

## About Historic Boston...



Historic Boston Incorporated is a private, non-profit organization that puts people and resources together to preserve endangered historic sites in the city of Boston.

It gives priority to projects that 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 that include buying property, making grants, providing technical assistance, lending money, building the capacity of other organizations with similar goals, and seeking new funds.

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.

Currently, Historic Boston owns two properties: the Old Corner Bookstore Buildings, acquired in 1960, and the Hayden Building, acquired in 1993. Both of preeminent significance to Boston and the nation, threats to their future inspired Historic Boston to marshal the resources to purchase and rehabilitate them. Today they provide continuing income streams while serving as examples of the impact a proactive preservation organization can have upon a city.

*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.*

## Historic Boston Incorporated

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# HBI Insights

News From Historic Boston Incorporated • Summer 2006

## Letter from the President

This issue of HBI Insights focuses on Historic Boston's Preservation Priorities Plan. In response to changes in both the preservation movement and the dynamics of the city, Historic Boston has been re-examining how to direct our efforts most effectively. Our goal continues to be using our entrepreneurial historic preservation skills to strengthen the economic and cultural vitality of Boston's communities. As we reported in the Winter 2005-2006 HBI Insights, the Preservation Priorities Plan is the product of that exploration.

With this Plan, HBI launches a new initiative - Neighborhood Centers - that will direct HBI activity to neighborhood centers with clusters of historic resources where our efforts will have maximum catalytic effect. The Plan also refines our goals and strengthens our ongoing preservation revolving fund and trademark Steeple's Program. On behalf of Historic Boston, I commend and thank our dedicated staff and the members of our Board, Council of Advisors, and many others who participated in a series of workshops, led by facilitator Bill Nigreen, that were so important in shaping this Plan. We hope and expect that the Plan will increase our scope and effectiveness and lead to many future collaborations.

- Matthew J. Kiefer, President

Pictured above at right: HBI's first two revolving fund projects - the stone Austin Block Building (circa 1822) and the late 18th century Hurd House - were a concerted effort to revitalize a neighborhood by tackling two pivotal properties literally across Main Street from one another in Charlestown. Their success and the additional reinvestment they generated illustrate the Neighborhood Centers initiative's great potential.

Please note HBI's new seal (above) featuring the Old Corner Bookstore Buildings, the preservation and rehabilitation of which spawned our creation in 1960.

## Neighborhood Centers: The New Initiative of HBI's Preservation Priorities Plan

As our residents are fond of saying, "Boston is a city of neighborhoods." At the heart of each neighborhood is a center that was designed to serve its citizens' commercial, spiritual, financial, and entertainment needs. When healthy, these centers anchor communities by reinforcing neighborhood identity and stimulating (or deterring) investment in surrounding properties. Some of the city's centers date to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and all provide a rich physical history of the city's development.

With Boston's gradual decline in the mid-to-late twentieth century, many of these neighborhood centers fell on hard times. Boston's more recent economic resurgence has brought new investment to neighborhood centers via a combination of private investment, city programs and other government-funded projects, and the concentrated efforts of mission-driven non-profits. However, some of these centers still do not serve their neighborhoods well, and many contain a concentration of historically significant buildings that are underutilized or endangered through neglect, abandonment, or demolition for new construction that is auto-oriented or out of character with the neighborhood. A few neighborhood centers have yet to enjoy any significant reinvestment, despite the best efforts of struggling merchants associations, neighborhood groups, community development corporations, and local Main Streets programs.



To meet the myriad needs of these centers of urban life and commerce, we are launching our new Neighborhood Centers initiative, applying both familiar techniques and new ideas and resources to maximize the catalytic effect of our preservation tools on communities. We will focus on centers that contain pivotal historic structures and sites, the restoration of which will benefit the entire community. The preservation of Boston's built environment not only conserves our cultural heritage, but also improves the aesthetics of our environment and stimulates further economic and cultural development. To ensure that we are serving the needs of the communities themselves, and investing in projects that offer sustainable improvement, we will partner with successful organizations and efforts already in place locally.

