without refined and prioritized ideas about its biggest challenges or how they might be overcome most efficiently. Many of these shortcomings stem from a lack of leadership and acrimonious relationships within the field which undermine the development of shared goals, a clear message and a collective voice with which to engage city-wide planning and decision-making processes.

However, the *Preservation Vision* discussion identified critical areas that will move the field past its current limitations. Investment is needed to develop serious research that yields quantitative and qualitative data to support many arguments in favor of preservation. Similarly new tools that go beyond the Landmarks Law to carry out preservation work need to be created or co-opted to achieve long-term goals. The field needs to find new partners and a more diverse group of participants while formulating a more positive public image. This type of readiness is not easily achieved. A new generation of practitioners and advocates must address the gap separating the existing state of New York’s preservation establishment from its optimal state.

It appears that the historic preservation movement stands at an important juncture. There may be a window of opportunity over the next three to five years with the convergence of economic realities, federal stimulus investments in social and environmental sectors, and growing public concern for issues related to sustainability. This opportunity should be used to lay the foundation on which the preservation field will meet its new challenges.

As originally conceived, the Preservation Vision project provided a temporary dialogue. The results of this conversation are submitted to the preservation community with the hope that they constitute a first step, at best, towards identifying issues for further debate and action.

Detailed documents on the results of the online survey, roundtable discussions, weekend retreat and final workshop can be found on the project website at www.preservationvision-nyc.org.

PROJECT OVERVIEW & COMPONENTS

Over the past 60 years the historic preservation movement has made significant contributions to the prosperity and growth of New York City. To be fully prepared to contribute to the city-wide planning efforts in the coming decades, preservation must consider its own best prospects and ideal role for the future. *Preservation Vision: Planning for the Future of Preservation in New York City* was launched as a year-long initiative to engage those interested in preservation in a conversation about their aspirations for New York City of 2030 and the actions needed to make those hopes a reality.

Preservation Vision: NYC invited interested citizens and preservation practitioners to think about the future of historic preservation practice in relation to the future of the city, creating a temporary forum for the profession to think concretely about its long-term goals.

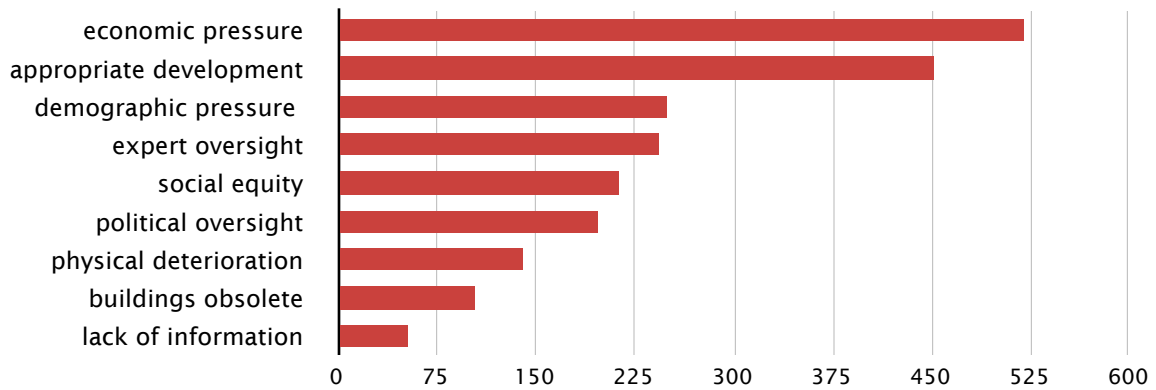
Between January 2008 and January 2009, *Preservation Vision: NYC* solicited participation, structured conversations, and gathered feedback from the historic preservation community in New York City regarding its **highest expectations for the future** of preservation over the next 25 years. By the end of this project, nearly 500 participants contributed to these findings. Detailed documents on the results of the online survey, roundtable discussions, weekend retreat and final workshop can be found on the project website: www.preservationvision-nyc.org.

The project was designed to provide multiple opportunities for participation, inspire new alliances, focus on common goals and compile an “idea bank” of good ideas for the future. To maximize the scope and diversity of participation, a **three-phase process** of gathering feedback, analyzing input and synthesizing findings was implemented. Participants were asked to put their institutional affiliations aside and contribute as individuals rather than as representatives of an organization.

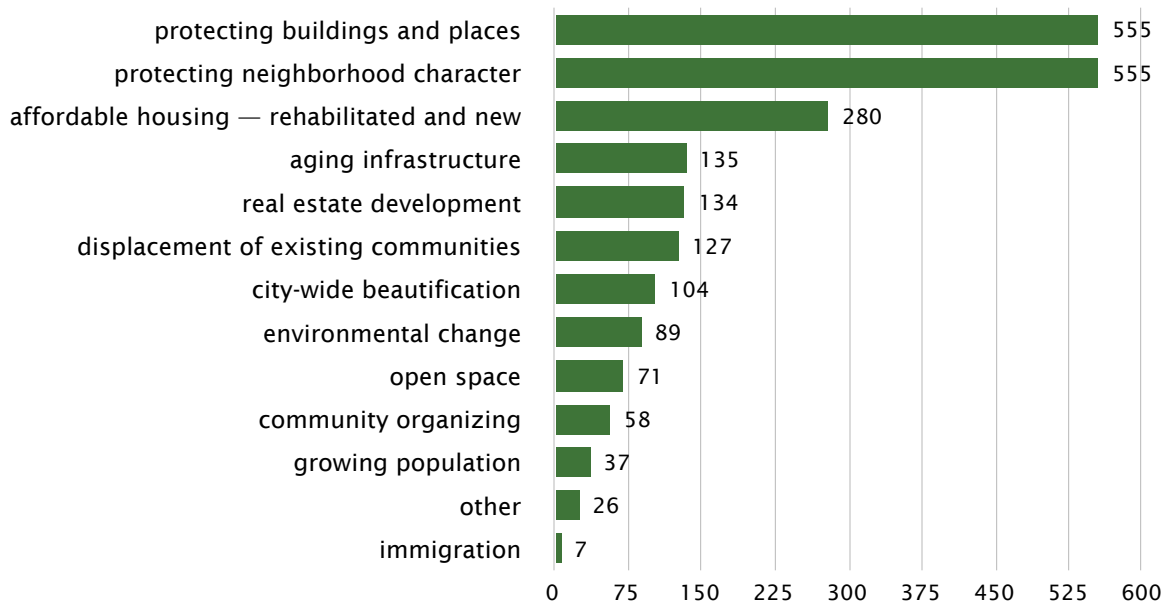
The following summary describes the three phases of the *Preservation Vision: NYC* project, methods of information intake used, and a few key results from each:

