

2025 ADAPTIVE REUSE DESIGN COMPETITION



GUIDELINES

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EVENT INTRODUCTION

We are proud to present the third annual Whatcom Housing Alliance Design Competition, this year centered on the theme of Adaptive Reuse. This competition invites designers, architects, students, and engaged community members to explore bold, creative solutions for transforming underutilized spaces within Whatcom County neighborhoods. From vacant commercial buildings to aging single-family homes this initiative challenges participants to envision tangible, affordable housing solutions that meet the needs of our growing and diverse community.

By working with real sites located throughout Bellingham, this competition aims to showcase innovative design approaches that fit seamlessly into existing neighborhoods while promoting long-term affordability and sustainability. Adaptive reuse not only reduces environmental impact through the repurposing of existing structures and materials, it also offers a framework for more resilient and inclusive communities. These design proposals will serve as catalysts for conversation, inspiration for local development, and models for reimagining how housing can evolve in place.

This program is made possible with generous support from the National Association of Realtors (NAR). Through their advocacy, education, and commitment to housing access, the NAR continues to champion efforts that strengthen communities and expand opportunities for all. The Adaptive Reuse Design Competition is one example of this shared commitment to addressing the housing crisis in Washington State and across the country.

Join us in rethinking Whatcom County's built environment. Let's repurpose, reimagine, and reuse our built environment, creating lasting, sustainable change, one house at a time.

ADAPTIVE REUSE OVERVIEW

WHAT IS ADAPTIVE REUSE?

Adaptive Reuse allows for the repurposing of underutilized spaces, like vacant commercial buildings, parking structures, or older single family homes, into affordable, diverse housing options. This transformation of existing spaces helps ensure preservation of significant/historic buildings, provides environmentally friendly building alternatives, can be cost effective, and gives a community forward path to fighting the housing crisis that Washington State is facing today.

CLASSIFICATIONS OF ADAPTIVE REUSE:

RENOVATION

When minimal changes are made to the exterior of a building but the interior is completely rebuilt or refurbished to serve a new purpose.

FACADISM

When the majority of a building is demolished and rebuilt but the front facing facade is left largely unchanged.

INFRASTRUCTURAL

The adaptation of railways, highways, industrial plants, and other industrial or commercial infrastructure into spaces that serve a new purpose.

INTEGRATION

The creation of a new structure around or attached to an existing building.

PRESERVATION

In the case of historic buildings, when the aesthetics of the interior and exterior are changed only in the capacity need to meet building code and efficiency updates

Adaptive reuse can take many shapes and sizes. However, for the intents of this competition, adaptive reuse must include housing options. Mixed use buildings are encouraged, where fitting with a community's needs, but all designs must encourage the implementation of new housing units within the space chosen. Specific details on design requirements can be found on [page 5](#).



COMPETITION TIMELINE

JULY 1ST

LAUNCH

The Design Competition is now available to the public. Questions can be submitted and registration is open!

JULY 16TH

QUESTION DEADLINE

Submit any questions to scottp@sustainableconnections.org. Questions will not be answered individually. Do not expect an answer at this time.

JULY 31ST

FAQ AVAILABLE

Answers to any question submitted can now be found at whatcomhousingalliance.org

AUGUST 29TH

REGISTRATION DEADLINE

Secure your spot in the competition by registering your intent to submit a design. This is a mandatory step and the only way to gain access to the submission portal. **Fee is due at this time (\$40)**. Registration will close at **11:59 PM**.

OCTOBER 1ST

DESIGN SUBMISSION DEADLINE

All designs must be submitted via the submission portal by **11:59 PM**. The jury will begin deliberation at this point.

OCTOBER 8TH

PUBLIC VOTING OPENS

People's Choice Award Voting opens at **9:00 AM**.

OCTOBER 14TH

PUBLIC VOTING CLOSES

DURING HOUSING WEEK

Voting will close at **11:59 PM**

OCTOBER 17TH

AWARDS PRESENTATION AND CELEBRATION

DURING HOUSING WEEK

Winners will be announced during this celebratory event. **Specific event details to be released at a later time.**

PROPOSAL SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

ELIGIBILITY

Eligible participants include **all design and construction professionals**, from interns and students to licensed architects and builders practicing in Washington.

Importantly, the design proposal should be **constructible** and follow the requirements outlined in this document.

Finally, we will be accepting **old and new designs alike**. Applicants may submit already-designed Adaptive Reuse Housing that meets the competition criteria.

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

This is a Two-Step Process:

1. All designers must signal their intent to submit by registering. This must be completed by 11:59 PM on August 29, 2025. The link to register can be found at: whatcomhousingalliance.org Designers submitting more than one design must register for each design they intend to submit, individually. **Registration is required in order to access the submission portal.** Entry fee is also due at this time (\$40 per design)

2. All finalized designs must be submitted via the submission portal before 11:59 PM on October 1, 2025.

Submissions are limited to three designs per designer or firm.

