



National Trust *for*  
Historic Preservation



## Why Do Old Places Matter?

*How character-rich buildings and blocks offer solutions for more sustainable cities*



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**Preservation Green Lab**

**SMART GROWTH NETWORK WEBINAR**  
**JUNE 9, 2015**



# PRESERVATION GREEN LAB

*strengthens the fabric of communities  
by capitalizing on the inherent value of their built assets  
to improve social, environmental and economic performance.*



## The Greenest Building: Quantifying the Environmental Value of Building Reuse

A REPORT BY:

**Preservation  
Green Lab**  
NATIONAL TRUST FOR  
HISTORIC PRESERVATION

WITH SUPPORT FROM:



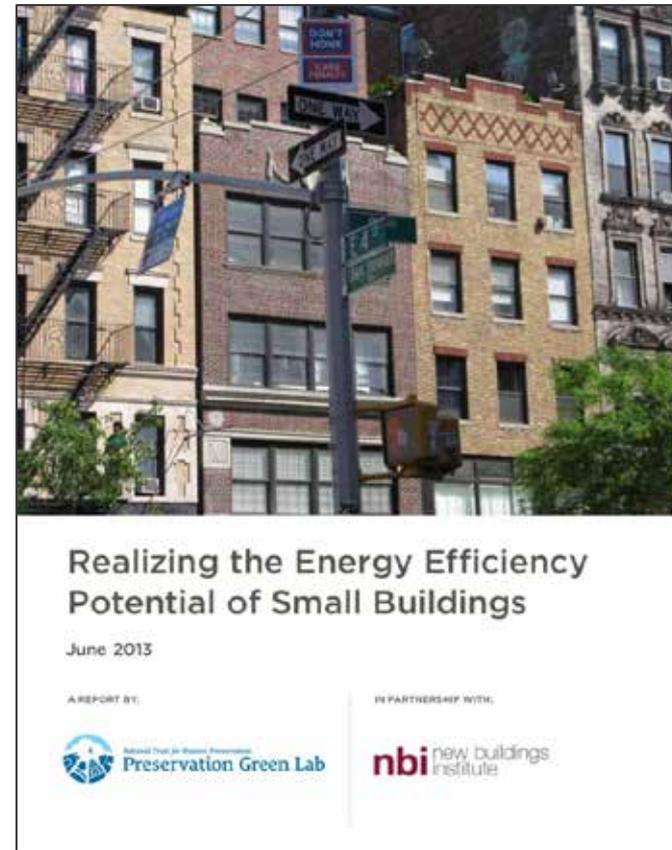
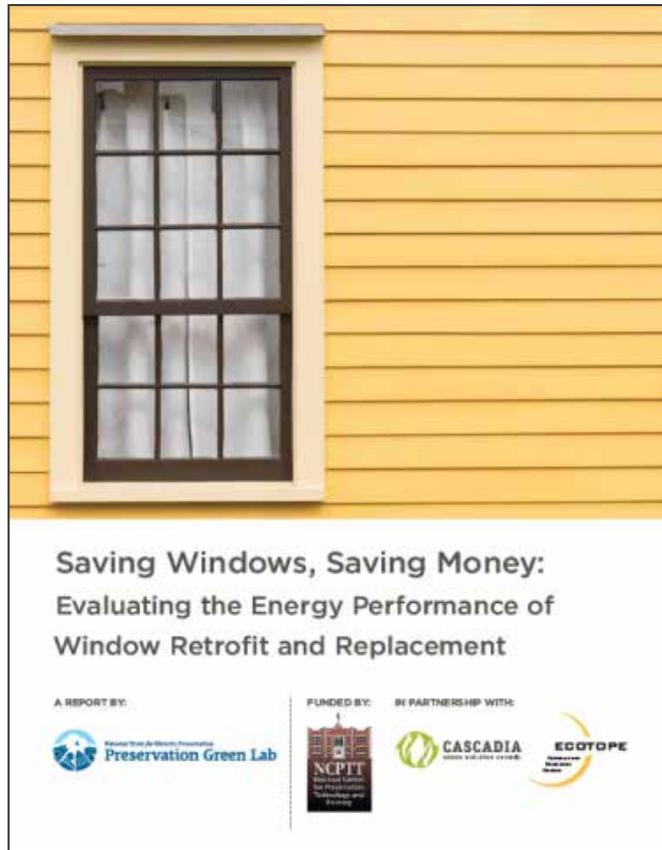
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:



## Why Do Old Places Matter? Addressing Climate Change

*It can take between 10 to 80 years for a new, energy efficient building to overcome, through efficient operations, the climate change impacts created by its construction.*

# Energy Efficiency + Old Buildings

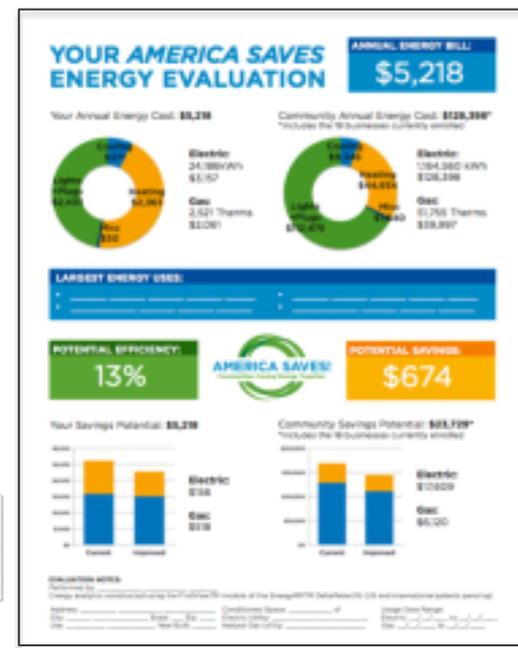


*Tremendous energy and cost savings can be realized by retrofitting existing windows and existing buildings.*

