

Ten FAQs for historic district homeowners

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Now there is a guide that makes it a lot easier for home renovators to navigate their way through the various guidelines of the Beacon Hill Historic District.

Thanks to a year-long collaboration between the Beacon Hill Civic Association, the Boston Preservation Alliance (BPA) and the Boston Landmarks Commission (BLC), a newly-printed brochure is now available that answers ten questions for historic district homeowners. They are the ten most frequently asked questions the offices of the three preservationist groups receive, according to Charlotte Thibodeau, who chairs BHCA's Architectural Committee.

"The initiative first came from Martha McNamara, a Beacon Hill resident and director of New England Arts and Architecture at Wellesley College, who participated in a brainstorming session with the committee to determine how to proceed with revisions to the Beacon Hill Architectural Handbook, published in 1975," said Thibodeau. McNamara offered an intern, Becky Paxton, who worked on the project with BHCA's Architectural Committee, Sarah Kelly of the BPA and Emily Wolf of the BLC last summer.

"The brochure makes the whole process user-friendly," said Thibodeau, referring to the fact that any proposed external changes to a property must be first reviewed by the Beacon Hill Architectural Commission. Often confused with the BHCA, the Architectural Commission is a division of the City's Environmental Department and has regulatory authority. It performs an evaluation of the proposed changes based on a predetermined set of criteria, including architectural continuity, physical impacts on the building and neighborhood, visibility from a public way, historical accuracy and appropriateness for the building.

"It's all about preserving your neighborhood," said Thibodeau. "If you get a 'no' [to your plans], they help you discover what you *can* do to your home."

The brochure is now available at the participating organizations, and the committee hopes to print enough to distribute to new residents in the historic district through real estate companies.