

A Walking Tour Of Boston City Hall



Prepared by
the Boston City Council
Central Staff

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Call to arrange for a guided tour.

A Walking Tour of Boston City Hall

Welcome to the “new” Boston City Hall. “Old” City Hall is located on School Street, near the old site of Boston Latin School, the first public school in the country. As you enter the main doors, you may be surprised to find yourself on the third floor. Built on the side of a hill, the lower floors are found in the back part of the building. The first floor opens onto Congress Street, facing Faneuil Hall, Quincy Market, Samuel Adams Park and the National Holocaust Memorial.

Architects Gerhard M. Kallmann, Noel M. McKinnell, and Edward F. Knowles developed three major themes which are represented throughout the building. These are:

- openness,
- accessibility, and
- harmony between the old and new Boston.

On this level, the bricks flow in from the plaza outside, through the front doors, giving the sense of openness and welcome. To create the impression of accessibility, the glass doors originally had no divisions between them. In the interest of conserving energy, revolving doors were installed in 1973. What appears to be an upside-down staircase, above the main entrance, actually houses the seating for the City Council Chamber. The skylight above is 126 feet high, allowing for natural light in the mid-afternoon.

The third floor houses the names of the recipients of the Henry L. Shattuck Public Service Award. The Boston Municipal Research Bureau, a non-profit “watchdog” organization founded in 1932, recognizes the extraordinary contributions of City employees through the annual Shattuck Awards.

As you walk through the doors, by the information desk under the clock, you will find yourself in the Scollay Square Gallery. Down one flight is the Mezzanine level where most of the billing and collection transactions take place. Down one more flight is the second floor. Both of these levels are designed with the public in mind, providing maximum efficiency to conduct business. Note that the second floor has no windows. Because it is built into the side of a hill, it receives

natural light only from the skylight above the staircase, the North door, and the thirty-three smaller skylights. Three more art display Galleries are located on this floor; the Boston Visual Artists Union Wall, Human Rights Corridor, and the Bostonian Gallery.

Proceed back up the escalators to the Main Lobby and toward the Grand Staircase. This area is used as the City Hall Auditorium. The landing is used as a stage and the stairs serve as seating space. As you continue up to the next level you will notice two stone lanterns (directly ahead of you) called “ishidoros”, a gift to Boston from Kyoto, Japan, one of Boston’s sister cities. Boston’s other Sister Cities include: Melbourne, Australia; Hangzhou, China; Taipei Municipality, Taiwan, China; Strasbourg, France; Padua, Italy; and Barcelona, Spain.

The large concrete structure to your right is the Mayor’s private staircase. Through the window behind the staircase, you can see the Old State House through a hole in the side of 28 State Street Building. I. M. Pei, Government Center’s planner, stipulated that the Old State House should never be cut off from view of New City Hall. Built in 1713 as the Boston Town Hall, the Old State House was the site of the reading of the Declaration of Independence in 1776 to the people of Boston. Before ascending the stairway once again, take time to observe the view the fourth level provides. In keeping with the theme of harmony of old and new, the architects designed this level as a vantage point where you can see out all four sides of City Hall. On the wall beside the staircase leading to the next level is a brass plaque given to the City of Boston by the City of Jerusalem in 1980, in honor of the City’s 350th anniversary. The plaque states the City’s motto “God be with us as He was with our fathers” in English, Latin and Hebrew.

Walk up one more level and take a look out the large picture window. There is a spectacular view of Dock Square. The large, red-brick building is Faneuil Hall, built in 1742. It is known as the “Cradle of Liberty” because of the famous town meetings held there just prior to the Revolution. The Golden Grasshopper above the weathervane became known as the symbol of Boston during the War of 1812, when sailors suspected of being spies or traitors were asked to identify this

grasshopper as our symbol. The grasshopper is a financial symbol of good luck placed here because the building was originally designed as a marketplace by Peter Faneuil, a wealthy local merchant. Behind Faneuil Hall is Quincy Market, built in 1826 and recently renovated as a center for shopping and restaurants, drawing many visitors and locals alike. Look out across the Harbor to Logan Airport Tower, which at 301 feet is one of the tallest in the world.

