

**A**s older homes are demolished and replaced with dramatically larger, out-of-scale new structures, the essential character of existing neighborhoods are changed forever. House by house, neighborhoods are losing a part of their historic fabric and much of their character.

Not every older home can or even should be saved. Teardowns are sometimes an acceptable approach for redeveloping existing areas and increasing density, but more recently, viable healthy historic neighborhoods are targets for teardowns.

At the heart of the issue, teardowns are about losing historic architecture, but the phenomenon is also about community character, smart growth, affordable housing, environmental sustainability, economic and demographic shifts, and ever-changing real estate market and housing preferences.

A visual analysis of the teardowns practice helps illustrate the physical impact demolition and inappropriate infill are having in historic neighborhoods across the nation.

The following is the result:

### Loss of Historic Houses

Teardowns often destroy older homes that are part of the community's heritage.

### Loss of Community Character

Without proper safeguards, historic neighborhoods will lose the identity that drew residents to put down roots in the first place.

### Loss of Livability

Neighborhood livability is diminished as trees are removed, backyards are eliminated, and sunlight is blocked by towering new structures built up to the property lines.

### Loss of Diversity

Community economic and social diversity is reduced as new, more expensive homes, often referred to as "McMansions," replace affordable and entry-level, starter homes.



David Swift

*Teardown Targets.* Historic homes of all types are typical targets for teardowns, many dating to the early to mid-Twentieth century.



Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana HLF

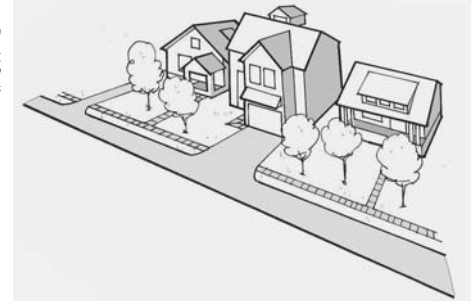


*Before and After.* This landmark house in Elkhart, IN, was purchased by new owners for its prominent waterfront site, and subsequently demolished, with neighbors caught off guard.



Nina Harradent | CTHP

*Losing Landmarks.* Historic homes in desirable neighborhoods, such as this house in Connecticut, are demolished to make way for much larger structures.



Adrian Scott Fine | NTHP

*Before and After.* Teardowns often result in over-scaled, bulky houses that do not relate to neighboring structures.



*Scale Matters.* With their volume and massing, new structures often loom over their neighbors and break the established building patterns of an area.



Adrian Scott Fine | NTHP

*Auto-Focused.* Front yards are given over to driveways and house facades are dominated by garage doors rather than porches.



Adrian Scott Fine | NTHP

*Domino Effect.* Incrementally, as the number of teardowns increases, the overall character and charm of a historic neighborhood begins to disappear, replaced by a hodgepodge of boxy new houses and forlorn-looking older homes.



Adrian Scott Fine | NTHP

*Rule of Three.* It is not uncommon for a demolished older home to be replaced with a new one that is three times as big as any other house on the block.



*A Tight Squeeze.* The shoehorning of massive, suburban-style homes into older neighborhoods will never result in a comfortable fit.



Adrian Scott Fine, James Lindberg | NTHP



*Pop-Tops.* If the older house is not completely demolished, it is often severely altered, completely encased or expanded vertically.



James Lindberg | NTHP

*Losing Livability.* The livability of historic neighborhoods is eroded when new houses are built out to the lot lines, all but eliminating side and back yards, blocking sunlight and diminishing privacy.



Adrian Scott Fine | NTHP

*Altering Development Patterns.* The new mini-castles often seem like stand-alone developments, their plans lacking uniform setbacks or architectural features that relate to adjacent historic houses.



Adrian Scott Fine | NTHP

*Building to the Limit.* New houses are often pushed to the limits and cover as much of the lot as possible, leaving little breathing room between other houses.



Sue Scherrer

*Losing Small Houses.* Homes like this Craftsman style bungalow in Denver, CO, are a common target for teardowns, perceived too small by today's standards.



James Lindberg | NTHP



*Endangered Starter Homes.* Teardowns can alter the socioeconomic balance of communities, in some places making the starter house endangered



Adrian Scott Fine | NTHP

*Tree Preservation.* Unless protected through preventive measures, mature trees and canopies that often give a community its character are often lost with teardowns.



Adrian Scott Fine | NTHP

*Disappearing Recent Past.* Post-war houses and neighborhoods from the 1950/60s are seen as ripe for teardowns, many lost before being recognized for their significance.



Anisley Park Civic Association

*Before, During and After.* Many well-maintained historic houses are needlessly demolished and replaced with larger houses without considering the full range of alternatives, such as additions.



Adrian Scott Fine | NTHP

*Nuisance Factor.* Neighborhoods experiencing teardowns face constant disruptions from noise, construction debris, water and drainage issues, and parking inconveniences.



University of Minnesota

*Making a Bold Statement.* What replaces a teardown can sometimes be visually jarring to the context of an historic neighborhood, standing out from others dramatically.

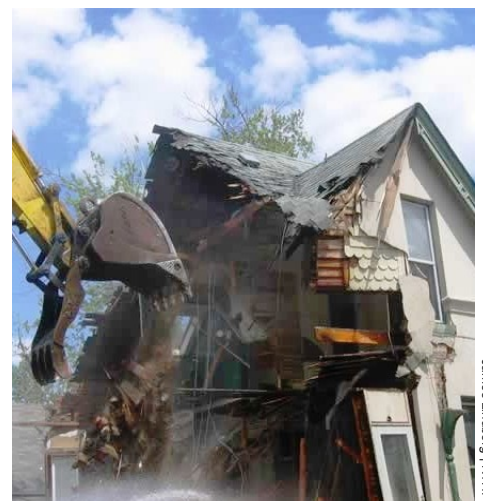


*Losing Landmarks.* Even the work of well-known architects is at risk with some of the best examples lost to teardowns, such as this modernist house in CT by Paul Rudolph.



Adrian Scott Fine | NTHP

*Looming Houses.* Many new houses range from 6,000-10,000 sq. ft. in size, making for a tight squeeze in older neighborhoods and often resulting in increased building heights.



James Lindberg | NTHP

*Redefining Community.* In some communities, up to 40 percent of the original residential housing stock has now been lost to teardowns, with about 200 homes demolished annually.

Update: March, 2008 / asf