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## A Charleston neighborhood changes, with newcomers preserving its past

BY MAURA HOGAN



Sugar Bakeshop and its adjacent house are an example of the diversity of use that is a signature of the Cannonborough-Elliottborough neighborhood.

There may be no Charleston neighborhood that has transformed with the speed and splash of Cannonborough-Elliottborough.

Throughout the area, which is nestled on the West side just south of the Septima P. Clark Parkway, there seems to be an ever-evolving proliferation of fastidiously rehabbed homes, cheery local boutiques and inviting new boites. They are regularly the stuff of prestigious awards, glossy lifestyle spreads and national television shows.

Case in point: In January, another three restored structures swooped up Carolopolis Awards — the annual nod from Preservation Society of Charleston bestowed upon projects employing exceptional standards in design, craftsmanship and historic integrity.

The fact that these buildings fell to such disrepair is another matter. Many who watch local development ebbs and flows attribute such vacancies and neglect to longstanding taxation practices that have been untenable for past residents.

It's true, such preservation efforts only bring back the buildings but rarely the former residents. However, many are committed to maintaining Cannonborough-Elliottborough as a dynamic mix of the residential and the commercial — in short, a living, working, multifaceted urban neighborhood.

### Form and Function

About those coveted Carolopolis Awards. Kristopher King, executive director of the

Preservation Society of Charleston, noted that the focus of the awards is the building's project, not its intended purpose.

Whether a structure is being spied up as a single-family home, a local shop or short-term rental is beyond the scope of the award's recognition. "One of the things that our application really doesn't ask is what the use is," King said, noting the process does not contemplate cultural, social, tax and other such shifts. "It really is focused on before and after (projects)."

That being said, King does view such preservation upticks as an indicator of the market. "We're very interested in how these patterns are emerging. And over recent years, we've seen a lot more (that are) not on the peninsula, which is really exciting. We had our first in West Ashley last year," he said.

### A Neighborhood Changed

According to King, the pattern in Cannonborough-Elliottborough speaks to its very unique evolution. "There's been a tremendous amount of change, arguably more so than in any other neighborhood over years," King said. "You have a neighborhood that was predominantly long-term residents. That was predominantly African American. That also possessed the core commercial district for the African American community."

A preservation spike in an area can be a boon for the greater cause. "It confirms ... that our value proposition extends beyond the mandate of the city," he said. However, such preservation does not necessarily beget attributes like livability or diversity, which market forces in Charleston continue to threaten. "Sure, there's been a lot of positive, but there's also been a lot of negative," King said.

### Uncovering History

Later this spring, the Preservation Society

of Charleston will launch an initiative that documents the neighborhood's history. "It's a difficult narrative," King said, when considering the changes in both the percentage of full-time residents and its demographic.

Victoria Rae Moore, facilitator of CONNECKtedTOO, a community arts initiative that explores issues like gentrification through the lens of small businesses, suggests new residents learn about their new home. "As the neighborhood evolves, I implore new and future residents to know the area's history," she said. She noted that in 1968, the year Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, the only hotel in Charleston that catered to Black people was the Hotel James in Cannonborough-Elliottborough. "You also would have found the Lincoln Theatre (opened in for an African American audience), Taylor's Bakery, where residents looked forward to buying snack-bags of crumbs for just a nickel and a number of other Black-owned businesses — so many ... in fact, that some refer to that time and space as Charleston's Black Prosperity Street." Even with this legacy,

