



# APARTMENT & CONDO SAFETY & SECURITY

BOSTON 2015-16



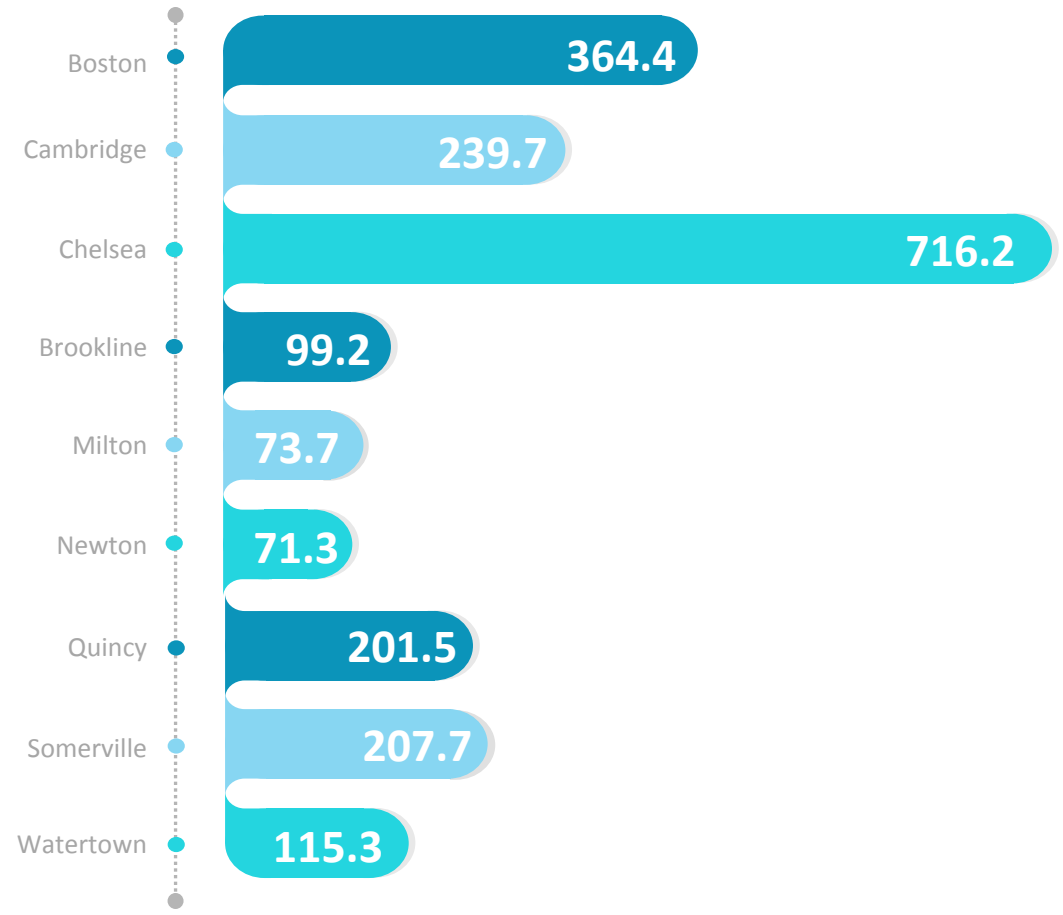
## ■ A SPECIAL REPORT FOR APARTMENT, CONDOMINIUM ■ & MULTI-UNIT RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY MANAGERS

- ❖ The City of Boston and surrounding communities closed 2014 with a drop in vital crime statistics. Fatal and nonfatal shootings dropped from 250 to 213 – nearly 15%. Violent crime, which includes homicide, rape, robbery and aggravated assault dropped 6%. Meanwhile, property crime – which includes burglary, larceny and auto theft dropped 4%.

