

03/09/2020

Brona Simon, Executive Director
Massachusetts Historical Commission
220 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, MA 02125

RE: Project Notification Form for proposed redevelopment of the Charles F. Hurley Building

Dear Ms. Simon:

The Paul Rudolph Heritage Foundation (PRHF) is a non-profit organization representing the Paul Rudolph estate, committed to preserving his architectural legacy for future generations and promoting the understanding of Rudolph's ideas about architecture and urbanism.

The most important part of our mission is advocating for the preservation and proper maintenance of buildings designed by Mr. Rudolph, since direct experience of his work is key to appreciating Mr. Rudolph's contributions to modern architecture.

I write in regard to MHC's February 25, 2020 letter in response to the January 24, 2020 Project Notification filing by the Massachusetts Division of Department of Capital Asset Management Maintenance (DCAMM), about the proposed redevelopment of the Charles F. Hurley Building within the Boston Government Service Center complex (BGSC).

The Paul Rudolph Heritage Foundation thanks the MHC for recognizing that DCAMM's project will have an "adverse effect" on the overall complex, and we want to offer additional objections to the current effort to redevelop the BGSC site through demolition.

Paul Rudolph and the design of the Boston Government Service Center

The BGSC is both an important part of Paul Rudolph's architectural legacy as well as "the most dramatic and architecturally ambitious of the modern office structures built as part of the Government Center Urban Renewal project," according to the Boston Landmarks Commission.

Despite the language in DCAMM's report and members of its team at public presentations, Paul Rudolph was directly involved and responsible for the design of the entire BGSC. As pointed out in MHC's letter to DCAMM, Rudolph was appointed the coordinating architect for the overall site and created a single master plan and design guidelines for all of the buildings in the complex. Rudolph's leading role in the project is covered in-depth in Tim Rohan's 2014 architectural monograph, *The Architecture of Paul Rudolph*.

Paul Rudolph's ideas regarding monumentality and urbanism led him to receive increasing civic commissions during the 1960's. As Rohan observed,

The Boston Government Service Center (1962-1971) ... elaborated on the signature monumental style that he had arrived at with the Yale Art & Architecture building. To critique what he considered the banality and incoherence of contemporary approaches to urban renewal and campus design, Rudolph imbued them with a scenographic quality fit for the set of an opera, with swirling staircases, colorful, multistory, balconied interior spaces recalling baroque architecture, and great plazas resembling amphitheaters inspired by the ideas of nineteenth-century city planner Camillo Sitte.

To result in a unified whole, given the diverse group of project architects involved, Rudolph created overall design criteria for the BGSC complex.

The most striking of these was the use of a common material and surface treatment for all of the buildings. According to Daniel Abramson's analysis of the BGSC, *Representing the Welfare State*, the building exterior and partial interior was covered in "gearworks" finish as it was referred to by the other architects – which was the same trademark finish Rudolph developed for his Yale Art & Architecture building, completed while the BGSC design had just begun.

To compose the rest of the project guidelines, Rudolph employed his criticisms of international style modernism and concern for scale, urbanism and monumentality (which he was exploring in smaller, yet similar projects such as the ENDO Pharmaceutical building in Garden City, NY).

The spatial archetypes employed by Rudolph in the BGSC design were featured in a 12-page cover story for the July 1973 issue of the *Architectural Record* by Carl Black, 'A Vision of Human Space.' The article was illustrated with sketches of the BGSC complex by Rudolph, along with as-built photographs and perspective renderings and was divided into sections with names such as "Sea and Shells," "Ebb and Flow," "The Spiral" and "The Cave." Originally intended to be a chapter in a book about architecture titled *Human Space: Conceptions and Constructions of Paul Rudolph*, Mildred Schmertz – a Senior Editor at *Architectural Record* – explained in her introduction, 'because Black's insights deepen one's comprehension of Rudolph's work and his interpretations seem so very fresh to us, we have decided to publish an excerpt.'

