The Leading Voice in the Construction Industry

The Architect’s Blueprint

Construction Starts with Architects

Founded in 1909, AIA Pennsylvania is the state-wide component of the American Institute of Architects. AIA Pennsylvania, headquartered in Harrisburg, is governed by a board of directors representing eight local AIA chapters across the Commonwealth. Our Association serves over 2,800 members.

Architecture is the leading edge of a design and construction industry that accounts for one in nine dollars of GDP. Every $1 million invested in building design and construction yields 28.5 full-time jobs. When an architect is hired, 30 additional jobs are created. Architects are in the business of problem-solving.

Building codes define the minimum standard of building performance and are a vital tool to assure the health, safety, and welfare of every citizen in the Commonwealth. Pennsylvania is operating under the 2009 building codes. The current review process is broken. We believe building codes must be adopted after a full review every three years and Pennsylvania should be a leader in adopting up-to-date codes.

Continuing education in architecture is crucial to advancing and improving the profession. Currently, there are no mandatory continuing education requirements for architects in the Commonwealth. Senate Bill 642 amends the Architects’ Licensure Law by adding language requiring each licensee to provide certification of successful completion of a minimum of 24 hours of continuing education as a condition for renewal of the biennial license.

To become a licensed architect, an individual must complete a minimum of five years of education from an accredited architecture school, six registration exams and nearly 4,000 hours of on-the-job training with a practicing registered architect. Individuals with less training and experience are not qualified to practice architecture; therefore we oppose any type of encroachment on the profession.

Student debt is one of the most critical issues facing the next generation of design professionals. We support legislation that provides loan assistance to architecture students and recent graduates who contribute their design services to underserved areas. As a result, communities will receive a broad range of architecture services that may not have otherwise been available, and architecture graduates will be able to gain valuable experience while lessening their debt.

Updated Building Codes

Mandatory Continuing Education

Architecture Practice Encroachment

Student Loan Forgiveness

ARCHITECTS ACTION DAY
Pennsylvania State Capitol
HARRISBURG, PA
AIAAPA.ORG

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PHOTO CREDIT: DANI FRESH
Updated Building Codes

Building codes define the minimum standard of building performance and are an important tool to assure the health, safety and welfare (HSW) of building occupants. Architects are professionally tested and licensed by the Commonwealth to interpret the building codes during the design process for application in many varieties of construction projects. Architects shoulder a long-term liability for each design realized.

Architects are intimately involved in the use and interpretation of the Uniform Construction Code (UCC) during the design and development process of the built environment, and in most cases, prior to the involvement of other licensed professionals, code officials, and contractors. Because the Commonwealth already entrusts architects with the primary role of interpreting and applying the building codes, architects should be at the forefront of this discussion.

The Commonwealth has not adopted the 2012 International Code Council (ICC) codes, which include the International Building Codes (IBC) through the UCC review and advisory council (RAC) review process. Therefore, we are currently operating under the 2009 building codes. This is unacceptable because code updates impact the HSW of all Pennsylvanians. In 2015, the RAC only adopted 16 codes out of over 1,900, making it evident the process is broken.

New building codes are published every three years. These updated codes also reference and incorporate updates from other trade organizations and government agencies. To promote public HSW, we believe that the building codes must be adopted after a full review every three years. We believe Pennsylvania should be a leader in adopting up-to-date codes. We support a 3-year review cycle with a review of the 2015 codes and adoption in 2018.

The RAC should only be reviewing those code sections they want to scrutinize. We support an opt-out review process by two-thirds majority instead of the current opt-in process. The IBC are already vetted by an all-encompassing group of stakeholders including architects. We support utilizing technical subcommittees to review these discrete code sections and submit their findings to the RAC for a vote.

Architects endeavor to provide the highest quality professional services and deliverables, and need a uniform field of reference for research and design efforts. Architects sign and seal design documents and shoulder the liability for their professional design work for a period of 13 years after completion of a project. This period of liability is much longer than the warranties that are normally applied to a contractor’s work and longer than most periods of responsibility of developers, who often sell the asset shortly after development. The Commonwealth has entrusted the responsibility to architects for the safety and efficiency of buildings over the long term. If architects cannot cite the most up-to-date building codes without the backing of Commonwealth endorsement, an architects’ exposure to HSW failures is increased.

School Construction Reimbursement

Architecture improves student success and health, thoughtfully designed buildings and spaces enhance learning outcomes by allowing teachers and students to focus on their education.

Education funding is a welcome focus of the ongoing budget discussions; however, there is one important component of education funding that appears to be at risk of elimination—the PlanCon Program for school construction reimbursement. While the current PlanCon Program must be reformed, the state must also continue to provide reimbursement for school construction and renovation projects.

While we are very supportive of state funding for school construction, the current PlanCon process is lengthy and burdensome and must be streamlined. The massive backlog of school construction and renovation projects now waiting for overdue state reimbursement is a dramatic symptom of an antiquated program in need of an overhaul.

We strongly believe, however, that the state must continue to play a role in providing reimbursement for school construction and renovation. Maintaining such a program ensures that all school districts can provide appropriate school facilities and safe and secure learning environments for their students.

In an Act 1 of 2006 environment, in which school districts cannot raise property taxes above the index, it will be nearly impossible for most school districts to ever fund a needed construction or renovation project without state reimbursement. Coupled with the fact that some school districts are also facing downgraded bond ratings, due mostly to rising pension and charter school tuition costs, making borrowing an even more expensive endeavor for schools and taxpayers.