PHASE I of the project began by casting a wide net to gather ideas and opinions from the entire “preservation community” in New York. A combination of information gathering tools were implemented including an **online survey** to generate the broadest input from a diverse group of stakeholders, several roundtable discussion groups and meetings with organizations. The online survey generated a snapshot of the current issues, demonstrated successes and a short-list of vision ideas for the future of preservation in the city. Over 360 individuals completed the survey form.

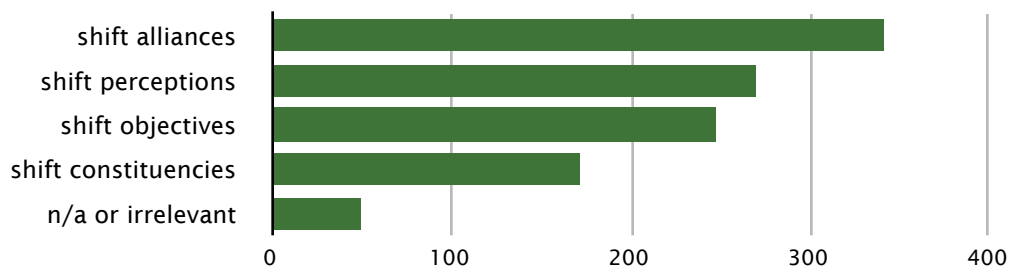
Online survey respondents were asked to describe the **top three challenges** threatening the buildings and communities in New York City over the next 25 years. All phrase responses (typically three per respondent, totaling 1104 discrete comments) were parsed, then grouped and sorted under nine prominent themes, as shown below:



Survey respondents were asked to rank the top three issues New York City historic preservationists should address over the next 25 years, and their replies were grouped into twelve major categories as shown below:



When asked **how the work of the historic preservation field can become more relevant** in shaping the future of New York City, responses from survey participants fell into five key categories, as shown below:



A handful of **free-response observations** from survey participants were of special relevance to the overall conclusions of this report, and are excerpted below.

•

“We are in an environment that has preservation in constant battle. It is hard to move forward when you cannot even stay in place...it is also exhausting when one has constant emergencies. This leaves little time to plan and be pro-active, which must delight many in the real estate industry.” (online survey respondent #18)

•

“[HP is] becoming a lightning rod for a tangle of issues too large for HP to actually address on its own: private property rights vs. public benefits; sustainability vs. resource-mining; community empowerment vs. top-down planning & development; gentrification vs. cultural preservation & continuity; long-term community investment vs. short-term profit-taking; elitism vs. populism; cultural values vs. economic values; taste vs. policy; zero-sum battle vs. dialog & compromise; and so on....” (online survey respondent #319)

•

“In the preservation movement concentration seems to be on isolated issues as they arise. An overarching policy designed to coordinate efforts throughout the city, as you seem to be doing, might create an effective political force. Something akin to an electronic communication task force tracking historic preservation issues throughout the city, identifying common threads and directing attention to what actions can be taken could help government decision makers see their policies in terms of their long range effect.” (online survey respondent #16)

•

“Historic preservation desperately needs to be more inclusive. Right now, the major players in the field are older, and overwhelmingly white. Historic preservation, at its core, is a grassroots movement, just like environmental justice, affordable housing advocacy, etc. Unfortunately, due to preservation’s domination by the old guard, it has a reputation as an enemy of these movements. The field needs not only some PR help, but an influx of new ideas and ways of thinking that align preservation with the other movements that are working to make NYC a more livable city for all New Yorkers.” (online survey respondent #28)

•

“People come before anything else. If a diverse population can’t afford to live in a city or even neighborhoods within that city in a healthy, sustainable partnership then it doesn’t matter if buildings are preserved or not - the human element will be missing, which is what created the buildings to begin with.” (online survey respondent #64)

•

“I believe that the movement towards sustainability in architecture, by focusing almost solely on new construction, puts preservation at a distinct disadvantage. We must work to broaden the scope of the discussion to include a better understanding of life-cycle analysis, community sustainability, financial

responsibility, and the benefits of figuring out how to do better with what we have rather than writing it off as ‘historic and cute’ but of no value to sustainable initiatives.” (online survey respondent #90)

•

“While I appreciate and prefer protection of character and building/places, economic growth and prosperity for citizens is most important to me and investors and the populace in general.” (online survey respondent #117)

PHASE 2 of the project included detailed analysis of the online survey results, convening six roundtable discussion groups, and hosting a weekend retreat.

Roundtable topics were identified as ideas developing from the results of the online survey and the weekend retreat that the organizers felt merited additional focused discussion. Each roundtable invited a group of 12-15 participants with expertise on the issue at hand to contribute to a free-form conversation guided by a guest moderator. **Roundtables** were convened on the following six issues:

- Land-use regulations
- Environmental sustainability
- Affordable housing
- Incentives
- Research
- Messaging and Branding

The **weekend retreat** at the Pocantico Conference Center of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund convened 22 emerging preservation leaders and practitioners along with the project steering committee and a professional facilitator for a two-day discussion.

