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July 21, 2020

Patrick J. Ward, Town Clerk  
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Town of Brookline  
333 Washington Street  
Brookline, MA 02445

**Re: Brookline Special Town Meeting of November 19, 2019 -- Case # 9725  
Warrant Article # 21 (General)<sup>1</sup>**

Dear Mr. Ward and Ms. Goldburgh:

In this Case we must determine whether a Brookline by-law prohibiting any permits for construction of certain buildings with fossil fuel infrastructure (Article 21 of the Brookline Special Town Meeting of November 19, 2019) conflicts with the laws or Constitution of the Commonwealth. Because the State Building Code, the Gas Code, and G.L. c. 164 occupy the field of regulation and preempt local by-laws in their respective fields, we must disapprove the by-law.

If we were permitted to base our determination on policy considerations, we would approve the by-law. Much of the work of this Office reflects the Attorney General's commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and other dangerous pollution from fossil fuels, in the Commonwealth and beyond.<sup>2</sup> The Brookline by-law is clearly consistent with this policy goal. During our review of the

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<sup>1</sup> In a decision issued July 17, 2020 we approved the remaining Articles from Case # 9725.

<sup>2</sup> For example, citing the threats of dangerous climate change to the Commonwealth, the Attorney General has filed and joined legal actions seeking to compel the U.S. Environmental Protection Administration to secure greater reductions of greenhouse gas emissions from the electric power, oil and gas, and transportation sectors. As the state's ratepayer advocate, the Attorney General has advanced the transition of the Commonwealth's electricity supply to renewable, non-carbon emitting sources of electric generation and the electrification of the heating sector. In 2016, the Office opposed attempts by the state's electric utilities to contract for gas pipeline capacity to anchor the construction of an unnecessary new interstate gas pipeline. *See NSTAR Electric Company and Western Massachusetts Electric Company d/b/a Eversource Energy*, D.P.U. 15-181; *Massachusetts Electric Company d/b/a National Grid*, D.P.U. 16-05/ 16-07. Most recently, the Attorney General petitioned the Department of Public Utilities to investigate and plan for an energy future that includes an electrified heating sector (*see Petition of Attorney General to Investigate Local Gas Distribution Companies*, D.P.U. 20-80) and executed a settlement agreement that requires Eversource Gas to study and report on the steps necessary for gas distribution companies to comply with the emission

by-law we received numerous letters from interested parties urging our approval of the by-law for both policy and legal reasons. We appreciate this input as it has demonstrated the importance of the environmental policy goal that prompted the Town to adopt the by-law.<sup>3</sup>

However, in carrying out her statutory obligation of by-law review under G.L. c. 40, § 32, the Attorney General is precluded from taking policy issues into account. Amherst v. Attorney General, 398 Mass. 793, 798-99 (1986) (“Neither we nor the Attorney General may comment on the wisdom of the town’s by-law.”). Pursuant to G.L. c. 40, § 32, the Attorney General’s by-law review is limited in scope to determining whether the by-law conflicts with the laws or Constitution of the Commonwealth. If it does conflict, the Attorney General must disapprove the by-law, regardless of the policy views that she may hold on the matter. Id.

Under this standard we must disapprove the by-law adopted under Article 21 because it conflicts with the laws of the Commonwealth in three ways:

1. The by-law is preempted by the State Building Code, which establishes comprehensive statewide standards for building construction and is “intended to occupy the field of building regulation.” St. George Greek Orthodox Cathedral of Western Massachusetts, Inc. v. Fire Dep’t of Springfield, 462 Mass. 120, 130 n. 14 (2012);
2. The by-law is preempted by the Gas Code and G.L. c. 142, §13 in that it creates a new reason to deny a gas permit and would “allow a locality to impose additional requirements and second-guess the determination of the State [Plumbing] board.” St. George, 462 Mass. at 128; and
3. The by-law is preempted by G.L. c. 164 through which the Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities (DPU) comprehensively regulates the sale and distribution of natural gas in the Commonwealth. See Boston Gas Co. v. City of Somerville, 420 Mass. 702, 706 (1995) (“[T]he [city] cannot use its limited authority to enact an ordinance which has the practical effect of frustrating the fundamental State policy of ensuring uniform and efficient utility services to the public.”) (emphasis added).

