

Managing teardowns in your community begins by knowing the terms and vocabulary used to describe the full range of tools and approaches that may be applicable. The *Teardowns Glossary* is intended to provide a single-source and explanation for the language that is increasingly being developed around the practice of teardowns and “McMansions.”

Accessory Structure: structure that is detached from a principal structure (dwelling) on the same lot, and customarily incidental and subordinate to the principal structure or use; increasingly seen as offering affordable housing options in tight real estate markets.

Addition/Alteration: an extension or increase of floor area or building height or any change or modification in construction or occu-



Adrian Scott Fine | NTHP

Addition. Historic house in Lewes, DE with large rear addition. Even additions designed with similar massing to the original can overwhelm a house and neighborhood.

Board of Appeals: local jurisdiction body, created by ordinance, whose responsibility is to hear appeals from decisions of the local zoning administrative official and to consider requests for variances and special exceptions (special use permits, conditional use permits) permissible under terms of that jurisdiction's zoning ordinance.

Bonus Zoning: additional density (beyond what would otherwise be permitted) granted in exchange for providing specified amenities such as a front porch. Also known as Incentive Zoning.

Building Code: a law, rule or regulation by a local government that deals with the construction and specifications of a new building.

Building Coverage: The surface area upon which a building rests on a lot.

Building Line: a uniform line established by a municipality to maintain a similar appearance in a neighborhood or street; the line is usually drawn a uniform distance from a curb or sidewalk, and requires that buildings be placed on it or not project beyond it; uncovered entrance platforms, terraces, stoops and steps generally do not apply

Building Volume Ratio (BVR): the ratio of the building's volume to the size of its lot; it is calculated by multiplying the building height time the width time the depth, then dividing by the area of the lot.

Build-Out Analysis: presented graphically and/or by data, it looks ahead to the planning horizon to project the amount and location of growth presently allowed under existing land use development policies.



Adrian Scott Fine | NTHP

Canyon Effect. New large house overwhelming older one-story house in a D.C. area neighborhood.

Bulk Plane: imaginary “envelope” within which a building must fit.

Canyon Effect: term given to a straight, usually blank, multi-story wall going up next to an existing house.

Carrying Capacity: used in determining the potential of an area to absorb the upper limits of development beyond which the livability or community character within an area will be negatively impacted.

Certificate of Appropriateness: A certificate issued by the a Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) authorizing exterior changes to building and grounds in locally designated historic areas.

Certified Local Government (CLG): a city or town that has met specific standards enabling participation in certain National Historic Preservation Act Programs.

Character: special physical characteristics of a neighborhood or area that set it apart from its surroundings and contribute to its individuality.

Character-Defining: a distinctive architectural feature or combination of features or qualities that distinguish one building, neighborhood or area from another.

Community Land

Trust: an organization established to hold land and to administer its use; established generally to provide low- and middle-income families access to affordable housing and to protect historically or culturally significant places.

Community Plan: A focused planning policy document that is part of a general plan. The community plan addresses a particular region within the overall planning area of an agency and is adopted in the same manner as a general plan. Also called area plan.

Compatible: capable of existing together without conflict.

Comprehensive Plan: plan, often also referred to as a general or master plan, that represents a local community's policy statement and adopted planning goals and objectives for its future growth and development; it may consist of a land use plan, a thoroughfare plan, historic preservation plan, a community facilities plan and a public improvements plan; usually adopted by the community's governing body.

Conservation District:

an area located primarily in residential neighborhoods that has a distinct physical character and preservation or conservation as the primary goal; accomplished through a variety of approaches including the adoption of a zoning overlay or independent zoning district, in order to provide protection for character-defining streetscapes in older areas threatened by new development or governmental policies that undermine rather than encourage neighborhood preservation by the application of neighborhood-specific design criteria and/or development controls.



Adrian Scott Fine | NTHP

Conservation District. Neighborhoods confronting teardowns are increasingly applying this tool.

Contributing Structure:

building or structure in a historic district that has historic, architectural, cultural or archaeological significance.

Covenant: a promise concerning land normally found in a deed.

Daylight Plane: a mechanism to regulate the building envelope or three dimensional area within which one can build through the imposition of an imaginary plane. Generally, except for projections such as roof overhangs and bay windows, no development may occur within the plane. It can be used to reduce the bulk of two-story houses in the back and thereby ameliorate otherwise adverse impacts on light and air.

