

# How We Can Protect Historic Charlestown

Charlestown is a special place, steeped in history. The mission of the Charlestown Preservation Society (CPS) is to find ways to retain this important history and unique character now and for future generations.

However, the historic preservation movement has always been a grassroots movement. When Federal legislation was enacted in the 1960s, it reflected that. The power to designate and protect our historic resources was given to the states, their local governments and, by extension, people living in the communities. In this spirit, CPS is taking the conversation to the residents of each pocket of the neighborhood to tailor protections for our historic buildings that are local rather than one-size-fits-all.

## Monument Square - a Brief History

Monument Square is often considered the center of Charlestown, both physically and culturally. For over 200 years, it has been a place for us to gather, and to celebrate and honor not only our neighborhood's past, but the battle that led to our Nation's formation. It is the place where the neighborhood gathers to celebrate holidays, catch up with neighbors and, most importantly, celebrate the anniversary of the Battle of Bunker Hill, which we have done every year since the late 1700s). For these reasons, we have chosen to start our preservation efforts here. It is important that Monument Square be protected for future generations to connect with and honor the past.

On the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Bunker Hill, June 17th, 1825, 15,000 people gathered to witness the laying of the cornerstone for the Bunker Hill Monument. The Monument was intended to be a grand symbol of the goals of advancing the nation through peaceful means. But fourteen years later, the Monument was not even close to complete. The Bunker Hill Monument Association began to sell building lots in 1839 on the preserved battlefield to finance the completion of the monument. Thus, the Square is a physical representation of the people's priorities, to build the Nation through peaceful means and memorialize the Battle of Bunker Hill.

## Designations and Regulations That Exist Today

Today, new development and alterations in Charlestown are regulated through the City of Boston Zoning code with oversight by City agencies. Zoning and the Historic Neighborhood Design Overlay District (NDOD) are overseen by the Zoning Board (ZBA) and the Boston Planning & Development Agency (BPDA), while the Boston Landmarks Commission (BLC) oversees demolition applications for buildings that qualify.

Monument Square, the Navy Yard, Town Hill, The Terminal Storage Warehouse, Charlestown Heights, and the Middlesex Canal and Archaeological sites have honorary designations as districts listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

National Register designation does not provide standards and criteria for alterations, and it doesn't prevent demolition or regulate new additions. The NDOD only applies to changes over 300 square feet in area and almost all the buildings in Charlestown can be demolished after a 90-day demolition delay as there is not a local district designation today.

## Options for Local District Designations

The only tools available to us that enable the City of Boston to deny the demolition of historic buildings are local districts or individual building designations. Our intent is to create a district that is *limited* in its oversight of architectural details, enables energy efficient building upgrades and, most importantly, enables the BLC to deny the demolition of historic buildings within district boundaries.

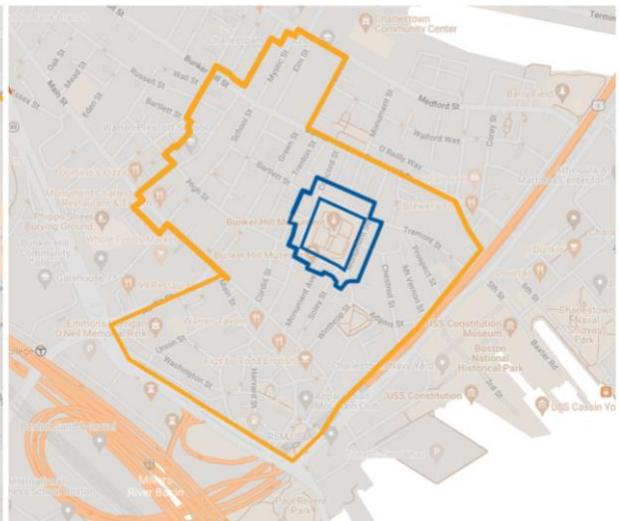
We have three options:

- Landmark District (must have National Significance)
- Architectural Conservation District (must have State or Local Significance)
- Protection Area (Must be adjacent to LD or ACD, with boundaries no more than 1200' from the LD or ACD boundary.)

