



Review and Approval Process for Changes to Designated Landmarks

What is the function of the Boston Landmarks Commission?

The Boston Landmarks Commission (BLC), the City's historic preservation agency, provides a mechanism for the orderly preservation of Boston's historic buildings and neighborhoods.

What is a Landmark?

According to the Commission's statute, a Landmark is a "physical feature or improvement which in whole or part has historical, social, cultural, architectural or aesthetic significance to the city and the commonwealth, the New England region or nation." The designation procedure is initiated through a petition, which is followed by a preliminary hearing before the Commission, the preparation of a study report on the proposed Landmark, and a public hearing. To be designated, a property must receive a 2/3 majority vote from the Commission and be confirmed by the Mayor and by City Council. When a property is designated a Landmark, it becomes subject to review by the Commission, and physical changes must be approved before they are undertaken.

What is the process for changing a designated Landmark?

Landmark designation is the "public insurance policy for preservation," the review mechanism which ensures that future physical changes are appropriate and sensitive to the historical value of the property. It allows local residents to participate in the process of change in their neighborhoods through the public hearing process.

What changes must be reviewed?

In general, any change, addition, or demolition that is visible from a public way with regard to design, materials, or appearance must be reviewed. In some cases where an interior has been designated, changes to specified interior elements are reviewed; otherwise, interior changes are not subject to review.

Specific Standards and Criteria, tailored to the property, are included in each study report and are adopted at the time of designation. The BLC has also adopted General Standards and Criteria, which apply to all designated Landmarks. Before work can begin, the appropriate certificate, either of approval or exemption, must be issued by the Commission.

What is the procedure for obtaining a certificate?

The staff of the Boston Landmarks Commission is available to determine whether proposed work requires a certificate. Application materials are available online, at <http://www.cityofboston.gov/landmarks> (hard copies are available at the City of Boston Environment Department Office). A certificate of approval or exemption must be obtained prior to obtaining a building permit.

When the completed application has been submitted, Commission staff will determine whether a certificate is required and, if necessary, will schedule the application for review at a Commission hearing. A hearing is always required for a Certificate of Design Approval and for a Certificate of Exemption based on hardship. In the case of routine maintenance and repair or a threat to safety, a certificate may be issued by the Executive Director of the BLC or by his/her representative. If a public hearing before the Commission is required, at least ten days notice is given to the applicant, owner (if different), abutters, public officials, and other interested parties.

Boston Landmarks Commission

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