

Q&A from PLAN: Charlestown Preserving Sense of Place Workshop Series

These answers are from both PLAN: Charlestown staff as well as BLC staff. For further questions on BLC, the designation process, and preservation within the City of Boston, please reach out to Nick Armata, Senior Preservation Planner, at nicholas.armata@boston.gov. For questions about PLAN: Charlestown and planning and development in Charlestown, please reach out to Jason Ruggiero at jason.ruggiero@boston.gov.

Where can I find additional preservation resources?

- **Where can I find a copy of the map that was shown earlier showing the overlays, inventoried buildings, historical areas, historical buildings, etc?** You can find this on our [PLAN: Charlestown website](#) under the *Past Events* section, or more directly [here](#).
- **Where can I find the master map of landmarks in Charlestown?** The PLAN: Charlestown team created [this map](#) of all the preservation assets in Charlestown. You can also look up local, state, and federal historic landmarks on the [Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System's online map](#) hosted from Massachusetts Historical Commission. If you feel like something is missing, you can submit a petition to the Boston Landmarks Commission at BLC@boston.gov.
- **Who do I contact for archeological information? Where can I find archeologist reports?** You can find more about archeology in Boston at the [City of Boston's Archeology website](#), including their contact information and the archaeology survey reports for individual sites. Here is the direct link to the report for the [Charlestown Training Field](#). Additional archaeological information may be found by contacting the Massachusetts Historical Commission.
- **Where can I find the contact information for the Study Committee and reports they've produced?** Study reports can be found on boston.gov/landmarks. We do not release contact information for study committees because they are community volunteers, not city employees. If you wish to speak to someone who served on a study committee, please contact BLC staff and they will arrange a conversation.

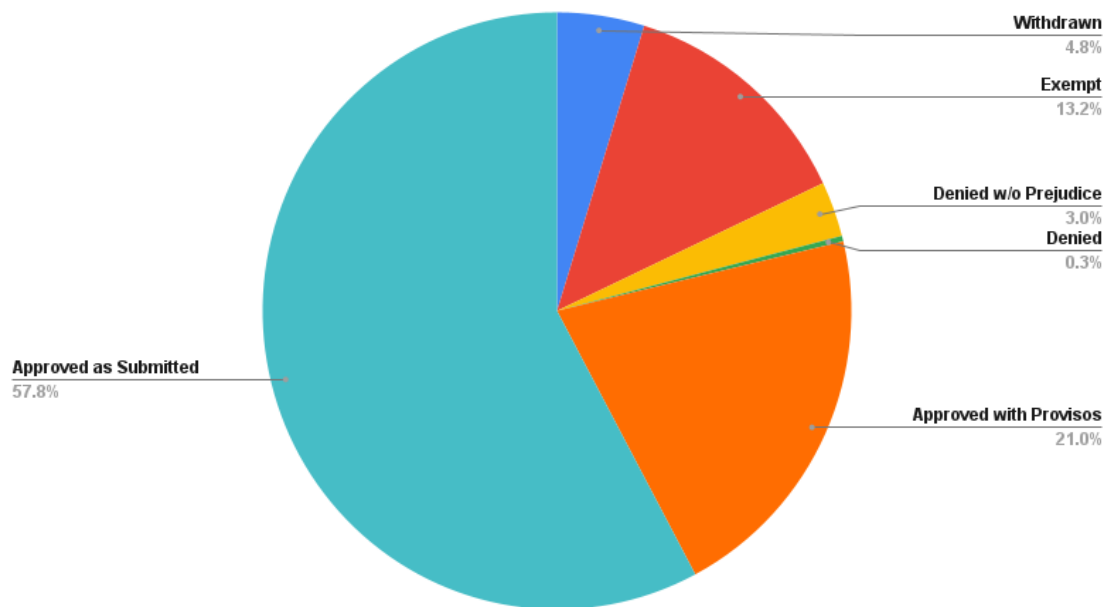
- **Where can I find the design guidelines for Beacon Hill?** You can find the standards and criteria for the Beacon Hill Architectural District [here](#). [Here is a link](#) to the Beacon Hill Architectural District.
- **Where can I find the contact information for the community appointed commissioners for District 1 / Navy Yard?** There is not a commission known as “District 1 / Navy Yard”. Instead, the Navy Yard’s preservation regulations are administered by professional staff from a combination of Federal, State, and Municipal agencies. All information including design guidelines, planning documents, and preservation regulations for the Charlestown Navy Yard can be found [here](#).