In this decision we briefly describe the by-law; discuss the Attorney General’s limited standard of review of town by-laws under G.L. c. 40, § 32; and then explain why, governed as we are by that standard, we must disapprove the by-law adopted under Article 21.<sup>4</sup>

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reduction mandates of the Global Warming Solutions Act (*see Joint Petition of Eversource Energy, NiSource Inc., and Bay State Gas Company d/b/a Columbia Gas of Massachusetts*, D.P.U, 20-59).

<sup>3</sup> We appreciate the letters we received from, among others, Town Counsel Joslin Murphy and Jonathan Simpson on behalf of the Town; Attorney Raymond Miyares on behalf of the petitioners; Attorney Sarah Krame on behalf of The Sierra Club; Attorney Aladdine D. Joroff on behalf of Mothers Out Front Massachusetts and others; and Attorney Alyssa Rayman-Read on behalf of the Conservation Law Foundation.

<sup>4</sup> As we have done in the past, our Office conferred with certain petitioners and opponents at their request regarding procedural matters in connection with the by-law. As is our practice, at no time did we offer an opinion as to the viability of the by-law or whether we would approve it.

## **I. Summary of Article 21**

Under Article 21 the Town voted to adopt a new general by-law, 8.39 “Prohibition on New Fossil Fuel Infrastructure in Major Construction.” The by-law establishes that “no permits shall be issued by the Town for the construction of New Buildings or Significant Rehabilitations that include the installation of new On-Site Fossil Fuel Infrastructure” with certain exceptions outlined in the by-law.

The by-law defines “On-Site Fossil Fuel Infrastructure” as:

[F]uel gas or fuel oil piping that is in a building, in connection with a building, or otherwise within the property lines of premises, extending from a supply tank or from the point of delivery behind a gas meter (customer-side of gas meter).

(Section 8.40.2, Definitions). The term “permits” is not defined but the by-law applies broadly to “to all permit applications for New Buildings and Significant Rehabilitations proposed to be located in whole or in part within the Town,” with certain exemptions as listed in the by-law (Section 8.40.3 Applicability).

The by-law includes a process by which applicants may request a waiver on the grounds of “financial infeasibility” or “impracticability of implementation.” (Section 8.40.5, Waivers). The by-law directs the Selectboard to establish a “Sustainability Review Board,” comprised of at least three members representing expertise in affordable housing, commercial development, architecture etc., to review and decide on waiver applications. (Sections 8.40.2, Definitions and 8.40.5, Waivers). The by-law also establishes an appeal process for denial of a building permit: “An appeal may be sought from the SRB following a denial of a building permit.” (Section 8.40.6 Appeals).

## **II. Attorney General’s Standard of Review and Preemption**

Pursuant to G.L. c. 40, § 32, the Attorney General has a “limited power of disapproval,” and “[i]t is fundamental that every presumption is to be made in favor of the validity of municipal by-laws.” Amherst v. Attorney General, 398 Mass. 793, 795-96 (1986). The Attorney General does not review the policy arguments for or against the enactment. Id. at 798-99 (“Neither we nor the Attorney General may comment on the wisdom of the town’s by-law.”) Rather, in order to disapprove a by-law (or any portion thereof), the Attorney General must cite an inconsistency between the by-law and the state Constitution or laws. Id. at 796. Where the Legislature intended to preempt the field on a topic, a municipal by-law on that topic is invalid and must be disapproved. Wendell v. Attorney General, 394 Mass. 518, 524 (1985).

In determining whether a by-law is inconsistent with a state statute, the “question is not whether the Legislature intended to grant authority to municipalities to act...but rather whether the Legislature intended to deny [a municipality] the right to legislate on the subject [in question].” Wendell, 394 Mass. at 524 (1985). “This intent can be either express or inferred.” St. George, 462 Mass. at 125-26. Local action is precluded in three instances, paralleling the three categories of federal preemption: (1) where the “Legislature has made an explicit indication of its intention in this respect”; (2) where “the State legislative purpose can[not] be achieved in the face of a local by-law on the same subject”; and (3) where “legislation on a subject is so comprehensive that an inference would be

justified that the Legislature intended to preempt the field.” Wendell, 394 Mass. at 524. “The existence of legislation on a subject, however, is not necessarily a bar to the enactment of local ordinances and by-laws exercising powers or functions with respect to the same subject[, if] the State legislative purpose can be achieved in the face of a local ordinance or by-law on the same subject[.]” Bloom v. Worcester, 363 Mass. 136, 156 (1973); see Wendell, 394 Mass. at 527-28 (“It is not the comprehensiveness of legislation alone that makes local regulation inconsistent with a statute. . . . The question . . . is whether the local enactment will clearly frustrate a statutory purpose.”).

