



INSTITUTIONAL MASTER PLANS

Introduction:

Boston is famous as a center of world-renowned universities and hospitals. Most of these facilities are located in the heart of the City's residential neighborhoods, where off-campus institutional development can significantly impact the surrounding communities. To ensure that the expansion of a hospital or university enhances the institution's public service and economic role in the surrounding community, as well as the City as a whole, the City instituted Institutional Master Plan Review.

What is an Institutional Master Plan?

An Institutional Master Plan (IMP) describes an institution's entire long-range development program, giving the community and the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) a context within which to evaluate all of the institution's proposed projects and their overall effect on the neighborhood. The IMP is a comprehensive development plan that describes an institution's existing facilities, long-range planning goals, and proposed projects. The institution must update and renew its IMP periodically and must amend it whenever it adds or changes any project over a minimum threshold.

Institutional Master Plan Review:

Institutional Master Plan Review recognizes that large colleges, universities, and teaching hospitals tend to expand and renovate their facilities more frequently than other uses do, and that the cumulative effects of incremental expansion may be greater than, or different from, the effects of each project individually. To assess these cumulative impacts and determine appropriate community benefits, Institutional Master Plan Review requires a public review of a hospital or college project in the context of the institution's overall development program.

Institutional Master Plan Review is required by Article 80 of Boston's Zoning Code for most hospital, university, and college projects that add more than 20,000 square feet of gross floor area or that involve interior alterations for more than 50,000 square feet of gross floor area. Institutional Master Plan Review seeks to engage affected communities in an open-to-all review of Institutional Master Plans and the projects described in them. The adoption or amendment of an Institutional Master Plan requires public comment periods, a public hearing, and votes of both the Boston Zoning Commission and the BRA Board of Directors. In addition, the institution must sign a Cooperation Agreement with the BRA. This Cooperation Agreement empowers the BRA to enforce the institution's public commitments approved in the review process. Approval of an Institutional Master Plan creates new zoning regulations for the land and buildings described in the plan. It does not however, examine the effects that particular project designs may have on specific areas. That question is left to Large and Small Project Review.

Large and Small Project Review:

An Institutional Master Plan may propose projects that are not allowed as-of-right by the general zoning for the area. If an IMP is approved, the institution may seek to build any project whose uses, dimensions, and location are described in the plan. If a proposed project is 50,000 square feet of gross floor area or more, examining the impacts and effects of these projects is left to Large Project Review. Large Project Review may require the applicant to submit detailed technical analyses, such as but not limited to, wind, shadow, groundwater, and traffic studies. The BRA may conduct Large Project Review at the same time as Institutional Master Plan Review if the information needed for these analyses is available when the Institutional Master Plan is ready for review.

If a proposed project is less than 50,000 square feet of gross floor area but more than 20,000 square feet of gross floor area, examining the impacts and effects of these projects is left to Small Project Review. The purpose of Small Project Review is to provide a concise procedure for reviewing the design of projects that do not require Large Project Review but that can be expected to impact the surrounding area and public realm because of their size or location. Small Project Review determines whether a project is consistent with the design guidelines and site plan standards established for the project location and for the City as a whole. The BRA may conduct Small Project Review at the same time as Institutional Master Plan Review if the information needed for these analyses is available when the Institutional Master Plan is ready for review.