A 2009 Building Inventory Form submitted to the MHC by the Boston Landmarks Commission (BLC) states "Although Rudolph is officially listed as coordinating architect, the strength and consistency of the design of all of the parts suggest that Rudolph was the design force behind the entire project."

The design of the BGSC – as perceived by scholars today as well as when it was first built - is so interwoven with Rudolph's design aesthetic and critical analysis of modernism that to relegate his contribution to a single portion of the complex as suggested by DCAMM in its project notification form is absurd.

Acknowledgement of the significance of the Boston Government Service Center

Paul Rudolph's design for the BGSC received widespread recognition in the architectural press, with articles about it appearing in *Progressive Architecture* (US), *Architecture and Urbanism* and *Global Architecture* (Japan), *Architecture D'Aujourd'hui* (France), *Architectural Review* (England), *Architettura* and *Casabella* (Italy), and *Deutsche Bauzeitung* and *Werk* (Germany) - and some of these journals covered the project in multiple issues.

The February 1964 issue of *Progressive Architecture* featured several pages on the proposed design including a photo looking down into on a model of the complex – comparing its enclosed pedestrian plaza with photos of the Piazza del Campo and Piazza San Marco in Italy.

The BGSC also appeared in numerous books around the time the building opened. Even later, it continued to attract attention – the presentation model and drawings appearing in MoMA's 1979 exhibit, *Transformations in Modern Architecture* (and being prominently shown in the catalog).

In addition to being lauded in the architectural press, the BGSC was designated a Category Two Building (major significance) by the Boston Landmarks Commission. The Building Information Form completed by the BLC in September 1990 recommended the complex "for individual listing on National Register and designation (exterior and selected interior) as a Boston Landmark BOS.1618 (9/90)." The statement of significance included in the Boston Landmarks Commission determination report states,

The Health, Welfare & Education Service Center for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts at 115 Cambridge Street possesses integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association, and both embodies distinctive characteristics of a type and represents a distinguished work of architecture.

The building was also recognized as architecturally significant in a report prepared by the preservation organization Docomomo in 2011. Their 40-page document notes,

Government Service Center is one of the masterpieces of Paul Rudolph's career. In its massive scale, and use of hammered concrete, it is often compared to the Yale Art and Architecture School in New Haven (1963).

The use of corduroy concrete, which Paul Rudolph invented, had a wide influence on architecture at the time, spurring many buildings to adopt the technique in the decoration of exterior surfaces.

In terms of urban planning, the complex is significant in its unified design of three buildings, and the intention to create public spaces around civic buildings. Furthermore, it is as an integral part of the massive Government Center Renewal Project of the 1960s which completely changed the character of 60-acres of downtown Boston in a matter of a few years, favoring Modern architecture, and adopting the latest urban planning principles of the time.

Incorporating the Lindemann Mental Health Center, a functioning inpatient facility for mental health patients, in a downtown civic complex is a noble statement about the culture that designed for such an arrangement, in favor of relegating the mentally ill population to the peripheries of the city, as is increasingly common.

While the complex is recognized for its architectural significance, it also is home to site specific public artwork that is equally distinguished.

Hanging under the portico at the end of the Hurley Building is a 30 by 17-foot brass sculpture by Charles Fayette Taylor (1894-1996) titled "Upward Bound." Originally an engineer noted for helping design the engine for the plane that carried Charles A. Lindbergh across the Atlantic, he turned to making art and sculpture upon retiring from MIT and his work is represented in several museums and public buildings throughout the United States.

According to a booklet published on the art installed at the *Hurley Building*, the upward-seeming movement of the sculpture is meant to symbolize the work of the building's employees, who assist people in growing through economic and work opportunities.