### **III. The By-law is Preempted Because it Conflicts with Three Uniform Statewide Regulatory Schemes**

The Supreme Judicial Court has frequently held that in determining whether a statute “impliedly preclude[s] regulation by municipalities,” a court must examine “whether there is a need for uniformity in the subject of the legislation.” Golden v. Selectmen of Falmouth, 358 Mass. 519, 524 (1970). Where there is “importance in uniformity in the law to govern the administration of the subject[, a] statute of that nature displays on its face an intent to supersede local and special laws and to repeal inconsistent special statutes.” McDonald v. Justices of the Superior Court, 299 Mass. 321 (1938) (discussing statute imposing uniform statewide regulation of alcoholic beverage sales). Where a state statutory scheme demonstrates an intention to create a uniform statewide regulatory system, municipal enactments in the area are invalid.

Brookline’s by-law implicates three statutory schemes that preempt local regulation: G.L. c. 143, § 95(c) (creating the State Building Code); G.L. c. 142, §13 (charging the Plumbing Board with administration of the Gas Code regulating “gas fitting in buildings throughout the commonwealth”); and G.L. c. 164 (through which the DPU comprehensively regulates the sale and distribution of natural gas in the Commonwealth).

#### **A. The By-law is Preempted Because it Interferes with the Express Statutory Goal of Uniformity in the State Building Code.**

General Laws G.L. c. 143, § 95(c) expressly states a goal of uniformity with which the by-law interferes. In addition, the state Board of Building Regulations and Standards (“BBRS”) has exercised its statutory authority to prescribe the process for issuance and denial of permits, and the process for waivers and appeals from building officials’ decisions. The by-law here purports to create a new basis for denial of permits, and a new waiver and appeal process, all of which conflict with the Building Code and state law.

##### *1. State Building Code and Board of Building Regulations and Standards.*

The BBRS is established by G.L. c. 143, § 93, and charged with adopting and regularly updating the Building Code. Id. § 94(a), (c), (h). The BBRS must administer the Building Code so as to further three “general objectives,” the first of which is: “Uniform standards and requirements for construction and construction materials, compatible with accepted standards of engineering and fire prevention practices, energy conservation and public safety.” Id. § 95(a) (emphasis added). “In authorizing the development of the [C]ode, the Legislature has expressly stated its intention: to ensure ‘[u]niform standards and requirements for construction and construction materials.’” St. George, 462 Mass. at 126 (citing G.L. c. 143, § 95(c)). As such, the Legislature established the Building Code as the one state-wide building code and rejected the premise of each municipality having its own

requirements. “All by-laws and ordinances of cities and towns...in conflict with the state building code shall cease to be effective on January [1, 1975].” St. 1972, c. 802, § 75 as appearing in St. 1975, c. 144, § 1. Based on this express legislative goal of uniformity, and the abolition of local by-law requirements, the St. George court found “the Legislature [had] demonstrate[d] its express intention to preempt local action.” Id. at 129.

The Building Code has broad application regarding building construction, including (most relevant here) the issuance of building and occupancy permits:

780 CMR, and other referenced specialized codes as applicable, shall apply to:

1. the construction, reconstruction, alteration, repair, demolition, removal, inspection, issuance and revocation of permits or licenses, installation of equipment, classification and definition of any building or structure and use or occupancy of all buildings and structures or parts thereof...;

101.2 Scope (emphasis supplied).

It is the local building official who makes the determination whether a building or occupancy permit application complies with the Building Code requirements and thus whether a permit should issue:

**104.2 Applications and Permits.** The building official shall receive applications, review construction documents and issue permits for the erection, and alteration, demolition and moving of buildings and structures, inspect the premises for which such permits have been issued and enforce compliance with the provisions of 780 CMR.

