



THE HOUSING SEARCH PROCESS

1 Determine Your Housing Needs

The first step in any effective housing search in Boston is deciding what specific housing needs you have. The **Housing Options** (pages 20 and 21) and **Boston Housing Market** (pages 22 and 23) sections can help students make the most informed decision about their requirements. Housing requirements come in many forms, but the big questions anyone needs to answer are simple: what is my price range? How far am I willing to commute? What do I need in my own neighborhood to feel safe and comfortable? Once these big questions have answers, students should start to think about more specific apartment needs: how much space do they require? Will they be bringing pets with them? Do they need laundry available in the building?

The goal of answering these questions is to give students a bottom-line assessment of what they require and to narrow down the neighborhoods where they will want to look for housing.

4 Find Housing Listings

Once students know what type of living experience they want, where they are going to look for it, and whether they will be living with anyone else, the next step is to start to look for advertisements for open apartments. This step will generally be the longest section of any housing search, and will be heavily dependent on the type of housing each student wants to find, the neighborhood they have chosen, and the price range they have set.

Generally, students have three major options for finding housing listings: large online apartment bulletin boards (like Craig's List), Property Management Firms (like BU's Rental Property Management), and real estate agencies. More tools are listed in the **Finding Housing Resources** section on page 60.

Most students will use a combination of those different tools and try to put together a list of between 10 and 15 potential apartments.

2 Pick a Neighborhood

Each neighborhood in Boston will offer students different living experiences. Once they have determined what their housing needs will be, picking a location that will be best situated to offer those opportunities keeps the housing search efficient and less time-consuming.

Each community in the city has its own housing search tools. Once a student has determined which locations will be the best fit, the OHR can provide specific housing search websites, property management firms, and realtors that work specifically in that area to help students find housing there. Some tools will be useful no matter what neighborhood students consider, but most will be neighborhood specific.

The **Picking a Neighborhood** section on page 24 can be a good place to start when trying to pick a neighborhood that fits your needs best.

5 Evaluate Your Potential Apartments

After locating a good number of housing listings, the next step in the rental process is to find some mechanism for evaluating each apartment to decide if it will be the right one. For many landlords and students, that will mean coming to Boston to look at each unit they have found. Many apartments sound great on paper, but don't turn out to be so wonderful in reality; others have eccentricities and quirks that make them more or less suitable for certain students.

For some students, coming to Boston specifically to evaluate apartments may not be possible. In these situations, there are a variety of alternative mechanisms for evaluating an apartment. None of them are quite as good as looking at a unit in person, but they can provide more information about an apartment than just a listing alone. See the **Securing Your Apartment** section on page 70 for more information about these techniques.

3 Find a Roommate

Most students at the BUMC will live with a roommate, either for companionship, or for financial reasons (and in many cases, both!) After students have determined their housing needs and the locations where they expect to find them, they will want to investigate several different roommate-locating tools to find someone who shares their neighborhood and housing requirements. While the housing market starts to open up in the early summer months in Boston, the roommate market is generally open throughout the year, especially through a variety of the BU or other university-based housing search engines.

The **Living with Roommates** section of the guide on pages 26 and 27 can point students towards a number of the online roommate-matching systems that operate in Boston, including the OHR roommate searching database.

6 Make Formal Arrangements to Rent

Once students have seen a few different apartments and have a decent idea of what units in their neighborhood of choice and price range look like, the last step is to pick a unit and make a formal agreement with the landlord to rent it. In most cases, students will find a unit they like after seeing five or six other apartments. Seeing fewer units might not provide the necessary variety, and seeing too many units can get confusing. The OHR firmly believes there are no "perfect" apartments in Boston - just units that are more likely to suit individual students' needs than others.

When students decide to make formal rental arrangements, they will normally fill out an application. If the application is accepted, the last step of the search process is signing a **lease**, the legally binding contract between a renter and his or her landlord. You can find more information about leases in the **Tenant's Rights** section on page 76.

