

# Teardowns – Losing the fabric of our historic past



# What do we mean by teardowns?

- **“Demolition of an existing house to make way for a significantly larger, new house on same site.”**
- **Buildings that come down**
  - **Historically or architecturally significant**
  - **Produced by known architects**
  - **Aging, small, lack of maintenance**
- **What goes up**
  - **Too big – too wide, too tall**
  - **Not in keeping w/neighborhood style**



# Continuing Trend

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- McMansion Backlash, No. 4 of Top 10 planning issues 2005
- Die, die, monster home! Die! CNN Aug. 18, 2005
- Bigger is not more beautiful – Fat people, fat houses: Weekend Australian, March 18, 2006
- Now hitting father out suburbs: 1950s bi-, tri-level homes

# Trends that promote teardowns



- Affluence
- Increasing land costs
- Built-out suburbs
- Differences in lifestyle
- Desirable communities: schools, services, parks, library
- Profit – land value high, subdivision possibilities

# What we are facing?

- More than 100 communities in 20 states -- number is climbing fast (Nat'l. Trust)
- 10%-20%-30% of housing stock in some communities
- Edifice Rex – South;
- Taco Belles – West;
- Scraping – East;
- Midwest: McMansions





# Results of teardown/rebuilding

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- Lack of architect-designed homes
- Crowding of suburban landscape
- Use of less quality materials than those of pre-World War II homes
- Loss of economic diversity in housing stock; squeezing out of lower- and/or middle-class
- Loss of historic heritage

# Social trends behind teardowns



- Increase in wealth
- Increase in interior space – 2,800 sq. ft. national average; from 2 bdrm./1 bath 900-1,000 sq. ft. Levittown
- Affluent average 2000: 4,000 – 5,000 sq.ft. – teardowns perhaps even larger



# Short history of American house since 1950: “Bigger = better”

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- New desires for:
  - Kitchen/family room
  - Fitness rooms
  - Larger bedrooms, closets, bathrooms
  - Media rooms
  - Home offices
  - “Costco” rooms
  - Three- or four-car garages

# New owners: no time, money, patience; understanding

- Don't want to rehab: hassles, costs
- Think preservation takes time, costs more
- Don't want to be told what to do:  
Property rights viewpoint
- Don't know/understand the character of the community



# Reasons to control teardowns

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- Flooding, storm water runoff increases w/impermeable surfaces
- Living in construction zone decreases quality of life
- Valuable resources wasted when homes hauled to landfill
- Trees, green space, light are lost
- Community diversity, affordable housing lost
- Community character eradicated



# Reverse trends?

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- Sarah Susanka: The Not So Big House series
- Cozy is in

# What can we do?

- Public education
  - Remember: Some houses show the natural order of change
- More stringent FAR, zoning regulations
- Stringent historic preservation ordinance
- Incentives for upgrading to 21<sup>st</sup> Century standards (IL tax assessment freeze, etc.)
- Teardown fees (e.g., Highland Park)