HBI will bring technical skills, seed funding, and project assistance to eligible neighborhood centers to facilitate preservation projects executed by various types of property owners and developers. Our activities will include encouraging preservation-friendly rehabilitation projects; undertaking feasibility studies and/or engineering assessments; research; project management; providing guidance on regulatory compliance including building code, state and federal rehabilitation tax credits,

New Markets tax credits, demolition delay, landmark designation, and National Register listing; providing staff assistance with stabilization, emergency repair, or rehabilitation projects; providing financial assistance in the form of grants or loans; and acquiring properties directly where appropriate. By working with, through, and for other neighborhood stakeholders, we hope to leverage our own knowledge and experience and extend the impact of our resources to better accomplish our overall mission.

Another aspect of the initiative will be to help local organizations address other physical needs that stifle the redevelopment and renaissance of these historic centers. These may include traffic and parking issues, inappropriate zoning, open space and other infrastructure deficiencies. We will explore green building and other new technologies to enhance the physical and investment environment of neighborhood centers. We will strive to interpret and celebrate the more recent history of newer immigrant groups living in Boston. We will encourage historic houses of worship in these centers to apply for Steeples Project grant funding. HBI staff also will explore the use of new tools, such as combining state and federal rehabilitation tax credits for several small projects within a center so that, bundled together, they will meet the minimum investment threshold where separately they could not do so. In keeping with a comprehensive approach to achieve a maximum catalytic effect, HBI will seek multiple project opportunities within targeted neighborhood centers.

HBI's Neighborhood Centers initiative represents an expansion of our efforts into new territory. It will allow us to utilize our past experience with successful preservation tools and techniques while exploring new methods and ideas. Like HBI's Steeples Project, which took some time to develop, this initiative intends to inspire others to work with us to find innovative ways to use historic preservation as a catalyst to revitalize Boston's historic commercial centers.

– by Eric Bretkreutz

## Sharpening Our Oldest Tool: Improving HBI's Preservation Revolving Fund

As part of the Preservation Priorities Plan process, HBI examined its revolving fund activities to determine how they could be refined and enhanced to most effectively preserve Boston's historic fabric. Taking into account transformations in the understanding and use of historic preservation since the inception of the fund, HBI is looking to how it can evolve to best serve the city's changing needs. The results of this examination has led to a mandate from the board of directors that the organization move beyond an emphasis on individually threatened properties to pursue preservation projects that will affect an entire neighborhood and strengthen community fabric in a deliberate and comprehensive manner. In order to work effectively in the selected neighborhoods and communities, we will explore new avenues of collaboration and funding. We hope to seek to develop a preservation ethos in our partners and help them to acquire the corresponding skills. We will also intend to expand our program to test new technologies or theories about

restoration, urban planning, and community development. We will be open to new approaches and will strive to originate fresh ideas.

To improve and expand HBI's responses to threatened resources we will analyze the properties included in prior HBI preservation revolving fund casebooks. In cases where HBI became involved with a property, we hope to identify how our involvement affected the outcome and assess the effectiveness of the tools we used.

We will also monitor trends that threaten particular types of historic buildings in Boston. Examples include: the demolition of older structures (typically residences) to make way for denser development — often referred to as the "tear-down epidemic;" institutional crises such as church closings and government downsizing; unsympathetic treatment of historic resources by the public agencies that own them; changes in technology that lead to the obsolescence of purpose-built

congregations of all faiths. The Steeples Project offers three categories of grants, funding technical assistance projects (such as comprehensive building assessments that guide future repair work), major building envelope repairs, and design and installation of exterior lighting. Just as important as the completion of the actual projects is the knowledge HBI staff members impart to congregations to promote a long-term planning approach to building use, maintenance, and preservation.

To qualify for the program, a property must be listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places and must be an active house of worship. Congregations also must support their surrounding neighborhoods by providing social services or educational programs. The program targets historic religious properties in inner city neighborhoods. Our goal is to promote healthy neighborhoods by empowering clergy and lay leaders to become thoughtful stewards of their historic religious buildings that not only house their congregations, but that serve as important community resources.



HBI's partnership with the BRA involving the structural stabilization and exterior restoration of the rowhouses at #7 & 8 Alvah Kittredge Park (the two farthest right in these "before" and "after" pictures from 1999 and 2006) enabled the rehabilitation of these two structures by their two new owner occupants while also stimulating major private investments in the other two rowhouses.

structures; and the problems that mission-driven non-profits or community development corporations face when they undertake housing rehabs and other developments involving historic buildings.

