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November 9, 2018

Mr. Tim Czerwienski
Boston Planning and Redevelopment Authority
One City Hall Square
Boston, MA 02201
Re: Kenmore Square Redevelopment

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 41 Organizational Members, 122 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 remained closely engaged with the Kenmore Square Redevelopment project, attending and providing feedback at multiple Boston Civic Design Commission (BCDC) design review meetings, participating in the Boston Landmarks Commission (BLC) Article 85 hearing, communicating our concerns directly to Related Beal and Roger Ferris + Partners in several meetings, and continuing a dialogue with Fenway residents and abutters. We feel that the designs for the two new buildings have progressed in a positive direction, and appreciate the team's efforts to incorporate a variety of comments. Yet we feel this project demonstrates significant deficiencies in the review and approval process which has resulted in a failure to optimize the expertise of commissioners and created unnecessary challenges to project proponents, citizens, and advocates.

The October 30 joint meeting between BCDC and the Boston Landmarks Commission (BLC) brought to light a fatal flaw in the BPDA's review process. When the project was presented to BLC on September 11 under Article 85/Demolition Review, commissioners determined several of the buildings at this location to be historically significant and preferably preserved. They felt the proponent had not fully explored creative solutions to integrate character-defining historic fabric into their proposal and urged a more in depth analysis. The maximum demolition delay of 90 days was imposed. This conclusion, however, seemed to have little impact on the existing proposal's progression which had already moved through at least four meetings with BCDC. The proponent, the BPDA, and BCDC continued to discuss the new development on this site, without any renewed consideration or discussion of the historic buildings and their potential for rehabilitation. In other words, designs that

required demolition continued to progress gaining even further momentum, clearly signaling that BLC's request would have no real impact on the final project. We feel it would have been appropriate for BCDC to pause their dialog with the proponent while requiring that the BLC's concerns be addressed.

When a joint BCDC/BLC meeting was finally held both BCDC and BLC commissioners indicated that such joint meetings on projects should occur earlier in the process where BLC concerns can be considered by BCDC/BPDA and have real impact. Commissioners of both boards clearly recognize the benefit of earlier collaboration and we *strongly urge* the process be altered to assure that happens. Scheduling can be challenging but should be addressed with special meetings if necessary. The city would clearly benefit from more cooperation.

The proponent claimed throughout this process to have conducted a robust exploration of methods to incorporate existing buildings, especially 541 Commonwealth Avenue, known as the Westgate. Urged by a strong request from the community to save the Westgate, the Alliance repeatedly advised the proponent to publicly demonstrate their efforts to save the building. The proponent, however, failed to do so. The reasons they provided for demolishing the building are standard challenges when rehabilitating existing buildings and not insurmountable, as the BLC noted at their hearing. The community deserves to have been provided a legitimate justification for the loss of buildings that contribute to the history, character, and sense of place in this unique neighborhood. With the unjustified demolition of these buildings Boston is losing a defining element of the dwindling historic character of Kenmore Square.

The Alliance believes that a creative integration of the historic Westgate building at 541 Commonwealth Avenue may be possible, and preferable. Integration would create a unique demonstration of Boston's hallmark tradition of merging old and new in an interesting juxtaposition of expressions, continue the rhythm of new and old facades, and preserve a prominent, character-defining feature of the neighborhood. However, it appears that the City will not pursue a project of that nature in favor of demolition and new construction. Therefore we hope to remain engaged with the proponent to advocate for a level of depth, texture, and detailing in their new design. We encourage the BPDA to demand a project that is appropriate and deserving of such a prominent position in one of Boston's most significant squares. If the existing buildings are demolished, the City should require that the proponent document the buildings, use environmentally-friendly deconstruction methods, and allow architectural salvage teams to remove as much historic fabric as possible.

We do feel that the evolution of the designs for the new buildings has progressed in a positive direction, benefitting from the review and feedback of BCDC, the BPDA, the Alliance, and many other community groups and residents. There are aspects of the designs that we feel are appropriate: both new buildings respond to the scale, massing, and rhythm of the architecture in the streetscape, the urban wall is

maintained, and the materials are in keeping with the neighborhood. Though not all of the views to the iconic Citgo Sign are preserved, the Commonwealth Building makes significant moves to step back at the upper floors to reveal the sign. The Beacon Building mirrors the tripartite expression of its two neighbors, creating a more cohesive integration of the new building with the existing buildings. We anticipate further modifications of these designs to tweak and improve the details, reflecting the latest feedback from BCDC and BLC.

Finally, we would like to reiterate the importance of process and extend an offer to collaborate with the City to make improvements. Adjustments should include better dialog and coordination between BCDC and BLC with collaboration at the outset of projects, more deference to BLC concerns regarding historic fabric and context, and vocal support for updating surveys of historic resources so proponents are not surprised by the community's call for preservation.

Thank you,



Greg Galer
Executive Director

CC:

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Michael Flaherty, Boston City Council
Annisssa Essaibi George, Boston City Council
Ayanna Pressley, Boston City Council
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