

Here's a study that seems particularly applicable to Bethlehem's current development climate

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(3rd in a 4-part series of posts on thoughtful planning by Kim Carrell-Smith)

Kim Carrell-Smith is a 31-year resident of Bethlehem's historic Southside, where she taught public history at Lehigh University for almost two decades. She is also an aspiring gadfly, buzzing in on issues of historic preservation, public education, city government, and other social justice issues. She tips her wings to the master gadflies who have served our community for so long!

Gadfly:

Part 3

Did I hear someone say, "More evidence, please?" Coming right up!

I offer up one study that seems particularly applicable to our current development climate: comprehensive, yet succinct, the 2014 study by the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Greenlab, **"Older, Smaller, Better: Measuring how the character of buildings and blocks influences urban vitality"** focuses on Seattle, San Francisco, and Washington, DC. But as the authors note, there are some general principles that can be extrapolated for cities of any size. Hang in there, I'll get to those.

- From the Executive Summary:

This study demonstrates the unique and valuable role that older, smaller buildings play in the development of sustainable cities. Based upon statistical analysis of the built fabric of three major American cities, this research finds that established neighborhoods with a mix of older, smaller buildings perform better than districts with larger, newer structures when tested against a range of economic, social, and environmental outcome measures.

Key Findings:

- **Older, mixed-use neighborhoods are more walkable.**
- **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 is lower than in areas with larger, predominantly new buildings. These areas are also home to a significantly more diverse mix of residents from different age groups. Nightlife is most alive on streets with a diverse range of building ages. San Francisco and Washington, D.C. city blocks composed of mixed-vintage buildings host greater cellphone activity on Friday nights.

- **Older business districts provide affordable, flexible space for entrepreneurs from all backgrounds.**

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

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

In Seattle and Washington, D.C., older, smaller buildings house significantly greater concentrations of creative jobs per square foot of commercial space. Media production businesses, software publishers, and performing arts companies can be found in areas that have smaller-scaled historic fabric.

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

In Seattle and Washington, D.C., streets with a combination of small old and new buildings have a significantly higher proportion of non-chain restaurants and retailers, and in Seattle, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C., areas of the city with older, smaller buildings host a significantly higher proportion of jobs in small businesses.

- **Older commercial and mixed-use districts contain hidden density**

In Seattle, San Francisco, and Washington, 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 Washington, D.C., these areas also have significantly more jobs per commercial square foot.

Hold on, and in Part 4 we will finally hear about specific principles that cities could adopt to guide development, so that historic preservation and the historical look and feel of cities work as economic drivers for everyone.

Kim

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