



Enabling Legislation for the Back Bay Architectural District

The rules governing the Commission's operations have changed over the years. A copy of the legislation, as [amended over the years](#), is available, courtesy of [BackBayHouses.org](#).

Here is a timeline of the more important changes.

1966: Legislation establishing the Commission to regulate development in the Residential District, with jurisdiction from Back Street to the alley between Commonwealth Avenue and Newbury Street, Arlington Street to Massachusetts Avenue. Five Commissioners and five alternates to be appointed by the Mayor from candidates from NABB, the Greater Boston Real Estate Board, the Boston Society of Architects, and the Back Bay Association.

1974: District name changed to Back Bay Architectural District; jurisdiction extended to Charlesgate East. Commission size increased to nine Commissioners and five alternates, at least one of which shall have an interest in a Newbury Street business.

1979: District extended to the center line of Boylston Street.

1981:

Section 1: Purposes of the Act changed to read: The purposes of this act are as follows:

- (a) to promote the economic, cultural, educational and general welfare of the public through high standards of design through- out the Back Bay and through the preservation of the residential portion of the Back Bay area in the city of Boston;
- (b) to safeguard the heritage of the city of Boston by preventing the despoliation of a district in that city which reflects important elements of its cultural, social, economic and political history;
- (c) to stabilize and strengthen residential property values in such area;
- (d) to foster civic beauty and
- (e) to strengthen the economy of the commonwealth and the city of Boston.

Section 2: Definition of exterior architectural feature no longer limited to those visible from a public way.

Section 8: The commission shall pass only on the exterior architectural features of a structure and shall not consider interior arrangements nor the use to be made of the structure. It is the intent of this act that the commission be strict in its judgment of plans involving substantial new construction or for structures deemed to be valuable according to studies performed on behalf of the city, the board or the commission for said area to determine which structures are of architectural value. It is also the intent of this act that the commission shall be lenient in its judgment of plans for structures of little architectural value, except where such plans would seriously impair the architectural value of surrounding structures or the surrounding area. It is also the intent of this act that the commission construe more liberally proposals respecting structures within those sections of the Back Bay Architectural District which may be zoned for local or general business uses than with those proposals within those sections of the district which may be zoned for residential uses, to the end that conversions of structures to business uses will not be unreasonably prevented.



1982: Commission offices moved from BRA to newly established Environment Department.

1989: Definition of conflict of interest for Commissioners.

2018: Regulation of appointments to fill vacancies on the Commission.

Related Links

[1966 Chap. 0625](#). An Act Creating The Back Bay Residential District In The City Of Boston, And Establishing In The Boston Redevelopment Authority The Back Bay Architectural Commission And Defining Its Powers And Duties.

[1974 Chap. 0463](#). An Act Changing The Name Of The Back Bay Residential District In The City Of Boston To The Back Bay Architectural District, Extending The Boundaries Of Said District, Increasing The Membership Of The Back Bay Architectural Commission And Further Defining The Powers And Duties Thereof.

[1979 Chap. 0645](#). An Act Extending The Back Bay Architectural District.

[1981 Chap. 0624](#). An Act Relative To The Back Bay Residential District In The City Of Boston.

[1982 Chap. 0624](#). An Act Establishing An Environment Department In The City Of Boston.

[1989 Chapter 0137](#). An Act Exempting Certain Members Of Certain Commissions Of The City Of Boston From Certain Provisions Of The Conflict Of Interest Law.

[2018 Chapter 373](#). An Act Further Regulating The Filling Of Vacancies On Certain Boards And Commissions In The City Of Boston.