

# Population Change in Historic Neighborhoods

*A Supplement to Historic Preservation and Rightsizing:  
Current Practices and Resources Survey*

Prepared for the Right Sizing and Historic Preservation Task Force  
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Donovan Rypkema  
Cara Bertron  
Courtney Williams  
*PlaceEconomics*



## Executive Summary

Historic districts play an important role in mitigating the loss of population in shrinking cities.

- In 2010, the twenty cities that were the subject of this analysis had a combined population of 4,267,503—an overall decline of 561,258 (11.6%) over the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In individual cities, however, the population change ranged widely, from a loss of 25% in Detroit to a gain of 2.6% in Utica, New York.
- Seventeen of the twenty cities had local historic districts that were home to 281,327 residents. While some of these neighborhoods also lost population from 2000 to 2010, the rate of decline was significantly less, representing a combined 6.6% loss of population.
- All twenty cities had National Register historic districts. While some of these National Register districts were also protected by local historic district designation, many were not. An additional 295,979 persons lived in National Register districts in areas not included in local districts. This number also declined between 2000 and 2010, but at a composite rate of 6.1%, or a loss barely half of the cities as a whole.
- While there were variations among cities, in 11 of the 17 with local historic districts the population change within those districts was more favorable than in the rest of the city, with either fewer residents lost or more gained. Put another way, while historic neighborhoods (both local and national) make up 13.5% of the population of these cities, they only accounted for 7% of the population loss.
- In spite of the relatively good news emerging from historic neighborhoods, these cities are not all taking fullest advantage of resources available. Only 14 of the 20 are partners with state and federal governments through the Certified Local Government program. Many cities did not have basic information such as maps and design guidelines available electronically for their citizens. Only two had GIS maps of historic districts publicly available.
- A data-based approach for looking at characteristics that mitigate population loss will demonstrate the importance of historic neighborhoods to rightsizing city strategies.

## Current Practices and Resources Survey

In May 2012 PlaceEconomics completed and delivered a report entitled *Historic Preservation and Rightsizing: Current Practices and Resources Survey* to the Right Sizing and Historic Preservation Task Force of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. The survey included telephone interviews and an online survey and consisted of:

- 22 interviews with preservation planners or preservation advocates from 20 cities
- 16 online surveys completed by planners
- 8 follow-up interviews with planners
- 5 interviews with State Historic Preservation Office staff, statewide nonprofit staff, and professionals and scholars focusing on the intersection of preservation and rightsizing.

The survey report attempted to answer six questions critical to effective rightsizing solutions:

1. What are the specific problems that result as a consequence of a declining population?
2. What actions are cities currently taking in response to declining populations?
3. What agencies and organizations are municipalities consulting in the rightsizing process?
4. Which of the available federal tools are used in general and for rightsizing efforts in particular?
5. What are the continuing challenges that these cities face?
6. What are the current and potential roles that historic preservation can play in rightsizing efforts?

## The Cities

The cities chosen for the survey had the highest proportional population loss in the U.S. between 1960 and 2000 (see below).<sup>1</sup>

This supplementary analysis began with assembling basic population data for each of these cities in 2000 and 2010 (Table 1).

### Surveyed Cities

Baltimore	Cleveland	Huntington	Scranton
Binghamton	Dayton	Newark	St. Louis
Buffalo	Detroit	Pittsburgh	Syracuse
Canton	Flint	Rochester	Utica
Cincinnati	Harrisburg	Saginaw	Youngstown

