



Policy Platform 2020–The American Institute of Architects

Building a healthy America

American architecture stands as a testament to our unique place in the world. Our architects work at the leading edge of a \$1T construction industry that promotes commerce and drives consumer confidence. Architects have always dared to reach higher and set new standards. Our next architectural achievements will be measured by how well they respond to a post-pandemic world, eradicate inequity, fuel economic recovery, eliminate carbon emissions, and nurture individual and community health.

Now is the time for urgent and decisive action on these issues. The American Institute of Architects (AIA) represents more than 95,000 architecture professionals. We step forward to address the needs of our economy, climate, and communities. We seek support for the crushing student debt of our members; support for disadvantaged businesses; and real progress to end the systemic racism that has existed for centuries and continues to grip our nation. We seek meaningful policies and commit to better buildings that will sustain a healthy country.

In a spirit of cooperation, we challenge others to join us in support for the following initiatives.

A Future Economy

When business thrives, America thrives. Architecture firms lead a \$1T building construction industry that catalyzes private investment. Most of these firms meet the federal government's definition of small business. The administration's tax policies should support small business, innovation, and talent recruitment. AIA commits to voice strong support for a future economy that advances the success of architecture firms and the profession.

Prioritize job creation and equitable access to opportunities

- Increase STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Architecture, and Math) investment and student debt relief to strengthen a diverse talent pipeline
- Strengthen workforce training for new, sustainable building technology and practices

- Reinforce women and minority business inclusion through contract policy
- Develop a Civil Service Corps option for graduates

Leverage private investment

- Utilize tax incentives to spark resilient, sustainable, and equitable development
- Invest in low-income housing tax credits
- Recommit to historic preservation tax credits

Adopt business-friendly tax policies

- Prioritize favorable tax policies for small businesses
- Provide research and development tax credits and research funding

Read more >

Climate Action

Human activity is warming our climate to dangerous levels and carbon from buildings is a primary culprit. Buildings must consume less energy, use only renewable sources, and contribute power back to the energy grid. AIA is taking action to eliminate all building carbon emissions by 2040.

Provide American leadership

- Rejoin the Paris Climate Accord
- Promote science-based environmental regulation and research
- Provide federal leadership on climate and cross-departmental integration
- Actively address the disproportionate impact of climate change and environmental degradation on communities of color

Transform energy use

- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions through energy efficiency in buildings
- Promote renewable energy and embrace building electrification
- Create federal incentives for the adoption of net zero carbon energy codes

Commit to zero carbon practices

- Reduce embodied carbon and encourage carbon-smart materials
- Renovate, adapt, and preserve existing buildings
- Preserve historic structures
- Fund robust federal investment in green infrastructure

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Healthy Communities

In towns and cities across the country, deep inequities exist that prevent access to safe and healthy buildings for many Americans. We as a nation must act to provide shelter—a basic human need. AIA commits to a future built environment that improves individual health and prepares communities to weather a variety of storms.

Invest in housing & infrastructure

- Catalyze accessible and affordable housing
- Promote toxin-free living
- Confront the legacy of discriminatory zoning and housing policies on communities of color
- House those who are experiencing homelessness and provide related supportive services
- Promote equitable development, including mass transit-oriented development, multimodal streets, and reformed Opportunity Zones

Reinvest in America's public places

- Fund best practices for school design to promote healthy, safe learning environments
- Provide federal funding to support health care surge capacity
- Invest in community and civic infrastructure
- Strengthen our resilience
- Improve building resilience and adaptation to allow populations to shelter-in-place
- Integrate buildings into the grid to promote energy resilience
- Fund flood and risk mapping, and prioritize resilient land-use policies
- Strengthen water and air quality policy

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A Future Economy

When business thrives, America thrives. Architecture firms lead a \$1T building construction industry that catalyzes private investment. Most of these firms meet the federal government's definition of small business. The administration's tax policies should support small business, innovation, and talent recruitment. AIA commits to a future economy that advances the success of architecture firms and the profession.

We challenge others to join us in the following initiatives.

