

## **Introduction**

Hello and welcome to Places & Spaces: The Regeneration of Preservation.

My name is Dan Holland and I'm the founder and chair of the Young Preservationists Association of Pittsburgh.

This is our first conference, and I want to thank our sponsors for making it possible. They include our two lead sponsors, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission and National City Bank, as well as the Sprout Fund, PNC Bank, The Mosites Company, Dollar Bank, and many others listed in the program.

I'd also like to thank our partners Preservation Pennsylvania, Sustainable Pittsburgh, and 10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania for co-presenting "Places & Spaces."

I especially want to thank our Planning Committee who worked tirelessly (over many bottles of red wine) to pull this conference together. Please join me in applauding them for organizing a wonderful event.

I also want to thank our Board for putting up with me, our Advisory Committee for their good advice, and our Members for their commitment.

### **Am I a young preservationist?**

First of all, let me quickly dispense with the obvious question: am I a "young preservationist"? Our response is, everyone who supports the next generation is a young preservationist.

We keep alive the legacy of those who came before us. But we also add some new ideas and energy to preservation, such as our Wheeling Through History bike tour, which begins today at 3:00.

### **Why do a conference?**

So, why do a conference? Mainly it's because young people have something to say. We have two messages.

The first point is that young people are on the move, stitching back together the Pittsburgh region's fabric through historic preservation.

For instance, on yesterday's Eastside Tour, we highlighted some preservation projects that young people are driving, such as the Penn Avenue Arts Initiative.

Earlier this year, young people nominated Oakland Square to be Pittsburgh's 12<sup>th</sup> historic district.

And, last night we gave our first "Promise Award" to a group of dedicated young people at the Union Project, who are doing a great job of restoring an old church in Highland Park.

This is a city of cool spaces, post-punk housing, Flux events, and Flicks on Bricks—all being driven by young people rebuilding our city through historic preservation.

## **Challenges**

Our second message is this: while there are many preservation success stories, there are some daunting challenges. I will name three.

First, sprawl. Sprawl is Pittsburgh's new "smoke": some people see it as progress, while others see it as the source of our problems. In many ways, sprawl threatens not only historic sites, such as the Meason House in Fayette County, but unbridled development is completely unraveling the region's unique sense of place.

In the 1990s, the Pittsburgh region lost 1.2% of its population, but paved over 46% of its land.

Brownfield sites are another challenge. We are thrilled that Allegheny County has taken the lead to transform the Carrie Furnaces into a steel museum. But on smaller brownfield sites, such as old gas stations and underground mines in low- and moderate-income communities, these vacant and abandoned sites pose difficulties for constructing new homes and businesses that will attract young people.

And finally, our region's African American heritage is not in very good shape. There are 74 city historic landmarks in Pittsburgh, but only three of them relate to African American history. Worse, we have no African American sites on the National Register.

One of the reasons I started the Young Preservationists Association of Pittsburgh was the demolition of the Ellis Hotel in the Hill District in 2002.

It was eligible for listing on the National Register, but as I watched it become a pile of rubble, I said to myself, we aren't treating our history the way it could or should be treated.

Take, for instance, the first home of the National Negro Opera Company in Homewood. This grand Victorian has a fascinating past. In the 1920s and '30s, it was home to Woogie Harris, owner of the Pittsburgh Crawfords Negro League Team.

Later, it became the headquarters of Madam Mary Cardwell Dawson's opera company, and served as a centerpiece for the African American community. Famous people like Roberto Clemente and Lena Horne stayed here.

Today, it is owned by a young woman who is desperately trying to find funds to restore it. This site is eligible for listing on the National Register, but remains boarded up, covered in weeds, and deteriorating.

Sadly, there are many sites like this all across the region.

But imagine for a second if more young people knew about this home. Imagine if high school students and middle school students and college students took an interest in this amazing historical site. Perhaps if more young people were involved, this home would have a happy ending.

So, that's what we're here for—the Young Preservationists Association: to raise the consciousness of people to support our forgotten historic sites before they are gone forever.

We realize that preservation is hard work. And the only way we are going to get anything done is to do it together. This summer, we launched the "Preservation Connection" to coordinate the efforts of preservationists throughout the region. It is our hope that, through a collaborative effort, more historic sites will be preserved.

## **Close**

Sometimes, we'd rather just fight. And sometimes, that's OK. It's in our nature to do battle, to stand in front of the wrecking ball to save the places and spaces we love. After all, this is home and many people are willing to put their lives on the line to save it.

But after a while, you say to yourself "I'm tired of being right, I want to win." What is it going to take to win?

Well, I'm here to tell you that the young preservationists will rise to the challenge. We will work hard, persevere, and cooperate to secure those long-awaited and long-lasting victories.

Because, in the end, it's not about us. . . it's about them: our children. They are our future. Let's not lose sight of that.

Thank you for coming. We have a great conference ahead of us, so I hope you enjoy every moment.

Give life to history.