**Table 1**

City	Population 2000	Population 2010	Change
<b>Baltimore, MD</b>	651,154	620,961	-4.6%
<b>Binghamton, NY</b>	47,380	47,376	0.0%
<b>Buffalo, NY</b>	292,648	261,310	-10.7%
<b>Canton, OH</b>	80,806	73,007	-9.7%
<b>Cincinnati, OH</b>	331,285	296,943	-10.4%
<b>Cleveland, OH</b>	478,403	396,815	-17.1%
<b>Dayton, OH</b>	166,179	141,527	-14.8%
<b>Detroit, MI</b>	951,270	713,777	-25.0%
<b>Flint, MI</b>	124,943	102,434	-18.0%
<b>Harrisburg, PA</b>	48,950	49,528	1.2%
<b>Huntington, WV</b>	51,475	49,138	-4.5%
<b>Newark, NJ</b>	273,546	277,140	1.3%
<b>Pittsburgh, PA</b>	334,563	305,704	-8.6%
<b>Rochester, NY</b>	219,773	210,565	-4.2%
<b>Saginaw, MI</b>	61,799	51,508	-16.7%
<b>Scranton, PA</b>	76,415	76,089	-0.4%
<b>St. Louis, MO</b>	348,189	319,294	-8.3%
<b>Syracuse, NY</b>	147,306	145,170	-1.5%
<b>Utica, NY</b>	60,651	62,235	2.6%
<b>Youngstown, OH</b>	82,026	66,982	-18.3%
<b>TOTAL</b>	4,828,761	4,267,503	-11.6%

As can be seen above, although these twenty cities suffered the largest proportional population losses between 1960 and 2000, three of them – Harrisburg, PA; Newark, NJ; and Utica, NY – experienced modest growth in the first decade of the 21st century. Even those cities, however, are still significantly smaller than at their population peak. Cumulatively, these twenty cities are home to 561,000 fewer people than a decade ago, a decline of 11.6%.

All twenty of these cities are older places: most were founded in the 19th century or before, and there are obviously “historic” resources in each of them. In the American preservation framework, buildings are formally recognized as historic through listing in the National Register of Historic Places (either individually or as a group of buildings) or inclusion in a local historic district. It is common for a building or a neighborhood both to be listed in the National Register of Historic Places and included within a local historic district.

The distinction between these listings is important. With few exceptions, simply being listed on the National Register provides no protection (or regulations) over what an individual property owner may do with the property. National Register status does, however, provide access to federal rehabilitation incentives for income-producing properties. Furthermore, when federal funds are expended on or

near properties listed in or determined eligible for listing in the National Register, a review process must be undertaken to determine if that federal activity would have an adverse effect on the historic resources. This is significant with regard to rightsizing activities.

However, the basic protections for privately owned historic properties come almost exclusively from designation at the local level. Local landmarks or properties included in local historic districts are subject to regulations and guidelines established by local historic preservation commissions.

An additional tool available to municipalities is designation as a Certified Local Government (CLG). To become a CLG, a city must:

- Establish a qualified historic preservation commission.
- Enforce appropriate State or local legislation for the designation and protection of historic properties. In most cases, this is done in the form of a local ordinance.
- Maintain a system for the survey and inventory of local historic resources.
- Provide for public participation in the local historic preservation program, including participation in the National Register process.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 2**

City	National Register Districts	Local Historic Districts	CLG
Baltimore, MD	X	X	X
Binghamton, NY	X	X	X
Buffalo, NY	X	X	X
Canton, OH	X	X	
Cincinnati, OH	X	X	X
Cleveland, OH	X	X	X
Dayton, OH	X	X	X
Detroit, MI	X	X	X
Flint, MI	X	X	
Harrisburg, PA	X	X	X
Huntington, WV	X		X
Newark, NJ	X	X	
Pittsburgh, PA	X	X	X
Rochester, NY	X	X	X
Saginaw, MI	X	X	
Scranton, PA	X		
St. Louis, MO	X	X	X
Syracuse, NY	X	X	X
Utica, NY	X	X	X
Youngstown, OH	X		

To understand the impact of historic designation on population loss, it was necessary to ascertain the systems in place in each city for formal recognition of historic resources (Table 2).

## Methodology

A Geographic Information System (GIS) is a geographically linked database that allows the user to capture, evaluate and represent diverse variables with geographical components. The potential historic preservation uses of GIS are nearly unlimited and are only now beginning to be utilized. A GIS was used to assemble and evaluate the data explained below.

Only 16 of the 20 study cities included historic preservation in the municipal websites. Of those, just 13 city preservation offices had a complete set of maps of historic districts available electronically. GIS data on historic districts was only available from two of the cities.

