

Pacific Northwest DREAMS Design Competition

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Hosted by:



Competition Brief

The Pacific Northwest is experiencing a severe housing shortage. For over 50 years, the region has underbuilt for the amount of population increase. Currently, our cities and towns offer few affordable options. The fastest growing demographic of unhoused people in Oregon are those over the age of 60. Families are being pushed out of our cities and towns to far-flung suburbs, leaving our schools with fewer students. Young people are delaying their lives due to the increased cost of homeownership.

We urgently need urban infill housing that is affordable, livable, cost-effective to build, and accommodates existing and new community members.

Reforming our building codes to allow for higher density housing is one pathway to increasing our supply of homes. Both Oregon and Washington have recently reformed their building codes to allow a single stair to meet egress requirements for taller buildings, and there is additional momentum within local jurisdictions to push the height limit even further.

The single-stair building—also known as the “point access block”—is a common mid-rise multifamily housing typology around the world. This building type has been allowed in Seattle for well over 40 years and allowed for over 100 years in Europe. Single-stair buildings offer multiple benefits over the “double-loaded corridor,” including:

1. Unlocked development of small lots, promoting dense infill development
2. Increased units on the same square footage lot
3. More family-sized units within a smaller building footprint
4. Greater natural light and cross ventilation compared to units on double-loaded corridors
5. Reduced construction cost and materials spent on circulation

The PNW DREAMS Design Competition aims to provide Pacific Northwest architecture students with the opportunity to innovate with this housing typology. These design concepts will illustrate what is possible with building code changes and act as a catalyst to changing real-world policy to address our regional housing crisis. With competition site options located in the Inner Eastside neighborhoods of Portland, Oregon, the competition will help us envision how this and other PNW communities can adapt to provide affordable, sustainable, resilient, community-connected, and well-built housing for all.

[Portland: Neighbors Welcome](#) and [Strong Towns PDX](#) are proud to host this competition.

Design Prompt

Teams should design a single-stair multifamily residential building with a height of up to 6 stories and up to 75 feet. Design concepts should reflect a maximum of 4 units per floor per stair. Teams should aim to maximize the number of housing units in the building. See additional details in the "Design Criteria" section.

The design should be sited within one of the below 50' x 100' lots located in the Inner Eastside neighborhoods of Portland, Oregon. See this [Google Map overview](#) of the site options. Design concepts do not need to comply with the zoning requirements of the sites. Teams should indicate their selected site on their submission.

- **Site 1:** 3215 NE 16th Ave, Portland, OR 97212 ([Portland Maps Link](#))
- **Site 2:** 315-317 NE 28th Ave, Portland, OR 97232 ([Portland Maps Link](#))
- **Site 3:** 40th & SE Belmont St, Portland, OR 97214 ([Portland Maps Link](#))
- **Site 4:** 3120 SE 53rd Ave, Portland, OR 97206 ([Portland Maps Link](#))

The site options reflect a range of typical development opportunities across the Inner Eastside neighborhoods. Lots are located within low-density single-family residential neighborhoods, medium-density multifamily neighborhoods, or medium-scale commercial mixed-use neighborhoods. The 50' x 100' lot size is also typical of many areas of Portland. See [this mapping tool](#) for other vacant sites, roughly 50' x 100', within Inner Eastside neighborhoods to understand the potential impact of new single-stair buildings and homes.

Guiding Questions

District-Scale

We are encouraging entrants to adopt a "District-Scale" approach to the competition to introduce students to thinking on multiple scales. Does the design both respect and enhance the neighborhood and district's character? Does the design feel connected to the wider district, both in terms of form and function? Is the design capable of meeting the needs of community members within the district? Is the concept designed with flexibility in mind, able to accommodate different typical infill sites?

Resilient

Many buildings in the US have been in use well past their initial estimated "lifespan." Buildings being built 30-60 years ago, and even those built today are being designed for a climate that no longer exists. The Pacific Northwest will be home to drier summers and more extreme precipitation events. Our region also expects a Megaquake in the next 30-50 years. How does your submission aim to be resilient in the face of our changing climate? How does your design aim to foster community amid natural disasters?

Ecological

Buildings are the second largest source of GHG emissions contributing to climate change, after transportation. In addition, the waste streams from the building industry include many toxic materials. How can your design incorporate building materials, designs, and technologies to enhance energy efficiency, lower GHG emissions, and minimize waste?

