



HBI *nsights*

News From Historic Boston Incorporated • Fall 2001

A transformation in progress

Horace Crockett, 92 years old, has been living at #5 Alvah Kittredge Park since the end of World War II. When he purchased his property some 50 years ago, his Second Empire brick row house was a comfortable home in a good neighborhood. Year by year, however, Crockett has watched his neighborhood—and his block—slip into a state of neglect, the victim of both demographic changes and the allocation of investment dollars elsewhere. The three adjacent row houses—#’s 6, 7, and 8—have been vacant for more than a quarter century.

In May of this year, Historic Boston began making the first investments to rejuvenate and recreate these landmark buildings – and the neighborhood that is defined in part by them.

We at Historic Boston believe that the presence of these and other blighted buildings in pivotal locations in our city is an *affront to common sense*, especially in light of Boston’s severe housing shortage. We also believe the rejuvenation of endangered historic sites such as these can catalyze neighborhood renewal, safeguard important cultural resources, and contribute to a healthier, more balanced city.

Photo: The steps and brick front of this row house in Alvah Kittredge Park, Roxbury, have been renovated with support from Historic Boston. Holding a new brick is Jeffrey Gonyeau, Project Manager with Historic Boston Incorporated. Behind him are Michael Mawn (on stairs), contractor and owner of M. J. Mawn, Incorporated; Chris Brown (landing), Job Captain with Amory Architects; and David Amory (in window), Principal with Amory Architects.



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The feasibility study that we completed last year on the preservation and redevelopment of the Alvah Kittredge row houses proves that revitalization is within our grasp. To create eight two-bedroom units that would sell at market rates, the study calculated that a subsidy of only \$152,000 per unit is needed – in other words, only *\$1.2 million total* to spark the rebirth of a neighborhood. Making these units affordable to middle-income buyers just requires more money.

Here’s where we stand today:

The Boston Redevelopment Authority licensed Historic Boston to restore the exterior of the two row houses now owned by the Authority. We began work on #8 (see photo) with the \$376,000 raised to date and are seeking to secure funds to bring the site up to a zero value. This would allow a community development group to seek additional subsidies to complete the restoration and make the units affordable for neighborhood residents.

Here’s what we need: Maintaining our momentum is critical! We estimate that we still need \$600,000 more to complete the structural repairs and exterior restoration of these historic and compelling resources.

Once we complete the exterior restoration, Historic Boston hopes the Boston Redevelopment Authority can make the whole site available to a non-profit, community-based organization to fit out the buildings as owner-occupied, affordable condominiums. New home ownership will bolster the long-term stability of the neighborhood and create an anchor in a society increasingly succumbing to zoning-encouraged sprawl.

Restoration of the Alvah Kittredge Park row houses is well underway, but *private support is still needed* to ensure the long-term success of the project and supplement grants to Historic Boston from the Massachusetts Historical Commission and others.



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Photo: Marc Draisen (seated, middle), Executive Director of the Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations. To the left: Tony Papillo from Historic Boston and Rosemary Kverek from the Charlestown Historical Society and Boston Preservation Alliance. To the right: Albert Rex from the Boston Preservation Alliance and Lois Harvey from Historic Boston and the Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay.

“Community preservation: a crossroads?”

At a September 6 meeting convened by Historic Boston Incorporated, leaders from several key historic preservation and neighborhood groups discussed the Community Preservation Act (CPA - *see sidebar*). Marc Draisen, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations, gave an illuminating presentation on behalf of the Community Preservation Coalition – an organization which unites 45 civic groups concerned with affordable housing, preservation, and open space issues.

Draisen outlined the current housing crisis in Boston, which is reaching historic proportions. The median home price in Boston currently hovers at more than \$236,000 - well out of reach of many low-income families. More than 14,000 families are on public housing waiting lists, and the percentage of loans to low-income homebuyers has decreased for four years in a row.

Draisen calculates that adoption of the CPA would liberate more than \$27 million per year for the related causes of affordable housing, open space, and preservation.

For Historic Boston, this translates into money that could be used to create housing in vacant historic buildings, revitalize neighborhood business districts, address deferred maintenance in historic religious properties, and provide rehabilitated homes for museums, cultural institutions, and health centers. The CPA would also create an unusual opportunity for advocacy groups in different areas to work together on new projects.

Discussion and comments followed Draisen’s presentation at the early morning meeting in Boston. Participants included representatives of the Beacon Hill Civic Association, the Boston Preservation Alliance, the Charlestown Preservation and Historical Societies, Historic Boston Incorporated, the Neighborhood Association of Back Bay, and the South End Historical Society.

Community Preservation Act: a thumbnail sketch

The Community Preservation Act (CPA) is a Massachusetts law passed in 2000, after a 15-year effort on the part of local housing and preservation communities, as well as business and environmental concerns.

Massachusetts cities and towns now have the option of adopting the measure, which would authorize a local 1-3 percent property tax increase to fund three fundamental quality-of-life programs: historic preservation, affordable housing, and open space acquisition.

A 2 percent surcharge on property taxes—in other words, a tax increase of about \$18 per year for the average Boston homeowner—would then qualify the city to receive matching funds from the state. The initiative has already been accepted by 31 communities across Massachusetts, and, if it were to be adopted in Boston, would infuse more than \$50 million into the community over the next two years.

