

AIA Washington Council



March 2026 | Advocacy Newsletter

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2026 Session Wrap Up



That's a Wrap!

The 2026 Washington State Legislative Session officially came to a close Thursday evening, March 12, as lawmakers adjourned sine die just after 8:00 PM, closing the books on a turbulent 60-day sprint defined by budget pressures and high-stakes tax debates.

The session's dominant storyline was the passage of a 9.9 percent tax on individual household income exceeding \$1 million per year, the state's first income tax since 1933. The bill consumed an extraordinary amount of floor time at the Capitol, culminating in a House debate that stretched nearly 25 hours, one of the longest in state legislative history. It ultimately cleared both chambers and heads to Governor Ferguson's desk for his signature.

Lawmakers were also navigating a significant budget gap throughout the session. Despite a record revenue package passed just last year, the Legislature entered this session facing a projected \$2 to \$3 billion shortfall driven by declining revenue forecasts, rising lawsuit payouts, growing human services costs, and federal spending uncertainty. The final supplemental operating budget grew the existing \$77.8 billion biennial spending plan by roughly \$1.6 billion, relying on a mix of accounting maneuvers, rainy day fund

withdrawals, and new revenue to close the gap. Many budget analysts expect the Legislature will walk into next session facing another structural deficit in the neighborhood of \$878 million.

As for the broader policy landscape, nearly 1,400 new bills were introduced when the session opened in January, and very few made it across the finish line. Outside of the fiscal arena, significant policy movement was limited. The Governor now has 20 calendar days, excluding Sundays, to act on bills that reached his desk within five days of adjournment. He can sign a bill, veto it, veto specific sections, or take no action, in which case the bill becomes law without his signature. Keep reading to learn more about the bills AIAWA followed this session.





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Bills That Made It Across The Finish Line

Practice:

HB 2304- This bill expands the types of condominium buildings eligible for express warranty of quality and insurance coverage as an alternative to implied warranties under state law. Currently this option is available for buildings with 12 or fewer units and three or fewer stories. This bill extends that eligibility to buildings of four or fewer stories. While AIAWA was supportive of this bill, we recognized it did not address the deeper issues affecting architects, particularly around insurance and liability. Prime sponsor Rep. Taylor framed this as a small but meaningful step, and we came away from a meeting with her encouraged by her interest in working with us and other stakeholders during the long session to tackle the bigger issues that continue to discourage condo construction in Washington. The bill passed both chambers unanimously and has already been signed into law by the Governor.

HB 2353- Passed by both chambers and awaiting the Governor's signature, this bill raises the threshold for required predesign on state-funded capital construction projects from \$10 million to \$15 million, and adds an annual inflation adjustment tied to OFM's C-100 form beginning in 2027. AIAWA engaged throughout the session, and while we were unable to

make changes to the legislation itself, Rep. Keaton expressed interest in working with us during the interim on two issues we identified as the more significant pieces of the puzzle: developing better definitions and guidance around when predesign is most appropriate based on project complexity rather than dollar value alone, and addressing the funding cycle timing issue where predesign work completed years before a project receives full funding often has to be redone entirely.

HB 2228- This bill directs the State Building Code Council to convene a technical advisory group to recommend amendments to the International Building Code that would allow scissor stairs in residential occupancies of more than two dwelling units where occupants are primarily permanent in nature. Scissor stairs are two interlocking stairways with separate exits that are separately enclosed and divided by fire-resistance rated assemblies. The advisory group must consider public health, safety, welfare, and construction costs when developing its recommendations, and must submit them in time for the Council to incorporate any necessary updates into the 2027 code update cycle.

AIAWA was supportive of this bill, which passed both chambers unanimously and was signed into law by the Governor on March 9.

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Livability

SB 6026- Under this legislation, cities of 30,000 or more and non-rural GMA counties are required to allow residential uses in areas zoned for commercial or mixed-use development. Jurisdictions may not require ground floor commercial or retail as a condition of permitting residential development in more than 40 percent of their total commercial and mixed-use acreage. Several area types are excluded from that calculation entirely, including station areas, areas allowing development heights of at least 85 feet, industrial zones, areas near active oil or gas refineries, and areas within tax increment financing districts established prior to the effective date. For publicly subsidized affordable housing projects, ground floor commercial requirements are prohibited outright regardless of where the project is located.

The legislation also requires jurisdictions to establish an administrative process for applicants to request a reduction or waiver from ground floor commercial requirements. That review must consider the merits of the project and the increase in dwelling units that would result, and jurisdictions that already have a waiver process in place are not required to adopt a new one.

On the implementation timeline, jurisdictions have 18 months from the effective date to update their local regulations to come into compliance. Updates to growth and development assumptions in comprehensive plans are not required until the next scheduled update cycle after January 1, 2031. This bill passed both chambers and is awaiting the Governor's signature.