Affordable

The Pacific Northwest is suffering from increasing housing costs. The development of higher density infill housing will enhance affordability within the region. Additionally, constructing more cost-effective housing will enable the creation of additional units, thereby enhancing overall housing affordability. How does your submission rely on cost-effective construction techniques, designs, and materials, without compromising quality?

Modular

Development continues to be strained by a lack of qualified tradespeople, increased material costs, and strained finances. Modular and prefabricated components may help with reducing material and labor costs. Prefabricated components can also help by approaching the district-scale. Are there opportunities for your design to incorporate prefabricated and/or modular components?

Rules

READ THESE OFFICIAL RULES PRIOR TO REGISTERING FOR THE COMPETITION.

The Pacific Northwest DREAMS Design Competition (“Competition”) is administered and sponsored by Portland: Neighbors Welcome and Strong Towns PDX (“Sponsor”), and the Competition is governed by these Official Rules (“Rules”).

These Rules form a binding Agreement (“Agreement”) between the Sponsor and all individuals who register for the Competition.

The Competition is made possible with the generous support of Portland: Neighbors Welcome, Strong Towns PDX, Growing Affordable Portland, Richard Sheperd (private), and additional sponsors (collectively, the 'Funders').

1. PARTICIPATION ELIGIBILITY

The Competition is open to individuals who are attending an institution of higher learning based in Oregon or Washington State in the United States of America during the year 2025 and/or during the first 4 months of 2026. Sponsor reserves the right, at any time, to verify eligibility requirements in any manner it deems appropriate. Employees and Directors of the Sponsor and their immediate family members and individuals residing in their same household are not eligible to participate.

2. THE COMPETITION PERIOD

The Competition begins on or after November 1, 2025 at 12:00:01 a.m. Pacific Standard Time (“PST”) and will conclude by June 30, 2026, at 11:59:59 p.m. PST (“Competition Period”). The official dates of the Competition are subject to change at the discretion of the Sponsor and will be announced no later than one (1) calendar week in advance to all participants. The computer of the Sponsor is the official timekeeping device for the Competition.

3. HOW TO REGISTER

To register for the Competition, all participants (“Participants”) need to: (1) visit <https://www.pnwdreams.org> (“Competition Website”), (2) click on the “Register Your Team” registration link to navigate to the Single Stair Design Competition registration form (“Registration Form”), hosted by Google Forms Inc., and (3) complete all requested information on the Registration Form.

By submitting this Registration Form, the Team and its Participants (“Team”) agree to receive emails from Sponsor related to this Competition. Teams may not register with multiple email addresses nor may Teams use any other device or artifice to register multiple times, or as multiple Teams. Any

Team and/or Participant who attempts to register for the same Award Category (as defined below) with multiple email addresses, under multiple identities, or uses any device or artifice to register multiple times will be disqualified and forfeit all prizes won at Sponsor's discretion. Sponsor is not responsible for any change of email address, mailing address, and/or telephone number of a Participant or for any Participant's inability to receive notifications pertaining to the Competition, or to register for the Competition. A Participant may join only one Team. Each Team may submit one design ("Design"). Each Team should consist of two to four Participants.

4. THE COMPETITION

The Competition will consist of one as detailed in Section 5 of these Rules. A Team may submit no more than one Design for each Award Category.

Designs must be uploaded to the Competition Website by April 1, 2026.

A panel of qualified individuals selected by the Sponsor based on their experience and/or expertise in the subject matter ("the Jury") will review the submitted Designs. Officers, directors, members, employees, and agents of the Funders and any of the foregoing persons' immediate family, are prohibited from participating on the Jury panel in the Competition. Members of the Jury, and their immediate family, are prohibited from participating in the Competition.

All Designs submitted for each Award Category will be reviewed and judged anonymously by the Jury with no marking and/or indication as to which Team submitted any Design. The top six Teams receiving the highest scores, in accordance with the "Scoring Criteria" described in Section 9, will be awarded a "Prize". One "First Place Prize" will be awarded to the highest scoring Team. The next two (2) highest-scoring Teams will each receive one "Second Place Prize". The next three (3) highest scoring Teams will each be awarded one "Third Place Prize". See section 11 for Prize amounts.

5. DESIGN CRITERIA

Design submissions must meet the following criteria ("Design Criteria") in order to be considered in the Competition.

Height

Teams must use the following building code assumptions to govern the maximum building height: up to 6 stories, and up to 75 feet.

No habitable uses may occur above the 75 feet height limit threshold, however, stair/elevator overruns, mechanical penthouses, or purely aesthetic features may exceed the 75 feet height limit.

Building Code

A maximum of 4 units per floor, per stair instance (there may be multiple attached or detached buildings with a single stair configuration per parcel).

