

# BACK BAY ARCHITECTURAL DISTRICT COMMERCIAL GUIDELINES

## GUIDELINES FOR EXTERIOR DESIGN

**(Adopted November 18, 2010; Updated July 10, 2019 and January 11, 2023)**

**COMMERCIAL DISTRICT:** Newbury Street, Boylston Street, Massachusetts Avenue and the commercially zoned segments of the district’s cross streets.

The Back Bay Residential District, as established under Chapter 625, Acts of 1966, was enlarged by Chapter 463, Acts of 1974 (effective August 3, 1974) to include Newbury and the north side of Boylston Street from Dartmouth Street to Massachusetts Avenue, with the intervening connecting streets, and its name was changed to the Back Bay Architectural District. The district’s boundaries were subsequently expanded, under Ch. 645 of the Acts of 1979 to include Newbury Street and the north side of Boylston streets from Dartmouth Street to Arlington Street (again with the intervening cross streets). The commission’s jurisdiction was further expanded to include all exterior features of a building, including alley elevations and those not visible from a public way under Ch. 624 of the Acts of 1981.

All plans for demolition or new construction or for exterior alteration or repair of existing buildings, as well as all proposals concerning the erection of signs, awnings and other features appurtenant to structures in the Architectural District, must be submitted to the Back Bay Architectural Commission (BBAC) for review and approval.

**COMPLIANCE WITH THE ZONING CODE:** Construction, features and signage which dimensionally or otherwise are not in compliance with the Boston Zoning Code, including Section 11, the Boston Sign Code, require a Conditional Use Permit from the Zoning Board of Appeal as a prerequisite to BBAC review.

These guidelines, a supplement to the “Guidelines for the Residential District” adopted in 1990 (and to be known hereafter as the “Architectural Guidelines”), apply to the special needs of businesses for changes to existing structures in the business zone—Newbury Street, the north side of Boylston Street (from Arlington Street to Massachusetts Avenue) and the commercially zoned segments of the district’s cross streets.

**FAÇADE CHANGES:** Retention of historic façades is generally encouraged, except as specified in these guidelines. The covering or removal of original façade elements (columns, pilasters, fenestration, arches, lintels, decorative features) is generally discouraged except as discussed elsewhere in these guidelines.

**EXTENSIONS INTO FRONT AND SIDE YARDS:** Are eligible for consideration on a case-by-case basis if allowable by zoning.

**DEMOLITION:** Not generally allowed, unless it is clearly demonstrated that any replacement is justifiable architecturally as well as in its urban design impact on the street. Demolition of structures identified in the National Register of Historic Places is not allowed. In order to prevent the appearance of open lots when approved will generally be allowed only after all permits for the replacement structure(s) have been obtained, financing has been secured and satisfactory assurance has been given that new construction will follow immediately.

**ENTRANCES - FIRST-FLOOR RETAIL CONVERSIONS OF ORIGINALLY RESIDENTIAL SPACES:** Boylston Street: Not applicable; Massachusetts Avenue: Not applicable; Newbury Street: In the interests of minimizing disturbance of the historic façade, it is preferred that access to a parlor-floor shop be provided from the original entry, unless a purpose-built storefront bay exists. Access to a basement shop may be from a depressed yard or from an entrance lobby. See “Yard Depressions.”

**MARQUEES:** These shallow, self-supporting metal-and-glass hoods projecting above a building entrance may be retained where existing if complementary to the architecture of the façade. Compatible marquees will be approved only for new buildings or certain renovations where their appropriateness to the architectural character of the building can be demonstrated.

**CANOPIES:** Unlike awnings, which are self-supporting within window openings, these fabric-clad structures are carried on stanchions projecting forward from an entrance. In that these features conceal architectural detail and obscure views of adjacent buildings, their signage and retail displays, and the introduction of new canopies is reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Any change in an existing canopy is subject to commission review.