**105.1 Required.** It shall be unlawful to construct, reconstruct, alter, repair, remove or demolish a building or structure; or to change the use or occupancy of a building or structure; or to install or alter any equipment for which provision is made or the installation of which is regulated by 780 CMR without first filing an application with the building official and obtaining the required permit.

Further, the Building Code establishes the local building official as the decision-maker regarding any requested waivers:

**104.10 Modifications.** Wherever there are practical difficulties involved in carrying out the provisions of 780 CMR, the building official shall have the authority to grant modifications for individual cases, upon application of the owner or owner's representative, provided the building official shall first find that special individual reason makes the strict letter of 780 CMR impractical and the modification is in compliance with the intent and purpose of 780 CMR and that such modification does not lessen health, accessibility, life and fire safety, or structural requirements.

Finally, the Legislature has designated the BBRS, sitting as the State Building Code Appeals Board, as the entity to hear appeals from local and state enforcement officials' orders under and interpretations of the Building Code. G.L. c. 143, § 100:

There shall be in the division of professional licensure a building code appeals board, hereinafter called the appeals board, to consist of the board established under the provisions of section ninety-three.

Whoever is aggrieved by an interpretation, order, requirement, direction or failure to act by any state or local agency or any person or state or local agency charged with the administration or enforcement of the state building code or any of its rules and regulations, except any specialized codes as described in section ninety-six, may within forty-five days after the service of notice thereof appeal from such interpretation, order, requirement, direction, or failure to act to the appeals board.

*2. G.L. c. 143, § 95(c)'s Stated Intention of Uniform Standards Preempts Additional Local Requirements.*

Where (as here) a statute authorizes a state agency to make a uniform statewide determination of what products and practices should (as well as should not) be allowed, a local by-law imposing an additional layer of regulation of the same subject is invalid. Wendell v. Attorney General, 394 Mass. 518 (1985). In Wendell, the statute established a “pesticide board” within the state Department of Food and Agriculture and empowered a subcommittee of the board to “register” a pesticide for general or restricted use if the subcommittee found that the pesticide met specific statutory criteria. Id. at 526, 528-29. In the face of this scheme, “[t]he Wendell by-law contemplate[d] the possibility of local imposition of conditions on the use of a pesticide beyond those established on a Statewide basis under the act.” Id. at 528. The court held that “[a]n additional layer of regulation at the local level, in effect second-guessing the subcommittee, would prevent the achievement of the identifiable statutory purpose of having a centralized, Statewide determination [and] ...frustrate the purpose of the act.” Wendell, 394 Mass. at 529.

In determining that Springfield’s ordinance was preempted by the Building Code, the St. George court relied on the reasoning of the Wendell decision:

The same reasoning applies here. The Legislature intended to occupy the field by promulgating comprehensive legislation and delegating further regulation to a State board. The board’s regulations, in turn, set a Statewide standard as to what products and practices were permissible in a particular field, a process involving a discretionary weighing of relevant factors, such as cost and safety. In response the local government created an additional layer of regulation imposing requirements beyond those contemplated by the board. There is no meaningful distinction between these cases, and we reach the same conclusion here: the code preempts inconsistent local regulations.

St. George, 462 Mass. at 133-134.

Just as in St. George and Wendell, it is ultimately the BBBRS -- not any city or town -- that is charged with determining the process by which a building or occupancy permit is granted or withheld.<sup>5</sup> Local ordinances and by-laws that second-guess the BBBRS’ determination of when a

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<sup>5</sup> As explained above, the initial determination is made by the local building official but any appeal from that decision goes to the Board sitting as the State Building Code Appeals Board. G.L. c. 143,

permit should (or should not) be allowed would frustrate the statutory purpose of having a centralized, statewide process for such matters. See Wendell, 394 Mass. at 529. The Town’s attempt to second-guess the BBRS, by prohibiting the issuance of a permit in a circumstance where the Building Code does not prohibit a permit, and assigning the waiver and appeal decision to a town board instead of the local building official and State Building Code Appeals Board, frustrates the purposes of § 95 -- including the purpose of uniformity -- and is therefore invalid.<sup>6</sup> As the St. George court stated in rejecting Springfield’s ordinance:

If all municipalities in the Commonwealth were allowed to enact similarly restrictive ordinances and bylaws, a patchwork of building regulations would ensue...Allowing the city’s ordinance to stand would...sanction[ ] the development of different applicable building codes in each of the Commonwealth’s 351 cities and towns, precisely the result that promulgation of the code was meant to foreclose.

