

## Danvers Stretch Code Workshop: Panel Questions & Answers

### About the workshop

On Thursday, September 17, 2026, the Town of Danvers held a Stretch Code Workshop for Town leadership at the Danvers Senior Center, 25 Stone Street, from 6:00 to 8:00 PM. The workshop was for voting members of Town government: Town Meeting members, the Select Board, the Planning Board, the Zoning Board of Appeals, and other boards and committees. Of those attending, 34 took part in the keypad polling.

After keypad polling and a look at six recent Danvers building permits, a panel of four experts who work with the Stretch Code every day answered questions that attendees wrote on cards or asked from the floor. The evening closed with one-on-one conversations between attendees and the panelists. Kim Lundgren of Kim Lundgren Associates, Inc. (KLA), which supports the Town on Resilient Danvers, moderated the panel.

This document collects those questions and the panel's answers, grouped by topic, for everyone who attended and for those who could not. Questions that were submitted, or prepared for the panel ahead of time, but not fully answered that evening are listed at the end, with responses prepared afterward.

### The panel

| Panelist         | Role                                                                                                          |
|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Scott Vandewalle | Building Commissioner, Town of North Andover; longtime Danvers resident                                       |
| Kevin Werme      | Project Manager, Bespoke Contracting, Bedford                                                                 |
| Bobby de Sousa   | Program Manager, Performance Systems Development; Mass Save Codes and Standards support                       |
| Dillan Patel     | Green Communities Regional Coordinator, Northeast Region, Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources (DOER) |

**Moderator:** Kim Lundgren, Founder and CEO, Kim Lundgren Associates, Inc. (KLA)

## Terms used throughout

- **HERS rating:** a Home Energy Rating System score from a certified HERS rater. Lower scores mean a more efficient home.
- **ACH:** air changes per hour, measured with a blower door test to show how airtight a home is.
- **DOER:** the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources, which writes the stretch code.
- **ERV / HRV:** energy or heat recovery ventilators, which bring in fresh air while recovering heat.
- **Stretch Code vs. Specialized Code:** the Stretch Code is the code Danvers is considering. The Specialized Code is a separate, stricter code that adds further requirements; Danvers is not considering it.

## When a project needs a HERS rating: six Danvers examples

Before the questions, a clarification. If Danvers adopts the Stretch Code, it becomes the energy code for every building project in town, the same way the base code is today. Most projects would not notice a difference: smaller additions and alterations follow the same checklist (prescriptive) path they follow now. The change is that new homes, large additions and major alterations need a HERS rating. That means a certified, third-party HERS (Home Energy Rating System) rater checks that the project meets the code's energy standards. So the practical question for a homeowner is when a project needs a HERS rating, and the questions in this document are framed that way.

**Q: When does a project need a HERS rating? Is one needed on every permitted project? Is the 1,000 threshold square feet or dollars?**

**Only new construction, large additions and major alterations need a HERS rating.** Smaller additions and alterations follow the same checklist (prescriptive) path they follow under the base code today, and an owner who is not building or renovating is not affected. The tests are measured in square feet, not project cost:

- **Large addition:** 1,000 sq ft or more of added space, or 100% or more of the existing home's square footage.
- **Major alteration:** a work area of more than 50% of the existing home that is also more than 1,000 sq ft, or more than 100% of the existing square footage.

Projects that cross one of these lines need a HERS rating. Most permitted projects in Danvers would not need one. The Town estimates that about 12 new homes are built and fewer than 40 homes undergo major renovation in Danvers each year, and that fewer than half of those projects are large enough to need a rating. *Source: DOER, "What are the main differences between the*

Massachusetts Base & Stretch energy codes?" (April 2026), handed out at the workshop; [Town of Danvers Green Communities and Stretch Code fact sheet](#).

**Q: Which recent Danvers projects would have needed a HERS rating?**

The panel opened with six real Danvers building permits. Attendees voted on each one before the panel discussed it. Price did not decide the outcome: the \$290,000 project would not have needed a HERS rating, and the \$340,000 project would have.