### **All good news.**

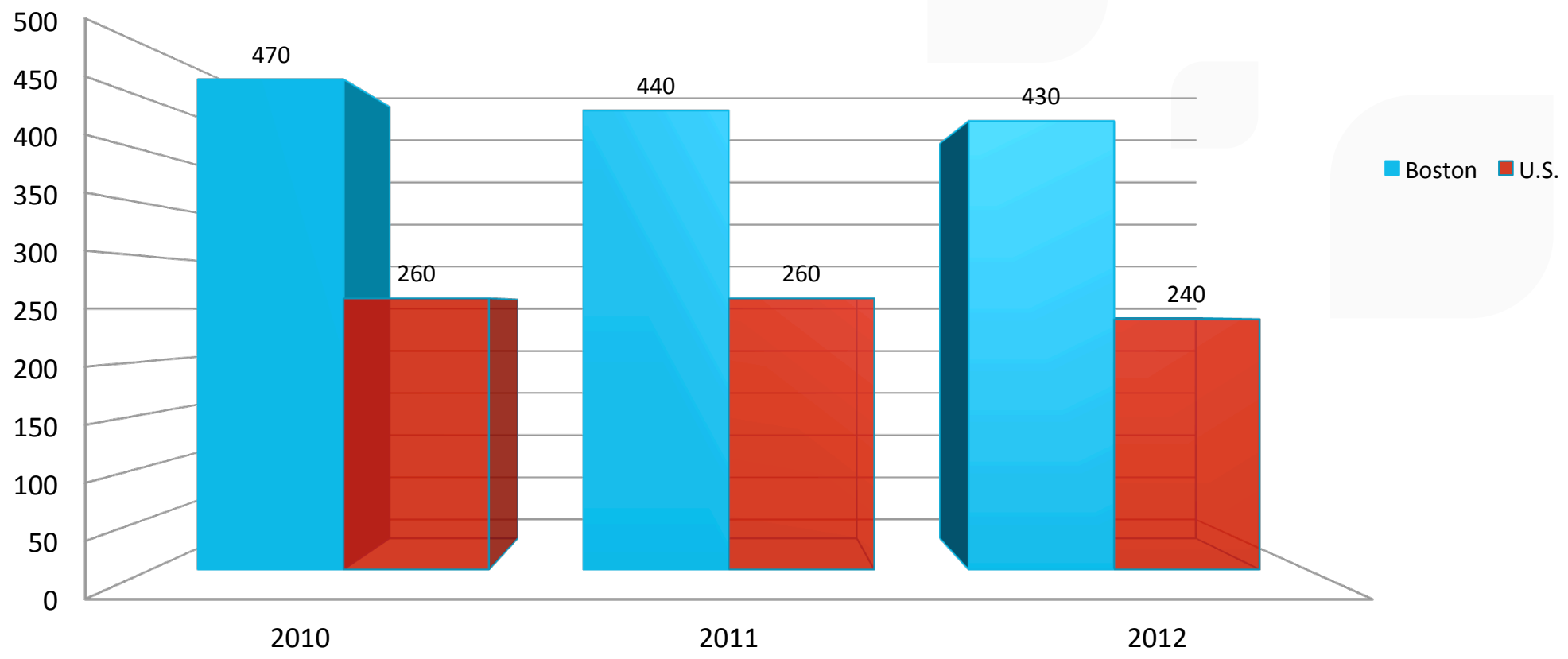
- ❖ But that was then. And this is now. Things have changed in 2015. For the worse. Homicides alone have spiked by 27% to date, with most taking place in Dorchester, Mattapan and Roxbury.
- ❖ In an interview with the Boston Globe, Mayor Martin J. Walsh said – “I want to get to zero. I don’t know if we’ll ever get to zero, but we want to.”
- ❖ As an apartment or multi-unit residential property manager – we know you feel the same. And that is why we at Boston’s Best Commercial Cleaning have taken the time to prepare this Special Report on Safety & Security for Apartment, Condominium and Multi-Unit Residential Property Managers.

■ Report of violent & property crimes  
■ Source: City Data, 2012.



**BOSTON 2012**

■ AVERAGE ANNUAL CRIME REPORTS: BOSTON COMPARED TO THE U.S.  
■ Source: City Data, 2012.



