

COMMUNITY DESIGN LAB FOR NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSING

DESIGN BRIEF

cityofboise.org/PDS



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INTRODUCTION

The City of Boise is initiating a Neighborhood-Scale Design Lab that explores possibilities for housing typologies suited for Boise neighborhoods.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR BOISE

Boise has a long history of neighborhood-scale housing. Many of our neighborhoods such as the North End and West End were built with diverse housing types that today we call “middle housing.” Yet in recent decades, new examples have been rare. When we picture middle housing now, our minds often turn to older Boise neighborhoods or to examples from other cities.

This lab challenges our community to reimagine middle housing in Boise: How can infill fit within all Boise neighborhoods?

In addition, this effort will also identify ways to improve our zoning code. We will work with the community to identify code amendments that result in more housing diversity across the city. Recommendations and findings from the lab will inform a future Zoning Ordinance Amendment (targeted for 2027), helping the city refine its code to better enable middle housing and expand housing choices for Boise residents.



CONTEXT

Like many communities across the United States, the City of Boise is struggling with housing affordability: rents and home prices have continued to rise, and mortgage loans have remained high.

In 2021, the city undertook a comprehensive Housing Needs Analysis to better understand the reality of the situation and found that at least 2,000 new homes are needed each year over the next ten years. Further, it was discovered that 47% of these new homes must accommodate households making 80% or less of Area Median Income.¹ Despite this demand, high building costs² and a local focus on single-family products have complicated the delivery of adequate housing options even in the market-rate housing segment. As a result, Boise housing construction has consistently fallen short of projected annual needs by 300-800 units.

Recent permitting data suggests some of these trends may be shifting. Since 2018, permits for multi-family and neighborhood-scale homes have increased across Ada County,³ and within the first year of Boise's adoption of its new zoning code, almost 70 percent of permitted units within the city were categorized as such. Unfortunately, this positive number was heavily influenced by a few large-scale, multifamily developments in mixed-use areas. Thus, despite the promise of these trends, neighborhood-scale housing has comprised only about 6 percent of all units approved.

Implementing housing “in the middle” is critical- historically, the construction of dwelling types such as duplexes, triplexes, cottage courts, and townhouses helped neighborhood vitality and provided housing options for differing income levels, all the while catalyzing community hubs and public amenities.

According to the city's Council Data Almanac, neighborhood-scale housing makes up about 12-15% of homes across all neighborhoods and a key organizing principle of the 2023 zoning code update was to encourage this variety across the city's neighborhoods to maintain vitality and housing options as the city grows. However, there are challenges that come with translating the one-size-fits-all regulations of a zoning code to the unique context of a neighborhood, block, or corner.

This Design Lab will explore the possibilities for increasing the availability, variety, and quality of neighborhood-scale housing in Boise.

GOALS

This lab seeks to engage a wide range of participants and encourage resident involvement in designing housing that contributes to both affordability and the unique identity of neighborhoods in Boise. As a method of promoting ongoing collaboration in the planning process, submissions will be used to drive more informed evaluation and future amendment of zoning form standards in support of healthy neighborhood development.

The Design Lab aims to:

- **Increase Variety:** Showcase how middle or neighborhood-scale housing can be designed in a variety of neighborhoods, development eras, and site conditions.
- **Improve Affordability:** Provide greater access to housing at all levels of affordability without the use of public subsidy.
- **Promote Climate Action and Resilience:** Integrate resilience to local and regional climate impacts.
- **Foster Design Excellence:** Uplift and inspire quality design within Boise neighborhoods.

