

BOSTON PRESERVATION ALLIANCE

August 24, 2020

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Executive Director

Gregory J. Galer, Ph.D.

Ms. Aisling Kerr
Boston Planning and Development Agency
Boston City Hall
Re: 39 Stanhope Street, Back Bay

Dear Ms. Kerr,

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, 142 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.

We are pleased to have had engagement and some influence on this project. The Alliance reached out to the property owner, Rosalind Gorin, almost a year ago to discuss the plan for 39 Stanhope Street soon after we heard it was under consideration. We are concerned for the unique character of this small block and are optimistic about enhancements to the urban realm that could highlight the historic resources.

In recent conversations with the development team of H.N. Gorin, Inc. we have learned that they have altered their approach, now embracing the existing stable building rather than demolishing it. Ever since our first meeting on October 4, 2019, Alliance staff has communicated our concern for the historic resource and urged Ms. Gorin to pursue preservation of the stable building in the proposed project, noting the building's significance to the streetscape and value to the community. We have maintained that there are feasible options for an elegant solution that could accomplish development and preservation goals. Since then, the project team has met with the Alliance several times to discuss different approaches.

While the team consistently concluded that preservation of the façade of the stable building was not viable, the neighborhood moved forward with steps to have the building designated a Boston Landmark and the Alliance supported the Landmark Commission's decision to accept the petition to further study the site.

Whether or not the stable building at 39 Stanhope is ultimately designated a Landmark, the Alliance believes that the building is historically and architecturally significant- it represents the evolution of the neighborhood and transportation technology and contributes to the sense of place, providing authentic placemaking,

along this street. The Back Bay continues to experience substantial development and change and preserving moments like this in our public realm provides a thread of continuity and connection to Boston's past. Preserving even just the façade of this seemingly vernacular stable building sets the tone for the rest of Stanhope Street and will hopefully lead to the preservation of this special, small-scale streetscape in an ever-growing neighborhood. (In this case, since the interior of the building has been radically altered several times, preservation of the rest of the building is less of a priority.)

Though the design is still in progress, we feel that the general concept of the current proposal is moving toward a successful outcome. There are many details that need further progression, such as the grid pattern of the new hotel, the transition between the hotel tower and the historic façade, and a mechanism to reflect aspects of the stable that have been lost over time, but the Alliance supports the direction that the design team has taken and looks forward to additional conversations with the team, the BPDA, the Boston Landmarks Commission and staff, and the community. We know that residents in abutting buildings, commuters who pass through this space, and other neighbors and visitors care deeply about this building and the streetscape and we share their commitment to historic preservation.

As a member of a growing, evolving city, the Alliance rarely advocates for museum-quality preservation. Typically, our role is to help all parties collectively understand the meaningful historic and cultural aspects of a site and find solutions that preserve them in harmony with updates or new development. We feel that this site could be a celebrated example of this kind of collaboration. We encourage the owner and project team, preservation community, and other local stakeholders to come to the table with a spirit of collaboration and we look forward to being part of that process.

Sincerely,



Greg Galer
Executive Director

CC:

Rosalind Gorin, H.N. Gorin, Inc.
Harry Wheeler, Group One Partners
Rob Festa, Group One Partners
Doug Kelleher, Epsilon Associates
Rosanne Foley, Boston Landmarks Commission
Lynn Smiledge, Boston Landmarks Commission
Alexa Pinard, Boston Planning and Development Agency

Michael Cannizzo, Boston Planning and Development Agency
Ted Schwartzberg, Boston Planning and Development Agency
Carlo Sartori
Beth Edwards Harris
Karen Reeves
Jaimie McNeil