## ■ If it's Not Safe and it's Not Secure --- It's Even Tougher to Manage

### Rent and Lease.

- ❖ Prospective tenants are a lot savvier about making their apartment choices than in previous years. Thanks to the Internet. That has become their first “go to” resource to begin their search. And today, they’re accessing all kinds of data, from crime statistics to walkability scores to help them make their choice. Safety and security are at the top of their list of things to check before signing a lease and handing over a check.
- ❖ It is important that property managers fully understand that prospective tenants rightfully assess and ask themselves key questions – “Will I be safe here? Will my family be safe? What about my children?”
- ❖ Properties that exhibit telltale signs of safety and security gaps will experience lower building occupancy, heightened vacancy rates, and reduced profitability.
- ❖ Experienced property managers understand that having a truly integrated security plan will retain a higher percentage of good residents. And most importantly – good residents will leave when crime and safety issues appear to be tolerated by the property management staff.

## ■ How Secure is Your Property from a Renter's Point-of-View?

- ❖ Day-to-day operations can prevent property managers from seeing the potential threats that renters see. There are some important security considerations to evaluate and correct, should vulnerability exist:
- ❖ **Security Lighting**  
In parking lots, building entrances, hallways and common areas, such as laundry rooms. The presence of lighted areas makes tenants feel secure. Poor lighting is a major drawback to making your property desirable. And lighting is one of the most inexpensive security upgrades you can make. Prospects who do a visual “drive by” and don't see lighting will certainly make note.
- ❖ **Vehicle Gate**  
If your apartment complex is a larger community, the next best defense is to gate it. A gate gives renters an additional level of comfort knowing that all who enter – must have an access code. They feel safer still when they see the gate is located within view and proximity to your management office.

### ❖ **Pedestrian Gates & Fencing**

Remember – tenants assess apartment facilities from street-to-door in terms of security measures. Just like the presence of vehicle gates – the presence of perimeter fencing and gates gets a thumbs up. This also applies to walk-up buildings. Wrought iron gates do provide a sense of security with minimal spoils to the building aesthetics. The closer to head height – the higher the feeling of safety. In cases where the building has a back alley or buildings side-to-side, a wood, concrete or brick gate that is “closed” and is also head height is most often the safest crime deterrent.

### ❖ **Exterior Trash Dumpsters & Garbage Disposal**

Another thing prospects look for is how the grounds are maintained. Over-filled dumpsters with everything from garbage bags to furniture may create the perception that the property is not well maintained. From there, they imagine pest and rodent infestation possibilities and renting or leasing a unit may be removed from consideration.

### ❖ **How Does Your Building Look to Someone With a Criminal Mind?**

Apartment buildings and complexes are the “shopping mall of the criminal mind.” The looser the security – the more likely a target your building or complex becomes for those with malicious intentions. Criminal minds look for ways in --- and ways out. So the more entrances and exits you have --- the more you need to secure and protect.

- ❖ Lack of gates and fencing put the property at-risk for being a top target. And your residents for having their apartment home violated and personal property stolen.

They also look for signs such as ground-level access to windows ... easy to kick-in doors ... poorly lit parking ... open access to laundry facilities ... and unprotected access to units once they are on the premises given a lack of gates and fencing.

❖ **No. Don't Leave it to Boston's Finest.**

In most cases, recognition of the need to secure premises is heeded by experienced apartment property managers. And in most cases – all it took was one incident for property managers and building owners to upgrade their security and safety. Those who defer to “leave it to the police” to handle put their property – and most importantly – the lives of their residents in harm's way. Tax dollars are not meant nor devoted to be at the sole use of what is essentially private property. Boston's police force is already stretched to the limits, and with ever-increasing things to watch out for in terms of public safety, and understandably have to provide services and make hard choices: respond to a noise complaint --- stop a larceny, or respond to something as serious as a terrorist attack. Protecting apartment buildings and multi-unit residences is what security patrol services are designed to provide.