Prioritize job creation & equitable access to opportunities

STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Architecture, and Math) jobs are growing twice as fast as other jobs, yet the percentage of students entering STEAM majors is not rising to meet demand. Incentives to spur STEAM education will expand opportunity, drive job growth, increase America's global competitive standing, and result in higher paying jobs that mitigate oppressive student loan debt.

As buildings grow in complexity, we must strengthen workforce training to match skills to jobs. Advanced building technologies, innovative sustainability measures, and digital fabrication demand investments in education and training.

We must also create opportunities for minority and women-owned businesses to be represented in the design of our buildings and communities. We challenge the administration to reinforce their inclusion through advantageous contract policy.

Finally, the current Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program does not reach an adequate number of intended recipients. A new program should be created through the Department of Education and the Department of Labor to include more eligible forms of civil service in distressed areas, including architecture, engineering, and urban planning. AIA has long supported the National Design Services Act, which could provide some of the provisions for this program, and commits to working with the administration on the details of this proposal.

- **Increase STEAM investment & student debt relief to strengthen a diverse talent pipeline**

- Increase investment in the Carl D. Perkin's Career and Technical Education (CTE) program
- Supplement Department of Education funding for STEAM outreach in historically underserved school districts and communities
- Formally include architecture as a unique STEAM category to streamline federal student aid applications
- Allow employers to contribute directly to their employee's student loan repayment the same way they can contribute to retirement savings

- **Strengthen workforce training for new, sustainable building technology & practices**
 - Establish a university-based Building Training and Assessment Center for architects and other building industry professions to learn energy-efficient design and technology best practices, coordinated with the Department of Energy, the National Labs, and state-accredited community colleges
 - Reauthorize the Workforce, Innovation and Opportunity Act, which is set to expire in 2020, to continue the services currently provided through the Department of Labor
- **Reinforce women & minority business inclusion through contract policy**
- **Develop a Civil Service Corps option for graduates**

Leverage private investment

Private investment drives a \$1T building construction industry, creates job growth, expands opportunities, and shapes our communities. Tax incentives can leverage these investments and target the urgent need for buildings to be more resilient, sustainable, and innovative.

The lack of affordable, accessible housing contributes to high rates of homelessness in America. The administration can transform communities and advance equitable access to opportunity through a 50% boost in funding for the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) and updated zoning strategies.

Historic buildings represent our heritage, yet many are crumbling and in desperate need of rehabilitation. Historic tax credits must be expanded to incentivize investment. Research proves that these programs preserve our communities, create jobs and generate wealth. The Historic Preservation Tax Credit should be expanded to increase the credit from 20% to 30% for smaller projects (whose rehabilitation expenses do not exceed \$2.5 million) to encourage more investment in small- to mid-sized cities.

- **Utilize tax incentives to spark resilient, sustainable, & equitable development**
 - 179D, the Energy Efficient Commercial Buildings Deduction: Increase the deduction from \$1.80 per square foot to \$3.00 and make the deduction permanent
 - 25C, the Non-Business Energy Property Tax Credit: Double the credit from \$1,200 to \$2,400 and the eligible expenditures from 15% to 30%
 - 45L, the New Energy Efficient Home Credit: Increase the credit to \$2,500 for 2021 and 2022
- **Invest in low-income housing tax credit**
- **Recommit to historic preservation tax credit**

Adopt business-friendly tax policies

Most architecture firms are classified as small businesses within federal guidelines and drive economic activity through the coordination of major building projects. Favorable tax policies will advance entrepreneurial activity and stimulate additional investment. As we adapt the design of buildings to address COVID-19 and consider future climate events, there is an urgent need to invest in targeted research and development to identify innovative building technologies and materials

- **Prioritize favorable tax policies for small businesses**

- Maintain the increased business interest expense deduction at 50%
- Allow net operating loss carrybacks for S-corporations and small businesses
- Establish another expanded version of small business interruption loans once the Paycheck Protection Program ends
- Establish federally-backed pandemic risk insurance for business interruption losses and event cancellations due to future pandemics or other public health emergency declarations

- **Provide research & development tax credits & research funding**

- Expand the Research & Development Tax Credit with an emphasis on small businesses
- Increase federal funding for the Department of Energy's US Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE), the Lawrence Berkeley National Labs (LBNL), and the National Renewable Energy Lab (NREL)
- Increase federal funding for chemical safety research including the Environmental Protection Agency's Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS) database and Chemicals of Concern Action Plan



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We challenge others to join us in the following initiatives.