**TEMPORARY VESTIBULE ENCLOSURES:** The use of temporary vestibule enclosures is limited to restaurants and similar hospitality businesses where customers are regularly required to remain in an area for service for a prolonged period. All temporary vestibule enclosures are subject to an application to the BBAC, require approval prior to installation, and must be installed without physical alterations to the building (e.g., damage to historic masonry). The applicant must demonstrate that there is no internal alternative to protecting customers from drafts created by frequently opening entry doors; and the installation is designed to be limited to the entryway, as small as practicable, of transparent material or a color that is consistent with the architectural palette of the street and specific building (browns, stone greys, dark brick, and black), and to the extent possible do not obstruct the view of significant architectural features. These vestibules will be permitted only during the winter season, as defined by the City of Boston, but not to extend beyond Dec 1 to April 1.

**DISPLAY WINDOWS:** It is intended that the original rhythm of bays, entrances, fenestration, and decorative elements be retained.

**ORIGINAL FAÇADES:** The first-floor windows may be elongated, generally by lowering their sills. It may be appropriate to widen window openings if this can be done without removing original decorative elements. Basement windows may be enlarged, but they should align with, and in no case exceed the size of the first-floor windows. Basement walls should be masonry to match existing stonework as closely as possible. Glass should be mounted in the same plane as the original glass.

**PROJECTING BAYS:** An existing bay originally used for the display of merchandise may be modified or replaced on the first-floor and/or basement levels subject to the following conditions: The plan of the new bay must conform to the plan of the original bay as closely as possible; supporting columns replacing existing masonry should be of a large enough cross section to appear visually to support the masonry above; the removal or alteration of existing storefront bays will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis, depending upon their historic or architectural significance balanced by the merchandising use of the building. Previously modified bays which do not conform to these guidelines should be brought into greater conformity whenever possible.

**EXISTING STOREFRONTS:** Remodeling of existing, non-original storefronts is allowed provided that: the remodeling is compatible with the overall architectural character of the building; existing major architectural features are given recognition; and the original architectural detailing within the storefront area is retained as much as possible. In such instances, good contemporary commercial design may be appropriate if complementary in scale and material with the original façade and with the façades of the neighboring structures.

## **FRONT YARDS**

**FENCES:** The retention of historic front-yard curbing and fence elements is preferred. Where these are missing and new fences are needed, fences should be durable so as to be able to withstand normal abuse and should be of a design and material consistent with the architecture of the building and with adjacent fencing. Fences should be largely transparent, with dimensions and spacing of posts and rails similar to those of original fences typical elsewhere in the district. In all cases, the design should be compatible with the building and the nature of the materials selected. Appropriate fence materials include wrought iron, cast iron and mild steel. Inappropriate fence materials include concrete block, chain link and wood. Color should be of a dark value, such as black or a darker version of the approved trim color. Light colors are discouraged.

**LIGHTING:** Inconspicuous low-height lighting of paved areas is recommended, particularly where it will contribute to the safety of residents and visitors. All lighting should be from concealed sources and should cast light downward or across the paving, and not upwards or outwards into the public way. General flood lighting of an individual building is

discouraged. The lighting of façades has generally been limited to churches and other buildings of civic importance.

**PAVING:** For walkways and other pedestrian-use areas, the Commission encourages the use of paving materials and patterns characteristic of the given building's period of construction. For most lots, red brick pavers are recommended, but smooth dressed stone may also be appropriate. Materials that are inappropriate include: blacktop paving, gravel, outdoor carpeting, and artificial grass. All paving materials must meet the permeability/recharge requirements of the Groundwater Conservation Overlay District as outlined in Article 32 of the Zoning Code. Where repaving of the sidewalk is required on Boylston Street, its materials, design and workmanship should reflect the highest prevailing standards, in compliance with the standards of the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board (MAAB) and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

**PLANTING:** Well-chosen and maintained landscaping is encouraged as it presents an attractive and inviting appearance. Accommodation of pedestrian access and entryways to storefronts is encouraged, along with complementary plantings. Grass and a wide variety of trees, ornamental trees, flowering shrubs, ground covers and flowering plants are appropriate and recommended plant materials. Plant materials should predominate within front yards; thus, the use of gravel, wood chips or marble chips should be minimal. Synthetic materials are inappropriate. For paved areas, boxes of plant materials are recommended as borders, particularly along the street lot lines on Newbury Street.

