Why Old Places Matter

Smart Growth Network

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Smart Growth Principles
Why Old Places Matter --

Why Do Old Places Matter? An Introduction

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The Eternal City—what better place to find answers to the question: Why do old places matter? Tom Mayes, a 2013 Rome Prize winner in Historic Preservation from the American Academy, is in Rome these days and is contributing a series of posts about his experiences and research. Join us for his periodic essays and add your thoughts to the discussion.

People like old places. They like to live in places like Ghent, in Norfolk, Va., and Logan Circle in Washington, D.C. They like to live in old houses—in white farmhouses in Vermont, brick mansions in Virginia, and in Arts and Crafts bungalows in Los Angeles. People like to visit old cities for vacation. They like Santa Fe, Provincetown, Mendocino, and Saugatuck. They like Rome, New York, Paris, and Kyoto. They like Brooklyn and Charleston and thousands of towns and cities and countrysides across America and throughout the world.

They like ancient troglodytic hotels (Matera, Italy), and Greek Revival houses (Athens, Ga.). They like adobe houses in New Mexico, farmhouses in Ohio, and townhouses in Philadelphia.

Why? Why do people like old places? And why do old places matter to people? Do old places make people’s lives better, and if so, how?

This series of essays will explore the reasons that old places are good for people. It begins with what I consider the main reason—that old places are important for people to define who they are through memory, continuity, and identity—that “sense of orientation” referred to in With Heritae So Rich.
Continuity
Memory
Individual Identity
Civic Identity
Learning
Creativity
Architecture
Beauty
Sustainability

Realizing the Energy Efficiency Potential of Small Buildings
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Home Rule

Sustainability

Education
Economics
Community
Why do you think old places matter?