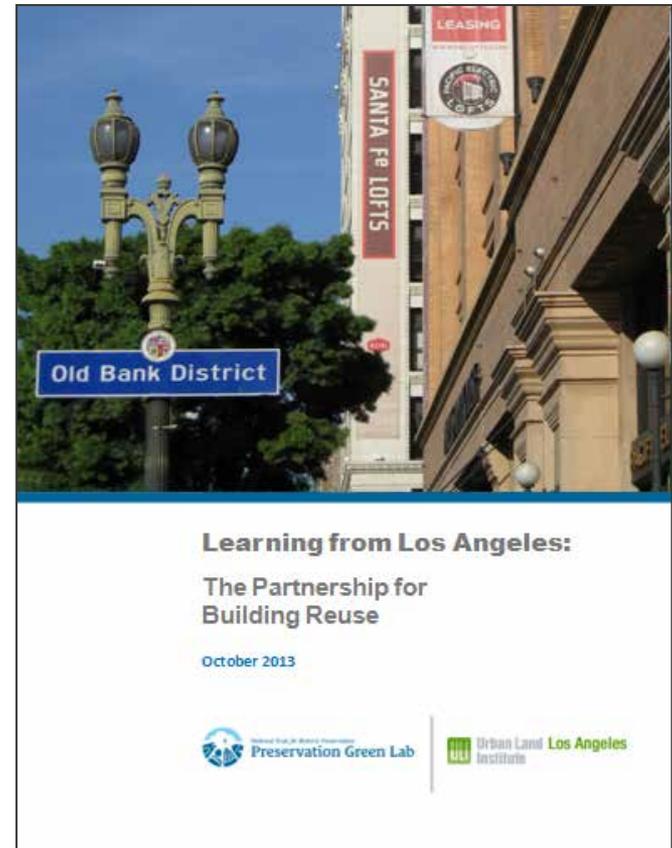
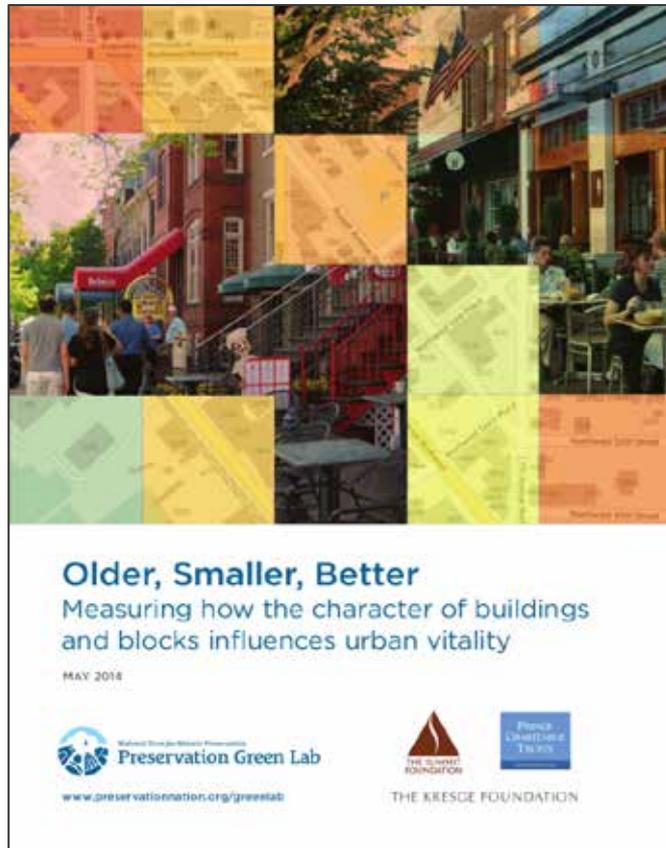
## Energy Efficiency + Old Buildings

# Retrofitting Districts of Small Commercial Buildings

*The Green Lab received a 3-year, \$2M grant from the Department of Energy to work with Main Street organizations, utilities, property owners and local businesses to encourage energy conservation retrofits of small commercial buildings across the country.*



# Demonstrating Value + Advocating for Reuse



*Broaden the scope of preservation by showing what a big difference older, smaller buildings and building reuse make*



**Jane Jacobs, 1961:**

*“Cities need old buildings so badly it is probably impossible for vigorous streets and districts to grow without them.”*

