

BOSTON PRESERVATION ALLIANCE

March 22, 2019

Board of Directors

Christopher Scoville
Chair

Susan Park
President

Sean Geary
Treasurer

Beatrice Nessen
Secretary

Diana Pisciotta
Vice Chair

Roger Tackeff
Vice Chair

W. Lewis Barlow IV FAIA

William G. Barry

Nicole Benjamin-Ma

Nick Brooks AIA

Valerie Burns

Ross Cameron RIBA

Laura Dziorny

Minxie Fannin

Gill Fishman

Kay Flynn

Leigh Freudenheim

Peter Goedecke

Miguel Gómez-Ibáñez

Carl Jay

Michael LeBlanc AIA

David Nagahiro AIA

Regan Shields Ives AIA

Anthony Ursillo CFA

Peter Vanderwarker

Executive Director

Gregory J. Galer, Ph.D.

The Otis House
141 Cambridge Street
Boston, MA 02114
617.367.2458

bostonpreservation.org

Katelyn Sullivan
Boston Planning and Development Agency
Boston City Hall
Boston, MA 02201
Re: MGH Clinical and Campus Services Building

Dear Ms. Sullivan,

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, 125 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 attended a public meeting and met with the project team to understand and discuss the proposed new facility at MGH. We fully support the hospital's goals to provide the best patient care possible and recognize that periodic expansion of their facilities is a necessary element of supporting patients through enhanced capacity and services as well as responding to climate-change realities. We understand MGH's space limitations and the logic of building on these two blocks of Cambridge Street.

That being said, it is important also to recognize that not only is MGH one of the largest stakeholders in the West End, the hospital also owns some of the neighborhood's last remaining remnants of pre-Urban Renewal historic fabric. Hundreds of homes, businesses, and community gathering places were razed starting in the late 1950s and these three are among the few buildings that survive. While we recognize that patient care is the focus of MGH's mission, as a powerful player in the West End, the hospital has a responsibility to the community which extends beyond patient care- a responsibility that includes sensitivity to the emotional scars that remain in the West End from the utter destruction of Urban Renewal. While the hospital isn't responsible for these efforts, it should make all efforts to help heal the damage of those losses, and as stewards of these few vestiges of the West End it has a responsibility to find a way to integrate these buildings into its proposal. After the widespread destruction of the neighborhood, demolition of all three buildings on this site is wholly unacceptable.

While today most people recognize that the characterization of the West End as blighted and unsalvageable was incorrect and was devastating to countless families,

we must not reinforce that wrong by failing to protect what little that survives. The buildings in question, 16 Blossom Street, 24 Blossom Street, and 25 North Anderson Street, stand testament to important parts of the story of the lost West End. A school, settlement house, and one of the last remaining tenements each can play an important role in telling such an essential Boston story that was nearly wiped out. Learning from the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in New York City we understand the power of structures such as these to tell the quintessential American story. By embracing the challenge of preserving these buildings and the history of the West End, the hospital would reinforce its commitment to its West End neighbors.

The Alliance feels that there are options that must be explored that both preserve these important buildings and accomplish the goals of the hospital. We have asked the project team to carefully study alternatives to demolition- specifically, moving the historic buildings to face Cambridge Street and constructing the new campus behind. Given their preliminary plans which already respect the height guidelines along Cambridge Street, the historic buildings seem like a logical way to meet that goal and respect the character of the streetscape and the adjacent Beacon Hill Historic District. Moving buildings was once common and in some cities is still accomplished far more often than here in Boston; it is not an unreasonable solution. We look forward to reviewing these studies.

We strongly urge the BPDA to require the proponent to find an alternate path than the one proposed. As a community, we must value and preserve our history, especially those of our immigrant and underserved neighborhoods, so that we can learn from past mistakes like the razing of the West End. These buildings are a tangible reminder of the neighborhood's complex history and the West End deserves their preservation.

Thank you,



Greg Galer
Executive Director

CC:

Representative Jay Livingstone, Massachusetts State House

Brona Simon, Massachusetts Historical Commission

Josh Zakim, Boston City Council

Annissa Essaibi George, Boston City Council

Michael Flaherty, Boston City Council

Althea Garrison, Boston City Council

Michelle Wu, Boston City Council

CCs cont'd:

Rosanne Foley, Boston Landmarks Commission

Lynn Smiledge, Boston Landmarks Commission

David Hanitchak, MGH

Nicholas Haney, MGH

Doug Kelleher, Epsilon Associates

Geoffrey Melhuish, Epsilon Associates

Tom Sieniewicz, NBBJ

Duane Lucia, West End Museum

Patricia Tully, Beacon Hill Civic Association

Jane Wilson, West End Civic Association