| Project | Existing home                  | The work                                                                                                                              | Cost      | HERS rating needed?                                                                             |
|---------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| A       | 1950s Colonial, 3,445 sq ft    | 750 sq ft two-story addition (living room, two bedrooms)                                                                              | \$92,800  | No. Under 1,000 sq ft                                                                           |
| B       | 1970s Colonial, 2,207 sq ft    | 980 sq ft frame-to-finish (living room, bedroom, full bath, kitchen area)                                                             | \$277,700 | No. Under 1,000 sq ft                                                                           |
| C       | 1970s Colonial, 2,000 sq ft    | 816 sq ft two-story kitchen and bedroom addition; bedroom renovated into laundry and closet                                           | \$290,000 | No. Under 1,000 sq ft                                                                           |
| D       | 1930s Cape, 1,560 sq ft        | Garage addition with primary bedroom, breezeway, dormer, finished basement; 1,351 sq ft added                                         | \$340,000 | Yes. Over 1,000 sq ft added. Estimated HERS cost \$1,325 to \$1,725                             |
| E       | 1970s split level, 1,315 sq ft | Two-level addition, about 804 sq ft per level, garage below and primary suite and family room above                                   | \$328,533 | Yes. Over 1,000 sq ft and larger than the existing home. Estimated HERS cost \$1,500 to \$1,900 |
| F       | 1980s Cape, 2,625 sq ft        | Roof and second floor removed and rebuilt, about 560 sq ft added over the garage, first floor taken down to the deck and reconfigured | \$400,000 | Yes. Major alteration: more than half the home rebuilt. Estimated HERS cost \$1,400 to \$1,800  |

Source: workshop slides, "Example Project Scenarios from Danvers Building Permit Database." HERS cost estimates are from the slides.

**Q: Project E's addition is bigger than the house it is attached to. Does that matter?**

**It matters only when the original house is under 1,000 sq ft.** Most people know that an addition of 1,000 sq ft or more triggers the requirement. There is also a second test: an addition larger than 100% of the existing home. That test matters only for homes under 1,000 sq ft. For

example, a 900 sq ft addition to an 800 sq ft house is under 1,000 sq ft, but because it is more than 100% of the existing home, it would trigger a HERS rating. Once the original house is over 1,000 sq ft, the comparison between the addition and the house no longer matters.

### Airtightness and blower door testing

#### **Q: How airtight does a home have to be?**

For new construction in Danvers today, the target is 3 air changes per hour (ACH) on a blower door test. On the HERS rating path the maximum is 5 ACH, which is a little more lenient than the existing-building standard. Making the house airtight is an important part of the HERS rating and can have a major impact on the score.

#### **Q: Does the Stretch Code make homes tighter than the base code does?**

**No. The Stretch Code does not make homes any tighter than the base code does.** Homes under the Stretch Code must be just as tight as base code homes, 3 to 5 ACH depending on the compliance path, and that does not change. The difference is that the Stretch Code requires new construction to install a heat recovery ventilator (HRV) or energy recovery ventilator (ERV), which changes how the home is ventilated (see Ventilation, health and spray foam). An HRV or ERV brings in fresh air while recovering heat.

### Thresholds, gray areas and rapid-fire questions

#### **Q: How does a homeowner find out they've crossed the 50% line on a renovation, and who makes the call?**

The building code and the energy code make the call. They define categories such as "major alteration." The reasoning is that once you have opened the whole house up, that is the time to bring it up to code, and it is not hard to do when you are already doing so much work. In practice, the homeowner would learn this from their HERS rater and architect during design.

#### **Q: What if a project adds a small amount of space but also renovates another part of the house that isn't a full gut? Does that trigger HERS?**

This is a gray area. The building department looks at the level of alteration. Some alterations, such as redoing a basement that was already habitable into an ADU, may not need a HERS rating, while adding an addition may. A practical rule of thumb: if you are tearing out more than 50% of what you have, you will need to bring things up to code, and not just the energy code. Electrical and heating come up to code as part of that too.

The code is unclear here today. DOER expects to release a Stretch Code update in the next four to six months. It will not bring major changes, but it is expected to clarify how a combination of

alteration and addition triggers a HERS rating, likely something like a combined total over 1,000 sq ft. Feedback from a public listening session earlier this year produced redline comments that are posted on the [DOER website](#); the panel was not sure whether this clarification is in them yet. Inspectors have long found existing-building conditions the hardest part of the code, and the panel welcomed the clarification.

**Q: Does an unheated two-car garage, 20 x 30 with storage on the second floor (600 sq ft x 2 floors = 1,200 sq ft), trigger HERS?**

**No. An unheated two-car garage does not trigger a HERS rating.** An unheated garage is not conditioned space, so it does not count.