The participants in the Pocantico meeting identified a lengthy list of their hopes for the future and further refined the list to six key priorities:

- Develop a NYC specific research agenda
- Develop new ideas for messaging and branding
- Focus on environmental and sustainability issues
- Create more alliances and coalitions
- Increase incentives for preservation
- Seek out new sources of funding

At this point in the project a few patterns were beginning to emerge: the need to engage ideas that expand preservation's ability to connect with the needs of people, the need make a stronger case through serious research, and the need to be prepared to address current issues like environmental sustainability. In addition, an overall sense of frustration with the lack of movement on these issues was evident.

PHASE 3 of the project included a one-day **workshop** entitled "The Future of Preservation in New York City: Issues, Ideas, Opportunities, Action." Workshop participants were asked to think about the future - 20 to 30 years from now - where do we want to go, what will it take to get us there, how does preservation position itself in this every changing city.

The workshop participants set their own agenda, moderated their own discussion sections and prioritized a list of key concerns by day's end. Participant-defined breakout sessions examined 16 discrete topics:

Waterfront

Education & Craft

Discovering History & Accessing it in NYC

Historic Preservation Preserves Social Fabric and Unifies

Community Education + Organization + Activism

The Next Generation

Religious Properties

Selling the Idea

Sustainability and Historic Preservation

Places that Matter

Incentives for Preservation

Reforming NYC Landmarks Law

One Big Historic District

Neighborhood Commercial Revitalization

New Good Design = HP Future + Preserving the Recent Past

Political and Economic Realities

During the concluding session of the Armory workshop, participants listed **key themes and ideas** that recurred throughout their conversations. Participants were invited to place four red dots next to those of highest importance and interest. The result was a prioritized list of action items:

1. create links between HP and environmental preservation
2. utilize 3-5 year window of opportunity to advance new policies
3. broaden the definition of historic preservation
4. educate in civics and aesthetics
5. expand historic preservation tool kit beyond landmarks
6. increase diversity within HP and its constituencies
7. advance neighborhood preservation & planning
8. strengthen the landmarks law without damaging it
9. educate children
10. move from reactive to proactive posture

The project's third phase concludes with this report. The [findings section](#) of this report presents an "idea bank" of participant recommendations for future action containing 102 items derived directly from all phases of the project as outlined above.

More detailed results from each of phase can be found [online](#).

MAJOR FINDINGS

What follows is a prioritized list of ideas -- the “idea bank” -- with details, wherever possible, action steps to begin to move the idea forward over the next two decades. This summarizes many of the ideas and recommendations heard by the project coordinators over the year-long project. Every attempt was made to reflect exactly the thoughts gathered from the participants.

There emerged from the process **10 key categories** related to the future of historic preservation that participants in the *Preservation Vision: NYC* project -- numbering nearly 500 voices in all -- found most important. Those categories, in order of overall frequency, are:

1. address environmental sustainability
2. undertake serious research
3. expand incentives
4. implement more land use regulations
5. strengthen the Landmarks Law
6. contribute to community livability
7. focus messaging & branding
8. expand alliances & diversity
9. identify new sources of funding
10. enhance education

On the following pages, these 10 categories are further explained and complemented with specific ideas for active engagement. Many ideas interrelate, some may appear slightly altered, and belong to more than one category. The contents of this “idea bank” -- some new, some twists on old ideas, and some no doubt being pursued by existing groups or individuals -- were gathered directly from participants.

Every attempt was made to convey the breadth and content of these exchanges between participants, but brevity demanded that many useful contributions were simplified, combined, or left out altogether. In no case are the assertions and assessments summarized here a reflection of the organizers’ opinions or best knowledge; they belong only to the participants and contribute to an open process of deliberation. Detailed documents on the results of the online survey, roundtable discussions, weekend retreat and final Armory workshop can be found at www.preservationvision-nyc.org.

I. **Environmental Sustainability** [back to list](#)

Throughout the project, the role of preservation in a city-wide response to climate change was among the most often repeated future concerns. Many agreed that the moment is ripe for convergence with others sharing an interest in environmentally sound, energy-efficient, and socially conscious approaches to housing and real estate development.

Frequent expression of interest in environmental sustainability among participants mirrors the tempo of discourse in the general public and media at this time. The need for firm steps towards clarity and unity of purpose was often articulated, and may reflect more broadly a growing frustration with the lack of tools and capacity within the historic preservation community to address urgent situations.

This category also links directly to the next regarding the need for serious research. Obviously, historic preservation needs to make the claim of relevance to the environmental issues more firmly using credible research and data.

Participant recommendations for more coordinated engagement with the issue of environmental sustainability included:

- 1) Address the issue of sustainability, not climate change.
- 2) Work to change the yard sticks that measure a building's sustainability to include more incentive for reuse, retrofitting and upgrading.
- 3) Promote the "greenness" of historic preservation to owners, governments and investors; old buildings are a big part of green living and tied to an idea of the good life; preservation should ride on the coattails of the sustainability movement and lay claim to decades of sensitivity to "green" design and balanced development.
- 4) Craft a preservation-specific research agenda and commission research that is rigorous and defensible; only when we have better science will we be able to support our arguments, and we cannot afford to continue to approach issues like sustainability as advocates.
- 5) Generate studies to counter the notion that a tear-down and rebuild is always the "green" solution, considering that the carbon neutral point for rebuilding may be 20 years out or more -- not good enough for the environment.
- 6) Produce the data to prove that LEED does not do enough to reflect New York City conditions, and LEED standards should focus more on existing buildings.
- 7) Lobby the New York State Environmental Quality Review (SEQR) and New York City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) to develop a protocol on demolition.
- 8) Since New York City tax code currently favors demolition and rebuilding for green architecture, explore a demolition tax, stiff recycling requirements and landfill fees to overcome market barriers and eliminate the incentives for demolition and reconstruction.

