

Position on Deconstruction

The process of carefully dismantling a building for the purpose of salvaging as many of the construction materials and components as possible is known as “deconstruction”. It is an increasingly popular “green” building practice and is valued as a way to recycle building materials and reduce construction waste in landfills. For example, the US Green Building Council gives credits for the use of recycled materials in the Leadership for Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program.

According to the Florida Center for Solid and Hazardous Waste Management:

“Deconstruction is defined as the disassembly of structures for the purpose of reusing the structures components and building materials. The primary intent is to divert the maximum amount of building materials from the waste stream. Deconstruction is a relatively new term used to describe an old process – the selective dismantlement or removal of materials from buildings instead of demolition. The common practice in the industry is to cherry pick — strip out highly accessible recyclable, reusable or historic materials — prior to traditional demolition. (Traditional demolition usually involves mechanical demolition, often resulting in a pile of mixed debris, which is sent to a landfill). Deconstruction encompasses a thorough and comprehensive approach to whole building disassembly (versus cherry picking specialty items), allowing the majority of the materials to be salvaged for reuse.”

The National Trust for Historic Preservation supports the practice of deconstruction of older and historic buildings but only as a last resort when the continued use or adaptive use of the older or historic building is not possible. We recognize the environmental benefits of reducing impacts to landfills and we support the reuse of older and historic building materials and architectural detail. We also recognize that deconstruction can provide a source of materials for rehabilitating other buildings in a historic neighborhood, and this may serve to help protect community character. At the same time, we believe that deconstruction should only be considered as the last of the following three options:

Option # 1 Reuse and repair the building in its existing location.

- Continuing the use of a building is very often more sustainable than deconstruction. It is better for the environment in that it recycles the entire building rather than recycling of materials and components.
- Reusing older or historic buildings often contributes to the architectural/historical value, stability, and livability of a neighborhood or community, — i.e. to its sustainability in the broader sense.
- Older and historic buildings, especially those built before World War II, generally used high quality construction materials, were constructed to adapt to the local climate and were built to last. Rehabilitation can extend the useful life these buildings for generations to come.
- After a natural disaster, all efforts should be made to survey, evaluate the feasibility of retaining, and support the rehabilitation of older and historic buildings as the highest priority.

Option # 2 Move the building to a new location

- If the building is listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register for Historic Places or has local or state designation as historic and it cannot be retained in its current location, moving it to a new location is preferable to deconstruction. Where appropriate, the building would ideally be moved to provide infill in an appropriate older neighborhood.

Option # 3 Deconstruct and carefully salvage materials only after all avenues for the continued or adaptive reuse of a building have been exhausted.

- Deconstruction is an appropriate and positive solution if there is no other prudent or feasible alternative.
- Deconstruction should not be used as a rationalization or incentive for ending the life of a building, especially a building listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, either individually or as part of a district or has local or state designation as historic.
- We do not support deconstruction of older and historic homes when they are removed from a neighborhood and replaced by out-of-scale houses that infringe upon their neighbors and harm the integrity and stability of the neighborhood.