❖ **And Prevent Leaving It to a Judge, Jury, and the Nightly News.**

Waiting for an incident to happen can open the door to danger for tenants --- but also to multi-unit residential property owners and management companies. All it takes in today's litigious society is one successful lawsuit to tarnish the image of a property at least --- and force an owner or property management company into bankruptcy at worse. In addition, verdicts cause insurance rates to soar and resale values to plummet.



The court records are full of cases where tenants and even employees have won multi-million dollar lawsuits against owners and property management companies. The most common grounds for suit are: inadequate security for failing to provide adequate door and window locks, absence of key control, inadequate lighting, no security patrols, poor maintenance, and even lack of thorough background screening for both employees and new residents.

The media is always camera and microphone ready to shine a spotlight on apartment buildings where robberies, rapes and crime occur. And, point to property managers and owners as being lack in security whenever a drug bust or gang activity goes down.

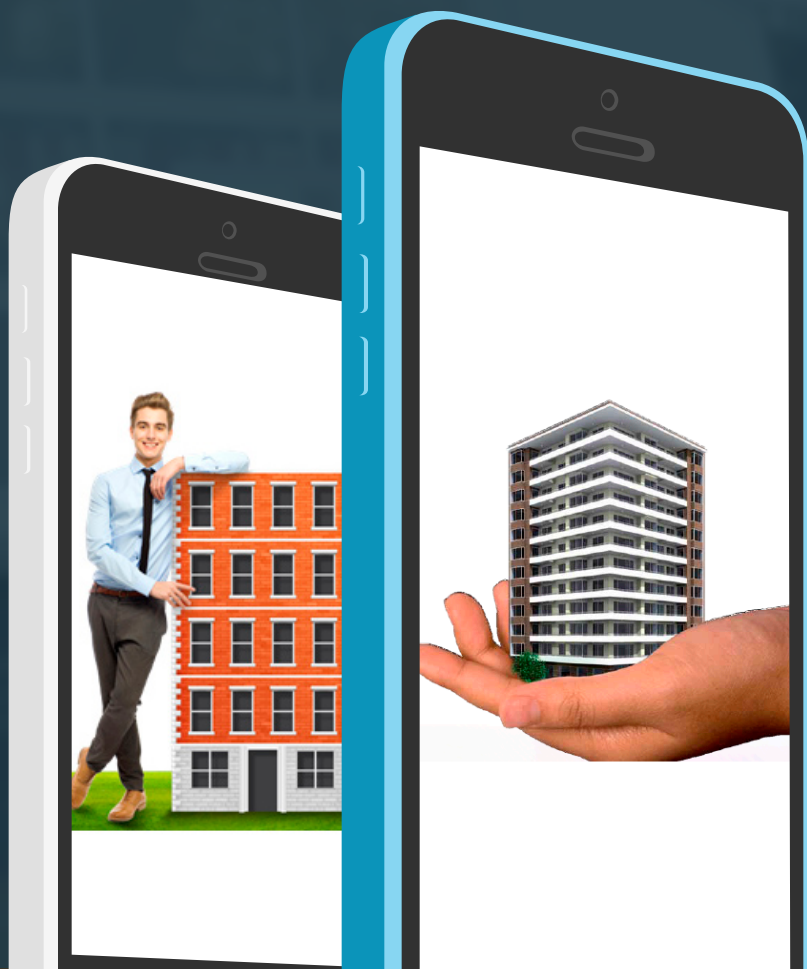
#### ❖ **Private Security Services as a Selling Point**

Many successful property managers contract and hire private security patrol services and use it as a semi-discreet selling point, so as not to “alarm” prospective tenants of crime or safety issues. Police officers themselves often serve as the patrol guards. And companies are often owned and managed by those who have current or former backgrounds in police work.

- ❖ Owners of multiple buildings offset costs by providing patrol service companies with work for all their properties. And owners and property managers of smaller, neighboring multi-unit residences often band together with other owners to get a discount on costs as a group.