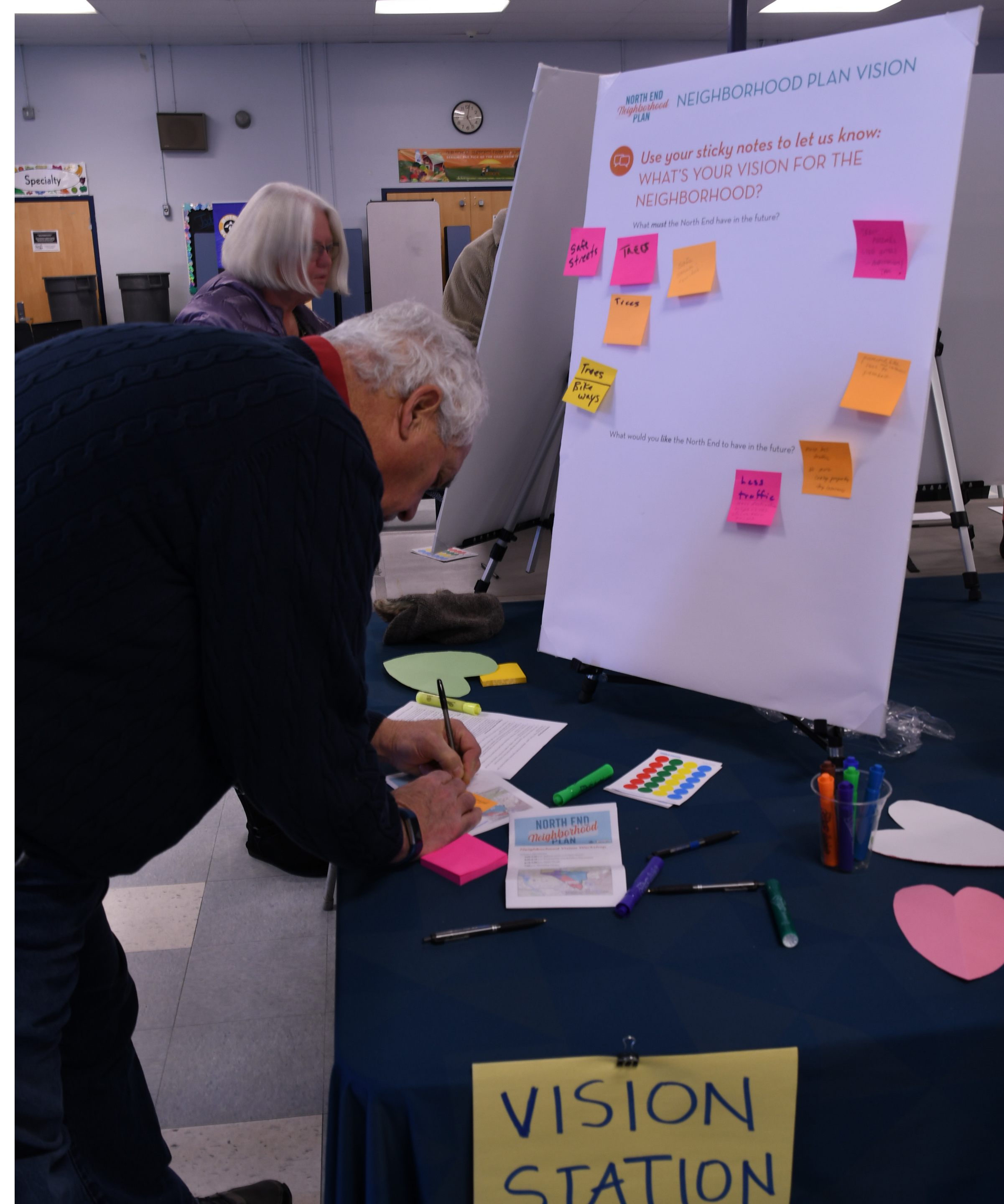


ELIGIBILITY

This opportunity is open to individuals and teams residing in Idaho. All team members must be at least 18 years of age. Boise City Planning & Development Services does not discriminate in its programs and activities on the basis of race, religion, national origin, sex, age, sexual orientation, gender identity and/or disability. Multidisciplinary teams are encouraged. Team submissions by more than one entrant will receive a 5 Point bonus in addition to the Judging Criteria below.