Provide American leadership

On November 5, 2019, The American Institute of Architects (AIA) issued a statement opposing the United States' withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accord, stating that withdrawal from the Paris Accord was an "abdication of America's leadership on climate action [that] undermines our nation's credibility on the global stage." Climate change, and its causes and impacts, cannot adequately be addressed by state or municipal governments or effectively remediated in isolation. AIA urges the next administration to support science-based environmental regulation and urges the continued funding of advanced scientific research on the relationship between the built environment and human health.

- **Rejoin the Paris Climate Accord**
- **Promote science-based environmental regulation & research**
 - Support Department of Energy (DOE) and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) programs that are critical to the practice of sustainable design including Energy Star and its suite of programs (Portfolio Manager, Target Finder, etc.), the Commercial Building Energy Consumption Survey (CBECS) database, and NOAA's US Climate Reference Network (USCRN)
 - Provide DOE and EPA support for the AIA 2030 Commitment's Design Data Exchange
 - Advance the 2012 EPA Guidelines for Water Reuse in developing rigorous guidelines for graywater and storm water reuse
 - Promote DOE's US Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE), the Lawrence Berkeley National Labs (LBNL), and the National Renewable Energy Lab (NREL)
 - Support chemical safety research including the EPA's Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS) database and Chemicals of Concern Action Plan
- **Provide federal leadership on climate & cross-departmental integration**
 - Make addressing climate change a top priority of national policy
 - Integrate and better coordinate the administrative departments that assist communities and individuals in responding to disaster recovery and weather-related impacts

- Continue to support the General Service Administration's (GSA) leadership in lowering building operating costs through high performance, designing healthy and sustainable buildings, and attracting top talent to public service
- **Actively address the disproportionate impact of climate change & environmental degradation on communities of color**
 - Strengthen and expand intra-governmental partnerships to focus specifically on providing direct assistance and planning support to overburdened and underserved communities
 - Expand the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) national Technical Assistance Services for Communities (TASC) Program to help overburdened and underserved communities access environmental impact analysis tools and advance environmental protections
 - Accelerate the work of the EPA's National Environmental Justice Advisory Council (NEJAC) to provide independent advice to the Administrator on broad, crosscutting matters of environmental justice, and greatly expand its national agenda for public meetings

Transform energy use

Paris Climate Accord targets that limit the rise in global average temperature to below the 2 degree C threshold require that all new construction meet high energy-efficiency standards. At the same time, approximately two-thirds of the existing building area will be with us in 2050, but annual building renovations currently affect only 0.5-1% of the building stock. A significant increase in upgrades to achieve energy efficiency, including the generation and procurement of renewable energy, is required to meet emissions reduction targets set by the accord. The administration should use existing Department of Energy grants and federal infrastructure investment to transform America's energy use.

- **Reduce greenhouse gas emissions through energy efficiency in buildings**
 - Support the 2030 Commitment by architecture and engineering firms and building developers.
 - Promote the adoption and enforcement of energy codes by state and local governments
 - Fund deep retrofits and mechanical and electrical system replacement in outdated existing buildings across the country
 - Provide federal support for municipal benchmarking and disclosure, including sharing best practices
 - Advance federal infrastructure investment in micro-utilities and networked district systems

- **Promote renewable energy & embrace building electrification**

- Promote all-electric buildings
- Promote electric mobility
- Increase development of microgrids and grid harmonization
- Promote the growth of renewable power by incentivizing US states to adopt uniform national grid interconnection, net metering, and distributed generation regulations
- Increase solar tax credits and green power procurement
- Require solar install on all new construction
- Advocate for the elimination of fossil fuels from buildings
- Promote development of biogas options at scale

- **Create federal incentives for the adoption of net zero carbon building codes**

- Adopt ZERO Code for all federal building and buildings receiving federal funding
- Support the ZERO Code as a national building energy standard for new building construction that integrates cost-effective energy-efficiency standards with on-site and/or off-site renewable energy, resulting in net zero carbon buildings.
- Create funding mechanisms and tie the highest energy incentives to Zero Code

Commit to zero carbon practices

Embodied carbon will be responsible for almost half of total new construction emissions between now and 2050. Making our nation's existing building stock more energy efficient, resilient, and adaptable to the impacts of a changing climate is as important to our prosperity as protecting any other element of our national infrastructure. Public investment to improve the energy efficiency of existing buildings will yield a public benefit.

