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January 11, 2017

Ms. Casey Hines
Boston Planning and Development Agency
One City Hall Square
Boston, MA 02201
Via email: casey.a.hines@boston.gov

Re: 115 Winthrop Square

Dear Ms. Hines,

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.

The Alliance commends the City of Boston for actively pursuing redevelopment of the abandoned parking structure at 115 Winthrop Square and for encouraging proposals with vibrant street engagement, public amenities, and mixed use. We were pleased that the City did not select a proposal that required the demolition of the adjacent, architecturally-significant mid-century Paul Rudolph Blue Cross Blue Shield Building.

While we feel there are notable benefits associated with Millennium Partners' proposal, we join many of our partners and members in expressing concern that the planned 750' tower violates state laws that protect the historic Boston Common and Public Garden from shadow (c. 362 of the Acts of 1990 and c. 385 of the Acts of 1993) without sufficient justification for the bold request to change state law. We worry about unprecedented action to weaken state laws to accommodate one project and the many potential long-term consequences of modification of laws intended to protect our treasured places. All other development has adhered to the laws since their creation, and we feel the proponent must demonstrate why this proposal is so particularly unique as to require a change offered to no other, with the potential precedents created by opening the door for future changes to this and possibly other protective laws.

Furthermore, we are disappointed that the City chose to pursue a process that encouraged submissions that blatantly violate standing state law without an open, public process to discuss the merits and challenges to such a pursuit. While we

understand the theory that having a specific proposal may appear to facilitate this dialogue, the violation should have been clearly identified to the citizens of Boston with opportunity to publicly debate it before the City condoned a project that violates existing state laws. Doing so would have resulted in a more inclusive dialogue with the public and would have demonstrated that the “new” BPDA has in fact found that full transparency is in everyone’s best interest. The methods pursued here only reinforce decades-old stereotypes of the agency.

If the City believes the current shadow law is somehow inappropriate or requires updating and modification to best benefit the residents of Boston in the long term, there should have been a focused analysis, dialogue, and public process before any specific project was proposed. This would have alleviated the impression that protection provided by state laws or other regulations can effectively be purchased away by developers. The process pursued here is unfair to the citizens of Boston, those pursuing this project, and to other property owners and developers who adhere to existing regulations.

The Alliance feels strongly that this proposal, as well as alternatives that allow redevelopment of the site without requiring these alterations to state law, need to be fully understood before action to pursue changes to the state shadow laws continue.

In addition to our concern about an amendment of the state law, we anticipate a complete and thorough Project Impact Report with a scope that fully evaluates the impacts of such a large structure at this site. In particular, we request that the DPIR scope include:

- Complete shadow studies: Shadow studies that demonstrate the complete shadow created by the proposed structure as well as comparative analysis of a structure that would not violate the state shadow law. These studies should not be limited to ¼ mile and should highlight all historic resources impacted. The analysis should not be limited to shadows that violate the existing state regulations, although highlighting those impacts is important as well.

Not only do shadows impact the pedestrian experience and the health of plants and parks, shadows can also have significant effects on the physical health of historic buildings, creating new microclimates that cause ice dams, biological growth, and deterioration of structures designed to benefit from the drying effects of sunlight. The integrity and longevity of our precious historic resources can be impacted by shadow, and landmarks in Boston suffer today due to lack of consideration of these effects in past developments.

- Visual impact analysis: Analysis of the broader visual impacts of the proposal and its relationship to historic resources both in the immediate vicinity and beyond. There are many buildings in the Winthrop Square area with historic and architectural significance, and we need more information about how the

proposal would interact with these buildings. We need to know the impact of the proposal on the visibility of the sky, particularly in downtown. Canyonization and the decreased sky background and context for our unique historic city need to be considered and better understood.

We therefore request the visual impact of this proposal be studied carefully with a wide variety of renderings from real perspectives of pedestrians rather than birds-eye views that are never actually experienced. Such renderings should be from many perspectives and not limited to those in the Winthrop Square neighborhood. We also request that the same views be rendered for both an as-of-right option and one of maximum height that does not violate existing shadow laws for comparison. The proponent should be sure to demonstrate views which include their proposed structure with significant historic resources in the foreground.

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
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Kathleen MacNeil, Millennium Partners
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