

# Advanced Building Energy Efficiency Policies (ABEEP) Task Force Meeting Overview and Summary Notes

June 3, 2025

Evanston became the first municipality to adopt Illinois' new stretch energy code for residential and commercial buildings on February 24, 2025. The City also became the first in Illinois to adopt a Building Performance Standard on March 10, 2025. The following is a summary the Advanced Building Energy Efficiency Policies meeting on June 3, 2025, which featured an interview of Evanston city staff regarding the recent passing of these policies as well as an overview of useful resources from Illinois Green Alliance's [Building Energy Hub](#).

[Watch the full meeting recording here.](#)

## City of Evanston Interviewees:

- Cara Pratt, Sustainability and Resilience Manager ([cpratt@cityofevanston.org](mailto:cpratt@cityofevanston.org))
- Kirsten Dreihobl, Sustainability and Resilience Specialist ([kdreihobl@cityofevanston.org](mailto:kdreihobl@cityofevanston.org))

**Interview Moderator:** Dan Streit, Slipstream Senior Researcher ([dstreit@slipstreaminc.org](mailto:dstreit@slipstreaminc.org))

**Building Energy Hub:** Katie Kaluzny, Illinois Green Alliance Deputy Director ([kkaluzny@illinoisgreenalliance.org](mailto:kkaluzny@illinoisgreenalliance.org))

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## Evanston Interview

**Q: How do Evanston's policies align with the Climate Action and Resilience Plan (CARP), and how has having CARP in place been important?**

Initially, the city's sustainability efforts focused more on green spaces and transportation. However, emissions data revealed that buildings were the largest contributor to greenhouse gases. CARP played a key role in shifting the city's focus toward building decarbonization, helping to justify and prioritize new initiatives even though building-related policies can be harder to communicate and generate excitement compared to more visible efforts like planting trees or expanding bike lanes.

**Q: Can you say more about gathering community feedback on stretch codes/Healthy Buildings Ordinance (HBO)? How did stakeholder engagement inform the process for developing the ordinances?**

In gathering community feedback for initiatives like the stretch code and building performance standards (BPS), Evanston developed a thorough engagement strategy focused on telling the story of the need for such policies. Evanston partnered with organizations such as Slipstream, the Midwest Energy Efficiency Alliance (MEEA), and IMT to learn from others and tailor their message. Community volunteers and

experts helped shape the policies and created accessible materials, such as storyboards to create “data walks”, to make the technical details easier to understand. The city also held targeted stakeholder engagement meetings, conveying the story or “why” behind the policies, while allowing space for residents to share their own concerns and have them addressed.

Despite extensive outreach, the city learned that misconceptions still surfaced during final legislative discussions, underscoring the need for clear communication throughout the process.

*View the Healthy Buildings Ordinance slide deck [here](#).*

*For more information on stakeholder engagement, explore [this fact sheet](#).*

**Q: What questions came up throughout the development process internally and from stakeholders? What resources/strategies were helpful in addressing these questions?**

Internally, collaboration with the city’s building official and other departments helped address questions and concerns early in the process. The city council had expressed interest in adopting the stretch code even before state-level action, and staff were generally supportive due to the city’s culture of active public engagement around development. City Council’s support for the stretch code grew out of engagement with active community groups advocating for climate action. To increase compliance with the new code, the city planned training sessions for developers and relied on outside experts to communicate technical information, allowing city staff to focus on coordination and storytelling rather than mastering the specifics of energy codes.

Training and peer support were emphasized as vital. For instance, upcoming trainings with MEEA were designed to help developers understand compliance pathways and avoid costly surprises.

Historical knowledge from past initiatives, public meetings, and early benchmarking policies also provided a foundation for developing newer policies like HBO. Benchmarking not only helped identify target buildings for performance standards but also encouraged building owners to pay more attention to energy use, though the city acknowledged that deeper analysis is still needed.

*For more information on stretch code trainings, contact John Gossman, Technical Manager at MEEA: [jgossman@mwalliance.org](mailto:jgossman@mwalliance.org).*

**Q: How did the data collected in benchmarking help shape the HBO?**

The benchmarking data played a foundational role in shaping the HBO. Benchmarking fostered greater awareness among building owners about their energy usage, encouraging them to consider efficiency improvements. Although there's an indication of positive trends, limited staffing has constrained deeper analysis of efficiency impacts over time. Expanding partnerships with organizations like ClearlyEnergy, Slipstream, and MEEA could enhance this work.

Additionally, having a list of covered buildings and insight into their energy use provided crucial context for developing the HBO policy, helping to answer key questions and inform decision-making. Engagement with the activist community and other stakeholders also significantly influenced the

process.



