

Meeting Minutes

AIA Massachusetts – Government Affairs Committee (GAC)

Date: Wednesday, September 9, 2026

Location: Virtual (Zoom)

Chairs: Russ Feldman, AIA; Larry Spang, AIA

Staff: John Nunnari, Executive Director

Attendance: Approximately 20 participants

1. Welcome and Introductions

Co-Chair Larry Spang called the meeting to order at approximately 8:30 AM and welcomed attendees. He noted that, following the August recess, the meeting would focus primarily on the status of ongoing legislative, regulatory, and working-group initiatives, as well as several emerging issues.

2. Legislative and Regulatory Update

Mr. Nunnari provided an overview of activity since the June and July GAC meetings, noting that the Legislature has concluded formal sessions and is now operating through informal sessions. Several major bills remain active in House-Senate conference committees and may continue to advance before the current legislative session concludes in January 2027.

Economic Development Bill

The House and Senate passed substantially different versions of the economic development bill in July, and a six-member conference committee is working to reconcile them. AIA Massachusetts continues to monitor provisions involving housing and zoning, adaptive reuse, energy and building codes, and emerging technologies.

Energy Bill

AIA Massachusetts submitted comments to the Energy Conference Committee in August addressing two principal issues:

- Preservation of the Mass Save program and opposition to reductions that could undermine energy-efficiency, decarbonization, and building-performance efforts.
- Support for strengthening the Senate's data-center provisions so environmental, energy, public-health, transparency, and accountability requirements apply to covered data-center projects regardless of whether they seek state tax incentives.

AIA Massachusetts also recommended that the Legislature establish the broad statutory framework while leaving detailed technical requirements – including appropriate clean-energy offsets – to a subsequent regulatory process.

Interior Design Licensure

The Senate unanimously advanced S.3107 in June, but the legislation remained in House Ways and Means when formal sessions ended. An effort to incorporate the language into the Economic Development bill was unsuccessful. AIA Massachusetts continues working with IIDA New England, ACEC Massachusetts, and the Massachusetts Federation of Building Officials to advance the agreed-upon legislation during informal sessions.

Building and Fire Codes

Development of the 11th Edition Massachusetts State Building Code continues through BBRS and its technical advisory committees based on the 2024 International Codes and proposed Massachusetts amendments. AIA Massachusetts continues seeking an architect to fill the open seat on the BBRS Structural Advisory Committee.

Mr. Nunnari also reported that the Board of Fire Prevention Regulations is approaching completion of the new 527 CMR I. Board members were expected to receive the redlined amendment package on September 10, with preliminary comments due September 25, a public hearing planned for October 1, and a possible final promulgation vote on October 15.

MAAB 30% Rule

The Massachusetts Architectural Access Board's regulatory subcommittee continues its comprehensive review of 521 CMR, with recommendations expected to reach the full Board during the first quarter of 2027. Reform of the 30% Rule remains an AIA Massachusetts priority through both regulatory and legislative avenues.

Mr. Feldman noted that a September 9 Boston Globe editorial identified reform of the 30% Rule as a useful housing and redevelopment policy. Mr. Nunnari added that legislative awareness and support for reform have increased, particularly among legislators representing Gateway Cities.

Architectural Licensing/eLIPSE

Members discussed the Division of Occupational Licensure's transition to the eLIPSE licensing system and issues encountered during the August 31 architect renewal cycle. Topics included account-linking problems, electronic licenses, continuing-education documentation, CORI requirements, and communications with reciprocal license holders.

Mr. Nunnari agreed to follow up with DOL regarding:

- Whether any grace period is available for licensees affected by the transition.
- How the system handles continuing-education requirements for newly licensed architects.
- How renewal and eLIPSE information is communicated to architects licensed in Massachusetts who reside outside the Commonwealth.

Members experiencing unresolved renewal or account issues were encouraged to contact AIA Massachusetts for assistance connecting with DOL staff.

3. Working Group Updates

Embodied Carbon/ECICC

Mr. Nunnari summarized results of the recent AIA Massachusetts practitioner survey. The survey was distributed to 2,972 members, generated 1,874 opens, and received 83 completed responses. Respondents expressed the strongest interest in resources addressing state policy and code updates, whole-building life-cycle assessment tools and workflows, low-carbon specifications, software resources, funding opportunities, and case studies. Short webinars, videos, and downloadable resources were generally preferred over in-person training.

Based on these findings, the Working Group is developing an embodied-carbon resource page for the AIA Massachusetts website. Rather than duplicating existing resources, the page is intended to serve as a Massachusetts-focused clearinghouse connecting members with reliable information from organizations including AIA National, Carbon Leadership Forum, Architecture 2030, BE+, and others.

The Working Group also plans to engage DCAMM to better understand how embodied-carbon requirements may affect state-project scopes of services, contracts, reporting requirements, fees, and project delivery.

A working version of the resource page is expected to be developed for Working Group review, with the goal of making the resource available during the first quarter of 2027.

Housing

Mr. Nunnari summarized the housing and zoning provisions contained in the House and Senate versions of the Economic Development bill.

