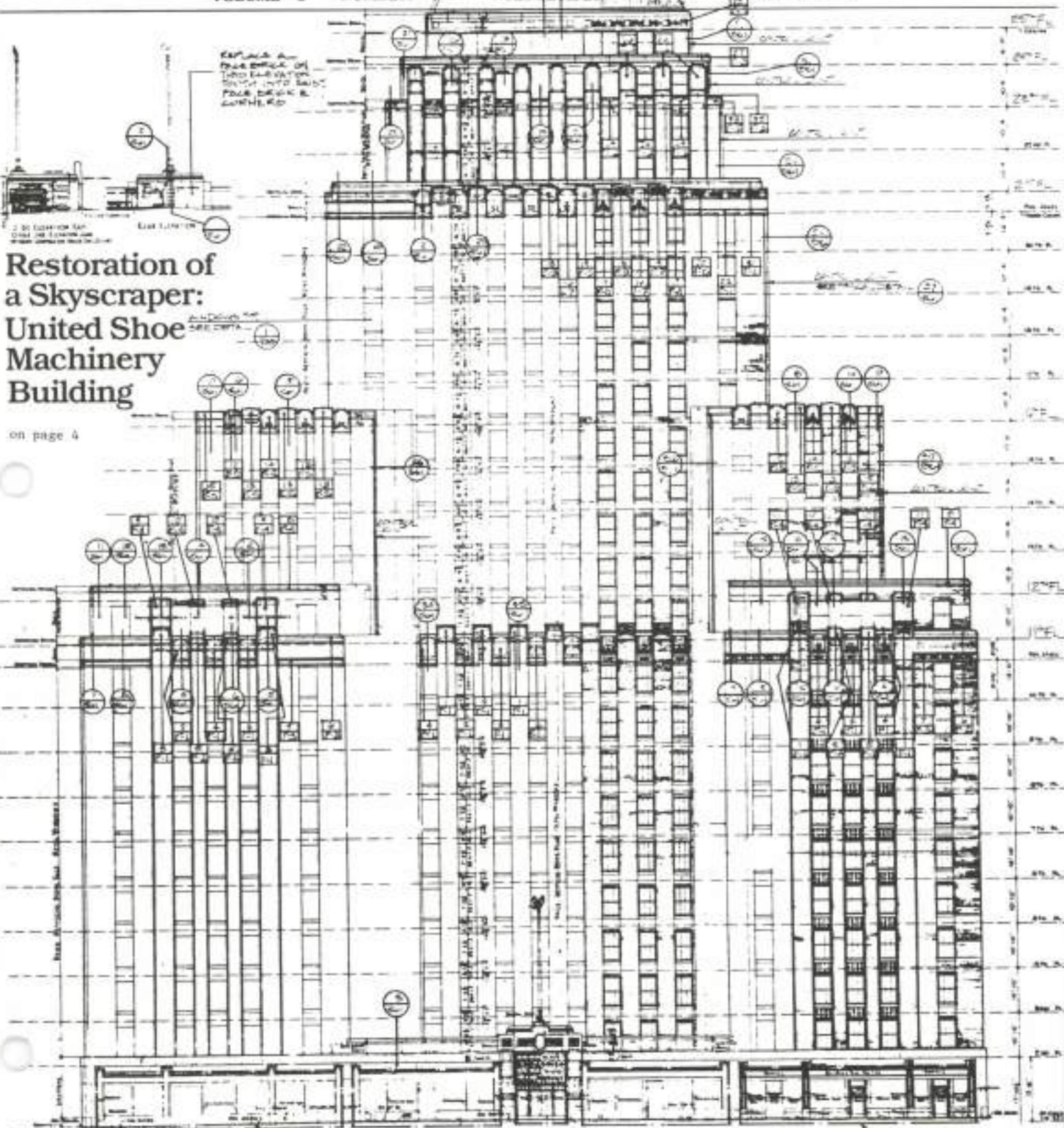


The Boston Preservation Alliance Letter

VOLUME 5 NUMBER 7 SEPTEMBER 1984 TWO DOLLARS



Courtesy of Meredith & Grew, Inc.

HIGH STREET ELEVATION

Restoration of a Skyscraper: United Shoe Machinery Building

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By Elliot Jon Schrank, Project Mgr. and Registered Architect

This article is about a landmark decision to restore a landmark. It is a tale that will warm the cockles of every preservationists' heart and probably some developers as well. It's the story about the United Shoe Machinery Building.

First, a little history: The USM building was built between 1929 and 1930 as the headquarters of the leading supplier of machinery to the shoe industry in the United States. The architectural firm of Parker, Thomas and Rice in association with H.B. Alden, created one of Boston's Art Deco treasures. Located at the corner of Federal and High Streets, it commanded a distinctive niche in Boston's skyline until the late 1950's, when new high-rise office buildings began to hide the ziggurat massing, decorative panels and glazed tile roof. As if it were taking signals from the "built" environment, the USM Corporation sold its flagship in 1964 and moved to Connecticut. The building, nonetheless, continued to perform as a speculative office building under different owners until the present



United Shoe Machinery Building, courtesy of Meredith & Grew, Inc.

owner planned to raze the building and replace it with a modern high-rise office tower. The building was then designated a city landmark and a complicated set of agreements were negotiated. As the building is restored according to rigorous historic certification standards, a new building is to be built on the site of an adjacent parking garage. The overall complex will have about one million square feet of first-class office space, and the city its Art Deco treasure.