The collection, aggregation, and evaluation of this data was, therefore, a labor-intensive process. The steps of this process were as follows for each city:

1. Collect total population data from the 2000 and 2010 U.S. Censuses.
2. Disaggregate citywide data to the Census Block level.<sup>3</sup> This is the smallest geographical unit for which Census data is available.
3. When necessary, correlate 2000 Census Blocks with 2010 Census Blocks, as boundaries often change or Census Blocks are renumbered.
4. Overlay on the Census Block maps boundaries of local and National Register historic districts.<sup>4</sup> In many instances, it was necessary to manually draw the map based on narrative descriptions provided on municipal, National Register, or third-party websites.
5. Aggregate the Census Blocks within each local and National Register historic district.
6. Further aggregate the populations within the various historic districts into two sets of data:
  - a. Population within local historic districts (including overlapping portions of National Register districts), and:
  - b. Population within National Register districts that was not included within the boundaries of a local historic district.
7. Compare the amount and rate of change between 2000 and 2010 for the city as a whole, the local historic districts, and the National Register districts not also in a local district.

The tables, charts and graphs in the remainder of this report were based on this data.

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## Population Change in Historic Neighborhoods

As noted above, 17 of the cities had local historic districts. Of those, local historic districts in 11 cities did better than the city as a whole in relation to population loss from 2000 to 2010 – that is, there was either a population gain or the population loss was less severe than for the city (Table 3). In fact, three of the cities – Binghamton, Rochester, and Syracuse saw population growth in their local historic districts even as the population of the city continued to decline.<sup>5</sup>

**Table 3**

Local Historic Districts Gained; City Lost	Local Historic Districts Lost less than City	Local Historic Districts Lost more than City	City Gained; Local Historic Districts Lost	City Gained, Local Historic Districts Gained Less	No Local Historic District
<b>Binghamton</b> <b>Rochester</b> <b>Syracuse</b>	Baltimore Buffalo Canton Cleveland Dayton Detroit Flint Pittsburgh	Cincinnati Saginaw St Louis	Harrisburg Utica	Newark	Huntington Scranton Youngtown

It is clear that the existence of local historic districts provides a degree of stability in most cities that are experiencing population loss as a whole. What about the population in those neighborhoods that are listed on the National Register but do not have the protections of a local historic district? (Table 4)

**Table 4**

National Register Districts Gained; City Lost	National Register Districts Lost less than City	National Register Districts Lost more than City	City Gained, National Register Gained More
<b>Binghamton</b> <b>Buffalo</b> <b>Dayton</b> <b>Scranton</b>	Canton Cleveland Rochester St Louis Youngstown	Baltimore Cincinnati Detroit Flint Huntington Saginaw Syracuse	Harrisburg Newark
<b>"National Register District" populations only include those living within a National Register District but <i>not</i> also within a local district.</b>			
<b>In Pittsburgh and Utica virtually all of the National Register districts are also included within local historic districts.</b>			

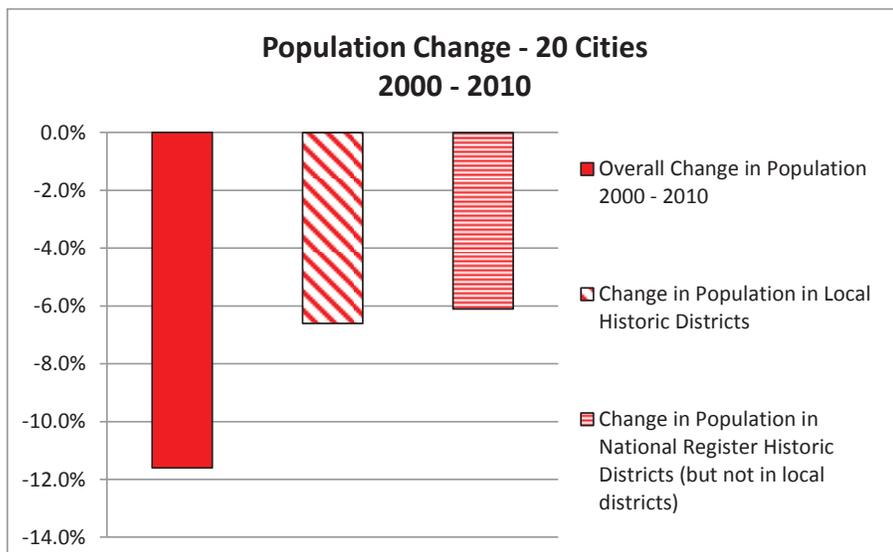
It would appear that being in a National Register District has some stabilizing influence. But a measurable pattern emerges when the comparison is made between the each city's population change in its local historic districts and the changes in its National Register Districts (Table 5). This indicates that, while there are exceptions, being in a National Register alone does not generally have the same positive impact on population changes than does being in a local historic district.

