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November 1, 2017

Mayor Martin J. Walsh
One City Hall Square, Suite 500
Boston, MA 02201
Via email: mayor@boston.gov

Re: 9 Chelsea Street, Maverick Square, Easton Boston

Dear Mayor Walsh:

The Boston Preservation Alliance is Boston's primary, non-profit advocacy organization that protects and promotes the use of historic buildings and landscapes in all of the city's neighborhoods. With 40 Organizational Members, 104 Corporate Members, and a reach of 35,000 friends and supporters we represent a diverse constituency advocating for the thoughtful evolution of the city and celebration of its unique character. We appreciate the opportunity to offer comments on projects that impact the historic character of the city.

Over the past few years, we have been contacted regularly by Boston residents who are increasingly distressed about development in their neighborhoods. While most support growth, especially in housing, their concern is the loss of character and historic resources as existing buildings are replaced with insensitive, often generic new construction. With few tools at our disposal to encourage preservation and adaptive reuse of existing buildings or new design that is contextual and contributing to the character of the neighborhood, we find the uniqueness of our neighborhoods giving way to homogeneity. Often dismissed as NIMBYs, these individuals, neighborhood associations, and community groups are fighting to preserve the historic fabric and unique qualities of Boston's neighborhoods, not simply stop growth and new construction. They find themselves repeatedly at odds with developers who express little interest in their concerns and have the power to proceed with projects despite opposition from the community.

A specific and time-sensitive example of this scenario is a proposed project at 9 Chelsea Street in East Boston's Maverick Square. The developer, Linear Retail Properties, has filed plans to clear the site and construct a two-story retail building. The project team has presented their proposal to the East Boston community on several occasions and has repeatedly expressed their unwillingness to alter their suburban-style retail approach to mediate the concerns of neighbors and abutters. Specifically, the community has demanded the preservation and incorporation of two historic rowhouses into the project. The Alliance has offered assistance to address these concerns and potentially facilitate a solution, but the proponent has been unwilling to engage with us. Their intent, we perceive, is to demolish the buildings as

soon as the 90-day demolition delay period imposed by the Boston Landmarks Commission expires on November 20th.

Not only has the proponent refused an adaptive reuse approach, they have also made plans to relocate a Landmarked historic clock from the site, going so far as to build the infrastructure for the clock in a different location before seeking the required approval from the Boston Landmarks Commission. This blatant disregard for Boston's policies and procedures, as well as the concerns of the community, should not be tolerated by the Boston Planning and Development Agency or your administration.

While this project in Maverick Square is just one example, we are seeing this scenario play out in other parts of East Boston and all across the city. Our historic buildings and places are being demolished with little regard for their contributions to the character and sense of place of our unique neighborhoods. Residents are desperate to protect the buildings, streetscapes, and landscapes that they recognize as home, as Boston. They feel powerless and marginalized. Developers are not held accountable for poor design, low-quality materials, and inappropriate variances from zoning ordinances.

As your administration continues to green-light development that many Boston residents increasingly consider to be eroding the identity of our neighborhoods, we implore you to work with the Boston Landmarks Commission, the Alliance, and our partner organizations to find a solution that better balances development with historic preservation. We believe that the best places in Boston are where old and new come together in a thoughtful way, but we need developers to engage with us in a thoughtful process.

We ask for your assistance to find better solutions and, more immediately, for your consideration of the East Boston community's request for your intervention in the 9 Chelsea Street proposal to stop the demolition of the historic rowhouses before the demolition delay expires on November 20th. Doing so would demonstrate that you understand the need to balance new construction with historic preservation and that you are prepared to help us find solutions moving forward.

Thank you for your consideration and swift action.

Sincerely,



Greg Galer
Executive Director

CC:

Rosanne Foley, Boston Landmarks Commission
Jonathan Greeley, Boston Planning and Development Agency
Michael Rooney, Boston Planning and Development Agency
Julia Burrell, East Boston Resident
Dan Bailey, East Boston Resident
Richard C. Lynds, Law Offices of Richard C. Lynds
Salvatore LaMattina, Boston City Council, District 1
Michelle Wu, Boston City Council, At-Large
Michael Flaherty, Boston City Council, At-Large
Annissa Essaibi George, Boston City Council, At-Large
Ayanna Pressley, Boston City Council, At-Large