

P. O. Box 512
Montpelier, Vermont 05601
September 9, 2020

Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy
meeting virtually out of the State House
Montpelier (in theory) or wherever they are

Subject: Proposed stretch code amendment to H.926

Dear Committee:

This is testimony on the proposed Stretch code amendment to H.926.

These comments are based on the draft 1.1 of 6/25/20.

That draft would amend the Public Utility statutes by adding a section to the chapter on building energy. The amendment would require use of the energy stretch code in downtown development districts and neighborhood development areas. The requirement will apply to construction of 10 or more units of housing or housing on 10 or more housing units.

This amendment is inadequate for the goals of H.688. Hopefully, housing that is built now will still be in use 100 and more years from now. And H.688 sets a goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 80% of 1990 levels long before then. Because we as a state have failed miserably at our earlier goals, that will require a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions of 82% from 2016, the latest value available.

Stretch codes will be totally inadequate to help us achieve that goal. A house built now to the stretch code will be perceived as a "gas guzzler" in 30 years. People in 2050 likely will wonder "what were they thinking, back then?" with regard to what will then be energy inefficient construction.

This amendment would apply to too little housing. Only housing in downtown development districts and neighborhood development areas. And within those areas only to 10 or more units or on 10 or more acres. I do not see how the goals of H.688 can be met with so much housing being omitted.

Three members of this committee voted in support of H.688. Both sponsors of this amendment voted in support of H.688. If they vote for this amendment I will interpret that as showing that they really do not support the goals of H.688.

Instead of stretch codes, I suggest something that will be effective in meeting that goal. Perhaps net zero construction will be needed. Perhaps net positive will be needed. I am not sure. But I do know that stretch codes will not get us there. Time is too little to evaluate these alternatives now.

And please remember, something built to the stretch code will be the most energy inefficient building it is legally possible to build. If the goals for greenhouse gas reductions in H.688 are to be met, we need to do far better than the stretch codes.

Please reject this amendment.

Thank you for taking the time to read this testimony.

Sincerely,
Thomas Weiss, P. E.