Demolition by Neglect:

process of systematically allowing a building or structure to deteriorate to the point that demolition may be necessary to protect public health and safety.

Demolition Delay: specified period of time a property owner may be required to wait before receiving permission to demolish a building.

Density: the intensity of use permitted on a property; usually calculated as the Gross Floor Area permitted to be built on the property; density can also be calculated as the number of units permitted on a property.

Density Bonus: a tool used to allow a project to have a floor area bonus (sometimes used on-site and sometimes transferred or sold off-site), to offset the costs of retaining heritage buildings.

Density Transfer: the transfer of permitted (but unused) density from one property to another property.

Design Guidelines:

shows applicants what design features and elements are considered acceptable and appropriate for a building, neighborhood or area; generally recommended to be designed in user-friendly format with images to illustrate appropriate and inappropriate treatments as a guide to property owners.

Design Review: a process by which a public agency or entity reviews and approves plans for exterior building alterations, new construction, additions, or demolition.

Design Review Board: generally an appointed board of members who hear and decide the approval of exterior building alterations.



Adrian Scott Fine | NTHP

Design Review. Guidelines and a process for discussing proposed new development can result in better outcomes.

Designation: act of identifying historic structures and districts subject to regulation in historic preservation ordinances or other preservation laws.

Development Bo-

nuses: may be allowed in exchange for positive development characteristics.

Development Rights:

the right to develop land by a land owner who maintains fee-simple ownership over the land or by a party other than the owner who has obtained the rights to develop; such rights usually are expressed in terms of density allowed under existing zoning.

Downzoning: rezoning to a lower density or intensity of use in a specified area; often used to protect a building, neighborhood or area from objectionable uses and development.

Easement: partial interest in property that can be transferred to a nonprofit organization or governmental entity by gift or sale to ensure the protection of a historic resource and/or land in perpetuity.

Enabling Law: statutory provision enacted at the state level that confers authority on local governments to regulate or restrict property. The authority granted may be broad or very specific depending upon a wide range of factors such as a state's constitution, the size of a local government, and the political will of the legislature.

Encroachment: an intrusion on the property rights of another; can be an obstruction, such as a building, which impairs travel, or restricts the use of that property.

Facade: face of the wall of a building.

Flag Pole Lots (Flag

Lots): lots that are shaped like a flag on a flagpole, in which back-to-back lots have a common frontage in which the lot farthest from the street has an access less than the permitted lot frontage on the street.

Floor Area Exclusion:

the exclusion of certain portions of a building from Gross Floor Area calculations.

Floor Area Ratio

(FAR): a measurement for limiting the bulk and mass of structures which occupy the property; the measurement is expressed as a ratio of the house size to the lot size; floor area is the sum of the areas of the several floors of the building. It is calculated by dividing the area of all floors by gross site area.

$$\text{FAR} = \frac{\text{Total Building Floor Area}}{\text{Total Lot Area}}$$

A FAR of 0.2 would =

$$\frac{8,712 \text{ sq. ft. (Building Size)}}{43,560 \text{ sq. ft. (One Acre Lot)}}$$

Footprint: the outline of a house on a lot looking down on it from above.

Form-Based Codes: a method of regulating development to achieve a specific urban form; they create a predictable public realm by controlling physical form primarily, and land uses secondarily, usually through municipally-based regulations.

Garage Apartment: a single-unit apartment located above a garage and sited behind the main house; permitted in areas with adopted neighborhood plans that specifically allow them.



Adrian Scott Fine | NTHP

Garage Apartment. The allowance and use of accessory structures for living space can provide affordable housing.

Granny Flat: a freestanding, single-unit building located behind the main house in a residential area; permitted in areas with adopted neighborhood plans that specifically allow them.

Gross Floor Area

(GFA): the total area of all the floors in each building on a lot, measured to the extreme outer limits of each building.

Growth Management:

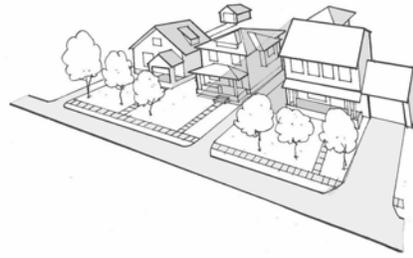
the use by a community of a wide range of techniques in combination to determine the amount, type, and rate of development desired by the community and to channel that growth into designated areas.

