

PRESERVING THE NEIGHBORHOOD WITHIN: THE SAN ANTONIO STORY

How a city uses its architectural heritage to lift up its community.



THE LOSS OF ITS ROOTS

In San Antonio, Texas, rapid urban growth threatened to erase the city's identity, turning historic "vernacular" homes into landfill waste.

But in 2022, San Antonio took a stand. It became the largest U.S. city to pass a comprehensive **Deconstruction Ordinance**, outlawing the demolition of its architectural heritage.



OLD-GROWTH, NEW LIFE

When a historic home must come down, its bones are treated like treasure. The city's ordinance mandates the salvage of rare, high-quality **old-growth lumber**—a precious resource unavailable in building supply stores today.

Unmatched Quality

Dense, rot-resistant wood that has stood for centuries is kept out of the wood chipper.

Preserving the Past

Every beam and block saved prevents the carbon-heavy environmental costs of importing new timber.



THE MATERIAL INNOVATION CENTER

Salvaged materials don't go to the highest bidder; they go back to the neighborhood. Funneled into the historic Port San Antonio bungalows, this material hub operates on a "community-first" model.

There, salvaged timber and masonry are made available at no cost to low-income homeowners and local housing repair initiatives, stabilizing neighborhoods where the wood was originally harvested.



A LIVING RESOURCE

San Antonio is transforming its architectural history into a resilient future. Through a dedicated **workforce academy**, the city trains local contractors in deconstruction techniques, building a specialized workforce from the ground up.

By keeping historic materials in rotation, San Antonio reduces landfill waste by thousands of tons, proving that the most sustainable building materials are often the ones already standing right in the neighborhood.



SAN ANTONIO



THE CIRCLE OF CARE

A Resource for the People

San Antonio connects preservation directly to human need, ensuring the value within older structures stays local to help neighbors who need it. By requiring deconstruction for homes built before 1960, the city redirects salvaged lumber and fixtures to a dedicated community repository for local development and repair programs. The system effectively bridges the gap between historic structures and community opportunities. Ultimately, San Antonio reminds us that the true measure of sustainability is not just what we save, but how we use our shared past to care for our neighbors today.