



SURVEY RATING POLICY

Boston Landmarks Commission

This Survey Rating Policy establishes guidelines for how the Boston Landmarks Commission and staff will use survey ratings to determine whether a property is eligible for a petition to designate as a Boston Landmark. It supersedes all prior policies regarding survey rating categories and/or survey rating changes.

Individual Boston Landmarks, Architectural Conservation Districts, and Landmark Districts must have significance to the city, the state, the New England region, or the nation. Designation as a Landmark or District provides protection against demolition and requires design review for proposed exterior alterations. Outstanding interior spaces may also be designated as Boston Landmarks.

The Executive Director reviews all submitted petitions to determine whether a property is potentially eligible for designation and whether the petition will be presented to the Commission for a vote. The Boston Landmarks Commission may vote to accept petitions for further study for potential designation for properties whose inventory forms indicate National Significance, State Significance, or Local Significance.

SURVEY RATING CATEGORIES

National Significance (formerly I. Highest Significance)

Buildings, structures, objects, sites, or places are considered to have *National Significance*:

- As resources associated with aspects of Boston history of demonstrated national significance,
- As nationally known examples of the work of notable architects, designers, engineers or craftsmen,
- As examples of particular styles or types of buildings, structures, objects, sites, or places that became prototypes for similar resources throughout the nation or that are rare throughout the nation.

A property with National Significance helps us understand the history of the nation by illustrating the nationwide impact of events or persons associated with the property, its architectural type or style, or information potential. It must be of exceptional value in representing or illustrating an important theme in the history of the nation.

All buildings, structures, objects, sites, or places of National Significance are considered to meet the criteria for individual listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Resources of National Significance meet the criteria for designation as Boston Landmarks. Historic districts may similarly be considered to have National Significance.

State Significance (formerly II. Major Significance)

Buildings, structures, objects, sites, or places of *State Significance* are considered to have highest significance to the city of Boston and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts:

- As the city's most outstanding examples of their style or type, distinguished for high architectural or design quality and high degree of intactness (integrity), as evaluated within a statewide context,
- As early or rare examples of the work of notable architects, designers, engineers or craftsmen who may have worked in a statewide context.

Properties or districts are evaluated in a State context when they represent an aspect of the history of the Commonwealth as a whole. A property whose historic associations or information potential appear to extend beyond a local area might be significant at the State level.

Buildings of State Significance are considered to meet the criteria for individual listing in the National Register of Historic Places and for designation as Boston Landmarks. Potential historic districts may similarly be considered to have State Significance.

For the purpose of designation as a Boston Landmark, the category of State Significance additionally includes properties and districts considered to have significance to the New England region.

Local Significance (formerly III. Significant)

Buildings, structures, objects, sites, or places of *Local Significance* are considered to be of significance to the city of Boston in a local context:

- As resources with outstanding historical significance or urban design value to the city of Boston,
- As fine examples of the work of Boston architects, designers, engineers or craftsmen,
- As buildings, structures, objects, sites, or places that make an important contribution to the character of a street or area,
- As buildings, structures, objects, sites, or places with strong historical associations with major Boston industries, organizations, institutions, events or local figures, or
- As fine examples of a particular style or building type.

A local historic context represents an aspect of the history of the city, county, or cultural area, or any portion thereof. Local Significance is defined by the importance of the property to the local context.

Buildings of Local Significance are considered to meet the criteria for designation as Boston Landmarks. All properties of Local Significance are also considered eligible for individual listing and/or contributing to a district in the National Register of Historic Places.

Districts with local significance may be designated as local Architectural Conservation Districts under Chapter 772 of the Acts of 1975, the BLC enabling legislation.

Contributing to a Historic District and May Contribute to a Historic District (formerly IV. Notable and V. Minor)

Buildings, structures, objects, sites, or places *Contributing to a Historic District* are considered important to the character of an area. Contributing resources in a district may be important:

- As part of a visually cohesive streetscape or element within a district,
- As resources with some individual architectural or design distinction, whether because of their materials, craftsmanship or detailing,
- As the best examples in their area of a particular style or type,
- As resources with some local historical significance.

Contributing resources may also be important as an ensemble, in relation to one another, even if individually distinct. Some properties may be potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places individually but also stand within an area distinguished as a district and thus more appropriately be listed as within a district.

Contributing properties located within a National Register District qualify for the same protection and incentives as buildings listed individually in the National or State Register.

Properties *Contributing to a Historic District* are not considered significant enough to be designated as individual Boston Landmarks.

Properties *May Contribute to a historic district* pending further study:

- As buildings, structures, objects, sites, or places that are compatible with surrounding structures in scale, style, materials or fenestration patterns, or
- As buildings with some architectural interest or integrity.

Properties that *May Contribute to a Historic District Pending Further Study* are not considered eligible for designation as Boston Landmarks or for individual listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

Non-Contributing (formerly VI. Non-Contributing)

Non-Contributing resources do not add to the historic associations or historic architectural qualities for which a property or district is significant. They may be of relatively recent construction (generally less than 50 years) or may be historic resources so altered that they no longer retain integrity.

Non-contributing properties are not considered eligible for designation as Boston Landmarks or for individual listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

SURVEY RATING CHANGES

- Petitions may be accepted for buildings rated as National Significance, State Significance, or Local Significance, following a preliminary hearing.

- Petitions for buildings rated Contributing to a Historic District or May Contribute to a Historic District Pending Further Study, and Non-Contributing (formerly IV, V and VI) shall not be accepted.
- If a rating has not yet been assigned to a building, staff will draft an inventory continuation sheet and will assign a rating within 30 days of receiving a written request.
- In lieu of accepting petitions for buildings rated below Local Significance, the Boston Landmarks Commission shall invite petitioners or other parties to submit a letter requesting the Commission review the rating and consider changing it. It shall be the obligation of anyone requesting a rating change to submit information that will assist the staff and the Commission with its review.
- Changes to ratings shall be made as follows:
 1. The new evidence is evaluated by the Survey Director and/or Architectural Historian against the criteria of rating categories described earlier in this policy. Evaluation will be based on the evidence presented (documentary or in situ); a repeat field check of the survey sub-area; a comparison of survey data of buildings of similar type, style, date, etc., in relevant ranking groups from the city-wide survey; and on any other factors the Commission or staff determine are relevant in their discretion;
 2. If upgrading or downgrading a survey rating is warranted, recommendation is made to the BLC. This recommendation will be expressed in the preparation of an inventory continuation sheet for a particular property or area that delineates the level of significance;
 3. If the BLC accepts recommendation, change in rank (rating) is made;
 4. The report of change is sent to the Preservation Alliance, Society of Architectural Historians, Massachusetts Historical Commission, Chamber of Commerce, Real Estate Board, and the Planning Department; if any of these formally objects in writing to the BLC within 45 days, the BLC will consider objections but will not be obliged to reverse its decision;
 5. Final report of change will be sent to the above organizations and to archival institutions that own the survey so that data can be used effectively for up-to-date planning.
 - When submitting a survey rating change MHC to be updated in MACRIS, MHC has recommended that BLC staff use an Inventory Continuation Sheet.
- Denial without prejudice of a request for a survey rating change shall not preclude a later submittal of a request for a rating change, provided it is accompanied by additional information.
- Petitions may be accepted for buildings with ratings changed to National Significance, State Significance, or Local Significance pending a preliminary hearing.
- If approved by the BLC this policy shall be effective as of the date below.

Approved by the Boston Landmarks Commission on March 11, 2025.