

# BOSTON PRESERVATION ALLIANCE

December 4, 2020

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## Executive Director

Gregory J. Galer, Ph.D.

Nupoor Monani  
Boston Planning and Development Agency  
Boston City Hall  
Boston, MA 02201  
**Re: 220 Huntington Avenue**

Dear Ms. Monani,

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, 103 Corporate Members, and a reach of over 100,000 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 would like to note that David Nagahiro, an architect with CBT on this project team, is a member of the Alliance's Board of Directors and has recused himself from all our discussions regarding this project.

The Alliance has had the opportunity to review the Project Notification Form for 220 Huntington Avenue. We have met with the project team and have attended an IAG meeting. We have also communicated with staff at the Boston Landmarks Commission, specifically concerning the building at One Cumberland Street. Though these conversations are ongoing, we provide the following comments at this stage of the review process and look forward to further dialogue.

Many mid-century hotels like the Midtown Hotel have been successfully upgraded, creating dynamic, unique spaces for visitors. The Verb Hotel in Fenway and The Revolution Hotel in the South End are great local examples. While we believe a creative approach could have been pursued at this prominent site, we are not opposing the demolition of the Midtown Hotel, and believe that many of the proposal's positive aspects, like expansion of the pedestrian realm, will benefit the neighborhood. Additionally, we find the proposal shows an elegant design with rich materials and a varied, textured façade that successfully transitions from the historic St. Botolph neighborhood behind the project site to the monumental Christian Science Center across the street.

However, the shadow studies presented in the PNF raise alarms due to the amount of new shadow cast on the Christian Science Center plaza and reflecting pool; the complex is a designated Boston Landmark. These spaces are historic, treasured outdoor spaces, enjoyed by visitors and residents for walking, resting, and peaceful

reflection. They are of national, if not international, design quality and reputation. Adding shadow to these spaces in Boston's colder months is not ideal and we urge the project team to pursue alterations to the design that might reduce shadows on the plaza. Recent modifications to the plaza have undergone meticulous and lengthy review by the Boston Landmarks Commission, and we urge the proponent be required to review these shadow impacts with the Commission.

The Alliance is particularly concerned about the loss of the building at One Cumberland. Though not technically within the boundaries of the St. Botolph district, a condition that is being reexamined by the Boston Landmarks Commission, the building has the same historic qualities as those within the district and is valuable to the character and quality of the neighborhood. Buildings such as this are not replaceable in material, design, and character, and the loss of any building of this type should be discouraged. That being said, we recognize that retention of the building does impact a variety of aspects of the larger proposal including access to the below-ground parking. However, the design alternatives presented to us that keep One Cumberland did not earnestly embrace strategies to allow the historic building to exist comfortably with the new, adjacent construction. The new building sat too close and crowded the historic, detrimentally affecting both buildings. We encourage the proponent to more earnestly explore strategies of co-existence - the new project designed sensitively around it, with enough space to give the building autonomy on the streetscape. We are confident that this expert team can find solutions that celebrate the historic building on the site while bringing a dynamic, successful new building to Huntington Avenue. Certainly they can develop far better solutions than those presented to us.

Alternatively, as we suggested at our meeting with the proponent, this may be a situation in which relocation of the historic building to a "missing tooth" lot in the area is a successful solution. One Cumberland has lost much of its context, so relocation may benefit it, would benefit the neighborhood if a gap is filled, and will demonstrate the value (both historic and embodied carbon impact) of saving and relocating existing buildings. Moving buildings was once common and continues to be an effective strategy in other cities. In this time of heightened environmental awareness, the dramatic occasion of such a move would present a positive and impactful message from the City about its concerns for the environment.

We look forward to further dialogue and exploration of options at this special site.

Thank you,



Greg Galer  
Executive Director

CC:

Rosanne Foley, Boston Landmarks Commission

Nicholas Armata, Boston Landmarks Commission

Lynn Smiledge, Boston Landmarks Commission

Michael Cannizzo, Boston Planning and Development Agency

Brooke Ten Eyck, The First Church of Christ, Scientist