What are the steps needed to get a Local Landmark District?

- **What are the steps Charlestown would need to take to get a landmark designation?** First, you should meet with BLC to discuss landmarking expectations, timeframe, and eligibility. Then, you should fill out a draft petition and send it to BLC@boston.gov. The Executive Director will review the draft and contact the spokesperson to set up a meeting. For more information, review this presentation from the Preserving Place I workshop.
- **How are study reports funded?** Study reports are funded in a number of ways, including private donations from the community or public grants. Some historic districts chose to write study reports themselves and thus do not need any funds.
- **Who selects landmarks commissioners? How are they held accountable for changes selected for each project?** Commissioners are composed of half community residents, half industry professionals (architects, planners, etc) but always a Boston resident. Commissioners serve in terms and must be renominated by neighborhood groups to continue their service. If the Community is not happy with the performance of a particular commissioner, they can speak to the nominating bodies, and request a replacement. The mayor can also remove Commissioners for any reason.
- **Is there a backlog of nominations at the BLC?** There is no backlog of nominations for individual landmarks. All nominations for individual landmarks have been voted on and either do not qualify for landmark status, or are pending landmarks. Pending individual landmarks are eligible for accelerated design review while a study report is being developed.

- How does BLC prioritize a nominated landmark building if it is potentially threatened by a neighboring project (not that building itself)?** Article 85 is designed to press a temporary 90-day “pause” on rapidly developing projects that affect historic resources. This is often an attempt to negotiate with the applicant ways the property can be redeveloped, but with the existing resource, instead of demolition. Any conversations or alternate approaches with developers are non-binding. While it’s possible to designate buildings threatened with demolition through the Article 85 process, a lot can happen during the 90-day delay. It is often the case that the building is demolished soon after the 90-day delay. To avoid this risk, community members should identify resources and petition to protect them before they are threatened.
- What are the statistics for approval for a district (not home owner applications)?** Approximately 80 percent of applications are approved/approved with provisos in historic districts. 13 percent of applications are exempt. See the chart below for 2021 data for all current historic district application outcomes.

APPLICATIONS BY FINAL DECISION



- **Why is there a disconnect between historic resources that are protected at the national and local level? Why do some resources still get demolished?** In general, it is important to nominate things locally and nationally *proactively* rather than reacting to proposals for demolition, due to the time required for the administrative process of landmarking. Even if something is protected at the national and state levels, for the community's most historic resources, it is important to also designate it at the local level. Local level designations provide the greatest protection for historic resources. If you want to nominate something for designation, you should fill out a draft petition and send it to BLC@boston.gov.

What are the limitations of a Local Landmark District?

- **What is the difference between a “Local Historic District” and a “Boston Landmark Local Historic District”?** They are the same thing. Based upon significance, a local historic district designated by the Boston Landmarks Commission is either a Landmark District or an Architectural Conservation District. Please see [BLC'S website](#) for more information.

The Commission may designate an individual landmark, a landmark district, an Architectural Conservation District, or a designated Protection Area.

- **An Individual Landmark:** an individual property, improvement or physical feature with significance above the local level.
- **A Landmark District:** an area with significance above the local level (State or National).
- **An Architectural Conservation District:** an area with significance at the local level.
- **A designated Protection Area:** an area adjacent to and contributing to the physical environment of an Individual Landmark, Landmark District, or Architectural Conservation District.

More information on these distinctions and associated level of significance can be found [on BLC's website](#).

- **Can non-building structures and spaces, like Pier 5, be designated?** Yes, non-building structures and spaces, like objects or historic landscapes, can be designated.
- **Would historic designation limit the color one could paint one's house?** It depends. Some districts regulate paint color, some do not. It's up to the study committee to decide this should a petition be submitted to the blc for a new district.

