

Many Brooklyn Heights residents were intrigued to read about Binyamin Appelbaum's ancestral stomping grounds in the neighborhood ("I Want a City, Not a Museum" – December 30, 2023). But we were equally dismayed at the omissions in his narrative, and his bleak conclusion.

To quote the New York Landmarks Conservancy with characteristic Big Apple bravado, "New York has the greatest collection of architecture of any city in the country." We disagree with Appelbaum's zero-sum-premise that preserving these buildings comes at the expense of opportunity (housing or otherwise).

Brooklyn Heights is world-renowned for its collection of 19th century houses, like the one on Willow Street in which Applebaum's ancestor David Moffat lived. A complex set of financial and physical factors combine with regulation to determine where new buildings replace old ones, or where buildings are preserved but their use or occupancy changes. The dynamic process of creative conversion and reuse, along with a give and take between preservation and transformation, began long before our historic district's designation in 1965, and continues to this day.

Brooklyn Heights didn't "fossilize" despite Appelbaum's hyperbole. Besides iconic brownstones and pre-war apartment buildings, and more recently constructed contemporary buildings, the neighborhood includes former stables, garages, hotels, mansions, religious buildings and factories, and even a police station, water pump facility and YMCA, that have all been converted to housing.

Vishaan Chakrabarti's accompanying essay, which outlined "a way to add more than 500,000 homes...without radically changing the character of the city's neighborhoods or altering its historic districts," is grounded in data. His practical optimism is a far better approach than blaming historic preservation for the city's housing woes.

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