Without some program for state reimbursement, it will be educational programs on the chopping block to fund needed renovation projects—such as projects to fix leaking roofs, replace failing HVAC systems or even add space to deal with growing enrollment.

We believe that the PlanCon borrowing plan proposed in House Bill 762 offers the unique opportunity to clear out the backlog and satisfy the already incurred financial obligations of the Commonwealth. It also provides the opportunity to craft a reformed, efficient and streamlined process for school construction and renovation reimbursement going forward, one that we think should look very different than the current PlanCon process.

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With school districts in mind, we ask that you continue to provide state funding for school construction both now and through future programs. Instead of eliminating the PlanCon Program, we urge you to take this opportunity to craft a program for school construction reimbursement that will benefit the Commonwealth, school districts, taxpayers and all components of the built industry into the future.
Mandatory Continuing Education

AIA Pennsylvania recognizes that continuing education in architecture is crucial to advancing the profession. Architects, who are licensed by the Commonwealth and endeavor to safeguard the health, safety, and welfare of the public by skillful use of planning and design concepts, building codes legislated for the various jurisdictions, and for the innovative use of new materials and industries.

As the AIA makes continuing education a requirement for all members and believes it is in the best interest of the Commonwealth for the legislature to mandate continuing education for all architects in order for them to maintain their technical skills, to prepare for the future, and fulfill the continuing education requirements for AIA membership.

In today’s rapidly changing landscape of building codes, standards, and new products and materials, architects must maintain an awareness and expertise of an ever-increasing amount of information. There is a new expectation among clients and the public to look at the expertise of architects for solutions that can help their design and building projects to leave a greener footprint.

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Green Building and Sustainable Design

Architects are responsible for designing buildings that protect the health, safety and welfare of not only the public but also the environment. Architects, as the leaders in design of the built environment, are responsible to act as stewards of the earth. Consequently, we encourage communities to join us in changing the course of the planet’s future by supporting governmental and private sector policy programs, including the development, evaluation, and use of building codes, standards and evidence-based rating systems, that promote the design, preservation, and construction of sustainable communities and high-performance buildings.

AIA Pennsylvania supports governmental policies, programs, and incentives that encourage energy conservation as it relates to the built environment as well as the development and harvesting of energy from renewable sources. Architects are encouraged to promote energy efficiency and waste reduction in the built environment to advance the goal of achieving carbon neutral buildings by the year 2030.

The 2015 U.S. Green Building Council Green Building Economic Impact Study, prepared by Booz Allen Hamilton (BAH) quantifies the economic value of green building and LEED programs, including the development, evaluation, and use of building codes, standards and evidence-based rating systems, that promote the design, preservation, and construction of sustainable communities and high-performance buildings.

AIA Pennsylvania supports the American Institute of Architects’ (AIA) advocacy efforts to push the industry’s trajectory towards sustainability, saving businesses, communities and the environment millions of dollars and billions of dollars in U.S. construction industry. The study finds that the trajectory of the green building sector of the U.S. construction industry is slated for expansive growth. To date, green building has created millions of jobs and contributed hundreds of billions of dollars to the U.S. economy.

As the AIA Pennsylvania supports House Bill 2030 which encourages steps to a more sustainable built environment and a carbon neutral Pennsylvania by 2030. In addition, AIA Pennsylvania supports Senate Bill 615 and House Bill 83 requiring the design, construction and renovation of certain state-owned or state-leased buildings to comply with specified energy and environmental building standards.

Student Loan Forgiveness

Student debt is one of the most critical issues facing the next generation of design professionals. The average architecture student with a five-year bachelor’s degree graduates with over $42,000 in student loan debt. Students graduating with a master in architecture face over $12,000 in loan debt, ranking architecture as one of the disciplines with the highest loan balances in the country.

Due to a spiraling economy several years ago, many architecture firms were forced to lay off staff or even close. Many architecture students were unable to find jobs in their field and were obligated to find another occupation. The design and construction industry faces a severe shortage of talent, at exactly the moment the Commonwealth needs to start rebuilding and revitalizing our downtown neighborhoods.

For the aforementioned reasons, we are supporting legislation that eases the burden by providing loan assistance to architecture students and recent graduates who contribute their design services to underserved communities. The bill would create a program allowing architecture students to work in underserved areas of the Commonwealth in exchange for assistance with their student loans. As a result, communities will receive a broad range of architecture services that may not have otherwise been available, and architecture graduates will be able to gain valuable real-world experience while lessening their debt.

The legislation will help promote sustainable economic development and jobs by ensuring aspiring architects are able to gain valuable experience while giving back to their communities designing public projects such as schools, health clinics, housing facilities and more. In return, the bill will alleviate some of the barriers new graduates face as they pursue their dreams in architecture. Architecture is the key to neighborhood revitalization and downtown restoration.

Mechanics’ Lien

Architects and engineers are at a legal disadvantage in Pennsylvania if they are not paid by the general contractor who hired them. House Bill 439 expands the mechanics’ lien law to add design professionals as a group that would be able to place a lien on a property if they are not paid for their work. Other subcontractors can currently file such a lien if a dispute with a general contractor leads to their non-payment. Nearly 40 states have some protection for design professionals.

In almost all instances, architects are reliant on arbitration and the courts to settle claims for non-payment. With a revision to the mechanics’ lien law, all architects must be provided the same leverage already given to contractors and other vendors who are not paid for their design work or materials.