- **Does a Landmark District govern shadows?** It depends. Some districts/landmarks regulate new shadows cast on public spaces, some do not. It's up to the study committee to decide this should a petition be submitted to the blc for a new district. or landmark.
- **How does each district regulate new buildings?** It depends. It's up to the study committee to decide what/how new buildings, also known as infill, are built in a historic district. Historic districts in Boston can have complete control over the design, height and positioning of new buildings.
- **Do Local Historic Districts regulate private development? Do National Historic Districts?** Local historic districts are the only type of historic district that regulates private development. National districts do not have any regulatory authority.

Neighborhood Design Overlay Districts

- **Who determines the boundaries for a Neighborhood Design Overlay District (NDOD)?** That's determined by the statewide inventory handled through both the Boston Landmarks Commission and the Massachusetts Historical Commission to identify areas of significance and then from there determinations are made in terms of are those areas eligible for listing on the national register. The national register studies were then adapted and put onto the zoning map and into the text of Article 62.
- **Why aren't all projects (or pending projects) that fall in an NDOD included in design review?** All pending projects located in the Neighborhood Design Overlay District receive design review, if they meet the following criteria:
 - Are not seeking zoning relief from the Zoning Board of Appeal; and
 - Are seeking to change the roof shape, cornice line, Street Wall height, or building height of an existing building; or
 - Create a new building that is at least 300 square feet; or
 - Enlarge an existing building by 300 square feet or more; or
 - Change an existing building to create new windows and doors that add up to 300 square feet or more of surface area.



- **How do the NDOD/NDR and Historic Landmark District address continually changing resilience and sustainability best practices?** Local Historic Districts may have resilient sustainability best practices incorporated into them, but they are guidelines that have to be in order to amend the guidelines, which can be a somewhat lengthy process that has to go through a Community review process with that particular local historic district Commission. Additionally, the Boston Landmarks Commission has to approve those changes which can add additional time. During the NDOD/NDR process, the BPDA has the ability to push for more up to date resilient sustainability best practices, without having to go through a lengthy process with different commissions, having to approve those guidelines.
- **Can there be an NDOD/ NDR in addition to a Local Historic District?** Local Historic District guidelines take precedence over an NDOD/NDR. It is important to note that any guidelines/standards and criteria for a Local Historic District or [designated Protection Area](#) (aside from demolition) may be less stringent than the design review process triggered through the NDOD/NDR process.
- **Does the NDOD process incentivize developers to demolish buildings?** The burden for design review would be equal for whether it's a renovation and retention of the original structure versus creation of a new one. Even if someone was to demolish and then rebuild something new it would still need to undergo NDOD design review if it wasn't going through ZBA. To better protect against the demolition of buildings, one avenue would be to reform the City's current demolition delay process. As with any city policy, you can advocate for this through your local city councilor or representative.
- **Do you think the NDOD is sufficient protection for Charlestown, or should there be a historic landmark district?** That's up to the community and your priorities.
- **Does the BPDA "own" the NDOD/ NDR process?** The NDOD/NDR process is written into zoning, and carried out by staff from the Inspectional Services Department (ISD) and the BPDA. First, ISD staff determine if a proposal needs NDOD/NDR design review. Once ISD has determined that a proposal does need NDOD/NDR review, ISD sends the case to BPDA Urban Design and Planning staff to conduct the design review and neighborhood comment process, as called for in Boston's zoning code.

- **What plans does the BPDA have to show the NDOD on its maps? Will the BPDA include BLC protected landmarks on plans provided to developers?** The current boundaries of the NDOD are shown on all zoning maps. If, through the PLAN process, the community indicates a desire to change the boundaries of the NDOD, BPDA staff would bring community-initiated changes to the Zoning Commission to request a zoning map amendment. If the Zoning Commission approves the change, official zoning maps would be updated to reflect the boundary changes.

Why are certain things protected while others aren't?

- **Why are the Charlestown Battlefield, Breed's Hill, Charlestown High School, [or other historic buildings in Charlestown] not landmarked?** In general, the process to landmark a significant historic resource begins with a complete petition signed by 10 registered Boston voters. A Boston Landmarks Commissioner or the Mayor can also submit a petition. Petitions for these sites were not submitted. If you want to nominate something for designation, you should fill out a draft petition and send it to BLC@boston.gov.
- **Why wasn't Charlestown designated as a local historic district when the process first became available in 1975?** As noted above, historic designation is primarily a community-driven process, requiring a petition signed by 10 registered Boston voters. No petition was submitted in 1975. The first Charlestown historic resource was Charlestown Savings Bank (1-4 Thompson Square), designated in 1981 after being petitioned by a BLC Commissioner. You can look up all the historic resources petitioned in Charlestown on BLC's website [here](#). If you want to nominate the neighborhood for local historic designation, you should fill out a draft petition and send it to BLC@boston.gov.

