

Apartment Search Guide

1. FAQs

- What are the different avenues for finding an apartment and features of each?
- What are the advantages of living in a condo versus an apartment complex?
- What factors play into pricing of Boston rental properties?
- How does timing affect availability and pricing?

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FAQs

1. What are the different avenues for finding an apartment and features of each?

Berklee housing bulletin board: Great resource to find both agents and owners.

Directly through owner:

- The only way to reach owners directly is typically through the Berklee website or through Craigslist, but not all owners will advertise on either.
- Least amount of selection
- Can be more lenient on move-in cost/guidelines
- No fees

Management companies:

- They only have the properties that they manage
- Less flexible showing hours
- Typically set move-in costs/guidelines
- Will typically send out their properties to agents to show instead of showing in-house
- No fees

Real estate agencies:

- Will save time by setting up all the appointments
- Will guide a client through the rental process
- Will match properties to a client's needs
- Will explain about different landlords, buildings, and areas
- Can try to negotiate on behalf of the client
- Largest selection of properties
- Depending upon the season and landlords, there are realtor fees

2. What are the advantages of living in a condo versus an apartment complex?

Condo complex:

- Typically will be professionally managed
- Have owner occupancy (thus a higher possibility of mixed age of occupants)
- Typically nicer common areas
- Tenants have to be more quiet due to owner occupancy
- Individual units can differ dramatically
- Occasionally will have a move-in charge

Apartment complex:

- Most of the tenants will be of the same age
- Units are typical of the same quality as each other

3. What factors play into pricing of Boston rental properties?

- Supply vs. demand. There are over 25 schools in the Greater Boston area in close vicinity to one another. Most Boston-area schools have increasing enrollment while the housing quantity stays constant.
- Landlords who own large amounts of properties can influence the pricing.
- Most schools do not have enough dorms to fulfill housing needs. (Many schools even rent apartments from landlords and use them as dorms.)
- Convenience of being close to school. (Properties outside of the Boston area are significantly more affordable.)

4. How does timing affect availability and pricing?

- Most properties are on a 12-month lease starting September 1 and ending August 31.
- We start renting out units for the following September. In January, prices will be at the highest point, but many of the big bedrooms, splits, and nicer units will be rented first.
- The bigger the landlord, the earlier they will ask current tenants to see if they are going to renew. Therefore the earlier the landlords will put properties on the market.
- All landlords should have their properties out by June for a September rental.
- The later in the spring/summer, the more negotiable landlords might be with move-in costs/pricing. However, there will be fewer properties to choose from.
- Please note that it is always better to start looking and to rent earlier than later.

Common Rental Term Explanations

Apartment condition statement: This is a form you will fill out and send to your landlord/management company within 15 days of move-in to make them aware of any prior damage (so you won't be held liable when you vacate) and/or any repairs that must be done to the property. Please make sure you take photos of any existing damage. Also make sure all major appliances are functioning.

Security deposit: A deposit held in an interest bearing escrow account. The security deposit and the interest accrued can be returned within 30 days of the tenant vacating. Any damage, repair costs that are a result of the tenant(s), or money in arrears will be deducted from the security deposit.

Lease: A binding agreement between the landlord/property manager and tenant(s) stating an agreement, rules, and terms for a property. Most landlords use a standard RHA lease that outlines the rights and responsibilities of the tenants and landlords according Massachusetts law.

Addendum: An addendum is typically attached to the standard lease and is the owners' specific rules and regulations pertaining to their building or unit. Most points in the addendum reiterate what is in the body of the lease but may have more specific guidelines such as no parties or no smoking.

Jointly and Severally: According to Massachusetts law, all lessees and cosigners are responsible jointly and severally. This means that each tenant and cosigner is responsible jointly for the rent each month.

Cosigner/Guarantor: A Cosigner/Guarantor will have to provide a Cosigner/Guarantor form. This form states that the Cosigner/Guarantor will be responsible for any financial obligations for rent or related services or damages incurred by the applicant for as long as the applicant is obligated to pay rent.

I-20 Form: A student visa form for foreign students that they must apply for through their school. This form states exactly how much the applicant has set aside for room/board. This can be used instead of a Cosigner/Guarantor in the case the applicant does not have a U.S. cosigner with a social security number.

Split: A type of apartment where the living room is used as an additional bedroom. The living room will have its own door, and you do not have to go through the living room to get to the other bedrooms. The common space would be the kitchen and bathroom. Splits are a great alternative way to save money.

Sublet: This is when a tenant will allow another tenant to occupy his room in return for payment of rent. If subletted with the landlord's approval, the incoming tenant typically will need an

application and additional funds. The original tenant and cosigner could still be responsible for rent and damages depending upon the situation.

Realtor fee: A fee paid to a real estate agent for securing an apartment. Typically properties are no fee, half a month fee, or full fee.

Fee disclosure: A document a real estate will have you sign that will disclose to you the realtor fees for each apartment you view.

Four or more occupancy rule: The city of Boston has set a law in place that no more than four unrelated students can legally occupy an apartment.

