

SMALL-SCALE DESIGN REVIEW

An Overview of Design Review for Projects less than 20,000 GSF

PURPOSE OF DESIGN REVIEW

The purpose of design review is to ensure that the design of the proposed exterior alterations, additions or new construction is compatible with, and enhances the existing character of the immediate neighborhood.

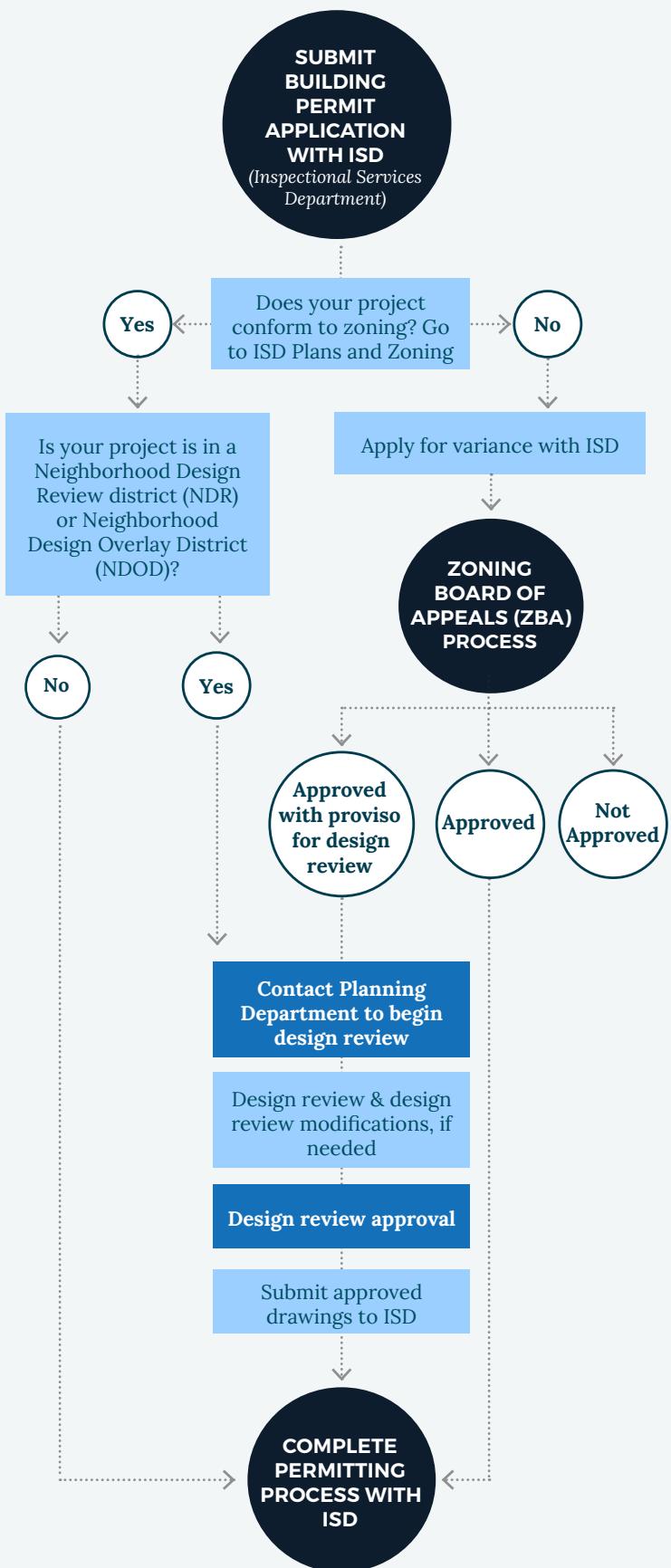
The Zoning Board of Appeal (ZBA) may require Planning Department design review as a condition of zoning relief. In addition, design review may be required for other projects based on zoning.

Planning Department Design Review is intended to address the following:

- » **Neighborhood Context:** What is the existing context of the site, building, and adjoining neighborhood? How well does the proposed design maintain and improve the existing neighborhood context and character?
- » **Site and Landscape:** What specifically is being proposed and how can it be best laid out on the site? Where is the usable open space?
- » **Building Form and Composition:** What will the proposed massing and/or exterior changes look like when the work is completed?
- » **Materials and Details:** Are the materials of the proposed addition or new construction compatible with the surrounding context and neighborhood?

For more information about the ZBA process, see the [ISD website](#) and the [ISD Guide to the ZBA Process](#).

AN OVERVIEW OF DESIGN REVIEW AND THE ZBA PROCESS



If you have any questions about the process, or would like to give us your feedback about the design review process, please contact designreview@boston.gov.

Updated January 2026



City of Boston
Planning Department

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STARTING THE DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS

Contact the Planning Department to start Design Review

Contact the Planning Department at designreview@boston.gov to get connected with a design reviewer. If your project includes a sign, see Article 11 of the Boston Zoning Code and email signreview@boston.gov. In order to assist the assigned reviewer of the project and to speed up the approval process, please prepare the following:

- » Address of the property
- » Zoning Board of Appeals decision letter, where applicable,
- » More Information Request Letter from the Inspectional Services Department ("ISD") (see [ISD Guide to the ZBA Process](#).)

At each stage of review, the Planning Dept. staff assigned to the case will respond within 5 business days of your correspondence/submit to determine next steps in the approval process.

SUBMISSION FOR DESIGN REVIEW

The visual documentation listed below helps us expedite our review.

All plans submitted should include:

- » Current photographs of existing site conditions and adjoining properties.
- » A certified Plot Plan (Existing Conditions), including the public sidewalk and infrastructure.
- » Site plan to scale indicating adjacent buildings, relationship to street (including sidewalk, location of existing street trees, fire hydrants, street light fixtures, utility poles, curb cuts, etc.), site access and egress locations, on-site parking, and trees.
- » Accurate dimensions for all drawings.

Submission guidelines by type of project:

Site Plan Review Only

- » Certified plot plan showing existing and proposed conditions
- » Provide a site plan and/or landscaping plan that shows:
 - » Existing and proposed building footprint
 - » Adjacent building footprints
 - » Existing grades
 - » Existing trees 6" in caliper or above.
 - » Proposed site walls, if any
 - » Proposed driveways, curb cuts (existing and proposed) walkways, planting areas
 - » Extents and dimensions of existing sidewalk and any existing or proposed street trees or utilities
 - » Proposed location of transformer, where applicable.

New Construction or Major Rehabilitation

- » Building floor plans indicating interior layout.
- » Building elevations of all sides of the building, with labels for all exterior materials. Size and type of windows, trim, cornerboards, fascia, and soffits should also be included.
- » Site plan (See site plan requirements above).
- » If the project includes signage, indicate the proposed signage location.

Minor Modifications (e.g., roof decks, dormers, additions, storefronts)

- » Drawing(s) indicating design and exterior materials of proposed alterations in context with the existing building or site. Drawing(s) must indicate all visible exterior changes in floor plans and elevation (exterior facade) views. Exterior materials should be labeled on the elevations. Size and type of windows, trim, cornerboards, fascia, and soffits should also be included.

Change of Occupancy only (with no exterior alterations)

- » Drawings showing proposed interior layout.

Signage

- » A photo or elevation drawing showing the location of the sign on the building, annotated with dimensions.
- » A plan containing the locations of all signage.
- » A drawing (or sheet / page) for each sign being proposed containing a dimensioned scale elevation, a collage or rendering of the sign in situ annotated with helpful building dimensions, and section-detail indicating all materials, what is transparent and what is opaque, lighting, etc.