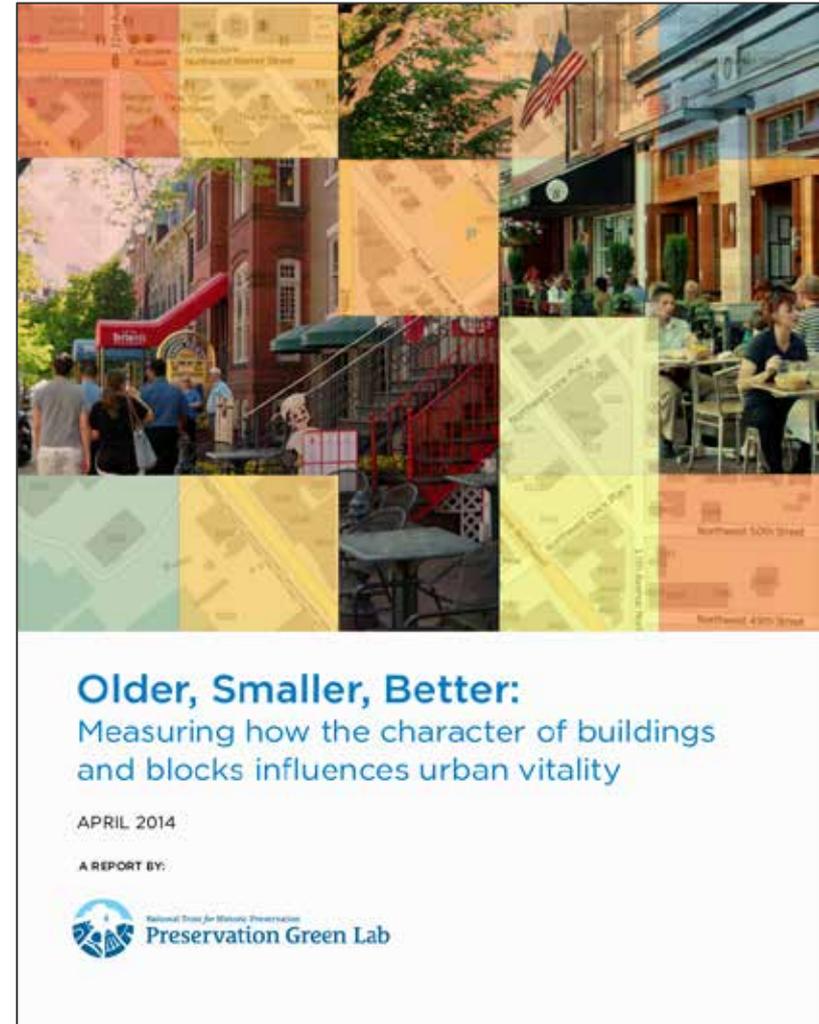


**Ed Glaeser, 2011:**

*“Restricting construction ties cities to their past and limits the possibilities for their future.”*

# Older, Smaller, Better Project Overview

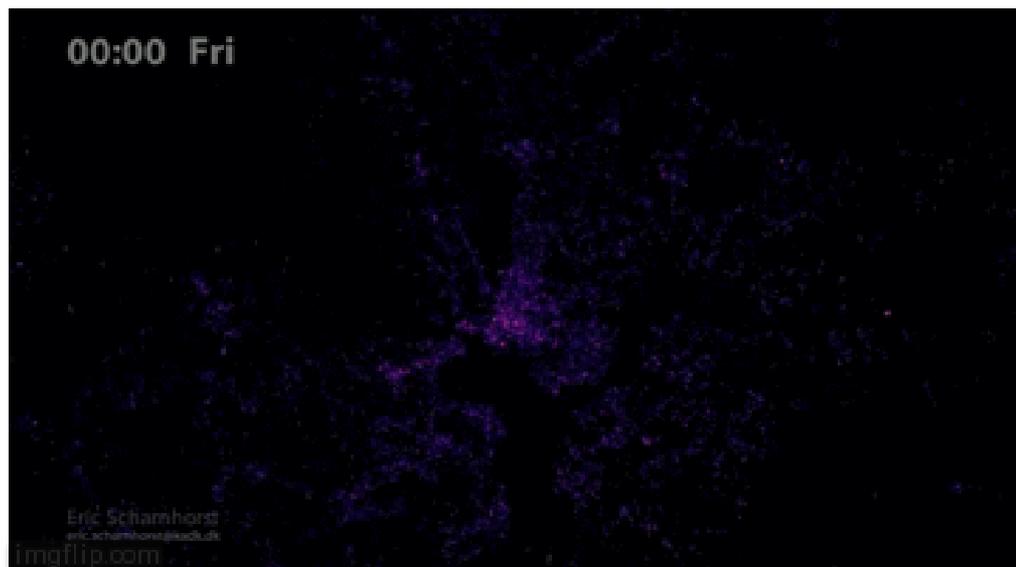
- **OBJECTIVE:** Test Jane Jacobs' hypothesis that diverse city fabric supports greater vitality and opportunity
- Used newly available data to assess the social, cultural, and economic value of older, smaller buildings
- Focused on Seattle, San Francisco, and Washington D.C.



