

2026

STUDENT PLANNING & DESIGN COMPETITION



**AMERICAN
PLANNING
ASSOCIATION**



About the Student Planning & Design Competition

Co-sponsored by the American Planning Association's (APA) Urban Design and Preservation Division, Divisions Council, and Student Representatives Council, the APA presents the 2026 Annual Student Planning & Design Competition (SPDC), which will conclude with finalist presentations before a jury and an awards ceremony at the 2026 National Planning Conference (NPC26) in Detroit, Michigan.

Now in its ninth year, the competition invites multidisciplinary teams of students pursuing degrees in urban planning, urban design, public policy, architecture, landscape architecture, and real estate development to create innovative planning and design proposals for a site in the NPC26 host city. The competition engages students in planning and designing real-world spaces to continue APA's ongoing effort to provide leadership in creating vital communities. Through excellence in planning, APA aims to equip emerging professionals with the tools and support needed to meet the challenges of growth and change.

Two juries, composed of experienced practitioners and emerging planning professionals, will use the selection criteria described below to evaluate competition entries. An initial jury will select the finalists, and a final jury will choose the winner at NPC26. Jury members will award points for clearly expressed originality, comprehensive approaches, and well-articulated, actionable strategies that demonstrate innovation, best practices, and thought-provoking ideas. Both juries will favor teams proposing equitable and innovative policy and design solutions that address the surrounding community's needs for housing, employment, and public spaces.

For 2026, the SPDC prompt materials are organized in a typical Request for Proposal (RFP) format. More information about the competition can be found in the SPDC Guide and Process section of this prompt.

About the Student Planning & Design Competition	1
Request for Proposal: SPDC Small Area Plan Concepts.....	4
About the Site	6
Required Proposal Elements.....	14
Existing Conditions Analysis	14
Framework Vision	15
CORE DEVELOPMENT AREA Plan Design	16
Implementation Plan.....	18
Hors Catégorie	18
Submission Format.....	20
Resources, Reference Materials, and Useful Links	21
SPDC 2026 Guide and Process	24
Awards and Recognition	24
Initial Selection	25
Finalist Presentations @ NPC26.....	26
Final Jury Score.....	27
Questions & Mentorship Session	27
Note on Boundaries.....	27
Commonly Asked Questions.....	28
Disclaimer.....	30
About APA	30

Competition Schedule

August 12th, 2025	Project site announcement
September 15th, 2025	Competition Prompt Released and Registration Begins
September 15th, 2025	Q&A Portal opens to receive questions. Responses posted biweekly on a rolling basis
December 5th, 2025	Registration Deadline. All registrations must be complete by 11:59 PM Eastern Q&A Portal closes at 11:59 PM Eastern
January 5th, 2026	Registered teams may begin submitting proposals
February 6th, 2026	Proposal entry deadline. All proposals must be submitted by 11:59 PM Eastern
February 13th, 2026	Initial jury deliberation begins
March 16th, 2026	Finalist notification
April 25th – 28th, 2026	Finalist presentations at NPC26

Request for Proposal: SPDC Small Area Plan Concepts

Student teams shall propose a small-area plan concept that reimagines the Davison-Schoolcraft & Joe Louis Greenway Study Area site. This is an opportunity to improve open space connections within this section of the JLG, harmonize conflicting land uses (especially industrial), increase employment opportunities, recognize and celebrate local history and architecture, promote greater equity, and consider policies that enhance overall well-being. Proposals must include a needs analysis, policy statements, site plans, 3D drawings and renderings related to the proposals, and an implementation plan.

Student Team Qualifications & Capabilities

Real-life planning practice involves cooperation and collaboration among professionals from different disciplines. The SPDC encourages planning students to collaborate with students from related fields such as landscape architecture, civil engineering, transportation, etc., to develop a holistic, place-based proposal. Team qualifications and standards are as follows:

- Teams must have a minimum of three members and a maximum of five members.
- All team members must be enrolled as students at a college or university for the entire duration of the competition and actively participate in coursework during at least one semester between Fall 2025 and Spring 2026.
- All team members must be registered as student members with APA. Student membership is free; [you can join at “Join as a Student Member.” \(planning.org\)](https://planning.org/join-as-a-student-member).
- Professors may not join or lead SPDC teams. However, professors are encouraged to offer guidance and review materials.
- Both undergraduate and graduate (master’s and doctorate) students are eligible and encouraged to participate. High school students are not eligible to participate on a SPDC team.
- International participation is welcome; however, APA cannot guarantee additional travel assistance or accommodations to attend NPC26.