BOSTON'S HOUSING OPTIONS

Because Boston is such an old city, there is a tremendous variety in the types of housing available. From brownstone rowhouses to apartment complexes, multi-family homes to modern lofts, Boston can offer every type of lodging that you could want. However, the trick to finding housing in the city is to know where to look to find the type of housing you like at a price that will fit your budget. Below are brief descriptions of the types of housing available in the city, and where you might expect to find each one. None of these housing options is 'better' than any other – they each offer different things to prospective tenants.

Brownstones/Victorian Rowhouses

A brownstone is a short, generally four- or five-storey building made of brown or red stone brick. This style of building, built mostly in the 1800s, is easy to recognize because of the distinct bowing of the street-facing fronts, the red brick, and older architectural detailing like engraved wooden baseboards. They are sometimes called “rowhouses” because developers would build a number of identical-looking brownstone units next to each other on the same street. Brownstone buildings are amongst the oldest housing stock in Boston, and are located in many of the most desirable neighborhoods. However, some of the more modern conveniences of apartment complexes - like laundry facilities on premises, easy-to-access internet ports, and central air-conditioning - are harder to find in these older buildings. Brownstone floor plans are rarely uniform, and each building's interior can vary tremendously compared to its neighbors. Many brownstones are not handicap accessible.



Locations: prominent in Beacon Hill, the Back Bay, parts of Fenway/Kenmore and Roxbury. The South End is the largest Victorian Landmark district in the U.S., so its predominant housing stock is Victorian brownstones.

Apartment Complexes

While Boston does not have as many high-rise apartment complexes as New York or Chicago (a number of the city's neighborhoods passed zoning ordinances that limited how tall a building could be), it does boast a fair selection of large apartment complexes. The facilities in these buildings are definitely more modern than most brownstones, have more access to conveniences like central air conditioning, climate control, and laundry. Most of the recently built apartment complexes are luxury units and tend to be more expensive than similar sized apartments in other types of housing as a result. Apartment complexes usually offer a mix of studios, one- and two-bedroom apartments. Higher occupancy units are rare.

Locations: downtown has the largest selection of large-style complexes, although usually each neighborhood has one or two big facilities. The Fenway neighborhood is emerging as a new premier location for large apartment complexes.

Small Apartment Buildings

Compared to the larger apartment complexes, small apartment buildings in Boston are much more numerous. Often managed by a small property owner or management company, these buildings have a few units – between five and 15 or 20, and offer a good balance between the architectural beauty and historical feel of brownstones, and the modern convenience of an apartment building. Many apartment buildings will have laundry on premises. Like the larger apartment complexes, most of these buildings offer studios and one- and two-bedroom units, although three- and four-bedroom units exist as well. Along with houses, small apartment buildings are probably the most common type of housing in Boston.

Locations: small apartment complexes dominate the Allston housing market, as well as certain sections of the Fenway/Kenmore area and parts of Roxbury. Small apartments are the most common rental housing in the city.

Houses

In many of the more residential and suburban sections of Boston, multiple-family houses are the dominant housing option. For a student population, this type of unit offers the most physical space of any of the housing described here, and is usually the easiest in which to arrange a multiple-occupancy living arrangement. Many home-owners or landlords will rent one floor of a multiple-family house to a group of four or five students. Houses offer a number of advantages: space, a “homey” feel, often parking, and the ability to host guests and visitors much more easily than in an apartment. They also tend to be the most pet-tolerant. However, rental opportunities in houses are almost always high-occupancy situations, so if you are interested in looking into a home, make sure you've found some reliable roommate ahead of time. Also, in many homes, you will be responsible for paying all or part of the heating bill, which can be expensive in the winter.

Homestays

A number of the short-term housing options in Boston are homestays - rental situations where tenants share a portion of a house with the family that lives there. In most cases, the tenant has access to his or her own bathroom and bedroom, but uses the family's kitchen and living room spaces. This type of housing is fairly common for international students doing rotations or short-term stays.