A coalition known as the Committee for a Better Boston has gathered over 40,000 signatures—enough to place the initiative on the November 6th ballot in Boston. According to Albert Rex, Executive Director of the Boston Preservation Alliance, “CPA funds would provide the first dedicated funds for preservation in the city.”

The Steeples Project: continued success

Historic Boston's Steeples Project continues to provide invaluable assistance to Boston's historic churches. The Steeples project raises and distributes money in the form of competitive matching grants to religious properties that are listed (or are eligible for listing) on the National Register of Historic Places.

As of July of this year, Historic Boston has awarded more than \$800,000 in grants to 40 churches. Nearly \$600,000 of this money has been dispersed, and the grants have leveraged *more than \$3.6 million* toward critical repairs, architectural studies and contract documents, and exterior lighting of eligible churches. More than a dozen foundations and corporations contribute money to this project, and we are seeking more supporters. The table below illustrates the distribution of these funds by Boston neighborhood.

Steeple in your neighborhood!

Neighborhood	Grant Recipients
Allston/Brighton	3
Back Bay	3
Beacon Hill	1
Charlestown	1
Dorchester	8
East Boston	1
Hyde Park	1
Jamaica Plain	3
Mission Hill	1
North End	2
Roxbury	7
South Boston	1
South End	6
West End	1
West Roxbury	1
Total	40

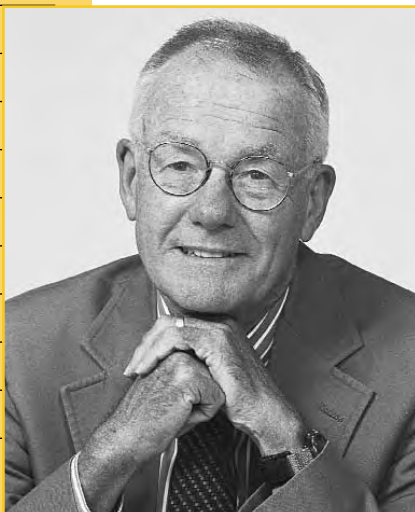
Letter from the Executive Director

Putting together our fall newsletter has afforded me an opportunity for reflection, both on Historic Boston—what we've accomplished this year, and where we hope to go from here—and more generally on preservation efforts in our city. For our part, Historic Boston has engaged in several important projects this year, including our ongoing Steeples Project and the restoration of the Alvah Kittredge row houses, about which you can read more elsewhere in this newsletter.

Widening the lens, the City of Boston also finds itself at an interesting crossroads, and a potential convergence of the worlds of preservation, affordable housing, and protection of our open spaces. Even as I write this, several community groups are trying to procure enough validated signatures from Boston voters to support the inclusion of the Community Preservation Act (CPA) on the November ballot in Boston.

This initiative would provide an unusual opportunity for three distinct constituencies to collaborate, creating a powerful force for change. It might well give Historic Boston—as well as many other preservation, housing, and open spaces groups—an important source of public funds to complement private monies. Let me illustrate what I mean.

Stanley M. Smith
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Together with members of the Conservation Law Foundation and the Massachusetts Affordable Housing Alliance, I recently paid visits to several Boston city councilors. We discussed at some length the housing crisis in Boston – a crisis exacerbated by the fact that escalating construction costs, competition for contractors, and growing pressure on real estate values in Boston make preservation and affordable housing projects increasingly difficult to undertake and finance.

As I explained during these meetings, Historic Boston has recently completed two feasibility studies focusing on endangered historical buildings identified in our 1999 planning study, published in a book and on our web site. Though we have already begun work on one of these exciting projects—the Alvah Kittredge Park row houses—raising all the money needed remains a challenge. Funds available through the CPA could conceivably complement crucial private dollars, making projects such as these more feasible. These same buildings also provide opportunities to create more affordable housing in Boston. As such, they are interesting candidates for a cooperative approach between affordable housing and preservation groups – as would be encouraged by the CPA.

So there is a chance of dramatic change in the way that housing and preservation are approached in the City of Boston. When the opportunity presents itself—whether it is this November, or at a future date—I urge you to study the arguments of both sides before voting on this important issue. At the same time, of course, we must keep in mind that though public funds would be an important source of both funding and validation for our work, it is the commitment of private individuals and groups—through time, financial backing, and other forms of support—that allows Historic Boston to pursue its crucial mission.

Stanley M. Smith
Executive Director,
Historic Boston Incorporated

About Historic Boston...

Historic Boston Incorporated is a private, non-profit organization founded in 1960 that puts people and resources together to preserve endangered historic sites in the City of Boston. It gives priority to projects which will leverage additional public and private commitments, embody thoughtful restoration standards, catalyze neighborhood renewal, and protect cultural resources.

To accomplish these objectives, Historic Boston engages in a variety of entrepreneurial activities which include buying property, making grants, providing technical assistance, lending money, building the capacity of other organizations with similar goals, and seeking new funds. Over the past 15 years, Historic Boston's revolving fund has invested \$4.6 million for 14 preservation projects, which has leveraged more than \$25 million of additional investments in Boston neighborhoods.

Historic Boston provides leadership, leverage and focus for people and organizations throughout the region who share the ideals and objectives of safeguarding America's heritage.

HBI is a charitable, non-profit organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and a private operating foundation under code Section 4942 (j)(3). Tax-deductible gifts or bequests may be sent to Historic Boston Incorporated at 3 School Street, Boston, MA 02108.

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