St. George, 462 Mass. at 135.<sup>7</sup>

The proponents and the Town err in arguing that the Town’s additional layer of regulation is authorized by cases like Lovequist v. Conservation Commission of Town of Dennis, 379 Mass. 7 (1979), which held that “[s]ince the language of the [challenged] by-law parallels that of the statute, it appears plain that [the by-law] furthers rather than derogates from the legislative purpose embodied in the Wetlands Protection Act.” Id. at 15. That principle is inapposite here, because, as the Lovequist court emphasized, “we have specifically held that [the Wetlands Protection Act] sets forth minimum standards only, ‘leaving local communities free to adopt more stringent controls.’” Id. (quoting Golden v. Selectmen of Falmouth, 358 Mass. 519, 526 (1970)).

Essential to the Golden court’s holding was its recognition that whether a statute preempted local regulation depended in part on whether the statute demonstrated “a need for uniformity in the subject,” id. at 524; and its conclusion that the Wetlands Protection “Act does not attempt to create a uniform statutory scheme.” Golden, 358 Mass. at 526 (emphasis added). Thus Golden and Lovequist cannot be applied here, where the statute authorizing the State Building Code expressly makes “[u]niform standards and requirements” a principal objective. G.L. c. 143, § 95(a).

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§ 100.

<sup>6</sup> Although G.L. c. 40A, § 7 and the Code (at Section 105.3.1) authorize the local building inspector to withhold a building permit for non-compliance with local *zoning* by-laws or ordinances, they do not authorize the withholding of a permit for non-compliance with a general (non-zoning) by-law such as Brookline’s.

<sup>7</sup> To illustrate how the by-law undermines the Code’s uniformity requirements: imagine one building project in Newton and one building project in Brookline, each with the same proposed architectural plans, construction and construction materials, and both proposing on-site fossil fuel infrastructure. Assuming the projects complied with the Building Code (and local zoning requirements) in all other respects, the Newton project would be entitled to a building permit, but the Brookline project would not.

The proponents and the Town are correct that the Building Code does not directly regulate fossil fuel infrastructure as defined in the by-law. However, the by-law's enforcement and waiver/appeal mechanism -- withholding of a permit and waivers/appeals therefrom -- is directly and comprehensively regulated by the Code. The BBRs asserts that "the Legislature has intended, by M.G.L. c. 143, § 94, for the Building Code to govern the issuance of permits" [and] "a local ordinance creating a new basis for denial of permits would conflict with the Building Code." (Letter from DPL Office of Legal Counsel to Hurley, p. 4).<sup>8</sup> As such, the by-law cannot stand.

It is true that, with the 2008 passage of the Global Warming Solutions Act ("GWSA") the Legislature has also mandated economy-wide greenhouse gas emissions reductions, and the Supreme Judicial Court has twice affirmed that the emission reduction limits of the GWSA are mandatory and enforceable, Kain et al. v. Department of Environmental Protection, 474 Mass. 278 (2016); NEPGA v. Department of Environmental Protection, 480 Mass. 398 (2018) (upholding power sector emission limits). Indeed, in NEPGA, the court observed:

Its name bespeaks its ambitions. The Global Warming Solutions Act, St.2008, c.298 (act), was passed to address the grave threats that climate change poses to the health, economy, and natural resources of the Commonwealth. The act is designed to make Massachusetts a national, and even international, leader in the efforts to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change.

Id. at 399 (internal citations omitted). While the by-law would further the purpose of the GWSA, it would, nevertheless, frustrate other express statutory purposes, uniformity in the Building Code, Gas Code and Chapter 164, and the by-law is thus invalid. See Take Five Vending, Ltd. v. Town of Provincetown, 415 Mass. 741, 744 (1993) (stating general standards for determining whether statute preempts local ordinance or by-law); see also Boston Gas Company v. City of Somerville, 420 Mass. 702, 705-06 (1995) (local ordinance in furtherance of a valid legislative delegation must nonetheless yield to state superintendence if the ordinance has the practical effect of frustrating fundamental State policy). During the unprecedented reality of climate disruption, the Town has acted in an exemplary manner to attempt a bold step to tackle the problem locally. Yet, to the extent the Commonwealth has not yet taken the necessary steps to ensure the state will achieve the 2050 net zero emissions limit, the by-law proponents' remedy lies with the Legislature and the courts.

