



Preservation Priorities Plan

Since our founding in 1960, HBI has worked successfully to preserve pivotal historic buildings in Boston using a variety of preservation tools. Through the establishment early in our history of a Revolving Fund for preservation of Boston's built environment, and the later creation of the Steeples Project, our matching grant program for historic houses of worship, HBI has used historic preservation to make positive contributions to every one of the city's neighborhoods.

Over the past several years, in response to changes in leadership at HBI, the dynamics of the city, and the preservation movement more generally, HBI's directors and staff entered into a strategic planning process to examine how to redirect our efforts to maximize our effectiveness. Subsequently, HBI organized focus groups of experts from the public, private, and non-profit sectors representing not only the field of preservation, but also urban planning, community and private development, lending, and other related fields. The resulting exchange of ideas helped HBI directors and staff better understand Boston's most pressing needs and led to the creation of this Preservation Priorities Plan.

Building on HBI's Accomplishments

Historic Boston has long been a leader in thoughtful preservation. In the 1950s, wholesale demolition of entire historic neighborhoods was common, and preservation was limited primarily to "museum-quality" buildings. In 1960, several public-spirited citizens founded HBI to buy the dilapidated Old Corner Bookstore Buildings, known in the nineteenth century as the literary hub of the United States, then slated for demolition for a parking garage. The founders were motivated by their belief that these buildings could be thoughtfully re-used to preserve their heritage while claiming a place in the modern world and contributing to the city's tax rolls. After extensive rehabilitation, the buildings now house the offices of Historic Boston as well as several retail and office tenants whose rent provides revenue for HBI's bricks-and-mortar-oriented activities.

In 1979, when many historic buildings and neighborhoods were threatened by neglect, demolition, or arson, Historic Boston built upon its philosophy of historic preservation as an economic regenerator by becoming a city-wide Historic Preservation Revolving Fund to complement the planning and regulatory functions of the Boston Landmarks Commission. Historic Boston planned to acquire and then rehabilitate buildings of architectural, cultural or historical value to the city for new, economically viable uses and sell the improved structures, revolving the proceeds into the next project. The Revolving Fund provides a flexible source of funding that allows us to serve, in essence, as a non-profit redeveloper of historic properties throughout the city. Following the model of the Old Corner Bookstore Buildings, the ultimate goal of the Revolving Fund was to enable economically viable new uses for underutilized historic buildings that would stimulate similar investment throughout entire neighborhoods.

HBI developed project selection criteria for potential Revolving Fund projects. Buildings and sites targeted for investment had to qualify for designation as a Boston Landmark or for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Buildings also had to be underutilized or threatened by physical deterioration, whether attributable to bureaucratic imbroglios or owners who were unwilling



The Old Corner Bookstore Buildings circa 1960 (left) and today.

or unable to act constructively. Perhaps most importantly, Historic Boston considered whether the building or site was pivotal to the community such that its preservation might lead to a turn-around in a transitional neighborhood.

An early example of this approach was Historic Boston's investment in Charlestown in the early 1980s. At a time when Charlestown suffered from disinvestment, HBI rehabilitated two historic properties that it considered pivotal – the Hurd House and the Austin Block. The creative use of feasibility studies, grant funding, loans, and tax credits enabled the rehabilitation and preservation of both buildings. This represented one of the earliest investments in historic preservation in that neighborhood and helped encourage the investment and homeownership that transformed Charlestown into the thriving community it has since become.

HBI also funded and supported similar projects in Roxbury, such as the Cedar Street Marble Row Houses (in conjunction with Urban Edge CDC), the Alvah Kittredge Park Rowhouses (in cooperation with the Boston Redevelopment Authority), and the Spooner-Lambert House. These projects provided home ownership opportunities for people of low to moderate income and served as important models for combining affordable housing and historic preservation.