Height: generally a measurement from ground level to the top-most point of a building or element. Some jurisdictions may measure from the mean street level to the mean roof line.



Adrian Scott Fine | NTHP

Historic District. Since the 1930s, local historic districts have proven to be one of the most effective means for preserving community character and property values.



Adrian Scott Fine | NTHP

Impact. The placement of a garage and driveway can disrupt the historical pattern of a community.

Impervious Surface:

area covered with solid material or that is compacted to the point where water can not infiltrate underlying soils (e.g. parking lots, roads, houses, patios, swimming pools, tennis courts, etc.); storm water runoff velocity and volume can increase in areas covered by impervious surfaces.

Incentive Zoning: See Bonus Zoning.

Infill: the use of vacant land and property within a built-up area for further construction or development, especially as part of a neighborhood preservation or limited growth program.



Adrian Scott Fine | NTHP

Infill. Example of infill attempting to compliment the existing neighborhood character and scale of surrounding

Inner-Ring Suburbs:

those located next to, or near, central cities.

Integrity: the degree to which an area, a neighborhood, or an individual structure's character-defining features remain intact.

Interim Protection:

provides immediate protection for structures being considered for historic designation; properties are protected for a specified period of time or until a decision about designation is made.

Landmark: a building, site, object, structure, or significant tree, having historical, architectural, social, or cultural significance and marked for preservation by the local, state, or federal government; a visually prominent or outstanding structure or natural feature that functions as a point of orientation or identification.

Land Use: the manner in which a parcel of land is used or occupied.

Local Designation: offers the strongest form of protection for the preservation of historic buildings within a neighborhood or area with proposed changes to exterior architectural features reviewed by a locally appointed body (historic preservation commission) who makes a determination on the appropriateness of the changes and then allows or denies the changes to be made.

Loom Factor: a function of building size, location, height, coverage and design; lot grading, landscaping and other factors also contribute to the perception of "loom;" derived from houses the loomed over the street, their neighbors or that changed the existing patterns or neighborhood character.

Historic District: an area that generally includes within its boundaries a significant concentration of properties linked by architectural style, historical development, or a past event; may be designated locally by governing body and subject to design review procedures or advisory only; also may be designated at state or federal level on the National Register of Historic Places.

Homeowner's Association: a formal legal entity or ad hoc gathering of residents created to represent the interests of a given neighborhood, sometimes regulating the appearance and certain uses above and beyond what the community's zoning and land use laws dictate.

Identity: a consistent quality that makes a city, place, area, or building unique and gives it a distinguishing character.

Impact: the effect of any direct man-made actions or indirect repercussions of man-made actions on existing physical, social, or economic conditions.

Impact Fee: a development fee, levied on a project by a governing body as compensation for otherwise-unmitigated impacts a project will produce.



Adrian Scott Fine | NTHP

Loss of Light. Teardowns can cast shadows onto a neighboring house, effectively blocking sunlight.

Loss of light: new buildings must not be sited so that an existing building's daylight or sunlight is significantly reduced.

Lot: a share, portion, division or parcel of land; one of several parcels into which a property is divided.

Lot Consolidation: the practice of purchasing two adjacent lots and building one large house that overlaps both lots.

Lot Coverage: the amount of the lot that is covered by principal buildings or accessory structures.



Lot Coverage. Many new houses are built to the maximum allowed under zoning, in terms of sq. ft. and the placement on the lot.

Lot Line: a line that separates lots of land as described in the legal description of a parcel or a lot of land.

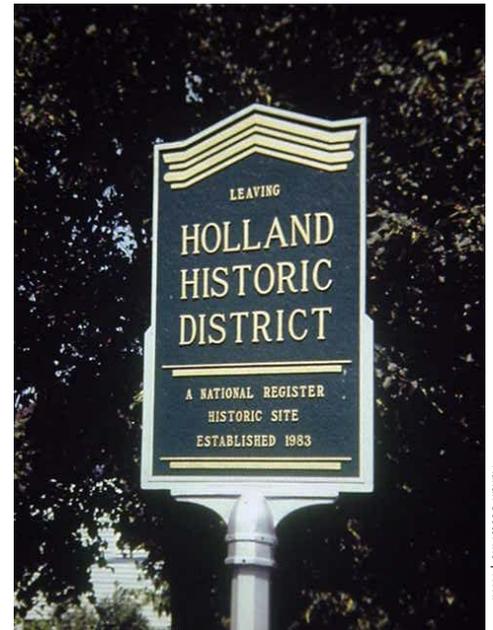
Mansionization: the process of oversized McMansions replacing homes in an older historic neighborhood.