- Teams must designate a team leader to act as the main representative for the team's proposal efforts and as the primary liaison between APA and the team.
- Multiple teams from the same university or program may submit proposals; however, they may not coordinate or share any materials with each other. Students may only join one team, regardless of their university affiliation.
- At least two team members, including the team leader, must plan and be prepared to present the team's proposal in person at NPC26 in Detroit. Only finalist teams will be invited to present at NPC26.
- Finalist teams must sign APA's Code of Conduct before attending NPC26.
- This prompt may be incorporated into a class syllabus for academic credit, and teams may modify their proposals to meet additional course requirements. However, SPDC juries will evaluate submissions **solely** based on the criteria outlined in this prompt.
- **CRITICAL:** *Teams may not conduct public engagement activities or surveys of current city residents, businesses, or property owners. This rule helps prevent confusion and disruptions for local stakeholders who may have participated in earlier planning events and avoids unwanted contact from student teams. Additionally, to maintain fairness and protect local residents' privacy, in-person site visits are highly discouraged. Direct any related questions to students@planning.org.*

Student Team Leader Requirements

- Throughout the entire competition, the team leader must be enrolled and actively engaged in an eligible planning degree program. Planning degree programs are eligible if they are accredited by the Planning Accreditation Board (PAB) or if they qualify as a planning degree program for AICP certification purposes. To verify eligibility for non-PAB-accredited programs, use the worksheet at:
<https://www.planning.org/media/document/9227010/>.
- If their team is selected as a finalist, the team leader must present the proposal in person at NPC26, which will be held in Detroit, from April 25 to April 28, 2026.
- The team leader must serve as the sole point of contact between the team and APA.

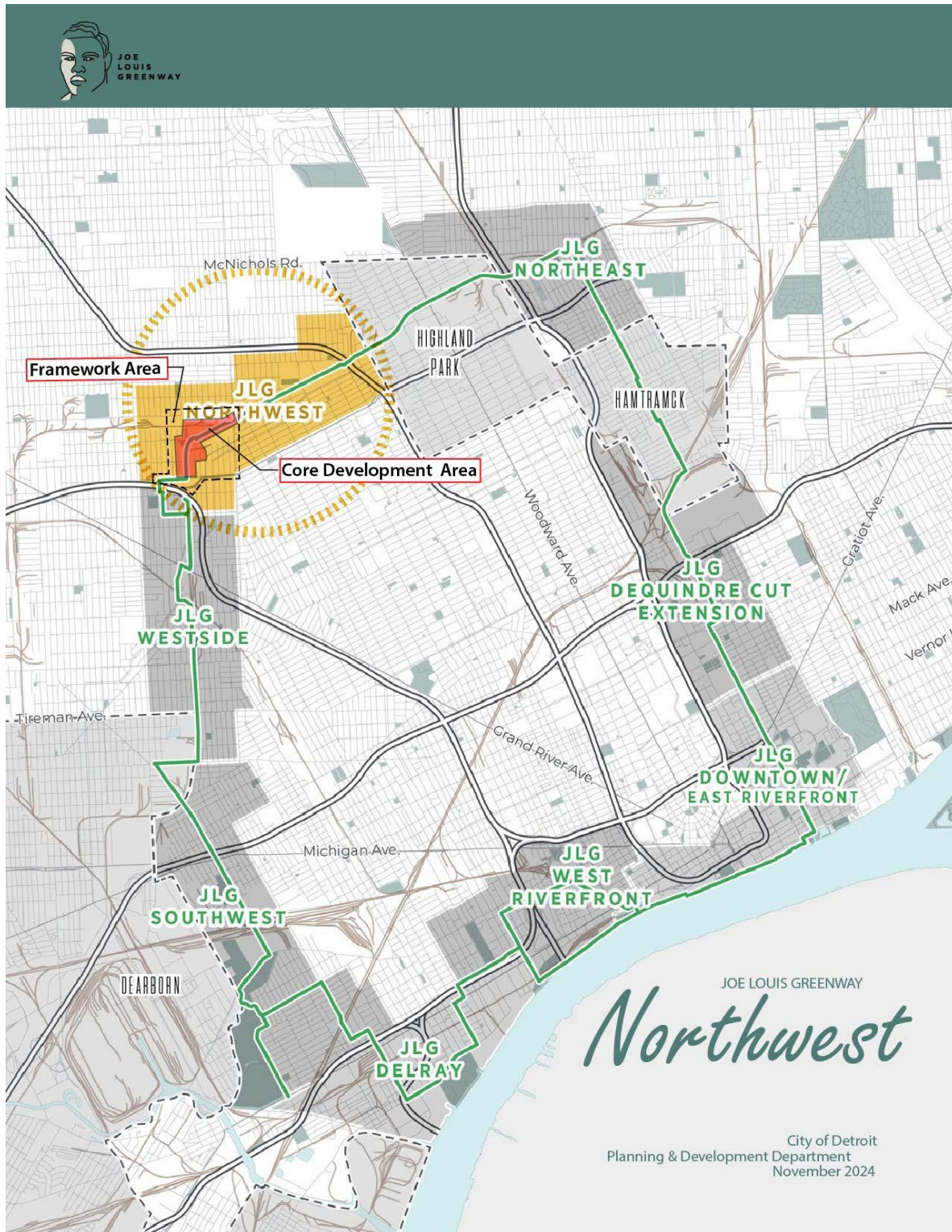
About the Site

The competition's small area plan concept site is an assemblage of primarily publicly owned properties on both sides of a recently completed section of the Joe Louis Greenway (JLG), a recreational pathway that connects Detroit's neighborhoods, businesses, people and parks. The site is anchored by the Davison Yard Site to the south, Intervale-Roselawn Park to the north, and several industrial properties fronting the JLG to the northeast.