AWARD

The winners of the competition will be announced at the Adaptive Reuse Design Competition Awards Ceremony during Housing Week. First Place will be selected by a jury of local housing stakeholders, and the People's Choice Award will go to the most voted by the public. Juried deliberation will occur the week prior to public voting opening.

Notification: You will be notified by email by **October 13, 2025** if your design has been selected for an award, and if your attendance at the ceremony will be necessary, but all designers are encouraged to attend.

ONE WINNER WILL BE CHOSEN PER AWARD:

* **\$3,500** Juried Award

* **\$1,500** People's Choice Award

Please email any questions to the contact at the end of this document by **July 16th**. We will share responses publicly on our website no later than **July 31st**.

DESIGN REQUIREMENTS

SITE CHOICE

Designers can choose any underutilized site within Bellingham to reimagine (definitions and examples of adaptive reuse can be found on [page 2](#)). Designs that encourage multi-family, affordable housing are encouraged.

Existing structures and their features/character should be preserved to the greatest extent whenever possible. Additionally, designs should be contextually sensitive. **Address of site and lot dimensions** must be included in final submissions.

ZONING & BUILDING CODES

Projects must comply with all applicable zoning requirements and building codes (including, but not limited to fire and accessibility standards) for the selected location and building type.

Designs must also **bring existing buildings up to current compliance with structural and energy codes**, if applicable.

The Adaptive Reuse design should reflect a “presentation plan” quality as opposed to a construction design. It must also have the following elements, at a minimum, to be considered in the competition:

KITCHEN -

includes food storage, food prep space, sink with running water, and a permanent cooking appliance.

BATHROOM -

includes toilet, sink, and shower/tub with running water.

SLEEPING AREA-

minimum of one sleeping area (includes studio designs).



Strong Towns: Sanphillippo (2016)



SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

All Submissions must include the following:

1. DIGITAL DESIGN BOARDS

- a. Arch D Size (24" x 36") - **Two Boards (max)**
- b. 300 ppi (min)
- c. PDF format only
- d. Adaptive Reuse **Rendering**
- e. Floor Plan(s)
- f. Site Plan
- g. Building Elevations
- h. Address of site & dimensions
- i. Additional graphics to describe key features of the design proposal, as applicable
- j. Must NOT indicate any information related to an individual or team's identity.

2. ACCOMPANYING NARRATIVE

- a. 750 words max
- b. PDF format
- c. Project title (3 word max)
- d. Describe in detail **how the project addresses the scoring criteria** (see Page 7 for more information).
- e. Describe the significance of the selected site.
- f. Must NOT indicate any information related to an individual or team's identity.

3. SHOWCASE IMAGE

Images will be used for promotional materials and serve as a preview for the design. The image must not indicate any information related to an individual or team's identity.

Upload **one image that best showcases the project** (may be from requirement 1).

The image must be...

- a. At least 2000x1680 pixels
- b. Oriented horizontally
- c. Maximum of 10MB
- d. PNG or JPG format

Examples of Showcase Images:



2023 ADU Competition Winner:
Elm ADU | [bundle] design studio



2024 Middle Housing Competition
Winner: the grove | studio hagen

SCORING CRITERIA

THE FOLLOWING SCORING CRITERIA IS DESIGNED TO EVALUATE DESIGN SUBMISSIONS IN A WAY THAT REFLECTS OUR COMMUNITY GOALS AND VALUES.

INNOVATION & CREATIVITY (25%):

Submissions should showcase adaptive reuse designs that exemplify innovation, creativity, and thoughtful transformation of existing spaces. Site selection should be made attentively and the design should actively work towards creating more livable neighborhoods. Designs should move beyond conventional renovation to explore bold, future-forward approaches to housing. Successful entries may incorporate sustainable technologies, imaginative spatial reconfigurations, resourceful material reuse, and inventive design solutions that highlight the full potential of adaptive reuse.

CONSTRUCTABILITY (25%):

Submissions should reflect adaptive reuse that is not only imaginative but also feasible within real-world constraints. Any significant anticipated structural retrofits necessary to bring original structures up to current compliance should be addressed.

SUSTAINABILITY & RESILIENCE (25%):

Submissions should feature designs that place a strong emphasis on sustainability and energy efficiency. These designs should incorporate key elements such as effective insulation, integration of renewable energy sources, water efficiency measures, and resilience against potential hazards. Designs should also consider the use of sustainable materials, waste reduction strategies, and overall ecological footprint reduction. A dedication to sustainability can be shown through materials chosen, energy sources used, water conservation efforts, adaptability and durability of the home, etc.

AFFORDABILITY (25%):

Submissions should be economically viable and efficient, considering factors such as construction costs, ongoing maintenance, and operational expenses. We are seeking inventive and cost-effective approaches that not only serve the community they reside in but also minimize costs and promote affordability where possible.

CONTACT INFO



[facebook.com/whatcomhousingalliance](https://www.facebook.com/whatcomhousingalliance)



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