- 9) Look critically at existing tax codes, create incentives to green older buildings, twin with other credits, do more cost benefit analysis and research.
- 10) Build more alliances, get at the table: Work on climate action plans, long-term action planning (get preservation fully integrated), building codes (building, energy, zoning) and interface more with green building groups, architects, developers and others.
- 11) Create a NYC preservation task force on environmental sustainability to pursue a common agenda, set priorities and commission research. Get organized in time for any climate change legislation that might be forthcoming.
- 12) Encourage the State Historic Preservation Office to be more proactive in its support for rehabilitation projects that include low and high tech “green” upgrades.
- 13) Pursue a moratorium on demolition and rebuilding as necessary because of global warming.
- 14) Create a database of uses or programs that are looking for buildings -- and -- a database with buildings looking for uses. Match in a proactive way. Set up a market for old buildings, get more people to creatively use the space that is available.
- 15) Create green collar jobs, bringing preservation skills into that category; reclassify HABS/HAER as “green” work.
- 16) Put environmental preservation in a long-term perspective by creating a fund to bridge the gap between short term investment and long term interests and agenda.

2. **Research** [back to list](#)

Consistent emphasis was given to the need for research to build a strong foundation of data, analysis and theory on which the historic preservation profession of 2030 might rest. It was recognized that the field does not have general research foundations, nor do practitioners have a shared vocabulary (yardsticks, parameters, criteria) with which to compare findings. Accordingly, there is no obvious way to resolve competing claims of “significance” or “utility” (even among preservationists themselves) and little ammunition with which to rebut arguments against protecting historic structures. Producing factual information to back up intuitive arguments in favor of preservation constitutes a pressing need.

The absence of a solution poses significant challenges to the field and hampers its evolution towards greater collaboration and effectiveness. Preservationists are skillful when measuring material performance and historical value in older buildings, but the bulk of their arguments in support of investment rest on non-verifiable claims of social good. Until quantitative comparisons reveal positive impact trends leaning strongly in favor of rehabilitated structures, it seems unlikely that preservation can enhance the persuasiveness of its message. Several respondents emphasized that research must be separated from advocacy and regulation; it must be independent and reliably objective.

Participant recommendations for enhanced research capacity included:

- 17) Compile existing data gathered by the National Park Service, Landmarks Preservation Commission, City agencies (working on housing, urban development, and public hardship), the New York State Historic Preservation Office, and borough presidents’ offices to create a nonaligned, information-sharing baseline.
- 18) Insert preservation issues and questions into ongoing data gathering now undertaken by city agencies and with other groups to create longitudinal data sources.
- 19) Design, test and promote a versatile scale to measure the impacts of any decision under consideration by policy makers, advocates, citizens, etc.
- 20) Set research priorities and agenda, moving away from the abstract and connecting historic preservation issues to the cause-effect relationships of social policy -- mental health, carbon emissions, productivity, waste management, economics, housing, class and races dynamics, etc.
- 21) Investigate the factors barring more support for historic preservation projects and greater diversity -- of actors and constituents -- within the preservation community.
- 22) Develop reliable, quantitative ways to measure the value of concern for buildings felt within communities.
- 23) Develop reliable, quantitative ways to determine the degree to which preservation and landmarking foster gentrification and demographic stability.
- 24) Consider various options to execute a research agenda -- consortium of interested organizations, existing university programs, existing think-tank in related fields, or

creation of a new entity. Desired results and goals should be determined prior to greater steps like creation of a new organization.

- 25) Start a class to train future researchers, including all relevant disciplines (statistics, economics, environmental psychology, etc.)

3. **Incentives** [back to list](#)

Enhancing incentives to encourage preservation work and simplifying the process for their utilization were considered key issues for the future success of historic preservation. It was routinely suggested that a bundle of incentives should be developed and presented to the public in a clear, concrete, and persuasive way, invoking the logic of sustainability, energy-modeling, and long-term agendas for financial benefit.

There are already incentives -- federal, state, J51, grant programs, TDR's, etc. -- but they do not seem to be a major factor in encouraging more preservation work. Problems with current incentives, designed for average homeowners and non-profit owners, seem too complicated while payoffs for the added time and trouble are not guaranteed.

Participant recommendations for strengthening existing incentive systems included:

- 26) Reduce or eliminate building and permit fees for landmarks, like in Chicago. Where fees are a real obstacle, find a funding source for applicants in distressed areas.
- 27) Prove that investment incentives for energy efficiency should apply to historic preservation (subsidizing, for example, proper storm windows and wood replacement windows); create finance mechanisms to support front-end, long-term investments to get the benefit over time.
- 28) Identify funding sources to offset costs for proper restoration material use -- wood instead of aluminum siding, for example; look into cooperative purchasing economies and other economies of scale to address the need for more suppliers of historic materials.
- 29) Generate funds to offset fees and provide other incentives -- community preservation act, create funding stream, land transfer act (land transfer or real estate tax), and demolition tax.
- 30) Create tax increment finance districts in which tax from new buildings is banked for preservation for a number of years; requires state approval, but over 20 states are using them already.
- 31) Create real property tax abatements, where non-profit rehabilitation projects generate preservation certificates sold to other property owners for tax credits.
- 32) Create property tax deferrals, state enabling legislations that provide for property tax deferral on improvements.
- 33) Create youth training in preservation and restoration as green collar jobs, creating more jobs and larger skill force, increasing affordability and availability of skilled workers.
- 34) Provide technical assistance for homeowners by underwriting up-front architectural, accounting, legal, and engineering consultations associated with rehabilitation of historic properties; some BID's have experts on staff, like the Brooklyn Heights

committee that provides design assistance and pro-bono services to qualifying residents.