Locations: *Jamaica Plain, Dorchester, South Boston, Brighton, Roslindale, West Roxbury and Hyde Park. Very difficult to find in the South End, Back Bay, or the Allston Village section of Allston/ Brighton. Homestays are common in nearby suburbs like Newton.*

Condominiums

A condominium is an apartment for purchase. Condos can be very similar to the types of rooms you will find in an apartment complex, although the buildings they inhabit can vary tremendously. Typically, a developer will find an apartment building, upgrade the individual units, and then sell them as condos. As a result, the units are often of slightly higher quality, offer more conveniences, and are more expensive to rent than an apartment in a similar building would be. Since condominiums are usually offered for purchase and not rent, if you find a condominium for rent, there is a good chance that you would be renting directly from the owner of the property. Condos may offer parking and will often have laundry in the facility.

Locations: *South Boston, certain areas in the South End, Downtown and the Back Bay have a large number of condos, and are more likely to see condos that owners have opened up to rent. Condos are common throughout Boston.*

Co-Operatives

For those interested in a slightly less traditional living environment, the Boston area does feature a number of different housing co-operatives. Generally, housing co-ops are groups of like-minded people who have all agreed to live in a building together under certain guidelines. These can range from living an organic or green lifestyle to being continually active in local civic organizations. Prospective tenants for most co-ops need to contact the co-op organization and schedule a time to meet with one of the current tenants to see if they would fit in with the co-op culture. Co-ops can range in size from just a handful of people to larger groups with several dozen members. As far as buildings are concerned, co-ops are not quite a different 'style' of housing - the type and interests of the tenants are what determines a co-op., rather than the type or size of the actual housing itself.

Locations: *Co-ops can be hard to track down. A good reference to finding them is the website www.Bostoncoop.net. Dorchester, Jamaica Plain, and the other suburban neighborhoods tend to have more co-ops than the more centralized and urban neighborhoods.*



BOSTON'S HOUSING MARKET



Boston's housing market is unlike virtually any other city's in the U.S. Three factors drive the realities of the market here: the age of the city, the expense of housing, and the high student population in town. Understanding the basics of the market will help students keep their expectations reasonable and their housing search efficient.

AGE

While Boston is a modern and exciting city, much of its real estate is old. About 70% of Boston housing stock was built before 1940. As a result, a lot of apartments in the city will simply not look the same as apartments that were built more recently. That does not mean the apartments are bad, or in poor condition, but it does mean the architectural styles and amenities might be different than apartments that were built 15 or 20 years ago.

Below are some characteristics of the apartments and buildings you might see here:

- Few apartments have carpeting. Most older buildings have hardwood floors.
- Most brownstone or rowhouse apartments in particular are not wired for central air-conditioning.
- Many older apartments will make use of a metal hot-water radiator system to heat the apartments. If you are not used to this type of heating system, it can be loud. The large metal radiators will make pinging and popping noises when they first heat up in the late fall.
- Especially in brownstones and smaller apartment complexes, disability access is limited, and few apartments have elevators.
- Many of the older buildings (again, especially brownstones) used to be houses and have been converted to apartments or condominiums. As a result, the floor plans of these apartments are rarely standardized. Come prepared to see some unique layouts!
- Many of the neighborhoods in Boston that contain older housing are built either near the water, or on filled-in swamp land. Even the best maintained of these apartments may occasionally have a mouse or insect problem. The age of the housing is not an excuse for a landlord or property owner to ignore a rodent problem, but it is reasonable to expect that you may see a bug or rodent once every so often.
- Because of the architectural details (and cranky neighbors), most old apartments do not allow large pets. Cats are usually OK, but large dogs and more exotic animals are not usually acceptable.

- Because the city is so old, many of the apartments in Boston are modestly sized. If you need to find an apartment with a lot of space, the more suburban neighborhoods will probably offer you that type of unit more easily than the central, urban neighborhoods.