Catalyzed by the JLG, the site presents an exciting opportunity to focus on economic revitalization, affordable housing, job creation, and the coordination of land use in open spaces, historic neighborhoods, and industrial areas. The small area plan concept proposal will address the following study boundaries that depict two levels of planning and development within the site, as shown below in FIGURES 0-1 and 0-2:

1. The approximately 62-acre **CORE DEVELOPMENT AREA or the site.**
2. The approximately 305-acre **FRAMEWORK AREA or Area of Influence.**

FIGURE 0-1: Location of site location within Detroit's JLG Neighborhood Planning *Study*.





This RFP seeks concept designs for the **CORE DEVELOPMENT AREA** (the Site). This area includes the parcels around the recently finished section of the JLG, large vacant industrial lots, and all right-of-way and sidewalk areas right next to the CORE DEVELOPMENT AREA boundary. The site also contains the former Andrew Young High School and Intervale-Roselawn Park. The **FRAMEWORK AREA** (Area of Influence) surrounds the CORE DEVELOPMENT AREA. It features several diverse neighborhoods with different building types, small businesses, light industrial uses, a City of Detroit Public Works facility, and the Davison Street - I-96 interchange.

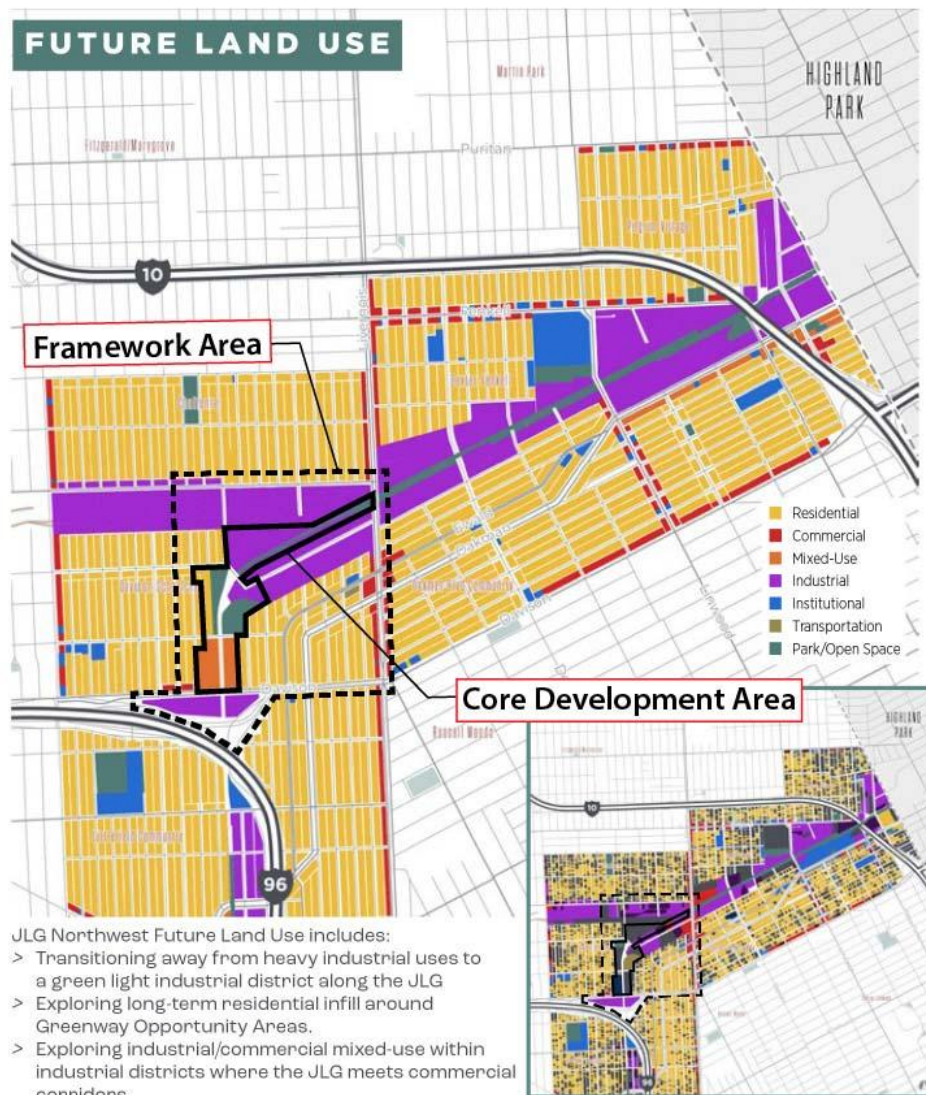
The Davison-Schoolcraft neighborhood, which borders the CORE DEVELOPMENT AREA, is about eight (8) miles from downtown Detroit. Driven by the City's outward expansion, Davidson-Schoolcraft was platted into neighborhoods in the 1920s. Davison-Schoolcraft appears on Homeowners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) redlining maps from the 1930s, which the [Mapping Inequality](#) project has digitized. The neighborhood has experienced an overall decline in population over the past few decades (*Downtown Detroit Partnership, 2022*). Intervale-Roselawn Park, situated in the heart of the CORE DEVELOPMENT AREA, has recently received an \$800,000 grant for upgrades and improvements. The park also functions as a vital link to the JLG, which is described further below.