McMansion: bulky, out-of-scale new homes on small parcels where they do not fit the existing character of a community; some additional common terms used regionally are “faux chateaux,” “monster home,” “starter castle,” “hummer house,” “garage mahal,” “trophy home,” “big box Victorian,” “pink palace,” “Tara on a quarter-acre,” and “bigfoot.”

Moratorium: stopping of a particular process, for example, a “building” moratorium or a “demolition” moratorium; can be temporary or permanent; allows communities to place a halt on new development and “cooling off” period so that local officials can examine the impact of proposed development and put measures in place to manage it.

National Historic Landmark (NHL): property included in the National Register of Historic Places that has been designated by the Secretary of the Interior to have a “national significance in American history, archaeology, architecture, engineering, and culture” 36 C.F.R. Part 65.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA): the federal law that encourages the identification and preservation of cultural and historic resources in the United States through partnership with state, tribal and local governments 16 U.S.C. § 470 et. seq.



Adrian Scott Fine | NTHP

National Register of Historic Places. A historic district can build awareness about a neighborhood's history.

National Register of Historic Places: official inventory of “districts, sites, buildings, structure, and objects significant in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering and culture 16 U.S.C. § 470a/36 C.F.R. part 60.

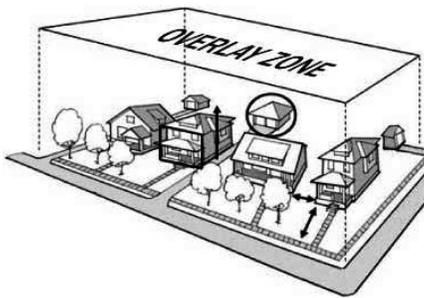
Neighborhood Association: a voluntary organization of residents who work together to improve and maintain the quality of life in their neighborhood. See Homeowner's Association.

Nonconforming Lots: classified as “nonconforming” when a zoning ordinance is adopted and some existing uses, structures, and parcels may not comply with the regulations of the zoning district in which they are located; while typically permitted to continue, their future expansion may be limited.

Open Space: land and water areas retained in an essentially undeveloped state.

Orientation: the placement of a building or structure on a site as it relates to the physical conditions of the site, such as its geography and man-made features, or a compass direction.

Overlay Zones: a zoning district that imposes certain restrictions on a specific area but does not change the underlying zoning category (all permitted uses remain the same, while additional requirements relating to concerns such as green space, landscape and architectural features apply).



Overlay Zones. Placing restrictions on an area through an overlay zone can help ensure compatible development.

Parcel: a lot or contiguous group of lots in single ownership or under single control, and usually considered a unit for purposes of development.

Pattern Books: handbooks used to help builders, home owners, and architects understand the elements and principles of design that help create the distinct character and image of a community, neighborhood or area.

Planning Commission: a board of lay people which is given some powers over planning; it may act in conjunction with a city council.

Pop-Top: a house enlarged through the use of an addition that breaks through, or "pops out of," the original roof line of the house.



Pop-Top. To gain additional living space, homeowners added a third floor to this former two-story house.

Proportion: the comparative relation between parts or elements with respect to size, dimension, ratio and quantity.

Refill: as opposed to infill which places new structures on already empty lots, refill is the process of "refilling" the lot following the removal of an existing house, otherwise known as a teardown.

Resubdivision: the process of dividing previously subdivided lots into two or more parcels. Greater density may be achieved by consolidating lots and then re-subdividing them.

Revolving Fund: fund established by a public or nonprofit organization to purchase land, buildings or make grants or loans to facilitate the preservation of historic resources.

Rule of Three: a new house will be three times as big and cost three times as much as the old house it replaces in a teardown.

Scale: proportional relationship of size and shape of buildings and elements to each other and their site.

Scorched Earth Law: penalty established by local government to prevent deliberate violations of the law by prohibiting action such as the issuance of necessary building or occupancy permits on properties for a specific period of time, where legal violations have occurred.



Setback. New houses that do not maintain uniform setbacks on a street can result in jarring disruptions.