EXPENSE

Boston is amongst the most expensive cities in the country. According to www.Realtor.org, it is the third most expensive city in which to be a renter, only cheaper than New York City and Los Angeles. The most basic implication of this expense is that most young Bostonians live with roommates to help split housing costs.

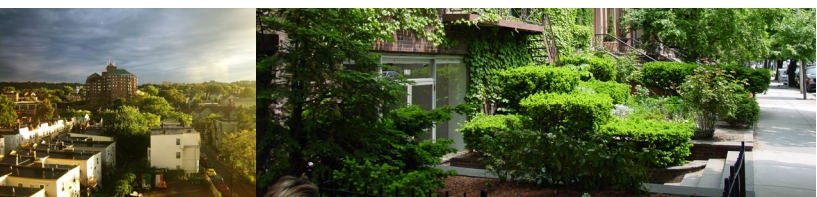
Students living with a roommate can expect to pay somewhere in the range of \$600 to \$900 or \$1000 per person each month in rent. Location is the biggest factor in this spread; apartments closer to downtown Boston are in the higher end of the range, and apartments farther away are at the lower end of the range. This variance certainly does not cover the entirety of housing in Boston; luxury apartment rental rates can easily be double or triple this range.

Price ranges for studio or one-bedroom apartments are more variable based on neighborhood, but start at a low of about \$900 for a small studio. The realistic range for a one-bedroom apartment that only one student intends to occupy is probably close to \$1200 or \$1500.

In certain neighborhoods of Boston (the South End being one of them), many students will share a one-bedroom apartment with a roommate. Even though these apartments are designed for one person, many of them are large enough to split between two people. Most students will partition the living room space to create a second bedroom. This option is usually cheaper than looking for a full two-bedroom apartment, and in some locations in the city, it may be the only practical option for reasonably priced housing. This type of apartment is called a "split (two bedroom, three bedroom, etc)."

STUDENT POPULATION

The incredibly high population of young people in Boston is the modern city's most prominent trait. Over 150,000 students call Boston home, but student renters often have unique needs not shared with long-term residents. Property owners and management firms know that students of all types represent a big portion of their business, and they have developed business strategies to best tap into this high student population.



Most colleges in the Boston area begin their academic year at the beginning of September. As a result, many landlords and property owners are used to renting their apartments on a full-year, September to August lease. The “Housing Season” in Boston gears up around mid-May (as many students graduate and move on to jobs in other places, or go home for the summer) and slows down in late August. During those summer months, landlords and property owners have the most listings for open apartments available. Most leases in the city of Boston require tenants to notify landlords about lease renewal 30-60 days before the end of the lease, so starting to look for actual apartments about two months before you need to move in, if you are looking to move in the summer, will give you a good selection of apartments to consider. This can be a good and bad thing: while there are generally more rental opportunities during the summer, the competition for the open apartments is also more prominent.

The major exception to the two-month rule is large apartment complexes. The management companies that run larger buildings count on having a small number of openings each year, whether they’ve received notice or not (they have enough tenants that they can almost guarantee that some of them will be moving out). These buildings often generate a waiting list in January for apartments opening in August or September. This is especially true for the few apartment complexes located in the South End, where the BU Medical Campus is located. Students interested in living in a big apartment complex should try to get on a couple of waiting lists as early as they can. If you can identify a couple of buildings or complexes that interest you, make an appointment to see an available unit. In most cases, if you like what you see, you can submit an application well in advance of when you plan to move in.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

In addition to the overarching market forces that will shape your housing search across the Boston area, you will also notice a few generally applicable commonalities to the apartments themselves in the city.