# Measures of Livability

## 40 performance metrics

- Intensity of human activity
- Economic and cultural vitality
- Diversity and inclusion
- Real estate performance
- Alternative transportation options



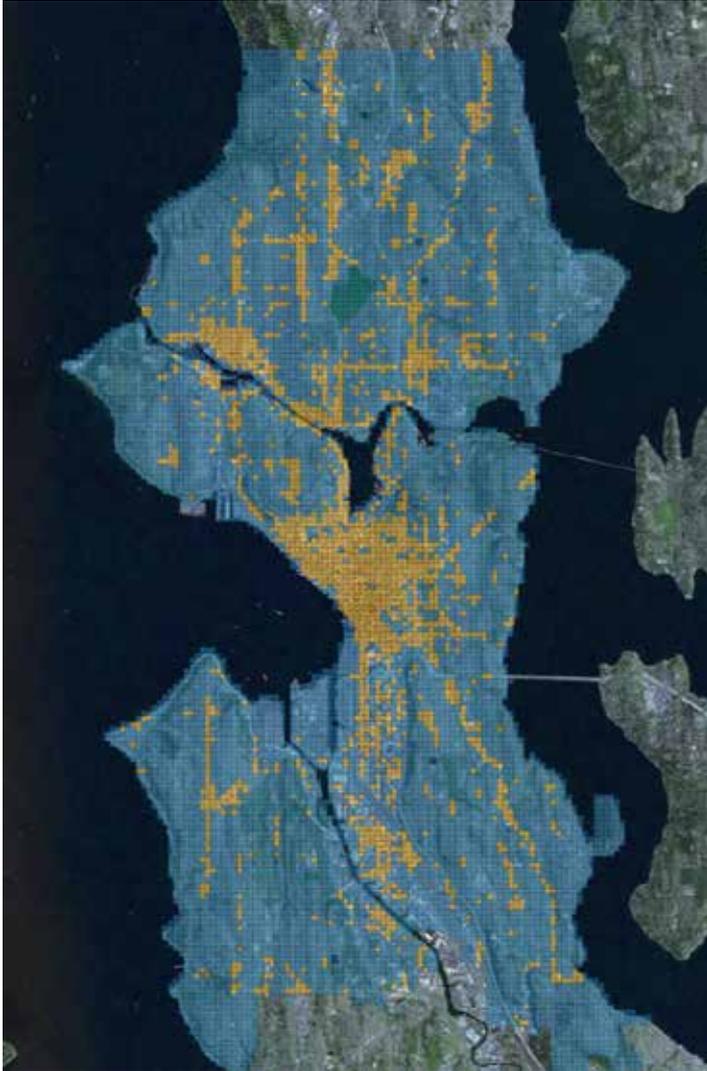
*D.C. cellphone activity – Friday*

# Our Methodology



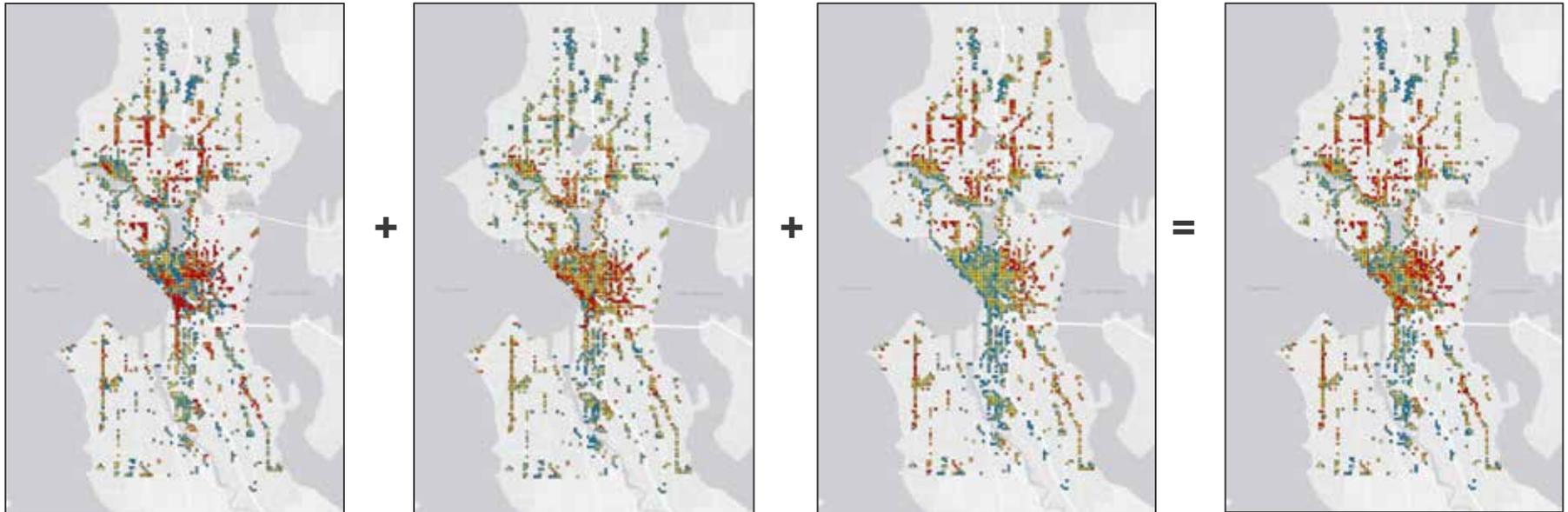
- Overlaid 200m x 200m grid

# Our Methodology



- Overlaid 200m x 200m grid
- Focused on mixed-use corridors
- Measured key features of the built fabric:  
building age, diversity of building age, granularity