**STREET FURNITURE:** At its public hearing of 28 November 2001 the Back Bay Architectural Commission voted to adopt the following guideline: Street furniture, as defined below, shall not be permitted within the Back Bay Architectural District with the exception of those structures erected or placed by authorized public agencies for public safety and/or public welfare purposes. Street furniture is defined as any structure erected or placed in the public or private way on a temporary or permanent basis. Authorized public safety/public welfare street furniture includes, but is not limited to, such structures as street lights, traffic lights, mail boxes, fire hydrants, street trees, trash receptacles, and such elements of the City of Boston Street Furniture Program as the commission may approve hereafter. Any such authorized public safety/public welfare street furniture, including elements of the City of Boston Street Furniture Program, shall be subject to commission review and shall be in keeping with the architectural character of the district and the criteria for exterior architectural features as specified in Ch. 625 of the Acts of 1966, as amended.

**YARD DEPRESSIONS:** Boylston Street: Not generally allowed; Massachusetts Avenue: Not generally allowed; Newbury Street: allowed subject to the following provisions: In reviewing proposals for depressed yard areas as entrances to lower-level shops, the Commission will take into consideration the rhythm of walkways and yards, the size of the lot and the overall appearance of the block. Access to the depressed area should be from

the original entry walkway, wherever possible, with planting and/or fencing retained along the inner edge of the sidewalk. Retaining walls should be masonry compatible in color with the existing building masonry. Excavations for basement conversions are discouraged between Hereford Street and Massachusetts Avenue. Improvements of existing excavations are encouraged.

**ENTRANCE LIGHTING:** Building entrances should be attractively lighted. Concealed-source down-lighting is recommended.

**FIRE ESCAPES:** New exterior fire egress features may be allowed at rear elevations to alleviate existing egress deficiencies only if required by the Inspectional Services Department. While appropriately designed fire balconies may be approved in certain cases, diagonal-stair type fire escapes are generally not allowed. Although exempt from review in themselves, interior alterations that would necessitate new exterior fire egress should be avoided as the commission is under no obligation to approve new connecting balconies or fire escapes. The removal of redundant forms of fire egress is encouraged.

**AUDIO SPEAKERS:** Exterior audio speakers are not allowed as they are architecturally inappropriate and may be an annoyance for residential and commercial neighbors. Technologies not covered in these guidelines are prohibited until specifically approved by the Commission.

**VIDEO CAMERAS:** The commission appreciates the importance of security within the district for merchants, residents and visitors. However, externally mounted surveillance cameras are generally inappropriate; where these devices are believed necessary, they should be installed within windows unless it can be demonstrated that an exterior installation is needed. Where interior locations are impractical, it may be appropriate to encapsulate surveillance cameras within decorative lighting fixtures.

**ROOFS:** The relevant criteria outlined in the residential guidelines will apply.

## **REAR ELEVATIONS**

**PURPOSE:** These guidelines are intended to encourage alterations which facilitate the service function of the alleys while improving or removing inappropriate additions, to restore historic or characteristic architectural features when feasible, and to improve the general visual quality of the alley environment. It is also the intent of these guidelines to acknowledge the differing evolved characters of the alleys running between Commonwealth Avenue and Newbury Street, which remain semi-residential in both function and appearance, and those between Newbury and Boylston streets, which have acquired a commercial character. In the alleys running between Commonwealth Avenue and Newbury Street, the residential guidelines will generally apply, although exceptions may be entertained on a case-by-case basis. Preference may be given to rear additions that eliminate visual clutter or mitigate non-conforming existing conditions. Properties whose

rear elevations face the alleys between Newbury and Boylston streets may be able to absorb appropriately designed and scaled additions or other alterations that would be inappropriate in the more residential context of the Newbury-Commonwealth alley. While additions that conform to zoning requirements are eligible for consideration anywhere in the district, their architectural appropriateness will be determined according to their impact on the subject building and its context. In the interests of reducing visual clutter within the alleys, additions are encouraged to allow for the interior accommodation of secondary egress, mechanical equipment, and trash and vehicular storage.

**DESIGN CRITERIA:** Alterations to rear elevations of commercial buildings shall be consistent in form, proportion, detail, material and color with the characteristic of alleys in the district. Alterations which compound or perpetuate inappropriate structures, or which remove or obscure historic features or significant landscaping are discouraged and underlying zoning should be respected.