Interior staircases must be fully enclosed and separated from the hallway/landing; however, open-air exterior staircases are permitted.

Elevators are optional. If provided, they cannot be placed inside an enclosed stairway.

Lot Coverage, Setbacks, Open Space, Unit Requirements, FAR

For the purpose of this competition, typical zoning regulations such as lot coverage, setbacks, FAR, and open space restrictions have been eliminated. However, note that the projects will be scored on their ability to take advantage of the elimination of the second stair to produce sensitive design solutions that provide usable open space, interior courtyards, family-sized units, passive cross ventilation, natural light, maintain privacy, etc.

Parking

There are no parking requirements. Car and bike parking can be provided at the discretion of the Teams.

Population / Unit Type

Families come in different sizes and with different needs. While there is no prescribed unit mix, single stair buildings may present opportunities for larger percentages of large family-sized units and/or novel unit types. Teams are encouraged to explore these possibilities.

Density / Unit Count

We encourage Teams to aim for the maximum number of units possible in the building, while meeting the other criteria.

If a Design does not meet the Design Criteria listed in this Section 5, the Design will automatically be disqualified from the Competition.

6. DESIGN WARRANTIES

By submitting a Design to the Competition you hereby warrant and represent that your Design conforms to the Design requirements set forth herein.

- A Design must not defame, misrepresent, or contain disparaging remarks about Sponsor or its products, or other people, products or companies;
- A Design must not contain trademarks, logos or trade dress owned by others, or advertise or promote any brand or product of any kind, without written permission, or contain any personal identification, such as, personal names, email addresses or street addresses;
- A Design must not contain copyrighted materials owned by others (including, but not limited to photographs, sculptures, paintings and other works of art or images published on or in websites, television, movies or other media without written permission of the owner;

- A Design must not contain materials embodying the names, likenesses, photographs, or other indicia identifying any person, living or dead, other than Participants on the Team submitting the Design, without written permission;
- A Design must not communicate messages or images inconsistent with the positive images and/or goodwill to which Sponsor wishes to associate; and
- A Design must not depict, and cannot itself, be in violation of any law except laws categorically exempted by these Rules.

BY SUBMITTING A DESIGN PARTICIPANTS AND TEAMS ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THEIR DESIGN MAY BE POSTED ON SPONSOR'S WEBSITE, SPONSOR'S SOCIAL MEDIA PAGES, AND/OR ANY OTHER MEDIUM DEEMED TO FURTHER THE SPONSOR'S MISSION, AT SPONSOR'S SOLE DISCRETION.

7. DESIGN SUBMISSIONS

All Designs will be submitted by 11:59:59 PM PST on April 1, 2026 via the Competition Website.

All Design submissions will be submitted on up to three (3) 24" x 36" sheets oriented vertically and uploaded as one (1) PDF file. Max file size: 50 MB PDF.

Submissions should include the following deliverables:

- Site plan showing proposed design. Include a graphic scale and north arrow.
- Floor plans showing unit furniture. Minimum ground floor plan and typical upper floor plan.
- Site section(s) to include the entire parcel and showing the relationship to the surrounding buildings and street.
- Exterior elevations including adjacent context elevations
- Rendering(s) of exterior views in context
- Rendering(s) of interior or indoor-outdoor spaces to convey livability
- Diagrams to convey the design concepts
- Recommended minimum resolution 300 dpi

A summary statement should be included on one of the sheets. The statement should include:

- Description of the project concept and how the design meets the evaluation criteria
- Address of selected site
- Total unit count
- Total stories
- Total stories above grade plane
- Project height
- Gross square footage per floor and for total project
- Floor area ratio
- Lot coverage
- Setbacks (including front setback, rear setback, side setbacks)

K. Amount of bike and car parking provided (if any)

****IN ADDITION** to the Competition Website submission, Teams must also submit a separate PDF to **pnwdreamscompetition@gmail.com** containing a short bio of each Participant on their Team, along with a photo of each Participant for publicity purposes. Participants will also submit a form as described in this Section 7. Designs submitted without the accompanying Participant information will not be considered.

8. SPONSOR'S DISCRETION

Sponsor reserves the right at its absolute and sole discretion to decide whether a Design will be posted to the Sponsor's Website, or otherwise used by the Sponsor. By submitting a Design, you acknowledge that Sponsor has no obligation to use or post any Design.