**Table 5**

Local Historic Districts Gained; National Register Districts Gained Less	Local Historic Districts Gained; National Register Districts Lost	Local Historic Districts Lost Less than National Register Districts	National Register Districts Gained; Local Historic Districts Lost	National Register Districts Gained, Local Historic Districts Gained Less	National Register Districts Lost Less than Local Historic Districts
Binghamton	Rochester Saginaw	Baltimore Canton Cleveland Detroit Flint	Buffalo Dayton Harrisburg Syracuse	Newark	St Louis
In Cincinnati the population decline in both local historic districts and the portions of National Register Districts not covered by local districts was statistically identical, at 11.1%, both just slightly higher than the city population loss of 10.4%					
There are no local historic districts in Huntington, Scranton or Youngstown					
In Pittsburgh and Utica virtually all of the National Register districts are also included within local historic districts.					

On a composite basis, the positive effect in stemming population loss can be seen in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**



**Table 6**

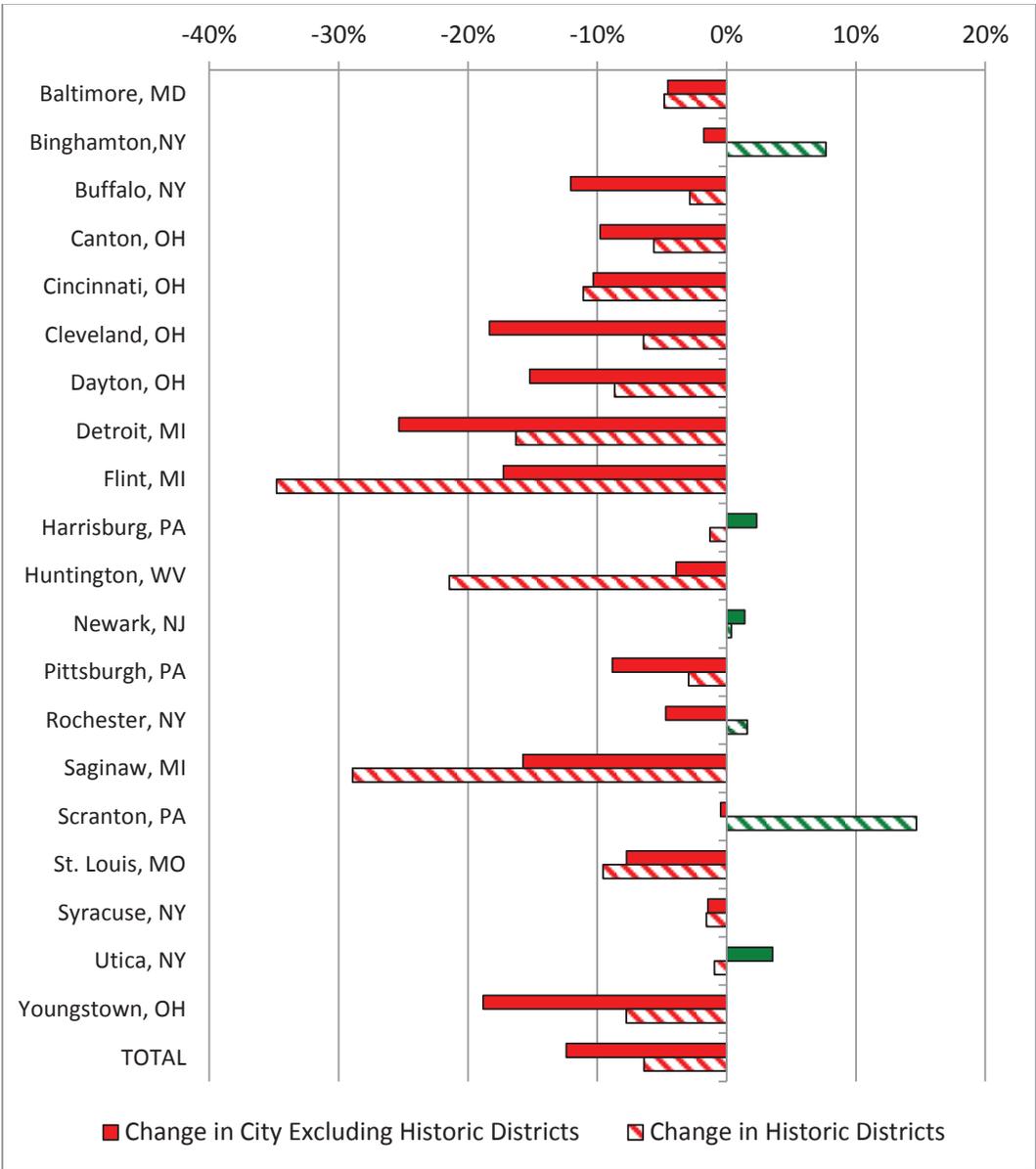
City	Change in Population 2000-2010	Change in Local Historic Districts	Change in National Register Historic Districts*	Change in All Historic Neighborhoods
Baltimore, MD	-4.6%	-2.0%	-5.4%	-4.8%
Binghamton, NY	0.0%	9.7%	2.8%	7.7%
Buffalo, NY	-10.7%	-7.2%	1.3%	-2.9%
Canton, OH	-9.7%	-2.5%	-7.8%	-5.6%
Cincinnati, OH	-10.4%	-11.1%	-11.1%	-11.1%
Cleveland, OH	-17.1%	-6.3%	-7.4%	-6.4%
Dayton, OH	-14.8%	-10.0%	31.2%	-8.7%
Detroit, MI	-25.0%	-11.1%	-27.6%	-16.3%
Flint, MI	-18.0%	-15.1%	-42.5%	-34.8%
Harrisburg, PA	1.2%	-4.0%	1.4%	-1.3%
Huntington, WV	-4.5%	***	-21.4%	-21.4%
Newark, NJ	1.3%	0.1%	333.3%**	0.4%
Pittsburgh, PA	-8.6%	-2.9%	0.0%	-2.9%
Rochester, NY	-4.2%	2.5%	-2.2%	1.6%
Saginaw, MI	-16.7%	-22.0%	-31.8%	-28.9%
Scranton, PA	-0.4%	***	14.7%	14.7%
St. Louis, MO	-8.3%	-15.1%	-3.6%	-9.5%
Syracuse, NY	-1.5%	0.1%	-3.3%	-1.6%
Utica, NY	2.6%	-0.9%	0.0%	-0.9%
Youngstown, OH	-18.3%	***	-7.8%	-7.8%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>-11.6%</b>	<b>-6.6%</b>	<b>-6.1%</b>	<b>-6.4%</b>
	* Population of National Register Districts <i>not</i> also in local district ** Percentage based on very small numbers *** No local districts			

