

WHAT IS THE BOSTON LANDMARKS COMMISSION?



Boston Landmarks Commission

City of Boston
The Environment
Department

Boston City Hall/ Room 805
Boston, Massachusetts 02201
617/635-3850

www.cityofboston.gov/landmarks

The Boston Landmarks Commission (BLC) is the City of Boston's historic preservation agency, created under state enabling legislation in 1975. The BLC is located in the Environment Department, room 805, Boston City Hall. Office hours are 9 AM to 5 PM, Monday-Friday. See the following page for staff contact information. If you have a specific question or are doing historical research, we invite you to contact staff before you come in. That way, we can confirm that we have what you are looking for, or can suggest another agency for your question or another repository for your research.

What are the chief responsibilities and activities of the Landmarks Commission?

- **Identification of Historic Buildings and Places** - For the city's neighborhoods and the downtown, the BLC has compiled over 12,000 survey forms on individual historic buildings and places, available in the office of the Boston Landmarks Commission. Brief development histories of most neighborhoods are also available, as well as information on properties and districts that are local Landmarks, that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, or are recommended for designation or listing.
- **Protection and Recognition of Historic Properties** - The Boston Landmarks Commission can designate individual properties and districts as Boston Landmarks, based on specific criteria, upon the vote of the Commission, and approval by the Mayor and City Council. When a property is designated as a local landmark, or is located in a local landmark district, any proposed change to its exterior is subject to review and approval.

The Boston Landmarks Commission administers the National Register of Historic Places for Boston. Review is triggered only when projects for National Register properties involve federal or state funding, permitting, or licensing. There are currently over 8,000 properties which have Boston Landmark status or are located in a Historic District, and over 11,000 properties in Boston listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In addition, there are approximately 20 interior Landmark designations.

- **Preservation Planning** - City, state, and federal legislation, other than the BLC and historic district legislation, can require comments on proposed projects, first to determine any adverse effects on historic resources, and then to avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse effects. BLC staff conduct these reviews routinely, in conjunction with other agencies. Examples are Boston Redevelopment Authority project reviews, Mass. Environmental Protection Act (MEPA) reviews, National Register reviews (Section 106) and State Register reviews (Article 254).

The BLC also administers Article 85 of the Boston Zoning Code which provides review of proposed demolitions of historic buildings, city-wide. Under Article 85, the BLC can delay demolitions for a period of 90 days in order to ensure that communities have the opportunity to participate in a public discussion about proposed demolitions, and to encourage the applicant to examine alternatives to demolition for preferably preserved buildings.

- **Public Education and Technical Assistance** - Professional assistance and public information programs are available to neighborhood groups, property owners and developers, and other interested individuals or entities. Meetings and site visits with staff can be arranged by appointment to answer questions about the preservation of specific properties or areas. Neighborhood brochures, information on designation and design review, applications, and other public information material is available in the BLC office. Legislation, design guidelines, and much more information is available at www.cityofboston.gov/landmarks.

Who are the preservation commissioners and staff?

There are 85 commissioner positions among the Boston Landmarks Commission and the 9 local historic commissions. All commissioners are volunteers, nominated as specified in the enabling legislation by professional and neighborhood organizations. They are appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by City Council. Lists of commission members are available on request.

The staff who perform the day-to-day business of the commissions are professionally trained in historic preservation and/or related fields such as architecture, architectural history, and urban planning.

I'm going to be doing work on a building/property located in a local historic district. How do I get an application and information on design review and approval?

There are nine local historic districts administered by preservation planners within the staff of the Boston Landmarks Commission. They are the:

- Aberdeen Architectural Conservation District
- Back Bay Architectural Commission
- Bay State Road/Back Bay West Architectural Conservation District Commission
- Bay Village Historic District Commission
- Beacon Hill Architectural Commission
- Fort Point Channel Landmark District Commission
- Mission Hill Triangle Architectural Conservation District Commission
- St. Botolph Architectural Conservation District Commission
- South End Landmark District Commission

To obtain a building permit for proposed exterior changes to properties within district boundaries, prior commission review and approval is required. Applications, application instructions, filing dates, hearing dates, and guidelines for review within specific districts are available online at www.cityofboston.gov/landmarks. To save time and costs, property owners and developers are encouraged to contact staff early on in the project planning process, in order to obtain information on compliance with guidelines.

There's a City Archaeology Program, too?

The Boston Landmarks Commission has a City Archaeologist on staff, who maintains the City Archaeology Lab and 27 collections of artifacts. The City Archaeology Program is focused on safeguarding collections from Boston sites and making them accessible for general public information and for specific research requests. The lab and collections are open to the public by appointment. School and group programs and partnerships with agencies, educational institutions, and corporations are encouraged.

How do I contact the BLC?

Phone: 617-635-3850

Email: BLC@cityofboston.gov