BOSTON PRESERVATION ALLIANCE

www.bostonpreservation.org

October 20, 2026

Councilor Enrique Pepén
City Councilor, District 5; Chair, City Council Committee on the Community Preservation Act
Boston City Hall, 5th Floor
Boston, MA 02201
CC: Ryan Pratt, Boston City Council's Budget and Legislative Analyst
Re: Docket #1601, City Council Committee on the Community Preservation Act

Dear Councilor Pepén,

The Boston Preservation Alliance is the city's primary nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting and promoting Boston's historic buildings, places, and landscapes. Our advocacy addresses pressing issues including climate resiliency, housing and small business affordability, and equity in preservation.

With 40 Organizational Members, 134 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 and initiatives that impact the historic character of the city.

Today, we write to express our concern that the City Council Committee on the Community Preservation Act is considering changing the allocation of CPA funds available to Boston organizations. Any discussion about changing the allocation of funds without raising the total funding available by adjusting the 1% property tax surcharge introduces the reduction of funding for either or both historic preservation and open space and recreation projects.

CPA funds are the only source of public funding directly available to Bostonians that supports brick-and-mortar historic preservation. They empower communities to undertake work that:

- Maintains affordable housing, as when CPA funds were used at Beacon House in Beacon Hill
- Protects cultural spaces, like the Footlight Club in Jamaica Plain
- Preserves places of worship, including Twelfth Baptist Church in Roxbury
- Keeps community resources open, as with the rehabilitation of the Chinatown Immigrant Heritage Center in Chinatown
- Completes restoration of distressed buildings to return them to use, like the Uphams Corner Comfort Station in Dorchester
- Supports restoration of schools, including Berea S.D.A. Academy in Mattapan

This is only a small selection of the more than 150 projects that demonstrate the positive impact this funding has on communities across Boston, especially in the neighborhoods represented by this committee. Preserving Boston's history includes stabilizing and documenting its neighborhoods'

cultural legacies. This includes supporting longtime nonprofits and cultural institutions, and resources that are traditionally open to all, like churches, community centers, and cultural sites. Many of these institutions occupy aging buildings, and CPA grants help many avoid displacement by funding building improvements.

Despite these success stories, the program remains highly competitive and many applicants are forced to delay or abandon much-needed work in their communities. Reducing the funding available for historic preservation projects puts communities at a disadvantage when it comes to protecting and maintaining the places where Bostonians have gathered, learned, worshiped, and received care for generations.

Critically, this funding reduction would impact historic preservation efforts disproportionately. In 2024, fellows at the Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics estimated that the cost per single unit of public housing projects (majority affordable housing) averaged $677,000 in projects that underwent Large Project Article 80 review. In comparison, the average proposed grant amount awarded to historic preservation projects in the FY26 CPA round was $354,347.83. Dollar for dollar, CPA grants have a larger impact on historic preservation efforts in Boston than on affordable housing production. Simply put, these funds are more limited, harder to come by, and more consequential to Bostonians seeking historic preservation funds.

Before altering the CPC's existing funding guidance, it's also important to note the overlap in the common benefits each funding category delivers. CPA funds categorized as "historic preservation funds" have preserved 144 units of affordable and naturally occurring affordable housing at roughly $6,500 per unit, demonstrating that investing in existing buildings is an extremely cost-effective way to stabilize housing in Boston.

Nationally, historic preservation is under attack. The National Historic Preservation Act and Section 106 are currently at risk, threatening the loss of significant resources and cultural landscapes across the United States. It is more important than ever that we use our local power to protect our irreplaceable cultural resources.

Historic preservation supports citywide sustainability and housing goals as well as making communities more stable, inclusive, and thoughtful places. It makes life in Boston better for us all.

The Alliance respectfully requests the Committee on the Community Preservation Act table any conversation discussing reduction in CPA funding for historic preservation projects.

Thank you,

Katherine Davis-Wheeler
Executive Director
Boston Preservation Alliance

Molly Donahue
Director of Advocacy
Boston Preservation Alliance