- 35) Promote the Community Preservation Act to allow local land transfer taxes to go towards preservation, open space, acquisition of public lands, historic sites, or affordable housing.
- 36) Amend legislation associated with Transfer of Development Rights (TDR's) – to make them more flexible and context-sensitive.
- 37) Streamline the permit process associated with state tax credits and increase certainty of approval, with fast track for public interest projects and desirable goals like subsidized housing or green building.

4. **Land-use regulations** [back to list](#)

Discussion of land-use regulations focused on historic asset ordinances for outlying areas, regulatory tools, community review, standards and design guidelines, long-term planning, and comprehensive zoning. It was noted that limitations embedded in NYC regulations, specifically associated with landmarking, might be eased by the use of conservation districts. These districts could be routinely regulated by an appropriate, to be determined, entity able to consider use, scale, aesthetics and social cohesion. Potential obstacles are many if review boards are not made up of professionals, designed with an appeal process, and shored up with strong Mayoral support. Many participants emphasized a need for comprehensive zoning reform and more effective planning.

Specific participant recommendations for enhanced land-use regulation included:

- 38) Think beyond the Landmarks law, identifying innovative land-use regulations that can be used to protect New York City neighborhoods.
- 39) Create Neighborhood Conservation Districts with their own, context-driven historic ordinances for areas worthy of protection not at the level of the existing landmarks law; provide guidelines that are more flexible than landmarks but regulate size, etc.
- 40) Create written guidelines for aesthetic regulation in design districts that are controlled locally by the neighborhood and perhaps regulated at the borough level through community boards; coordinate, subsidize, and train these boards; establish a system of appeals through the zoning board and the landmarks commission.
- 41) Consider creation of a Division of Urban Design and Preservation, like the one in Seattle, and explore examples from other places.
- 42) Re-examine the broader implications of down-zoning, which has proven good for some neighborhoods but causes problems in others by curtailing development or fostering out of scale construction in adjacent areas.
- 43) Adjust rules governing the transfer of air and development rights to give more options and flexibility to owners of landmarked buildings.
- 44) Explore policy adjustment related to federal tax credits in cities with a population greater than 1 million, providing more options for buildings that are not of state or local landmark quality.
- 45) Review and update the 1950s Bard Law.
- 46) Create a flexible system for the banking of transferred air and development rights.
- 47) Insure that easement and other development rights are strictly attached to the building that generated them, not the institutional owner.
- 48) Place square footage caps on new stores to maintain traditional streetscape scale and appearance in historic areas, banning “formula retail”; complement these initiatives with “big box” zones in designated areas like Ladies Mile.

5. **Strengthening the Landmarks Law** [back to list](#)

Discussion among participants was often dominated by concerns regarding the future of the New York City landmarks law, considered by many to be the centerpiece of the preservation arsenal, and by many others to be a growing liability. Some suggested that the law should be updated, some suggested that it should be discarded and replaced by an entirely new law, and some suggested that it should be strengthened in its current form. In any case, it seems to be the elephant in the middle of the room wherever the potential of the preservation profession is being weighed. Many participants were highly informed and expert regarding this legislation, its history, and its ramifications.

Specific participant recommendations regarding the New York City Landmarks Law included:

- 49) Engage communities in the landmark identification process providing opportunities for “places that matter” and cultural landmarks -- not always identified by architectural excellence -- to be considered.
- 50) Compel the City Council to articulate a community purpose when it overturns a LPC designation.
- 51) Compensate commissioners appropriately and provide additional support staff.
- 52) Take steps to make the LPC designation process more democratic.
- 53) Amend the 40-day rules regarding the review period for Department of Buildings to issue permits, specifically by requiring review of all demolition permits and perhaps significant alteration requests, with the specific goal to expand the possibility to protect buildings that have not been vetted.
- 54) Reform the law to provide more protection and support a more rational approach to landmarking, putting it on par with other city agencies.
- 55) Create more regional designation offices.
- 56) Make landmarking more profitable for local owners.
- 57) Make the landmarking process more transparent, clarifying distinctions between internal policy and legal obligation.
- 58) Revisit the authenticity issue regarding LPC consideration of structures that have been altered.

6. **Community Livability** [back to list](#)

Affordable housing and small business retention were considered by many to be a priority for New Yorkers and an issue to which preservation should make more substantial contributions in the future. In these conversations, affordable housing included both low-income or subsidized housing and the question of general affordability for middle-class New Yorkers. In both cases, clearly the link between affordable housing and preservation is important because it draws preservation closer to broader social issues such as public health, enjoyment of high living standards for all economic classes, social diversity, and social justice. If preservation is seen as a positive force for the creation and perpetuation of affordable housing it might in turn garner much needed public support and increased relevance.

Specific participant recommendations for strengthening preservation's contributions to a social agenda included:

- 59) Find a way to make it easier to use the Historic Preservation tax credit program; if the State Historic Preservation Office could be more flexible and the standards for restoration eased so that developers could also conform to code requirements, the tax credit could be used to help finance safe and affordable apartments.
- 60) Collaborate with affordable housing developers and advocacy organizations on tax credit filing, research and paperwork in support of middle class property owners and lower-income housing developers.
- 61) Create a city policy for mandatory inclusionary zoning, with new subsidies for the creation of affordable housing; since available properties are privately owned and expensive for affordable housing developers to buy, more public funding should be devoted to helping them succeed.
- 62) Rethink the question of density on wide streets; NYC has been and will continue to be a growing city, no historic district designation or down-zoning should be affected without some thought to where new housing can be built in the community; pursue a nuanced approach as in the case of the East Village rezoning, where the character will be protected by contextual zoning but taller buildings can be built on the avenues.
- 63) Explore opportunities for affordable housing development using the unused floor area ratio of historic buildings; the current "transfer of development rights," or TDR, program is probably not being used to create anything but market rate housing, and only designated landmarks are eligible.
- 64) Expand and intensify public participation when the City Planning Commission and Landmarks Preservation Commission interact with each other during the designation or rezoning process; if brought into the collective discussion of goals and trade-offs, the communities would better understand and be able to help shape any new plan for their area.
- 65) Maintain the streetscape by considering a square footage cap for new stores and banning "formula retail."

