National Planning Conference 2020

American Planning Association

4th Annual Student Design Competition
The Competition

Project Statement
The American Planning Association (APA) presents the Annual Student Design Competition as part of the 2020 National Planning Conference in Houston. Now in its fourth year, the competition invites teams of students pursuing graduate degrees in planning, public policy, urban design, architecture, and real estate development to participate. This competition is seen as part of the APA’s ongoing efforts to provide leadership in the development of vital communities by advocating excellence in planning, promoting education and citizen empowerment, and providing the tools and support necessary to meet the challenges of growth and change.

The unique focus of this competition is for students to demonstrate a multidisciplinary and multifaceted approach to creating great communities for all through their proposals. Proposals should seek to promote healthy communities, support workforce development and community entrepreneurship, increase high-quality housing options, and incorporate strategies that optimize environmental assets and awareness. The final jury and the selection committee will be seeking comprehensive, thoughtful, implementable solutions that integrate innovation, best practices, and thought-provoking strategies for addressing these four objectives.

This year’s competition challenges students to create a masterplan for the community of Kashmere Gardens in Houston’s Fifth Ward. Proposals shall be prepared in direct response to the goals and objectives outlined in the Livable Centers Study, a visioning plan created by residents of Kashmere Gardens through the City of Houston’s Complete Communities Program, which aims to serve as a vehicle for targeting funds to neighborhoods in the city that have been historically under-resourced. Respondents will find the four objectives above clearly delineated in the Study’s Conceptual Plans and Recommendations. The final jury and selection committee shall give preference to master plans that best address the recommendations found in this document.

In addition, the final jury and selection committee shall look favorably on teams that clearly state how their proposals incorporate the policy solutions contained within the APA’s Housing Policy Guide to address the challenges of accessibility, affordability, and availability – which are plaguing rapid and slow growth communities nationwide – and the APA’s Planning for Equity Policy Guide, which includes policy recommendations for planners to advocate for equity at local, state, and federal levels.

While the competition is based on a very real set of existing conditions in Houston’s community of Kashmere Gardens, and proposals are expected to be implementable if also innovative and provocative, there is no representation that solutions offered by the winning team will be incorporated in any way.

Competition Schedule
15 January 2020 Competition Announced
15 February 2020  Deadline for Questions
22 February 2020  FAQ Responses Released

28 February 2020  Deadline for Registration

27 March 2020  Deadline for Submissions

29 March 2020  Selection Committee Deliberations
31 March 2020  Finalist Notified

25-27 April 2020  Final Jury Presentations at NPC2020

28 April 2020  Awards Announced at the APA Annual Awards Luncheon

Awards and Recognition
Up to three teams will be selected as finalists and will be given the opportunity to present their proposal to the jury at the 2020 National Planning Conference in Houston, Texas. Up to four (4) team members from each of the selected finalists will be given free registration to the NPC 2020 and are encouraged to take full advantage of the myriad of panels, workshops, and presentations at the premier event for planning professionals. Selected proposals will also be featured on the APA’s website www.planning.org and in the APA’s publication InterACT.

In addition, the following prize monies shall be awarded to the Competition winner:

$2,500  First Place
Eligibility

To participate in APA’s Affordable Housing Student Design Competition a team of at least three members must meet the following requirements:

**Team Leader**
1. Must be an enrolled student in a U.S. or Canadian planning accredited school during the entire competition;
2. Must be a student member of the APA; and
3. Must be able to present their proposal to the jury at the National Planning Conference in Houston between April 25th and April 28th, 2020.