**Q: If a project is under 1,000 sq ft, can the homeowner choose to comply with the Stretch Code anyway?**

**Yes. A homeowner can choose to comply with the Stretch Code even when it is not required.**

**Q: How long is the look-back for the 1,000 sq ft threshold? Could I do 800 sq ft today and 950 sq ft in two years?**

Under the existing buildings section of the building code (Appendix J), all permits pulled within a 12-month period are considered a single job. Work done within a year is looked at as a total picture. Projects spread further apart than that are not combined.

**Q: Does work that affects the whole building, such as adding central air, fire sprinklers or insulation, trigger a HERS rating for the whole house?**

**No. On its own, that work does not trigger a HERS rating for the whole house.** Adding central air to a home that does not have it, with no other work, would not trigger a HERS rating even if it reaches every room, because you are adding a mechanical system rather than altering those spaces. There are many exemptions for mechanical work. The code focuses on when a home's habitable, heated areas are substantially modified. Topping up attic insulation, such as adding another 8 inches over existing 8 inches in a 1,200 sq ft attic, also does not trigger it. Fire sprinklers are not required in homes under 14,000 sq ft, so they do not come into this. If those items are part of a larger project, their cost counts toward the total project.

### **Walls, insulation and trade-offs**

**Q: New construction now uses 2x6 walls instead of 2x4. When an addition triggers HERS, does the existing house have to be converted to 2x6 walls?**

**No. The existing house does not have to be converted to 2x6 walls.** Builders have used 2x6 walls with about R-19 insulation in new construction for many years, so that is not new. The HERS rating works on trade-offs. For example, you can make the addition very tight or heat it

with an efficient heat pump instead of a furnace, which balances losses elsewhere in the house. You might replace an old furnace, which is often due anyway. The panel has not seen anyone rip open an existing house to make the walls thicker.

**Q: Are there options besides spray foam to reach the required R-values?**

**Yes. Spray foam is not required, and other insulation can reach the required R-values.** The code is largely material-neutral, and fiberglass can get you there. The prescriptive values discussed were about R-21 in walls and R-48 in the roof. Those are the "check the box" requirements. A HERS rating gives more flexibility, for example a little less insulation in the wall, a very tight envelope, or more insulation in the attic.

There is an optional credit for carbon-storing insulation such as cellulose and wood fiber. It allows a higher HERS score even if the material has a lower R-value, as DOER tries to build a market for these products.

Some builders add 1 to 2 inches of foam board on the outside of the house. It reduces heat loss through studs and headers and, installed correctly, improves air sealing, though it is a cost consideration. In the panel's experience, spray foam is popular but is used in less than half of projects.

**Builder workflow once HERS is triggered**

**Q: Once a HERS rating has been triggered in a Stretch Code community, how do you approach the job differently?**

The main difference is bringing on a HERS rater. One builder on the panel described his company's sequence:

1. Price the project scope and agree on a budget with the homeowner.
2. Once the client signs, bring in the HERS rater, who produces a preliminary HERS report.
3. Compare the report against the scope and bid. For example, if the bid assumed R-48 in the roof and the report calls for R-60, that gap is discussed with the client. Often there is another lever, such as a slightly better window package instead of more roof insulation.
4. With the scope agreed, apply for the permit and go through normal inspections.
5. The rater does a midpoint inspection during construction, then inspects the finished work and issues a final report.

The only added steps are the rater's visits. The panel added that on jobs that straddle the line, the building department may reject a permit application until a HERS rating is provided.

**Q: What is a HERS rater, and what do they do?**

A HERS rater is a certified, third-party professional who checks that a home meets the energy code's efficiency standards. In the sequence the builder on the panel described, the rater issues a preliminary HERS report once the contract is signed, does a midpoint inspection during construction, then inspects the finished work, including a blower door test, and issues a final report with the home's HERS score. For what a rating costs, see Costs and affordability.

*Source: workshop transcript; DOER, Base vs. Stretch one-pager (April 2026); [DOER FAQ](#) (R6).*

**Heating fuels, solar-ready and EV-ready**

**Q: Under the Stretch Code, can new homes be heated with gas or oil, or is it electric only?**

**Yes. New homes can be heated with gas or oil under the Stretch Code.** You can heat your home and hot water however you like. No energy code in Massachusetts requires full electrification. Oil, propane, natural gas and all-electric are all allowed under the Stretch Code and every other Massachusetts energy code. A home using fossil fuel must meet a somewhat lower (more efficient) HERS target. All-electric homes get a 3-point HERS credit, so they can be slightly less efficient technically, but electric is not required.