At the top of the stairs is the fifth floor (the ceremonial level) which houses the offices of the Mayor, who is elected every four years; and the offices of the thirteen City Council members, who are elected every two years; the Christopher A. Iannella City Council Chamber, which is open to the public during weekly Council meetings and Committee hearings; and the Main Gallery area. Since City Hall was constructed, membership in the City Council has expanded from nine to thirteen members. As a result, some of the Main Gallery area has been transformed into office space. The gallery theme is maintained in the hallways with artwork displayed on the walls, and historic Boston photographs in the Gabriel Piemonte City Council Hearing Room. Take a moment to browse through the gallery and view exhibits. Originally the exhibits changed monthly, the Main Gallery (the only one of its kind in any American City Hall) enables residents to combine business with leisure in this public building.

As you continue walking down the fifth floor, you will come into the City Council Main Reception Area. The Past Presidents of the City Council, Board of Aldermen and Common Council (pre-cursors to the current City Council) dating back to 1822 when Boston became a City are displayed along the walls. At the end of the corridor are pictures of the current members of Boston City Council, with the current President in the center.

As you walk through the door to the left of the Council pictures, you will enter the Council Chamber Ante Room. The Ante Room houses pictures of former Central Staff Directors and City Messengers, Massachusetts and City legislative district maps, and the main collection of the Municipal Reference Library. The Reference Library, which is open to the public, contains state and city legislative documents and a full copy of the Massachusetts General Laws in addition to

other periodicals and reference materials. The James Michael Curley Conference Room is off of the Ante Room. The Curley Room, named after a former Councillor and Boston Mayor, houses his portrait and composite photographs of various Boston City Councils dating back to before the opening of New City Hall.

If you proceed to the right, you will enter the Christopher A. Iannella City Council Chamber. Weekly City Council meetings and hearings are held in this room. For meetings, the President (elected annually from among the members) presides over the meetings, while the City Clerk sits below to record official actions of the meeting. For Council Committee hearings, the Council Committee chair sits at the desk where the Clerk sits during meetings. All meetings and hearings held in the Iannella Chamber and the Piemonte Room are broadcast over municipal access cable, which airs Monday through Friday from 10AM to 5 PM.

The four floors above this contain administrative and planning agencies for the city.

How It All Began

New City Hall opened in 1969. In 1962, a nationwide competition was conducted by the Government Center Commission of the City of Boston for the design of a new City Hall, the focal point of the entire downtown Boston, Government Center Urban Renewal Project. The overall plan for the project, prepared by I. M. Pei & Partners, architects and city planners, was an undertaking of such tremendous scope that one like it has been attempted by no American city. It has transformed the blighted Scollay Square area into a modern Government Center contained sixty acres of striking contemporary buildings designed by outstanding architects.

Boston's national competition for a City Hall design was the first by a major American city since 1909 and it drew 255 entries. The design selected was that submitted by the New York architectural firm of Kallmann, McKinnell, and Knowles. The jury of four nationally known architects and three Boston laymen termed the design impressive, functional, economical, and harmonious with its surroundings. The winning team then joined with two Boston firms, Campbell, Aldrich, and Nulty (architects) and LeMessurier

Associates (consulting engineers), to form the architects and engineers for the Boston City Hall and to execute the design and supervise construction.

Awards

Boston City Hall has received the following awards:

- *American Institute of Architects Honor Award*
- *Harleston Parker Medal* – an award by the City of Boston and the Boston Society of Architects for excellence in design and construction.
- *Precast Concrete Institute* – for excellence in architectural and engineering using Precast concrete.
- *Bartlett Award* – sponsored by the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped and the A.I.A. and given to those projects recognized as having a great degree of accessibility and usability for the handicapped.

Construction Facts

Total Building Site:	97,000 sq.ft.
Plaza Area:	417,000 sq.ft.
Net Office Space:	318,000 sq.ft.
Height:	9 levels reaching 138 ft.
Personnel Capacity:	1,600-2,000
Widest Point:	322 ft.
Total Enclosed Area:	513,000 sq.ft.
Cost:	\$21,600,000
Overall Building Weight:	200,000,000 lbs.
Architects:	Kallmann, McKinnell, & Knowles; Campbell, Aldrich and Nulty
Contractor:	J. B. Bateson Co., Inc.
Structural Engineer:	LeMessurier Assoc., Inc.

1969 City Administration:

Executive Department
Kevin H. White, Mayor

1969 City Council

Gerald F. O'Leary, President; Thomas I. Atkins; Garrett M. Byrne; William J. Foley, Jr.; John E. Kerrigan; Frederick C. Langone; Patrick F. McDonough; John L. Saltonstall, Jr.; Joseph F. Timilty.