

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

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A Guide for Beacon Hill Homeowners

**LIVING IN
A HISTORIC
DISTRICT**



Beacon Hill Civic Association

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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 Beacon Hill Architectural Commission.

1 IS MY BEACON HILL RESIDENCE HISTORIC?

Yes. If your residence falls within the region bounded by Storrow Drive and Cambridge, Bowdoin, Beacon and Park streets, you live within the Historic Beacon Hill District.

(Please refer to the map on the back of this pamphlet.)

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 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. The Beacon Hill Architectural Commission (BHAC), with members appointed by Boston's mayor and city council, works with homeowners to ensure that the neighborhood's character is protected and preserved.

3 HOW DOES LIVING IN A HISTORIC DISTRICT AFFECT ME?

For homeowners on Beacon Hill, living in a historic district means that any change to the exterior of their properties must be reviewed by the BHAC. The BHAC evaluates proposed changes according to criteria that include architectural continuity, physical impacts on the building and neighborhood, visibility from a public way, historical accuracy, and appropriateness for the building. These criteria are outlined in the Historic Beacon Hill District Architectural Guidelines, which are available from the BHAC.

(See question 5 for more information about the guidelines.)

4 DOES THIS MEAN I CAN'T CHANGE THE COLOR OF MY FRONT DOOR?

Not necessarily. Homeowners in the Historic Beacon Hill District who wish to make exterior changes to their properties that will be visible from a public way must apply to the BHAC for approval. As the commission follows the Historic Beacon Hill District Architectural Guidelines, it may decline to issue a "Certificate of Appropriateness" for your proposed paint color. Keep in mind, however, that members of the commission, who are knowledgeable about historic structures, do not make decisions arbitrarily. If your application is denied, you are encouraged to seek guidance from the commission in making an appropriate color selection.

5 WHAT STEPS SHOULD I TAKE BEFORE I START A RENOVATION PROJECT?

To obtain approval for exterior changes, property owners should visit the BHAC at Boston City Hall to obtain a copy of the Historic Beacon Hill District Architectural Guidelines and an application form. The guidelines and the application may also be downloaded from the BHAC website: <http://www.cityofboston.gov/environment/downloads.asp>.

6 HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO GET A "CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS," AND HOW LONG IS IT VALID?

Most applications are processed by the BHAC within a month. 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 submit the changes 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 is a division of the City of Boston's Environmental Department and shares offices and staff with the Boston Landmarks Commission. As a branch of city government, it has regulatory authority. The Beacon Hill Civic Association is a nonprofit neighborhood group of residents and property and business owners within the Beacon Hill Historic District. The civic association is a volunteer organization that helps preserve and enhance the quality of life on Beacon Hill, an urban, historic, residential neighborhood that requires constant vigilance to ensure its 'livability.'

9 HOW CAN I LEARN ABOUT THE HISTORY OF A BUILDING ON BEACON HILL?

The Boston Landmarks Commission 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. 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 many ways to get involved. You can join the Beacon Hill Civic Association, which helps protect Beacon Hill's residential character in a variety of ways, as well as the Boston Preservation Alliance, a citywide nonprofit organization that provides proactive, grassroots advocacy and educational programming on major issues affecting Boston's historic buildings and communities. Listed on the back are several other nonprofit resident-supported organizations and initiatives devoted to ensuring that Beacon Hill's historic homes will continue to enrich the lives of future generations.