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Preserving Place, Preserving Community - by Kelly Lyons

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When we think of preservation, our minds often go to historic landmarks or iconic architecture. But preservation is about more than well-known buildings — it's about safeguarding the everyday places that shape our lives. The neighborhood church, the corner store, the school where friendships were formed. These places hold memory, meaning, and identity. They tell the story of who we are and how we connect to the world around us.

That's what makes preservation so powerful. It's not only about restoring architecture — it's about ensuring the spaces we inherit continue to serve their purpose for generations to come. It's about maintaining the character of a place while allowing for thoughtful evolution.

At Shawmut, we view preservation as both a responsibility and a privilege. Whether revitalizing a centuries-old structure or reimagining a mid-century landmark, we work closely with clients, partners, and communities to preserve the intent and craftsmanship of original designs — while upgrading systems, improving safety, and enhancing functionality for modern use. That balance is at the heart of our work, from restoring historic academic halls to transforming civic spaces with accessibility and sustainability in mind.

Take Boston's City Hall Plaza, for example. Known for its distinctive Brutalist design, the plaza had become difficult to navigate and underutilized. With a 26-foot grade change and what many called a "mountain of steps," the site presented real physical barriers. In partnership with the City, we helped reimagine the space into one that is more welcoming, usable, and reflective of its original civic vision. The revitalized design incorporates thoughtful grading, stormwater management, and ecological infrastructure, along with new spaces for gathering, events, and everyday use. The result is a civic space reborn — one that honors Boston's legacy while serving the city's needs today.

Other recent projects — from the renewal of the historic Langham, Boston to the iconic Huntington Theatre — reflects our continued commitment to preserving spaces that hold deep meaning for the communities and institutions they serve. These projects demand precision, respect, and a deep understanding of how to balance preservation with progress.

Preservation Month is an opportunity to celebrate this work — and to reflect on what it truly means to protect place. When done well, preservation isn't just about saving buildings. It's about protecting the stories, traditions, and experiences that define our communities. It's about ensuring the places that shaped us can continue to shape others.

At Shawmut, we're honored to help carry that legacy forward.

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