# Measures of City Fabric



Building Age

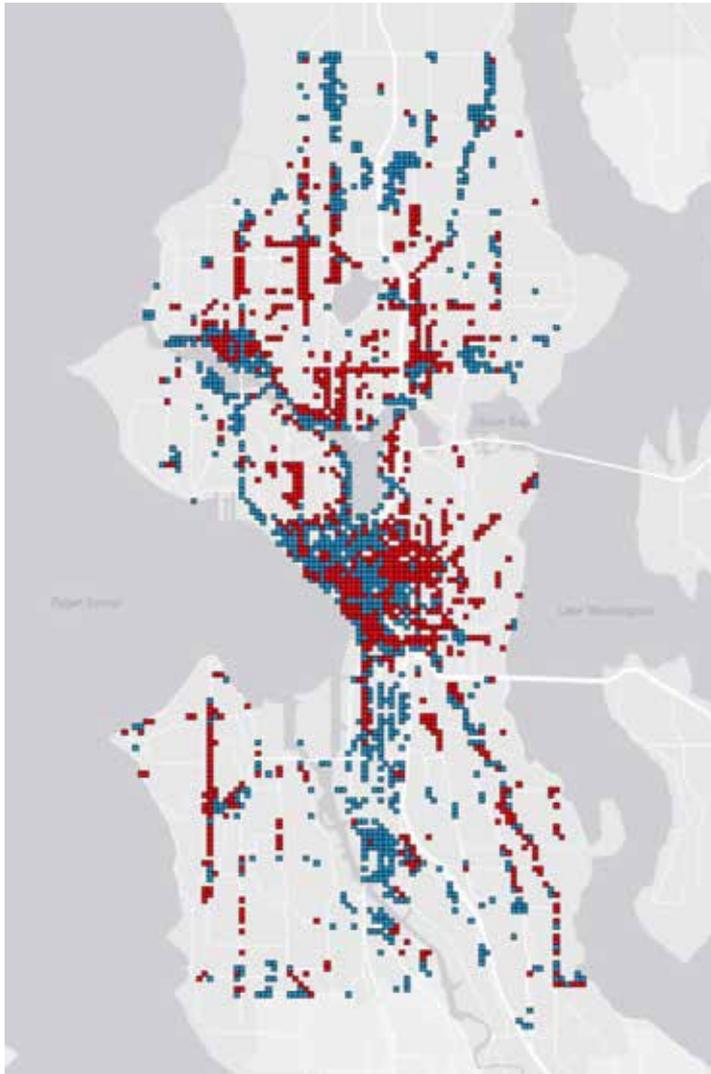
Age Diversity

Granularity

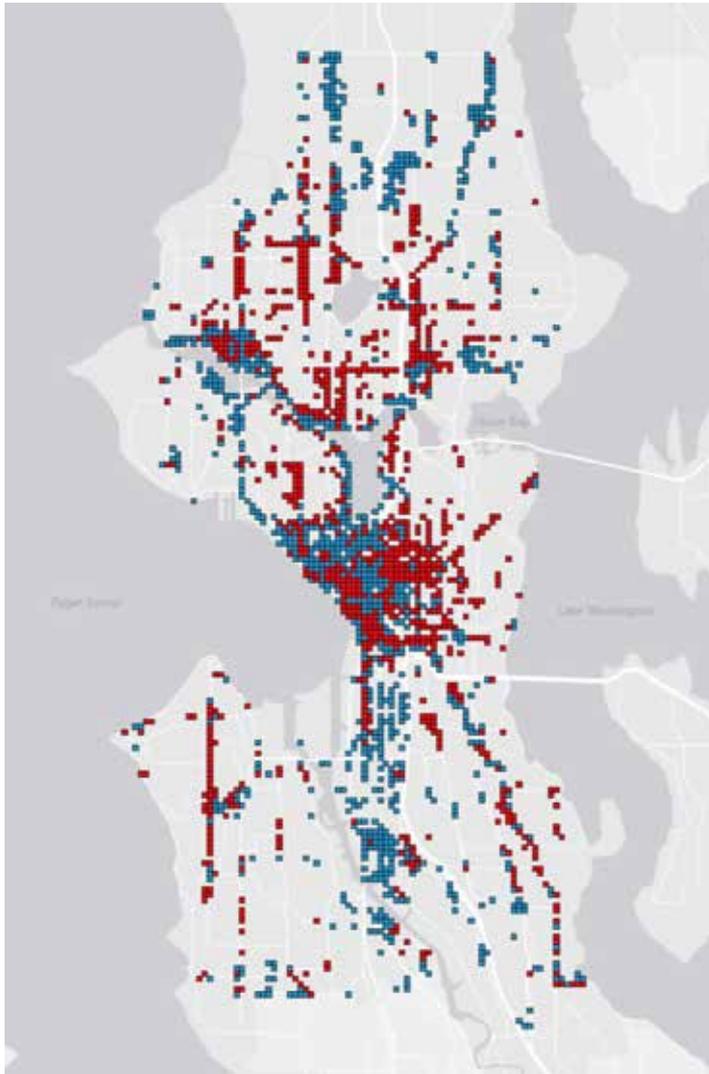
Composite of all three

**Our composite measure = “Character Score”**

# Seattle – Character Score



# Seattle – Character Score



Older, smaller, more  
age-diverse buildings

Average Walk Score = 83.6



Newer, larger, less  
age-diverse buildings

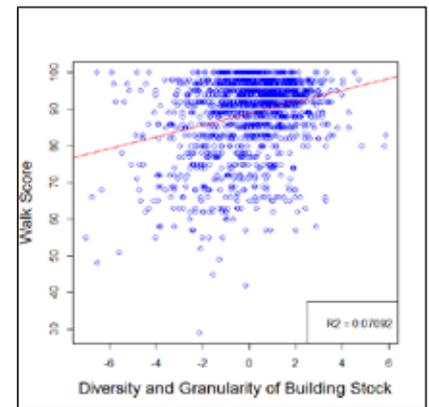
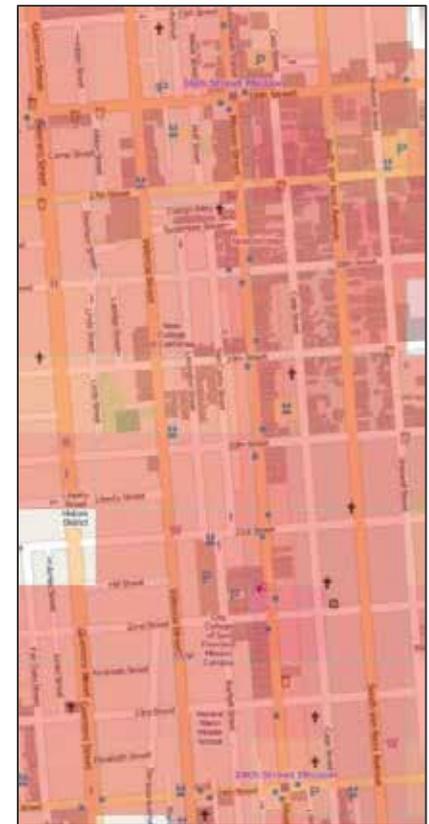
Average Walk Score = 78.1

Older, Smaller, Better: How the Character of Buildings and Blocks Influences Urban Vitality

# Findings: Why Do Old Places Matter?

# Older, mixed-use neighborhoods are more walkable.

In Seattle and San Francisco, older neighborhoods with a mixture of small old and new buildings have a significantly higher Walk Score and Transit Score than neighborhoods with large, new buildings.



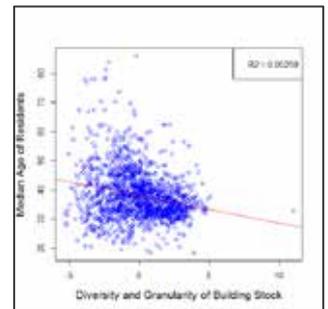
Photos: Walking and Transit in San Francisco (top right by Kim Komenich, SF Chronicle; bottom left from Flickr); Seattle (bottom right from worldchanging.com); Map: Walkscore in the Mission District, San Francisco



## Young people love old buildings.

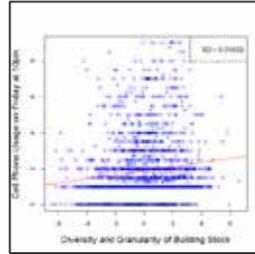
In Seattle, San Francisco, and Washington D.C., the median age of residents in areas with a mix of small, old and new buildings was significantly lower than in areas with larger, predominantly new buildings.

