

Meeting Minutes

AIA Massachusetts – Government Affairs Committee (GAC)

Date: July 9, 2025

Location: Virtual (Zoom)

Topic: Legislative and Regulatory Updates; Single-Stair Overview

I. Welcome and Introductions

Russ Feldman, Co-Chair, opened the meeting and welcomed attendees. With Larry Spang away on vacation, Russ chaired the session with support from John Nunnari, Executive Director, and Christine Clements as moderator. Attendance included multiple new participants – over one third attending for the first time – reflecting strong ongoing engagement with AIA MA advocacy efforts.

2. Legislative and Regulatory Updates

John Nunnari provided a comprehensive review of recent state developments:

- **FY26 Budget:** The Legislature and Administration reached agreement on a \$60.9B budget, with \$130M in vetoes and an \$800M reserve to offset federal fiscal uncertainties.
- **Regulatory Reform:** Governor Healey's new reform directive encourages agencies and boards to streamline processes and enhance competitiveness; the BBRS and Division of Occupational Licensure will assess implications for construction licensure.
- **Building Code Progress:** The BBRS finalized appointments for the 11th Edition Technical Advisory Committees, advancing proposals on carbon monoxide detector standards and other safety updates.
- **MAAB Subcommittee on Regulations (30% Rule):** The subcommittee continues work on the long-delayed rewrite of accessibility regulations. A new framework would exempt 75% of costs for specified "accepted" work (mechanical, electrical, plumbing, etc.)—equating, through a controversial formula, to 120% of assessed building value. John noted that while this represents a modest improvement, inequities remain between regions due to property value disparities. Legislative members (Reps. Keefe, Duffy, and Farley-Bouvier) continue pressing for a more equitable Level 2/Level 3 renovation model aligned with the International Existing Building Code.
- **Timing:** Even if adopted, any MAAB regulatory changes would likely require two years before promulgation.
- **Discussion:** Members expressed frustration over the slow pace and lack of trust between disability advocates and design professionals. Members proposed that AIA MA explore convening educational sessions with accessibility advocates to foster better understanding and rebuild trust.

3. Interior Design Legislation

John Nunnari reported that the Joint Committee on Consumer Protection and Professional Licensure scheduled a July 14 public hearing on the coalition's redrafted Interior Design Licensure Bill (HB 324/SB 254).

- The redraft represents consensus among AIA MA, IIDA NE, ACEC MA, and MFBO;
- AIA MA will testify alongside IIDA representatives;
- The bill is expected to advance quickly given bipartisan support and the absence of organized opposition; and
- The new joint committee rules require House action within 30 days of hearing, improving prospects for passage this session.

4. Indemnification Reform

John Nunnari outlined progress following the Supreme Judicial Court's decision in *Trustees of Boston University v. C&A*.

- AIA MA, ACEC MA, and David Hatem, Esq. are coordinating development of contractual language and legislative options to limit overbroad indemnification clauses.
- A draft issue brief and model language are being prepared for review at the July 11 working group meeting.
- Long-term success will require coalition-building and persistence in the face of anticipated opposition from the Trial Lawyers Association.
- Members were encouraged to share the memos with firm leadership and contract administrators.

5. Historic District Commission Legislation

Briefly noted: updates on proposed adjustments to commission authority and oversight will be deferred to a future meeting pending further committee action.

6. Presentation: Single-Stair Housing Overview

Guest Speaker: Steven Smith, Executive Director, Center for Building in North America. Mr. Smith provided a research-based overview of single-stair multifamily design, highlighting findings from the Boston Indicators/Utile "Legalizing Mid-Rise Single-Stair Housing in Massachusetts" report.

Key points:

- Most developed countries allow single-stair buildings up to 16 stories; the U.S. typically limits them to three.
- Seattle and New York City have safely permitted six-story single-stair buildings for decades without recorded fire fatalities attributed to lack of a second stair.
- Data show multifamily housing has lower fire-death rates than single-family homes, largely due to stricter modern code and sprinkler requirements.
- Eliminating the second stair could yield ~10% cost savings and unlock small, infill parcels for development, expanding housing supply and improving design flexibility.
- For architects, single-stair typologies offer smaller project scales, greater creative control, and opportunities for natural light, ventilation, and livability—contrasting the growing prevalence of deep, double-loaded corridor buildings.

John and Russ emphasized that AIA MA has not taken a formal position but supports further study under HB 1542, which would create a state commission with AIA representation. The October 8 GAC meeting will be dedicated to deeper exploration of the topic, including public safety and design perspectives.

7. Working Group Updates

Green and Healthy Schools: Ongoing coordination with the Massachusetts School Building Authority; report forthcoming.

Housing Working Group: Continuing analysis of housing legislation and planning coordination with October's single-stair session.

8. Next Steps / Adjournment

Members were encouraged to review the linked indemnification memo and Boston Indicators single-stair report (included in the agenda). Educational outreach regarding MAAB accessibility reform to be discussed further at upcoming meetings. Meeting adjourned at 10:00 a.m.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, September 10, 2025 – Topic: Embodied Carbon Council