In addition, we intend to enhance our existing historic properties database and make it available online via the HBI web site. This web-based properties database will draw attention to threatened properties, will help us build collaborative relationships, and will attract additional financial resources.

Armed with our analysis of resource types and threat pathologies of past casebook properties and HBI's responses to them, and having studied the trends affecting Boston's historic building stock, HBI will craft a systematic program of repeatable responses. This will allow us to improve the efficiency of our efforts and better manage staff and financial resources. Working with new partners and creatively applying new tools, we hope to explore all viable opportunities to help strengthen Boston's communities through historic preservation.

Since the inception of the program, the Steeples Project has awarded nearly \$1.4 million raised from 15 foundations and corporations to 51 houses of worship, mostly for major repair projects. The grants have leveraged additional investments of \$12.8 million for a total of over \$14 million spent on preservation and maintenance projects. In addition to providing fundraising guidance, training, and encouragement, our staff contributes time and expertise for basic technical assistance to grant recipients. HBI pays for all administrative and overhead costs of the program from its own operating budget, so that 100% of the funds raised from external sources go directly to grant recipients' projects.

As the new Steeples Project Director, I have spoken to many parishioners, clergy, and other religious leaders to understand how HBI can better meet the needs of these stewards of active, historic houses of worship. Many have suggested collaborations with religious governing bodies at the city-wide and regional level so as to more broadly influence building stewardship policies and increase its outreach to all faiths. Community members have encouraged us to help congregations that currently operate out of storefronts and homes transition into underutilized houses of worship. These actions will help increase the resources available for the care of these historic religious properties while also removing an impediment to the development of commercial centers — a chief concern of HBI's new Neighborhood Centers initiative.

In order to extend our outreach, we will improve upon and expand the tools and funding resources that support the Steeples Project. We will strengthen our systematic process for tracking the success of projects during the grant period and after completion. We will also maintain records on the changes that occur in the neighborhood as a result of Steeples grants awarded. Furthermore, in cooperation with our board members and long-term partners, HBI will strive to create a stable, long-term funding source for the Steeples Project by continuing to raise funds for annual grant rounds while working to establish a healthy endowment.

The Steeples Project has the potential to not only continue to positively effect the physical landscape of Boston, but also to do even more to improve the lives of the

structures; and the problems that mission-driven non-profits or community development corporations face when they undertake housing rehabs and other developments involving historic buildings.

- the historic and cultural significance of the resource;
- the urgency of the threat to the resource;
- the need for HBI's particular skills;
- the presence of willing collaborators;
- the potential catalytic effect an investment by HBI will have on the surrounding community;
- the potential for developing the preservation ethos or skills of others;
- the opportunity to work on a particular challenge that is common to many buildings or types of buildings; and
- the opportunity to address a troubling trend issue.

HBI's staff and leadership will also develop measures to periodically evaluate the effectiveness of the revolving fund's work to help ensure that this most fundamental preservation tool remains effective, efficient, and relevant to Boston's historic preservation needs.

– by Jeffery Gonyeau

people living here. Reverend Hurmon Hamilton of Roxbury Presbyterian Church once expressed an eloquent testimony about the ultimate meaning of the Steeples Project and the secret of its success:

*"The proper maintenance of the building has an impact far beyond those who come to worship. Beginning with our congregation, we can transform the inner life of the inner city. As the building begins to re-emerge, perhaps in conscious and unconscious ways it can have an impact on people who pass in front of it.*

*In this revitalization project they may gain a better sense of their own self-worth and self-esteem. They might look again with new eyes of hope and faith and go out and get their GED, get a job, enter a recovery program. Seeing an old dilapidated building fixed up speaks to the heart."*

We hear this sentiment echoed by so many others whom we come to know as we help them with their properties, and it inspires us to constantly explore new ideas so that we can continue to build a better Steeples Project for Boston and its communities.

– by Jillian Adams



Father Godderz of the Parish of All Saints, Episcopal, in Dorchester inspects the rebuilt stone bell cote on the roof of the church, which was completed with the assistance of a Steeples Project grant in 2005.

## Building a Better Steeples Project

Building upon the lessons learned from its revolving fund, in 1993 HBI created the Steeples Project, an innovative program aimed at strengthening inner-city neighborhoods by preserving historic houses of worship that have anchored them for generations. This competitive matching grant program is open to