Submission of a Design grants Sponsor and its agents a non-exclusive, unlimited, worldwide, perpetual, royalty free license and right to publish, use, copy, display, publicly perform, and create derivative works from the Design, and authorize others to do the same, in any way and in any/all media now known or hereafter discovered, and on the Internet and World Wide Web, without limitation, and without consideration to the Team or Participants, with or without attribution.

The Sponsor reserves the right at its sole discretion to cancel the Competition at any time without cause.

9. COMPETITION SCORING CRITERIA AND WINNER SELECTION

Scoring: Teams will submit a Design, and it will be reviewed and scored by the Jury. The Jury will evaluate all eligible Designs based on the following criteria ("Scoring Criteria"). Each criterion will be judged on a scale of 0-10 (10 being a perfect score) and weighted equally. The highest ranked entry will be designated as the Prize winner ("Winner").

Scoring Criteria:

Conceptual Clarity & Design

- Strength of architectural parti
- Coherent relationship between concept, form, and program
- Clarity and intention of single-stair organization
- Consideration of structure, materials, and building services (MEP, trash, mail, etc.)

Life Safety & Code

- Demonstrated understanding of life safety concepts
- Clear, defensible life-safety approach
- Innovation within (or pushing) current building codes

Unit Design & Livability

- Quality of daylighting and natural ventilation strategies
- Flexibility or diversity of unit types for different households
- Consideration to acoustic and visual privacy

Shared Space & Community Design

- Activation of community spaces, stair landings, courtyards, lobbies
- Opportunities for neighborly social interaction
- Thoughtful treatment of unit entry thresholds

Context & Construction

- Response to lot constraints and neighborhood scale
- Relationship to the public realm
- Adaptability across different sites, potential as a scalable housing model
- Construction logic and cost awareness

Environmental Performance & Materiality

- Passive design strategies (solar orientation, shading, envelope)
- Carbon-conscious material consideration (esp. structural systems) and efficiency
- Material durability and lifecycle thinking
- Climate resilience

Sponsor reserves the right to amend the Scoring Criteria at any time.

The Winners will be notified by May 30, 2026 (“Winner Announcement”) by **pnwdreamscompetition@gmail.com**, and later posted on Sponsor’s website. The Winner Announcement may be rescheduled at the Sponsor’s sole discretion.

10. WAIVER AND RELEASE OF CLAIMS

No waiver of any term, provision, or condition of these Rules by the Sponsor, in any one or more instances, shall be deemed to be, or be construed as a general waiver of any such term, provision or condition of these Rules.

By submitting a Design, each Participant and Team agrees that the Design is gratuitous and made without restriction and will not place Sponsor under any obligation. Sponsor is free to disclose or otherwise disclose the ideas contained in the Design on a non-confidential basis to anyone or otherwise use the ideas without any additional compensation to the Participant and/or Team. Each Participant acknowledges that, by acceptance of the Design, Sponsor does not waive any rights to use similar or related ideas previously known to Sponsor, or developed by its employees, or obtained from sources other than the Participant.

11. PRIZE DETAILS

First Place Prize: One (1) \$1,500 USD Prize

Second Place Prize: One (1) \$1,000 USD Prize

Third Place Prize: One (1) \$500 USD Prize

Prizes are non-transferable, except at the sole discretion of the Sponsor. The Sponsor will distribute each Prize award to the Participants designated as “Primary Point of Contact” during the registration process detailed in Section 3. All Prizes shall be awarded in accordance with United States law and other applicable laws. Any and all fees and taxes incurred in the processing, transfer, or delivery of payment of a Prize to Participants will be the responsibility of the Participants. Should Sponsor be required to make such payments in order to complete delivery of a Prize payment, said payments will be deducted from the total Prize money designated for that particular Team. Prizes may be subject to tax withholding by the Sponsor if a Participant is unable to execute and deliver to the Sponsor IRS Form W-9 or W-8 BEN with an appropriate exemption before any Prize is awarded.

If any Prize notification or Prize is returned as non-deliverable, or if a Team or any of its Participants are found to be ineligible, or not in compliance with these Rules, such Prize will be forfeited by the noncompliant Participant(s) only. The Prize money allocated for the ineligible Participant(s) will be distributed equally amongst the remaining eligible Participants of the winning Team. If all Participants of a winning Team are deemed ineligible, the Team will forfeit their Prize, and the second highest scoring Team in that Award Category will be named the Winner.

Except where legally prohibited, each Participant grants (and agrees to confirm that grant in writing) permission to the Sponsor and those acting under the Sponsor’s authority the right to the use of his/her name, photograph, video recording, likeness, voice, image and biographical information and statements, and the Design for advertising, trade, publicity and promotional purposes without additional compensation, in all media now known or hereafter discovered, worldwide, and on the Internet and World Wide Web, without notice, review or approval.