The development of Oakman Boulevard, which shares its name with a historic neighborhood adjacent to the CORE DEVELOPMENT AREA, was a significant infrastructure investment that enhanced connectivity between the CORE DEVELOPMENT AREA and other parts of the City. Interstate 96 (I-96) runs just south of the CORE DEVELOPMENT AREA. Regionally, I-96 follows what is believed to have been a Native American through-trail ([Wilson and Lee 2025, citing Hardy 2024](#)). In the 1800s, the path was eventually converted into organized roadways, and from the 1940s through the 1970s, these roads were transformed into I-96, "cut[ting] a swath through the parish, displacing five hundred houses" ([City of Detroit Historic Designation Advisory Board, 2019](#)). The highway now poses significant challenges to local connectivity, and the city is exploring alternative opportunities to enhance connections between neighborhoods.

The industrial section and corridors along the edges of the CORE DEVELOPMENT AREA are vital to the local historical story. Lyndon Street once featured small factories, warehouses, and rail-connected businesses, including the "Mulch Site," which is intended for redevelopment. The eastern edge of the CORE DEVELOPMENT AREA is bounded by Livernois Avenue, known as the "Avenue of Fashion." Today, Livernois Avenue hosts one of the highest concentrations of Black-owned businesses in the US ([Avenue of Fashion](#)). Livernois Avenue facilitates intermodal travel but remains primarily auto oriented; the street recently was enhanced with bicycle lanes, trees, and improved sidewalks. Just north of I-96, W Davison Street mainly supports residential with some commercial uses but has not experienced any significant recent upgrades. Additionally, the Detroit City Public Works and the Detroit General Services Department are located on W Davison Street.

A 27.5-mile non-motorized, recreational pathway loop designed to connect neighborhoods throughout Detroit (including the CORE DEVELOPMENT AREA), the JLG is the primary investment driving renewed planning interest. Detroit owns and manages the JLG, and the City's recent [JLG Neighborhood Planning Study](#) engaged residents, business owners and key stakeholders in a process to develop detailed action plans and policies for the study's JLG Planning Area. The CORE DEVELOPMENT AREA is situated within the "JLG Northwest" portion of the JLG Planning Area, and the [JLG Northwest Playbook](#) identifies recommendations and opportunities for investments and improvements within JLG Northwest. In addition to enhancing connectivity, the JLG stimulates various neighborhood and community investments, such as housing, economic development, green spaces, and overall quality of life improvements ([City of Detroit, 2024](#)). These investments, along with the City's focus on neighborhood-level planning, provide an exciting opportunity to celebrate and honor Davison-Schoolcraft's rich history while welcoming a new chapter for the community.

FIGURE 0-3: Preferred Future Land Use map in JLG Northwest Playbook



The area offers long-term development opportunities along the JLG, such as at Schoolcraft, which would provide additional greenway frontage and activate the area.

FIGURE 0-4: The JLG section that intersects with the site was completed in 2025, and adjoining parcels are ready for new development. Below, this figure presents drone views of recent site conditions (JLG City Team).



Assumed Planned Conditions

In developing their proposals, teams will consider the JLG Northwest Playbook, including its future land use map. Since this is the current planned scenario, all proposals must clearly identify areas of agreement with and differences from the future land use map (FIGURE 0-3).

Teams should be prepared to defend their proposals, whether they fully or partially follow the recommendations of the JLG Northwest Playbook or propose an alternative.

Teams may consider these additional existing site features and land use assumptions when developing their proposals; however, please note that APA and the City of Detroit make no recommendation or endorsement regarding privately owned land:

- The two existing cell towers in the CORE DEVELOPMENT AREA have been removed or relocated.
- The JLG path is built and shall remain; enhancements are permitted.
- Teams may propose site enhancements, but not redevelopment of, the adjoining areas within JLG property parcels, which are shaded red in FIGURE 0-2.
- Intervale-Roselawn Park must remain but may be improved and expanded within the CORE DEVELOPMENT AREA.
- Development is restricted to publicly owned land and private property that is for sale.

A list of key City plans is provided in the references section of this prompt.

