



**AIA**  
Austin

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Michael Hsu, AIA  
President, AIA Austin  
801 W 12<sup>th</sup> St.  
Austin, TX 78701

Andrew Linseisen, P.E., CNU-A  
Assistant Director  
City of Austin Development Services Department

Beth Culver  
Acting Assistant Director  
Building Plan Review

Dear Andrew and Beth,

I am writing with regard to the City of Austin's practice of providing indefinite public access to all residential permit related documents and drawings. Currently when a residential permit application is submitted to the City, all of the required drawings and documents are posted to a publicly searchable platform. These drawings include detailed and dimensioned plans, elevations, and schedules for the home. The submitted documents include personal homeowner information and signatures.

After speaking with representatives at the permitting departments in Houston, San Antonio, and Dallas, AIA Austin has learned that this practice is not common in other major Texas cities. In Houston, architects and engineers campaigned to restrict access to permit materials so that their intellectual property is not readily available to the public. As they have no online access to permit materials, Houstonians may instead schedule one-hour appointments to view permit materials on a computer at a City office, but they are not allowed to take any hard copies or digital copies of the plans. In San Antonio, there are also no permit drawings or documents available online. Citizens in San Antonio may submit an open records request and then pay to receive hard copies of permit drawings and documents. However, the city of San Antonio only keeps records of permitted plans for three-to-five months and then they are destroyed, so there is a very small window in which copies of permit materials may be obtained. Dallas has a similar system in which interested parties must go the Library of Records, sign in and then present an ID in order to obtain copies of permit materials.

Thank you for meeting with AIA Austin Residential Advocacy Chairs Carina Coel, AIA; and Travis Young, AIA; on October 18, 2019. Based on your discussions with them, we have prepared the following list of our concerns and our recommendations.

Our members have identified two primary concerns:

1. **Safety of the homeowner.** The full plan sets submitted for permitting provide the public with access to critical personal information of the homeowner. Access points into the house and the location of private spaces within the home are easily discernable from these drawings.

The American Institute of Architects  
AIA Austin  
801 W. 12<sup>th</sup> Street  
Austin, TX 78701-1709  
512-452-4332  
[www.aiaaustin.org](http://www.aiaaustin.org)



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2. **Intellectual property of the architect.** Drawing sets submitted for permitting could easily be downloaded and re-used to build projects without the architect's knowledge or consent.

AIA Austin recommends the following:

1. Limit the residential permit information that is made available to the public to the information that is logged and stored in the AMANDA system.
2. Provide a means for verified property owners or their designated agents to be able to request the full set of permit materials for their property.
3. Provide a means for interested parties to register to obtain access to a limited set of the permit drawings and documents, including the plot plan, exterior elevations, and calculation tables. A neighborhood association and neighbors within a certain radius of the property could register as an interested party.
4. Discuss options for limiting public access to information on projects that have already been permitted. Example: For permits two years or older, remove all access to permit drawings and documents. Interested parties may file a request to access a limited set of information as outlined in #3 above.

I appreciate your willingness to discuss these concerns, and I look forward to working together to find the best possible resolution.

Sincerely,

Michael Hsu, AIA  
President, AIA Austin