12. INDEMNIFICATION AND LIMITATION OF LIABILITY

Each Participant agrees to indemnify, defend, and hold harmless the Sponsor, Funders, and their officers, directors, and employees from and against any liability for any injuries, losses or damages of any kind to persons, including death, or property resulting in whole or in part, directly or indirectly, from acceptance, possession, misuse or use of any Prize, or participation in this Competition, or Competition-related activities, or use of a Design.

By submitting a Design, a Team and its Participants warrant and represent that the Design is: (a) the Team’s original work, (b) has not been previously published, (c) has no previous awards, (d) does not infringe upon the copyrights, trademarks, rights of privacy, publicity or other intellectual property, or other rights of any person or entity; (e) that the Team has obtained permission from

any person(s) whose name, likeness or voice is used in the Design; and (f) that publication of the Design via various media including Web posting will not infringe on the rights of any third party. Participants agree to indemnify, defend, and hold harmless the Sponsor, Funders, and their officers, directors, and employees from any claim to the contrary.

THE TOTAL AGGREGATE LIABILITY OF SPONSOR FOR ANY CLAIMS, CAUSES OF ACTION, DISPUTES OR DEMANDS ARISING FROM, RELATING TO, OR IN CONNECTION WITH THIS AGREEMENT, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO SPONSOR'S BREACH OF ANY TERM OF THIS AGREEMENT AND/OR SPONSOR'S NEGLIGENCE OR OTHER TORTIOUS CONDUCT AND/OR ANY DECISION BY SPONSOR TO DISQUALIFY A TEAM AND/OR TERMINATION OF THIS AGREEMENT, SHALL BE LIMITED TO \$1000.

13. PRIVACY NOTICE

Email addresses, mailing addresses (other than city and state), and phone numbers of Participants provided to the Sponsor will be used for the purpose of contacting Participants about their participation in this Competition and otherwise treated in accordance with Sponsor's privacy policy.

Email addresses, phone numbers and any other information provided to Sponsor will not be sold or otherwise provided to any third party. If a Team is selected as a Winner, the names of all Participants from that Team, and their cities, and states of residence may be included in a publicly available list of Winners.

14. GENERAL PROVISIONS

Neither Sponsor nor its agencies are responsible for not receiving Designs, no matter what the reason even if known in advance, or other errors of any kind whether human, mechanical, electronic or network, incorrect or inaccurate capture of a registration, or the failure to capture any such information. Persons who tamper with any aspect of the Competition, as solely determined by the Sponsor, or who attempt to participate with multiple email addresses or under multiple identities will be disqualified. Any use of robotic, automatic, macro, programmed or like registration methods will void all such registrations, and disqualify any Participant using such methods. Should any portion of the Competition be, in Sponsor's sole opinion, compromised by virus, worms, bugs, non-authorized human intervention, technical failures, or other causes which, in the sole opinion of the Sponsor, corrupt or impair the administration, security, fairness or proper play, or submission of Proposals, Sponsor reserves the right at its sole discretion to suspend, modify or terminate the Competition. (VOID in states and territories where different local rules apply). In case of dispute, the authorized subscriber of the email or cell phone account used to register for the Competition at the actual time of registration will be deemed to be the Participant and must comply with these Rules.

15. GOVERNING LAW AND ARBITRATION

Except where prohibited, each participant agrees that any and all disputes, claims and causes of action arising out of or connected with the Competition or any prize awarded shall be resolved individually, without resort to any form of class action. The Competition shall be governed according to the laws of the state of California. Any claims against the Competition and/or Sponsor shall be submitted to binding arbitration heard by a single arbitrator in accordance with the American Arbitration Association (except as modified herein). The parties shall each bear their own costs and attorneys' fees in any arbitration proceeding. Any counterclaim not brought within thirty (30) days after receipt of the arbitration notice shall be barred. The arbitration shall be conducted in-person, in the state of California. Unless otherwise specified herein, the arbitrator may award any relief that he or she deems proper, including but not limited to equitable relief. The award shall be final, binding, and enforceable in any court of competent jurisdiction.

16. WINNER ANNOUNCEMENT AND LIST

The Designs will be reviewed and scored, and the Winners will be selected by May 30, 2026. The names of the Participants for each Team named as a Winner will be posted to the Competition Website within one month of when the Winners are notified and will remain available for no fewer than 90 days following the announcement of the Winners.