To guide this investment, HBI began in 1980 to systematically study endangered properties throughout Boston, which led to the publication of three Preservation Revolving Fund casebooks. The casebooks provided the planning context for future investments and offered factual and pictorial references to encourage investment in these resources by other organizations and individuals as well as by HBI.

Unlike many locally-oriented preservation organizations, Historic Boston does not focus on advocacy. Instead, it complements the advocacy work of the Boston Preservation Alliance and others to help address crises and tackle important issues. This separation of physical redevelopment from advocacy has allowed HBI to concentrate on its Revolving Fund operations. Notable among the nation's 28 revolving funds, HBI has honed the use of feasibility studies to guide the selection of its own projects and to stimulate development of historic properties by others. Like other revolving funds, it has placed preservation easements on the properties it has "revolved" to insure their continued value to their communities.

Unlike most revolving funds, however, HBI has retained two of its completed rehab projects, the Old Corner Bookstore Buildings and H. H. Richardson's Hayden Building in Chinatown, as long-term investment properties that generate income while serving as collateral for loans needed to complete further Revolving Fund projects. Finally, HBI has capitalized on the successful management of its Revolving Fund projects and has been able to offer its project management services *pro bono* or on a reduced fee-for-services basis to help other non-profit developers and organizations complete restoration and rehabilitation projects.

Building on the lessons learned from its Revolving Fund, in 1993 Historic Boston created the Steeple 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 congregations of all faiths. It funds technical assistance (such as comprehensive building assessments that guide future repair work), major building envelope repairs, and exterior lighting, and promotes 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 critical social services and education programs.



A group of Harvard University Loeb Fellows reviewed HBI's past initiatives and toured project sites with HBI board members and staff. This was one of five focus groups that guided the development of the Preservation Priorities Plan.



HBI's purchase and rehabilitation of the H. H. Richardson designed Hayden Building, pictured above before and after our work, helped Chinatown businesses replace adult entertainment uses in the area formerly known as "The Combat Zone."

The Preservation Priorities Plan: Background and Purpose

Recent years have brought new leadership to HBI's board and staff. Building on four-and-a-half decades of preservation leadership and accomplishment, and twenty-five years as a highly successful Revolving Fund, HBI's new leaders have made a priority of adapting our Revolving Fund to changes in the preservation movement and the dynamics of the city in order to remain effective in our mission. We embarked on a strategic planning process with the resulting plan calling for increasing HBI's capacity to meet new preservation challenges, expanding on our role as a thought-leader and innovator in the field of historic preservation, and enhancing or building collaborative relationships with others. The board and staff, with guidance from HBI's newly convened Council of Advisors, next turned to the creation of a Preservation Priorities Plan (PPP) to serve as the road map to accomplishing the strategic plan's mandates.

The goals of the PPP are to:

- guide decision-making about projects in which to invest;
- help make the case to funders for HBI's preservation priorities;
- increase appreciation among non-preservationists for the city's built heritage; and
- serve as a model to similar organizations in other cities.

HBI determined at the outset to address systemic preservation needs within areas of programmatic focus similar to HBI's successful Steeples Project. We held a series of workshops involving preservationists, planners, public officials, funders, and for-profit and non-profit developers to help us assess the current state of preservation in the city and to match the greatest preservation need with our particular tools and resources. Historic Neighborhood Centers emerged from these workshops as the area of greatest need and the best opportunity for Historic Boston to make a difference in Boston. While the Strategic Plan and Preservation Priorities Plan direct HBI to improve and expand our existing programs, the Preservation Revolving Fund and the Steeples Project, our most challenging mandate from the PPP is the creation of the new Historic Neighborhood Centers program.