Required Proposal Elements

Each submitted small area plan concept proposal must include the following elements:

1. Existing Conditions Analysis
2. Framework Vision
3. CORE DEVELOPMENT AREA Design
4. Implementation Plan

Existing Conditions Analysis

The Teams shall conduct a comprehensive analysis of the current physical, economic, social, transportation, mobility, and cultural conditions at the site. The Existing Conditions Analysis must cover the entire FRAMEWORK AREA (Area of Influence) and the CORE DEVELOPMENT AREA (see FIGURE 0-2), while considering the socioeconomic impacts of the site's history and development. The analysis should identify, describe, and reference the site's history, past public engagement efforts, and relevant citywide and neighborhood policies and should highlight the unique opportunities and constraints that will inform the proposal. Additionally, the analysis should evaluate the physical aspects of the site, including topography, natural features, and the density and character of existing structures and developments within and near the site. The analysis should include a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Challenges) deliverable.

Key Required Deliverables for Existing Conditions Analysis Element

- A **Planning analysis** that includes demographic trends, environmental factors, and site development history, as well as physical and cultural landscapes and past and current transportation patterns. The planning analysis may be presented in both narrative and visual formats, such as mapping, infographics, and diagrams.
- A **SWOC analysis** to determine the site's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges.

Framework Vision

The Framework Vision will incorporate and implement findings from the Existing Conditions Analysis. The teams shall propose and clearly define guiding principles for the CORE DEVELOPMENT AREA through a policy-focused Framework Vision that outlines a high-level strategy for long-term, integrated growth and development within the FRAMEWORK AREA.

Key Required Deliverables for Framework Vision Element

- A **Vision statement** for the **FRAMEWORK AREA**
- **Guiding principles** for the **CORE DEVELOPMENT AREA**
- A **Framework plan** indicating character areas, activity nodes, open space network, development, and opportunity sites, as well as spatial relationships of neighborhoods, employment, and activity centers, etc.
- A **Land use plan** illustrating proposed changes to City's Future Land Use Map (FIGURE 0-3)
- A **Connectivity and circulation plan** addressing major transit, vehicular, pedestrian, and bike connections and networks
- A **Greenprint** addressing environmental and ecological systems and opportunities

CORE DEVELOPMENT AREA Plan Design

The CORE DEVELOPMENT AREA Plan Design is key to the small area plan concept proposal. The CORE DEVELOPMENT AREA is the smaller study boundary within the site, including the existing JLG and nearby parcels (FIGURE 0-2). This year, the SPDC challenges student teams to propose a design for the CORE DEVELOPMENT AREA that emphasizes housing and open space connection strategies, while ensuring smooth integration with the broader FRAMEWORK AREA both functionally and visually.

All teams shall prepare a Conceptual Site Plan for the CORE DEVELOPMENT AREA that includes a public space plan, land use mix, building typologies, densities, and building heights. The team shall consider precedent projects and related development scenarios and propose an urban design approach for how the CORE DEVELOPMENT AREA should relate and interact with surrounding uses. The Conceptual Site Plan must include at least one 3D visualization of the proposed heights, massing, and spatial relationships of the site, but additional visualizations are welcome. Proposed Conceptual Site Plans should acknowledge the interconnectedness of land use and multi-modal transportation by illustrating how the proposed transportation network could be visualized using right-of-way (ROW) cross-sections, including proposed buildings, ground-floor activation, setbacks, or other features.

The CORE DEVELOPMENT AREA Plan Design element must explain how the proposed Conceptual Site Plan responds to the needs and guiding principles established in the Framework Vision element.

Finally, student teams should develop their Conceptual Site Plans with a racial equity lens. Viewing change through an equity lens, which the Gemini Company defines as a critical thinking exercise, begins by asking the following question: Who benefits? Who is burdened? Who is missing? How do we know? What do we do?

Key Required Deliverables for Core Development Area Plan Design Element

- **A Conceptual Site Plan** that includes:
 - An illustrative 2D Site Plan.
 - Land uses that delineate densities and intensities.
 - Proposed massing, building heights, and setbacks.
 - 3D drawings or diagrams, including at least one visualization of the site.
 - Development tabulations in square feet, dwelling units, and acres for open space.
 - Corridor cross-section drawings for different street typologies. Street designs should be consistent with any local guidance on street typologies. Teams may use simplified typologies (“A,” “B,” and “C” streets), or use more refined functional designations.
 - A detailed look at the connectivity and circulation plan (from the previous element), with the site placed in greater focus and detail, highlighting multimodal networks.
 - Environmental standards, connections, and needs.
 - An open space, stormwater, and public realm plan.
- **A Proposal Narrative** that communicates core recommendations and ideas in response to the community’s five principal goals:
 1. Build wealth and ensure affordable housing,
 2. Improve connectivity and access,
 3. Support small businesses and corridor activation,
 4. Create and sustain jobs, and
 5. Beautify and green neighborhoods.
- **Urban Design Guidelines** that visually convey the proposal's vision and design intent for all proposed uses in the CORE DEVELOPMENT AREA, encompassing various residential building types (single-family, duplex, multifamily, etc.). The Urban Design Guidelines may be illustrated using 3D massing diagrams, elevations/sections, and/or

precedent imagery. *The Urban Design Guidelines should be no longer than five pages within the overall document*, and must address:

- Building typologies.
- Height, bulk, and massing approach, including key scale transitions/buffer conditions.
- Architectural character, including building elements such as rooflines, projections, fenestration, material and color.
- Open space typologies and streetscape.
- **Relocation Considerations** for any significant historic structures or areas that are removed, improved, or relocated. Include a description of their historical significance and explain how the proposal balances priorities when directly affecting the site. Provide an explanation of how the proposed Conceptual Site Plan addresses the needs articulated in the Framework Vision element through an equity lens.

Implementation Plan

The Implementation Plan should outline the necessary steps to achieve the proposed CORE DEVELOPMENT AREA Plan Design element. It should cover project phases, stakeholders, feasibility, and any needed zoning or regulatory changes.

- Key Required Deliverables for Core Development Implementation Plan Element A **high-level phasing approach** presented graphically as a Gantt or critical path chart with approximate durations or as layered/phased 2D/3D diagrams indicating proposed uses and densities for each phase.
- A **high-level financing strategy** including considerations of potential policy options and funding tools. Teams may cite applicable best practices from case study projects.

Hors Catégorie

Student teams may choose to include an additional submission in their proposal without a specific category (*Hors Catégorie*), in any format. This optional element should further illustrate

the design and policy solutions proposed by the team. A submitted Hors Catégorie can be programmatic or content focused. Examples from the past include app development, a demonstration website, a video, or a fly-through. The Hors Catégorie also could present a deep dive on project viability or market conditions.

Submission Format

Each student team must submit a small area plan concept proposal that includes the following:

- **Executive summary:** a concise summary of the small area plan concept proposal that serves as a stand-alone document.
 - No longer than two (2) pages, presented in a minimum of 12-point font, single-spaced, one-sided.
 - Page dimensions not to exceed 11 by 17 inches [ANSI B (tabloid)].
 - Submitted as a PDF.
- **Final report:** a document that presents the four required proposal elements.
 - Not longer than twenty (20) pages, presented in a minimum of 12-point font, single-spaced, one-sided.
 - Page dimensions not to exceed 11 by 17 inches [ANSI B (tabloid)].
 - Submitted as a PDF.
- **Notes for Submissions:**
 - Graphics and layout should be of a professional quality, befitting the proposal's content. Competitive proposals will feature high-quality, clearly illustrated graphics and document layout.
 - The final report may be either vertical or landscape orientation.
 - No citation style is mandated, but the team's selected style should be consistently applied.
 - Please target a submission PDF size of less than 40 MB.
- **Hors Catégorie, if the team so elects:**
 - Any format, medium, or design is acceptable but must be accessible to both the initial and final jury. This elective element does not count against the final report page limit.
 - Any interactive submissions should include a static PDF or explainer that fully captures the interactive element, in the event that a data source of website is unavailable at the time of review.

Resources, Reference Materials, and Useful Links

References

Avenue of Fashion. "Livernois Avenue of Fashion." <https://www.avenueoffashion.com/>.

City of Detroit Historic Designation Advisory Board. 2019. St. Brigid–High Praise Historic District Final Report. Detroit, MI: City of Detroit.

<https://detroitmi.gov/sites/detroitmi.localhost/files/2019-10/St.%20Brigid-High%20Praise%20HD%20Final%20Report.pdf>.

City of Detroit Historic Designation Advisory Board. 2018. Oakman Boulevard Historic District Final Report. Detroit, MI: City of Detroit.

<https://detroitmi.gov/sites/detroitmi.localhost/files/2018-08/Oakman%20Boulevard%20HD%20Final%20Report.pdf>.

City of Detroit Planning and Development Department. 2023. Joe Louis Greenway Neighborhood Planning Study Overview Presentation. Detroit, MI: City of Detroit.

<https://detroitmi.gov/sites/detroitmi.localhost/files/2023-03/FINAL%20Joe%20Louis%20Greenway%20Neighborhood%20Planning%20Study%20Presentation.pdf>.

City of Detroit Planning and Development Department. 2024. Joe Louis Greenway Northwest. Detroit, MI: City of Detroit.

https://detroitmi.gov/sites/detroitmi.localhost/files/2024-12/JLG%20NORTHWEST_V2.pdf.

Detroit Historical Society. "Oakman Boulevard Historic District."

<https://www.detroithistorical.org/learn/online-research/encyclopedia-of-detroit/oakman-boulevard-historic-district>.

Detroit Land Bank Authority. "Property Map Viewer."

https://buildingdetroit.org/purchase_property.

Downtown Detroit Partnership. 2022. Downtown Density 1925-2020.