- **Reduce embodied carbon & encourage carbon-smart materials**

- Establish a whole-building life cycle assessment requirement and adopt the 2030 Challenge for Embodied Carbon reduction targets for all federal buildings and buildings receiving federal funds
- Continue and expand USFS leadership on mass timber construction and forest health
- Create a zero-net carbon jobs task force to identify economic growth targets
- Require manufacturers to be responsible for end-of-life of products (product takeback)
- Incorporate projected building service life into the building code
- Create tax incentives for buildings meeting the 2030 Challenge for Embodied Carbon

- **Renovate, adapt, & preserve existing buildings**

Federal tax reform should include:

- The creation of financial incentives that could be paired with an improved 179D to further enhance energy efficiency in existing buildings.
- Additional market-driven carbon reduction strategies, with input from representatives of the building trades and building owners.

- **Preserve historic structures**

- Increase funding support for the Department of Interiors Standards for Historic Preservation
- Expand historic preservation tax credits



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We challenge others to join us in the following initiatives.

Invest in housing & infrastructure

The affordable housing crisis is typically discussed in dollars, but the mental and physical health of hundreds of thousands of Americans is compromised by a lack of access to housing that is safe and affordable. According to the Low-Income Housing Coalition, there are only 27 affordable rental homes available for every 100 extremely low-income renting households.

According to HUD's 2019 Point-In-Time report, over 550,000 people were experiencing homelessness on any given night in 2018. Of those Americans, nearly 40% were African Americans, despite African Americans only accounting for 13% of the overall US population.

Federal funding is necessary to prevent the loss of housing through stabilizing programs for those who are housing insecure; to increase the amount of affordable housing available; and to increase access to shelters and supportive services. AIA must partner with all levels of government to enact anti-racist housing and housing finance policy that counteract policies such as redlining, which have been unjust to Americans of color.

The human impact of the materials and systems that make up the built environment is better understood today than ever before. Exposure to lead, radon, and poor air quality contribute to serious health conditions. AIA supports increased federal research funding to better protect inhabitants and to reduce the disparate effects of these hazards on communities of color.

All Americans benefit when development is planned in a way that is equitable, provides transportation options, and connects people to opportunities. AIA supports government adoption of policies that facilitate equitable transit-oriented design and multimodal streets through zoning, building and land-use codes, and parking standards that support appropriate density, building types, and neighborhood characteristics.

- **Catalyze accessible & affordable housing**

- Repeal the Faircloth Amendment, which currently limits the construction of new public housing units funded by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) if doing so results in a net increase in Public

Housing Unit (PHA) owned, assisted, or operated as of October 1, 1999

- Expand funding for the Section 8 Housing Voucher Program, which allows HUD to assist low-income families, the elderly, and the disabled so they can afford housing in the private market
 - Expand the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC)
 - Streamline the multiple agency review process (such as those from the EPA, FEMA, and then state and local agencies) for affordable housing developers to better enable and incentivize affordable housing construction and investment
- **Promote toxin-free living**
 - Expand the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) national Technical Assistance Services for Communities (TASC) Program to help overburdened and underserved communities access environmental impact analysis tools and advance environmental protections.
 - Accelerate the work of the EPA’s National Environmental Justice Advisory Council (NEJAC) to provide independent advice to the Administrator on broad, crosscutting matters of environmental justice and greatly expand its national agenda for public meetings.
 - **Confront the legacy of discriminatory zoning & housing policies**
 - **House the homeless & provide related supportive services**
 - Protect the Housing for Elderly program (Section 202, established under the Housing Act of 1959) and Supportive Housing for persons with disabilities (811 Program, established by the National Affordable Housing Act of 1990)
 - Increase funding to address the public housing capital backlog and the backlog of capital needs for Section 515 and 514 (of the Housing Act of 1949) rural housing stock
 - **Promote equitable development, including mass transit-oriented development, multimodal streets, & opportunity zones**
 - Provide continued investment in Opportunity Zones, created in the TCJA of 2017
 - Reform Opportunity Zones to incentivize investments that lead to concrete measures of equitable success for community residents, like real estate and infrastructure development and local job creation

Reinvest in our public places

AIA supports federal reinvestment in our public spaces. This includes safe and healthy schools, civic infrastructure, and, as the pandemic continues to be deeply felt, federal funding to support health care surge capacity.