# So What's A Property Manager to do?

There are three main approaches to security:



Reactive



Proactive



Active



- ❖ **Reactive security** means installing visual deterrents, such as alarm systems which activate upon an unwanted entry. This includes systems that make loud sounds, turn on lights and provide a recorded voice warning that the police are on the way.
- ❖ **Proactive security** measures include visible deterrents such as signs that notify criminals (and provide residents with a sense of security) that your building does indeed have security service protection. Criminals look for opportunities that have minimal risks for the highest reward: entering premises, automobiles and common areas such as laundry areas or office rooms where cash and other valuables are located.
- ❖ **Active security** introduces the human factor of roving patrol guards and guard station(s) and entry points. It also includes coded entry to the premises, such as key pads installed at the entrance of your complex or to unlock the main door to an apartment building.
- ❖ **It is important that property managers use a combination of all of the above.** When managers and owners do as little as possible to fight crime it sends a message which residents interpret as “they don’t care.” Each incidence of burglary or assault is followed by residents being on guard, personally at first – then they closely watch to see what actions the property management takes. If too little is done too late – that evolves into fear and anger among residents. Then, negative comments are shared with other residents. Before long, buildings and complexes gain a bad reputation. In the worst cases, instead of attracting good tenants, the building also becomes viewed as attractive for the least desired tenants.

## Engage Residents



Just as property managers have a responsibility to keep their eyes out – they can enlist the help of residents to engage them in playing a vital role to keep their homes, grounds and their very lives safe and sound. Tenants can play an important co-partner role when they are educated and informed.

- ❖ Provide security tips. Create a flyer. Slip the tip sheet under their door. Add the information on your website.
- ❖ Advise them to remember to keep doors locked and valuables out of sight.
- ❖ Encourage them to report small groups of people who hang out. Have them contact the office about frequent groups who gather in the parking lot or around the premises who don't appear to be residents.
- ❖ Warn them of risks of making that big-screen TV and computer system visible from their living room window.
- ❖ Make the connection between cleanliness, safety and security. Remind them how proper disposal of garbage shows would-be criminals that their complex and apartment building is on-point with everything. Piled up and over-spilling dumpsters indicate that property management is lax.
- ❖ Encourage them to watch for suspicious activity and to report it at first sight. Property criminals use infiltration as one of their most potent strategies – take this advantage away from them by keeping your tenants in the know.

## ❖ Host a Workshop for Residents and Staff

If you have a building with a recreational common area such as a greeting area in the office, party room or swimming pool – host a Safety & Security event. Contact your local police and fire departments to help you with planning. In most cases, they have Public Information and Community Relations Officers who may come to your event, speak and/or give a presentation. They may also provide you with safety and security literature for your residents.

Also, contact your property and business liability insurance providers. They can be a great resource for tips, advice and printed materials. They might also sponsor the event.

By hosting a workshop, you demonstrate to your residents and to your public safety officials that you take safety and security seriously.

## Need Some Help?

Ask the Boston's Best team to provide a presentation on proper cleaning and maintenance techniques. We'd be glad to assist!

## Safety & Security Best Practices for Property Managers and Staff



Taking precautions to limit crime also includes the potential for crime against YOU and your staff. Surely, this is not a frequent occurrence in the profession – but every property management professional and employment must exercise safety and precautionary practices:

### When Showing Apartments & Condos...

- ❖ Avoid meeting the prospective tenant at the unit itself. Always ask them to stop by your office.
- ❖ Before showing a unit - always require a driver's license or State-issued ID. Hold on to the ID until after the tour is over.
- ❖ Have them fill out a guest form or sign-in. Request: name, address, phone number and email.
- ❖ Try to schedule showings when the office won't be unattended. And don't leave an employee alone to hold down the fort for an extended period of time. That could provide a set-up opportunity for an accomplice to burglarize the office, or endanger an employee.
- ❖ Pay attention to your intuition and gut feelings. If something does not feel right, you can ask for more identification, such as requesting the name of a reference – or ask a maintenance person to go with you to “check out an appliance.” Having a second person present during a tour is always a good thing to do.