**Additional Team Members**
*(minimum of 2 additional team members and no more than 5 team members in total, including the team leader)*
1. All team members must be enrolled at a college or university for the entire competition;
2. Teams are encouraged to be interdisciplinary in nature – it is the intent that planning students collaborate with students of allied disciplines (e.g., architecture, landscape architecture, urban design, real estate development, engineering, etc.) to create a holistic, reality- and place-based design proposal; and
3. At least one additional team member must be able to present the proposal to the jury at the National Planning Conference in Houston between April 25th and April 28th, 2020.
The Project

Overview

Kashmere Gardens is historically an African American neighborhood in the northern 610 Loop area of Houston. The neighborhood itself largely consists of single-family homes, with some light industrial uses. Key sites include Hutcherson Park and Hunting Bayou, and it is relatively close to Houston’s downtown. But it remains largely cut-off by physical barriers such as the 610 Loop to the north, Highway 69 to the west, the Union Pacific railyards to the south, and a heavily industrialized zone to the east. In general, the area is low-lying which, in combination with the proximity of the Hunting Bayou along its northern edge, renders most of Kashmere Gardens within the FEMA 100-year flood plain. A study by the University of Houston’s Community Design Resource Center conducted immediately after Hurricane Harvey impacted the area found that 79% of the homes in this neighborhood were damaged by the flooding. More than two years later, this community is still struggling to fully recover from Harvey’s aftermath.

Kashmere Gardens is also facing two additional challenges to the social fabric that has held this community together: environmental justice and gentrification. In addition to the environmental challenges of living in a low-lying area prone to flooding, a recent report conducted by the Texas Department of State Health Services confirmed a “cancer cluster” in northeast Houston, including the community of Kashmere Gardens. The high rates of cancer were most likely caused by Union Pacific’s use of the cancer-causing chemical creosote in the treatment of railroad ties along the southern edge of this neighborhood; and over time, the creosote seeped into the soil contaminating the groundwater throughout this entire area. Before Hurricane Harvey, concerns of gentrification already existed amongst the residents of Kashmere Gardens due to the neighborhood’s close proximity to downtown and its high percentage of renters. But the surge in vacancies that followed the storm have ushered in a new wave of speculative developers, further validating these concerns.

Before Harvey, fears of gentrification, and even before Union Pacific, Kashmere Gardens has been a relatively low-income community without many employment opportunities, housing options, or infrastructure investment by the City of Houston. In an attempt to reverse this disinvestment, the current administration included Kashmere Gardens in its Complete Communities program. This program has brought an unparalleled level of community outreach to residents who actively participated in the creation of the Living Center Study. This study includes a Concept Plan and a set of detailed recommendations for how to improve Kashmere Gardens in a way that would benefit the entire community.

While not the only document that describes the needs of this community, nor does it comprehensively capture everything that could and should happen in Kashmere Gardens, it gets the closest to articulating what the people in this community would like to see happen.
The Challenge

This competition challenges students to develop a master plan for Kashmere Gardens, as limited by the Project Area described below, that fully addresses the needs of the community as stated in the Living Centers Study and supplemented by your own research analysis and assessments. Master plans should focus on the following four primary objectives:

1. Promote healthy communities
2. Increase high-quality housing options
3. Support workforce development and community entrepreneurship
4. Optimize environmental assets and awareness

The master plan is defined in the APA’s Planner’s Dictionary as “a land use plan focused on one or more sites within an area that identifies access, general improvements and needed infrastructure, and intended to guide growth and development over a number of years and in phases.” It is one of the most important processes that planners can lead, bringing clarity and consensus when done in an equitable, participatory, data-driven, and human-centered manner.

Master plans are often built upon a concept or vision plan, supplemented by additional research, analysis, and assessment, and include a land-use plan, a report containing various recommendations, and visualizations of what a street, neighborhood, or municipality could look like once the master plan has been fully realized.

Similarly, proposals should be submitted with a master plan that includes the following:

1. An assessment of the Concept Plan and Recommendations
2. Additional research and assessment of existing conditions
3. A set of recommendations for policy changes, investment incentives, public spending, changes to land-use, etc.
4. A land-use plan
5. Additional plans and maps, including but not limited to transportation and access, open space, neighborhood amenities, topography, etc.
6. At least one large-scale visualization
7. At least two small-scale visualizations (street view vignettes)
8. A clearly articulated vision
The Rules

Basic Considerations

The intent of this student design competition is to create innovative and thought-provoking planning solutions for equitable, sustainable, and resilient communities through place-based designs made possible or further supported by policy interventions. Even though each team will be judged on their creativity and thorough completion of design, there are a few rules that must be followed by each submission:

1. All proposed improvements should be located on, under, and within the physical airspace of the project site boundary, which is roughly delineated by the 610 Loop to the north, Highway 69 to the west, Lockwood Drive to the east, and Collingswood Road to the south; however, when a watershed-based approach is incorporated, watersheds may extend beyond these boundaries.

