

BOSTON PRESERVATION ALLIANCE

May 1, 2018

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Mr. Tim Czerwienski
Boston Planning and Development Agency
One City Hall Square
Boston, MA 02201
Via Email: Tim.Czerwienski@Boston.gov
Re: 560-574 Commonwealth Avenue/645-665 Beacon Street, Kenmore

Dear Mr. Czerwienski,

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 35 Organizational Members, 103 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 has had the opportunity to meet with the project team for a preliminary discussion about the proposal. We are not opposed to the construction of two hotel buildings on these sites nor do we feel the buildings and spaces that will be lost are historically significant or important contributors to the character of Kenmore Square. However, we do have concerns about the introduction of a dramatic new building scale to the square and its impacts to surrounding historic resources, especially without a plan to manage and appropriately shape this evolution of the neighborhood.

Kenmore Square is a unique neighborhood in the heart of Boston. Visitors and locals alike frequent the neighborhood as students, residents, baseball fans, sight-seers, and marathon runners. It is a place of celebration, nostalgia, and vibrant activity. For everything the neighborhood gains with the continuing wave of new development, it loses in grit, authenticity, and history. Part of what makes Kenmore Square and the Fenway neighborhood so special is that they feel like quintessential Boston. As the older buildings come down and the dynamic of the neighborhood continues to change, it becomes less like Boston and more like any other urban city. These new proposed buildings contribute to this wave of change and while we welcome the vibrancy they will bring, in light of the full scope of change in this neighborhood we are cautious about embracing the shift in the scale and sense of place so unique to Kenmore Square.

With those concerns in mind we request additional renderings and/or massing drawings of what the proposed buildings will look like from several different perspectives. We still feel we do not fully understand the implications of the

proposals. We think it essential to understand and consider the pedestrian experience from Kenmore Square, especially as baseball fans head to and from Fenway Park, and views from inside Fenway Park. These perspectives will be how millions of people will experience these buildings and it is important that we are carefully considering the view sheds and character that define the neighborhood including the nearby Bay State Road and Back Bay Landmark Districts, historic Fenway Park, and the iconic and pending Landmark Citgo Sign. We ask the proponent to provide additional renderings from several perspectives including: approaching the site from the southern end of Beacon Street with views of the Citgo Sign; views including Related Beal's proposal for the Citgo Sign site if possible; from within Fenway Park; from Charlesgate Park or closer to downtown to understand how the proposed buildings enhance or detract from the skyline and the pedestrian experience. The views coming into Kenmore Square are so defining for the city: the Citgo Sign, the light towers of Fenway Park, and even the glow of Fenway Park at night, visible even across the Charles River. We feel the impact of the proposal must be understood within that entire context.

We hope examination of additional views will allow us to fully support this proposal. Because of its proximity to public transit and the wide, open avenues where several streets converge, we feel this area can successfully support more density. This proposal attempts to form a well-defined edge for Kenmore Square and could help create a more intimate "outdoor room" experience for pedestrians. If this project is approved at this height, though, it could set precedent for future buildings of similar height nearby which has the potential to overwhelm the scale of the neighborhood. We need to better understand all of the planned and potential developments to assess their collective impact on the character and historic resources that remain.

The Alliance would also like to be clear that while substantial changes to the Buckminster Hotel are not part of this proposal, we do feel that the building has a significant presence on the square and should be carefully restored, optimally as a part of this project, but if not, then support of this project should require a commitment to such a restoration in the near future. We encourage the BPDA to make the Buckminster restoration a part of the PDA approval. We currently have no concerns regarding the proposal to add openings to the back of the building to engage the proposed pedestrian area, but look forward to understanding more about these interventions and how the proposal will provide benefits to enhance the historic building.

Additionally we would like to better understand the use of a Planned Development Area across two noncontiguous sites, across a large, public street, and with two owners. While we understand this situation or something similar has occurred before, although rarely, we want to be sure that there are no precedents set that will facilitate inappropriate future development using this mechanism. We recognize the PDA as a powerful development tool that can lead to more collaborative work and enhanced public benefits. We also recognize that it is a tool that can limit the community voice in

outcomes which residents typically find unsatisfactory, particularly as it weakens existing zoning, and by extension weakens zoning broadly across the entire city. We believe that it is necessary to balance that ability to subvert base zoning without a standard zoning appeals process and PDA usage across multiple owners to provide unique opportunities with the planning goals of neighborhoods, as specified in Article 80. We urge the BPDA to use such a structure judiciously.

We look forward to further engagement with the project team and the BPDA, in particular with additional views from various perspectives, to allow us to more fully assess the proposal as the process continues.

Thank you,



Greg Galer
Executive Director

CC

Brona Simon, Massachusetts Historical Commission
Josh Zakim, Boston City Councilor
Rosanne Foley, Boston Landmarks Commission
Damien Chaviano, Mark Kenmore, LLC
Jackson Slomiak, Buckminster Annex Corporation