



The Landmark Building  
34 Main Street Ext. Suite 401  
Plymouth, MA 02360  
617-723-3383

April 2, 2018

Waltham City Council  
City Hall  
610 Main Street  
Waltham, MA 02452

RE: Impact of Proposed School Site on Stonehurst, the Robert Treat Paine Estate.

Dear City Councilors,

I write on behalf of Preservation Massachusetts regarding the Waltham School Committee's selection of a new school site and the impact of this decision on the Stonehurst Estate and surrounding protected lands. We hope that this letter can be included as part of the public comments on this important matter.

Preservation Massachusetts (PM) is the statewide non-profit historic preservation organization dedicated to preserving the Commonwealth's historic and cultural heritage. Established in 1985, PM is supported entirely by members and concerned citizens. The organization works in partnership with national, state and local preservation organizations and individuals across the Commonwealth to promote the preservation of historic buildings and landscapes as a positive force for economic development and the retention of community character.

Our concerns lie not only with the effect this land taking would have on a National Historical Landmark, of which the City has been a tremendous steward, as well as the precedent setting impact the taking would have on conservation restrictions put in place to protect important environmental and historical landscapes in Massachusetts. The proposal as we understand it, would take at least 13 acres of protected Storer Conservation Lands, part of the overall Stonehurst Estate, to use as the site for a new high school while there is at least one other viable site in the City.

A National Historic Landmark designation honors historically significant places that possess exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting the heritage of the United States. It is one of the highest historic recognitions the United States Government gives and just over 2,500 places in the entire country can claim this distinction. The history of the Paine family, their ties to the community and the creation of their Stonehurst Estate clearly demonstrates why this site is so important, not just to Waltham and Massachusetts, but the entire country. Iconic names like Frederick Law Olmsted, H. H. Richardson, and Charles Eliot have left



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their mark not just on the Stonehurst buildings, but on the surrounding landscape. One could argue that their legacies to architecture, design, conservation, landscape design and environment is embodied within the entire estate site, of which we know the City must be proud.

The site embodies a remarkable combination of historic preservation and environmental conservation, which made it the perfect site for the signing of the Community Preservation Act into law in 2000. CPA has become one of the best tools for historic preservation and conservation efforts in our state. Preservation Massachusetts was one of the founding organizations for CPA and attended that signing.

The taking of this conservation land would negatively impact a National Historic Landmark and would undo years of stewardship and protection of this site by the City of Waltham. Conservation restrictions are made to protect land and environment in perpetuity. By undoing this restriction, the City is sending a clear message to the community and the rest of the state that, even the best tools we have, it is not enough to protect important community resources. It also signals cultural, environmental and historical resources are not assets to celebrate, learn from and cherish and expresses a lack of willingness to follow the promise to steward this land, its buildings and resources for this and future generations.

The potential statewide impact of this proposal is very real. Communities may see the taking of conservation land or historic buildings previously deemed protected as viable opportunities for development or new construction. As development pressure continues to be intense in many Massachusetts communities, protections such as conservation and deed restrictions are incredibly important to maintaining our environment, open spaces, parks and our connection to nature, especially as we face the impacts of climate changes.

The taking of Waltham's only official conservation land and building a new school on it is an irreversible act, and one that goes against the very wishes of the Paine family heirs and the ethos of preservation and community. We understand and fully support the best possible educational facilities for our children in all communities, but we strongly encourage the Waltham School Committee to consider different sites in the community.

In support of the Friends of Stonehurst and several our fellow preservation and land conservation organizations, we strongly ask you not to proceed with the undoing of years of protections and good stewardship with this proposed land taking. Instead we urge you to re-consider and if necessary re-engage with negotiations for the other sites initially proposed. The effects of this decision not only impact Waltham alone. As Waltham has been such a good steward of this important site for many years, we ask that you not discount the historic integrity of the entire



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Paine Estate, its national significance and its benefits to the residents and community of Waltham.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our commentary on this important preservation and conservation issue. If our organization can be of any assistance to the City Council, Mayor or residents of Waltham, please contact our office at any time.

Sincerely,

James W. Igoe  
President

cc:

Jeanette A. McCarthy, Mayor  
William Durkee, CPA Program Manager  
Mort Issacson, Vice Chair, Historical Commission  
Brona Simon, State Historic Preservation Officer  
Stuart Saginor, Community Preservation Coalition  
Friends of Stonehurst  
New England Chapter, Society of Architectural Historians  
The Trustees  
Mass Audubon  
Mass Land Coalition  
Trust for Public Land