**INAPPROPRIATE ADDITIONS:** In the alleys running between Commonwealth Avenue and Newbury Street, inappropriate additions include those that are more than two stories in height, or constructed on top of existing additions or ells. Freestanding accessory structures, stacked decks, mechanical equipment, carports and canopies are inappropriate. As stated above, properties whose rear elevations face the primarily commercial alleys between Newbury and Boylston streets may be able to absorb rear additions that would be inappropriate elsewhere (as accommodated in the Zoning Code). Such additions will be considered in the context of the specific block. The appropriateness of additions exceeding two stories in height, or which may otherwise disrupt the alleyscape, may be questioned.

**LANDSCAPING, FENCING AND PAVING:** The relevant criteria outlined in the residential guidelines will apply. Newly paved parking areas adjacent to the Newbury/Commonwealth alleys shall be paved with unit pavers, consistent with the residential guidelines. The use of asphalt or poured concrete paving may be acceptable for the maintenance of an existing surface depending upon its area and condition. Note that tree removal or replacement requires BBAC approval. All paving materials must meet the permeability/recharge requirements of the Groundwater Conservation Overlay District as outlined in Article 32 of the Zoning Code.

**WINDOW AND DOOR OPENINGS:** On rear elevations the lowering of sills on the rear elevation is generally preferred to alterations that alter the head and jamb conditions. The introduction of louvers may be accommodated within existing windows or new openings detailed to continue the existing pattern. The introduction of garage bays may be appropriate in rear elevations, particularly those of originally commercial structures or of previously altered originally residential buildings.

**UTILITY EQUIPMENT:** All utility equipment, condensers, vents, chases, etc., should be placed inside the building or on the ultimate roof of the building. Placing equipment in the rear yard or on the roof of an ell is inappropriate. The appearance of telephone and/or

cable equipment should be minimized. Compliance with applicable noise regulations is required.

## **APPROPRIATE COLORS**

Color samples should be submitted to the commission staff for approval before work is begun. Generally, the commission prefers that, in repainting, the original colors be used when such information exists.

**DOORS:** Original or historic doors should be restored to deep-toned wood finishes but black and muted browns, greens, greys and ochre paint colors may be acceptable alternatives if the condition of the door does not favor a stained finish. If there is no historic door or entry, modern interventions may be appropriate. Yard curbing, retaining walls, front stoops and other stone trim: Repainting should maintain the general color of the natural masonry; bright or unusual colors are inappropriate. For further guidance, please refer to the commission's Residential Guidelines.

**MARQUEES:** Anodized bronze, black, or dark-colored metal are appropriate.

**WINDOW FRAMES AND SASH:** Black and dark browns are most appropriate for the wood frames and sash of most brick and brownstone buildings within the district. Beiges and creams may be appropriate as the window trim for buildings whose façades are executed in lighter-colored masonry materials. These should be considered on an individual case-by-case basis, however white is generally inappropriate.

**ORIELS:** Subdued colors approximating the façade's stone trim are most appropriate; otherwise, shades of brown, bronze-green and black may be acceptable.

**STORM WINDOWS:** Storm windows should be designed to have a minimal visual impact. Their color should closely approximate that of the primary sash.

**SHUTTERS (WHERE APPROPRIATE):** Black, dark brown, or dark green are most appropriate. White or light colors are unsuitable.

**IRONWORK (FENCES, HANDRAILS, BALCONIES, FIRE ESCAPES, ETC.):** Generally, these features are most appropriately painted black, however shades of brown suggestive of bronze may be acceptable if more compatible with the design of the façade.

**CORNICES AND DORMERS:** Shall be painted the color of the original masonry or masonry trim. On buildings of certain styles black is appropriate.

**GUTTERS AND DOWNSPOUTS:** Must be copper on street façades; bronze- or black-anodized aluminum may be acceptable at rear elevations.

**UTILITY EQUIPMENT:** Shall be dark, generally black or charcoal gray, in color or painted to match the surface it is placed upon or appears against.

