



AIA San Antonio

September 9, 2008

POSITION PAPER

Consolidation of Planning Department with Development Services Department

The San Antonio Chapter of The American Institute of Architects (AIA San Antonio) **opposes** the City of San Antonio's proposal to consolidate the Planning Department and Development Services Department under one director. The AIA Board of Directors feels that the "checks and balances" of separate Planning and Development Services entities is critical to maintaining the independence and integrity of each department.

AIA San Antonio commends Mayor Phil Hardberger, City Manager Sheryl Sculley, and the City Council for their efforts to improve the organization and effectiveness of the city's various staffs. We support streamlining local government to make it more efficient. However, the majority of the nation's ten largest cities maintain *separate* departments for services and planning, including New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Phoenix, San Jose, and San Antonio.

San Antonio is one of the largest cities in the country. It is growing rapidly, and careful, independent strategic planning, adhering to the city's Master Plan, is necessary for it to grow in an orderly and efficient way. As energy prices increase and the historic patterns of growth change, it is imperative that planning be made a priority in San Antonio, not take a back seat. Consolidation of the two departments is not in the best interest of the City of San Antonio.

The Development Services Department focuses on health, safety, welfare and building access for all people. The department is primarily an enforcement and reactive entity that reviews plans for building permits, inspects buildings and assures statute, code and, ordinance compliance. Conversely, the Planning Department is traditionally an independent *visionary* entity responsible for strategic planning. Their separation is important for the effectiveness of each. Each is influenced by different imperatives and constituencies, and having them report to one director dilutes their effectiveness and creates the opportunity for conflicts of interest.

AIA San Antonio's Board of Directors believes that strategic planning is critical to San Antonio's orderly growth and development. Careful shaping of the physical environment directly affects the quality of our daily lives. Therefore, planners and architects play a crucial role in creating safe, attractive, economically viable and environmentally sustainable communities.

AIA San Antonio recommends the following policy:

- Maintain an independent planning department with a clear vision.