

# BOSTON PRESERVATION ALLIANCE

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## Executive Director

Gregory J. Galer, Ph.D.

February 24, 2017

Mr. Brian Golden  
Boston Planning and Development Agency  
One City Hall Square  
Boston, MA 02201  
Via email: [brian.golden@boston.gov](mailto:brian.golden@boston.gov)

Re: 115 Winthrop Square

Dear Mr. Golden,

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, 98 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.

As the Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA) moves forward with plans to redevelop the Winthrop Square site, the Alliance joins many other voices in expressing concern. At this time, our concerns include the status of the DPIR and the pending initiative to alter state laws to accommodate an existing project proposal.

In a previous comment letter we noted a wide variety of potential impacts of the proposed tower – shadow on the Public Garden and Boston Common being just one element – and requested analysis of the proposal to allow a more comprehensive assessment of both its positive and negative effects on the city. To our knowledge that analysis has yet to be completed and made available to the public. The Alliance therefore strongly urges the BPDA to pause further action to facilitate the current 115 Winthrop Square proposal until the City's Draft Project Impact Report (DPIR) and State's Environmental Impact Report (EIR) have been completed and the public has had ample time to comment. By ensuring a thorough public process, the BPDA can utilize this opportunity to demonstrate the reformed agency's promise to be transparent and cooperative.

We feel that modifying state laws that have successfully protected some of the city's most important historic resources and public amenities without a full and public review is poor precedent. We are particularly concerned that in a desire to enable this lucrative project the City inadvertently weakens other protective regulations, establishing a model where future project proponents can effectively buy their way out

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of rules that others have successfully lived with for decades. This scenario sets revenue to the City as the priority in decision making when many other factors should be given equal weight.

Furthermore, we feel that it was inappropriate for the BPDA to solicit proposals for the Winthrop Square site that violate state laws without providing opportunity for public comment on the significant policy change now under consideration. If the BPDA believed the shadow laws were unnecessarily restrictive for downtown growth, a study and public process should have been conducted to explore broad modifications, without the pressure of one particular proposal skewing the outcome. Such an analysis is still needed and should not focus on a specific proposal but the cumulative effects of altering the protective state laws.

I urge the BPDA, elected-officials, and other decision makers involved not to focus on the false dichotomy created by the way this process has evolved – that we must accept this project or no project at all at the Winthrop Square site. We should not simply measure the success of a proposal by the financial contributions it provides to the city, and there is insufficient information at the current time to measure the full impact of this proposal.

It is possible that revisions can be made to the state shadow laws that maintain the important protections for our historic resources and allow for more development downtown. However, these revisions should be made only after the necessary independent studies have been conducted and the public has had adequate time to review and comment. Furthermore, a comprehensive planning effort for all of downtown should be initiated immediately to gauge the impacts of current development trends that may threaten the character and inherent value of Boston's downtown neighborhoods in order to avoid this situation in the future.

The Alliance joined several other organizations in asking for specific information from Millennium Partners in their DPIR/DEIR and we eagerly await the results of their comprehensive analyses. **No effort to alter the state shadow laws should proceed until the complete DPIR/EIR is submitted and the public has had an opportunity to review and comment.**

We look forward to continuing the dialogue as the project evolves.

Sincerely,



Greg Galer  
Executive Director

Cc: Governor Charlie Baker  
Senator William Brownsberger  
Senator Joseph Boncore  
Representative Jay Livingstone  
Representative Aaron Michlewitz  
Representative Byron Rushing  
Brona Simon, Massachusetts Historical Commission  
Mayor Martin J. Walsh  
City Councilor Frank Baker  
City Councilor Andrea Campbell  
City Councilor Mark Ciommo  
City Councilor Anissa Essaibi George  
City Councilor Michael Flaherty  
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City Councilor Matt O'Malley  
City Councilor Ayanna Pressley  
City Councilor Michelle Wu  
City Councilor Josh Zakim  
Kathleen MacNeil, Millennium Partners  
Cindy Schlessinger, Epsilon Associates  
David Carlson, Boston Planning and Development Agency/BCDC  
Rosanne Foley, Boston Landmarks Commission  
Elizabeth Vizza, Friends of the Public Garden  
Wendy Landman, Walk Boston  
Vicki Smith, Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay  
Patricia Tully, Beacon Hill Civic Association