



AIA Austin

January 18, 2021

The Honorable Steve Adler, Mayor

Re: Stay Home, Mask, and Otherwise Be Safe Order, Section 7: City Deadlines

Dear Mayor Adler,

AIA Austin appreciates your inclusion of development application and permit extensions within the “Stay Home, Mask, and Otherwise Be Safe” Orders. As primary users of the city’s Development Services Department (DSD) for obtaining building and construction permits, AIA Austin’s members fully support these extensions while our city continues to grapple with the current, and likely long term, effects of the pandemic.

Obtaining a building permit within the City of Austin is a time consuming and expensive process. Those who invest their time and money in developing a project within our city do so with a certain amount of risk. However, with the current economic environment many planned projects do not know when they will be able to begin construction. Assuming a building permit has been approved, obtaining funding to proceed with projects at this time is more difficult as many lenders are cautious to move forward. There are a multitude of issues with securing funding and being able to move forward with construction during a pandemic. Having a permit expire will only serve to create more barriers to this process. Requiring those who want to build a project to permit it twice would, at best, force developments to pass these costs on to the tenants, resulting in more expensive lease rates, higher rent, more expensive hotel rooms, etc. and, at worst, create a burden that could halt desperately needed developments with small profit margins, like affordable housing.

Applications have become an important part of this discussion as well. DSD’s plan review staff have continued to be shorthanded and as the pandemic has progressed, they have fallen further and further behind in reviewing projects in a timely manner. These delays in the review process are increasingly pushing applications to their expiration limits, thereby creating the need for plan review application extensions to continue to be included in this Order.

Many industry experts are predicting that the current economic climate could last deep into 2021 and beyond before activity begins to pick up in certain market sectors. Permits are a key component to our economic recovery as expired permits create a barrier that restricts and delays job growth. It is with this in mind that we respectfully request that the current permit expiration order that is set to expire on March 15, 2021 be extended. Further, rather than extending this in small increments of time that could create more uncertainty and instability in the industry, we would recommend extending it to December 31, 2021. This longer the extension will help to create predictability in these uncertain times.

Sincerely,

Stephi Motal, AIA
AIA Austin President