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Periodic facade inspections required by Boston ordinance

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The City of Boston passed a Façade Ordinance Code in 1995 requiring that exterior walls and appurtenances of "high rise" commercial buildings whose height is greater than 70 feet be inspected periodically for safety. The law requires inspection every year for "unoccupied" buildings and every 5 years for "occupied" buildings. The inspection must be performed and report filed by a registered architect or engineer. The report shall include a record of all significant deterioration, unsafe conditions, and movement observed, as well as a statement regarding the water tightness of the exterior surfaces.

While the architect or engineer is certainly qualified to handle the "technical" aspects of the inspection, masonry contractors help facilitate the practical aspects of the process.

According to Michael Norman, president of Abbot Building Restoration Co. Inc., a leading commercial masonry contractor in the Boston area, the masonry contractor can provide the architect/engineer with access to the building, utilizing aerial lifts, staging, and/or scaffolding, to assure a close-up inspection. For example, while a binocular inspection may indicate a minor crack in the masonry, a closer inspection may reveal a more severe problem. Such close inspections can evaluate defective areas and save the owner money if immediate repairs are required.

In addition, the contractor can assist in the assessment of the extent of the deterioration and outline of the scope of work required to restore the integrity of the façade.

While many building owners are either unfamiliar with this law or choose to ignore it, conducting such an inspection can save the owner fines, eliminate injuries, identify problems, and ultimately save the owner expensive repairs.

For more information on this Ordinance Code, contact the city of Boston Inspectional Services Department at 617-635-5300, or visit http://facadeordinance.com/boston_code.shtml.

High rise buildings like Zero Marlborough St. in downtown Boston are subject to engineering inspections every 5 years.

Harlan Polishook is an independent marketing consultant, Boston

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540