<https://downtowndetroit.org/news-insights/downtown-density-1925-2020/>

Nelson, Robert K., LaDale Winling, Richard Marciano, Nathan Connolly, and the Digital Scholarship Lab. 2025. Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America. University of Richmond. <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining>.

Wilson, Bob, and Anna Lee. 2025. Trail Building Law and Policy: A Michigan Manual. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Libraries.

<https://openbooks.lib.msu.edu/michigantrails/chapter/chapter-1/>.

Additional materials

Research Seminar in Quantitative Economics. 2025. City of Detroit Forecast (February 4, 2025).

Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan. https://lsa.umich.edu/content/dam/econ-assets/Econdocs/RSQE%20PDFs/RSQE_Detroit_Forecast_Feb2025.pdf.

National Capital Planning Commission. Repairing & Connecting (Washington, D.C.).

https://ncpc.gov/files/projects/2024/8536_Kennedy_Center-Foggy_Bottom_Area_Study_Project_Narrative_Apr2024.pdf.

National Association of City Transportation Officials. For helpful transportation standards and designs, including inspiration for cross sections. <https://nacto.org/>.

American Planning Association. From Urban Renewal to Highway Removal – APA PAS, By

Caitlin Dewey. <https://www.planning.org/planning/2020/dec/intersections-infrastructure/>.

American Planning Association. Planning for Equity Policy Guide.

<https://planning.org/publications/document/9178541/>.

American Planning Association. “Reconnecting Communities,” Federal program presentation.

Available on APA Passport (may be paywalled).

<https://www.planning.org/passport/course/9223460/>.

American Planning Association. Healthy Communities Policy Guide.

<https://www.planning.org/publications/document/9141726/>.

American Planning Association. Public Redevelopment Policy Guide.

<https://www.planning.org/policy/guides/adopted/redevelopment.htm>.

SPDC 2026 Guide and Process

As an official SPDC entrant, each student team must follow the required competition process:

- **TEAM LEADER SELECTION.** Each student team must select a team leader to act as the team's single point of contact.
- **REGISTRATION DEADLINE.** Registrations are due by **December 5th, 2025 at 11:59 PM Eastern Time**. Before the registration deadline, the team leader must register the team by submitting a form on the APA [SPDC website](#).
- **ENTRY DEADLINE.** Completed submissions are due by **February 6th, 2026, 11:59 PM Eastern Time**. After registration, the team leader will receive access to a Microsoft SharePoint folder, where each team will submit its proposal before the entry deadline. The team leader is responsible for ensuring all team members have access to the SharePoint folder at least two days before the entry deadline. Teams that need help accessing the SharePoint folder should contact students@planning.org and include "Submissions - APA Student Planning & Design Competition" in the email's subject line.
- **SUBMISSION PORTAL.** All required proposal materials must be uploaded to the team's SharePoint folder before the entry deadline.
- **SUBMISSION FEE.** There is no submission fee to participate in the APA Student Planning & Design Competition.

Awards and Recognition

Up to three (3) teams will be selected as finalists and invited to present their proposals to the final jury in a conference session at NPC26 in Detroit, Michigan.

APA will provide the three finalist-presenting teams with complimentary NPC26 registration and may partially assist with travel costs. Selected proposals will be featured on APA's website (www.planning.org) and in APA's publication *Interact*. The APA's Student Representatives Council (SRC), a cosponsor of the competition, will help orient teams and serve as their primary point of contact at NPC26 in Detroit. Finalists presenting their proposals at NPC26 are

encouraged to take full advantage of the panels, workshops, and presentations at this premier event for planning professionals.

The following prizes shall be awarded to the winning teams:

- \$6,000 **First Place**
- \$4,500 **Runner-up**
- \$1,500 **Third-place Finalist**

In prior years, finalist teams have received funding to support their travel and attendance at NPC25 from affiliated groups, including the APA Divisions Council, state APA Chapters, local APA sections, universities, and their Planning Student Organizations (PSOs). Teams also have submitted SPDC proposals for consideration in other APA competitions.

Initial Selection

In February, the initial jury will review all proposals submitted prior to the deadline. All jury members must recuse themselves from judging entries in which they have a conflict of interest (e.g., a jury member who teaches as part of a planning program may not judge student entries from that program).

APA retains the right to disqualify any team member who does not meet the eligibility requirements, who fails to disclose a conflict of interest, or who is found to have plagiarized material.

Each submittal will be scored using the following **Selection Criteria** by the initial jury:

Proposal Element	Weight
Existing Conditions Analysis	15%
Framework Vision	30%
Core Development Area Plan Design	40%
Implementation Plan	10%
Professionalism and quality	5%

Hors Catégorie	5% (Bonus)
Total	105% (including 5% bonus)

Finalist Presentations @ NPC26

After initial jury deliberations, the **selected finalist teams** will be invited to present their work to the final jury and a live audience during an NPC26 session available to conference attendees for AICP credit. Each finalist team will deliver a complete, well-rehearsed presentation that clearly and succinctly explains the full scope and concept of their proposal.