Here are a couple of those commonalities:

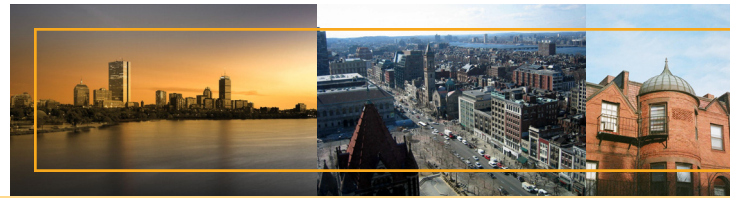
- Most apartments are unfurnished
- Most will include the cost of heat and hot water along with the rent, but not electricity and cooking gas
- Few apartments have air-conditioning or central air.
- Most will not include a parking space. Some will, but often the space is an extra fee.

Want Nicer Digs?

Some of the luxury apartment facilities in Boston include really nice amenities – in-house gyms, internet cafés, loading docks for moving furniture – but they come with a major issue, too: cost. Students who are looking for a housing experience with more amenities, and who do not mind living with more roommates, will find that many of the higher-end and luxury units in the city are willing to accept several graduate students in one apartment. A luxury two-bedroom apartment probably will not be affordable for two students, but it may be for a group of three or four. If you really like stainless steel appliances, and you do not mind other people, this can be a good way to get into an otherwise unaffordable building.



CHOOSING THE RIGHT NEIGHBORHOOD



Picking a neighborhood is the second big step in finding good housing in Boston. Most students will use the following criteria to determine what neighborhoods are the best fit for their needs.

CRITERIA

NOTES

Cost

Boston is an expensive city, and one of the expenses of coming to school at BU is the cost of housing. To help guide students in the process of taking out loan or grant money to finance their education, each year the Office of Student Financial Services (OSFS) puts together a budget for the total cost of attending BU, and that includes a component for room and board. The current monthly OSFS budget for room and board is about \$1,200. Taking out \$300 per month for food expenses leaves just a bit over \$900 for rent and utilities. Finding a multiple occupancy unit in Boston for \$900 is a reasonable task. Finding a single occupancy unit for that price is not reasonable, most of the time.

With this \$1,200 as a reasonable guide for apartment prices, most students on the BUMC will look for housing somewhere between \$600 per month and \$900 per month in rent, per roommate. The biggest influence on price will be proximity to downtown Boston: apartments closer to the center of the city are more expensive than those farther away. Cost is probably the most important neighborhood criterion.

Convenience

Deciding how close to campus they need to live is an important consideration for most students. For those who aren't living in the South End itself, they will be commuting to class on a bus, a train, bicycle, or other transportation mechanism.

The average commute time for most students to the BUMC is about 30 minutes, and will cover between two and four miles of physical travel, and one or two forms of transportation. Some students are comfortable traveling that distance to class; others know that they need regular access to the library and other facilities on campus, and they won't be able to study the way they need to without being within walking distance of it.

The benefits of being close to campus are simple: students have better access to the resources that exist here. The benefit of having a wider commuting tolerance is having more housing options: students who are willing to travel from farther away to get to campus have more neighborhoods they can investigate, a more flexible price point, and more choices in atmosphere.

Atmosphere

In addition to going to class and learning a profession, most students also intend to experience the city around them and enjoy their social lives. Finding a neighborhood that has the right type of atmosphere will make living in Boston more enjoyable.

The internet is one of the best tools in learning more about the character of the different neighborhoods in the city. While both Allston/Brighton and the South End are socially active neighborhoods, no one would ever confuse the two: the former is a garage rock and beer neighborhood; the latter is a cocktail and ballet neighborhood. The neighborhood profile section later in this guide discusses the social scene of each neighborhood, and its relative level of raucousness.

