



William Francis Galvin
Secretary of the Commonwealth

Contact: Brian McNiff
Telephone: 617-727-9180

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COMMISSION TABLES PARK SQUARE-STUART ST. HISTORIC DISTRICT

The Massachusetts Historical Commission decided to take no action on the proposed nomination of the Park Square-Stuart Street Historic District in Boston to the National Register of Historic Places at its December 12, 2007 meeting. Approved nominations are submitted to the National Register of Historic Places at the National Park Service in Washington, DC, for final consideration and designation.

The proposed Park Square-Stuart Street Historic District, Boston, encompasses 41 historic resources that illustrate the development of this business and institutional area from ca. 1868 to 1956, with the latest contributing building completed in 1976. The district is significant for its associations with the evolution of transportation patterns in and around Boston over the course of a century, particularly as those changes affected the area bound by the largely residential neighborhoods of Bay Village, the South End, and the Back Bay. Most of the district's late 19th-century buildings are associated with transportation or light-industrial uses established in the vicinity of the 16-acre Boston & Providence Railroad yard, which encompassed much of the district area and featured a passenger depot (demolished) fronting Park Square. The proposed district has further significance as an early 20th-century extension of Boston's downtown business district, when relocation of the railroad terminus in 1900 and subsequent redevelopment of the railroad property led to the construction of Stuart Street and adjacent business and institutional buildings. Several buildings within the proposed area were constructed as corporate headquarters, including three consecutive buildings constructed for the John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Company. The company's two signature tower buildings, completed in 1949 and 1976, respectively, have been major character-defining features of the Boston skyline for several decades. For the importance of the tower completed in 1976, the proposed district also is of exceptional significance to the City of Boston. Most of the proposed district's buildings were designed by prominent architecture firms from Boston, New York, or Chicago. In its architecture and the relationship of contributing resources to one another and to the street pattern, the proposed district is a well-preserved, physically distinguishable entity holding historical associations with the development of downtown Boston and its economic base over more than a century.

At the time of the December 12 meeting, MHC staff reported having received 44 objections to the nomination out of approximately 75 property owners, which represents 58% of the areas owners. Because a majority of owners objected, the district cannot be listed in the National Register of Historic Places by the Keeper of the National Register. In view of the objections from the majority of property owners, the State Review Board of the Massachusetts Historical Commission voted unanimously to table the nomination indefinitely.

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The National Register is the nation's official listing of significant cultural resources. In Massachusetts, there are over 65,000 properties listed in the National Register. The Massachusetts Historical Commission has been administering the National Register of Historic Places program in Massachusetts since 1966. Among the benefits of listing, owners of historic income-producing properties may be eligible for state and federal investment tax credits for substantial rehabilitation of those properties. Because a majority of owners have objected to listing, property owners in the proposed district will not be eligible for these incentive programs. Listing in the National Register also provides limited protection from federally assisted actions. If, in the future, property owners in the area choose to lift their objections, it would be possible for the nomination process to begin anew, provided that the area continued to meet the qualifications for listing in the National Register.

Secretary of the Commonwealth William Francis Galvin serves as Chairman of the 17-member board, which meets regularly and considers historic resources eligible for the National Register four times a year. The Massachusetts Historical Commission is the office of the State Historic Preservation Officer and the State Archaeologist. It was established in 1963 to identify, evaluate, and protect important historical and archaeological assets of the Commonwealth. Visit our website to learn more about the Commission's programs (www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc).

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