## **BACK BAY ARCHITECTURAL DISTRICT SIGN GUIDELINES**

The commission believes that signage of appropriate design and materials can be an architectural ornament, rather than an intrusion. All signage is reviewed on a case-by-case basis: in its design review the Commission considers the design of the sign itself, its effect on architectural details, its method of attachment to the building, and its effect on neighboring buildings. Exceptions to the Boston Sign Code regulations (available online at [https://library.municode.com/ma/boston/codes/redevelopment\\_authority?nodeId=AR T11SI](https://library.municode.com/ma/boston/codes/redevelopment_authority?nodeId=AR T11SI)) require a Conditional Use Permit issued by the Board of Appeal as a prerequisite to BBAC review pertaining to allowable area for signage on a building front may not be exceeded. More minimal signage may be required in order to conform to the architectural character of the building and neighborhood. Signage approvals pertain to a particular applicant and are not transferable. Existing nonconforming signs should be brought into compliance with these guidelines when a new sign is anticipated. Consultation with staff prior to the submission of an application is recommended.

**APPLIED SIGNS:** May be allowed when the design of the façade is compatible and signage will not obscure architectural details. The use of common building features serving multiple tenants, such as entries and their transoms, as signage vehicles is generally not allowed by commercial landlords, as a matter of tenant equity, and is generally inappropriate.

**SIGNAGE IN BUILDING ENTRIES:** Common building features, such as entries, should not be used as the signage vehicle of an individual tenant, but rather to identify the entire building. Exterior directory panels attached to façades may be appropriate if their architectural impact is minimal. Where appropriate, such panels may be subdivided proportionally, at the discretion of the landlord, to reflect tenant lease areas.

**PROJECTING (BLADE) SIGNS:** May be allowed when the design of a façade is not compatible with an applied sign. Projecting signs should not exceed six square feet in area. They should be suspended from metal brackets, not attached directly to the building.

**SIGNS REQUIRING ZONING RELIEF:** Freestanding signs are not allowed under the Zoning Code, and would, if pursued, require a Conditional Use Permit from the Zoning Board of Appeal as a prerequisite to BBAC review; temporary sandwich board-type signs are not allowed under the Boston Sign Code. Freestanding showcases or kiosks are not allowed. The reuse of such existing features is subject to review and is typically discouraged. All of these, if pursued, require a Conditional Use Permit from the Zoning Board of Appeal as a prerequisite to BBAC review. Such freestanding features not only create visual clutter but compete with views of other buildings and their signage, create impositions along view corridors and introduce maintenance issues.

**SIGNS ON SIDEWALK RAILINGS:** Including real estate listings and menu boards may be allowed only if located below the top of the railing. Signs located above the railing require a



Conditional Use Permit prior to BBAC review. Where appropriate, there should be no more than one such sign per building; its material shall be painted wood or metal (vinyl, plastic or other synthetic materials are not acceptable). Illumination for such signs is inappropriate. If located on the fence elevation adjacent to the front walkway, such a sign may have two faces, visible from both directions.

**SIGN COLORS:** Signs featuring light-colored lettering against dark-colored backgrounds are preferred at buildings with façades of dark masonry materials, such as brick or brownstone. Although light background colors may be appropriate at buildings with facades of lighter colored materials, bright background colors should be avoided. Understanding the importance of corporate colors, the commission will work with applicants to ensure an architecturally appropriate appearance. At buildings with multiple retail stores, the use of a variety of colors, expressive of the individual tenants, is appropriate.

**AWNINGS (WITH OR WITHOUT SIGNAGE):** Whether fixed or retractable, awnings with flexible rather than rigid valances are preferred. Their frames should be clad in matte canvas, rather than vinyl or other shiny materials. Because awning fabric weathers more rapidly than other sign materials, approval is contingent upon appropriate maintenance. Open-sided awnings are preferred; closed-sided awnings may be inappropriate on bay- or bow-fronted buildings. Awnings are most appropriate for first floor windows. Because they block pedestrian views of displays they are unsuitable at basement locations. Awnings are generally discouraged on the upper floors of originally residential (typically bay- or bow-fronted) buildings, but may be considered at flat-fronted original commercial buildings if integrated within a consistent treatment for the façade as a whole.

**BANNERS:** Defined as narrow strips of fabric anchored, top and bottom, at right angles to a building façade, are inappropriate.