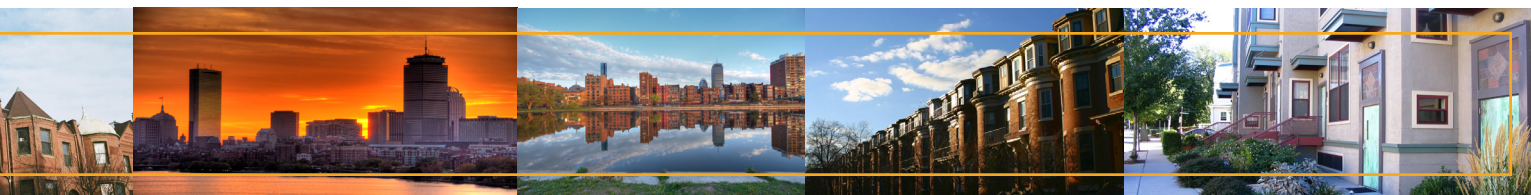
Boston is an old city and all of the neighborhoods have well-developed personalities. There is a good chance that at least one of them will match any given student's social requirements.

Safety

Reported crimes are tracked by police throughout the Boston area and reported several times each year. Boston, overall, is a very safe city for its size, but crime is very much an issue in some areas. Much of Boston's violent crime over the past five or ten years has been gang related and is geographically focused in areas where gangs claim territory; specifically, certain areas of Dorchester, Mattapan, and Roxbury.

Rates of reported crime do not alone provide the full picture of the safety of a neighborhood. A better term than safety would be comfort: some neighborhoods, while experiencing very little in the way of reported crime, have very visible poverty and homelessness. For students who have not lived in a heavily urban area in the past, these issues may be just as important as the actual rate of reported crime.

The neighborhood profile section of this guide has a more nuanced description of each community's demographics, and goes a bit further in explaining the safety concerns that students may have outside of just reported crime.



HIGH LEVEL

Expensive neighborhoods (\$850-\$900+ per roommate)

Back Bay,
Beacon Hill
Brookline
Chinatown
Downtown
Harvard Square (Cambridge)
South End

MODERATE LEVEL

Moderate neighborhoods (\$750-\$900 per roommate)

Cambridgeport (Cambridge)
Central Square (Cambridge)
Charlestown
Fenway/Kenmore
Jamaica Plain
Kendall/MIT (Cambridge)
Mission Hill
South Boston

LOW LEVEL

Inexpensive neighborhoods (\$600-\$750 per roommate)

Allston/Brighton
Dorchester
East Boston
Hyde Park
Mattapan
Roslindale/West Roxbury
Roxbury

Convenient neighborhoods (under 20 minutes commuting)

Back Bay
Beacon Hill
Chinatown
Roxbury
South End (the BUMC is located here)
South Boston

Moderate neighborhoods (25-35 minutes commuting)

Brookline
Cambridgeport (Cambridge)
Central Square (Cambridge)
Dorchester (on average)
Downtown
Fenway/Kenmore
Kendall/MIT (Cambridge)
Mission Hill

Inconvenient neighborhoods (45 minutes commuting or more)

Allston/Brighton
Charlestown
East Boston
Harvard Square (Cambridge)
Hyde Park
Jamaica Plain (on average)
Mattapan
Roslindale/West Roxbury

Active neighborhoods (lots of bars, clubs and restaurants)

Allston/Brighton
Back Bay
Central Square (Cambridge)
Chinatown
Fenway/Kenmore
Harvard Square (Cambridge)
South End

Moderate neighborhoods (some bars, clubs, and restaurants)

Beacon Hill
Dorchester
Downtown
Jamaica Plain
Kendall/MIT (Cambridge)
Mission Hill
Roxbury
South Boston

Quiet neighborhoods (not many bars, clubs, or restaurants)

Brookline
Cambridgeport (Cambridge)
Charlestown
East Boston
Hyde Park
Mattapan
Roslindale/West Roxbury

High Reported Crime

Chinatown
Downtown
East Boston
Mattapan
Mission Hill
Roxbury
South Boston

Moderate Reported Crime

Back Bay
Central Square (Cambridge)
Charlestown
Dorchester
Fenway/Kenmore
Jamaica Plain
South End

Low Reported Crime

Allston/Brighton
Beacon Hill
Brookline
Cambridgeport (Cambridge)
Harvard Square (Cambridge)
Hyde Park
Kendall/MIT (Cambridge)
Roslindale/West Roxbury