

June 26, 2006

Mr. Jay Rourke  
Project Manager  
Boston Redevelopment Authority  
One City Hall Square, 9<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Boston, MA 02110

**RE: Paramount Center Project Notification Form/Institutional Master Plan  
Notification (PNF/IMPNF)**

Dear Mr. Rourke:

The Boston Preservation Alliance is a nonprofit 501(c) 3 organization founded in 1978 to preserve Boston's historic built environment. The Alliance believes Boston's architectural heritage is a national treasure, contributing to the quality of life for Boston's residents and visitors as well as to the economic health of the city.

We offer the following comments on the Paramount Center PNF/IMPNF:

Paramount Theatre

The Paramount was Boston's first and is its only remaining Art Deco theatre. Both the interior and the exterior of the Paramount were designated as Boston Landmarks in 1984. At that time, the Boston Landmarks Commission found the Paramount's interior to be the city's most comprehensive example of Art Deco interior design.

The Alliance supports the restoration of the exterior façade of the Paramount and the interior restorations of the lobby as outlined in the IMPNF/PNF. The Alliance strongly supports measures to restore the Paramount that are in keeping with the property's exterior and interior landmark designations and requirements put in place by the Boston Landmarks Commission in the 1980s.

In September 1985, the Boston Landmarks Commission issued a Certificate of Exemption when the owner of the Paramount at that time removed significant portions of the building's interior finishes for asbestos abatement. In October 1988, an Application for a Certificate of Design Approval for the property was granted for the redevelopment of the theater. (Redevelopment did not follow at this time and the building was subsequently purchased by Emerson College.) In both the 1985 and 1988 certificates, the Landmarks Commission required that any redevelopment of the Paramount Theatre must include the restoration of the original detailing of the interior finishes of the Paramount Theatre "to the greatest extent possible."

Mr. Jay Rourke  
June 26, 2006  
Page 2

The Alliance recognizes that substantial interior alterations will be necessary in order to convert the Paramount from a venue for film to a smaller performance theater. We also acknowledge that much of the original interior has been removed. However, the Alliance believes that key interior restorations can and should still be made. We support the project proponent's commitment that "every effort will be made to maintain the original plaster detail on auditorium walls and ceiling" (p.1-7).

In addition to the plaster detail, the Paramount once contained elaborate 1930s murals, which depicted outdoor scenes and fireworks in an unusual variation of an Art Deco style. Unfortunately, the original murals, which were removed in 1985, have been partially destroyed and appear to be beyond restoration. However, sufficient portions of the murals still remain intact. The Alliance urges the project proponent to recreate the murals for use in the interior of the new building. The practice of recreating wallpaper and other historic designs is a common practice in the restoration of historic interiors and would, in this case, be an appropriate way to recall the original, unique interior of the theater.

#### Arcade Building

The four-story, granite Arcade Building has been in a state of disrepair and partial vacancy for many years. The Alliance supports the project proponent's proposal to restore the existing granite façade of the building. We also support retaining the existing interior architectural features of the building for potential use within the new structure. The Alliance requests that interior architectural features of significance be carefully documented prior to their removal.

The Alliance believes that the materials used to replace the mansard roof of the Arcade Building should be similar to those that were original to the building. Flat seam metal cladding does not possess the same textural quality as slate. For this reason, the Alliance asks that the project proponent use real slate or an appropriate synthetic alternative to replace the existing roof.

The LED lighting scheme, which is proposed to light the above grade windows of the Arcade Building, presents an exciting opportunity to energize the building. Historic photographs indicate that Washington Street near the project site was once a vibrant stretch of lighted signs and marquees. It is extremely important, however, that any new lighting scheme compliment and enhance the existing historic façade. For this reason, the Alliance requests that the project proponent provide more information on the types of "abstract images and historical content" that might be displayed in these lighting systems.

#### Parcel B/North Lot

We urge the project proponent to reconsider the setback and design of the Washington Street façade of the new building that will be built on Parcel B (the North Lot) behind the

Mr. Jay Rourke  
June 26, 2006  
Page 3

Arcade Building. The proposed design, with a blank wall facing Washington Street and one sheer, sloping glass structure behind the Arcade Building's mansard roof, does not provide a sympathetic backdrop for the Arcade Building. We ask the project proponent to consider designs for the new building that would incorporate windows or features that would not mimic the Arcade Building, but would better compliment it.

Finally, the Alliance believes that the setback for the new building could be increased. This would more clearly differentiate the new building from the Arcade Building and would give the Arcade building greater prominence and a stronger sense of its own volume. Likewise, an orientation of the Washington Street façade of the new building at the same angle as the Arcade Building and the other buildings along the street should be explored. This could create a more congruous streetscape of old and new buildings along Washington Street.

The Boston Preservation Alliance has advocated for the renovation and restoration of the Paramount Theatre for more than twenty years. We look forward to a high quality and appropriate adaptive re-use of the Paramount and the Arcade Building.

Sincerely,

Sarah D. Kelly  
Executive Director

Susan Park  
President