- 66) Explore ways to preserve small businesses -- investigate tax credits to property owners who have long-term commercial tenants.
- 67) Create a small business zones. Get community boards together with city council sub committees to hold oversight hearings on small neighborhood commercial areas -- neighborhood conservation districts.
- 68) Limit the number of franchises of the same business in the city.
- 69) Contain big-box retail in specified areas.

7. **Messaging and Branding** [back to list](#)

Serious consideration throughout the project was given to the way historic preservation is perceived by the general public in New York City today and how these perceptions can be reframed in a more positive way. The question of target audience was discussed and many participants observed that a diverse, relatively young audience is highly desirable, though this demographic generally does not sense that the goals of the profession relate well to them. It was noted that preservationists are often perceived as stodgy, elitist, negative, and scolding -- not yet associated with flexibility, new options, new spaces, new technologies, and profitability. It was also suggested that there is a problem with the words “preservation” and “historic.” These give the impression of old, fragile and highly important places and things fixed within the realm of the connoisseur, not the layperson.

It was also mentioned that historic preservation should consider ways to become part of the psyche of New Yorkers. Perhaps taking cues from the green movement and adopting a broad market-driven preservation initiative. Making historic preservation into a mindset, a lifestyle and an issue ordinary people can actively contribute to in their daily lives.

Specific participant recommendations for strengthening messaging and branding in support of preservation include:

- 70) Look at perception problems associated with the word “preservation,” considering how to provide a new, positive connotation to what has been a static profession.
- 71) Demystify the language of the profession and put explanations of its benefits in accessible, jargon-free terms that speak to their values; find stories that go beyond conflicts and battles.
- 72) Put human stories first: notions of “neighborhood preservation” and “community character” and “sense of place” have meaning for regular New Yorkers, but they need translation and specificity; for now, many associate the work of the profession with the negative impacts of gentrification.
- 73) Reframe the core message; balance negative stories with positive ones that contribute to a different conversation; i.e., environmentalism is not just about saving a tree, but about clean air so you can breathe.
- 74) Cultivate productive press relations by documenting, interpreting and pitching positive stories on a regular basis, using case studies to show model projects with vital links to communities; other fields and industries conduct weekly conference calls with press contacts, for example.
- 75) Form new alliances with progressive thinkers.
- 76) Create a new professional magazine for general consumption; Preservation magazine not doing it.
- 77) Commission postcards, film festivals, public relations consultants, books, public access television productions, online technical guides, NY1 Minute segments,

columns in TimeOut and other baseline publications, subway visuals like Poetry in Motion but Preservation in Motion, and create a unified logo.

- 78) Coordinate an event series, like Open House New York, for preservation.
- 79) Evolve communications beyond the eblasts; pick a message all about New York, a poster child, and reposition in a sophisticated way, not just on a crisis-by-crisis basis.
- 80) Support and augment the creation of more block associations, devise a standard template; for example, the Sustainable Business Council helps individual stores figure out who to run their business.
- 81) Create a website with all the tools needed to rehabilitate a privately owned building or form a new block association -- no need to reinvent the wheel each time.
- 82) Host celebrations: 50th anniversary of the Landmarks Law, 200th anniversary of the New York grid, etc., linking festivities to all of New York, not landmarks in particular.
- 83) Engage and commission the art community to design sophisticated and unexpected materials; preservation needs a familiar, universal symbol like the recycling arrows or organic certification seal: a big wrecking ball?

8. **Alliances and Diversity** [back to list](#)

Building alliances and coalitions and expanding opportunities for cross-disciplinary collaboration emerged as major concerns for many participants. Equal emphasis was given to the need for more conversation within the field and to the need for new collaborators outside the field. For the moment, it was frequently observed, that while preservation has an important and critical purpose – to advocate and fight for preservation of buildings – the field is too bogged down with infighting between groups. Many participants believe that more structured exchanges outside of the daily preservation battles, like the ones supported by the *Preservation Vision* project, would be helpful, along with deliberate efforts going beyond crisis response to build common ground and shared agendas.

Likewise, participants suggested that more effort should be made to participate in meetings and conferences hosted by other professions, formalizing interdisciplinary dialogue as a proactive approach. This would multiply opportunities to pool resources, build bridges and get to the table where important decisions are being made. Emphasis was also given to building alliances with communities, finding ways to engage people and work inclusively with local groups. Some participants encouraged all preservation groups and practitioners to get into communities and assess what their needs and desires might be and then determine how preservation can respond.

Seasoned voices noted that successful collaboration calls for negotiated trade-offs, well-defined priorities, and reliable data in hand to support rational comparisons, decisions and arguments. While some participants called for protocols to identify common causes that will anchor a strong, unified front, others called for improved diversity – which might expand the field's spectrum of concerns.

Specific participant recommendations for building alliances in support of the professional preservation community include:

- 84) Pursue interdisciplinary actions: formalize an interdisciplinary dialogue to reach out and reduce the tendency to respond reflexively to specific issues or threats.
- 85) Build alliances with communities, identifying new ways to engage people, to work inclusively with local groups before conflicts or imminent threats, and assess the nature and scope of local needs with an eye to how preservation might respond.
- 86) Use other tools to engage a broader partner base: listserves, roundtables, media, websites, articles in allied professional journals, etc.
- 87) Negotiating trade-offs in order to build political and community buy-in; use research data to be prepared for tough bargaining, define priorities and make rational arguments.
- 88) Work strategically with other groups – community housing groups for example – and isolate areas of common interest in relation to tough political issues; find point of alignment with consortiums, unions, politicians, special interest groups, etc.