Squatters: Please try to refrain from letting anyone stay in your apartment who is not on a lease. If the landlord finds out, this can lead to an increase in rent.

Tenancy at Will: A Tenant at Will is one who occupies a rented premise without a lease but pays rent periodically (typically monthly). The agreement for the Tenancy at Will may be either written or verbal. Either the landlord or tenant may terminate this arrangement by giving written notice 30 days or one full rental period in advance, whichever is longer. No reason is required to terminate.

Bed bugs: Insects that are most commonly found in beds that will bite and can be exterminated. Please refrain from taking free items out of the trash on September 1, or buying used goods, as this is the most common way of spreading.

Utilities to be aware of are heat, hot water, cooking gas, internet, electricity (especially electric heat), and heating systems powered by electric fan. Gas/oil companies typically offer a fixed-price plan where you can choose to have a fixed heating bill throughout the year. You can also check the current tenant's average and high and low heating bills.

Area and Price Coverage

Below is a list of the locations that Berklee College of Music students typically live/rent in, including average price ranges, as well as a brief description of the demographic of each area. Each area has its own characteristics.

Fenway/Kenmore/Symphony: A mix of young professionals and students, in the heart of multiple schools.

Back Bay/Beacon Hill: Very quaint neighborhood. Residents include politicians and typically people of higher income brackets.

Brookline/Coolidge Corner/Brookline Village/St.Mary's: A suburb just outside of Boston where the majority of residents are young professionals, families, and some Boston University students.

Jamaica Plain: An artsy and diverse neighborhood that is becoming increasingly GBL friendly.

Brigham Circle/Fort Hill/Mission Hill: Surrounded by many of Boston's top hospitals, the residents include many doctors and students from nearby Northeastern, Wentworth, and Mass Art.

Allston/Brighton: Residents include many students from Boston University and Boston College. Many larger apartments are located in these areas.

Somerville: A cheaper alternative to Cambridge. It has a mixture of students, professionals, and families, blue- and white-collar residents.

Cambridge: Many pharmaceutical companies are located here. It is also home to Harvard and MIT. Residents include professionals as well as students.

| Fenway/Kenmore/Symphony | | | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------|-------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Studio | \$1050-\$1400 | | | |
| 1 Bed | \$1400-\$1900 | 1 Bed Split | \$1400-\$1950 | (1 or 2 people) |
| 2 Bed | \$1800- \$2000 | 2 Bed Split | \$2100-\$2700 | (2 or 3 people) |
| 3 Bed | \$2700-\$3600 | 3 Bed Split | \$3200-\$3700 | (3 or 4 people) |
| 4 Bed | \$3600-\$4400 | | | |

| Brookline/Coolidge Corner/Brookline Village/St.Mary's | | | | |
|--|---------------|-------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Studio | \$1100-\$1400 | | | |
| 1 Bed | \$1400-\$1600 | 1 Bed Split | \$1400-\$1700 | (1 or 2 people) |
| 2 Bed | \$1600-\$2200 | | | |
| 3 Bed | \$2100-\$2600 | | | |
| 4 Bed | \$2400-\$3000 | | | |

| Jamaica Plain | | | | |
|----------------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Studio | \$800-\$1050 | | | |
| 1 Bed | \$1050-\$1200 | 1 Bed Split | \$1250-\$1350 | (1 or 2 people) |
| 2 Bed | \$1400-\$1700 | | | |
| 3 Bed | \$1750-\$2400 | | | |
| 4 Bed | \$2200-\$2800 | | | |

| Brigham Circle/Fort Hill/Mission Hill | | | | |
|--|---------------|--|--|--|
| Studio | \$800-\$1000 | | | |
| 1 Bed | \$1050-\$1200 | | | |
| 2 Bed | \$1300-\$1900 | | | |
| 3 Bed | \$1900-\$2400 | | | |
| 4 Bed | \$2400-\$3200 | | | |
| 5 Bed | \$3000-\$3600 | | | |

| Allston/Brighton | | | | |
|-------------------------|---------------|-------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Studio | \$900-\$1100 | | | |
| 1 Bed | \$1100-\$1500 | 1 Bed Split | \$1195 -\$1450 | (1 or 2 people) |
| 2 Bed | \$1200-\$1800 | 2 Bed Split | \$1600-\$1900 | (2 or 3 people) |
| 3 Bed | \$1900-\$2400 | 3 Bed Split | \$2100-\$2400 | (3 or 4 people) |
| 4 Bed | \$2400-\$3000 | | | |
| 5 Bed | \$2500-\$3800 | | | |

| Cambridge/Somerville | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------|--|--|--|
| Studio | \$850-\$1400 | | | |
| 1 Bed | \$1200-\$1600 | | | |
| 2 Bed | \$1500-\$2000 | | | |
| 3 Bed | \$1800-\$2500 | | | |
| 4 Bed | \$2500-\$3200 | | | |
| 5 Bed | \$3000+ | | | |

| Back Bay/Beacon Hill | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------|--|--|--|
| Studio | \$1150-\$1600 | | | |
| 1 Bed | \$1550-\$2100 | | | |
| 2 Bed | \$2200-\$3300 | | | |
| 3 Bed | \$3200-\$4000 | | | |
| 4 Bed | \$4100+ | | | |

Transportation

Public transportation: The MBTA, also known as the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, is Boston's public transportation system. The MBTA's website, www.mbta.com, has bus and train schedules for users' convenience. It also calculates the estimated time (in minutes) from one destination to another.

