

March 13, 2022

Department of Energy Resources (DOER)
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 1020
Boston, MA 02114

Re: **Stretch Code Straw Proposal Comments**

Dear Commissioner Woodcock, Secretary Theoharides, and Secretary Kennealy,

On behalf of the Boston Clean Energy Coalition (BCEC)—which comprises thirteen member organizations and nine ally groups—I am writing in response to the straw “specialized” stretch code for municipal adoption that DOER has put forward per the mandate to create a **net-zero** stretch code. The current definition as presented by DOER does not meet the charge assigned by the legislature, as it does not meet the definition of **net-zero** carbon emissions for buildings. The straw proposal does not live up to the standard envisioned in the Next Generation Roadmap bill.

To be specific, we encourage DOER to write a net-zero definition that does not allow for on-site combustion of fossil fuels. To meet the Commonwealth’s emissions-reduction targets, net-zero buildings should be energy efficient and all-electric, have low embodied carbon, and achieve carbon neutrality through the production of renewable energy or its purchase.

Four years ago, BCEC worked with the City Council to research net-zero ordinances and regulations to inform the development of a local net-zero ordinance. When the City Council attempted to write an ordinance that incentivized net-zero emissions in new construction, they were advised not to develop it because it was in conflict with the state code. In 2019, the Chief of Boston’s Environment, Energy, and Open Space Department testified at a Board of Buildings of Regulations and Standards hearing that Boston needed a net-zero code to meet its emissions-reduction targets, and this remains true today.

Boston has been innovative in trying to reach its emissions targets: the Boston Department of Neighborhood Development requires the affordable-housing grantees it funds to construct zero-emissions buildings; the Boston Planning and Development Agency is updating its zoning code for buildings larger than 20,000 square feet to build to a net-zero emissions standard; and Boston recently passed an update to the Building Emissions Reduction and Disclosure Ordinance (BERDO) that sets emissions targets for large buildings. However, according to the *Carbon Free Boston Summary Report* (2019), commissioned by Mayor Walsh, these efforts aren’t sufficient to meet Boston’s emissions-reduction targets. The report clearly states we need all-electric, zero-emissions new construction. That is why we are depending on DOER to put forward an opt-in code that is all-electric.

Further, as we learned first hand through our work on updating BERDO, equity needs to be part of a true net-zero stretch code. Allowing fossil fuels to continue to burn in new buildings perpetuates health risks and high utility bills, which are most harmful to those living in poorly constructed homes or in environmental justice neighborhoods. It is necessary to note that net-zero code adoption is not just for wealthy towns; energy-burdened communities benefit most from energy-efficient affordable housing and declining emissions.

In addition, an all-electric net-zero stretch code will leverage state investment in jobs training and electrification incentives, ensuring good jobs and a strong economy. Continuing to allow a

fossil-fuel pathway in the “specialized” stretch code will only slow innovation, delay the clean-energy transition, and limit investment in a clean-energy economy.

DOER should be leading the way to provide an opt-in stretch code for Massachusetts municipalities that want to build all-electric new buildings, and supporting them to reach their own emissions-reduction targets and, in turn, the Commonwealth’s targets. Decarbonizing our buildings is crucial if we are going to have a livable, breathable future for everyone. BCEC urges you to go back to the drawing board and develop an all-electric, highly efficient code that includes operational and embodied carbon. Doing so will help us mitigate the climate crisis, lower energy bills, and improve air quality. There is no time to waste in cleaning up our emissions and shifting the paradigm from burning fossil fuels to using renewables. Making these changes now is essential for a healthy, thriving Commonwealth.

Sincerely,
Rickie Harvey (she/her)
On behalf of the Boston Clean Energy Coalition

BostonCleanEnergyCoalition.org
[@BosCleanEnergy](https://twitter.com/BosCleanEnergy)

Member organizations

350 Mass—Boston Node
Back Bay Green
Boston Climate Action Network
Clean Water Action
Community Action Works (formerly Toxics Action Center)
Dorchester Climate Justice
Environment Massachusetts
Home Energy Efficiency Team (HEET)
Massachusetts Climate Action Network
Mothers Out Front, Boston
Resist the Pipeline
Sierra Club of Massachusetts
West Roxbury Saves Energy

Ally organizations

Alternatives for Community and Environment (ACE)
Built Environment Plus (formerly USGBC-MA)
Charles River Watershed Association
Gas Leaks Allies (Boston)
Greater Boston Physicians for Social Responsibility
Massachusetts Environmental Justice Alliance
Massachusetts Power Forward
The Metropolitan Area Planning Council
Passive House Massachusetts