

The Time Is Now - We Need To Be Ready

13 July 2016

As we transition to a clean energy economy from polluting fossil fuels, we need to ensure we are ready in a cost effective and safe way. These decisions will profoundly affect both our wallets and our families. Changes under consideration to our building codes can either help or hurt those efforts in a major way.

Building codes may seem like a complicated and even boring topic, but our buildings are responsible for over 40 percent of our total energy use. Our buildings last for 50 plus years, so their current construction matters for our families' wellbeing in the future.

The Massachusetts Attorney General's Study showed that energy efficiency and renewables were the cheapest way to meet our state's energy needs. As a hotel owner and environmental advocate, we are some of the many people who strongly support boosting building efficiency, as well as wiring for electric vehicles (EVs) and solar "ready" roofs new construction.

We are very encouraged that Mass' Board of Building Regulations and Standards (BBRS) is considering improving the state codes to make it easier and less costly for new buildings to install solar panels and electric vehicle chargers.

With the booming growth of solar installations and electric vehicles it is just a matter of time before they are a consumer expectation. These upgrades will only cost more if we wait to implement them and will quickly create thousands of good paying, local jobs.

With these improvements we will be in good company. California, Vermont, and Oregon have already enacted EV pre-wiring code changes - with others on the way.

In my own industry, hotel guests are now demanding a lower carbon footprint and comprehensive sustainability measures. Likewise, team members Employees are attracted to - and stay longer at - companies that prioritize environmentally sustainable efforts. That means what is good for the environment is also good for business.

These are among the many reasons The Lenox and our other hotels feature EV charging stations, cleaner CNG (compressed natural gas) vans, onsite co-generation electricity, and much more.

The proposed changes for the Massachusetts base code make sense economically and environmentally. It's much cheaper to install EV and solar pre-wiring during construction rather

than later on. Installing EV charging wires during construction can take an electrician under an hour. However, ripping up sidewalks to do an install after the fact is expensive, with potential regulatory hurdles.

The BBRS is also updating the 2009 “stretch” building code. When it was first adopted, the stretch code cut energy use (and consumer costs) 30 percent and carbon pollution 40 percent compared to the base energy code. Now with more efficient base code updates, the stretch code is no longer a “stretch” at all. The proposed stretch code has zero requirements for all existing, new small and medium commercial buildings and some new residential buildings. The stretch code should be strengthened in order to save ratepayers energy, which in turn saves them money.

We urge the BBRS to strengthen the stretch code and approve the proposed base code updates, creating security for our residents, good paying jobs and speeding our transition to the clean energy economy.

-- Tedd Saunders is Co-Owner of The Lenox and other hotels & CSO of The Saunders Hotel Group. Emily Norton is the Director of the Massachusetts Sierra Club Chapter