In addition, a pair of abstract sgraffito murals by noted Italian artist Constantino Nivola (1911-1988) are painted and etched directly into the walls of the public lobby of the Hurley building. As noted in a statement issued by the Nivola family,

More significant than the impressive scale of the two Hurley murals, is its elaborate narrative explicating the purposes of the Massachusetts State Division of Employment Security, housed in the building. Nivola was commissioned to make two facing murals for the lobby: one on the theme of "Unemployment Insurance" and the benefits it provided to families and society; the other on the theme of "Employment Service" and how skills training aids workers and the economy. The artwork is unique in depicting the functions and benefits of the American social service system, reflecting the ideal of government's capacity to address social ills. The murals not only capture a moment in Massachusetts history, but thanks to their aesthetic merits, have a strong and vitalizing effect on viewers.

This artwork must not be destroyed, and DCAMM's proposal to redevelop the BGSC site does not include what efforts, if any, the state plans to take to protect or relocate this public artwork.

The proposed redevelopment of the Boston Government Service Center

The PRHF reviewed DCAMM's project notification form (PNF) and attended presentations regarding the state's plan to redevelop part of the complex, and we have several objections to the proposal as well as concerns about how the process is being handled.

First, the PRHF disputes DCAMM's language that Rudolph's role in the overall project was minimal, save for the design of the Lindemann Center portion of the BGSC complex. This conclusion is being manufactured to diminish the importance of the Hurley Building, and to make it easier to sell off part of the public complex for private redevelopment.

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In addition, the development schemes put forth in the PNF only show options that call for demolition, with no alternatives offered for retrofit or preservation. There is no evidence to support the PNF other than an unsubstantiated cost to retrofit the existing building, along with subjective opinions about why the building cannot be adapted or upgraded.

DCAMM's PNF also argues that the site can be altered since it was never completed as originally conceived. However, the proposed demolition will destroy the character of the public plaza and amputate a large portion of the complex, relegating the Lindemann Center to a single building without the context that made its design significant. If DCAMM's plan proceeds, the remainder of the BGSC will be diminished in importance and face future pressure to be removed for further development. Despite claims to protect the Lindemann Center, DCAMM offered no commitment or plan to designate the building as a landmark or guarantee its preservation.

DCAMM's PNF states the BGSC is in disrepair despite statements at a recent meeting at the Boston Society of Architects (BSA) that the building is in overall good condition. During the same presentation, DCAMM representatives showed photos of the site and suggested it was unsafe in order to justify the redevelopment. However, public safety could be enhanced by simple and more cost-effective solutions such as installing more site lighting without the need for new construction.

DCAMM also suggested that the Lindemann Center will be repaired despite this not being noted as a priority in the PNF. DCAMM is charged with the maintenance and upkeep of the state buildings, yet DCAMM has paved over Rudolph's original plaza and allowed staff parking to destroy original benches and stairs. The care and maintenance (or lack thereof) that is evident at the BGSC is the result of years' worth of poor decisions and neglect by the agency that now claims it will provide it once it tears down part of what it was supposed to maintain from the beginning.

The PRHF also has concerns about the process of the PNF application. During public presentations, DCAMM was unable to answer questions about project milestones and deadlines, and when opportunities for public review and comment would be available. Stakeholders and knowledgeable parties, such as the PRHF, have not been invited to participate in the process, except being copied on press releases or notified after a single invitation-only site visit.

In conclusion, the Paul Rudolph Heritage Foundation strongly supports the preservation of the Boston Government Service Center, as a part of the larger effort to preserve and interpret Boston's architectural and urban history. The proposed demolition of the BGSC will impact the public plaza and the loss of the Hurley building will partially unravel the urban fabric that is now part of Boston's unique history. The BGSC is a landmark of American modern architecture, and it is important that it be preserved. The Paul Rudolph Heritage Foundation supports finding alternative development proposals that would allow for the preservation of the existing complex and encourages consideration of a respectful compromise.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at +1-917-242-0652 or by email at kelvin.dickinson@paulrudolphheritagefoundation.org.

Sincerely,



Kelvin Dickinson
President

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