In the majority of cities, historic districts outperformed the city as a whole.

The city-by-city rates of population change are shown in Table 6.

It is most revealing when the change in population of areas not included in local or National Register historic districts is compared with the change within historic districts. This separates the overall population change from the impact of population shifts in the historic districts. In the majority of cities, historic districts outperformed the city as a whole, resulting in a mitigation of population losses (Figure 2). Binghamton, whose overall population remained essentially the same between 2000 and 2010, would have experienced a 1.8% de-

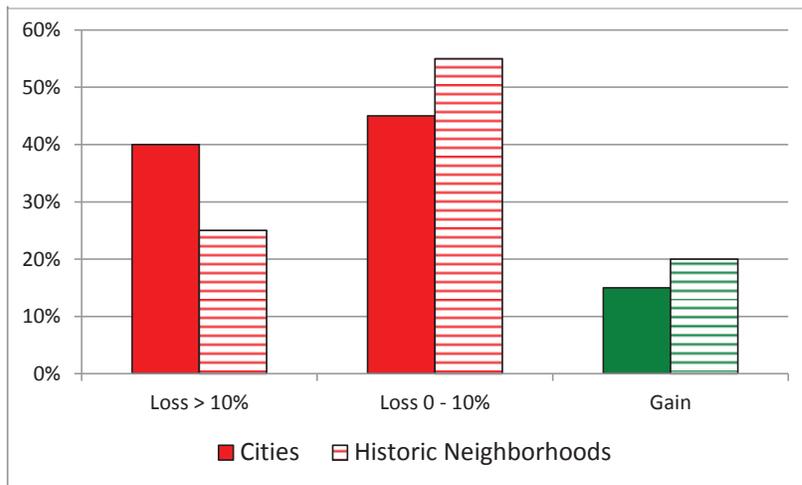
Figure 2



cline in population were it not for the growth in the historic districts.