**Q: Is rooftop solar required? Do homeowners have to supply all the services and materials for it?**

**No. Rooftop solar is not required under the Stretch Code.** New construction must be solar-ready, which is largely already a base code requirement. The Stretch Code adds a panel requirement. Most of solar-ready is documentation: you show a pathway on your plans, often one that already exists in the home. Piping is usually not required. The main physical item is designating breaker space in the electrical panel.

**Q: Does the Stretch Code require a 300-amp electrical service to charge an EV?**

**No. The Stretch Code does not require a 300-amp electrical service.** The code requires new construction to set aside 50 amps of panel space for future solar and 30 amps for a future EV charger, piped and wired out to the device location, so 80 amps in total. The code does not set a panel size. Setting aside that space, plus a home's normal needs, can push some homes to a 300-amp panel, and the panel has seen some 400-amp panels in large homes. A typical Tesla charger needs more than the 30 amps set aside anyway. The panel did not discuss the cost of upsizing a service.

The goal is "plug and play": breaker, wire, pipe and a device on the other end, so a future owner does not have to open walls or replace the panel.

**Q: So you don't need the charging station itself, just the outlet?**

**Correct. You do not need to install the charging station itself.** And EV-ready applies to new construction only. Additions and alterations do not need to be EV-ready.

**Q: Will residents lose the freedom to choose cooking appliances, dryers and fireplaces? Will they lose the freedom not to build in EV outlets and a solar-ready roof? What other surprises are there?**

**No. Residents keep the freedom to choose their own appliances.** DOER's Stretch Code fact sheet, handed out at the workshop, says the Stretch Code retains choice for fossil fuel appliances, and that all-electric and mixed-fuel homes are both options. Conditions on gas stoves in new homes are part of the Specialized Code, which Danvers is not considering. New homes do have to be EV-ready and solar-ready, which means reserving panel space and showing a pathway on the plans; additions and alterations do not have to be EV-ready. The other change the panel described for new homes is a balanced ventilation system (an ERV or HRV).

*Source: DOER, Stretch Energy Code one-pager; [DOER FAQ](#) (R16, Specialized Code); workshop transcript.*

## Historic exemptions

**Q: Who determines whether a historic building is exempt from a HERS rating?**

The code has an exemption for historic properties. It is the same exemption as in the base code, word for word. To qualify, the building must have a true historic designation, such as a local historical board, a state registry or a federal registry. Age alone is not enough: an 1890 or 1918 house may just be old, not historic. The applicant must also show that complying with the code would degrade the historic nature of the building.

What is designated matters. Some designations cover only the street-facing facade, while the interior has been changed so often it is no longer historic. Nantucket is an example: facades there are designated, so buildings may keep single-pane windows.

The local building commissioner makes the determination, based on documented historic status. That decision can be appealed to the state board. The onus is on the permit applicant to request the exemption and provide the documentation; the building department will not apply it unprompted.

**Q: A dispute with the state Architectural Access Board (MAAB) over a lift at a historic building held up an occupancy permit. Who decides in cases like that?**

Accessibility review by the MAAB is a separate process, focused on public accommodation. It is very different from the energy code exemption.

**Q: Danvers has a Preservation Commission that reviews demolition permits for older buildings and can find a building historically significant. Could that local determination support an exemption?**

The building official on the panel said he had not faced that question before and would need to look into it. A panelist thought that [DOER's Stretch and Specialized Code FAQ](#) and technical guidance include a Historic Preservation Commission designation as an example that can support an exemption. A panel member added that demolition review can cover partial work, such as removing a wall, not only full demolition, so a Commission finding in that context could be used in an exemption request.

### **Costs and affordability**

**Q: What if people can't afford this? Is it fair?**

There can be some upfront cost. But cost is usually discussed as a snapshot of construction, and rarely as the cost of living in the building. A builder asks what it costs to build and a buyer asks what it costs to buy, but monthly heating and cooling costs are significant too. Over a long ownership they can add up to more than the cost of the building. Because the Stretch Code's intent is more efficient buildings, the upfront cost can be offset by lower operating costs over time.

**Q: What does a HERS rating cost?**

The HERS rating itself is the one obvious added cost, about \$1,500 to \$3,000 depending on the size of the work and what the rater's report covers. Other costs are harder to pin down because there are many different levers for reaching the required score. To estimate the rating cost for a specific project, try the [HERS Rating Cost Calculator](#) from Home Energy Efficiency Consultants, a firm that provides HERS ratings in Massachusetts.