WHY YOU SHOULD PARTICIPATE

This is an opportunity to influence Boise's evolving neighborhood character while working in cross-industry teams. The Design Lab offers a low-barrier platform for idea exploration, from testing innovative housing concepts to envisioning alternative zoning forms, with the potential for work to be displayed in the Gallery. All qualifying submissions will be featured on the City website, and included in future publications. It's a chance to contribute your professional voice and creative vision to Boise's design dialogue!



PROGRAM

Entries will propose a 3-12 unit housing solution for one of the given sites. The solution will utilize one of the housing types permitted by the 2023 City of Boise Zoning Code: triplex, fourplex, cottage village, or small apartments. Proposals should either demonstrate compliance with the City's use standards or explicitly demonstrate a challenge to these standards. (See Resource 1: Design Standards)

Desirable Building Outcomes:

- Methods that lower construction cost.
- Methods to lower operating consumption (water, trash, energy systems).
- Use of local/regional healthy, low carbon materials.
- Awareness of whole building lifecycle – maintenance and end of life deconstruction.
- Use of natural systems such as daylighting, ventilation, and connection to nature.
- Innovative uses of space and arrangements of units.

Desirable Neighborhood Outcomes:

- Additional amenities at the neighborhood-scale such as neighborhood cafes and community space
- Increased variety of housing types and sizes.
- Accessible to a variety of income levels.
- Walkable human-scale connectivity.
- Gathering spaces and public spaces.
- Responsive to aesthetic qualities of neighborhood.

Questions to Consider

- *How does the concept of public/private space change in the context of a neighborhood-scale housing?*
- *Are there opportunities to provide shared amenities both to residents of the new housing proposal and residents of the neighborhood ?*
- *Can the opportunities of shared community space within neighborhood-scale housing increase the possibilities in a given neighborhood?*

RESOURCES

Proposals should demonstrate compliance with the following document.

Proposals may explicitly demonstrate a challenge to 3 General Standards and 3 Housing-Type Specific Standards.

[View Design Standards](#)

Additional Resources:

- [Boise Zoning Code](#)
- [Table of Allowed Uses](#)
- [Neighborhood Housing Design Guide - City of Boise Planning & Development Services](#)

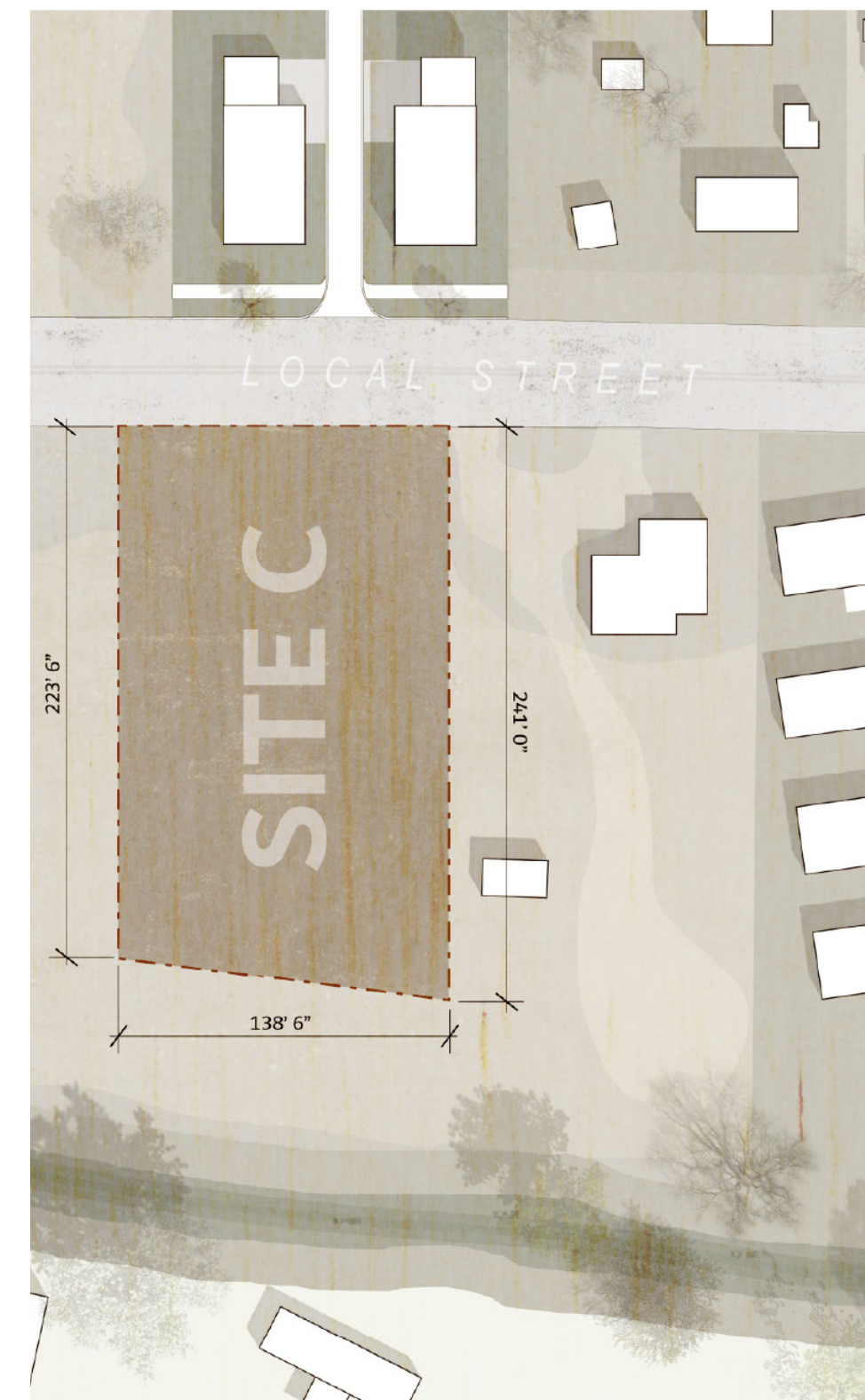
✱ *Entrants: Please save and refer to the Design Standards.*



