

# Heritage Society of Austin

## *51<sup>st</sup> Annual Preservation Awards Celebration*



**Thomas M. Menino**  
Mayor of Boston

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**Remarks to Heritage Society of Austin's**  
**Preservation Awards Celebration**  
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Thank you, **Mayor Leffingwell**. It's great to be in Austin – a beautiful and creative city. Thank you for your leadership and for such a warm welcome.

I also want to thank John Rosato, the President of the Heritage Society of Austin, all the board members, and Executive Director Jacqui Schraad.

I look around Austin and see so many reminders of Boston. A great university. A historic capitol. A beautiful river filled with rowers and paths dotted with joggers. A growing population. A youthful spirit. A vibrant cultural and arts scene. All of these things – combined with that famous Southern Hospitality – have me feeling right at home.

So, I'm proud to be down here to discuss a subject about which I care deeply— historic preservation. At the same time, we gather at a time of deep anxiety for people across the country. Too many people are unemployed. Economic inequality is out of control. And our country's economic growth remains sluggish. How do these two issues relate to one another? I am here to say you don't have to choose between historical preservation and economic development. We can preserve the historical character of our cities AND our status as economic engines at the same time. **Historic preservation does not inhibit economic development – it ignites it.**

Boston comes at this from a position of strength.

- We are ranked the 6<sup>th</sup> most economically powerful city in the world, according to an index created by Richard Florida and Atlantic Magazine.
- Boston had the fastest growing economy of any city in the country last year, and job growth in metro Boston (2.1%) is outpacing both the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (1.5%) and the nation (1.1%).

- We are home to the largest private development project anywhere in the country – Vertex Pharmaceuticals’ new headquarters on our waterfront.
- 5 thousand units of housing have been proposed or have started construction in Boston since the start of the year.
- Our city’s office space added 1.2 million square feet of occupancy over the first three quarters of the year.
- And hotel revenues are up 5.3 percent compared to last year.

All of this growth is great, but it has to be planned carefully. I believe people want to live in places that are unique, so we have insisted that Boston not grow into “Anywhere America.” We have worked hard to keep Boston a special city. We have put neighborhoods at the center of our work because we know that strong neighborhoods make a strong city. We have made blending the old and the new a priority. We have focused on adaptive reuse. We have engaged the community. And we have achieved great results – both in preserving our past and growing for the future.

Today, I want to share three examples of how historical preservation is helping Boston grow.

Let me start with our local business districts, which begins with **Boston Main Streets**, because that really was my introduction to historic preservation. The story of Main Streets began about 25 years ago when I was a City Councilor representing the neighborhoods of Roslindale and Hyde Park, which is where I grew up and still live today. At that time, Roslindale Square was in trouble. Over 20 arson fires had destroyed several businesses. Seeing the neighborhood I loved in such rough shape really bothered me. So I looked for ways to revitalize that business community.

I wanted a comprehensive solution, not just an easy fix. And in my search for an answer I discovered the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and that's where Main Streets came in to play. Previously, Main Streets was thought of as a solution for small-town America. But in the 1980's, the National Trust was looking to adapt the program for cities. We joined forces with

residents and the private sector – and together, we began to turn our neighborhood business district around.

We had to change the perception that people had of the business district. Who wants to shop at a business with unsightly grates over its storefronts and graffiti on the walls? I wanted to make the image of the district more welcoming. So in Boston, when you receive money from our program, you are not allowed to use those awful metal grates.

In the first three years of the program, 29 new businesses opened, 132 new jobs were created, there were 128 renovation projects, and over 5 million dollars was invested in Roslindale. Today, Roslindale is one of the most vibrant areas in Boston and exciting new businesses continue to open there. Roslindale Square is now home to a thriving farmer's market, great local shops, popular restaurants, and more.

When I became Mayor in 1993, I pledged to build on our success in Roslindale and bring Main Streets to other parts of the City of Boston. I am proud to say that Boston Main Streets

was the first multi-district urban program in the country. Today, Boston has 20 Main Streets districts. They are the heart and soul of our neighborhoods. They provide business opportunities for new immigrants and young entrepreneurs, and serve as a hub of activity for residents and visitors alike.

Last year, over 16 hundred businesses received financial or technical assistance from Main Streets; over 550 jobs were created; 120 new businesses opened; and, 95 percent of Boston Main Streets district storefronts are occupied.

The second example I want to talk about is our **downtown theatres**, especially the redevelopment of the Opera House, the Modern Theater and the Paramount Theater on lower Washington Street in downtown Boston. I know you also have worked on revitalizing your theatres in Austin, including your own Paramount, so I think you can relate to our work in Boston.