**Q: What are the cost increases as a percentage of the total project? For example, on a \$300,000 full renovation with an addition about the size of the house?**

It varies widely by type of project and each builder's square-foot costs. On a whole-home renovation that already touches the entire interior, meeting the HERS score is a small share of the overall budget. On a 1,000 to 1,100 sq ft addition that forces the existing house to comply, the share is larger, because work in the existing home, such as new windows or roof insulation, is added.

In a case where the whole house must come up to compliance, one panelist said it could add about 20% to the job cost. Others stressed it depends on how efficient the home already is. A home with recently replaced mechanical systems and windows and Mass Save weatherization is

a lighter lift than one untouched for 20 years. The panel agreed 20% is not typical of most projects; it is case by case.

### **Catastrophic loss and insurance**

**Q: Is a HERS rating required after a catastrophic loss, such as a fire that forces a 50% rebuild? What if our 1928 house catches fire? Do we need to beef up insurance?**

**A HERS rating is usually not required when a damaged home is repaired.** As inspectors typically enforce it, rebuilding a home to the condition it was in before the damage is treated as a repair. You rebuild it the way it was, not to the new code. If the house must be completely replaced, that is new construction and different rules apply.

**Q: What if smoke damage means it's effectively a gut job, over the 50% line, even though the house didn't burn down?**

In fires, smoke usually causes most of the damage, and adjusters often require removing drywall throughout the house. Electrical and heating systems may need replacing. The building department will not make you rebuild 2x4 walls as 2x6, but you will be asked to fill the wall cavities with insulation. Life safety and electrical systems must come up to current code. Energy code is one piece, and often not the biggest piece.

**Q: Does that mean homeowners should talk to their insurance agent?**

**Yes. It is worth asking your insurance agent.** More homeowners are buying "cost of code compliance" riders. A standard policy covers replacing what was there, but after a loss you must bring systems and life safety devices up to code, and the rider covers that gap. The panel did not know the typical cost of a rider but expected it is not very expensive.

### **Commercial, municipal and nonprofit buildings**

**Q: Are the regulations different for commercial renovations?**

**Yes. The rules are different for commercial renovations.** HERS ratings do not apply to commercial buildings, except multifamily projects such as apartment buildings, which can have individual HERS ratings for each unit. Other commercial buildings follow a different set of criteria, "the other half of the book." The main Stretch Code change for existing commercial buildings is additions over 20,000 sq ft, which limit the compliance paths that can be used.

**Q: What about municipally owned buildings?**

They must comply the same way as anyone else. They do not get a HERS rating; they follow the commercial requirements, and the trigger is still a 20,000 sq ft addition.

**Q: Is it the same process, with a rating first?**

**No. Commercial projects do not start with a HERS rating.** HERS is unique to residential buildings. Commercial projects involve engineers, architects and a full design team. Since over 90% of Massachusetts residents live in a Stretch or Specialized Code community (the Specialized Code is a separate, stricter code that Danvers is not considering), designers and builders working in the state already know these requirements.

**Q: Does the Stretch Code apply to a nonprofit such as a church?**

**Yes. The Stretch Code applies to nonprofits, including churches.** Nonprofit status is not an exemption. The building must meet the applicable codes, for energy as for electrical and structure.

### **Ventilation, health and spray foam**

**Q: Can you discuss the flammability, toxicity, future remodeling and ventilation issues with spray foam insulation? What are the consequences of a highly efficient home? Are there medical issues, and what are the remedies for a tight home?**

A tight home needs mechanical ventilation. Codes have long required bringing fresh air into homes, first with bathroom exhaust fans running continuously or on a cycle. Under the Stretch Code, new construction uses an ERV, which exchanges stale indoor air for fresh outdoor air and tempers it. The panel has seen ERV systems cost from about \$1,200 to \$15,000. They do the same job; larger homes and extra features cost more.

The Stretch Code does not require homes to be any tighter than base code: 3 to 5 ACH depending on the path, as today. The only change is requiring an HRV or ERV in new construction. Ventilation is the other side of building tight, and base code homes are already built tight. With good ventilation, the panel said there should be no added health risk.

Spray foam is not required (see Walls, insulation and trade-offs). The panel did not separately address spray foam flammability, toxicity or future remodeling. For homeowners who choose it, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) guidance says cured spray foam is considered relatively inert, but the chemicals used to make it can cause skin, eye and lung irritation and asthma during installation, and manufacturers recommend how long to stay out of the home afterward. EPA also warns that heat-generating work on foam during later remodeling, such as drilling, sawing or sanding, and fires involving foam can release harmful chemicals, so remodeling contractors should take precautions.

