AIA Massachusetts

Meeting Minutes

AIA Massachusetts – Government Affairs Committee (GAC)
Date: Wednesday, October 14, 2026
Location: Virtual (Zoom)

Chairs: Russ Feldman, AIA; Larry Spang, AIA
Staff: John Nunnari, Executive Director
Attendance: Approximately 30 participants

1. Welcome and Introductions

Co-Chair Russ Feldman opened the meeting at approximately 8:30 AM and outlined an agenda focused on ongoing legislative and regulatory matters, Working Group progress, and planning for the 2027 legislative session.

2. Legislative and Regulatory Update

Mr. Nunnari reported that legislative activity remains limited during informal sessions ahead of the November election. Several major bills, including the Economic Development and Energy bills, remain in conference committees.

Economic Development / Housing

Following the September Board discussion, AIA Massachusetts prepared a letter supporting commercial-to-residential conversions, adaptive reuse, municipal land-use training, Chapter 40R and starter-home incentives, and appropriately conditioned duplex-by-right provisions. The letter was undergoing final Board review prior to submission to the conference committee.

Energy / Data Centers

AIA Massachusetts continues to support energy affordability and the Mass Save program while advocating for stronger energy, environmental, and public-health provisions governing large data centers. Governor Healey's **Executive Order 658** was noted as a framework addressing energy, water, permitting, and community impacts.

R&D Tax Treatment

Mr. Nunnari explained concerns arising from differences between federal and Massachusetts treatment of research and experimental expenses, including potential retroactive tax obligations, penalties, interest, accounting complexity, and cash-flow impacts on architecture firms. Members discussed the importance of collecting specific examples from affected firms and accountants, and possible coordination with ACEC Massachusetts, the biotech sector, and other affected businesses. AIA Massachusetts will gather further information before determining whether legislative or administrative relief should be pursued, with particular attention to retroactive interest and penalties.

MAAB / Accessibility

AIA Massachusetts continues pursuing reform of the 521 CMR 30% Rule through legislative and regulatory avenues, advocating a work-area-based alternative to the assessed-value threshold. The MAAB Subcommittee on Regulations continues reviewing broader accessibility provisions, with a consolidated package anticipated for consideration by the full Board in the first quarter of 2027.

Interior Design Registration / Single-Stair Advisory Group

The interior design registration bill remains before House Ways and Means following Senate engrossment, with possible action during informal sessions. The Governor's Single-Stair Technical Advisory Group met October 5; a smaller Working Group began meeting October 13. AIA Massachusetts is participating from a neutral, evidence-based position, with Advisory Group recommendations anticipated in February 2027.

Building Code and Architectural Registration Board
The BBRS continues work on the 11th Edition State Building Code and related committee reviews. It approved clarifying language concerning the relationship between 780 CMR and 521 CMR accessibility requirements and referred other proposals for technical review. The Board of Registration of Architects discussed NCARB's future competency-based licensure initiative and clarified eLIPSE renewal issues: late-fee waivers will be considered case by case; newly licensed architects may upload a statement when continuing education is not yet required; and renewal notices are distributed electronically to account email addresses.

3. Working Group Updates

Housing
Emily Paparella presented a **draft housing policy statement** developed with Kerry Bartini and Shirin Boulos Anderson. It frames the housing challenge around production, affordability, and access, with potential actions including greater density, streamlined approvals, aligned financial incentives, and innovative housing approaches. Members suggested examining unit-size standards, tracking zoning reforms and their effects, and considering timely public communication on housing-related ballot questions. The draft remains under development; any public policy position would require appropriate AIA Massachusetts review and approval.

Embodied Carbon
Marc Sternick demonstrated an expanded draft of the proposed AIA Massachusetts embodied-carbon resource webpage, covering introductory guidance, codes, policy, whole-building life-cycle assessment, materials, specifications, software, and funding resources. Members praised its progress and discussed a phased rollout, site maintenance, user feedback, accessibility of freely available third-party resources, and potential funding or sponsorship. The next step is to engage the website developer and continue populating and refining content, aiming for a first-quarter 2027 launch.

