

Meeting Minutes

AIA Massachusetts – Government Affairs Committee (GAC)

Date: Wednesday, July 8, 2026

Location: Virtual (Zoom)

Topic: MBTA Communities Act – Early Implementation Review

Chairs: Russ Feldman, AIA; Larry Spang, AIA

Staff: John Nunnari, Executive Director

Attendance: Approximately 30 participants

1. Welcome and Introductions

Co-Chairs Russ Feldman and Larry Spang called the meeting to order at approximately 8:30 AM and welcomed attendees. The agenda for the meeting was reviewed.

2. “State of Play” Legislative & Regulatory Update

Mr. Nunnari provided an overview of recent legislative and regulatory activity as the Legislature moves through budget season and toward the July 31 formal session deadline.

Legislative Update

Key topics discussed included:

- FY2027 state budget activity following House passage and in advance of Senate budget debate.
- Increased activity surrounding several proposed ballot questions, including legislative audits, public records, income tax reductions, all-party primaries, recreational marijuana repeal, and rent control.
- Ongoing legal and political disputes involving ballot initiatives and state oversight issues.
- Continued legislative focus on affordability, housing, energy policy, and economic competitiveness.

Regulatory Update

Mr. Nunnari reported on several active regulatory initiatives, including:

- Continued development of the 11th Edition Massachusetts State Building Code.
- Ongoing review of residential provisions of the 2024 International Energy Conservation Code (IECC).
- Recent BBRS discussions regarding code amendments, public accessibility of code documents, and certificates of occupancy.
- Activity before the Board of Elevator Regulations, Plumbing Board, and Sheet Metal Board.
- Transition of professional licensing systems within the Division of Occupational Licensure, including implementation of the new Eclipse licensing platform.

Members discussed experiences with the new licensing system, continuing education requirements, and license renewal procedures. Participants generally reported a smooth transition to the new platform.

Energy Affordability Legislation

Mr. Nunnari provided a detailed update on House Bill 5151 and broader energy affordability discussions.

Key points included:

- House passage of an energy bill containing a proposed \$1 billion reduction in Mass Save funding.
- Removal of earlier language that would have weakened the legally binding nature of the Commonwealth's greenhouse gas reduction requirements.
- Public statements by Senate leadership indicating that the Senate is unlikely to adopt the House's proposed Mass Save reductions.
- Senator Mike Barrett's interest in identifying alternative sources of utility cost savings, including possible reforms to the Gas System Enhancement Program (GSEP).
- Expectations that significant policy negotiations will likely occur through a conference committee process later in the session.

Members discussed potential opportunities for advocacy and the importance of maintaining support for successful energy-efficiency programs while addressing affordability concerns.

1. Welcome and Introductions

Co-Chair Russ Feldman called the meeting to order at approximately 8:30 AM and welcomed attendees. He thanked members who participated in June's successful forum on rent control and noted that the July meeting would focus on another timely housing policy issue—the implementation of the MBTA Communities Act. Mr. Feldman introduced guest speaker Amy Dain, Senior Fellow at Boston Indicators, whose recent research examines the Commonwealth's early experience implementing the Act.

2. Guest Presentation – *An Early Look at the MBTA Communities Permitting Pipeline*

Ms. Dain presented findings from Boston Indicators' recent report examining the implementation of the MBTA Communities Act and the early permitting pipeline resulting from local zoning reforms.

Ms. Dain explained that the law represents the most significant statewide zoning reform undertaken in Massachusetts and was intended to increase housing production by requiring MBTA communities to establish multifamily zoning districts near transit.

Key observations included:

- Nearly all affected municipalities have now adopted compliant zoning, with only a small number remaining out of compliance.
- More than 9,000 housing units are currently identified within the statewide permitting pipeline, with additional projects continuing to emerge.
- Although implementation has produced measurable results, the overall level of housing production remains incremental relative to the Commonwealth's long-term housing shortage.