9. **Funding** [back to list](#)

Not surprisingly, the need to bring more revenue into all aspects of preservation work -- budgets for existing organizations, programs, new initiatives, physical work and acquisition, etc. -- was frequently mentioned by participants as a high priority. Respondents spoke in favor of increased tax revenues accruing to a fund for preservation projects derived from filming in the city, tourism, parking, hotels, real estate broker commissions in historic districts, voluntary demolition, etc.

It was noted often that strategic planning for expanded funding requires knowledge and experience that preservation professionals often lack; here again the need for alliances and collaborations, serious research and data were considered integral to enhanced funding. These high-priority issues converge neatly around the question of revenues: if steps are taken to support research, the strength of preservation arguments improves, and if these arguments improve, previously untapped funding prospects would open to the preservation community.

Going further, some respondents argued that the preservation field should be more proactive in helping foundations set their priorities instead of always fitting preservation work into their guidelines.

All boats rise on the tide, attracting to the profession younger professionals with diverse educational and cultural backgrounds, more members, more donors, and enthusiastic volunteers.

Specific participant recommendations for identifying new funding sources include:

- 89) Require developers receiving public subsidies to incorporate some preservation work into their projects or fund other preservation projects.
- 90) Create a Preservation Superfund to freeze property taxes for rehabilitated buildings meeting revised energy efficiency standards for up to 25 years.
- 91) Lobby for higher tax revenues from groups taking direct benefits from New York's unique sense of place, funneling some of those funds into preservation; here better alliances with city agencies, earning preservationist a place at the decision making table, would provide significant advantages.
- 92) Earmark special tax levied on developers requesting demolition and real estate transactions where property values are elevated due to historic associations, all channeled into preservation projects.
- 93) Develop partnerships with major funding agencies and foundations to help shape their priorities, providing them with current insights regarding preservation's expanded priorities.
- 94) Cultivate "high roller" donors for preservation, especially those interested in the "green movement" and the question of environmental sustainability in general; Al Gore as spokesperson? Why not?

- 95) Generate data that will lead to funding by demonstrating tangible results.
- 96) Create conduits through which technical consulting services can be sold to for-profit developers and property owners, like coops contemplating rehabilitation or upgrade; these same services could be provided *pro bono* to individual property owners, non-profits, etc.
- 97) Undertake invigorated grassroots fundraising: door to door, hands-on, getting people involved.

10. **Education** [back to list](#)

Many conversations in the course of this project concluded with a call for enhanced education at all levels – children, policy makers, the general public. This subject was addressed by participants as a two-way street: the preservation community needs to educate and to be educated in order to improve its productivity and effectiveness. It was observed that low “awareness” and a shallow “knowledge base” plagued both the general public in New York, whose appreciation for the benefits of historic places and their protection was often characterized as insufficient, and the preservation profession itself, whose understanding of local community needs and the work of allied disciplines is chronically weak.

Specific participant recommendations for strengthening education and awareness, in both directions, include:

- 98) Host workshops to educate the general public in civics and aesthetics, with emphasis on children and community boards.
- 99) Place preservation directly into the K-12 public school curriculum, putting them into contact with historic places and delivering a message to children over consecutive years of their education so that they can take it home; give them the idea that the past is good, countering the idea that new is always better.
- 100) Foster a new generation that can appreciate the preservation agenda, supported with mentoring opportunities that bring together new preservationists with those who have been in the field awhile.
- 101) Foster a specialized work force armed with preservation skills training across New York State, supporting new preservation projects and job creation in a rapidly changing economic environment where conservation is increasingly central.
- 102) Create programs that provide vital information to property owners, the real estate industry, and politicians with decision-making power in relation to preservation incentives.

SYNTHESIS & CONCLUSIONS

There is no easy way to summarize all the outstanding participant responses collected over the year-long duration of the *Preservation Vision: NYC* project. In this final section of the report, the project managers offer a handful of reflections gleaned from this process on the general state of the field, the temperament of the profession, and its prospects.

While detailed findings have been documented elsewhere, here it must suffice to say that historic preservation professionals in New York hold convictions so diverse -- about what the field is, what it could be, and what it does well -- that one is left to wonder where lively debate ends and lack of internal coherence begins. For certain, practitioners and advocates of historic preservation do not share a plan for how to make measurable impacts on New York of 2030, and meanwhile cannot consistently prove the usefulness of their work to New York of 2009.

The purpose of the *Preservation Vision: NYC* project was to arrange a bank of chairs, free to all interested parties, in front of a window. This was a window looking onto the habits and aspirations of the profession; it was a window looking onto New York City as it will be in 2030; it was a window of opportunity for imagining collaborations, actions, and policy changes during an economic downturn. At the beginning of the *Preservation Vision: NYC* process, the chairs were empty and the agenda was blank; the cover of this report was intended to reflect this blankness, and the sense of possibility that informed these efforts at their outset.

We left tablets and pencils on the chairs, they filled, and we too took careful notes, making no effort to predict, shape, edit or improve what emerged. We simply thought it was worth a look, and our donors generously agreed.

general observations

On the horizon, *Preservation Vision: NYC* participants saw: compliance demands for environmental sustainability, new demographic patterns and constituencies, prospective partnerships with former rivals, a pressing need for incentives expanded beyond the Landmarks Law, and the specter of declining relevance if negative perceptions of the preservation profession persist. The nature of these observations, and the steps recommended by *Preservation Vision: NYC* participants to address them, are detailed elsewhere in this report.