A final way of looking at the difference between what is happening in historic neighborhoods and in the study cities overall is to look at the severity of the population change. More cities than historic districts suffered population losses of greater than 10%. On the other end of the spectrum, historic districts in more cities gained population than cities overall (Figure 3).

**Figure 3** Severity of Population Change: Cities vs. Historic Neighborhoods



## Conclusions

The data from this supplementary analysis, combined with the findings in the surveys conducted for *Historic Preservation and Rightsizing: Current Practices and Resources Survey*, leads to five conclusions.

In most cases, both National Register historic districts and particularly local historic districts mitigate the impacts of population loss, either by growing while the rest of the city is shrinking or through sustaining a lower rate of population loss.

The problem of lack of resources in local planning departments and historic preservation commissions identified in the *Historic Preservation and Rightsizing* report manifests itself in the availability and utility of basic information about historic districts in many of these cities.

A data-based approach to setting priorities for rightsizing in general and for historic preservation in particular is critical and technologically available. However, without the available resources, a set of valuable tools remains underutilized.

While both the aggregated data and the majority of cities demonstrate the positive impact of historic districts on population loss, a very significant range exists in the magnitude of that impact. Further analysis is needed to understand the variables that affect how and when historic districts are most beneficial in stabilizing population loss.

The demonstrated existing strength and stability of historic districts strongly suggest that historic preservation should be a central part of cities' rightsizing strategies.

Historic preservation should be a central part of cities' rightsizing strategies.

## Endnotes

**1** The list was drawn from Joseph Schilling and Jonathan Logan's "Greening the Rust Belt" in the *Journal of the American Planning Association* (Autumn 2008, Vol. 74, No.4). In turn, this list was adapted from a selection of 65 older industrial cities included in "Restoring Prosperity: The State Role in Revitalizing America's Older Industrial Cities," by Jennifer Vey for The Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program (2007).

**2** [http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/clg/become\\_clg.html](http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/clg/become_clg.html)

**3** An area bounded by visible and/or invisible features shown on Census Bureau maps. A block is the smallest geographic entity for which the Census Bureau collects and tabulates 100-percent decennial census data. <http://www.census.gov/dmd/www/glossary.html>

**4** In many cases, a Census Block was entirely within the boundaries of a historic district. When that was not the case, however, the population data for the entire Census Block was included in the population numbers for the historic district. This has the likely effect of marginally increasing the total population reported for historic districts, but should affect the relative change in population as compared to the entire city only nominally, if at all. In a very few instances, it was simply not possible—given the available information—to correlate Census Block population with historic district boundaries. Those populations are not included in the totals.

**5** In fairness, it should be noted that the Binghamton population was essentially the same in 2010 as in 2000. Over that period, the population of the local historic districts grew by 9.7%.

## About the Authors

This report was prepared and written by Donovan Rypkema, Cara Bertron, and Courtney Williams. Rypkema is principal of *PlaceEconomics*, a Washington D.C.-based real estate and economic development consulting firm. He is the author of *The Economics of Historic Preservation: A Community Leader's Guide* and an adjunct professor in the Historic Preservation Program at the University of Pennsylvania. Cara Bertron is Director of the Rightsizing Cities Initiative at *PlaceEconomics*. She received an undergraduate degree in urban planning at Stanford University and holds a master's degree in historic preservation from the University of Pennsylvania, where she wrote her thesis on incorporating preservation in older industrial cities' rightsizing strategies. Courtney Williams was primarily responsible for the GIS work on this report. She is a recent graduate of the historic preservation master's program at the University of Pennsylvania, holds an undergraduate degree in preservation from the College of Charleston and is a native of New Orleans.

*PlaceEconomics*  
1785 Massachusetts Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20036  
info@PlaceEconomics.com  
www.PlaceEconomics.com