Setback: the required minimum horizontal distance between the building line and the related front, side, or rear property line.

Significance: as used in historic preservation, a term ascribed to buildings, sites, objects, or districts that possess exceptional value or quality for illustrating or interpreting the cultural heritage of the community .

in relation to other properties and property types within a specific historic theme, period, and geographical setting; a principal test of significance for historic property is "integrity."

Site Plan: a detailed plan which depicts the location of improvements on a parcel of land which also contains all the information required by zoning ordinances.



Scale. A new structure that does not relate in terms of scale to neighboring properties or an area can dramatically change a community's character.



Adrian Scott Fine | NTHP

Snout House. Visually and proportionally, the protruding garage wing on this house is the dominant feature.

Smart Growth: development that is environmentally sensitive, economically viable, community oriented, and sustainable.

Snout House: a house where the garage protrudes past the architectural face of the home and so is the prominent feature of the building.

Subdivision: the division of land, lot, tract, or parcel into two or more lots, parcels, plats, or sites, or other divisions of land for the purpose of sale, lease, offer, or development, whether immediate or future.

Streetscape: the corridor of space bounded by the facades of the buildings on either side of the street.

Sustainability: The conservation and improvement of our existing built resources, including re-use of historic and older buildings, greening the existing building stock, and reinvestment in older and historic communities, is crucial to combating climate change.



WestportNOW.org

Teardowns. Some communities have lost more than 40 percent of their original residential building stock to this practice.

Taking of Property: act of confiscating private property for governmental use either through “eminent domain” or by regulatory action that denies all reasonable and beneficial use of property.

Teardowns: the practice of purchasing a home on a lot, demolishing it, and constructing a new, larger house in its place; the purchased home is typically small and older; the newly built house is oversized for the lot and out-of-character with the neighborhood; also referred to as “knockdowns,” “scrape-offs,” “bash and build,” “bulldozers,” and “scrapers.”

Tipping Fees: fee charged to individuals, businesses and waste haulers to dump trash in the landfill; revenues from tipping fees may be used to offset the impact of teardowns by subsidizing programs that encourage neighborhood preservation and affordable housing.

Transfer of Development Rights (TDR): a market-based technique that encourages the voluntary transfer of growth from places where a community would like to see less development (called sending areas) to places where a community would like to see more development (called receiving areas).

Tree Ordinance: provides for trees in construction zones by requiring protective fencing, restricting/limiting removal, or mandating planting of new trees.

Variance: a granting of administrative relief which excuses compliance with a zoning ordinance.

Weighted Face Print: the “observed height” of a house, its distance from the street and its mass in comparison to other houses.



Adrian Scott Fine | NTHP

Tree Ordinance. Communities are increasingly adopting ordinances to protect their mature tree canopies.

Work Force Housing: euphemism used to avoid the negative connotations of “affordable housing;” housing that is affordable to support and service workers in a community.

Zero lot line: the location of a building on a lot in such a manner that one or more of the building's sides rests directly on a lot line.

Zone Busting: efforts to warn homeowners that an impending zoning change in their neighborhood will affect property values.

Zoning Board of Appeals: an administrative body that hears and resolves disputes involving zoning ordinances and which interprets these ordinances.

Zoning: the primary regulatory instrument for implementing the general plan. Zoning divides a community into districts or “zones” which specify the permitted and prohibited uses.

NOT INCLUDED?

The *Teardowns Glossary* is intended as a guide and starting point for many of the terms being used in association with teardowns. Always consult appropriate state enabling legislation when drafting ordinances as definitions may vary.

As communities experiment with tools and new approaches to manage teardowns, the vocabulary will continue to expand. Share your teardowns experience, your approach, how this trend is impacting your community and historic neighborhoods, and the response from residents and local leaders.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation will update the *Teardowns Glossary* as we continue to track the teardown trend and its impact on historic neighborhoods across America.

Contact us at nefo@nthp.org

Sources — City of Boulder (CO) Focus Group Results; City of Phoenix General Design Guidelines for Historic Properties; Glossary of Commonly Used Preservation Terms; New Canaan Draft Zoning Regulations; Pattern Book for Norfolk Neighborhoods, City of Norfolk; PlannersWeb.com; San Bernardino (CA) County Land Use Services Plan Glossary; Urban Design Dictionary; USA Today.

Update: March, 2008 / asf