*Pictured: Capitol Hill Block Party on Pike St., Seattle, WA; Credit: KEXP Blog; Map: Median Age of Residents, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> St NE, Washington D.C.*



# Nightlife is most alive on streets with a diverse range of building age.

San Francisco and D.C. city blocks comprised of buildings from different eras host greater activity on Friday nights.



*Seattle's Pike-Pine Corridor - Cell phone usage at 10pm on a Friday night*

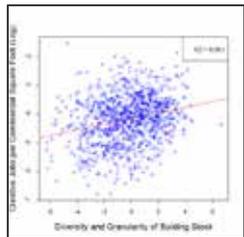
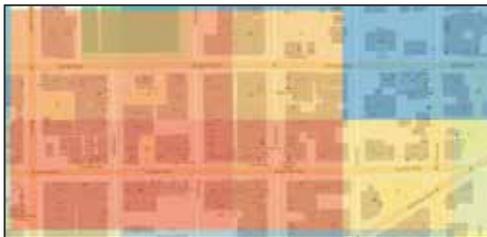


*Right: H Street NE, Washington D.C., Amanda Voisard; Below: Pine and 11<sup>th</sup>, Seattle, WA, Michael Hanscom*



# The creative economy thrives in older, mixed-use neighborhoods.

In Seattle and D.C., mixed-use neighborhoods with a mix of old and new buildings are significantly more likely to house creative companies and creative jobs.



*Creative jobs per commercial square foot (log) – Seattle, WA  
(Red = High performance; Blue = Low performance)*

*Pictured: Urban Outfitters corporate offices in Philadelphia (Inhabitat); Graham Baba Architects studio in Seattle (Picasa)*

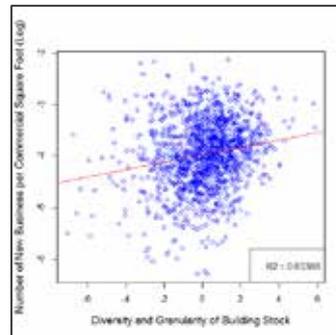


# Older business districts offer opportunities for entrepreneurs of all backgrounds.

In Seattle and Washington D.C., neighborhoods with a fine-grained mix of old and new buildings host a significantly higher proportion of new businesses and women and minority-owned businesses than areas with predominantly larger, newer buildings.