**B. The By-law is Preempted Because it Interferes with the Express Statutory Goal of Uniformity in the State Gas Code.**

Just as with the State Building Code, the by-law is also preempted by the State Gas Code. The Gas Code is comprehensive, uniform, and directly regulates the gas piping targeted by the Brookline

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<sup>8</sup> As does the court, "[w]e afford substantial deference to an agency's interpretation of a statute that it is charged with administering." Boston Edison Co. v. Town of Bedford, 444 Mass. 775, 783 (2005) (internal citations and quotations omitted). Thus, where the BBRs, Plumbing Board (see pp. 16-19 below), and DPU all concur that the by-law is preempted by the statutes and regulations each Board administers, those interpretations are entitled to great deference, particularly "[w]here, as here, the case involves interpretation of a complex statutory and regulatory framework." MCI Telecomm. Corp. v. Dep't of Telecomm. & Energy, 435 Mass. 144, 150-151 (2001) (internal quotations and citations omitted).

by-law. The Gas Code regulates when a permit may be issued and the waiver/appeal process for denial of a permit. Because the by-law creates an additional layer of regulation, a new ground for denial of a permit, and a new waiver/appeal procedure, all not found in the Gas Code, the by-law interferes with the express legislative goal of uniformity in the Gas Code.

*1. The Fuel Gas Code and the Plumbing Board.*

The Massachusetts Fuel Gas Code (Gas Code) is comprised of a series of regulations adopted by the Board of State Examiners of Plumbers and Gas Fitters (Plumbing Board), specifically 248 CMR 4.00 through 8.00. The Gas Code’s authorizing legislation is G.L. c. 142, §13 which charges the Board with the duty to “alter, amend, and repeal rules and regulations relative to gas fitting in buildings throughout the commonwealth.” *Id.* Further said regulations “shall be reasonable, uniform, based on generally accepted standards of engineering practice, and designed to prevent fire, explosion, injury and death.” *Id.* (emphasis added).

Chapter 142, Section 1 defines “gas fitting” as:

[A]ny work which includes the installation, alteration, and replacement of a piping system beyond the gas meter outlet or regulator through which is conveyed or intended to be conveyed fuel gas of any kind for power, refrigeration, heating or illuminating purposes including the connection therewith and testing of gas fixtures, ranges, refrigerators, stoves, water heaters, house heating boilers, and any other gas using appliances, and the maintenance in good and safe condition of said systems, and the making of necessary repairs and changes.

Thus, in regulating “fossil fuel infrastructure” (as defined in the by-law), the Brookline by-law directly regulates the same gas piping regulated by Chapter 142 and the Gas Code.

The Gas Code is enforced by Inspectors of Plumbing and/or Inspectors of Gas Fitting, individuals who personally hold licenses issued by the Plumbing Board. G.L. c. 142, §11. Prior to commencing most work governed by the Gas Code, a permit must be issued by the plumbing and/or gas inspector. *See* 248 CMR 3.05. The Gas Code designates who may obtain a gas permit (a licensed plumber or gas fitter) as well as describes how permits are issued and, if necessary, terminated. *Id.* Finally, a plumbing inspector’s determination that a permit should be denied is appealed to the Plumbing Board per G.L. c. 142, §13 and 248 CMR 3.05, not a locally created entity as contemplated by the Brookline by-law.

*2. G.L. c. 142, § 13’s Stated Intention of Uniform Standards Preempts Additional Local Requirements.*

As an initial matter, pursuant to G.L. c. 143, §96, the State Gas Code is incorporated into the State Building Code. *Id.* (“The state building code shall incorporate any specialized construction codes...”) Thus, the Building Code field preemption found by the St. George court applies with equal measure to the State Gas Code. *See St. George*, 462 Mass. at 133-134 (“[T]he Legislature intended to occupy the field by passing comprehensive legislation and delegating further regulation to a State board.”).

