

# Across The Country, Some Neighborhoods Are Thriving And Some Struggling, But What About The Ones That Fall Somewhere In The Middle?

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Researchers at Reinvestment Fund in Philadelphia report that 48 percent of city residents in the United States live in “middle neighborhoods.” These neighborhoods are generally affordable and functional, and they offer a reasonable quality of life, but many are in danger of decline.

A shrinking middle class, the suburbanization of jobs, obsolete housing styles, and dwindling homeownership rates cloud the future of these middle neighborhoods that serve as the lynchpin of success for most American cities and older suburbs.

Yet these areas—that provide a substantial portion of local property-tax revenue—are ignored by policymakers who have focused on the problems of concentrated poverty, gentrification, and the need for downtown revitalization.

In an environment of proposals to severely cut funds for cities, the federal government would be wise to allocate some small amount of funds to test approaches to prevent the decline of America's middle neighborhoods.

There is not a one-size-fits-all approach for supporting middle neighborhoods. Something that works in one area of a city may not work in another due to a host of factors such as the average age of homeowners, the

quality of housing stock, and other existing neighborhood assets. Targeted improvement strategies, like Philadelphia's Rebuilding Together, are working to increase both homeowner and neighborhood value through low-cost, high-impact home improvement projects. Across the country, new middle neighborhood initiatives are working to strengthen neighborhood organizations and clubs that are working together to improve their middle neighborhoods. Some are building marketing programs to build stronger neighborhood cohesion and attract new residents.

Modest investments in a middle neighborhoods strategy could make a big impact on the quality of life of millions of people living in our nation's major cities and older suburbs. Strengthening these middle neighborhoods has the practical outcome of helping modest-income homeowners build some wealth through home appreciation, and increases property taxes paid to cities and suburbs, enabling them to provide better services throughout their jurisdictions. Policymakers and city-builders should recognize the critical importance of middle neighborhoods and invest in them—as we already do in our very distressed neighborhoods and our downtowns—so that they can continue to serve their vital and historic role in American cities.

*Congressman Dwight Evans represents the 2nd District of Pennsylvania and Paul C. Brophy is editor of On the Edge: America's Middle Neighborhoods.*

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