**Q: Can you speak about the key concerns that emerged during the development of the HBO and how they moved forward to address this?**

During the development of the HBO, several key concerns emerged, and the team took deliberate steps to address them. To anticipate these concerns, Evanston staff researched similar efforts early on in development, like Chicago's attempt to ban natural gas in new construction, by watching past public hearings, and listening to oppositional arguments. This helped staff identify potential sources of disagreement and recognize the importance of engaging key stakeholders, especially early on. Some common points of opposition were:

1. **Affordable Housing:** A primary concern was how the HBO might impact affordable housing. Given that expanding affordable housing is a central goal in Evanston, the team prioritized this issue. They aimed to provide honest, transparent communication and pointed stakeholders to resources like [the Building Energy Hub](#) to explore decarbonization strategies for affordable and multi-family housing.
2. **Costs and Complexity:** Stakeholders raised concerns about the high costs and complexity of compliance, particularly for large property owners and historic buildings. The team responded by referencing existing support tools like [ComEd's facility assessments](#) and incentive programs while acknowledging the challenges ahead.
3. **Grid Reliability:** Concerns about whether the electric grid could handle widespread electrification were addressed by involving ComEd in Council meetings to provide reassurance and technical information.

4. **Technical and Sector-Specific Concerns:** Additional issues included:

- The complexity of decarbonizing buildings served by district systems or with central utility plants.
- How large building portfolios would comply.
- The differences between net zero and zero emissions.
- Legal protections for equity-priority buildings like schools, which were addressed by incorporating these protections into the ordinance and allowing flexibility through Alternate Compliance Pathways (ACPs).

Overall, the team emphasized proactive stakeholder engagement, transparency, and a flexible yet committed approach to equity and technical feasibility.

**Q: Where do you start this process- stretch code, benchmarking, BPS? Do you talk with the Mayor, City Council, Building Department, or City Administration?**

No matter what policy you are working on or who you talk to first, it is essential to start with a strategic, data-driven foundation. Without the data proving why these policies work and are important, it is hard to have productive conversations.

In Evanston, the effort often begins within sustainability commissions or similar local groups discussing how to improve building efficiency. Initial outreach may involve engaging the mayor and local building enforcement officials to set high-level goals and gain support. Evanston sustainability staff focused on aligning their local efforts with broader climate goals and tailoring the narrative to the specific needs and characteristics of the community. Framing the conversation with a clear problem statement, highlighting work already done, and presenting the need for action helps decision-makers understand the urgency and rationale. Once this groundwork is laid, conversations with elected officials and community groups can move the process forward. At this point in time, prioritizing stretch energy codes and a BPS is seen as key to addressing building sector emissions that have remained stagnant.

*For more information on the stretch code adoption process, explore [this fact sheet](#).*

**Q: Other closing thoughts or advice to share? What do you recommend to those wanting to explore these policies more?**

It is important to connect with organizations and communities that are already leading in this space, such as the [Institute for Market Transformation \(IMT\)](#) and municipalities with established building policies. For those with limited internal capacity, these external partners can provide critical support and guidance throughout the process. While implementing policies like a Building Performance Standard is not easy, it is achievable—especially when grounded in local data and aligned with community goals. Evanston staff can also act as a resource for others pursuing similar efforts, in addition to peers like Oak Park, who has also adopted a policy and gathered valuable lessons. As more communities implement these policies, a growing network of shared knowledge and experience will make the process increasingly accessible for others.

## **Building Energy Hub**

The Hub is Illinois' trusted resource center for building professionals seeking practical solutions to improve building performance.

### **Key Resources:**

- [Energy Efficiency Checklist](#): This guide will walk you through the steps to measure and manage energy use effectively, starting with the foundational practice of benchmarking.
- [Operations & Maintenance Guide](#): This document seeks to provide property owners/facilities managers, as well as operations, engineering, and maintenance personnel, with a guide for O&M procedures designed to increase energy efficiency. Building operations staff can use this guide as a template for creating a manual tailored to their own specific facilities or to complement existing materials on building systems, equipment, and other processes and information tailored to individual properties or companies.
- [Building Performance Planning Guide](#): This guide will help you as a building owner/ operator/ manager make decisions about how to improve the operations and energy efficiency of your building through strategic investments. This guide introduces decarbonization through three overarching principles: 1) getting to know your building, 2) developing a decarbonization plan, and 3) implementing a decarbonization plan.
- [Funding & Financing Guide](#): Explore this page to find useful resources to help you find suitable funding and financing options for your next project.
- [Online Discussion Forum](#): Free, online, volunteer-moderated community to share resources, tools, best practices, and exchange ideas related to energy efficiency and decarbonization. Our platform offers a collaborative space for building professionals to share insights, discuss innovations, and explore best practices.
- [Case Studies](#): Real-world insights highlighting commercial buildings, nonprofits and small businesses, higher education and healthcare, hospitality and multifamily, and municipal buildings.
- [Hub Help Desk](#): The Building Energy Hub is your go-to resource for expert guidance, tools, and one-on-one technical assistance. Connect with our Help Desk to get answers to your questions.