New businesses per commercial square foot (log) - San Francisco  
(Red = High performance; Blue = Low performance)



*Pictured: E. Smith Mercantile, Pioneer Square, Seattle, WA  
Credit: Mike Powe, above; Hien Dang, Alliance for Pioneer Square right.*



SEATTLE, WA



# BUSINESSES WITH WOMEN OR MINORITY OWNERSHIP

**2x**  
WOMEN AND  
MINORITY  
OWNERSHIP

Areas of Seattle with older, smaller, more age-diverse buildings have more than twice the rate found in areas with mostly newer, larger buildings.



Oldest, most diverse & finest-grained buildings



19.2%



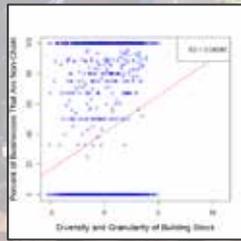
Newest, largest, least age-diverse buildings



9.5%

# Older, smaller buildings provide space for a strong local economy.

In Seattle, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C., streets with a combination of small old and new buildings have significantly higher proportions of non-chain businesses and small businesses.



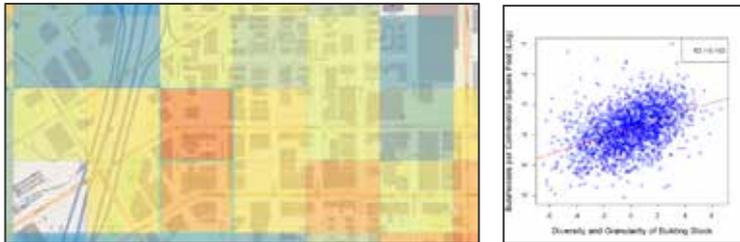
Percent of businesses that are locally owned - Washington D.C.  
(Red = High performance; Blue = Low performance)

Pictured: H Street in Washington D.C.  
Credit: Ted Eytan (Flickr)



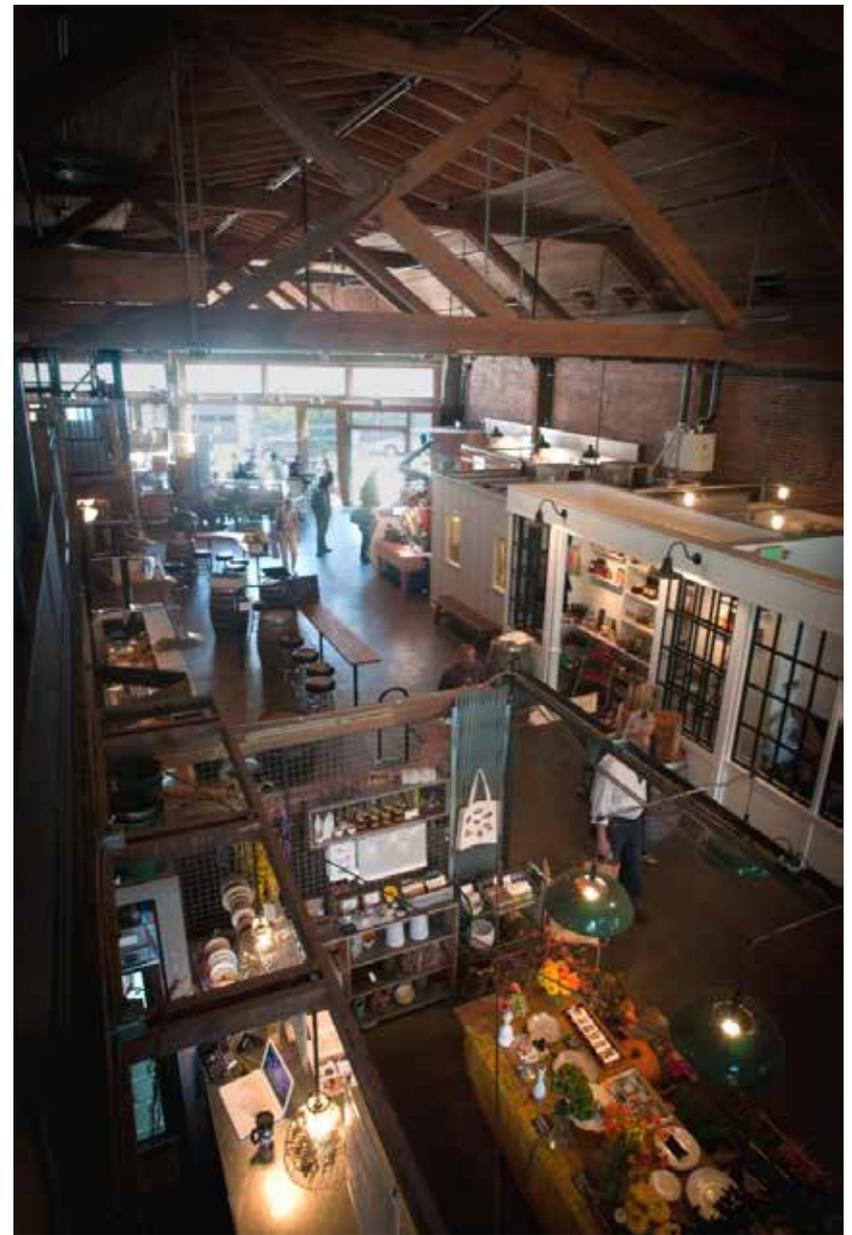
# Older commercial and mixed-use districts contain hidden density.

