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CITY, NEWS

Multi-year struggle to preserve Hotel Buckminster nears close in hands of Mayor, City Council

September 6, 2023 9:53 pm by [Matthew Eadie](#)

Since its construction 120 years ago, the fate of Hotel Buckminster, the historic building located in Kenmore Square, is heavily contested as Boston preservationists fight to protect the building’s facade from being altered by a developer.

IQHQ, a life sciences development company, purchased Hotel Buckminster in November 2021 with the intention of altering part of the exterior of the building and constructing a life science laboratory in its stead. In October 2022, the



Hotel Buckminster in Kenmore Square. After closing in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the building's future is still yet to be determined. ANDREW BURKE-STEVENSON/DFP PHOTOGRAPHER

Boston Preservation Alliance submitted a Landmark petition to the Boston Landmarks Commission stating that the building was historically significant. If the commission agreed, this would prevent the exterior facade of the building from being reconstructed or demolished in any way.

Designed in 1897 and opened in 1900, Hotel Buckminster left a legacy where a famous baseball scandal occurred, soldiers were housed during World War One and many jazz legends such as Billie Holiday and Louis Armstrong performed. Hotel Buckminster remained a fixture of Kenmore Square, drawing tourists to stay at the famous hotel and attend the nearby jazz clubs and restaurants.

However, due to COVID-19, Hotel Buckminster was forced to close its doors and was later sold to IQHQ.

The designation of the building as a landmark was initially set for a vote before the commission in July, but Chief of Policy for the City of Boston, Mike Firestone, postponed the vote. Due to [pushback](#) from the BPA, the vote for the designation was added to the agenda for an Aug. 22 meeting, where it was passed unanimously by the commission.

Mayor Michelle Wu and the Boston City Council have 45 days from Aug. 22 to accept the designation, which would preserve and protect the exterior of the building.

Mayor Wu has indicated that she supports the designation and will have 15 days to officially accept it before it is sent to City Council for final approval, which then needs a two-thirds vote, wrote a spokesperson for the City's Environment Department in an email.

"IQHQ has been working with the City to ensure that our plans for redeveloping Hotel Buckminster recognize its historical significance to Kenmore Square and the needs of the neighborhood," IQHQ Development Director Kim Thai wrote in an email.

However, the letter of intent filed by an attorney representing IQHQ in January states that the existing hotel building will be "substantially renovated" in the redevelopment project.

"They were looking to reconstruct a portion of one side of the facade and that's not a preservation option in my mind, that's demolition," said Alison Frazee, executive director of the BPA. "We felt [that] was unacceptable for the historic nature of the site."

Frazee said the BPA does not object to IQHQ's plans for redevelopment, as long as they do so in a way that preserves Hotel Buckminster's historic external features.

"I'm confident we can find a way that [IQHQ] can move forward with a successful project while we are being respectful of the historic fabric," Frazee said.

Fraze said she expects that IQHQ will need to “modify” their redevelopment plans for the site if the landmark designation is accepted by the Mayor and City Council, but also said she encourages IQHQ to work with the Landmarks Commission to create a design that is “acceptable” in the eyes of the commission.

Boston city councilor Sharon Durkan, immediately before the Aug. 22 vote, read a letter saying the building’s location “serves as one of the gates into the area ... we must recognize the history of this city without precluding the future.”

Durkan said she has confidence the decision made by the Landmarks Commission will be made in the interest of protecting the history of the building.

Patrick Browne, a lecturer in the history department at Boston University, said he believed the redevelopment of Kenmore Square puts the area in danger of losing its historic nature.

“I worry that the historic character of that square is going to be completely overwritten, and that would be a real pity,” Browne said.

Browne called the proposal of projects at Kenmore Square “alarming” and said he agrees with the Landmarks Commission’s designation.

“I think it’s important to preserve the historic character of the building itself, to preserve the exterior, [and] to preserve the character of the square,” Browne said.

Fraze said she hopes the development plans allow the building to become “vibrant again,” adding that she would “love if they could find ways to incorporate the history of the site” and restore its damaged exterior.

“Through public spaces, restaurants, maybe they can incorporate a music hall or space again, there’s a lot of ways that they could promote the history of the site within the project if they’re willing to,” Fraze said. “That way the neighborhood can engage with this building in similar ways that they have in the past.”



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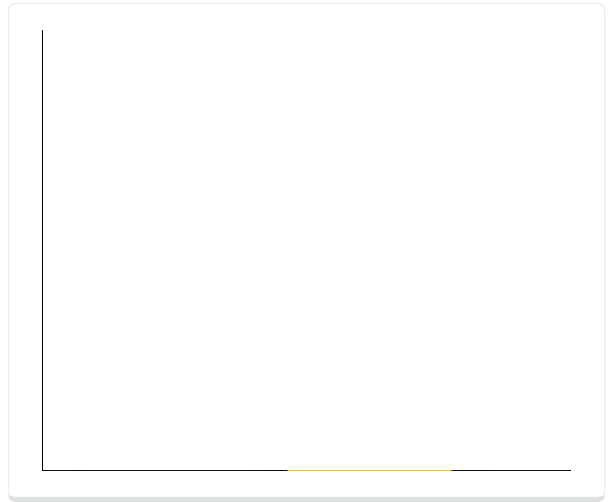
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