**OFFSITE SIGNAGE:** Article 11 of the Zoning Code permits only on-premises signs. Any sign advertising a business at another location will require the approval of the Zoning Board of Appeal prior to BBAC review.

**COMMERCIAL FLAGS:** Are generally inappropriate on buildings occupied by multiple tenants. Such flags may be appropriate on single-use buildings (see related section, below), provided that they are of a size and scale that does not unreasonably obscure visibility of the building or neighboring structures. Reuse of existing flagpoles may be allowed, particularly if the design of the façade does not afford a more suitable signage vehicle. The display of a U.S. or other civic flag (of another nation or political subdivision) from an existing pole is exempt from review.

**ILLUMINATION:** Lighting for signs will be considered on a case-by-case basis; conduit and junction boxes may not be exposed. Box signs whose backgrounds are illuminated are inappropriate. Sign illumination may be direct (e.g., gooseneck fixtures) or indirect

(integrated within the signage itself). Whichever method of illumination is pursued should be consistent with the visual character of the building. Exposed fixtures should be inconspicuous in size, color and placement. Illumination shall be static or steady-burning; animated or flashing effects are inappropriate, as are televisions, projection screens, LED and any future technology which incorporates movement. Back lighting for awnings may be allowed provided only the lettering is illuminated.

**NEON (BOTH EXTERIOR AND INTERIOR WINDOW) SIGNS AND LIGHTING:** Are not allowed on Newbury Street. All neon signs, including replacements of existing neon signs, require a Conditional Use Permit from the Zoning Board of Appeal as a prerequisite to BBAC review. Neon may be appropriate at the ground floor level on Boylston Street and Massachusetts Avenue if integrated with the overall storefront design.

**GRAPHICS:** Acknowledging the importance of corporate logotypes, the commission will work with applicants to ensure a recognizable identity. Expression of the name of the business only is appropriate: goods, services, individual names, telephone numbers, Web addresses, business locations, slogans, etc. are not allowed. The year of establishment may be appropriate. Third-party signage (i.e., graphic copy promoting a product or service marketed by the tenant business, which operates under another name) is not acceptable.

**INTERIOR WINDOW SIGNS:** Lettering applied to window glass or signs hung directly behind the glass are to be reviewed. Window signage is encouraged in many cases, and is most appropriate on upper floors. Under the Zoning Code, window signs cannot exceed thirty percent of the glass area without a Conditional Use Permit.

**PROJECTED SIGNAGE:** Moving or still images or graphics may not be projected onto buildings.

**TEMPORARY SIGNS:** May be installed in windows only for up to 60 days pending submission and approval of permanent signage. Banners strung across the building or on railings are not appropriate.

**OUTDOOR DISPLAYS OF MERCHANDISE:** Although not ordinarily subject to architectural review, the outdoor display of merchandise is generally inappropriate to the visual character of the commercial district, except as may be otherwise allowed by the Zoning Board of Appeal.

**SIGN MATERIALS:** Traditional materials, such as wood, metal and glass, are preferred, as they are not only more compatible with the district's architectural fabric but more durable than their lesser-quality counterparts. Vinyl, plastic or other synthetic materials are not acceptable.

**UNITS OF SIGNAGE:** The appropriate number of signs for a given business is governed by architectural conditions that are highly variable from one building to another. In the

interests of reducing the visual clutter that can arise from excessive repetition, the commission carefully considers the number, scale and placement of all proposed signs, as well as how they relate to each other and to other signage on the building.

**SINGLE-USE BUILDINGS:** Because their façades need not accommodate the signs of multiple retailers, single tenant buildings are encouraged to develop a consistent sign theme for the entire building, which by their number, type or placement might be considered less appropriate elsewhere. For example, commercial flags may be appropriate on such buildings. In general, however, single-use buildings carry fewer signs than their multi-tenant counterparts. Color-consistent awnings may be appropriate for such buildings.