Since its inception, the Steeples Project has awarded over \$1.4 million raised from 15 corporations and foundations to 53 houses of worship located throughout Boston's diverse neighborhoods. The grants have leveraged additional investments of over \$13 million for a total of almost \$15 million spent on preservation and maintenance projects, with the majority of investment involving major repair projects. HBI staff members provide technical assistance, project management training, and fundraising guidance to all grant recipients. Grant recipients have found that this staff expertise is of inestimable value, significantly contributing to the success of their projects. Notably, Historic Boston pays for all administrative, overhead, and program-related costs from our own operating budget, so that 100% of the funds raised from external sources go directly to grant recipients for their projects.

The goal of the Steeples Project has been to promote healthy neighborhoods by empowering congregations to become thoughtful stewards of their buildings that serve as such vital community resources. The program's success has taught us the power of a sustained thematic focus.

In short, Historic Boston has invested in many projects throughout Boston with goals ranging from preservation of historic commercial structures for reuse by new commercial ventures to creation of affordable housing. HBI has partnered frequently with other organizations from the public, private, and non-profit sectors, and has given priority to projects that protect important cultural resources, leverage additional public and private commitments, embody thoughtful restoration standards, and catalyze neighborhood renewal.

Refining and Enhancing the Revolving Fund and Steeples Project

In expanding and improving our Revolving Fund, HBI seeks to move beyond an emphasis on individual threatened properties to pursue wider opportunities to use the preservation of important cultural resources to strengthen communities. HBI will continue to use its Revolving Fund tools and resources to rehabilitate endangered historic structures and sites throughout the city. We will improve and expand the organization's responses to threatened resources by analyzing the outcomes of properties identified as endangered to discover recurring resource types and pathologies. HBI will develop systematic responses, so that we can improve our efficiency by better managing our human and financial resources. In addition, we will expand and make available online our historic properties database. This web-based database will draw additional attention to threatened properties and attract additional resources.

HBI will monitor trends that threaten particular building types in Boston. Examples include the demolition of older structures to make way for denser development (the "tear-down epidemic"), institutional crises such as church closings and government downsizing, unsympathetic treatment by public agencies of the historic resources they own, changes in technology that lead to a purpose-built structure's obsolescence, and the problems that mission-driven non-profits or CDCs face when they undertake housing rehabs or other redevelopments of historic buildings. Having identified and explored these trends, HBI will craft systematic responses. In doing so, we will explore all viable opportunities to help strengthen communities in Boston.

HBI will explore new methods of collaboration and funding, and will work to expand the capacity of others to include historic preservation in their methods of operation. We will incorporate new technologies, and test new theories about preservation in the context of urban planning and community development. We will be open to and originate fresh ideas and approaches.

An examination of the Steeples Project confirmed that the program is successfully meeting its objectives. Restoring significant religious architecture conserves our cultural heritage, improves the aesthetics and safety of the neighborhood, helps spawn reinvestment in surrounding properties, and allows congregations to continue to host critical social and educational programs in their buildings.



In cooperation with Roslindale Village Main Street, HBI prepared a feasibility study on the preservation and reuse of this 1911 MBTA Substation, a pivotal Roslindale Village structure.



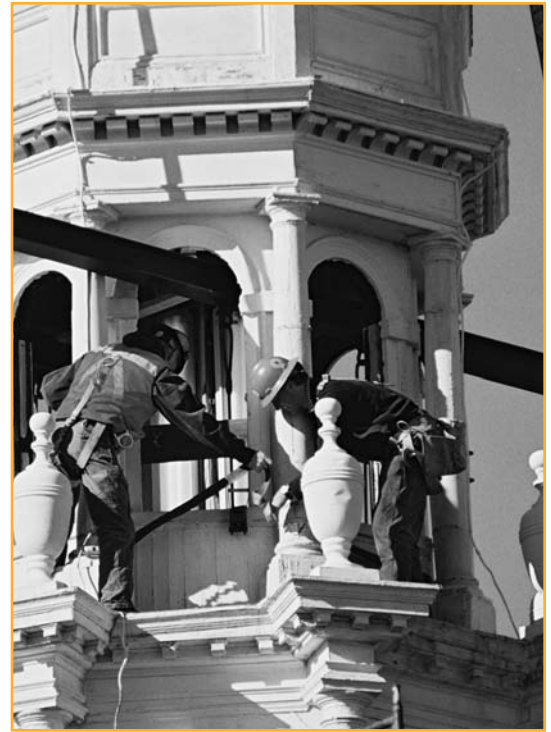
HBI partnered with the Boston Redevelopment Authority to complete the exterior rehabilitation of these once derelict rowhouses in Roxbury's Fort Hill neighborhood. They are now owner-occupied housing.



