

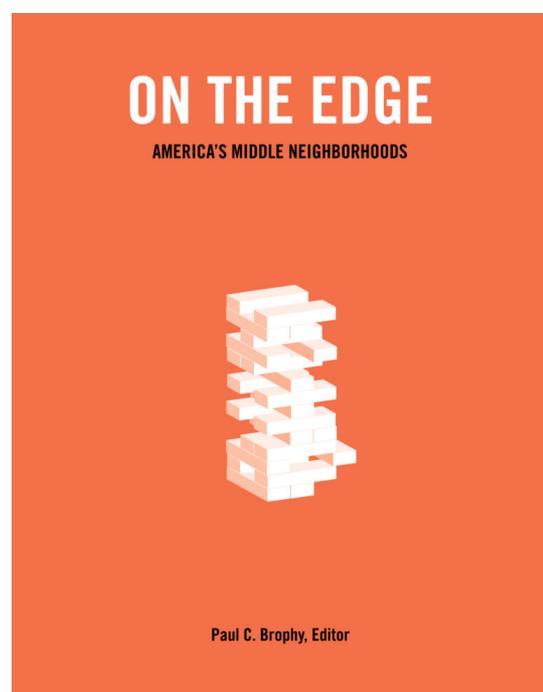
On the Edge: Our City's Middle Neighborhoods



by Paul C. Brophy, Brophy & Reilly LLC //

Researchers at the [Reinvestment Fund](#) in Philadelphia report that 48 percent of central city residents in the United States live in “middle neighborhoods.” These neighborhoods are generally affordable and attractive 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 shrinking homeownership rates clouds the future of these middle neighborhoods that serve as the lynchpin of success for most American city regions. Yet these areas—that provide a substantial portion of local property-tax revenue—are relatively ignored by policymakers who have focused on the problems of concentrated poverty, gentrification, and the need for downtown revitalization.



I recently edited a book of case studies and essays by leading policymakers, community development professionals, and scholars that aims to stimulate a national dialogue about middle neighborhoods. Published by [The American Assembly](#) at Columbia University, [*On the Edge: America's Middle Neighborhoods*](#) explores the complex web of communities transitioning—for better or worse—across America.

Authors reviewed research, discussed the challenges faced by middle neighborhoods, and provided a number of examples of strong programs and effective organizations working to make a difference in these on-the-edge communities. A key take-away of the essays is 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 build both homeowner and neighborhood value through low-cost, high-impact home improvement projects. In Baltimore, [Healthy Neighborhoods](#) pools capital for mortgage and rehab loans in strong but undervalued neighborhoods to build home value. These demonstration programs are operated by nonprofit organizations, with cooperation from city or county governments.



middleneighborhoods.org/overview/

Modest public and philanthropic investments in a middle neighborhoods strategy—supporting research, demonstration projects, and/or resident engagement initiatives —will make a big impact to millions of people living in and around our country's major cities. 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.

[Sign up](#) to join the conversation and stay informed on the latest on middle neighborhoods.



Paul C. Brophy is a principal with Brophy & Reilly LLC, a consulting firm specializing in economic development, and neighborhood improvement; the management of complex urban redevelopment projects; and the development of mixed-income housing communities. Brophy has been a Senior Advisor to the Center for

Community Progress, a Senior Scholar at the George Warren Brown School at Washington University in St. Louis; a Senior Advisor to Enterprise Community Partners. He is currently an adjunct professor at School of Urban and Regional Planning, Georgetown University and a member of the Reinvestment Fund's Policy Advisory Board.

In 1992, he chaired the so-called Brophy Commission for Mayor Ed Rendell that recommended broad changes to the city's housing and community development programs and organizational structure.

Mr. Brophy holds degrees from LaSalle University and the University of Pennsylvania. He is co-author or editor of four books: *On the Edge: America's Middle Neighborhoods* (2016); *Neighborhood Revitalization: Theory and Practice* (1975); *Housing and Local Government* (1982), and *A Guide to Careers in Community Development* (2001).

And, he was born and raised in Philadelphia in Hunting Park.

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