Both versions contain significant commercial-to-residential conversion and adaptive-reuse provisions, including opportunities for as-of-right multifamily or mixed-use development on commercially zoned parcels, streamlined site-plan review, protections for certain nonconformities, tax incentives, and preference under the historic rehabilitation tax credit.

Additional provisions differ between the two bills. The Senate includes duplexes by right, housing-related preferences within state grant programs, Chapter 40R and starter-home incentives, limits on certain local dimensional controls, and revised appeals deadlines. The House includes a statewide training program for local land-use boards and a four-year extension of certain permits and approvals.

The preliminary AIA Massachusetts approach is to support the shared adaptive-reuse and commercial-conversion provisions and consider supporting the House training program and Senate housing incentives, while seeking targeted refinements to preserve appropriate consideration of design, infrastructure, environmental, accessibility, and life-safety issues.

Mr. Nunnari will prepare a draft advocacy letter for review by the Housing Working Group before bringing it to the AIA Massachusetts Board for consideration and potential submission to the Economic Development Conference Committee.

Historic Preservation

The Historic Preservation Working Group continues refining its approach to historic-district legislation in preparation for the 2027–2028 legislative session.

Discussion emphasized the importance of clarifying that the proposal is intended to provide municipalities with an optional toolbox of statutory tools and clarifications rather than impose new statewide mandates. Issues under continued review include demolition-delay authority, transparency in local decision-making, definitions such as "demolition," access to outside technical expertise, and the practical resource limitations facing local commissions.

The Working Group agreed that stakeholder engagement should precede development of revised statutory language. Next steps include renewed discussions with Preservation Massachusetts, the Massachusetts Historical Commission, local historic commissions, and other preservation stakeholders.

Member Mike Roughan also identified upcoming Massachusetts Historic Alliance discussions on October 9 and November 6 concerning implementation of local historic districts as potential opportunities to better understand municipal concerns.

AIA Massachusetts will also coordinate with newly appointed Massachusetts Historical Commission member Ed Adelman to discuss the background and objectives of the initiative and potential opportunities for engagement with the Commission.

Data Centers

Mr. Nunnari outlined a proposal to establish a new Data Center Working Group to help AIA Massachusetts develop an informed policy framework addressing the rapidly expanding data-center sector.

The discussion builds upon AIA Massachusetts' recent Energy Conference Committee advocacy and broader Board discussions concerning data centers' energy demand, infrastructure requirements, water use, environmental impacts, and relationship to the Commonwealth's climate and affordability goals.

Mr. Nunnari also summarized Governor Healey's September 8 Executive Order 658 addressing "responsible data center development," including requirements relating to energy costs, environmental impacts, clean-energy procurement, community benefits, water use, greenhouse-gas emissions, reporting, workforce practices, and municipal guidance.

Members agreed that AIA Massachusetts should develop greater technical expertise before advocating for detailed requirements. Particular emphasis was placed on recruiting architects, electrical and mechanical engineers, and allied professionals with direct data-center experience to help evaluate realistic approaches to energy demand, generation, storage, siting, and other operational issues.

Several participants expressed interest in joining the Working Group. AIA Massachusetts will follow up with interested members and begin organizing an initial meeting.

4. 2027–2028 Legislative and Regulatory Goals

Because of time constraints, the planned substantive discussion of AIA Massachusetts' 2027–2028 Legislative and Regulatory Goals was deferred until the October meeting.

Members were asked to review the current [2025–2026 Legislative and Regulatory Goals](#) and consider which priorities should be retained, modified, removed, or added for the next legislative session. The GAC will use that discussion to develop recommendations for eventual review and ratification by the AIA Massachusetts Board.

5. New Business – Newton Backyard Blueprint ADU Competition

Mr. Feldman briefly updated members on AIA Massachusetts' discussions with the City of Newton regarding its [Backyard Blueprint ADU design competition](#).

AIA Massachusetts had identified several contractual concerns after the City requested assistance promoting the competition. Discussions with City staff resulted in revisions to portions of the competition requirements.

AIA Massachusetts intends to inform members of the opportunity while encouraging anyone considering participation to carefully review the competition's contractual terms and conditions before entering.

6. Next Steps

AIA Massachusetts will:

- Continue monitoring conference committee negotiations on the Economic Development and Energy bills.
- Continue advocacy for Interior Design licensure during informal legislative sessions.
- Follow up with DOL regarding architect licensing and eLIPSE implementation issues raised by members.
- Continue development of the embodied-carbon resource page and pursue discussions with DCAMM.
- Prepare a draft housing advocacy letter for Working Group and Board review.
- Continue stakeholder outreach on historic-preservation legislation.
- Organize the new Data Center Working Group and recruit members with relevant technical experience.
- Prepare for an October discussion of AIA Massachusetts' 2027–2028 Legislative and Regulatory Goals.

7. Adjournment

Mr. Feldman thanked attendees for their participation. The meeting adjourned at approximately 10:04 AM.

Next GAC Meeting: Wednesday, October 14, 2026, at 8:30 AM via Zoom.