



Before You Build: Navigating Exterior Changes in Boston Condominiums

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From time to time, we are asked about the process for making modifications to the building exterior that can include common area components such as exterior window trim or a large project like a roof deck or addition. The answer is often complex. These projects may involve structural and design considerations, potential amendments to condominium governing documents, and, in some cases, the negotiation of easements or agreements between unit owners. This article focuses on the process in the City of Boston; however, if you live outside this jurisdiction, please contact us for guidance specific to your municipality.

One of the most important factors when planning an exterior renovation or addition in the City of Boston is determining whether the property is located within one of the historic districts overseen by the Boston Landmarks Commission (BLC).

If a property falls within a designated historic district, an application must be submitted to the BLC for review. Any exterior changes or additions visible from a public way are subject to review and must be presented at a public hearing.

The Commission evaluates projects based on established design guidelines and standards, which may address materials, architectural style, overall appearance, and even paint colors.

To begin the process, applicants must submit a standard application through the BLC's online portal. Once received, BLC staff will review the submission and assign it to one of two review tracks:

- **Administrative Review** – for minor work or projects that closely match existing property elements.
- **Design Review** – for projects involving significant structural or design changes that require a full public hearing.

If a full design review is required, attendance at the hearing is required. We strongly recommend that applicants attend with their architect and construction supervisor, as the Commission - and members of the public - may have detailed questions about the proposed work.

We hope this overview provides helpful insight as you consider your project. As always, working with a registered architect in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and an experienced contractor familiar with your neighborhood is essential to navigating this process successfully.

If you are contemplating a project of this nature, please don't hesitate to contact us. We work with many highly qualified architects and construction professionals and would be happy to help guide you in the right direction.