

"Deconstruction is Policy Already Written: The Case for Government Building Deconstruction"

By Sara Badiali

Reclaiming materials is a powerful tool for bolstering the economy, generating jobs, providing job training, and establishing markets for materials. Beyond these economic advantages, it mitigates the need for fresh resource extraction like timber and diminishes the demand for landfill space, simultaneously reducing CO2 emissions. This multifaceted approach is often referred to as a "triple bottom line economy," aligning job creation, market development, and sustainable environmental practices.

Municipalities nationwide are actively developing policies to address the recycling of buildings. Initiatives aimed at creating and enforcing ordinances have sparked interest in mirroring established European laws. An effective avenue for catalyzing change is the implementation of deconstruction policies within government agencies. Mandating the deconstruction of all government buildings not only sets a precedent for public adoption but also ensures that tax investments circulate back into the local economy when structures reach the end of their lifespan.

The journey to establish deconstruction policies in municipal settings can be challenging due to bureaucratic hurdles. However, a closer examination reveals that governments already possess existing policies that can be repurposed for this purpose. A prime example is the disposal of governmental property policy, such as Portland, Oregon's Ordinance 5.36.010 Disposition of Surplus Property. This ordinance provides a framework that, with slight reinterpretation, can seamlessly incorporate deconstruction practices.

Notably, reclaimed building materials are valuable assets when harvested and processed appropriately. While materials like concrete can be immediately reused, wood requires meticulous separation into reusable and recyclable categories. Despite the time and labor-intensive process of de-nailing reusable wood, the overall benefits, including reduced landfill waste and increased recycling, outweigh the challenges.

Markets for reclaimed building materials exist, mirroring the fluctuations seen in other markets and responding to supply and demand dynamics. The pace of housing renovation directly influences the demand for construction materials. Aligning with the language of existing ordinances, the benefits of deconstructing buildings become evident, emphasizing the importance of incorporating these practices into established policies.

Rather than constructing new policies, a more pragmatic approach involves reinterpreting existing rules to encompass the deconstruction of government buildings. This aligns with common practices for surplus property disposal, extending from government vehicles to outdated electronics. By viewing deconstruction through this lens, we transform the process from mere demolition to a systematic separation of reusable components, diverting resources back into local markets.

In essence, deconstructing government buildings aligns with our highest ideals and legal frameworks. Instead of resorting to demolition and landfilling, this approach not only retains economic value but also fulfills environmental benchmarks, creating a more sustainable future.

*Note: The article assumes a level of familiarity with industry terminology and incorporates slight restructuring and refinement for clarity and coherence.