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Growing up in the historic city of Charlottesville, Virginia, I have always admired old houses. However, it was not until I left Charlottesville for college, moving to a city of comparable size and age, Middletown, Connecticut, that I began to appreciate Charlottesville's historic areas and the wisdom of historic preservation. When I arrived in Middletown, the city was just ending a multi-million dollar effort to revitalize its downtown strip, deemed the "Main Street Renaissance" – an overt move to attract businesses and shoppers. However, even after this colossal effort, downtown Middletown still paled in comparison to the city I left behind. Middletown's Main Street was still flecked by '70s architecture, and many historic storefronts had been altered beyond repair. Further, the Renaissance effort did not rid Middletown of its major highway, Route 9, which runs parallel to Main Street. Route 9 plows through a historic neighborhood, and cuts off the downtown area from the Connecticut River, destroying the waterfront. On most nights, Main Street is still largely deserted. Charlottesville, in comparison, has a booming downtown region, which has flourished especially since the City bricked over ten blocks of Main Street in the 1970s.

The stark difference between these two cities sparked my interest in historic preservation. Why had it happened in some cities and not in others? What are the economic repercussions of historic insensitivity? Are there still historic areas being demolished?

These questions prompted me to take many classes at Wesleyan relating to the city and community life. My freshman year classes included 'The City in American Fiction,' 'Introductory Sociology' and 'African American Politics: An Urban Question.' When I returned home during the spring break of my freshman year, I told my dad about my interest in all things relating to city life, and he arranged a meeting with a good friend and colleague of his, Mr. Huja, the former city planner of Charlottesville. Mr. Huja told me about many of the inspiring projects he was working on, and helped me to become involved with Charlottesville's yellow-bike program, which encourages citizens to use free and strategically placed yellow bicycles around down-town Charlottesville instead of driving.

After working with the city planner of Charlottesville, I began to recognize more and more the impoverished state of urban planning in Middletown. Phenomena in Middletown such as Route-9 display not only a lack of interest in history, but also a lack of foresight which is essentially irreversible. This is why The National Trust's mission of historic preservation is especially urgent and relevant to the future of the urban area. As the composition of the city continues to rapidly change, the public-private partnerships which the National Trust facilitates are essential to protecting valuable historic areas which can increase personal ties to a community and foster willingness to participate in it.

My friend Matt Roe worked for the National Trust two years ago, and all of the lectures he went to and the opportunities he had to meet with politicians and city officials sound amazing to me. I was very interested in the research aspect of his job, although the policy sector of the National Trust, which I read about on-line, sounds fascinating as well. I am especially interested in policy that works to counter suburbanization by revitalizing city-centers via programs such as the successful yellow-bike program. However, like Matt, I would also love to do research, especially about how inner-city neighborhoods can be rehabilitated with sensitivity to renewable energy, as so many old buildings are incredibly wasteful and energy-inefficient.

I honestly do not know what my long-term career goals are, and I think there are many directions I could go. While this freedom is incredibly exciting, it is also very scary. However, an internship at the National Trust would greatly help me explore my interest in urban planning, and give me a glimpse of what my future would look like if I were to be an urban planner. This internship would be an amazing boon to my efforts to choose a direction, especially as graduation looms.