Because of the building's landmark status in Boston (in addition to being listed on the National Register of Historic Places, August 1980) a strenuous restoration program has been set up by the development team. The building's significant architectural features will be restored, while accommodating market requirements. The blended development effort provides the strong economic base required for this historic renovation. A description of the magnitude of the rehabilitation and preservation work follows.

Though the masonry exterior facade is generally in good condition, there is cracking. Vertical cracks have allowed water penetration into walls with resulting rusting of embedded structural steel. Exfoliation of rusting has in turn pushed the brick facing away and caused further cracking. All cracked facing bricks will be replaced with new bricks. Control joints will be introduced at the external corners and incorporated into the brick facing to prevent future cracks. The original clay pits and brick presses in Ohio are being reactivated to assure an exact match of new brick to original. Right now the brick manufacturer is experimenting with flyash in the kiln to pick up the yellow beige color of the original brick which were produced when the kilns were coal fired. Because of seismic loading requirements and the extensive deterioration of precast, all the parapet walls will be restructured while the original appearance will be maintained.

The cast stone elements have not fared as well as the masonry. All over the building, the window sills, parapet caps, column covers, ornamental panels and belt courses are deteriorating at an alarming rate. Accordingly, all of these elements will be replaced with newly fabricated air entrained concrete to exactly match the original appearance. Rubber molds will be "painted" on those intact existing elements and then peeled off the base molds. The impressions

will be restored and then new units fabricated. There are over sixty-three ornamental castings on the building; all will be reproduced. Fortunately, the most visible and distinct figures of the USM building, the glazed tile roof of the mechanical penthouse above the 24th floor, is in good condition. Where tiles must be replaced, matching units are available 55 years later from the original tile manufacturer.

The program calls for the replacement of all windows with energy efficient fixed aluminum units that duplicate the original size, pane, muntin and rail configurations, while still achieving the necessary thermal performance.

The lobby will be restored to its original condition. Marble walls and travertine floors will be cleaned and repaired. Non-original features will be removed. Damaged original features will be replaced with matching materials. Original light fixtures will be cleaned and restored. New lighting that remains in harmony to the Art Deco motif will be installed to supplement the original lighting. The unique and highly decorative elevator doors and surrounds will be restored.

Extensive pre-design research and testing was done on the USM building to determine the scope of existing problems and their impact on renovation feasibility. The results were awesome. It became clear to the development team that the project will be the most extensive historic renovation ever undertaken in Boston. ■

Boston's Fiscal Crunch

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partment Director; Architect; the Supervisor of the Common Sense Program; Neighborhood Program Coordinator; and the new position of South End Historic District Administrator. The FY 1985 budget provides a mere \$35,182 to compensate for these five positions which require \$118,500 to fund.

Among the programs of the Environment Department that will have to be reduced or eliminated are publications, the intern program and the program to restore and maintain public monuments.

The Parks Department budget has also been seriously cut. This will pose a more serious threat to our already deteriorating park

system which include the Olmsted Parks and Historic Cemeteries.

Without the additional revenue sources needed, even more pressure will mount to further overdevelop the city even though Mayor Flynn has expressed some concerns about the density of development in the city. However, the mayor is also concerned about the need to balance Boston's budget, a difficult task which has now been even more cumbersome and problematical by the defeat of the parking excise tax.

An inappropriate project such as the proposed multi-building International Place project will automatically generate \$25 million in revenue just from the sale of the Fort Hill Garage. The project, to be located in the vicinity of High and Oliver Streets, will fill 2.6 acres and be composed of 5 buildings of varying heights. The vast size of the project, will severely impact the local cityscape, in particular the neighboring Custom House National Register Historic District.

Aside from the \$25 million generated from the sale of the garage, \$1.6 million in tax revenue will be provided during the construction period and an estimated \$12 million tax revenue when the development is completed. In addition, the BRA has approved a "linkage" formula for the project, which will generate an additional \$8.7 million to be used to construct low and moderate income housing in the city's neighborhoods. The sale of the Fort Hill Garage for the development of International Place will only be a temporary band-aid over the deficit wound. Inappropriate ventures like International Place will solve yesterday's problems while seriously undermining preservation efforts and objectives.

After the September Primary elections, Mayor Flynn plans to reintroduce a similar parking tax proposal or possibly a new revenue bill before the Legislature. Other possible sources of revenue being studied include a hotel-motel tax plan, a speculator's tax and a sales tax.

While taxes are never popular, responsible citizens must face up to the realities of today. If we are to preserve the quality of life we have and aspire to for ourselves and future generations, Boston must be fiscally sound. We ought to closely examine the merits of these new tax proposals within the perspective that they are vital links to Boston's future and the preservation of our environment. ■