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New laws promote development in Mass.

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The Massachusetts Legislature completed its work for the legislative session on July 31 and sent bills passed by both houses to the governor for signature. Among the bills signed into law of interest to the real estate community were: the Energy and Environmental Bond Bill, the Economic Development Bill, the Water Infrastructure Bill, and the Solar Net Metering Bill.

The Energy and Environmental Bond Bill includes funding spread out over four years for land protection, conservation, coastal infrastructure and waterways, waste management, cleanup of the Connecticut River in Western Massachusetts and prevention of sewage overflow.

The Water Infrastructure Bill will assist municipalities with financing options for water, waste water, sewer pipes, stormwater infrastructure, pumping stations and wastewater treatment stations; and increases the funds available in the Massachusetts Clean Water Trust.

The Solar Net Metering Bill, which was combined with the Renewable Thermal Bill, will provide a modest increase in the cap that allows power to be sold back to the grid, including: homeowners when they install solar panels; municipal and privately funded projects; and large scale projects.

The Economic Development Bill expands a variety of tax-related initiatives to promote redevelopment in so-called "Gateway Cities." Additionally, monies were added to the Brownfields Redevelopment Fund and Access to Capital for remediation and redevelopment of contaminated properties, above appropriations in the FY '15 Budget.

However, the Legislature failed to pass the Clean Energy Bill, which was described by the Boston Globe, as dealing a "setback to the Commonwealth's climate agenda." It stated that "lawmakers lost sight of the overriding goal of cutting carbon emissions amid important, but ultimately secondary drawbacks." The "drawbacks" related to the various options for reducing and moving towards eliminating carbon emissions that involved a variety of less polluting energy sources including: natural gas, hydropower, solar, wind, and others. The complications of arranging and incentivizing these energy sources seemed to contribute to the Legislature's failure to support the bill. However, the Legislature did approve an increase in the number of large scale solar projects that will qualify for financial incentives, which will move the Commonwealth closer to meeting its goal of 1,600 MW of solar power.

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