## Proposed District and Protection Area Boundaries



*Local Landmark / Conservation District = National Register District Boundaries*



*Protection Area: Pearl/Sullivan/Salem to Main St, Austin St, Rutherford Ave, Chelsea, Bunker Hill Street, Polk St. to Medford St.*

## What would change with a district designation?

The process required by an owner to modify or demolish a building within district boundaries would change slightly. Currently, an owner of a building can receive a building or demolition permit after 1) the Inspectional Services Department (ISD) has been notified that the project conforms to zoning or that the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) has allowed a variance or zoning relief, 2) the BPDA has reviewed the new designs for appropriateness with established design guidelines, and 3) the 90-day delay on demolition has expired.

The process for buildings within the boundaries of a District would change slightly in that they would need a certificate of appropriateness from the BLC rather than the BPDA. Demolition permits would only be

allowed for buildings that *do not contribute* to the historical significance of the district or protection area or buildings with severe structural defects that cannot be saved.

Essentially, the only procedural change would be in the agency providing the design review, and that the demolition of historic buildings could be denied.

## **What Would NOT Change**

The standards and criteria established for a district are unique to each district. For example, Charlestown would NOT become Beacon Hill. The Beacon Hill district was established with the strictest standards under Massachusetts General Law many years before the BLC was created. Districts proposed under the BLC's oversight are more flexible and tailored to the individual districts and priorities of the neighborhood.

One specific point to note is that the color of paint on wood architectural details would not be regulated and specifications for window sash replacements could be suggested but non-binding. See chart on next page for examples of owner actions and required review.

## **Next Steps**

The Charlestown Preservation Society reached out to all the owners and residents on Monument Square and held a discussion to discuss the options for a local landmark district as well as gauge level of support.

We are in the process of creating the petition that asks the BLC to study Monument Square's eligibility for a district designation. Upon acceptance, a study committee will be formed of neighborhood residents and BLC staff to establish the boundaries and the standards and criteria that will regulate changes to buildings within the district. Throughout the process, the BLC will conduct many hearings and public meetings and notify residents of every step. Ultimately, the district designation will require the approval of residents, the BLC, the Mayor of Boston, and the City Council.

The petition is the first step needed to honor Monument Square for its importance to Charlestown by protecting it for future generations. Please reach out to [info@CharlestownPreservation.org](mailto:info@CharlestownPreservation.org) if you would like to sign the petition and/or volunteer for the study committee. The study committee will meet once a week for about six weeks.

Selected Examples of Typical Private Residential Property Owner Actions & Extent of Review

Unit of Government	Use	Demolition	New Construction	Scale, Massing & Setbacks	Floor Area Ratio (FAR) & height	New Additions	Exterior Materials	Roof Deck	Fenestration Pattern	Door Size & Placement	Trim & Detail	New Window Type	Paint Color	Railings & Fences	Other	
<b>Commonwealth of MASSACHUSETTS</b>																
<b>Massachusetts Historical Commission (Oversight)</b>																
<i>Monument Square Historic District</i>																
Listed on the National Register of Historic Places*																
<b>CITY OF BOSTON</b>																
<b>Zoning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals</b>																
Article 62 (In place, Governs Charlestown)	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X							
Monument Square Neighborhood Overlay District	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X					
<b>Boston Landmarks Commission</b>																
Demolition Delay Review, 90 days **		X														
Individual Landmark (Building)***		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	?
Landmark District***		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	?
Architectural Conservation District***		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				optional, determined at designation		
Protection Area****		X	X	X	X	?	X	X								

\* Currently in place. Buildings that contribute to the historic significance of the district are subject to "Section 106" review when projects that have state or federal ownership, funding, licensing, or permitting could "affect" the building or site. Private residential properties are not subject to review. Listed buildings may be demolished and new buildings may be erected within districts.

\*\* A demolition delay hearing is required for buildings in the City of Boston 50 years or older. Should the commission determine that a building is historically significant, a 90 day demolition delay may be enacted. Day 91 the owner can choose to demolish.

\*\*\* Possible / Not currently in place at Monument Square. If visible from a public way. The Standards and Criteria determined for landmark districts are unique to each district. This chart shows what is possible.

\*\*\*\* Possible Not currently in place in Charlestown. Must be contiguous with a district, cannot stand alone. Allowable up to 1200 feet from district boundaries or individual landmark.