Costs: Charlie card, \$1.70; cash on board, \$2.00; or monthly link pass, \$59.00, unlimited travel on subway and local bus.

Allston/Brighton

MBTA Green Line (B, C, D trains)
Bus #57, #64, #65, and #66

Back Bay

MBTA Green Line (all trains) and Orange Line
Bus #1, #39, #55

Beacon Hill

MBTA Green Line (all trains), Blue Line, and Red Line
Bus #43, #55

Brookline

MBTA Green Line (C, D trains)
Bus #60, #65, #66

Dorchester

MBTA Red Line (Ashmont and Braintree lines)
Bus #1, #8, #18, #19, CT-3

Fenway and Kenmore Square

MBTA Green Line (all trains)
Bus #8, #39, #55, #57, #65

Jamaica Plain

MBTA Green Line (E train), Orange Line
Bus #39, #41, #48

Mission Hill, Roxbury

MBTA Green Line (E train), Orange Line
Bus # 8, #39, #43, #66, CT-2

South End

MBTA Green Line (E train), Orange Line
Bus #1, #43, CT-1

Rental Process

1. Figure out your budget. (If it is less than \$1,000 a roommate would be suggested.) Remember, not all unit pricing include all utilities. Be sure to factor into your budget utility costs that are not included in the monthly rent.
2. Find a roommate and establish a cosigner (one for each tenant).
3. Figure out the area where you want to live. Take into account commuting time, parking (if you have a car), and area pricing and amenities.
4. There are more no fee apartments available to view in June/July/August, but searching can begin as early as January for September listings.
5. Decide on an apartment that suits your needs.
6. Make sure your cosigner is creditworthy, as landlords review your cosigner's credit report and verify employment.
7. Make sure you have at least one month's rent in your bank accounts.
8. To secure an apartment, it would be in your best interest if the owner took the apartment off the market to prevent other realtors from showing/renting it. To do this, the owner requires a deposit equal to one month's rent. This is due the day you decide to put forth an application. Note: Some landlords will not even consider an applicant unless they have a deposit of one month's rent. If the owner accepts your application, your deposit gets applied to your first month's rent payment. Should the owner reject your application, your deposit will be returned.
9. You should have two and a half months in reserves, in addition to the month rent you already put down, for last month, security, and any misc. fees. The remainder of the last, security, fees will be paid on a schedule set forth by the owner/property manager.

Things to Think About

- Landlords can legally charge first month + last month + security = three month's rent. There can also be a key deposit.
- When you move in, fill out the Apartment Condition Statement and give it back to the landlord within 15 days. Please also take detailed pictures of any damages to the unit.
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- Pets: Not all landlords allow cats/dogs. Most allow cats.
- Renter's insurance: You probably have more in personal property than you realize. Computers, stereos, televisions, clothing, jewelry, and furniture would be expensive to replace in case of a fire or theft. Renter's insurance is a good idea and is surprisingly affordable. Don't assume your landlord's or your parent's insurance will cover your belongings. Any expensive instruments or jewelry will need to be added as "scheduled property" and will need to be appraised. Certain participating real estate firms will pay for one year's apartment insurance paid.
- Avoid breaking rules. Breaking rules may lead to eviction, losing your deposits, and additional fees.
- Parking sticker: If your vehicle is insured in Massachusetts and you have a copy of your lease, you can obtain a street parking sticker for your area for free.
- If your roommate moves out, you may still be responsible for paying the portion of his/her rent until you find a new roommate.
- Is a cosigner required? Yes. If you are a student and not working full time, you need a cosigner. If working full time, you most likely will not need a cosigner, but you will need an employment verification letter, prior rental references, and good credit, otherwise all landlords require a cosigner. If you recently graduated this applies as well. This person is usually a parent or guardian but can be anyone financially able and with good credit.
- General maintenance: On the front page of your lease, there will be a phone number for the landlord/management company and or a superintendent. If either the management company or superintendent are not present on the lease, you should call your landlord if you have any repair problems.
- Make sure you call your landlord or maintenance company whether it is a minor or major problem, as minor problems become major problems if ignored. If your landlord or maintenance company does not respond or repair any major issues, you can call the ISD (Inspectional Service Department).

- Fire/CO2: Please check and see if your apartment has a working fire/CO2 detectors. (It would also be good to get your own fire extinguisher).
- The best way to find out about an apartment/landlord is by asking the current tenants of the unit/building.
- How much time do I have to pay the move-in costs? First month's deposit is due immediately to hold the apartment. The remaining payments are to be paid on a schedule set by the landlord/property manager.