Under overcast conditions, a window becomes a mirror. In that frame we saw energetic and committed actors, savvy strategic thinkers, resourceful advocates, and a shared interest in seeing the preservation profession evolve. We also saw a fleet of recycled causes, complaints, and proposals tossed on the choppy waters of New York's real estate development market without rudders of data, firm proposals, or constructive self-assessment. We saw a profession without sufficient inclination to consolidate and refine ideas about what the big problems are, and how they might be addressed most efficiently.

Though many of these reflections are unflattering, a clever practitioner will make good use of what the *Preservation Vision: NYC* conduit delivered. The findings of this project provide a blueprint of sorts that might guide the construction of an improved professional apparatus fit for the needs and challenges of New York in 2030.

rising to the occasion

Many participants suggested that the preservation community in New York stands at an important juncture, with the convergence of a new administration in Washington and a national economic crisis. Tightening of the credit markets, sluggish construction, economic stimulus, and growing concern for carbon emissions in the building industry all may contribute to a climate much more sympathetic to the core concerns of the preservation profession. If the profession is able to link its agenda to these trends, it will be able to capitalize on temporary skepticism regarding *laissez faire* economics and an involuntary rest period for the wrecking ball.

How to make this linkage, rising to meet these new challenges and shifting expectations? Participants suggested that the profession has a 3 to 5 year window of opportunity to make clear that its work will have a broad, positive affect a wide cross-section of New York City residents.

It must be ready -- armed with data, partners, and examples -- to show, for example, that its work reduces carbon footprints, embodies a commitment to social justice, and makes daily life more pleasant and affordable for regular New Yorkers. This type of readiness is not easily achieved. A new generation of practitioners must address the gap separating New York's existing preservation establishment from an optimal state of readiness -- a gap many participants characterized as distressingly wide. One step forward, some participants suggested, would be to extend the *Preservation Vision: NYC* discourse to create more opportunities for discussion, exchange, and critique outside of institutional roles.

the problem of relevance

Participants routinely emphasized discrepancies that decrease effectiveness and undermine positive public perceptions of the preservation community: professional capacities that do not align well with residents' needs, campaigns that do not align well with political and economic realities, assumptions that do not align with data, and arguments that are loosely tethered to data. This project found that the cloak of the martyr -- a traditional costume of the preservation profession -- may not have served it well. The profession needs to move decisively to buttress its ethical, intuitive, and aesthetic postures with facts, figures, and transferrable arguments owing little to a listener's appreciation of architectural poetics. Once constructed, these arguments would be likely to eclipse common complaints about elitism, obstructionism, and irrelevance.

Lack of supporting, impartial research hampers many of the field's central aspirations. It will be difficult to implement campaigns for expanded public awareness, youth education, re-branding, and public funding -- all high priority issues identified by *Preservation Vision: NYC* participants -- in the absence of persuasive cost-benefit data linking the work of the profession to superior impacts on regular New York residents over the long haul. The basis of

the field should be shifted from a reactionary, militant, and dogmatic sensibility towards one that is widely perceived as practical, reasonable, empirical, and collaborative. One upshot of these *Preservation Vision: NYC* findings is that such a shift is not just desirable, but probably mandatory if the profession seeks to improve the persuasiveness of its message and associate its work with key social concerns.

an internal crisis of capacity

At present, New York's preservation community is not prepared to complete this transition in time to pass through the window of opportunity discussed above. This prospect of non-convergence was frequently identified by participants as a source of anxiety and motivation. Serious, unimpeachable research to substantiate basic preservation assumptions and assertions is required, collected in an idea bank of "data that are practical, timely and tied to issues, putting information at the fingertips of all groups to use," yet the necessary armature, resources and leadership seem absent. Acquisition of armature, resources, and leadership in turn seem to demand unimpeachable evidence of effectiveness -- for today's preservationists in New York, a Catch-22!

Meanwhile, the field can no longer afford to indulge its historically intense passion for advocacy and resistance to the point of exclusion of more positive and sensible postures. In many ways, these passionate reflexes appear to have turned inward, producing internal divisions and conflicts that obstruct progress and collaboration. A more unified attempt to find common ground should move to the foreground of the professional stage. *Preservation Vision: NYC* demonstrated the value of this shift by exploring shared values.

climbing through the window

Participants explored some promising solutions. Pointing to its potentials, past successes, and timeliness, the profession might leverage support for a substantial laboratory exercise -- assuming it can ask for this support with a single voice. An emerging leader might be recruited to lead this campaign -- assuming that leader had the gift of a vivid imagination. Pilot projects might be executed quickly to test the value of the idea bank -- assuming the profession is ready to compromise, abandon zero-sum-game modeling, and judge success from an end-user's perspective. The pilot projects might be productive, illuminating a longer-term strategy for reform, but assuming disappointing outcomes, supported by research, are accepted gracefully and their implications embraced.

From a chair next to the window to the embrace of high-impact, collaborative urban development strategies grounded in impartial research -- that is a long and unpaved path, almost certainly fraught with difficulties. The hundreds of voices contributing to the discussion hosted by *Preservation Vision: NYC* have helped to sketch some of the routes that are possible. This was, at best, a first step: tentative, not in unison, and with detractors in tow.

It remains for stalwart individuals with exceptionally keen vision to extend this exploration, taking from these deliberations whatever may be of use along their way.

LINKS TO DETAILED PROJECT INFORMATION

Further information and the detailed reports from all phases of the Preservation Vision: NYC project can be found on the project website at www.preservationvision-nyc.org or by clicking the links below.

1. Please find the project online home & summary [here](#).
2. Please find the online survey summary & report [here](#).
3. Please find the weekend retreat summary & report [here](#).
4. Please find the National Trust conference & presentation [here](#).
5. Please find a roundtable series summary & report [here](#).
6. Please find an interim summary report [here](#).
7. Please find the Armory workshop summary & report [here](#).