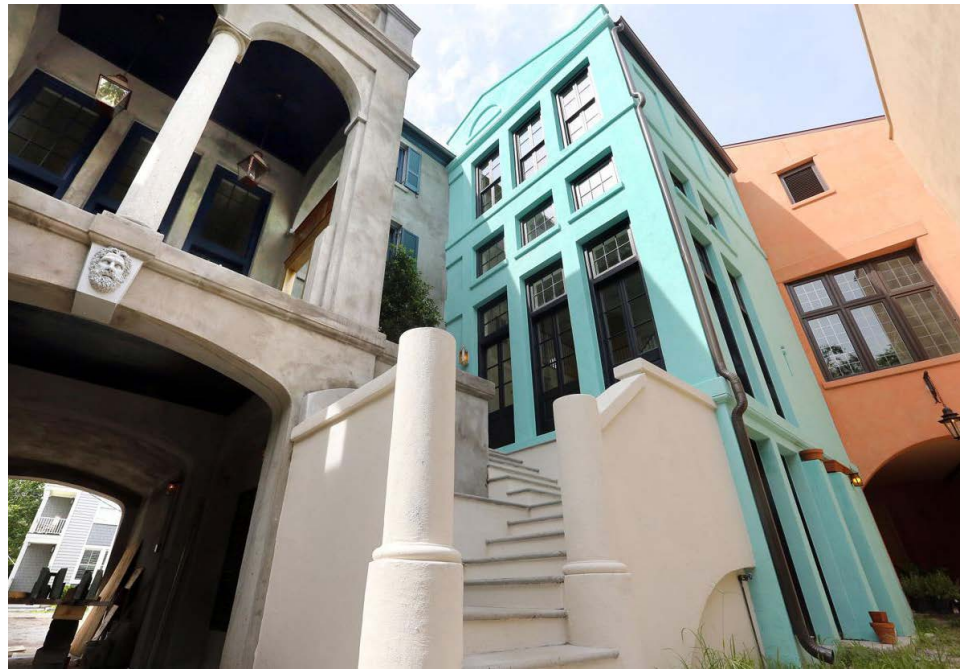
King noted also that Cannonborough-Elliottborough is not currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places, which would afford tax credits to those developers with the means to fully meet the highest standards.

### Determined Diversity

Diversity is a term that comes up regularly, applied by stakeholders to use, style and residents. Over the past few years, there have been projects committed to retaining it.

Moore points out that though the racial demographics have shifted, today there are many small businesses in the community including Veggie Bin, Poke San and Rose Florist, which opened in and is still operated by its original owner, Donald Bennett. "Beyond their goods and services, these mom-and-pop-sized operations are cultural assets. Their presence and their stories are integral to the neighborhood's vitality," she said.

King also points to two single-story, mixed-used structures at A and B Spring St., which were built between and by Huldah J. Prioleau, one of the first female Black



Some of the final new homes on Catfiddle Street in downtown Charleston are taking shape. File/Brad Nettles/Staff

physicians in South Carolina. She used B as her office, and rented the other as a barbershop.

In its recent rehabilitation project, Jeffrey Roberts, managing partner at JJR Development, worked with architect Julia Martin to reinstitute wood siding, windows and doors, and opened B Spring St. with a storefront. "We just think they fight way above their weight and someone needed to preserve them," said Roberts, who believes it bodes well for Charlestonians to fight for the little ones that other people wouldn't save, particularly vernacular buildings like the Spring Street structures and another that is now Sugar Bakeshop, that were important to those traveling north and south along U.S. Highway 17.

Roberts also points to the community's span of styles and uses, acknowledging invaluable contributions of leaders like Marion Hawkins, president of Cannonborough-Elliottborough Neighborhood Association, for championing them. Hawkins and his wife Lori were also recognized with a Carolopolis Award this year for the rehab of 84 Cannon St., which is adjacent to their boutique inn in a fully restored, three-story circa 1860s single house at 86 Cannon St.

A recent mixed-used restoration can be spotted from the Septima P. Clark Parkway at Rutledge Ave. It was rescued from dereliction by owner Lindsay Nevin,

president of Flyway, a company involved in numerous aspects of the construction and real estate industry, and represents a collaboration with designer Andrew Gould of New World Byzantine. King holds the project up as an example of a highly visible corner structure. "It has that nonresidential use, which we think is critical to the survival of neighborhoods."