SB 5156- Originally introduced last session by Senator Salomon and revived midway through this session, this bill directs the State Building Code Council to adopt standards for the 2027 technical code update that would allow smaller apartment buildings, specifically those with six stories or fewer and no more than 24 units total, to use passenger elevators minimally sized to meet federal accessibility requirements. The bill also directs the Council to convene a technical advisory group to examine hoistway opening protection requirements and two-way visual emergency communications devices, and to evaluate whether current requirements appropriately balance cost and safety for small apartment buildings. Notably, the bill specifically calls for an architect of small multifamily buildings to be included on that advisory group. It passed the House 93 to 1 and the Senate 41 to 6 and is awaiting the Governor's signature.



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Livability, continued.

HB 1345– This bill authorizes counties planning under the Growth Management Act to allow detached accessory dwelling units outside of urban growth areas, subject to a defined set of development regulations and planning accountability measures. DADUs permitted under this bill may not exceed 1,296 square feet, must be sited within 150 feet of the principal unit, must share the same driveway access, and are limited to one ADU per parcel. Water supply and septic capacity requirements also apply. Counties must track and annually report completed DADU permits and update their comprehensive plans accordingly, with population growth targets from DADUs capped at 10 percent for rural counties and 7 percent for non rural counties. Counties are also required to have a code enforcement process in place for unpermitted units, including penalties for owners who do not seek compliance.

AIAWA tracked this bill given our longstanding interest in growth management and protecting urban growth boundaries. We were encouraged by the limitations and guardrails included in the final version. The bill is now awaiting the Governor's signature.

HB 1974– Washington state will have a formal land banking framework under this legislation, authorizing cities and counties to allow public corporations, housing authorities, or nonprofit organizations to operate land banks for the purpose of acquiring, holding, and transferring property for affordable housing development. Land banks may sell or lease property to housing developers at below market rate in exchange for affordability commitments, and at least 50 percent of land leased or sold must include a covenant ensuring affordability for at least 30 years. The bill also gives land banks priority access to tax foreclosed properties and exempts qualifying land banks from property taxation to help reduce land holding costs. The bill passed the House 59 to 37 and the Senate 30 to 19 and is awaiting the Governor's signature.



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Taxes

SB 6346- Without question, this was the dominant story of the 2026 session. This bill establishes a 9.9 percent tax on individual income exceeding \$1 million, beginning January 1, 2028, with first payments due in 2029. The bill includes a \$1 million standard deduction, meaning only income above that threshold is subject to the tax, and is expected to affect roughly the top half of one percent of Washington households. House Republicans mounted a record-setting floor fight spanning over 24 continuous hours, working through close to 80 amendments before the bill ultimately passed. The Senate followed with considerably less drama before sending the bill to Governor Ferguson, who has pledged his signature.

The bill includes a pass-through entity election, meaning partnerships and limited liability companies may choose to pay the tax at the entity level, with individual owners receiving a corresponding credit for their share of the tax paid by the entity. While this option exists, the final bill made very few changes to how pass-through income is treated more broadly, which was an area the business community had hoped to see addressed. The bill also includes an expanded B&O tax credit for small businesses, raises the annual B&O filing threshold to \$250,000, and repeals most of the 2025 sales tax on services with the exception of

advertising, effective 2030. No broader structural tax reform was included in the final package, and legal challenges are widely expected once the Governor signs the bill.

Bills That Stalled At The End of Session

SB 5729- Despite its title referencing affordable housing, this bill had little to do with affordable housing in practice. The original version, introduced last session, would have deemed permit applications complete upon submittal if stamped by a licensed architect or engineer, effectively limiting a jurisdiction's ability to request modifications to those plans. The bill was broadly written with very few guardrails, and AIAWA joined many other groups in opposing it. It returned this session in a substantially scaled back form, though we were not included in any stakeholder discussions along the way. The provisions we were most concerned about were ultimately stripped out, though the bill failed to advance out of the Legislature.

HB 1175- This bill would have required cities and towns to allow neighborhood stores and cafes in any zone that permits residential uses. Neighborhood stores are defined as convenience grocery stores or mini-markets of at least 500 square feet, and neighborhood cafes are defined as establishments of at least 500 square feet that must offer food if alcoholic drinks are served. Cities would retain the ability to regulate parking, limit hours of operation, and establish additional regulations including maximum square footage requirements, though those

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Stalled Bills, continued.

regulations could be no more restrictive than what applies to other residential uses in the same zone. The bill passed the House last session and returned this year but ultimately failed to advance out of the Senate.

HB 2721- This bill would have established a voluntary registration system for commercial interior designers in Washington, creating a new category of registered commercial interior designer under an expanded State Board of Architects, with stamp and seal privileges. The bill was given a courtesy hearing but did not move forward this session.