Already, architects around the country have mobilized to develop expertise in

designing health care facilities for periods of intense use. The federal government should support these efforts by investing in the country's health care infrastructure to provide surge capacity in hospitals and clinics in underserved urban and rural communities.

- **Fund best practices for school design to promote healthy, safe learning environments**

- Update the School Safety Clearinghouse established by the federal government in 2019 to include a dedicated section on design strategies that minimize threats of violence, foster a stronger sense of community, and promote positive learning environments
- Use architects as a resource for design strategies to control access points, reduce blind spots, and facilitate a welcoming, pro-social, age-appropriate learning environment
- Amend existing federal funding sources for school safety, including the STOP School Violence Grants, to allow design services to be an eligible use of funding so school districts can take a holistic approach to physical security investment
- Increase federal funding for necessary school retrofits. While much school construction funding is local, federal infrastructure investment should include long overdue funding for schools to enhance student health, including increased daylighting, updated ventilation, asbestos and lead paint abatement

- **Provide federal funding to support health care surge capacity**

- **Invest in community & civic infrastructure**

- Invest in vertical infrastructure in any infrastructure package to support critical community structures such as hospitals, schools, first responder facilities, and affordable housing
- Invest in mass transit including bus, bus rapid transit, fixed rail lines, and intermodal transit facilities
- Develop a US heavy and high-speed rail strategy
- Invest in the development of parks, open spaces, and the civic realm

Strengthen resilience

Resilience is the ability to absorb, recover from, and adapt to adverse events. For both buildings and the people who occupy them, the need for resilience is more acutely understood now than ever before.

An intelligent grid, interacting with buildings that are smart and responsive, can reduce carbon emissions through efficiencies, protect inhabitants from weather events, and save money. In order to realize this type of integration, policies for government and utilities must support net metering policies where they do not already exist, address legacy assets and the shift toward electrification (in most cases), and plan for equitable integration.

The federal government must update the national flood maps and reform the National Flood Insurance Program to reduce the impact of flooding on private and public structures and help communities to better adopt and enforce floodplain management regulations. The federal government must also rigorously enforce the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the Toxic Substances Control Act, and other environmental legislation through the regulation and oversight powers of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

- **Improve building resilience & adaptation to allow populations to shelter-in-place**

- Hasten the adoption of updated building codes and standards so the emerging built environment is resilient to future natural disasters and better equipped to shelter-in-place, including incentives for localities to adopt voluntary stretch codes related to energy efficiency, including the Zero Code Renewable Energy Appendix
- Provide direct incentives to homeowners and business owners alike to improve the resilience of existing buildings so high-risk areas can proactively prepare for future natural disasters, including tax incentives for 25C and 45L

- **Integrate buildings into the grid to promote energy resilience**

- Increase federal funding for the Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE) grants to increase investment in R&D, training and technical assistance in emerging technologies, and renewable energy generation and energy storage
- Increase federal funding for the Building Technologies Office within the Department of Energy to advance research in grid-responsive buildings
- Expand the federal government's role in evaluating, accelerating, and showcasing "smart" building technologies

- **Fund flood & risk mapping & prioritize resilient land use policies**

- **Strengthen water & air quality policy**

- Urge the EPA to issue final risk studies on the first 10 chemicals required under the Toxic Substances Control Act; only one of the 10 (methylene chloride) has been reviewed on time under that law
- Reverse the EPA's recent regulatory changes on methane, asbestos, and hydrofluorocarbons
- Reverse the EPA's recent regulatory changes to the Waters of the United States (WOTUS) rule



