

# Preserving Bloomington's embodied energy

CFC Properties  
blazes trails in  
historic preservation

**F**or 48 years, CFC Properties, the real estate arm of Cook Group, has been a pioneer in historic preservation in Monroe County, Indiana, where Bloomington is located. Saving and preserving many of the community's historic structures has been paramount to CFC's mission. A few of CFC's significant renovation projects in the area include the Cochran House, Graham Plaza, Fountain Square, and Showers Plaza.

While preserving and renovating have many benefits, perhaps one of the more notable benefits is "embodied energy." Embodied energy is a term that gets a fair amount of attention within the preservation and renovation movements.

According to the Whole Building Design Guide from the National Institute of Building Sciences, recent advances in lifecycle analysis suggest it takes roughly 30 years for a newly built sustainable structure to recoup energy outlays when compared with a renovated building.<sup>1</sup>

## Environmental benefits

It's important to recognize how much energy has already been consumed during a building's lifecycle, because energy consumption produces carbon dioxide (CO<sup>2</sup>), which contributes to greenhouse gases. Energy embedded in an



▲ On the left is Fountain Square before the renovation in the early 1980s. On the right is the courthouse on the downtown square, circa 1930s.



▲ A look at the exterior and interior of Graham Plaza before it was renovated.



▲ Fountain Square's exterior before it was renovated, and some of the renovation efforts as two men worked to repair a section of brick.

## Embodied energy

Embodied energy breaks down into four parts:

1. **Initial embodied energy:** the amount of energy used for the excavation, manufacturing, transportation of materials, and construction of a building.
2. **Recurring embodied energy:** the energy consumed by refurbishing and maintaining a building during its lifecycle.
3. **Operational energy:** the energy consumed by electricity, heating, cooling, and powered appliances.
4. **Demolition energy:** the energy consumed by disposing of the old materials.

existing building can be significant. By preserving an existing structure, we divert additional materials from being added to landfills as well.

"One of the greatest forms of recycling is renovation for adaptive reuse," **Jim Murphy**, president of CFC Properties, said.

The practice of adaptive reuse consists of using an old building or site for something other than it was originally designed or intended to be used for, and is typically done with preservation efforts in mind.

## Good bones

**Bill Cook**, who along with his wife, **Gayle**, founded Cook and CFC



▲ *The Shower's Building, which was once the home to the Showers Brothers Furniture Factory, prior to its renovation. It is now a center of activity for CFC, the City of Bloomington, and the Monroe County government offices.*

*"One of the greatest forms of recycling is renovation for adaptive reuse."*

*– Jim Murphy, president of CFC Properties*

Properties, thoroughly enjoyed visualizing a building's potential, imagining what it could be and how it could be updated for modern-day uses. CFC has adopted a similar approach; if a structure has a solid foundation and infrastructure, and is architecturally or historically significant in some way, then it's worth considering saving.

## Preserving downtown Bloomington's embodied energy

What began as a passion of Bill and Gayle, restoring historic and architecturally significant structures, eventually sparked the revitalization of downtown Bloomington and helped preserve over a century of embodied energy.

From the mid-1960s to the early 1980s, people, businesses, and jobs began leaving the downtown area, and over time

the abandoned buildings fell into disrepair. Determined to reverse the downward spiral, Bill proposed to renovate Graham Plaza, an eight-story building on the downtown square. Formerly known as Graham Hotel, it was built in 1929 on the site of the old Bowles Hotel (also the former Gentry Hotel built in 1899). The hotel was considered "the glittering hub" for Bloomington's social activity through the 1950s because it attracted Hollywood stars and notable businesspeople to town. CFC completed the renovation by 1982, and today, the building provides retail and commercial space to consultants and business owners alike.

Between 1982 and 1988, CFC worked on a variety of preservation projects, but in 1988, they would undertake a prominent project in downtown Bloomington.

In 1988, CFC announced they would renovate the entire south side of the downtown square. This was referred to as "the Anchor Project" because it would ultimately catapult revitalization efforts downtown.

This massive undertaking began

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## SUSTAINABILITY

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with 13 buildings, which were eventually reduced to ten. Then, those ten merged into one, forming what is now Fountain Square.

On March 2, 1985, **Bill Pittman**, a journalist for Bloomington's *Herald-Times* newspaper, wrote, "A \$50 million partnership of government and private enterprise is nearing fruition, bringing the central city back from the graveyard."

The construction dates of Fountain Square's collection of historic buildings range from 1859 to 1936. According to historical records, the building at the corner of East Kirkwood Ave. and South Walnut St. is one of the oldest buildings on the downtown square.

The Showers Building, located in the CFC Business Plaza, was once the home to the Showers Brothers Furniture Factory, the largest in the world by the 1920s. Prominent because of its saw-tooth roof, the building has been an important Bloomington landmark for over 100 years. In 1995, a partnership was formed between CFC Properties,

**"Preservation keeps our nation's history and culture alive, and we learn much from the methods and practices of those who came before us."**

*— National Institute of Building Sciences*

the City of Bloomington, and the Bloomington Advancement Corporation to renovate the 200,000 square foot space. Today, the building serves as a center of activity for CFC, the City of Bloomington, and the Monroe County government offices.

### Preservation benefits

Renovation and preservation projects offer many benefits aside from making use of the existing embodied energy. The Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives program provides opportunities for financial savings as well. It is known as one of the government's "most successful and cost-effective community revitalization programs,"

and it offers incentives to renovate both certified historic and non-historic structures.<sup>2</sup>

To learn more about these incentives, visit [nps.gov/tps/tax-incentives.htm](https://nps.gov/tps/tax-incentives.htm).

### Get involved

Efforts to preserve the history of downtown Bloomington, including its revitalization, may have started in the early 1980s, but those efforts continue through the activities of CFC Properties and Downtown Bloomington Inc. (DBI), a Main Street America program. DBI is a nonprofit that was started in 1984 to help continue the revitalization efforts. DBI's mission today continues to focus on educating the public about the benefits of a strong

Learn more about CFC, including its properties, by visiting [cfcproperties.com](https://cfcproperties.com).



▲ Graham Plaza (left), Fountain Square Mall (middle), and the Shower's Building (right) as they appear today.

downtown, to facilitating public and private partnerships, and providing unified leadership to strengthen and support the heart of the city. To become a supporting member or to volunteer, please visit [downtownbloomington.com](http://downtownbloomington.com).

### By the numbers

To date, CFC Properties has restored 34 buildings, 21 of which are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The benefits of the huge number of restoration projects CFC has led over the past 48 years are difficult to measure; however, their impact has been profound. Thousands of community jobs were created, several iconic buildings have been saved, and the community's history is being preserved. Through it all, these efforts have helped curate a hometown that locals are proud to talk about and that presents a unique historic destination for visitors.

### CFC's commitment

CFC Properties is committed to preserving the past and creating a better future by engaging and enriching the community through growth, philanthropy, equality, and education. The company strives to be a positive role model to its employees and the customers they serve.

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### Sources

1. Sustainable historic preservation. Whole Building Design Guide Web site. <https://www.wbdg.org/design-objectives/historic-preservation/sustainable-historic-preservation>. Updated August 26, 2019. Accessed April 22, 2021.
2. Tax incentives for preserving historic properties. Technical Preservation Services Web site. <https://www.nps.gov/tps/tax-incentives.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2021.

# APARTMENTS

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