AIAWA has been engaged on this issue for well over a year, working collaboratively with the Consortium for Interior Design Washington on the legislation. Our board president was prepared to testify at the March 3 hearing, but the committee ran out of time before we had the opportunity to speak. We submitted written comments directly to the committee following the hearing. AIAWA remained neutral on the bill, as several important questions around scope of practice, examination criteria, and qualification alignment still needed to be resolved.

The ICOR report, which we had been waiting on, was

released in early March, representing nearly six years of collaborative work among national organizations representing architecture, interior design, landscape architecture, and engineering on the question of overlapping practice between the professions. The interior design community hopes to bring refined legislation forward in 2027, and we will continue working with them over the interim with the ICOR report to help guide us. We encourage members to review the report and share feedback using the links below, and to revisit the town halls we held last fall where we discussed this legislation in detail.

- [ICOR Introduction](#)
- [Full Report](#)
- [Introductory Video](#)
- [Feedback Form](#)
- [Town Hall 1](#)
- [Town Hall 2](#)





What's Next: Interim Priorities

With the session behind us, the work does not stop. The interim is often where the most meaningful progress happens, and we have a full plate heading into the months ahead.

There are several things we know we will be working on. We will continue our ongoing work with OFM on the state fee schedule. We will also be working to update our own practice act and the definition of the practice of architecture with the goal of bringing that legislation forward in 2027. We will continue collaboration with the Consortium for Interior Design Washington as they work toward interior design legislation for the upcoming session. Our embodied carbon will continue as well. Beginning in May, there will be a public comment period on two proposals for an optional embodied carbon appendix to the state building code, and we plan to engage in that process.

Beyond that, there are a number of areas we hope to develop into future legislation, including working with Rep. Keaton and OFM on the predesign complexity and timing issues we identified during the session, and potentially working on bills related condominium reform, permit reform, and unreinforced masonry.

Looking further ahead, we expect a push next session to lower the threshold required to pass school bonds and will likely engage in advocacy on that issue as well. All of this is happening against the backdrop of election season, with many incumbents focused on

securing reelection and a number of seats opening up for new faces. We will be working to build relationships with both returning and incoming legislators, scheduling meetings to share our priorities and learn more about theirs.

As you can imagine, this is a lot of work for a small team. We will be working closely with our board and committees to identify which of these are top priorities and will be assembling taskforces and workgroups to help move this work forward. Much of this work happens through our committees, and we would love to have more members at the table. If you are interested in engaging with any of these issues or helping shape our priorities, consider joining one of our committees. We need your expertise and passion.

- Livability & Affordability Committee – First Tuesday of the month at 10:00 AM
- Climate Committee – Third Monday of the month at 1:00 PM
- Education Committee – Third Tuesday of the month, quarterly at 10:00 AM
- Practice Committee – Third Thursday of the month at 11:00 AM
- Historic Resources Committee – Fourth Wednesday of the month at 12:00 PM

Reach out to learn more about getting involved. More to come as we get organized for the months ahead.



Support Your Profession: Invest in APC

Your advocacy matters, and so does your role in shaping the legislative landscape that influences our profession. AIA Washington Council is your advocate in state government, diligently working on key issues that impact the architecture community.

The legislative and regulatory environment is a critical arena that directly affects how we provide professional services. The AIWA Architects Political Committee (APC) is a vital part of our advocacy efforts. It supports lawmakers who champion our priorities, endorsing their campaigns and raising awareness about issues crucial to architects

What APC Does:

- **Supports Advocacy Priorities:** APC backs lawmakers aligned with our advocacy priorities and the values of our profession.
- **Builds Relationships:** By supporting campaigns and engaging with legislators, APC strengthens the relationships between AIWA and lawmakers.
- **Amplifies Your Voice:** APC enables architects to become a powerful voice for the design and construction industry, positively influencing legislative decisions.

We can't do it alone. Your expertise and advocacy are critical for the architectural profession. Investments in APC ensures face-to-face opportunities to educate legislators about our work and provides a platform to advocate for the priorities of Washington architects.



Benefits of Your Investment:

- **Education Opportunities:** Your support enables face-to-face interactions, educating legislators about the architectural profession.
- **Advocacy Platform:** APC provides a platform for architects to advocate for our priorities, ensuring our voices are heard.
- **Political Influence:** By contributing to candidates aligned with our values, APC gives architects a strong political voice in state offices.

How You Can Contribute:

Election season is right around the corner, and there has never been a more important time to support the APC. Your investment in APC is an investment in the future of our profession. Contribute to support candidates who align closely with AIWA's legislative priorities and our shared values.

Visit the [APC Contribution Page](#) to learn more.



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AIA Washington Council serves as the collective voice for and a resource on state government policies that impact the practice of architecture for all architects and the profession through AIA components in Washington State.

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