**EXEMPTIONS FROM REVIEW:** As defined by the City of Boston Sign Code, “Temporary signs pertaining to special sales or events lasting no more than fifteen days may be affixed to windows provided their total area does not exceed thirty percent of the window. No permit is required for such temporary sign or signs.” Window signage incidental to the short-term display or seasonal promotion of merchandise, not repeating the business name, is exempt from review. The City of Boston Sign Code additionally provides for “temporary display posters, without independent structural support, in connection with political campaigns and with noncommercial civic, health, safety and welfare campaigns, provided such posters are removed within 30 days following the conclusion of such campaign; temporary displays of a patriotic, religious, charitable or civic nature.” The City of Boston Sign Code additionally provides for “temporary display posters, without independent structural support, in connection with political campaigns and with noncommercial civic, health, safety and welfare campaigns, provided such posters are removed within 30 days following the conclusion of such campaign; temporary displays of a patriotic, religious, charitable or civic nature.”

**OUTDOOR DINING INSTALLATIONS:** The paved front-yard terraces of Newbury and Boylston streets have become an attractive three-season dining destination, consistent with City of Boston outdoor dining regulations. Appropriately designed and maintained installations can enhance the district’s visual appeal. Although subject to independent zoning and licensing review, which must precede that of the BBAC, the aesthetic quality of outdoor dining areas is within the purview of the Back Bay Architectural Commission for permanent or semi-permanent architectural alterations. The following criteria are intended to promote the vibrancy these outdoor cafés offer while maintaining the architectural integrity of the district’s streetscapes.

Cafés shall be located within the paved area of the private property extending across the given building’s frontage. They must not obstruct the public way, or clear passage to the entrances of the building and its neighboring structures. A perimeter treatment (metal railings, bollards and chains, planters or some combination thereof) must be provided on all exposed sides. The perimeter treatment must be securely attached to the ground, and may

take the form of sectional metal railings (similar in scale and design to the traditional wrought-iron front-yard fences found throughout the district), metal bollards and chains, or planter boxes. This enclosure should have a light, transparent appearance to ensure that the outdoor dining area maintains visual connection with the pedestrian environment. Thus wood, glass and canvas are inappropriate perimeter materials; likewise, solid metal, or dense metal mesh are unacceptable. The most appropriate railing height is 30-36 inches above grade. Planter boxes may be used, alone or with railing segments, to create an enclosure but must contain only healthy, living plant materials. Where pedestrian traffic is constricted, planter boxes should be hung inside or on top of the railing.

Café furniture must be freestanding (i.e., not secured into the ground or attached to other streetscape features such as trees or street lamps). Tables and chairs should match each other in material, style and color. High-quality, durable materials such as metal, or wood seats and backs on metal frames, are preferred. Dark colors and finishes are recommended. Plastic furniture is inappropriate.

Heaters, whether electric or gas-fired (subject to independent approval by the Inspectional Services Department), may be used to extend the use of the dining area during periods of colder weather that may occur within the season. Such heaters may be freestanding or mounted to the underside of an awning (if one is in place). Audio speakers may not be installed on outdoor dining patios, nor may televisions, video screens, or other forms of audio or visual entertainment.

Host or hostess stands and menu boards shall complement the perimeter treatment and furniture. These features shall not protrude into the public way or obstruct pedestrian circulation outside the outdoor dining area. Menu boards are most appropriately integrated into the café enclosure. Sandwich-board signs are not permitted.

Umbrellas should be made of matte canvas, typically of acrylic material and size appropriate for its proposed location. Third-party signage on umbrellas is not allowed. Appropriately sized company name and logo are allowed.

String lighting over dining areas are permitted as long as they can be mounted without physical alterations to the building (e.g., damage to historic masonry) and properly maintained to avoid sagging. White or off-white lights that are dimmable are preferred, with a light temperature between 2700-3200 Kelvin. Flashing lights are not permitted. All string lighting designs are subject to an application to the BBAC and require approval prior to installation. Approved string lighting must be removed at the end of the city mandated outdoor dining season for the Back Bay.

At the daily close of business during the outdoor-dining season, furniture should be secured with heavy-duty cable and locks. Furniture should be secured together and not to objects such as street lamps, trees, or the enclosure itself.

At the conclusion of the café season all furniture and enclosure must be removed and stored either inside the premises or off site. Any penetrations to the ground plane must be capped or filled.

Outdoor dining areas whose features are unchanged and well maintained from season to season may be reinstalled annually without review. Non-compliant installations are ineligible for such annual reinstallation and may be subject to enforcement action to ensure their appropriate appearance.

