Partnership for Building Reuse

Project Scope and Progress to Date

The National Trust for Historic Preservation is partnering with ULI Chicago to foster the market-driven reuse of vacant and under-utilized buildings in the City of Chicago by making it easier for property owners and investors to renew and repurpose older buildings. The Partnership will do this by identifying barriers (technical/design, regulatory, market and financial) to building reuse, and developing recommendations for solutions to overcome them.

An important part of the Partnership's activities is convening local leaders and industry experts to facilitate a sharing of knowledge and experience, leading us towards potential solutions that are grounded in reality. At our first stakeholder meeting in June 2015, we discussed the most significant barriers to building reuse (please see summary list below), and on October 1, we will be focusing on potential solutions.

Summary of Barriers for Building Reuse
First Stakeholder Convening, June 16, 2015

Market Barriers

- Limited overall demand in some neighborhoods and for some building types such as older commercial and industrial structures
- Little diversity in viable options for new use of older buildings, especially buildings built for specific purposes such as schools, theaters and places of worship

Financial Barriers

- Challenges of securing financing – especially for smaller, less experienced developers
- Lack of education and promotion of existing development support programs
- Limited incentives for building reuse projects – makes reuse harder in areas with weaker markets

Technical Barriers

- Challenges created by building layout and design such as low ceiling heights, narrow elevator shafts, lack of room to build ramps for accessibility and difficulty in eliminating "dead zones" for internet connectivity
- Site issues such as contaminants from prior uses and limited or no on-site parking

Regulatory Barriers

- Inflexibility of zoning and parking requirements such as required ground floor retail
- Building and energy codes – prescriptive codes (as opposed to performance based) can be very restrictive
- Permitting process – slow approval/denial processes can add substantially to development costs
- Historic preservation standards
- Neighborhood planning and aldermanic influence – lack of coordinated neighborhood planning can create uncertainty