

From: National Architectural Trust

Rubenstein Communications, Inc.
Public Relations
Contact: Bud Perrone (212) 843-8068

**NATIONAL ARCHITECTURAL TRUST SPEARHEADS EFFORT TO
UPDATE BEACON HILL NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK DESIGNATION**

*Process Is Designed to Expand Benefits for Owners in District While Creating
Updated Inventory of all Structures Contained within the Beacon Hill Historic District*

Boston, MA, May 8, 2006 – The National Architectural Trust (NAT), a non-profit organization dedicated to the voluntary preservation of the country's architectural heritage, has announced plans to submit, in late May, a detailed study and application to the National Park Service to revise the definition of the Beacon Hill National Historic Landmark to include architecturally-significant structures built or altered between 1920 and 1955.

In its drive to update the Beacon Hill National Historic Landmark designation report, the National Architectural Trust contracted with Boston Affiliates, Inc., a local historic preservation consulting firm. In this project, Boston Affiliates led by President Pauline Chase-Harrell, a former Boston Landmarks Commission Chairwoman; is working with Edward W. Gordon, another independent architectural historian who has carried out extensive studies of the architecture of the North and South Slopes for the Boston Landmarks Commission. The project was initiated with the guidance and support of the Massachusetts Historical Commission.

“The National Architectural Trust took on this project in part because we feel it is important to more accurately and completely define the architectural history of Beacon Hill,” said NAT representative in Boston, Mr. Mory Bahar. “In addition, by updating the historic district to include more contributing structures, we can assist local residents who, by virtue of residing in a local historic district, must bear the costs of preservation, but who, by virtue of owning property not designated contributing at the federal level, cannot take advantage of all the governmental tools created to assist the guardians of historic properties. Perhaps as much as 10-15% of the property owners are currently left out of these government historic preservation and financial incentive programs.”

Beacon Hill, the first local historic district to be created outside the South, was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1966. At the time, it was listed as a well-preserved “Early republic or Federal period urban area,” and only structures built by 1835 were considered as contributing to the historic district. In the 1980s, the period of significance was extended to 1920 to include the Victorian, Colonial Revival and Neo-Federal styles, allowing buildings such as the Lincolnshire Hotel and Charles River Square to be designated as contributing to the district. In addition, with the growing understanding of the significant role the African American Meeting House and the black community around it had played in the Abolition movement, this, too, was recognized as a significant aspect of the district.

The update process consists of numerous activities, which include visually inspecting the historic neighborhood and hundreds of individual properties, researching the background and current condition of representative properties, and providing greater detail about the district's development than the earlier documents. The focus of this process and research is to further study those properties that were excluded from the list of properties recognized as contributing to the national historic landmark district and to identify and evaluate those that were constructed or altered between 1920 and 1955, when the local historic district was created.

“Recent studies, including our ongoing inventory, have shown that the Hill’s architectural heritage is far richer and more complex than previously understood,” said Ms. Chase-Harrell. “The twenty-five properties that were specifically excluded from the list of contributing properties include rather obviously modern structures such as 145 Pinckney. However, many properties that were not specifically excluded are in fact considered non-contributing due to their construction or alteration after the 1920 cut-off date. Based on our initial results, we believe that a significant number of properties built or altered in the 1920 to 1955 timeframe merit serious consideration as contributing to the historic significance of the neighborhood.”

Some examples of properties that were built or altered between 1920 and 1955 but deserve consideration as contributing to the historic district are: 21 Brimmer Street; 50, 56, 60 and 97 Mt. Vernon Street; and 43A Joy Street.

“Updating the district designation to include the contribution of these types of significant structures will solve some problems for many property owners,” said Mr. Gordon. “Since all buildings within the boundaries of the district that are visible from a public way come under review by the Beacon Hill Architectural Commission regardless of their status in the national historic landmark district, no additional restrictions will result; however, additional benefits available to contributing buildings will be gained, such as tax incentives for rehabilitation of commercial buildings or for donation of historic preservation easements.”

The National Architectural Trust expects to have its study completed and submitted by Boston Affiliates to the National Park Service in Washington in late May. Following staff review and recommendations, it will be sent to the National Historic Landmark Advisory Board. A final decision on the application could come as early as the Board’s fall meeting in November.

NAT invites and welcomes comments and feedback from Beacon Hill residents on this project. Please forward your comments to Mory Bahar at mbahar@natarchtrust.org (or call 978-352-5615), or Polly Harrell at BostonAffiliates@verizon.net.

The National Architectural Trust is a non-profit organization dedicated to the voluntary preservation of the country's architectural heritage.

Boston Affiliates, Inc. is a Boston-based historic preservation consulting firm.

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