



August 31, 2023

City of Portland  
Historic Preservation Board  
c/o Evan Schueckler  
Historic Preservation Program Manager  
389 Congress Street  
Portland, ME 04101

Dear Historic Preservation Board,

Please accept this letter as an application for the Portland Museum of Art, Portland, Maine, to request that the Historic Preservation Board of the City of Portland re-classify the 142 Free Street property, currently a "contributing structure," to be "non-contributing" on the basis that the building never should have been classified as contributing in 2009 and 2020. Please review the History of 142 Free Street report prepared by Margaret Gaertner, Historic Building Consultant, for the details on the history of this property as well as the memo attached analyzing the existing designation position.

**Throughout its lifetime, 142 Free Street has been significantly altered, and is now virtually unrecognizable when compared to previous iterations of the building. As a result, and after much diligence and research, we have come to believe it does not contribute to the district historically, nor does it support our city's innovative vision for the future. When considered for its role in the Congress Street Historic District, and as part of the PMA's historic campus, 142 Free Street does not carry the same historical stature, architectural consistency, or community significance that the District's or the museum's other properties do.**

In the case of a nominated historic district, the Historic Preservation Board shall also determine whether there is an interrelationship of resources within it that creates an identifiable entity, even if composed of a wide variety of resources. A district must convey a visual sense of the overall historic environment or be a grouping of historically or functionally related properties. To be clear, we believe:

- 142 Free Street should not be designated a contributing structure and doing so diminishes the credibility of the designation.
- Our values and interests are absolutely aligned with the city's and are in the best interests of its citizens, visitors, and future.
- The PMA has a long history of stewardship and preservation of historic buildings, understands their significance, and has a legacy of architecturally significant contributions to our community.

After World War II, Portland's leaders looked to urban renewal to draw businesses and development into the city. A series of "slum-clearing" and redevelopment projects demolished entire blocks to make room for widened streets and new buildings that would accommodate an automobile-focused culture. To this day, many of these blocks, including much of Free Street,

remain vacant and await redevelopment. Implementation is *long* overdue. We have completed a thorough search to identify a design team with a bold vision that is appropriate for Portland, Maine, and the 142 Free Street site. With your support, we stand ready to create a new landmark for Portland.

**The City of Portland is driven by a vision of “six interconnected themes,” set forth in *Portland’s Plan 2030*, of equity, connection, sustainability, dynamism, authenticity, security, and connectivity. The PMA is driven by the values of courage, equity, service, trust and sustainability, activating our *Art for All* mission. Together, with our communities we can create a landmark building that exemplifies these shared values and goals, communicating to anyone who visits that all are welcome in Portland, Maine. To do this, we must have the flexibility to develop our campus responsibly, with courage and care.**

The Portland Museum of Art was founded 140 years ago by artists living here in Maine. It grew quickly, as community members donated their time, energy, and passion for the arts, enabling the PMA to establish a downtown Portland campus. For the next 100 years, that campus grew to include the McLellan House, LDM Sweat galleries, and the Clapp House. As art from donors throughout our communities began filling up the walls and spaces within the museum, our communities came together again in the late 1970s for what was, at the time, the largest major expansion in PMA history.

That expansion, a courageous and iconic design of the Charles Shipman Payson building by Harry Cobb of the I. M. Pei & Partners firm, was a result of collection growth, campus limitations, and community support. In the more than 40 years since construction began, the Payson building has anchored the dynamic and world-renowned arts district of Portland, Maine, and enabled millions of people to discover and connect with the transformative power of art.

*But a lot has changed in 40 years.*

**Our collection has grown exponentially, and in the last decade alone has diversified deliberately and more quickly than at any point previously.** Judy Glickman Lauder, Barbara Goodbody, Richard Estes, Bruce Brown, David and Eva Bradford, the Berger Collection Educational Trust, and Alex Katz Foundation have all made significant and transformative gifts to the PMA collection in recent years, expanding the narratives we can tell and connections we can make.

**Our campus has changed, and we’ve restored the McLellan House, purchased, restored, and opened the Winslow Homer Studio, and reinstalled our collection multiple times to maximize our existing footprint.** And yet our campus has reached its limit, with attendance already at twice the planned capacity of the Payson building. In just five years, we will more than triple the planned capacity of our campus. We need to expand, as we are being forced to make tough choices around reducing exhibition size and restricting capacity due to the physical limitations of our campus.

**Critically, we, as a community, have changed as well. Our needs and expectations from our institutions have changed, and nowhere is that clearer than for museums.** We must do more to create opportunity—on our walls, in our galleries, through our programs, on our board, and within our staff—to ensure the PMA experience reflects *your* experience, lifestyle, and values. We must elevate individuals and communities that have been excluded from museums and “the art world,” embodying our values through artwork, exhibitions, programs, and didactics by and in partnership with our BIPOC communities, immigrants and new Mainers, LGBTQIA2S+ neighbors, our elders, youth, and other communities across Maine. We must be at the center of our communities, which

requires dialogue, trust, and transparency. And we must ensure we are championing a more diverse, inclusive, and sustainable region. We must become a community institution that is rooted in *belonging*.

