

RESOURCES

Local Organizations

Beacon Hill Civic Association

617 227 1922
www.bhcivic.org

Boston Preservation Alliance

617 367 2458
www.bostonpreservation.org

Government Offices

Beacon Hill Architectural Commission

617 635 3850
www.cityofboston.gov/Environment/historic.asp

Boston Landmarks Commission

617 635 3850
www.cityofboston.gov/Environment

Research Resources

Boston Public Library Research Services Department

617 536 5400
www.bpl.org/research

Bostonian Society

617 720 1713
www.bostoniansociety.org

Massachusetts State Archives

617 727 2816
www.sec.state.ma.us/arc/arcidx.htm

Historic New England

617 227 3956
www.historicnewengland.org



Beacon Hill Civic Association
74 Joy St
Boston, MA 02114-4055

The Beacon Hill Civic Association

NEIGHBORS HELPING NEIGHBORS

10 QUESTIONS FOR HISTORIC HOMEOWNERS



BOSTON
PRESERVATION
ALLIANCE

1 | Is my Beacon Hill residence historic?

Yes. If your residence falls within the region bounded by Storrow Drive, Cambridge Street, Bowdoin Street, Beacon Street and Park Street (see map on opposite side), you live within the **Historic Beacon Hill District**.

2 | What is a historic district?

A **historic district** is a neighborhood with historic, cultural, architectural and/or aesthetic significance to a city, state, or region or to the country as a whole. The Historic Beacon Hill District, the oldest historic district in Massachusetts, was created in 1955 by an act of the Massachusetts General Court. The enabling act was designed to promote the educational, economic and general welfare of the public by preserving and maintaining the Beacon Hill neighborhood as a landmark in the history of American architecture.

3 | How does living in a historic district affect me?

A historic district is a legally authorized designation, presided over by a Commission with governance authority. For homeowners, living in a historic district means that any external changes to a property must be reviewed by the **Beacon Hill Architectural Commission (BHAC), which will perform an evaluation** based on a predetermined set of criteria. Architectural continuity, physical impacts on the building and neighborhood, visibility from a public way, historical accuracy and appropriateness for the building, are all considered. These criteria are set forth in the [Historic Beacon Hill District Architectural Guidelines](#).

4 | Does this mean I can't change the color of my front door?

Not necessarily. All changes to a building in the Historic Beacon Hill District that can be seen from a public street or way need to go before the BHAC. While the BHAC may decline to issue a "Certificate of Appropriateness" for your intended paint color, the BHAC follows the Historic Beacon Hill District Architectural Guidelines and has expertise on historic structures. It does not make decisions arbitrarily. If your application is denied, you may refer to the Commission for guidance on making an appropriate paint selection.

5 | What steps should I take before I start a renovation project?

To obtain approval for exterior changes, property owners should contact the **Boston Landmarks Commission staff** to obtain a copy of the **Historic Beacon Hill District Architectural Guidelines** and an application for a "**Certificate of Appropriateness**." Copies of the Guidelines and application forms can be found at the Boston Landmarks Commission office at Boston City Hall or their website (<http://www.cityof-boston.gov/environment/downloads.asp>), or on the Beacon Hill Civic Association's website (<http://www.bhcivic.org>)

6 | How long does it take to get a "Certificate of Appropriateness," and how long is it valid?

Most applications are processed by the BLC within a single monthly hearing cycle. Certificates of Appropriateness are valid for two years from the date of issue.

7 | What if I want to remodel my home's interior? Do I need to get approval from the Architectural Commission?

No. Residents wishing to make interior modifications need not seek a Certificate of Appropriateness nor submit the change to the Beacon Hill Architectural Commission.

8 | What is the difference between the Beacon Hill Architectural Commission (BHAC) and the Beacon Hill Civic Association (BHCA)?

The Beacon Hill Architectural Commission operates with the Boston Landmarks Commission as a division of the **City of Boston's Environmental Department**. As a branch of City Government, it has regulatory authority. **The Beacon Hill Civic Association** is a non-profit neighborhood group consisting of residents, property and business owners within the Beacon Hill Historic District. The Beacon Hill Civic Association is a volunteer neighborhood organization that helps preserve and enhance the quality of life on Beacon Hill. Our neighborhood is urban, historic and residential, requiring constant vigilance to ensure its "livability".

9 | How can I learn about the history of a building on Beacon Hill?

The Boston Landmarks Commission, a division of the Boston Environmental Department, has published a guide to researching historic homes that contains information on how to locate building and alteration permits, newspaper articles, maps and other print resources. Historic New England has a large collection of photographs, which can be seen by appointment and can often provide evidence of the earlier appearance of a building. Information on the history of the neighborhood and its architecture can also be found in the Beacon Hill Civic Association publication, "A Historic Homeowner's Handbook." In addition the Boston Landmarks Commission may have survey information on properties on Beacon Hill.

10 | What can I do to help preserve the historic Beacon Hill neighborhood?

There are lots of ways to get involved! You can join the **Beacon Hill Civic Association**, which helps to protect Beacon Hill's residential character by educating the community on responsible ways to maintain historic homes or the **Boston Preservation Alliance**, a citywide nonprofit organization, which provides proactive, grassroots advocacy and educational programming on major issues affecting Boston's historic buildings and communities. Listed on the back are several other non-profit, resident-supported organizations and initiatives devoted to ensuring that our historic homes will continue to enrich the lives of future generations.



This pamphlet is intended to provide suggestions and resources to residents in a convenient manner. It neither supplements nor overrides the regulations, opinions and decisions of the Boston Landmarks Commission and the Beacon Hill Architectural Commission.