Municipal Implementation

- Ms. Dain categorized municipal responses into three general approaches:
- Communities that adopted zoning designed to encourage moderate, incremental housing growth.
- Communities that exceeded the minimum state requirements by creating larger districts and permitting greater development potential.
- Communities whose zoning changes appear unlikely to generate significant new housing production.

She emphasized that most municipalities chose the first approach, producing steady but relatively modest housing growth while avoiding dramatic changes to existing neighborhoods.

Housing Production Trends

Examples from Bedford, Newton, Arlington, Belmont, Braintree, Weston, Lexington, Westford, Somerville and other municipalities illustrated how implementation has varied across the Commonwealth.

Discussion highlighted that:

- Most projects currently entering the pipeline are relatively small in scale.
- The majority of projected housing units are concentrated within a limited number of larger redevelopment projects.
- Significant housing production generally occurs where municipalities allow greater densities, larger redevelopment sites, or more extensive multifamily zoning districts.

Ms. Dain observed that while the MBTA Communities Act represents meaningful progress, additional zoning and regulatory reforms will be necessary to address Massachusetts' long-term housing needs.

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)

Ms. Dain also summarized findings from her recent report on statewide ADU legalization.

Highlights included:

- More than 1,600 ADU permit applications were submitted during the first year following statewide legalization.
- Over 1,200 permits have already been issued across more than 200 municipalities.
- Approximately one-half of newly permitted ADUs are detached units, reflecting opportunities created through the statewide reform.

She noted that statewide legalization produced substantially faster results than decades of municipality-by-municipality zoning reform and suggested that similar state-level approaches may be appropriate for future housing initiatives.

Ms. Dain concluded that while recent zoning reforms have been successful, additional work remains to modernize related regulatory systems, including building code, permitting, infrastructure, and other development regulations.

3. Questions and Discussion

Co-Chair Larry Spang facilitated a question-and-answer session following the presentation. Representatives from the Town of Westford, including Assistant Town Manager Jeffrey Morrisette and Town Planner Joseph Giniewicz, provided an update on implementation within their community. They reported that multiple multifamily developments approved under the Town's MBTA Communities zoning are progressing through permitting, with construction expected to begin on several projects later this year. They also discussed ongoing efforts to address infrastructure needs, including electrical capacity, pedestrian connectivity, and wastewater treatment.

Committee members discussed a number of implementation issues, including:

- The state's methodology for tracking projects within the MBTA Communities permitting pipeline.
- Differences between projects entering permitting, receiving approvals, and reaching construction or occupancy.
- The relationship between housing production, affordability, infrastructure capacity, and municipal planning.
- Lessons learned from the first several years of implementation.

Mr. Nunnari also asked whether the experience of the MBTA Communities Act offers lessons for future statewide housing policy and invited Ms. Dain's thoughts on the proposed Starter Home ballot initiative. Discussion focused on the value of statewide zoning reform, balancing local planning with regional housing needs, and opportunities for future legislative action.

4. Legislative and Regulatory Update

Mr. Nunnari provided a brief legislative and regulatory update.

Topics discussed included:

- Senate passage of the Energy Bill and the beginning of House-Senate conference committee negotiations.
- Adoption of two AIA Massachusetts tracked Senate amendments.
- Ongoing monitoring of legislation involving housing policy, energy, data centers, and climate initiatives.
- Continued outreach regarding the AIA MA embodied carbon practitioner survey and related implementation efforts.

5. New Business

No additional new business was raised.

6. Next Steps and Adjournment

Mr. Spang thanked Ms. Dain for her informative presentation and thanked the representatives from the Town of Westford for sharing their practical experience implementing the MBTA Communities Act.

AIA Massachusetts will continue monitoring:

- Implementation of the MBTA Communities Act and related housing initiatives.
- Conference committee negotiations on the state Energy Bill.
- Legislative and regulatory developments affecting the architectural profession.
- Ongoing embodied carbon implementation efforts.

The meeting adjourned at approximately **10:06 AM**.