Source: EPA (archived Safer Choice guidance), [Health Concerns about Spray Polyurethane Foam](#) and [Potential Chemical Exposures from Spray Polyurethane Foam](#).

**Q: If homes are already built tight under base code without an ERV, why is this extra equipment required now?**

Homes have been built to 3 to 5 ACH for about a decade, ventilated by bathroom exhaust fans. One problem was that when the fan failed, it often was not replaced with one that had the right controls. An exhaust fan only removes air, so replacement air leaks in from wherever it can. An ERV brings in fresh air on purpose and pre-treats it, so you are not pulling cold air into a warm house.

**Q: Is the \$1,200 system the basic one?**

An ERV is designed mainly to bring in outside air, but it is an exchanger, so it also moves stale air out and keeps the two balanced. Simpler systems bring in tempered fresh air. More elaborate ones add extra features.

**Q: Is the ERV required only for new construction, or also for major renovations?**

It depends on how much work you are doing. As a rule of thumb, if you exceed 50%, you may need one.

### **Town implementation, rebates and Danvers Electric**

**Q: If Danvers adopts the Stretch Code, what do building commissioners and inspectors have to do differently? What staffing is required?**

**Not much changes for building commissioners and inspectors.** Up front, the department checks that there is a HERS rating and reviews the score, and may look over the drawings. In the field, inspectors are already trained to check insulation quality, such as foam behind electrical boxes and batt insulation that fills the cavity properly. That work has little to do with the HERS rating itself; it just fits with good ratings. The building official on the panel does not see it as a significant use of time beyond what inspectors already do.

**Q: What support is available to town staff?**

One panelist manages a [Mass Save energy code technical support hotline](#) that anyone can call; building inspectors are its top users. Mass Save offers regular free training for code officials, open to the public. DOER also runs a stretch code email inbox ([stretchcode@mass.gov](mailto:stretchcode@mass.gov)) for inspectors and builders. Danvers is not a Mass Save community but already uses this training and these guides like every other town.

**Q: Would adopting the Stretch Code change the Light Board or electric rates?**

Clint Allen, Danvers Utilities Director, was not at the session but shared that he does not anticipate any change. Danvers is a summer-peaking community, so switching from traditional air conditioning to more efficient heat pumps would help reduce summer load and benefit the community.

**Q: A handout says Mass Save programs offset implementation costs. Is Danvers eligible?**

That handout is a general DOER flyer. In at least one case, a Danvers resident converting from natural gas to a heat pump received both a Mass Save rebate (as a gas customer) and a Danvers Electric rebate. The panel could not speak to construction incentives. Danvers Electric offers rebates on equipment such as thermostats and heat pumps, plus an energy analysis similar to Mass Save; see [its website](#) for the list. DOER also recently launched the “DOER MLP Z-Loan”, a [0% interest loan for municipal light plant customers](#) to finance home energy upgrades. One attendee reported getting both the Mass Save rebate and a 0% loan when converting to a heat pump.

**Q: Does moving to the Stretch Code increase permit or approval turnaround time?**

**No. In the panel's experience, moving to the Stretch Code does not increase permit turnaround time.** Reviews still run within the usual maximum of about 30 days. There is a learning curve, but it has not been a major issue, and inspectors learn changes through ongoing training.

**Q: What help can a do-it-yourself homeowner expect from the town? Will the building inspector be supportive or a gatekeeper?**

**Building inspectors are supportive.** Some homeowners are lost, and inspectors help case by case. The panel said inspectors spend a lot of time in the field teaching code to people.

### **Green Communities program**

**Q: How many Massachusetts communities have adopted the Stretch Code? Why or why not? What is the incentive to adopt it?**

About 301 of the state's roughly 350 municipalities have adopted the Stretch Code or the higher-tier Specialized Code. About 92% of Massachusetts residents live in one of these communities; 8% live under the base code. The benefits are environmental, lower operating costs for occupants, and, the main draw, access to [Green Communities grants](#) for municipal buildings. Those grants cut operating costs for town buildings and schools and improve indoor environments.

