

ACADIA CENTER EXPLAINS

DPU Order 20-80-B

Spring - 2024



WHAT DOES THE DPU DO?

According to the Department of Public Utilities, they are “an adjudicatory agency overseen by a three-member Commission. It is responsible for oversight of investor-owned electric power, natural gas, and water utilities in the Commonwealth. In addition, the DPU is charged with developing alternatives to traditional regulation, monitoring service quality, regulating safety in the transportation and gas pipeline areas, and the siting of energy facilities. The mission of the DPU is to ensure that consumers’ rights are protected, and that utility companies are providing the most reliable service at the lowest possible cost. The DPU oversees the public safety from transportation and gas pipeline-related accidents, and the energy facilities siting process. The DPU seeks to promote safety, security, reliability of service, affordability, equity, and greenhouse gas emission reductions.”¹



WHAT DID THIS ORDER DO?

D.P.U. Order 20-80-B cements direction of the Commonwealth’s building sector decarbonization strategy, initiating a managed transition away from the gas distribution system and endorsing efficient, all-electric heating and cooling solutions for families and businesses. The Order also sets into motion critical follow-on activities to evaluate and reform gas utilities’ policies, practices, and tariffs.



HOW WILL THIS ORDER IMPACT THE TRANSITION AWAY FROM FOSSIL FUELS IN MASSACHUSETTS?

The DPU’s decision represents a pivot point in the Commonwealth’s strategy for decarbonizing the buildings sector and transitioning away from the natural gas distribution system that utilities operate today. Through this Order, as well as recent promising clean heating actions rejecting renewable natural gas (RNG) and hydrogen as viable gas system decarbonization measures, the Healey-Driscoll Administration is signaling a steadfast commitment to the vision of an efficient, electrified building stock enabled by sound, science-backed policy pathways.



HOW DID ACADIA CENTER PLAY A ROLE IN THIS ORDER?

The DPU 20-80 proceeding officially began in 2020, and although the release date of the December 2023 final decision came as a surprise to stakeholders, it reflects the important role that groups like Acadia Center can play when they have the resources to engage in proceedings over the long-term. The unexpected release of the DPU’s landmark 20-80 decision highlights the importance of organizations like Acadia Center staying actively involved in regulatory processes and taking advantage of key venues when they arise. Acadia Center was an active participant from the very beginning and engaged in all aspects of the docket, such as many sets of stakeholder sessions. We submitted 11 sets of comments both individually and as part of the Beyond Gas coalition that we lead. These comments highlighted significant procedural and technical issues. Many of these points were flagged in the eventual DPU order. Acadia Center’s advocacy was crucial in this docket and had tremendous impact.

To read our full press release on the DPU Order, visit: <https://acadiacenter.org/acadia-center-applauds-the-massachusetts-d-p-u-for-a-groundbreaking-science-backed-gas-utility-transition-order/>

¹ <https://www.mass.gov/about-the-dpu>