What's the deal with the Navy Yard?

- **Is the Navy Yard a National Landmark?** Yes.
- **How can parks, like Doherty Park, be protected from loss of vistas?** Parks can be designated individually or as part of a local historic district. To protect a particular vista or specific views of an individually designated landmark or district, the Study Committee/BLC may also designate a Protection Area which may help to protect views by limiting heights and changes in topography within the Protection Area.

- **How is maritime-derived history being handled and protected?** As noted above, the Navy Yard is a National Historic Landmark (NHL) with each building having its own set of design guidelines. In terms of maritime-derived history in other areas of the neighborhood, the Charlestown Mystic River Industrial Area was surveyed in 1997 (information can be found via MHC's MACRIS database), and the buildings at 30-50 Terminal Street are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.
- **Why isn't the Navy Yard in the NDOD?** The Navy Yard is a National Historic Landmark that has a program for preservation and utilization in which each individual building has its own set of design guidelines that must be followed. The Navy Yard already has one of the highest levels of protection compared to other sites in Charlestown. A robust design review process already occurs because each building has a set of design guidelines that were established back in the 1970s, making NDOD redundant. It was turned over to ownership to the BRA, the National Park Service, and the Advisory Council for Historic Preservation. Additionally there's a memorandum of agreement with the Mass Historical Commission that established these design guidelines that are still in place and in use today.
 - [Design Guidelines for New Development Area \(1978\)](#)
 - [Design Guidelines for Historic Monument Area \(1978\)](#)
- **Why is the BPDA able to sell and rent land in the [Navy Yard's] National Historic Landmark areas?** When the Navy decommissioned the site, the BPDA and the National Parks Service were given responsibility for adapting this military facility for everyday use, as a means of preserving its built environment and opening it up for use by members of the general public. Incrementally, over nearly five decades, these agencies have been following the Navy Yard Master Plan as the guide for using and preserving the former military base. Federal, State, and Municipal historic protections have been in place since the Navy Yard was decommissioned, and are integrated into the Navy Yard Master Plan. For detailed documentation, see [here](#).
- **Was there ever a request to landmark Pier 5? If so, where are the historic landmark reports and what was the result?** No, there was not a petition submitted to designate Pier 5. You can look up all the historic resources petitioned in Charlestown on BLC's website [here](#). If you want to nominate the neighborhood for local historic designation, you should fill out a draft petition and send it to BLC@boston.gov.

- **Who gave the BPDA the Authority to control the Navy Yard, and when did this take place? Can you share the documents that give the BPDA this power?** The Navy Yard was decommissioned on July 1, 1974 and a portion was subsequently conveyed by the General Services Administration (GSA) to the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) in 1978. Four distinct parcels were ultimately identified in the disposition process: the National Historic Site (controlled by the National Park Service); the Historic Monument Area; the Public Park; and, the New Development Area. The design regulations that were implemented as conditions of the Navy Yard transfer to Boston are the following links:
 - [Design Guidelines for New Development Area \(1978\)](#)
 - [Design Guidelines for Historic Monument Area \(1978\)](#)

Other

Reviews/ Preservation tools

- **How does the Parks Design Review Process work?** This process is overseen by the Boston Parks and Recreation Department and explained on their website: <https://www.boston.gov/development-approval-near-public-parks-and-parkways>.
- **Can you protect things through legislation, or does it need to go through BLC?** Per Chapter 772, the enabling legislation that created the Boston Landmarks Commission (BLC), designated the BLC as the municipal preservation agency for Boston's historic buildings, places, and neighborhoods. You can read more about this [here](#).
- **For a property owner who has successfully adhered to the Art 85 process, demo delay expired, and demo permit granted, would the BLC like to see a modern design while maintaining balance & scale of the street?** Once the Article 85 process has expired, the Boston Landmarks Commission (BLC) is not involved in further design review.