2. While improvements can be proposed within the public right-of-way and city-owned property, particular sensitivity should be employed when suggesting improvements to privately-owned sites, whether occupied or vacant.

3. Proposed improvements within the Project Area may involve or improve connectivity to off-site areas and should be described as such (e.g., a proposed bus station and/or trail improvements).

4. Descriptions of how all facets of the master plan coordinate and complement all current City-based initiatives and any other master plans, including the various findings and recommendations contained therein, for nearby areas should be included in the report. In addition to the Kashmere Gardens Living Center Study, these initiatives include, but not necessarily limited to, the following: Resilient Houston – Resiliency Assessment, Complete Communities, Houston Bike Plan, Downtown Houston Masterplan, Mobility Houston Plan, Houston Recovers.

5. Any recommended policy changes to support proposed improvements should be detailed in the report.

6. Teams should make strategic decisions about which parcels to redevelop, designate for future development, or leave as is. These recommendations should be detailed in the report.
Concept Plan and Recommendations

The residents of Kashmere Gardens, through the City of Houston’s’ Complete Communities program, created a concept plan which included a series of recommendations, strategies for implementation, and a clearly stated set of priorities. All proposed master plans should endeavor to address at least recommendations Numbers 2, 5, 6 and 7, while special consideration will be given to proposals that address all eight. The following outline of these recommendations is excerpted from the Living Centers Study. A link to this study in its entirety can be found in the References and Resources section of this document.

1. **Ensure that the community benefits from new investment:**
   Restoring existing and creating new development is necessary to increase the value of the community and attract businesses to the area, but strategies should ensure that existing residents benefit.

2. **Increase high-quality housing options for residents of all income levels:**
   Fair housing choices and affordability strategies aim to restore existing housing conditions, redevelop vacant properties, provide additional housing options for mixed income residents, implement workforce housing, as well as retain and maintain a stock of affordable housing for vulnerable residents.

3. **Leverage opportunities created by existing large infrastructure:**
   Infrastructure addresses the structures and systems (i.e. buildings, railroads, highways) needed to help a community function properly. By examining how these can work together to catalyze investment for the community, it will ultimately serve their personal and economic needs.

4. **Align citywide plans with the community’s goals:**
   At the local level, city wide plans can present opportunities and challenges to communities. For the purpose of this study, the focus will be on how the study area can use these efforts to their advantage.

5. **Optimize environmental assets and awareness:**
   By understanding the environmental challenges and assets of a community, this knowledge can be used as a tool to implement preventative measures that increase the power of the individuals, families and natural ecosystems in the area, while maximizing the overall longevity of the community.

6. **Support workforce development and community entrepreneurship:**
   Supporting workforce development and local entrepreneurship is essential to enhancing the economic stability of the people within the study area. By looking at the job opportunities and needs of the community, investment can be targeted.
7. **Promote healthy communities:**
Knowledge of environmental health is essential to the livelihood of those living in the study area. Members of the community should have reasonable transportation access to necessary healthcare services, which can aid in reducing health disparities.

8. **Build the capacity of the management district:**
By examining the Near Northside Management District's ability to allocate funding towards projects that enhance the living conditions of the community, and create and promote new economic development, the residents remain the beneficiaries.
Site Location

The competition calls for a master plan for the community of Kashmere Gardens, located within the 610 Loop to the northeast of downtown Houston. This neighborhood-scale site includes all right-of-ways within its boundaries, allowing for holistic consideration of all costs and functions (e.g., transportation) that affect affordability, accessibility, and the community as a whole.
Project Area

The project area is further defined as the area roughly delineated by the 610 Loop to the north, Highway 69 to the west, Lockwood Drive to the east, and Collingswood Road to the south.
Submission Requirements

Each student team is required to submit the following minimum requirements to be considered as an official entrant:

**Board**
A PDF of one (1) 36x48” (Arch E paper size) board depicting the proposed masterplan for the project site is required. If selected as a finalist, the board must be printed and brought to the conference for display.