SITE SELECTION

The following Site Options are available to choose from.

[View Site Information](#)



* Entrants: Please save and refer to the Site Information.

AWARDS & PRIZES

The Urban Land Institute, in partnership with the City of Boise, will award cash prizes to the top three winning proposals and four additional honorable mentions. All submissions will be published on our website and in future publications, and will be featured in the City of Boise Housing Design Gallery.

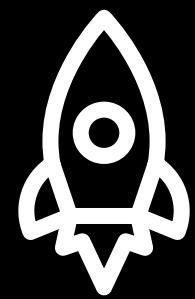
 **1st place \$6,000**

 **2nd place \$4,000**

 **3rd place \$2,500**

 **Honorable Mentions \$1K each**
*Sustainability, Affordability, Ingenuity, Visitability,
Neighborhood Choice*

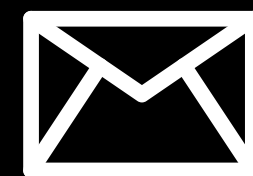
IMPORTANT DATES



January 15th 2026

Event Launch. Attendance is optional. Virtual Attendance option available.

[Free Event Registration](#)



April 1st 2026

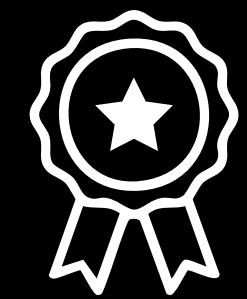
Submission Deadline. See Submission Instructions and Requirements below.



April 13th 2026

Housing Week Kickoff.

[Housing Week Events](#)



April 17th 2026

Awards Ceremony. All entrants are invited to register.

[Housing Week Events](#)

JURY

The jury will be announced in January, and will include representatives from:

➤ Planning

➤ Neighborhood
groups

➤ Architecture &
Urban Design

➤ University
Programs

➤ Economic
Development

➤ Housing
Development

➤ Arts & History

➤ Construction &
Building Materials
Specialists

JUDGING CRITERIA (JUROR DISCRETION)

Successful designs will demonstrate creativity and promote beauty via the skillful deployment of formal/material compositions configurations that are well-resolved and accentuate positive aspects of the given neighborhood. The submission should include a well-informed and spatially adept living arrangements. All designs should acknowledge the particularities of a given neighborhood and provide ideas for how dwelling and neighborhood might contribute to one another. Multidisciplinary teams are encouraged. Team submissions by more than one entrant will receive a 5 Point bonus.