In addition, G.L. c. 142, §13 mandates creation of uniform, statewide standards for gas fittings with which the Brookline by-law interferes. By restricting the installation of “On-Site Fossil Fuel Infrastructure” (By-law, Section 8.40.2), the Brookline by-law is in reality restricting the installation of “gas fitting” -- work governed by the Gas Code. By way of example, if a consumer in Brookline decided to replace an aging oil heater with a new gas furnace, the consumer could have the gas furnace installed and have a local gas utility bring a new gas line into the property to a gas meter, all without interference by the by-law. Where the Brookline by-law directly applies is when the consumer then hires a licensed plumber or gas fitter to install gas piping connecting the new gas furnace to the meter installed by the utility company. For that step, the consumer needs a licensed plumber or gas fitter to apply for a locally issued -- but state regulated -- gas permit and perform work exclusively governed by the Gas Code. The Brookline by-law would prohibit the state regulated gas permit and bar the state regulated plumbing work.

The St. George court’s reasoning applies here and dictates the conclusion that the Brookline by-law is preempted by the Gas Code. The by-law and the Gas Code have different requirements for when gas fitting work can occur and have different appellate/waiver procedures governing relief from denial of a permit. As a result, “the [by-law] would frustrate the achievement of the stated statutory purpose of having centralized, Statewide standards in this area.” Id. at 129-130. The Gas Board asserts that the by-law is preempted by the Gas Code and G.L. c. 142, §13 because the by-law “attempt[s] to supplement the rules for permits governed by the Gas Code” and “attempts to regulate the performance of work that the legislature has deemed exclusively governed by the Gas Code.” (Letter from Plumbing Board Executive Director to Hurley, p. 6). As such the by-law is preempted by the Gas Code.

C. The By-law is Preempted by Chapter 164, Which Reflects the Fundamental State Policy of Ensuring Uniform Utility Services to the Public.

The by-law is also preempted by G.L. c. 164, through which the DPU comprehensively regulates the sale and distribution of natural gas in the Commonwealth. The Supreme Judicial Court has repeatedly recognized “the desirability of uniformity of standards applicable to utilities regulated by the Department of Public Utilities.” New England Tel. & Tel. Co. v. City of Lowell, 369 Mass. 831, 834 (1976) (citing cases). In that case, a city ordinance created “a burden for the [utility] company additional to those which it carries elsewhere. To the extent that this is so, there is a variation from the uniformity desirable in the regulation of utilities throughout the Commonwealth,” and accordingly the ordinance was invalid. Id. (invalidating ordinance requiring registered engineer to stamp utility’s street-opening plans, where state statute exempted companies under DPU jurisdiction from requirement that company’s engineers be registered).

Similarly, in Boston Gas Co. v. City of Somerville, 420 Mass. 702 (1995), the court invalidated a city ordinance regulating repair of street openings by utilities because “the [city] cannot use its limited authority to enact an ordinance which has the practical effect of frustrating the fundamental State policy of ensuring uniform and efficient utility services to the public.” Id. at 706 (emphasis added). In Boston Gas Co. v. City of Newton, 425 Mass. 697 (1997), the court invalidated a city ordinance imposing street-opening fees on utilities, where it “would impose an additional burden on the plaintiff, a burden which undermines the ‘fundamental State policy of ensuring uniform and efficient utility services to the public.’” Id. at 703 (quoting Boston Gas Co. v. Somerville). And in Boston Edison Co. v. Town of Bedford, 444 Mass. 775 (2005) the court invalidated a town by-law that would have imposed a penalty on pole owners for having double poles in the town, concluding

that, “[a]lthough there is no express legislative intent to forbid local activity regarding double pole removal, the ‘comprehensive nature’ of G.L. c. 164 implies that the Legislature intended to preempt municipalities from enacting legislation on the subject.” Id. at 781.

The Superior Court recently applied the Boston Gas line of cases in overturning a Boston ordinance regulating the inspection, maintenance, and repair of natural gas leaks within the city. Boston Gas Company v. City of Boston, 35 Mass.L. Rptr.141, 2018 WL 4198962. The court ruled that “the [Supreme Judicial Court]’s decisions in City of Somerville and City of Newton make it plain that, with limited exceptions, non-incidental local rules and ordinances affecting the manufacture and sale of gas and electricity are preempted by Chapter 164.” Id. The court rejected the City’s argument that because the City ordinance was a “permitting” requirement (like the Brookline by-law here) the ordinance was not preempted:

The fact that the City couches its inconsistent obligations as “permitting” requirements does not make them any less objectionable, or any less subject to preemption, because the net effect on Boston Gas is the same as if the obligations had been imposed directly. *Cf. City of Newton*, 425 Mass. at 699-706 (portion of ordinance charging inspection and maintenance fees as a prerequisite to acquiring a permit to excavate public ways and sidewalk was invalid).

