

# BOSTON PRESERVATION ALLIANCE

April 26, 2018

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## Executive Director

Gregory J. Galer, Ph.D.

Community Preservation Committee  
City of Boston  
One City Hall Square  
Boston, MA 02201  
Re: Support for Vilna Shul

Dear Community Preservation Committee,

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 36 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.

We are writing in support of the Vilna Shul, Boston's Center for Jewish Culture, Inc. on Boston's Beacon Hill. The former synagogue is the city's only Jewish building in the National Historic Landmark District. Boston, in spite of its rich Jewish history and many famous religious sites, has no structure of comparable Jewish historic importance.

The Shul is noteworthy as one of only two extant free-standing buildings on the north slope of Beacon Hill. The building represents the last immigrant-era synagogue left in Boston out of more than 50. All but this have been lost to disaster, re-purposing, and/or urban renewal. Built in 1919, it represents the oldest Jewish building within the city limits whose entire history has been an exclusively "Jewish building."

It no longer is a synagogue, and now acts as a cultural center, community center, and living museum. Today, the building hosts the organization's events and programs as well as those of other community groups. Equally as important, thousands of visitors, including international tourists and school groups come there to learn about Boston's history and the immigrant experience. The Vilna is dedicated to preserving history by preserving and restoring the building and embracing the collective memories of the past. They continue to establish themselves with a significant presence as a community and cultural resource in Boston through programming, alliances and partnerships, exhibitions and the celebration of life-cycle events.

It is urgent that they embark on the next phase of preservation and restoration. This includes needed upgrades to the building and conservation of the only multi-layered synagogue folk art murals in the United States before they disintegrate further and become unsalvageable and lost to history. Most importantly, they must make the

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Boston, MA 02114  
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building universally accessible so that everyone is able to experience this historic space.

The full cost of the first phase of the overall project is estimated at \$4M. The Vilna and its pre-construction team of consultants and engineers are ready to put the project out to bid to start construction almost immediately. This CPA grant is crucial to the completion of this important preservation and rehabilitation.

Thank you for considering the Vilna Shul, Boston's Center for Jewish Culture and their request for grant.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'GA', is positioned below the word 'Sincerely,'.

Greg Galer  
Executive Director