



**Testimony of Leslie Singleton Adam, Board Chair, Friends of the Public Garden, to the
Joint Committee on Municipalities and Regional Government, regarding House Bill 3749
June 27, 2017**

Good morning Chairmen Moore and O'Day, Vice Chairmen Timilty and Stanley, and members of the Committee. My name is Leslie Singleton Adam, and I am here as Board Chair of the Friends of the Public Garden to testify on House Bill 3749, titled An Act Protecting Sunlight and Promoting Economic Development in the City of Boston. While we are hesitant to take a formal position on the bill at this time, since we are engaged in discussions with the City of Boston and Millennium Partners on what we hope will be a mutually beneficial agreement that will protect our cherished downtown parks, I am here to offer some thoughts on the legislation and context about the issues it addresses.

First, I would like to provide some information on the history and mission of the Friends of the Public Garden. The Friends has worked in partnership with the City of Boston since 1970 to maintain, enhance, and advocate for the Boston Common, Public Garden, and Commonwealth Avenue Mall. When we first came into existence in the 1970s, the parks were in total disrepair. Today they are national treasures and are the heart of the city.

We are in the parks daily, working as guardians and gardeners for 1,700 trees, 53 acres of grass, and conservators of 42 pieces of public art, including the world-famous George Washington, Shaw Memorial, and Make Way for Ducklings statues. The Friends is able to invest more about \$1.6 million annually directly into the parks to more than match the city's annual appropriation through the Parks Department. With over 3,000 Members representing 133 communities in the Commonwealth, all of the funding for our work in the parks comes from private donations.

We care for the parks on a daily basis and work to restore the many fountains and statues that grace them. We raised \$4.4 million to renovate Brewer Fountain Plaza near Park Street Station to bring it to life with tables and chairs, music, a reading room, and an active food truck program. And we raised \$720,000 to restore and set up a maintenance fund for the famous "Angel" fountain (George Robert White Memorial fountain) in the Garden to its former glory, bringing the water back after 30 years.

We come to this issue not as hobbyists, but as experts in horticulture and longtime partners with the City. We have raised legitimate issues regarding the impact of the shadows the Winthrop Square Building will cast on our landmark parks. We still have strong reservations about a one-time amendment to laws that have worked to protect our parks while allowing development to continue in downtown Boston. But we are working toward an agreement that will result in a significant investment in the parks, as well as a comprehensive planning process for downtown development. Our goal is to minimize - or mitigate - the impact of the shadows and gain assurances about future exemptions from these laws.

We have been working closely with the Mayor and the BPDA, members of the City Council and the Boston legislative delegation - Reps. Jay Livingstone, Aaron Michlewitz and Byron Rushing and Sens. Will Brownsberger and Joe Boncore – and they have listened to our concerns. In this bill are assurances that the City will undertake a comprehensive downtown planning process - something we plan to be fully engaged in. Also in this bill is the elimination of the remaining approximately quarter acre of allowable shadow under the law in the so-called Shadow Bank.

We acknowledge that the City Council's 10-3 vote was a clear statement of support, and that the Mayor is strongly supportive of this petition. However, the City consistently refers to this project as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and we plan to hold them to that. We will oppose any further encroachment of shadows on the city's landmark parks. And we hope that, in its consideration of this bill, the Committee will make it clear to the City that you will not entertain further exemptions to these laws that have protected our parks for over two decades while allowing robust economic development downtown.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important matter.