

LOBBY REFORM UPDATE

Many of you are aware that a proposed "Lobby Reform" ordinance is making its way to City Council this Thursday.

Over the past year, AIA Austin has actively participated in an 11 organization coalition, unprecedented in our industry, to provide a uniform voice during the City's forums for public discussion and testimony. Our coalition has been engaged in the process and provided consistent testimony and feedback at each meeting of the Ethics Review Commission, Council Audit and Finance committee and City Council. Working constructively with our coalition and showing leadership and acknowledgement of the issues important to all sides, Council unanimously approved a resolution last November that our coalition fully supported.

Fast forward 6 months to June - CM Pool released the draft ordinance and the language our coalition specifically negotiated was modified to include "non-discretionary, non-appealable". The addition of these words effectively rendered the exception language useless and would require design professionals to register as lobbyists because of the day to day routine activities we perform within the Development Services Department would not be exempt.

Hundreds of design and building professionals, who our coalition represents, must interact and communicate with City staff in order to do their job, as it is nearly impossible to take a public or private project through the City of Austin permitting system without speaking to City staff at length to show compliance with the existing codes. Fundamentally, we do not believe that these day to day routine activities should require these professionals to register as lobbyists and by law prohibit them from service on our city's boards and commissions. This fact was the key point in the negotiations that took place over the last year.

I AM PLEASED TO SHARE THAT OUR COALITION HAS SUCCESSFULLY NEGOTIATED NEW LANGUAGE THAT IS INCLUDED ON THE LATEST VERSION OF THE DRAFT ORDINANCE THAT COUNCIL WILL VOTE ON THIS THURSDAY.

4-8-3 Registration Requirement

(D) Compensation or reimbursement for lobbying does not include compensation or reimbursement for the following: 3) Communicating, for the purpose of sharing information to demonstrate compliance with an audit, inspection, city investigation, or existing laws, rules, and policies;

In conclusion, countless hours of negotiations have resulted in a change to the language that we believe that will protect 99% of our coalition membership from requiring to register under the proposed ordinance scheduled to go into effect on June 1, 2017. Our coalition will continue to monitor this issue and keep you informed. Thank you for your trust and support.

Stuart Sampley, AIA
Advocacy Commissioner/ Past-President
The American Institute of Architects - Austin Chapter