Id.

Just as in Wendell and St. George, the Legislature here has granted to the DPU, not to individual cities and towns, the authority to regulate the sale and distribution of natural gas throughout the Commonwealth. The DPU views the by-law as conflicting with this legislative grant of authority because, “[i]n effect, the [by-law] restricts National Grid’s ability to add new customers in Brookline (particularly heating customers) and restricts National Grid’s ability to serve existing customers who perform significant renovations on their buildings.” (Letter from DPU General Counsel to Hurley, p. 2). Clearly the Town could not directly prohibit National Grid from adding new customers in Brookline because such a move would directly interfere with the DPU’s authority. As in the City of Boston, the Town cannot do indirectly (through a permitting requirement) what it is prohibited from doing directly. *See Boston Gas Company v. City of Boston*, 35 Mass.L.Rptr.141, 2018 WL 4198962 (“The fact that the City couches its inconsistent obligations as ‘permitting’ requirements does not make them any less objectionable, or any less subject to preemption, because the net effect on Boston Gas is the same as if the obligations had been imposed directly.”)

The by-law also interferes with the express legislative objective in Chapter 164 for uniform service throughout the Commonwealth. As the DPU explains:

[The by-law] would impose non-uniform service among its residents with new customers forced to become residential non-heating customers (Rate Class R-1), rather than having the option to become residential heating customers (Rate Class R-3). Article 21 prevents the uniform service that G.L. c. requires and, therefore, Article 21 is preempted by the well-established, comprehensive scope of G.L. c. 164.

Letter from DPU General Counsel to Hurley, p. 3. By prohibiting gas and oil service to the Town’s residents, the by-law interferes with the legislative intent in G.L. c. 164, § 105A that there be “absolute interdependence of all parts of the Commonwealth and all of its inhabitants in the matter of availability of public utility services, [so that] all may obtain a reasonable measure of such services.” Pereira v. New England LNG Co., Inc., 364 Mass. 109, 120-121 (1973). To be sure, even without the

by-law, residential and commercial property owners may choose energy systems that do not rely on fossil fuels. And the Town may consider adopting incentive programs to nudge property owners in that direction. However, the by-law here forces a decision on property owners and thereby interferes with the legislative goal in Chapter 164 of uniform utility options statewide. The Town is thus preempted from utilizing this method to achieve its stated goals.<sup>9</sup>

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The Attorney General agrees with the policy goals behind the Town's attempt to reduce the use of fossil fuels within the Town. However, the Legislature (and the courts) have made plain that the Town cannot utilize the method it selected to achieve those goals. The Town cannot add an additional layer of regulation to the comprehensive scope of regulation in the State Building Code, State Gas Code, and Chapter 164. This is true no matter how well-intentioned the Town's action, and no matter how strong the Town's belief that its favored option best serves the public health of its residents. Because the by-law adopted under Article 21 is preempted, we must disapprove it.

**Note: Pursuant to G.L. c. 40, § 32, neither general nor zoning by-laws take effect unless the Town has first satisfied the posting/publishing requirements of that statute. Once this statutory duty is fulfilled, (1) general by-laws and amendments take effect on the date these posting and publishing requirements are satisfied unless a later effective date is prescribed in the by-law, and (2) zoning by-laws and amendments are deemed to have taken effect from the date they were approved by the Town Meeting, unless a later effective date is prescribed in the by-law.**

Very truly yours,  
MAURA HEALEY  
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<sup>9</sup> We considered whether we could disapprove only the offending text (the withholding of a building permit and appeal/waiver scheme) and approve the remaining text. When a portion of a law or regulation is found to be invalid, “[u]nless it is evident that the Legislature would not have enacted those provisions which are within its power, independently of that which is not, the invalid part may be dropped if what is left is fully operative as a law.” *Alaska Airlines, Inc. v. Brock*, 480 U.S. 678, 684 (1987). Here no fully operable by-law would remain if we excised only the offending text. Therefore, we determine that the offending text is non-severable, and we must disapprove the entire by-law.