Originally built in as John Meyer & Co. Grocery, the ½-story wood-frame building was distinguished by an ornate bracketed cornice and tripartite gable window.

The vestiges of that history moved Flyway to take on the much altered, rot-ravaged property with the vast majority of its historic character gone or covered up and its original storefront lost. However, when they pulled a couple of the panels back, they realized that the barrel vaulted ceiling was still in place.

"No one had probably seen it for decades. And that was really the inspiration that pushed us over the edge to move on the structure," Nevin said.

Even in the midst of pandemic shutdowns, the building now shows heartening sparks of urban verve. On a given evening, outdoor tables flank its new ground-floor restaurant, Chasing Sage, where patrons partake of ramen or Saturday night sushi, bathed in the glow of light from its interior.

A handsome, pint-sized bar named The Gilded Horn and residences are also housed in the building.

That's just the sort of home-meets-hub vibe that King commends, particularly in light of market pressures. "A lot of people have this very protective mentality that you've got to keep it all residential. It's almost sort of a gated community mentality," he said. "What makes these neighborhoods so great is the fact that these are urban neighborhoods, the diversity of use."

He also cites shops like Sugar Bakeshop at 59 & 59½ Cannon St. (and another Carolopolis Award winner) that embody that welcome, historic mix. Two years ago, Roberts acquired the historic mid-1800s Charleston single house and bakery when its owners retired. Deeming it essential to the lifeblood of the neighborhood, he backed longtime manager Kat Palmisano to continue running it.

Other projects are attracting small, local business owners to the commercial strip. A recent mixed-used rehab by Ramsay Management Group at 46 Spring includes five commercial storefront bays as well as short term rental units. The developer, Alex Ramsay, aims to fill them with local artisans and others from the creative sector.

Among them is The Tiny Tassel, a jewelry and accessories brand founded by Spartanburg native Mimi Striplin, who was previously part of Cannonborough Collective at 185 A St. Philip St. It recently announced it will soon open in one of the five newly renovated storefronts at Spring St. A few of her designs reference nearby streets like Percy and Bogard. "Cannonborough-Elliottborough is such a special part of town for me. From my apartments in college to my favorite bakery, local shop and now The Tiny Tassel's first flagship, the neighborhood has always been a favorite of mine," said Striplin.

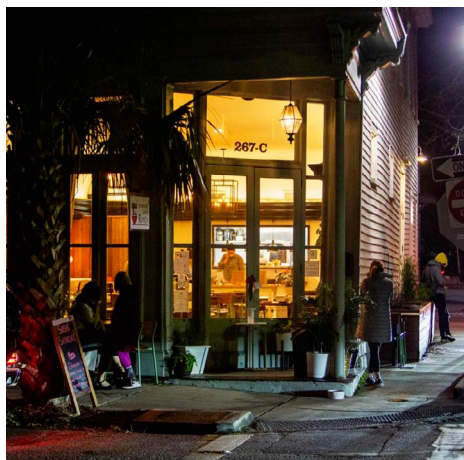
### A Legacy Realized

But it's the invested residents that make the neighborhood a standout. A Carolopolis winner from is a two-story Victorian wood-frame house residence at 94 Bogard St. Its owner, Judith Aidoo-Saltus, is the third generation of her family to live in the house. She and her wife Julia worked with Flyway and New World Byzantine on the project, which was followed on the television



The rear house and 92 Spring Street as they appeared in 1985.