### **142 Free Street is our catalyst for a brighter future, ensuring Congress Square is a sustainable center for arts and culture.**

In 2022 we launched our vision with *The Blueprint Project: Building a Landmark for the Future*. This case for development was supported by years of open-ended community building and research, including campus planning, listening sessions, focus groups, strategic plan development, equity strategic action plan development, a feasibility study, and an economic impact study. Through this work, we came to understand what our communities want from museums and their arts institutions. These needs, desires, and expectations are embedded in the project, our Strategic Plan, and our mission, *Art for All*. We are the first museum in the country to have a mission led by our values in this way.

The shared values of the PMA and city of Portland were centerstage as we put out a global open call for architects to assemble diverse teams of experts to imagine the future of 142 Free Street. Our International Design Competition attracted submissions from 104 teams representing 20 countries, including Australia, Belgium, China, Denmark, Finland, Japan, Mexico, Spain, South Korea, United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and more. In total, more than 250 firms participated as part of the 104 submitting teams, with 46 percent of all lead architecture firms founded or owned by people of color or women.

After a rigorous selection process, Portland, Oregon's LEVER Architecture won the commission. LEVER stood out for numerous reasons, chief among them their commitment to sustainable design and building practices, and deeply rooted understanding of DEAI.

### **Their initial concept has been overwhelmingly supported by our communities, with an astounding 93% positive feedback rate for LEVER's concept.**

Here are a few of the impacts we're looking forward to:

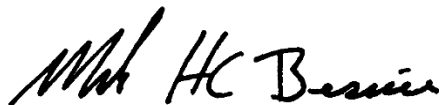
- 1. Align with our *Art for All* mission.** The new PMA wing will be a lasting example of our communities' values and the PMA's commitment to diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion. In the words of the late artist David Driskell, "What we leave as proof of our being here will not necessarily be in the sciences, in politics in economics, but will manifest itself through the arts". ***This once-in-a-lifetime museum expansion and unification that will forever change Maine and New England.*** Through *The PMA Blueprint*, we will redefine our region, unite our communities, and sustain our economy for generations to come.
- 2. Contribute significantly to Portland and Maine's economy.** A 2022 economic analysis commissioned by the PMA through the Center for Business and Economic Research at the University of Southern Maine concludes that post-expansion, ***the PMA's annual economic contribution will more than double to include more than 600 jobs, \$28.1 million in labor income, \$65.3 million in sales, and \$4.2 million in local and state taxes.*** The expansion also will solidify the PMA's status as quintessential destination and defining experience in Maine.

- 3. Promote sustainability and spark revitalization across our state.** True to the spirit of the City of Portland’s comprehensive plan and dedication to sustainability, our new building will showcase innovative construction materials and techniques that are on the forefront of sustainability. The building will be constructed primarily of mass timber, a remarkably strong, durable, and sustainable material with an ability to sequester carbon. When wood that is used for mass timber construction is obtained from sustainably managed forests, the resulting materials have a much lower life-cycle carbon footprint than steel and concrete, delivering a 26.5% reduction in global warming potential, according to University of Washington researchers. ***We’re working to operationalize the shared desire for a mass timber plant in Maine and get it to the finish line with our policymakers at all levels, the University of Maine, Indigenous leaders, landowners, forestry advocates, businesses, and more.*** Why? Because mass timber in Maine just makes sense. We’re the most forested state in the country—with nearly 90% of the land covered in forests, the potential to revitalize and reimagine our state through this innovative industry is real. This is a rare and unique opportunity to bring rural and urban communities, companies, and governments together through clean industries that make the world better and support Maine jobs.
  
- 4. Expand inclusivity and belonging.** It is important to acknowledge and understand the potential interpretations of architectural styles, and when they are applied in different time periods, when considering what to champion for our city. Maine’s marquee cultural institution must be a landmark designed with everyone in mind. 142 Free Street’s current façade, however, was erected during the Jim Crow era. Our region is one that is striving to become more inclusive, dynamic, and diverse—a city where everyone belongs—and some architecture styles can carry unfortunate legacies of the past into the future that undermine these values and goals.

**Without the removal of 2009’s misclassified designation, we will not be able to realize this collective vision for our future and our city will be less dynamic, inclusive, equitable, and sustainable as a result.**

We are aligned with the City of Portland’s values and vision, and our drive to do right by our communities has been at the center of this project from day one. We believe that this project will spark our economies, spur urban development locally, and change the way our city and state are seen by visitors from around the world. We request that the City of Portland take the brave step forward to support our request to re-designate the 142 Free Street property to “non-Contributing” to enable our communities’ vision for the City of Portland, our beautiful state, and the PMA.

Thank you for your consideration,



Mark H.C. Bessire  
Judy and Leonard Lauder Director