_____	Design Concept (20 pts) <i>Clarity, Innovation, Persuasiveness, Follow-through to affect the project.</i>
_____	Design Creativity (20 pts) <i>Ambition, Craft, Insight into design standards.</i>
_____	Design Feasibility (20 pts) <i>Constructability/strength of the technical idea, affordability inherent in the proposition.</i>
_____	Attention to Neighborhood Context (20 pts) <i>Proportion, Scale, Style, Materials and Color, Use-sensitivity.</i>
_____	Presentation (20 pts) <i>Clarity, Quality of graphics, Persuasiveness of imagery.</i>
_____	TOTAL (out of 100 points possible)
+ _____	Team Bonus (5 pts) Team Submission (Yes/No)

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

All submissions will be Digital.

Please submit via this link:

[Submit Here](#)

SUBMISSION CLOSES WEDNESDAY, April 1st 2026 AT 11:59 PM MST.

Late entries will not be accepted.

Note: The City will manage all gallery displays. Printing of all submissions is not guaranteed and will be determined at the City's discretion based on available printing budget. Higher-scoring submissions may be prioritized for gallery displays.

Depending on printing resources available, the first page of each submission may be prioritized for gallery display.



SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Eligible submissions will consist of the following documents:

PDF IMAGE FILE

#1

Image Requirements:

- Single PDF file shall consist of a maximum of four (4) - 24"x36" pages horizontally oriented.
- Please include first and last names of entrants or the firm name. Only include identifying information in the lower right corner of each page.
- Name the file as follows:
boise_design_lab_submission_2026_lastname(s)
- Files larger than 100 megabytes will not be accepted.

Drawings Required *(Please dimension and label all drawings):*

- Site Analyses: Studies of contextual place, ranging in scale from regional to parcel. Historical and cultural context of place.
- Precedent Analyses
- Project diagrams
- Site plan: Illustrate a variety of mobility systems including bikes, pedestrians, motor vehicles, service vehicles (i.e. fire and solid waste.)
- Floor plans
- Building Elevations
- Site and building Sections
- 3D Perspectives
- Any relevant conceptual and iterative design drawings

RECORD OF NEIGHBORHOOD DESIGN ENGAGEMENT

#2

- **Purpose:** Engaging the community is a key part of the design process that is intended to allow residents, property owners, businesses, and organizations an opportunity to learn about the project design, and to provide feedback. Submissions not including a Record of Neighborhood Design Engagement will not be accepted.
- **Criteria:** Design Engagement can encompass a wide variety of approaches to sharing preliminary design work and gathering feedback throughout the process. We invite innovation and creative ways to meaningfully involve the community in the design process. Examples of engagement include gathering feedback through comments on social media posts, video calls, email correspondence, and in-person presentations. In the Site Information you will find information on how to get in contact with community groups applicable to each neighborhood.

➤ **Materials:** As a part of Design Engagement, the entrant shall share with the community preliminary versions of drawings listed in the Submission Requirements.

➤ **Record of Neighborhood Meeting(s):** The entrant shall complete and submit to the City a detailed summary of community engagement discussions. This will include:

A written detailed summary of the approach(es) to gathering feedback. How did you share your materials and communicate the design intent? What feedback did you receive from the community? What changes to the design were made as a result of the feedback?

Note: Community members will have the opportunity to vote on the Housing Week Submissions for the *'Neighborhood Choice'* Award.

* **Consent for publication**

Upon submission the entrant will grant permission to use the drawings and information in future materials.

Email all questions to

kduclos@cityofboise.org



[**cityofboise.org/PDS**](http://cityofboise.org/PDS)