

The Path to Advanced Building Energy Policies: Bite-Sized Strategies for Communities

- Session Time: 4:45 pm - 5:45 pm
- Session Date: 10/01/2026
- Session Type: Breakout Session
- Location: Hinman Auditorium

Session Description:

CREDITS: 1 CM

ABSTRACT

Municipalities across Illinois are exploring how long-range planning and local policy tools can promote long-term sustainability, energy, and resilience goals. However, many local governments, particularly smaller and mid-sized communities, face capacity, political, and implementation challenges when considering policy and regulatory updates in these areas.

This facilitated discussion will explore practical and incremental “bite-sized” approaches that communities can use to align community planning practices with energy efficiency goals, while considering a longer-term trajectory of more advanced policies such as the adoption of the Illinois stretch energy codes and Building Performance Standards (BPS). Subject matter experts and local municipal leaders will share their experiences implementing incremental approaches, including: zoning code reforms to reduce barriers to renewable energy and electrification; EV readiness programs; and leading by example through municipal energy benchmarking initiatives. To demonstrate how these approaches come together in practice, this session will also feature the City of Evanston’s experience implementing a variety of smaller-scale sustainability initiatives through its Climate Action and Resilience Plan. By highlighting how these efforts fit within a broader long-term vision, Evanston will demonstrate how communities can use incremental actions to build momentum and support for more ambitious sustainability and energy policies over time.

Rather than a traditional presentation, this session will encourage attendee participation and peer exchange around implementation challenges, political considerations, lessons learned, and practical strategies communities can adapt to their local context. Attendees will leave with actionable ideas and implementation approaches that can support energy planning efforts in communities of varying sizes and capacities.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify actionable first steps municipalities can take to begin or advance sustainability and energy planning efforts.
2. Evaluate the relative benefits and applications of “bite-sized” energy planning approaches to align with local capacity, context, and priorities.
3. Learn from successes, challenges, and experiences of peer communities to inform potential small-scale actions municipalities can take, and understand how these efforts contribute to a longer-term vision of improved energy efficiency in community buildings and advancement toward broader energy policy goals.

Haider Attiq *He/him/his, Slipstream*

Haider Attiq is a Research Analyst at Slipstream focused on energy analysis, building performance, and data-driven climate and decarbonization work. He supports public-sector and other partners through technical analysis, energy and emissions modeling, technical report writing, cost-benefit analysis, and research related to building energy use, electrification, benchmarking, and community greenhouse gas inventories. Haider combines training in environmental science, public affairs, and electrical engineering to translate complex energy data into practical insights that support local decision-making.

Emma Hurbanis *She/her/hers, Midwest Energy Efficiency Alliance*

Emma Hurbanis is an Associate, Building Codes and Policy at MEEA. In this role, Emma works to advance building-related energy efficiency programs and policies at the local, state and regional levels through research and education, stakeholder engagement, and policy implementation. Emma has a background in local government, with experience at the Dane County Office of Energy and Climate Change where she contributed to the implementation of the Inflation Reduction Act and the City of Hopkins, Minnesota, where she led the creation of a pilot workforce development program. She received a B.S. in Education Policy from the University of Wisconsin- Madison.

Cara Pratt *She/her/hers, City of Evanston*

Cara Pratt is the Chief Sustainability & Resilience Officer for the City of Evanston, IL. She and her team are responsible for implementing the City's Climate Action & Resilience Plan

and the recommendations of the City's Environmental Justice Resolution. Cara holds an MPA from Cornell University with an emphasis on Science, Technology, & Infrastructure Policy and undergraduate degrees in Environmental Policy and International Relations from Drake University.

Edith Makra *She/her/hers, The Metropolitan Mayors Caucus*

Edith Makra directs sustainability initiatives for the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus, a coalition of 275 mayors in the greater Chicago region. Makra developed the Greenest Region Compact, a consensus sustainability pledge now adopted by 166 Chicago-area communities, forming the largest regional municipal sustainability collaborative in the US. She has led the creation of the first climate action plans for the Chicago region and is now leading municipalities to adopt clean energy and clean transportation practices through innovations like the EV Readiness Program. Makra previously served as the first environmental advisor to Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley and has directed state-wide and regional environmental programs in Illinois and Massachusetts. She has a B.S. in Forestry from the University of Illinois; an Executive Sustainability Certificate from Harvard University; and is an International Society of Sustainability Professionals – Sustainability Excellence Professional; and is a Climate Change Professional, Certified by the Association of Climate Change Officers.