**Report**
A PDF of an associated report indicating background analysis, researched best practices, and description of the proposed improvements is required. The background analysis should present a comprehensive understanding of the project site, immediate area, and greater region. Best practice affordable housing trends and already developed or implemented examples should be compiled to provide justification for proposed site improvements. The proposed design should be further defined in the report (max # of pages not to exceed 10 pages, one-sided). It is expected that the graphic quality and layout of the report will meet current best practices for document preparation and format.

**Hors catégorie**
One additional item without category (hors catégorie) in any format may be used to further convey the design and policy solutions identified for your project. Examples in the past have included creating an app, a demonstration website, a video, and other examples of existing or innovative tools which were used to highlight the design and policy solutions proposed for the site.

**Presentation**
Selected finalists shall have the opportunity to present their work to the Final Jury in front of a live audience and are encouraged to bring a full presentation that clearly articulates the full scope and concept of their proposal. Projection capabilities will be provided, as well as easels for boards and pedestals for models if requested by any of the selected teams. Additional details of the presentation format and the final jurors will be provided at the appropriate time. PLEASE NOTE: Presentations are not required as part of the initial submission.

The entire submittal package and all presentation materials shall be the sole work of the student team members, and the student team members alone.
Selection Criteria

The selection committee will review projects through a blind review process: the identities of the student teams will be kept secret until selections have been made. Further, members of the selection committee will be required to recuse themselves from judging entries in which they have a conflict of interest (e.g., a committee member who teaches as part of a planning program will not be able to judge entries from that program). APA retains the right to disqualify any entrant who does not meet the minimum student/team eligibility requirements or fails to disclose a conflict of interest.

Each submittal will be scored using the following criteria:

**Innovation in Ideas**
Each team will be scored on the creativity and quality of the planning solutions proposed as part of the project site design. (20%)

**Addressing Community Recommendations**
Each team will be scored on the way in which they address the four objectives drawn from the Livable Centers Study for Kashmere Gardens: promoting healthy communities, high-quality housing options, locally focused economic opportunity, and incorporating strategies that simultaneously address environmental concerns while raising awareness. Additional consideration will be given to master plans that address all eight (8) of the community’s recommendations. (20%)

**Incorporating APA Policy Guides**
Each team will be scored on how well they articulate the way in which they incorporated the policy recommendations found in the APA’s *Housing Policy Guide* and the APA’s *Planning for Equity Policy Guide*. (20%)

**Quality of Research, Writing, & Document Preparation**
One of a planner’s primary tools is a written report, plan, or study. Accordingly, each team will be judged on the quality of their research, writing, and document preparation. The report should be written and prepared in a manner and format that is highly graphic and easy to read and understand. (20%)

**Quality of Design**
Each team will be judged on the visual legibility, clarity, and overall quality of their masterplan, visualizations, and information graphics. (20%)
Final Jury

The final jury will review up to three finalists which the selection committee has identified as best meeting or exceeding the criteria set out below. Finalists are required to present their proposals at this year’s National Planning Conference to be held in Houston, Texas. Student teams who are unable to attend the NPC2020 will be disqualified and the next highest ranked team will take their place.

The final jury will be tasked with selecting the winning proposal as well as designating a proposal as first runner-up. All finalists will come in on equal footing regardless of the scoring by the selection committee. In addition to being evaluated by the criteria outlined above, the final jury will take the following into consideration while making their selections:

**Comprehensiveness, Quality and Effectiveness of Team Presentation**
Each team will be judged on the comprehensiveness, quality, and effectiveness of the presentation at the National Planning Conference.

**Team Collaboration**
Working collaboratively as a team is an essential skill needed in the planning field. Each team will be judged on how well they demonstrate how the team worked collaboratively throughout the process and incorporated different expertise, backgrounds, and disciplines.