**Q: What does the town government itself get out of being a Green Community? What are the strings attached, now and later?**

Neighboring Salem and Beverly have each received over \$1 million in Green Communities funding. For Danvers:

- **Designation grant:** a one-time, formula-based grant, mostly based on demographics, likely about \$140,000 to \$180,000.
- **Competitive grants:** afterward, Danvers would compete with other Green Communities for a \$7.5 million pool, offered twice a year, with up to \$250,000 per award.
- **Eligible uses:** insulation, LED lighting, heat pumps, tuning mechanical equipment, hybrid and electric vehicles, EV charging, and other efficiency and clean energy upgrades to municipal buildings.
- **Strings attached:** continuing to follow the Stretch Code and the other program criteria (below).

**Q: So the initial grant is \$140,000 to \$180,000, and then you can apply every year?**

**In theory, yes.** There are two rounds a year, spring and fall, but a town applies in only one and must close out its current grant before applying again. Some towns apply every year; most apply every other year, usually because completing projects takes time and staff capacity.

**Q: Is the grant money coming from taxpayers?**

It comes from the [Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative \(RGGI\)](#), a carbon trading compact of about a dozen Northeast and Mid-Atlantic states. Fossil fuel power plants pay into it to emit. Massachusetts has participated since 2008, and state law directs part of the proceeds to Green Communities. It does not appear as a line on a Danvers Electric or National Grid bill; it is built into the wholesale cost of electricity. So everyone pays indirectly, likely more in states with more carbon-intensive grids such as Pennsylvania.

**Q: Is that similar to how the cost of upgrades to power plants in general gets passed on?**

**Yes. It works in a similar way.** It is part of how power plants make investment choices. A plant that upgrades from a single turbine to a combined cycle, for example, pollutes less and has to buy fewer pollution credits.

**Q: So we're already paying for it through electricity costs, and not joining wouldn't lower our rates?**

Since 2008, any utility buying on the wholesale market, including municipal light plants, has paid for it indirectly. The panel was not sure whether Danvers's renewable energy commitments change this, but if Danvers buys on the wholesale market, ratepayers very likely pay indirectly whether or not the town joins.

### **Q: What are the other Green Communities criteria?**

The Stretch Code is one of five criteria:

1. Zoning that allows renewable energy facilities or related research and development. It only has to be hypothetically possible, not built.
2. Expedited permitting for those facilities. Town staff said Danvers's existing bylaws already appear to satisfy criteria 1 and 2, pending official approval.
3. A plan to reduce municipal energy use by 20%. The plan is required, not the result. The Electric Division plans to have a consultant compile it, using projects the town has already identified.
4. A fuel-efficient vehicle policy for administrative vehicles. Police, fire and DPW equipment are exempt. A draft policy is under review.
5. Adoption of the Stretch Code.

### **Other questions**

**Q: Some federal incentives require a large share of materials and equipment to be made in the USA, which is hard for builders. Does that federal requirement apply to the Stretch Code?**

**No. Federal Buy America requirements do not apply to the Stretch Code.** Buy America and federal prevailing wage (Davis-Bacon) requirements apply only to projects receiving federal money. They are not part of the Stretch Code.

**Q: Is Danvers looking to adopt "stretch code plus" or the standard Stretch Code?**

**Danvers is considering the standard Stretch Code only.** Danvers is not considering the higher-tier Specialized Code.

**Q: Four communities adopted the Stretch Code and later pulled out. Why? What happened in Essex?**

Four communities rescinded the Stretch Code, all by town meeting vote: Essex, Rochester, Marion and Clinton. On Essex:

- **Timing:** Essex's May 2023 town meeting came when DOER's regional coordinator position for the area was vacant, so no one at DOER was doing outreach.
- **Stricter rules at the time:** it came a few months after the January 2023 Stretch Code revision first applied HERS requirements to large additions and renovations of existing

homes. The required HERS scores then were 52 to 58, very hard to reach in an older house.

- **Cost concerns:** influential residents believed, fairly, that construction and renovation costs would outweigh the benefits. Some claims about the Green Communities program were untrue, but concerns about Stretch Code cost had validity, and a majority of town meeting agreed.

After that feedback, DOER relaxed the existing-building targets to HERS 65 to 70, which is easier to achieve.

### Questions answered after the workshop

These questions were submitted on cards, or prepared for the panel ahead of the workshop, but were not fully answered in the recorded session. They may have been covered in the one-on-one conversations at the end of the evening. The responses below were prepared after the workshop from Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources (DOER) guidance and other public sources and from what the panel said that evening and on its prep call on September 16th.