Each finalist presentation will last about 10 minutes, all taking place during the same NPC26 session. After each presentation, each finalist team will receive some time—possibly varied—for a short Q&A with the final jury.

In recent years, finalist presentations have been given to large, supportive audiences. After the finalists are chosen, more details about presentation length and format and the final jurors will be shared. Additionally, finalist teams will have the chance to ask questions about their final presentations.

Presentations are expected to be of professional quality. Competitive proposal presentations will feature high-quality graphics and a seamless presentation from all team members presenting.

Projection capabilities will be provided. APA staff will work with each team leader to upload the finalist team's presentation into the NPC26 presentation system preceding the session. Remember: despite everyone's best efforts, conference technology can be unpredictable, so please be prepared.

Presentations are not required *or expected* for the initial proposal submission.

Final Jury Score

The final jury will assemble at NPC26 to evaluate up to three finalist presentations, as selected by the initial jury. After the presentation event concludes, the final jury will place the finalist teams. Initial jury scores will be discarded before finalist presentations and will not influence final jury decisions. In addition to the selection and presentation criteria outlined above, the final jury will consider presentation delivery and Q&A responses.

After the presentations conclude, the final placement and award ceremony will take place. Additional details regarding reception time and location will be provided after the finalists are selected.

Questions & Mentorship Session

Teams are encouraged to submit questions about the required proposal elements, evaluation criteria, or any other part of the competition. SPDC organizers will post answers to all questions received on a rolling basis to the designated Q&A web page. All questions must be submitted via email to students@planning.org by **11:59 PM Eastern on December 5th, 2025**. Include “Questions - APA Student Planning & Design Competition” in the email’s subject line.

SPDC organizers are developing a mentorship event for competition participants and will provide additional information as it becomes available.

Note on Boundaries

APA will provide the teams with the study boundaries for the CORE DEVELOPMENT AREA and the FRAMEWORK AREA in an ESRI .shp format. These study boundaries are provided to a planning-level accuracy for discussion, and teams should use their discretion and additional resources, such as zoning and parcel lines, as needed in the case of any ambiguities. The CORE DEVELOPMENT AREA generally includes all ROW and sidewalk areas immediately adjacent to the boundary.

Commonly Asked Questions

- *Q: Can teams ask for expert consultation and feedback? How much outside participation is permitted?*
- *A: Outside participation is only allowed in an advisory role. The team members (students) must complete all the work of the submitted proposal on their own.*
- *Q: Can teams request unpublished data from the City?*
 - *A: No. Team members should not contact City staff to request data. Any publicly available information can be used to inform the proposal. Upon successful registration, GIS data for the (FIGURE 0-3) and the study boundaries (FIGURES 0-1 and 0-2) will be provided to registered teams.*
- *Q: What are the limits for public participation? How do we conduct proper community outreach without contacting current residents/property owners?*
 - *A: Teams may not conduct public engagement to avoid an unfair and confusing situation where community members are contacted by multiple competition teams. Teams are encouraged to access public engagement data in publicly available City resources and other sources like census data and media coverage.*
- *Q: Can non-planning students participate?*
 - *A: Yes, so long as they meet all the requirements outlined under “Student Team Qualifications & Capabilities.” Note: the team leader *must* be a planning student.*
- *Q: Can teams submit questions, registrations, or proposals late or update/change submitted questions, registrations, or proposals after the relevant deadline?*
 - *A: **No, questions, registrations, and proposals cannot be submitted, uploaded, updated, changed, amended, modified, or replaced after their respective deadlines.** Exceptions can only be considered in cases of genuine medical emergency or natural disaster. Teams encountering technical submission issues should contact APA immediately. APA strongly recommends testing upload capabilities and file compatibility well before each deadline. This rule only applies after respective deadlines have passed; teams may edit or*

change submitted materials before their respective deadlines and should notify APA staff of any changes.

Disclaimer

APA and the competition sponsors make no representation that the winning team's proposal will be implemented in any way or incorporated into future redevelopment plans or other requests for proposals for the site. However, City of Detroit Planning Department staff helped develop this competition prompt and will serve on the initial jury, and a senior Planning Department representative has been invited to serve on the final jury at NPC26. Additionally, compelling planning frameworks or approaches could be used as models for small-area planning work in other areas along the Joe Louis Greenway.

About APA

The American Planning Association (APA) is a nonprofit education and membership organization committed to creating better communities and better lives. APA exists to elevate and unite diverse planning professionals as it helps communities, their leaders, and residents anticipate and navigate change.

Join as a free student member today! Being a student member of APA allows students to grow in their career path. Benefits include access to career services, journals, publications, magazines, networks, awards, leadership, and discounted registration at the National Planning Conference. More information can be found at <https://planning.org/join/students>.

About the National Planning Conference

Every year, APA hosts the National Planning Conference (NPC), a prestigious event that brings together thousands of experts, thought leaders, and professionals in the planning field. For 2026, NPC will be hosted in Detroit, Michigan.