In Seattle, San Francisco, and D.C., streets with a mix of old and new buildings have greater population density and more businesses per commercial square foot than streets with large, new buildings. In Seattle and D.C., those areas also had significantly more jobs per commercial square foot.



*Businesses per commercial square foot (log) - Seattle, WA  
(Red = High performance; Blue = Low performance)*

*Pictured: Melrose Market in Seattle, WA.  
Credit: Graham Baba Architects*





SEATTLE, WA



**JOBS PER 1,000 SQ FT**

**36.8%**  
MORE  
JOBS/SQ FT

There are more jobs per commercial square foot in areas of Seattle composed of older, smaller, more age-diverse buildings than in areas with mostly newer, larger buildings.



Oldest, most diverse & finest-grained buildings



**4.39 jobs**



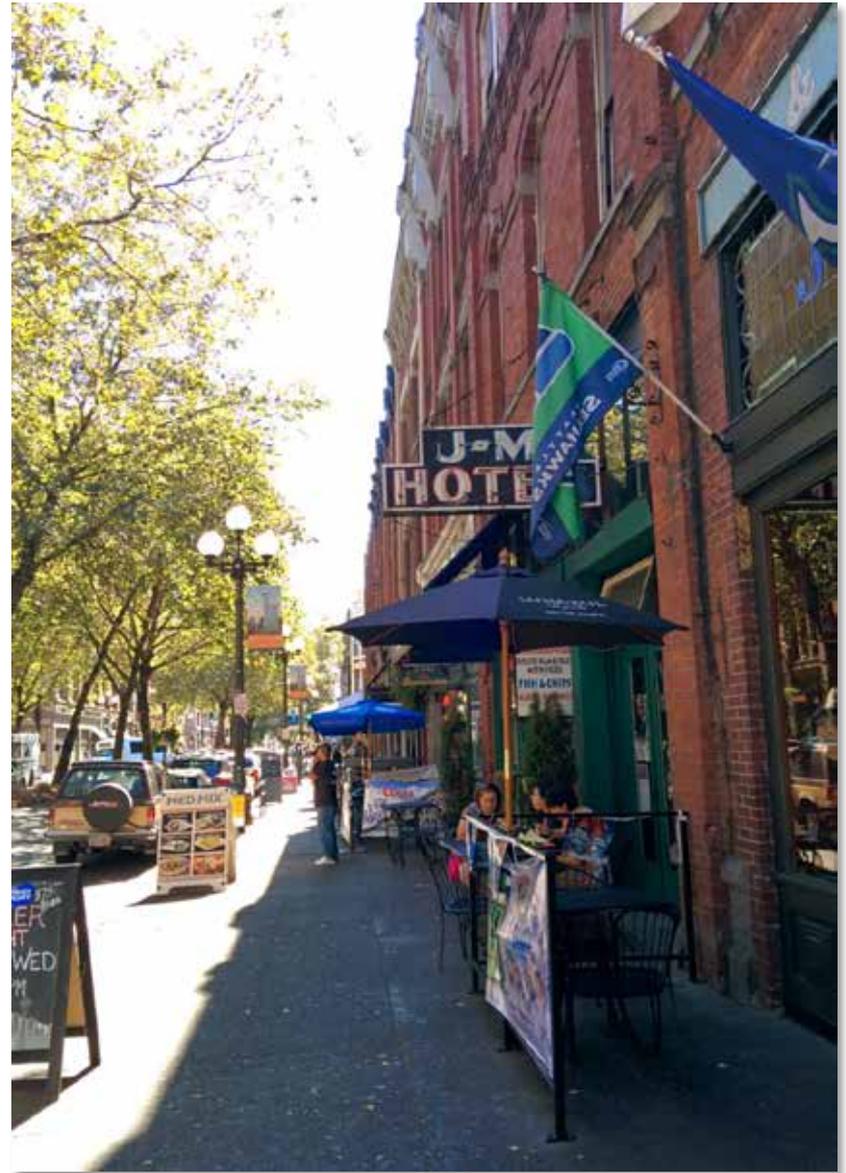
Newest, largest, least age-diverse buildings



**3.21 jobs**

# Key Findings

- Where you find older, smaller buildings and mixed-vintage blocks, you see significantly...
  - Greater walkability
  - Younger residents and a greater mix of people at different stages of life
  - Greater nightlife and cultural vitality
  - More jobs, creative jobs, and businesses per square foot
  - More women and minority-owned businesses, non-chain businesses, small businesses, and new businesses





## Key Implications

Character and scale of buildings matter.



## Key Implications

Foster the existing strengths of great neighborhoods that work.

*Photo: Fairhaven.com*



## Key Implications

Encourage reuse and infill in transitioning neighborhoods with  
'good bones'

*Photo: Kathleen Cooper, Tacoma News Tribune*



## Key Implications

Don't be afraid to mix old and new — just be smart about design

*Photo: Jim Lindberg*



## Older, Smaller, Better

Measuring how the character of buildings and blocks influences urban vitality

MAY 2014



[www.preservationnation.org/greenlab](http://www.preservationnation.org/greenlab)



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