



March 24, 2025

Honorable Mayor
Honorable City Council Members

Re: Single Stair Access Buildings

Dear Mayor Watson and City Council Members.

AIA Austin is deeply committed to advocating for policies that not only shape but also improve the future of our city. As the foremost organization representing Austin's architecture community, we draw upon the vast expertise and diverse perspectives of our 1400+ members, who work across a wide range of building typologies and programs to enhance the built environment.

We are grateful to the Mayor and City Council for their consideration of this critical amendment to the International Building Code, which would allow for an increase in the number of residential stories served by a single exit. This is an essential step in ensuring that Austin has the type of housing needed to foster safe, vibrant, family-oriented, and walkable neighborhoods as our city continues its dynamic growth.

Additionally, we want to extend our sincere thanks to Austin's emergency response professionals, who have clearly articulated their concerns regarding this proposed amendment. We respect their concerns, which are informed by their expertise and the invaluable real-world experiences they bring to the table.

Above all, we are grateful to everyone who has collaborated with us to advance this important conversation. The collective effort to bring this proposal to the table reflects our shared commitment to the future of Austin.

Single-Stair Buildings

Single-stair buildings are an innovative design solution that utilizes compact apartment layouts centered around a central stairway, offering more efficient, well-lit, and safer living spaces. These buildings are a natural fit for Austin's goals of promoting increased density while maintaining neighborhood character and streetscape integrity. By supporting this provision, we are advancing a vision of sustainable, responsible urban growth.

AIA Austin and Single-Stair

AIA Austin has spent over a year working alongside the city to refine this proposal. Our advocacy is driven by genuine concern for the long-term shape and sustainability of our city. We are committed to creating spaces that prioritize the well-being of all Austinites through equitable, resilient, and environmentally conscious design practices. This initiative aligns closely with the AIA "Framework for Design Excellence," which emphasizes the importance of design that supports community, safety, and sustainability.

Given the tight timeline – City Council will hear discussions on March 27th and vote on April 10th – we have kept this message concise. For more detailed information, Sophia Razzaque, the former president of AIA Austin, issued a letter on July 23, 2024, outlining the benefits of this initiative and addressing some of the concerns raised by first responders. (see: [link](#))

Public Support

This amendment has garnered widespread public support, as reflected in Public Input #1 (see: [link](#)) and Public Input #2 (see: [link](#)). It is vital that we emphasize these positive voices and recognize the proposal for what it is: an opportunity to create a more vibrant, dense, and affordable Austin that aligns with the city's long-term vision. By prioritizing family-oriented housing, we are fostering safer, more resilient communities that will endure for generations to come.

Timeline and Fire Service Preparation

The proposed development timeline provides an ample window for our fire services to prepare and adapt to any potential challenges. This thoughtful planning ensures that first responders will have the necessary resources and time to meet the needs of these new buildings, contributing to a safer environment.

Addressing Concerns About Safety

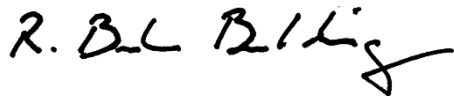
Our support for single-stair buildings is likewise rooted in our commitment to safety. The proposal allows us to build more family-friendly units within sprinklered buildings, as opposed to expanding the less fire-protected single-family homes in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). We acknowledge the concerns raised by local first responders, particularly regarding ladder truck reach and building height. However, we are confident that with proper planning, resource allocation, and ongoing collaboration, these concerns can be effectively addressed, ensuring public safety while maintaining the positive benefits of this initiative.

Our Position

AIA Austin strongly believes in the evolution of building codes to meet the changing needs of our city, and we advocate for innovative approaches to create better housing solutions. We also stand in full support of our first responders and the AIA has had a long history of working closely with them to ensure our codes prioritize safety. Specifically, we support the evolution of the single-point access stair initiative, as it provides greater flexibility in design and contributes to a broader range of housing options for Austin residents.

In conclusion, AIA Austin wholeheartedly supports the single-stair point access initiative, provided that the concerns of our emergency response community are addressed, including, if necessary, the allocation of resources to update response equipment to ensure these buildings can be safely served.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. BALDRIDGE". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping "B" and a long, horizontal stroke at the end.

Burton Baldrige, FAIA
AIA Austin President