**Q: How long does a HERS report take, so it doesn't delay the project? How many HERS raters are in Massachusetts, and how long to get one scheduled?**

It is recommended to plan for the rater from the start. DOER advises that HERS raters work with the builder and design team and should be part of the team from the outset. The builder on the panel brings the rater in as soon as the contract is signed, so the preliminary report is in hand before the permit application, which is when the building department looks for it. Lists of HERS raters working in Massachusetts are available on the [Mass Save website](#) and from the [Northeast HERS Alliance](#).

*Source: DOER, [Stretch Energy and Municipal Opt-In Specialized Building Code FAQ](#) (Q18); workshop transcript.*

**Q: Who pays for the HERS rater, including re-inspections? How much is the preliminary report for the town on its own?**

**The owner or builder who hires the rater pays for the rating, not the Town.** On a typical job the rater produces a preliminary report, inspects at the midpoint and at the end, and issues a final report; the panel put the cost of a rating at about \$1,500 to \$3,000 depending on the size of the work. The workshop slides estimated \$1,325 to \$1,900 for the three Danvers examples that would have needed a HERS rating. Charges for a reinspection vary by rater, so ask about them when you hire one.

*Source: Workshop transcript; workshop slides (examples D, E and F); [DOER FAQ](#) (Q18).*

**Q: When an addition needs a HERS rating, do the old house and the new portion both have to pass the blower door test?**

It depends on how the project is rated. A blower door test is a required part of every HERS rating. A HERS rating can only be done on a dwelling unit, so an addition that is a complete unit, with space for living, sleeping, cooking and a bathroom, can be rated and tested on its own. Any other addition is rated together with the existing home, so the test covers the whole house. Additions too small to need a HERS rating generally do not need a blower door test.

*Source: [DOER FAQ](#) (R5, R6 and R7); DOER, 2025 Residential Stretch Code (additions comply as a combined dwelling unit).*

**Q: For a basement renovation, does the HERS rating cover the whole residence or just the basement?**

It depends on whether the home is gaining square footage. DOER's own example: insulating and fully conditioning an existing 1,200 sq ft unconditioned basement does not trigger a HERS rating, because the basement is not growing. An addition with a full basement that connects to the existing basement, where the new, larger basement is conditioned, does require a HERS rating. When a rating is required, it generally covers the whole home (see the blower door question above).

*Source: DOER, 2025 Stretch Code updates webinar slides (effective February 14th, 2025); [DOER FAQ](#) (R5).*

**Q: We have heard that some builders keep their projects under the thresholds to avoid a HERS rating. Is that common?**

**Owners and builders can size a project to stay under the thresholds.** The thresholds are set in square feet, and a project under them follows the same checklist path it follows under the base code today. Phasing the work does not get around them: under the building code, all permits pulled within 12 months count as one job. The panel did not say how common this is.

*Source: DOER, Base vs. Stretch one-pager (April 2026); workshop transcript; panel prep call, September 16th.*

**Q: Why does the Green Communities program exist? What is the state trying to do through it?**

**The state created the Green Communities program by law to help cities and towns cut the energy their own buildings use.** The Green Communities Act of 2008 directed DOER's Green Communities Division to set up the program. Under state law, it gives technical and financial help, in the form of grants and loans, to cities and towns that qualify as Green Communities. The money can pay for energy efficiency work and for renewable energy projects on town-owned land. To qualify, a town pledges to cut municipal energy use by 20% over five years and meets four other criteria, one of which is adopting the Stretch Code (see What are the other

Green Communities criteria?). The program is funded with RGGI proceeds (see Is the grant money coming from taxpayers?).

Source: [M.G.L. c. 25A, § 10](#); [Mass.gov, Becoming a Designated Green Community](#).

**Q: Is this really necessary, given questions about climate change science?**

**Scientists are not in doubt that human activity is warming the planet.** The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the United Nations body that assesses climate research, concluded in 2023 that “human activities, principally through emissions of greenhouse gases, have unequivocally caused global warming.” NASA reaches the same conclusion.

The panel’s case for the Stretch Code rested largely on practical grounds. More efficient homes cost less to heat and cool over the years people live in them, and adopting the code is the last step for Danvers to qualify for Green Communities grants for municipal buildings, which are funded through RGGI rather than local taxes. The Select Board adopted the Resilient Danvers plan in 2023 and directed staff to carry it out. Adopting the Stretch Code is one of those steps, and it helps address affordability by making buildings cost less to run.

Source: *Workshop transcript*; [IPCC, AR6 Synthesis Report, Summary for Policymakers \(2023\)](#); [NASA, Scientific Consensus](#).