Historic Preservation
Mr. Nunnari reiterated that the Working Group's proposed historic-district legislation is intended as an optional municipal toolkit, not a statewide mandate. Stakeholder outreach remains the immediate priority. Discussions are underway with Ed Adelman, AIA Massachusetts' appointee to the Massachusetts Historical Commission, and additional engagement with Commission representatives and Preservation Massachusetts is anticipated.

Data Centers
The Data Center Working Group held its kickoff meeting September 30. Its initial tasks are to examine existing regulatory requirements, gather reliable technical information on energy and water use, cooling, grid demand, and community impacts, and identify practical policy improvements. Members emphasized building-type-specific standards and engaging experienced architects, engineers, and relevant state agencies, including energy and utility regulators. The group will continue recruiting technical expertise and planning its next meeting; no predetermined policy position was adopted.

4. Legislative and Regulatory Goals / 2027 GAC Planning

Because of time constraints, a detailed review of the 2025–2026 goals and proposed 2027–2028 updates was not completed. Discussion instead focused on future GAC programming and outreach. Members suggested inviting legislators, regulators, and state housing officials; addressing zoning-board education, affordable versus low-income housing, and implementation of energy-code requirements; and exploring collaboration with the Massachusetts Municipal Association. Members were encouraged to forward speaker and topic recommendations to the Co-Chairs or Mr. Nunnari. The committee also discussed planning outreach to new legislators early in 2027, potentially including gatherings in both Boston and Western Massachusetts.

5. Next Steps

- Finalize and submit the Economic Development Conference Committee letter following Board review.
- Collect firm-specific information about the R&D tax issue and explore coordination with other affected sectors.
- Continue participation in the Single-Stair Advisory Group and monitoring of MAAB, BBRS, registration, and legislative matters.
- Refine the Housing Working Group draft statement and evaluate appropriate public outreach.
- Advance the embodied-carbon resource webpage with the developer and identify long-term maintenance needs.
- Continue historic-preservation stakeholder outreach and Data Center Working Group technical research.
- Solicit future meeting topics and speakers and revisit the 2027–2028 legislative and regulatory goals.

6. Adjournment

The meeting concluded at approximately 10:00 AM.
Next GAC Meeting: Wednesday, November 11, 2026, at 8:30 AM via Zoom.

Summary of GAC Meeting Chat Comments

The meeting chat reflected positive engagement with the Housing and Embodied Carbon Working Groups' initiatives, along with several suggestions for resources, partnerships, and future GAC programming.

Housing Policy: Participants expressed appreciation for the Housing Working Group's efforts to consolidate its discussions and recommendations into a cohesive policy document. Members also shared a **WBUR article** and a **Charles River Chamber of Commerce webinar** addressing Massachusetts Ballot Question 7 and starter homes as additional resources for consideration.

Embodied Carbon: Members strongly supported the proposed embodied-carbon resource webpage, particularly its potential to provide smaller architectural firms with centralized, accessible information. Suggestions included incorporating resources from **Parsons School of Design Healthy Materials Lab** and **mindful MATERIALS**, developing a user-friendly website that could be updated internally, exploring partnerships with utilities, and seeking AIA grant funding to support development. One participant emphasized that the resource should remain freely accessible rather than being placed behind a paywall.

Historic Preservation: A participant recommended engaging the Massachusetts Municipal Association (MMA), given its relationships with local historic commissions and potential ability to support legislative advocacy.

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Future GAC Programming: Members expressed interest in another in-person breakfast meeting and suggested several potential discussion topics, including European housing approaches and lessons applicable to Massachusetts, the architectural registration process for emerging professionals, and inviting architectural educator and **YouTube presenter Stewart Hicks** as a guest speaker.

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