**Hors categorie**
Each team will also be judged on any additional material they present to the final jury.
Questions

Teams are encouraged to submit any questions they may have about the competition, the evaluation criteria, or the project. All questions must be submitted via email to Rachael Thompson Panik (rtpanik@gmail.com) by no later than 6:00 pm EST on 15 February 2020. Be sure to reference Questions - APA Student Design Competition in the subject line of the email.

Competition organizers will endeavor to address all questions submitted in writing in a single set of FAQs to be released no later than 22 February 2020.
**Entry Form**

Each student team shall select a team leader to act as the team’s single point of contact. The team leader must complete and submit the following registration form here:

https://form.jotform.com/93224975869172

**Deadline for Registrations**

Registrations are due by 6:00 PM (EST) Friday, **28 February 2020**.

**Deadline for Submissions**

Submissions are due by 6:00 PM (EDT) Friday, **27 March 2020**. The team leader shall be responsible for contacting the competition organizer Ellen Forthofer (ellen.forthofer@gmail.com) at least two days prior to the submittal deadline to confirm access to a Dropbox account. All required submittal materials must be uploaded by the deadline. No entries will be accepted after the deadline.

**Submission Fee**

There is no submission fee to participate in this student design competition.
Resources, Reference Materials and Useful Links

Resources:
1. Houston Map Viewer
2. Mobility Houston Report
3. Resilient Houston – Resilience Assessment; May 2019
4. Houston Recovers
5. City of Houston GIS Portal
   Complete Communities: Kashmere Gardens
7. Kashmere Gardens Livable Centers Study
8. Houston Bike Plan; February 2017
9. Plan Houston
10. City of Houston – Demographic Data
11. Healthy Communities of Opportunity; The Kresge Foundation; 2016
12. Harris County Flood Education Mapping Tool
13. Texas Housers
14. Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America
15. APA’s Planning Home Initiative
16. APA’s Housing Policy Guide
Reference and Useful Links:

1. A Year After Hurricane Harvey, Houston’s Poorest Neighborhoods Are Slowest to Recover; New York Times; by Manny Fernandez; September 3, 2018
2. Harvey’s Aftermath; Houston Chronicle; by Sarah Smith; April 5, 2019
3. Many Houston Neighborhoods Still Recovering from Harvey; Green Star Eco Services
5. Greens Bayou resiliency plans tie engagement and technical expertise together; Rice University, Kinder Institute for Urban Research; November 27, 2019
6. Data-Driven Planning for City Resilience: Mapping and Measuring Flood Risk; Urban Footprint; by Koshy Thomas; July 10, 2018
7. Houston’s Big Opportunity for Better Urban Development; CityLab; by Richard Florida / Jonathan F.P. Rose; September 7, 2017
8. Lessons from Hurricane Harvey: Houston’s Struggle is America’s Tale; New York Times; by Michael Kimmelman; November 11, 2017
9. Doing Houston Wrong; City Journal; by Joel Kotkin & Tory Gattis; December 13, 2017
10. How Houston Can Become More Resilient to Future Floods; Fast Company; by Adele Peters; August 29, 2017
11. Hell and High Water; ProPublica with The Texas Tribune; by Neena Satija, Kiah Collier, Al Shaw, and Jeff Larson; March 3, 2016
12. How Houston’s Urban Planning Made A Catastrophic Storm Even Worse; Fast Company; by Diana Budds; August 27, 2017
13. Harvey Wasn’t Just Bad Weather. It Was Bad City Planning; Bloomberg Businessweek; by Peter Coy and Christopher Flavelle; August 31, 2017
14. Houston unveils post-Harvey downtown master plan; Architects’ Newspaper; by Jonathan Hilburg; November 13, 2017
15. Neighborhoods on Houston’s east side highly susceptible to gentrification; Rice University News and Media Relations; by Amy McCaig; December 13, 2018
16. Cancer cluster identified in Houston neighborhood near Union Pacific railyard’s creosote contamination; Houston Chronicle; by Erin Douglas; December 5, 2019
17. Where You Live Impacts Your Health Right Down to the ZIP Code; Texas Housers; by Michael Depland; March 6, 2019