Seasonal outdoor dining installations on public property, including street parking spaces, are subject to the above guidelines. To streamline the review process applications for seasonal outdoor dining installations will be reviewed annually and approved administratively at the end of the licensing process by BBAC staff (no public hearing process is required) provided that they are consistent with the guidelines approved by the BBAC. When jersey barriers are required for protection from vehicular traffic they must be maintained and fully disguised with planters that are planted with live material (synthetic plantings are not allowed) or solid wood boards that conceal the interior and exterior faces of the barriers. Wood boards must be painted or stained a dark color (browns, stone greys, dark brick, and black) or left natural to weather to a silver grey. Signage is not permitted on barriers. Approved outdoor dining installations must be removed at the end of the city mandated outdoor dining season for the Back Bay.

## **SUSTAINABILITY**

It is the position of the Back Bay Architectural Commission that historic preservation and sustainable development are complementary goals. So frequently and successfully have the district's historic buildings been converted to new uses that their adaptability may be overlooked. The district's historic buildings already enjoy a surprising degree of energy efficiency owing both to their high quality of materials and workmanship, and their typically attached condition, which makes frugal use of passive heating and cooling technologies. In reusing and retrofitting the district's buildings, the amount of demolition debris can be reduced, unnecessary demands on limited and costly fuel sources can be lessened, and embodied energy (the amount of energy originally expended to create existing structures) can be conserved. While no environmentally-friendly intervention may be functionally or aesthetically suitable in every instance, the commission supports efforts to save and harness energy. These may include such simple expedients as the installation of storm windows to reduce drafts in the winter and awnings to limit heat gain in the summer. Low-emissivity ("low-E") glazing may be appropriate if clear and not unduly reflective. Efficient mechanical equipment is generally more compact, easing its visual relationship to the historic context. As with any other rooftop mechanical system, solar- or wind-powered devices should be located out of view from below. The replacement of asphalt surfaces with pervious paving systems (facilitating recharge to foundation piles)

and the introduction of green roofs may offer visual as well as environmental benefit. (Adapted from the National Trust for Historic Preservation).

## **ACCESSIBILITY**

Working closely with the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board (MAAB), the Back Bay Architectural Commission has long supported the introduction of access. Whenever possible, access to historic buildings should be through a primary public entrance. For example, entries whose existing thresholds are already near grade can often be modified unobtrusively; while high stoops tend to be more architecturally significant (to the extent that they occupy more of the façade), low stoops may sometimes be removed to provide access with only minor impact upon the historic fabric. If this cannot be achieved without permanent damage to major character-defining features, at least one entrance used by the public should be made accessible. If the accessible entrance is not the primary public entrance, directional signs should direct visitors to the accessible entrance. If it agrees that it is the only means of entering a building, the MAAB may accept a rear or service entrance, sometimes requiring that a dedicated accessible parking space be provided. Although conditions vary widely from building to building, within an attached rowhouse district this goal is typically complicated by the availability of only two elevations from which access may be achieved. A common solution is the alteration of grade and entry-threshold conditions. These interventions are typically both more aesthetically sensitive and more convenient to use than mechanical solutions, such as wheelchair lifts.

When it is not feasible to modify an existing entrance, it may be possible to develop a new entrance by creating an entirely new opening in an appropriate location, or by using a secondary window for an opening. This solution should only be considered after exhausting all possibilities for modifying existing front and rear entrances.

In some instances, ramps or more gently inclined walkways, which require no handrails, may make an entrance accessible. As a new feature, ramps should be carefully designed and appropriately located to preserve a property's historic character. Ramps should ideally be located at public entrances used by everyone whenever possible, preferably where there is minimal change in grade. Ramps should also be located to minimize the loss of historic features at the connection points (e.g., porch railings, steps, window and door openings) and should preserve the overall historic setting and character of the property. Larger buildings may have below grade areas that can accommodate a ramp down to an entrance. Below grade entrances can be considered if the ramp leads to a publicly used interior, such as an auditorium, or if the building is serviced by a public elevator. Ramps can sometimes be incorporated behind historic features, such as cheek-walls or railings, to minimize the visual effect.

(Adapted from National Park Services Preservation Brief 32)



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