## Carefully Select Outside & Independent Service Providers



In some cases, outside service providers become suspect when vandalism and crimes occur. The first line-of-questioning becomes: was it an inside or outside job.

A first step, internally, is to make sure that your on premise maintenance crew wears a lanyard with a photo ID so they are readily identifiable as staff members.

### The next step is to make sure that you hire right.

- ❖ Conduct a background check on the business with the Better Business Bureau.
- ❖ Request references from current clients. **BE SURE TO CALL THE REFERENCES.** Don't just settle with the fact that they have provided a list.
- ❖ If the company is local or a small business - make sure that you have a face-to-face meeting with the owner if possible – prior to signing a contract for services agreement.
- ❖ Make sure the company assigns you a direct contact representative. That way, if you have any issues – you know exactly who to call for resolution.
- ❖ Insist that every company who sends personnel to your complex has proper company-issued ID.

## ■ ASSESS SERVICE BIDS CAREFULLY. LOOK FOR SMOKE SIGNALS OF ILLEGITIMACY.

- ❖ Cost considerations are often the hands-down deal maker in selecting outside service providers. This can be a big mistake. A company that provides a low-ball bid may not be conducting business legitimately.
- ❖ We know about this firsthand at Boston's Best Commercial Cleaning. We see it every day.
- ❖ After a business pays employees, pays overhead expenses there is little left for the bottom line – sometimes less than 15% depending on the company and the service provided. So when you request quotes from 2 or 3 companies and you get that really cheap price **please beware**. This could be a strong indicator that the company pays its staff under the table, or they are illegally hiding costs and/or inappropriately misqualifying their employees to pay less workers compensation fees, Taxes and/or general liability/bonding insurance.



## ❖ Why do we care?

We encounter these practices among competitors on a daily basis. It is abhorrent to us what they are doing, and how it negatively impacts Boston communities. When these companies hire under the table, misqualify employees and compete on price they are not taking care of their clients and or their employees—they only seek to make a profit and move on. These types of situations have a huge impact on our local communities and it is nearly impossible to stop these scandalous practices unless the market place and property managers pay attention.

## ❖ BOSTON'S BEST

Because safety and security matter. Now more than ever.

Boston's Best Commercial Cleaning has consistently ranked as one of the top providers of cleaning and maintenance services throughout the Greater Boston Metropolitan area.

The company is a division of Tremendous Maid, which in 2013, was awarded the "Best of Boston"® designation for Best House Cleaner by Boston Magazine.

The report you are reading now results from the company's deep commitment to provide stellar services to its growing roster of property management clientele. "We approach residential property cleaning and maintenance from a unique perspective. We believe in extending the value of your property by exercising proper maintenance in a systematic approach that prolongs its life and helps it to hold its value," says Boston's Best CEO and Co-Founder, Victoria Amador.

Boston's Best Commercial Cleaning is a woman and family-owned business, led by Victoria Amador, Nisaury Tejada, and Rosa Tejada. The founders take great pride in their work and services they provide to Boston property managers. Their business has grown tremendously. They bring a level of professionalism and genuine care for client satisfaction that is unparalleled.

❖ **We Hire Right. We Train Fastidiously. We Serve Securely.**

We take time to recruit and interview each and every member of our company. All have to pass an extremely rigorous background check. All are trained to master the very same best practices that our founders learned at some of the very best 5-star hotels in the world.

And all Boston's Best cleaning team associates are aware that at any time, any one of the founders will show up on the job site to make sure that services live up to the expectations of the founders and the clients we serve. In fact, our senior staff members will regularly perform a quality control check of the properties you manage.

In addition, our team is trained to incorporate your own security measures. And we welcome your invitation to have a representative participate in any safety or security workshop that you hold for your residents.

We become part of your team and work side by side to ensure we maintain your account in the best conditions possible. We put programs and systems in place to help you extend the lifetime of your buildings' surfaces.



**BOSTON'S BEST  
COMMERCIAL CLEANING**

— PEOPLE-DRIVEN, CLIENT-FOCUSED —

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