All three Boston theaters opened in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century and were hubs of activity that sadly fell into disrepair. In 1995, I listed them on the National Trust for Historic Preservation's

Most Endangered List. And we brought the different stakeholders – from local arts groups and the preservation community to developers and institutions – together to turn these theatres around.

While the revitalization of each theatre was different, all three shared a common theme: teamwork. We had true partners in preservation. With the Opera House, we worked with the private sector. With the Paramount and Modern we partnered with two universities, Suffolk University and Emerson College respectively. It wasn't easy. And it didn't happen overnight. Some people doubted us and wondered why we would put such effort into these theaters. But we got it done and the results are spectacular.

The Opera House reopened in 2004. It is a 3 thousand seat theater home to the Boston Ballet and hosts many national touring productions.

The new Emerson College Paramount Center opened in January 2010. In addition to performing arts space, the Paramount

provides housing for 260 students, classrooms, faculty offices, a sound stage, a black box theatre, and a film screening room. The place is so spectacular I had my 2010 Inauguration Day party there.

And just over a year ago, we opened up the Modern Theatre. Suffolk University rebuilt the Modern façade and added a new performance space and a new dorm. I was proud that all of this progress was recognized with an honor award at last month's National Preservation Conference in Buffalo, NY. I was pleased to accept the award on behalf of everyone who worked so hard to revitalize those theaters.

All of these theaters created much needed construction jobs and have triggered even more economic growth in the area. In the past month, two residential towers have broken ground in the neighborhood that will bring 550 units of housing to our downtown and are creating over 850 construction jobs. And 50 new businesses have opened up in the area in the last two years, including new restaurants and shops. So the impact of our historic theatres will continue to be felt for years to come.

You can't just focus your preservation work downtown, however. This leads me to my final example. In Boston, we believe that strong neighborhoods are the foundation for a strong city. **So we are taking our historic preservation work to our neighborhoods** – from Washington Street in the South End to the Golden Building in Dorchester's Fields Corner to the Everett Square Theatre in Hyde Park. But there is one neighborhood in particular that I would like to focus on: Dudley Square.

Dudley Square lies in the heart of our Roxbury neighborhood and is the heart of the black community in Boston. If you talk to grandmothers who grew up in Dudley Square, they will recall a bustling center of city life. Their children, however, had a different experience growing up in Dudley. Businesses were leaving, but hope remained. Kids growing up in Dudley Square today have seen much progress, thanks to both public and private investment. In fact, Historic Boston Inc. recently opened their brand new headquarters in the 1859 Eustis Street Fire House, the oldest remaining fire house structure in Boston.

But there remains work to be done. And that work centers on the former Ferdinand's furniture building, which is located in the heart of the Dudley Station Historic District. The Ferdinand's Building is a rare surviving example of a late 19th century department store.

In 2004, I promised to fulfill a commitment that our State government – under the previous administration – had dropped: to bring more people and economic life to historic Dudley Square. Then, in 2006 we acquired the Ferdinand's site with the intention of building a sustainable centerpiece in the square and bringing city workers there, as patrons and partners. We held a design competition and received many good proposals. But then, the economy threw a wrench in our plans. However, we didn't give up. We managed the city through the crisis and we came up with a plan to get the job done.

Here's how we are doing it. We will utilize a new public-private development structure to construct a new office building for our school department at the Ferdinand site. The City is investing 115 million dollars to construct this building and we will work with a private sector partner to help us with retail

leasing and property management. We are preserving the façade of the building, and the facility will feature modern, highly efficient office layouts that will have collaborative workspaces to foster more efficient organization and improve service delivery to Boston Public Schools families.

We will break ground in March and 4 hundred City employees will call this building home – a real boon for Dudley’s small businesses. With our investment, we will unlock the potential at the Ferdinand, and it will be the catalyst for Dudley redevelopment. And by working together, and getting other businesses to take a new look at Dudley, we will help the Square reach its full potential.

Let me make one final point before finishing up. While we were able to plan these projects and generate resources locally, in many cases – especially for neighborhood projects – we utilized a range of federal incentives like preservation tax credits and Community Development Block Grants to help move these projects forward.

I know we need to reduce the federal deficit, but we also have to grow our economy. So let's not cut things that produce economic development and jobs. Preservation generates revenues from economic activity. I ask all of you to organize and get the word out so Washington knows what matters to America's cities.

Whether it's in our local businesses districts, at our downtown theatres, or in our neighborhoods, historic preservation is a springboard – not a roadblock – to economic growth. This has been true in Boston and I believe it can be true in Austin and many other great cities. Once again, I thank you for inviting me today. Now, I'd be happy to take a few questions.