92-A and 92-B Spring St. were once owned by Huldah Prioleau, one of the first African American women doctors in South Carolina, in a 1985 photograph. Jeffrey Roberts/Provided

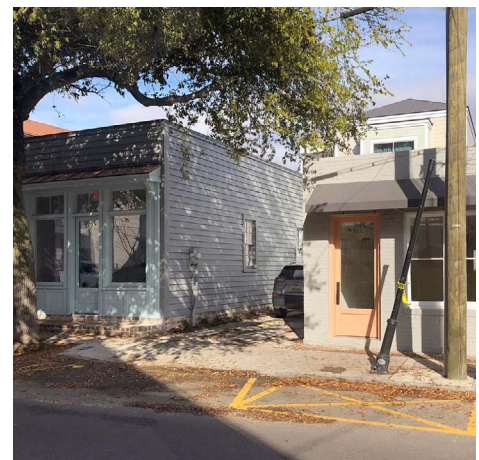


Customers wait outside Chasing Sage for their orders on Saturday Jan. 16, 2021, in Charleston. File/Gavin McIntyre/Staff

program "This Old House."

"This is, in my opinion, one of the most significant projects that we saw," King said. The house stood vacant for around 15 years, resulting in severe deterioration. "To do it that well is such an incredible contribution to the streetscape in the neighborhood, but obviously so significant that it's able to be maintained by the long-term owner," King said. "To me that's one of the most positive examples of a project that we've seen in the neighborhood."

The rehab was extensive, entailing efforts like the removal of a structurally unsound 1960s addition and restoring or replacing



92-A and 92-B Spring St. were restored, adding a storefront on one, and lending to the diversity of use that is a signature of Cannonborough-Elliottborough. Jeffrey Roberts/Provided

components like a failing roof, wood siding and windows. "It was little more than termites holding hands," King said.

Of course, such efforts require deep pockets. In a Post and Courier interview with Aidoo-Saltus, she reflected, "In a strange way, the strength of Charleston, which is its beauty and commitment to preservation, means that the average human being or average family from the neighborhood where my great grandpa lived couldn't afford to refurbish their home."

Nevin, who has worked on projects close by that have come down through generations,



“This Old House” documented the restoration of this home on Bogard Street in the Elliottborough neighborhood. File/Kevin O’Connor/Provided

believes efforts like those undertaken by Aidoo-Saltas also help show people what’s possible in resorting these structures back to their original glory. “There’s definitely some good, high-quality work going on,” he said. “Our ability to help continue to set that example will pay dividends with other folks being able to ... understand what’s possible.”

Some of them entail rigorous research that can offer a deeper knowledge of the

area. Among them is 133 Cannon St., another of this year’s Carolopolis sweep, for which Tift Properties worked with Andrew Gould and Arnett Construction, finding documentation of similar proximate structures to recreate the facade. And new construction can also lend to the existing flavor of the area, like Catfiddle Street, a single-family residential development designed by Urban Ergonomics that represents a collaboration between George Holt and Reid Burgess.

“The developers and designers very much understand the urban context associated with new development,” Nevin said. “They’ve just done a fantastic job as far as paying attention to detail and sensitivity to scale ... and what historically has been the development patterns throughout the neighborhood.”

In building these structures to last, they have trained an eye on the past that can endure for decades to come, thus perhaps vouchsafing the neighborhood’s future. “Always have respect for the people who came before,” Roberts said.

At Humphrey Court, sisters Christine Maitland and Theodosia Wright are winding up a two-month preservation project with Wayne Green, owner of TrimLine Contracting.

Green knows the ins and outs of the neighborhood well, as both his grandfather and his wife’s grandfather once owned grocery stores there. The project involved repairing and replacing the wood siding on their house and painting it, something that had not been so extensively attended to since their father built the house in. Prior to that, her family had lived a few houses down.

“We’re doing it up,” said Maitland, adding that she aims to keep the house there for another seventy-plus years. She said the repairs have warmed up the house considerably. Those expertly, fastidiously restored boards also hold the possibility that longstanding Black residents can remain in the place they have always called home.



“This Old House” documented the restoration of this home on Bogard Street in the Elliottborough neighborhood. File/Kevin O’Connor/Provided



Judith Aidoo-Saltus (left) and her wife Julia Aidoo-Saltus restored Judith’s family home on Bogard Street in the Elliottborough neighborhood. The PBS show “This Old House” documented the restoration. File/Kevin O’Connor/Provided