The Federal Period Fowler-Clark Farm in Mattapan was threatened with demolition, but an HBI-funded engineering study proved it was structurally sound and provided support for the Boston Landmarks Commission to landmark the property.



The Calf Pasture Pumping Station on Columbia Point in Dorchester was recently transferred to UMass, Boston. HBI received a grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation to study feasible re-uses for this Romanesque Revival building that will serve the University and the surrounding community.



The Steeples Project will remain a significant source of seed funding for technical assistance, façade lighting, and major repairs to Boston's historic houses of worship, such as the dramatic project pictured here at First Parish Church in Dorchester.

Heartened by the finding that the program has functioned much as intended, HBI will strive to build upon its successes. We will seek opportunities to collaborate with religious governing bodies at city, state, and regional levels to more widely influence building stewardship policies and to increase our outreach to congregations of all faiths. We will encourage congregations worshipping in storefront churches and homes to move into underutilized historic houses of worship. This will increase the resources available for the care of these properties, will remove an impediment to the development of commercial centers, and will generate new contacts and friendships between congregations.

We will continue to expand our training program of workshops and networking events. Many of these sessions are now open not only to current grant recipients, but also past and prospective participants and even congregations outside of Boston. As with our Revolving Fund and threat response projects, we will improve our analytical tools. We will develop new data collection and interpretation mechanisms so as to better measure our success and improve the program. Finally, we will work with HBI's Board of Directors and Council of Advisors to create stable, long-term funding for the program while continuing to raise funds annually for granting purposes.

Building on our Successes: The Historic Neighborhood Centers Initiative

As our residents are fond of saying, "Boston is a city of neighborhoods." At the heart of each neighborhood is a corner, square, or center designed to serve its citizens' commercial, social, spiritual, and financial needs. Yet many of Boston's neighborhood centers have not recovered from the economic downturn and resulting disinvestment of the mid-to-late twentieth century. Throughout our strategic and preservation priorities planning processes these opportunities and challenges came to the forefront again and again. HBI staff, Board of Directors, and Council of Advisors assessed Historic Boston's skills and resources and selected Historic Neighborhood Centers as HBI's new thematic area of focus.

In the coming year, we will launch the Historic Neighborhood Centers program and will begin to apply our experience using historic preservation as an economic revitalization tool to selected neighborhood commercial centers. Collaborating with local organizations and individuals, we intend to invest our resources to help build neighborhood cohesiveness and identity, improving the quality of life and strengthening community in these centers.

For more information on this program, please see our accompanying publication, *Historic Neighborhood Centers: An Initiative of Historic Boston Incorporated*.

Conclusion

Historic Boston's Preservation Priorities Plan provides a roadmap both for the improvement of proven programs and for expansion into new territory with the development of the new Historic Neighborhood Centers program. The plan allows us to capitalize on our experience with successful preservation tools and techniques and to explore new methods and ideas to aid in the revitalization of Boston's neighborhoods that remain in transition. HBI hopes that this plan will inspire others to work with us to find innovative ways to use historic preservation as a catalyst to improve the urban environment, preserve our city's heritage, stimulate economic and cultural development, and ultimately build stronger neighborhoods.

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Through an expanded program of seminars and workshops, HBI will educate a wider audience of religious property owners about effective building stewardship and fundraising techniques while creating an interfaith support network for congregations with historic houses of worship.

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