To better protect against the demolition of buildings, one avenue would be to reform the City's current demolition delay process. As with any city policy, you can advocate for this through your local city councilor or representative.

- **Who does Climate Resilience planning in Charlestown?** Climate Ready Boston, and more specifically Coastal Resilient Solutions for Charlestown and East Boston address the neighborhood. The first report was released in 2017 and the second version of that report is currently being worked on right now with the environment department leading it and the BPDA supporting them. You can learn more about the ongoing Climate Ready Charlestown work on [their website](#).

PLAN: Charlestown

- **I am just curious about why there seems to be such a disconnect between what you are communicating and the community.** We're sorry to hear that members of the community feel this way. We encourage you to continue participating in the process. We appreciate your patience through this iterative process as we strive to accurately reflect the communities' priorities. We endeavor to incorporate a multitude of community perspectives, but acknowledge that there may also be disagreement between community members as well.
- **Why is the BPDA continuing to approve projects when Charlestown has not even had its historic protection set forth?** The built environment is constantly evolving. Historic preservation protections are not meant to stop development altogether. They are intended to help guide change so that it is appropriate and contextual to the existing environment.

For example, the NDOD is a regulatory tool currently in place. Therefore, any proposed alterations that trigger that level of design review are considered when reviewing a proposal. Any property owner can choose to propose alterations to their property at any time.

- **Why are Bunker Hill Housing and the Navy Yard excluded from Plan: Charlestown?** The geographic scope of PLAN: Charlestown is the entire neighborhood of Charlestown, including Bunker Hill Housing and the Navy Yard. Because Bunker Hill Housing recently completed a five-year public review process, PLAN: Charlestown does not seek to re-create this process. While the Navy Yard is an integral part of the neighborhood, PLAN: Charlestown focuses on other parts of the neighborhood with fewer planning guidelines in place. See the [Navy Yard Master Plan](#) for the current planning context.

Development Projects

- **What is the Carbon footprint at Bunker Hill Housing Development?** Based on the energy analysis the BPDA's Smart Utilities Team received, the project has very low operational energy use <20 kBtu/sf/yr which is very good for a project of this scale. That number also corresponds to low operational carbon emissions which is also part of the Passive House certification requirements Bunker Hill Housing Development is targeting.
- **Why have the Bunker Hill Housing buildings never undergone a land use study or inventoried for historical significance?** The Bunker Hill Housing development underwent a comprehensive community process and review by City staff. Boston Housing Authority should have additional information regarding a land use study. Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) should have additional information on the current historic inventory status. Projects that have federal or state funding, licensing, or permitting, like the Bunker Hill Housing development, have to submit a project notification to MHC who then reviews the project. Boston Landmarks Commission (BLC) will be able to speak to whether or not the project underwent Article 85 Demolition Delay.
- **Pier 5 is available as a park. What would that process look like financially?** This question was also addressed in the November 2021 update on the Pier 5 RFP which is available online [here](#). Copied below is the response:

“Throughout the past several months, the BPDA has received significant advocacy for the construction of a public park to replace Pier 5. The BPDA is highly supportive of public open space along the water’s edge and ensuring access to the harbor. In fact, current State regulations for development on Pier 5 require a minimum of 51 percent public open space at the property and the inclusion of public facilities on the first floor of any built structures.

At this time neither the BPDA nor the City of Boston have plans to spend public funds to finance a park at Pier 5. However, the BPDA would enthusiastically support increased open space and/or park creation at Pier 5 through philanthropic or private financing. Should such a proposal emerge, the BPDA would be willing to accept an asking price of \$0 for the property if this was economically necessary to support additional public open space or other exceptional public benefits on Pier 5.

(excerpt from Pier 5 RFP November 2021 update cont.)

It is important to note that Navy Yard is already well served by public open space (e.g. Shipyard Park, Pier 4, Menino Park, and the Navy Yard National Historic Park) and there are areas in Charlestown, as well as other neighborhoods within the City of Boston, that are in greater need for public funding for park creation. Equitable public investment in open space must prioritize the needs of low income, diverse communities that currently lack adequate access to open space and face serious risks related to climate change. Given these social and environmental equity concerns, the BPDA believes that Pier 5 is an unlikely candidate for open space public funding.”