

## Needham developers buck teardown trend by renovating old houses

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### NEEDHAM

The lemon-colored house sits on Linden Street a few blocks from Needham Center. The 1,800 square foot colonial house, built in 1914, could have easily been torn down and rebuilt in a larger and pricier incarnation.

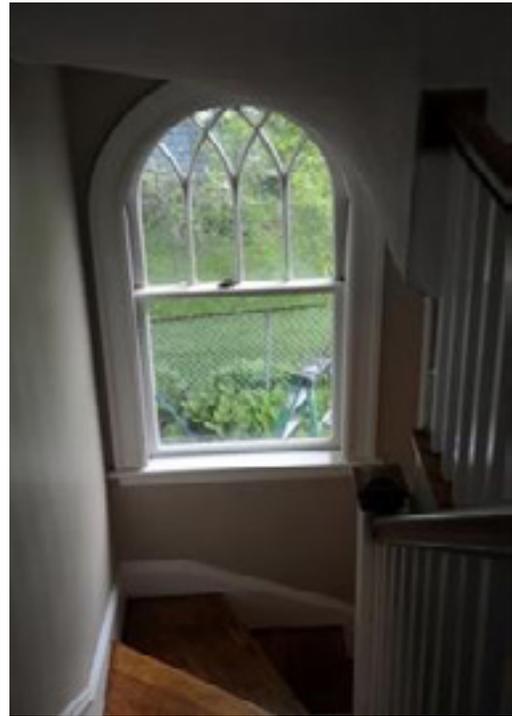
But Needham resident Barbara Jones had a different fate in mind. Jones recently founded Little Pink Houses, a company that buys Needham's older and smaller houses and renovates them instead of tearing them down. Jones is currently finishing her first project, the Linden Street house.

"I think this is a nice alternative for houses that there's nothing wrong with," said Jones.

Over the past few years, the town has seen developers tearing down an increasing number of small houses and building sprawling colonials in their place. As a result, the median price of a newly constructed single-family home in Needham has risen from \$740,000 in 2000 to \$1.273 million in 2011, while the median price of all homes in Needham has risen from \$440,000 in 2000 to \$690,000 in 2011.

Supporters of the teardown trend say it speaks to Needham's vibrancy. But detractors say the new construction decreases economic diversity in town and hurts Needham's character.

But Jones and several other developers in town are bucking the trend. When these developers get their hands on older, structurally sound houses, they install modern amenities while keeping many historic features of the houses intact. Sometimes, these houses sell for more modest prices than newly constructed homes.



*Wicked Local Staff photo by Erin Prawoko | An original window is left in a house undergoing renovation.*

"It's not a starter home for two young people out of college, but it's definitely more affordable than a lot of the homes today," said Jones of the Linden Street property.

Jones, who renovated her own Colonial-era home, said her motivation for saving older homes stems partially from her passion for older architecture.

"If every time a small house comes on the market and is torn down, Needham is going to lose its small-town New England feel," she said.

Jones also said she noticed that many children of Needham residents are leaving town, unable to afford the community's rising prices. She said many of the babysitters she hired when her children were young have moved to more affordable communities. Jones said renovating a house is cheaper than tearing it down, which allows developers to pay sellers more for the house and to ultimately charge less for the house than for newly constructed homes.