

To: All Members of AIA Massachusetts
From: John Nunnari
Date: 02/10/2026
Re: **DOER Residential and Commercial Stretch Energy Code Proposals – February BBRS Meeting**

Presentation Overview (DOER / Ian Finlayson)

At the February 10, 2026 meeting of the Board of Building Regulations and Standards (BBRS), DOER representative Ian Finlayson presented a detailed overview of proposed updates to the residential energy code, as well as an advance briefing on anticipated revisions to the commercial stretch and specialized codes. His presentation outlined the intent, scope, and expected impact of the proposed changes, summarized key technical updates, and provided the Board with a preview of the forthcoming public comment process.

DOER Code Change Proposals – 2024 Residential Energy Code ([see attached](#))

DOER presented two proposed residential energy code updates for referral to the Energy Advisory Committee (EAC). The proposals were described as largely technical in nature, with minimal policy change and no anticipated cost impact.

Proposal 1 – Definitions and Substantial Project Trigger

The first proposal focused primarily on definitions within Chapters 1 and 2 of the residential energy code. DOER explained that most language remains unchanged, but Massachusetts-specific definitions are being added to reflect state practices and improve clarity. New or revised definitions include accessory dwelling unit (ADU), electric building, mixed-fuel building, and several ventilation-related terms tied to HERS rating pathways.

A key substantive change is the removal of the “substantial improvement” concept (still present in the Existing Building Code) and its replacement with a new “substantial project” definition. DOER explained this change is intended to simplify compliance and avoid reliance on disputed market-value calculations, which building officials have found difficult to administer consistently. Discussion focused on how the new trigger would apply in multi-unit buildings, with DOER clarifying that the threshold is measured per dwelling unit rather than across the entire building.

Board members also discussed implications of the new “all-electric building” definition. Questions were raised about treatment of decorative gas fireplaces, backup fossil-fuel generators, and whether homeowners could later add fuel-burning appliances after construction. DOER clarified that the definition is not a mandate but a classification used to differentiate compliance pathways and encourage electrification. If additional fuel systems are installed later, the building would simply be considered mixed-fuel, and the energy code would apply as it does today for existing buildings.

Additional discussion touched on potential enforcement gaps where certain installations (e.g., gas appliances added under separate permits) may not clearly trigger energy-code review; DOER noted this issue could be considered when reviewing the existing-buildings chapter.

Proposal 2 – Updated Reference Standards (Chapter 6)

The second proposal updates the list of referenced standards in Chapter 6 to align with newer ICC/IECC editions and current industry standards. DOER explained that most changes are technical—primarily updating publication dates or reflecting reorganized standards—and are intended to keep the code current without introducing new compliance burdens. No cost or substantive policy impacts were identified.

Outcome

Following discussion, a motion was made to forward both proposals to the Energy Advisory Committee for further review. **The motion passed unanimously.**

DOER Update – Stretch & Specialized Code and Anticipated Public Comment Period (see attached)

DOER provided an overview of upcoming updates to the stretch and specialized codes, noting that these codes—last updated in February 2025—are not expected to undergo major revisions. Instead, the proposed changes are described as targeted improvements and clarifications developed in response to feedback from code users.

DOER reported that the **formal public comment period has not yet begun**, as the proposed regulations remain under review at the Governor's Office. While no specific release date was provided, DOER indicated the comment period is expected in the near future and that the Board will be updated once the regulations are released and comments are received.

DOER then previewed the types of changes anticipated, including:

- Adjustments to requirements affecting buildings connected to district energy systems, providing greater flexibility regarding electrification and pre-wiring expectations.
- Additional flexibility in leakage testing requirements for certain larger commercial buildings.
- Expansion of options within the optional embodied-carbon credit framework, including provisions for smaller buildings.
- Modifications to pre-wiring requirements in the specialized code to better accommodate engineered systems.
- Clarifications, corrections, and errata based on user feedback.
- Addition of a proposed six-month concurrency period allowing projects to use either the old or updated code following adoption, to ease transition and avoid disruptions.

DOER emphasized that these changes are primarily incremental and technical rather than policy-driven, and committed to reporting back to the Board once the public comment process begins and stakeholder feedback is available.