

Restoring Santa Rosa Through Historical Preservation

The problem I want to focus on in my community is how parts of Santa Rosa are starting to look run down because of abandoned buildings and overgrown lots. A lot of these areas don't get taken care of, which makes the city look less inviting and can even feel unsafe. This mostly affects the people who live there, small businesses, and even tourists. If a place looks neglected, people are less likely to visit or spend money there, which just keeps the problem going. Things like limited funding and not enough city resources make it harder to fix these issues. According to reports on historic travel routes like U.S. Route 66, towns that invest in preservation and tourism often see economic improvement, showing that change is possible.

Background and Context of the Problem

Santa Rosa has a long history, especially because of its connection to U.S. Route 66. At one point, it was a popular stop for travelers, which helped local businesses grow. However, as travel patterns changed and highways shifted, fewer people started stopping in the area. Over time, this led to businesses closing and buildings being abandoned. Studies on Route 66 communities show that bypassed towns often experience economic decline when traffic decreases, leading to empty storefronts and reduced tourism. Without enough funding or attention, these spaces have continued to deteriorate, creating the issues we see today.

Target Audience and Involvement

The main audience for this project would be city officials, local government, and community leaders who have the power to approve funding and make changes. Local residents are also an important audience because they would be directly affected and could help support or volunteer for the project. Small business owners and tourism organizations would also be involved since they would benefit from increased visitors.

As a **primary source**, I conducted a small informal survey of community members, and one response stated, *"It feels like parts of Santa Rosa have been forgotten, and it makes people not want to stop here."* This kind of feedback shows that residents are aware of the problem and would likely support efforts to improve the area. Community involvement could include volunteer clean-up days, local fundraising events, and partnerships with historical preservation groups.

Expanded Problem and Why This Solution Helps

The problem is not just that buildings look bad—it also affects safety, the economy, and community pride. Abandoned buildings can attract vandalism or crime, and overgrown lots make areas feel neglected. This can lower property values and discourage new businesses from opening. Research on historic preservation shows that restoring older buildings can increase tourism and boost local economies by attracting visitors interested in history and culture. By restoring historical sites and removing unsafe or unused buildings, the city can improve its appearance and create a more positive environment. Focusing on historical preservation, especially related to U.S. Route 66, gives the city a unique identity that can attract tourists. This solution not only fixes the physical problem but also helps boost the local economy and rebuild a sense of pride in the community.

Research, Plan, and Problem Understanding

Research for this project would include looking at how other small towns have successfully restored historical areas and increased tourism. For example, towns along U.S. Route 66 in states like Arizona have used preservation efforts to bring in visitors and revive their local economies. It would also involve collecting data on costs, potential revenue from tourism, and which buildings are most important to preserve. Surveys or interviews with residents and business owners (primary sources) help show what the community wants and needs. This combination of primary and secondary research would guide the planning process and make sure the project is realistic and effective.

Project Plan (Major and Minor Steps)

The project would be completed in several steps. First, the city would identify and prioritize abandoned buildings and historical sites that are most important to restore. Then, funding would be secured through grants, city budgets, or partnerships with preservation organizations. Unsafe structures would be demolished, while historically important sites would be restored and renovated. Finally, the city would promote the area to attract visitors and businesses, especially by highlighting its connection to U.S. Route 66.

Smaller steps would include conducting community surveys, applying for historical preservation grants, hiring contractors, organizing volunteer clean-up days, improving landscaping, and creating marketing materials focused on tourism.

Costs and Benefits

There are definitely some big costs involved in this project. Tearing down abandoned buildings could cost around \$10,000 to \$50,000 each, and restoring historical sites could range from \$100,000 to over \$500,000 depending on the condition. According to general historical preservation data, restoration projects can be expensive upfront but often lead to long-term economic gains through tourism and business growth. When adding labor, materials, and permits, the total cost could be between \$500,000 and over \$2 million, with additional yearly maintenance costs.

Even though it sounds expensive, there are many benefits. Studies on tourism show that heritage-based travel continues to grow, and towns that invest in their history often see increased visitor spending. Restoring Santa Rosa could bring in more tourists, create jobs, support small businesses, and increase property values. It would also help preserve the city's history and create opportunities for events and festivals tied to U.S. Route 66.

Conclusion

Overall, even though restoring Santa Rosa would cost a lot at first, it would be worth it in the long run. It would improve the city's appearance, attract more visitors, and create a stronger sense of pride among residents. By using both **primary sources** (community feedback and surveys) and **secondary sources** (research on Route 66 and historical preservation), this proposal shows that the solution is not only meaningful but also realistic and supported by evidence.