

# BOSTON PRESERVATION ALLIANCE

www.bostonpreservation.org

February 3, 2022

The Honorable Michelle Wu  
Mayor of Boston  
One City Hall Square  
Boston, MA 02201

Dear Mayor Wu,

On behalf of the Boston Preservation Alliance and our partners signed below, we congratulate you on your historic win as Mayor of Boston! We are excited about your enthusiasm and vision for the city and look forward to close collaboration with your administration. We have actionable recommendations that demonstrate how historic preservation advances your stated priorities.

As you have made clear in the past, as well as in your responses to our [Mayoral Candidate Questionnaire](#), you understand the importance of historic preservation. Given the historic nature of the city, many of our most pressing challenges - **development and affordability, climate change preparedness and mitigation, equity and inclusion, and neighborhood empowerment** - all converge at historic resources. With over 70% of the city constructed before WWII our existing built environment must be part of the solution and we look forward to working with you to demonstrate and support those many places of alignment. For example:

Naturally occurring **affordable housing** exists across the city in our older and historic building stock. These buildings are an essential element to overcoming the ongoing housing crisis; a city as developed as Boston cannot possibly build its way out of a dearth of affordable housing, especially without serious environmental impacts.

The pace of demolitions and the amount of waste trucked to landfills and incinerators negates all other efforts to reduce, reuse, and recycle. The Preservation Green Lab states that it can take up to 80 years for a new, energy-efficient building to overcome the negative climate-related impacts of demolition and new construction. **Building reuse is climate action**, and one of the most meaningful and immediate actions we can take in Boston.

Many of Boston's historic neighborhoods are home to our most economically vulnerable, and these Bostonians are often the least prepared to proactively protect their homes or recover from major losses. This is due to both a lack of resources and an understanding of the historic contributions of these places and stories. **This requires examining and updating our processes with new tools and resources needed for preservation, education, awareness, celebration, and resilience.**

While we recognize that you are facing many priorities, we urge you and your team to publicly recognize that historic resources are a core and essential part of Boston and they present a wealth of opportunities to be part of the solution. This message from you and your cabinet will go a long way to helping address the city's challenges. As you have said, we do the big things

BOSTON PRESERVATION ALLIANCE

by getting the little things right and building trust; the list below reflects both big and small measures towards our shared goals.

**We ask for a public meeting promptly to discuss these priorities and look forward to collaborating with you and our partner organizations signed below on the following summary of goals:**

#### Development and Affordability:

- Make members of the preservation community a central part of formal discussions about changes to the **BPDA** and the process of development review, including Article 80 and Article 85 (Demolition Delay). We know well the existing process and its flaws and opportunities.
- Support expanding existing financial tools to assure that historic resources are supported in proportion to the many benefits they provide to the city. This would include examining how **CPA** funds are being allocated now and in the first five years of the program and assuring that the **Legacy Fund for Boston** is prioritized on equal footing with other mitigation negotiations managed by the BPDA.
- Restructure, build stronger staffing, and enhance the budget resources of the **Boston Landmarks Commission**, enabling a preservation mindset to be more proactive, engaged, and influential with city development guidance earlier in the process -better integrating preservation into planning efforts and feedback to proponents.
- Underscore how older buildings are **naturally occurring affordable housing** stock and host more local and small businesses than new construction. Support DND work and city policies and funding that encourage the use of existing and historic buildings.
- Complete the **PLAN: Downtown** process with the Advisory Group and implement recommended changes; all development in the Downtown area should pause until this plan is finalized and existing proposals should be modified to conform with the guidelines that result.

#### Climate Change Preparedness and Mitigation:

- Examine and pursue policies, through a formal public process, such as **minimum maintenance** requirements, consequences for **demolition by neglect, salvage** and reuse ordinances, etc. that promote the continued use/reuse of existing buildings by owners and developers.
- Fund a study and recommendations for **updating guidelines for local historic districts** to sensitively incorporate climate preparedness measures, such as solar panels and modifications to mitigate rising waters, into Boston's protected neighborhoods.

#### Neighborhood Empowerment:

- Create a committee/commission to develop a framework for reviewing proposals to **change place names, remove or alter statues or monuments**, and take other actions that more equitably and sensitively illuminate and celebrate our collective history.

- Provide funds for a comprehensive, **city-wide survey of historic resources** with a public, digital database and a plan for continued maintenance and updates to the survey.

Equity and Inclusion:

- Support the effort, through additional resources, to clear the backlog of **Pending Landmarks** at the Boston Landmarks Commission. Do so in a well-communicated, transparent, and equitable manner that uses this as an opportunity to bolster public support for historic preservation.
- Help rally state legislative support for the Home Rule Petition already passed by the City Council to allow **sites of local significance** to be protected through Landmarking.
- Resource and empower the Boston Landmarks Commission and other departments to engage with neighborhoods to better understand and **celebrate local history**, identify meaningful places, and support legacy businesses.

Thank you for your consideration. As we collectively work toward these goals, the most meaningful action you and your administration can take is to strongly communicate that Boston's historic resources and neighborhoods, from East Boston to Mattapan, are essential elements in any plan to address and solve our manifold challenges. It is time to be thoughtful and intentional about the evolution of our city. We are confident that through your leadership we will establish new ideals in Boston that value our unique, irreplaceable character.

Thank you,



Alison Frazee  
Acting Executive Director

With:

Boston Building Resources  
Boston By Foot  
The Art Deco Society  
Brighton-Allston Historical Society  
Charlestown Preservation Society  
Friends of the Public Garden  
The Gibson House  
Jamaica Plain Historical Society  
The Old North Foundation  
Paul Revere Memorial Association/Paul Revere House  
Revolutionary Spaces  
Unbound Visual Arts

CC:

Boston State Senators

Boston State Representatives

Boston City Council

Rev. Mariama White-Hammond, Chief of Environment, Energy, and Open Space

Sheila Dillon, Chief of Housing and Director of Neighborhood Development

Dion Irish, Chief of Operations

Brianna Millor, Chief of Community Engagement

Mariangely Solis Cervera, Chief of Equity and Inclusion

Segun Idowu, Chief of Economic Opportunity and Inclusion

Jascha Franklin-Hodge, Chief of Streets

David Vittorini, Senior Advisor to Mayor Wu

Bryan Glascock, BPDA Deputy Director for Regulatory Planning and Zoning

Susan Cascino, Recycling Policy Director, City of Boston

Brian Golden, BPDA

Michael Christopher, BPDA

Michael Cannizzo, BPDA

Lauren Shurtleff, BPDA

Elizabeth Stifel, BCDC

Rosanne Foley, Boston Landmarks Commission

Joseph Cornish, Boston Landmarks Commission

Lynn Smiledge, Boston Landmarks Commission

Thadine Brown, Community Preservation, City of Boston

Anita Lauricella, Downtown BID

Symone Crawford, MAHA

Erin Kelly, Preservation Massachusetts