CNU Congress for the New Urbanism

1923 Vermont Avenue NW, Suite 201
Washington, DC 20001
cnu.org

Guidelines for the 2027 Charter Awards

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INTRODUCTION

The CNU Charter Awards celebrate the best current work in New Urbanism from around the world. They recognize exemplary projects by local government, developers, architects, urban designers, and others engaged in revitalizing and creating coherent cities, towns, neighborhoods, and metropolitan regions. The winners not only embody and advance the principles of the Charter of the New Urbanism—they make a difference in people's lives. Award-worthy designs also succeed through beauty, exhibiting the extraordinary skill of designers and developers.

The Charter states:

"The Congress for the New Urbanism views disinvestment in central cities, the spread of placeless sprawl, increasing separation by race and income, environmental deterioration, loss of agricultural lands and wilderness, and the erosion of society's built heritage as one interrelated community-building challenge.....We recognize that physical solutions by themselves will not solve social and economic problems, but neither can economic vitality, community stability, and environmental health be sustained without a coherent and supportive physical framework."

2027 JUDGING CRITERIA

The Charter Awards recognize excellence in architecture, landscape design, urban design, and planning, especially work that engenders more equitable, sustainable, connected, healthy, and prosperous communities. This section provides broad guidance on the core criteria and strengthening elements for evaluating projects.

Each year, the jury evaluates submissions for overall quality and alignment with Charter principles. In addition, the jury considers projects that align with the annual Congress Focus. The focus is a big idea that influences all the content at the Congress. Each focus ties to language from the Charter and intersect with issues that are being addressed by our Local Host region or city. However, any project that meets the following criteria will also be considered.

However, any project that meets the following criteria will be considered.

Criterion 1: How does this plan or project enhance people's lives? Charter Award-winning projects represent more than just beautiful neighborhoods, buildings, and streets. They are projects that have improved residents' health and happiness, financially strengthened local governments, and helped protect the natural environment. In short, the Charter Awards honor places that celebrate people and improve their lives.

Criterion 2: How does this plan or project advance the principles of the Charter? Entries are judged by the extent to which they meet this promise and fulfill and advance the principles of the Charter of the New Urbanism. The Charter can be found online at www.cnu.org/charter

Elements that Strengthen Applications
Is this project built, substantially completed, adopted, or otherwise realized?
Our movement has reached an important threshold that allows us to focus on built work. The jury strongly prefers built or implemented work yet also recognizes that "built" means something different at each of the three Charter scales described below. The larger the scale, the longer it takes to see physical improvements on the ground, and the more intervening factors there are between the plan and the physical result.

- For block and building-scale projects, projects should be fully realized to qualify as built.
- For neighborhood-scale projects, a significant portion of both public and private improvements should be built.
- For regional plans, legislatively adopted policies, code changes, and capital budgets demonstrate implementation.

CATEGORIES

Charter Awards applicants must select a category with which their project falls under. The following categories, corresponding to the three scales addressed by the Charter, are:

1. **Region, Metropolis, City, and Town**, including comprehensive plans, regional plans, visions, open space and environmental proposals, public policies, transportation plans, and citywide or very large master plans that include elements of smaller scale, such as neighborhoods, districts, and corridors.
2. **Neighborhood, District, and Corridor**, including neighborhood, district, and corridor master plans, urban designs, regulating plans and their codes, and building and landscape designs for specific areas within cities and towns.
3. **Block, Street, and Building**, including detailed urban designs, designs for individual or small sets of buildings, and landscape and public realm designs for individual urban blocks and civic spaces.

Emerging Projects: To highlight design and urbanist innovations in the planning and design process, an applicant can designate the project as an "Emerging Project." These are projects that are only partially implemented and can include theoretical projects that may not be immediately realizable, but nonetheless hold exceptional promise for showing how to apply the techniques and principles of the New Urbanism. *Student projects do not need to mark their submissions as Emerging.*

ACADEMIC AWARDS

Degree-seeking students and faculty advising them at both the graduate and undergraduate level are also invited to submit applications to the Charter Awards. Applications may be initiated by faculty (for the work of an entire class, team, or individual student), or by degree-seeking students(s) in any discipline that contributes to the shaping of the built environment. Individual and team projects done for credit are welcome. These entries will be reviewed separately from the professional entries.

APPLICATION

Applications will only be accepted through CNU's submission portal, OpenWater. If you have not used the system before, you will need to create an account. This account is separate from CNU's Constituent Portal.

Before starting your application, please have your CNU Constituent Portal Number handy. You can find that number in your online profile by logging in here. A CNU constituent profile doesn't require membership. If you don't already have a CNU online account, you can create one here.

PROJECT CHARACTERISTICS

Over a three-year process, CNU has updated the project characteristic categories and has added additional data-based questions. This update is to better quantify the impacts of New Urbanism. Some project characteristics may generate additional data questions. Please answer these data questions to the best of your ability. Missed data points will not count against project submissions.

WRITING AND IMAGE SUPPLEMENTS

There are five writing supplements found in the online application. In addition to answering the questions, applicants must also upload up to ten high-resolution photos of your project along with captions for those photos. More information on these supplements can be found below.

Note: **Do not identify the name of any of the individuals, firms, or agencies involved in the project in the writing supplements and images you upload to your application.** The Charter Awards jury judges all entries blindly and will not see the contact information within the online application nor the lead firm/company of the project.

For quotes or writing supplements mentioning individuals, firms, or agencies involved with the project submission please replace names with ***[NAME WITHHELD].*** *If your project is selected, CNU will follow up for quote identification.*

1. **Project description: (650 WORDS MAX)**

Describe the general characteristics of the project and how it demonstrates design excellence and ingenuity. Describe how the project was initiated and how the key design concepts respond to the challenges posed by the project and context.

CNU recognizes that larger-scale projects take long periods to execute. Please give details of plan implementation strategy and current stage of implementation.

2. **What is uniquely excellent in your project? (150 WORDS MAX)**

What is uniquely excellent in your project? Please identify an aspect of your design, plan, or project that is uniquely worthy of commendation.

It might be an approach to public engagement, a specific design solution, a forward-thinking element of policy, or some other advancement of practice.

3. **Required quotes:** (exempt from word and page limits)

Include 2-3 short quotes or testimonials that illustrate the project's impacts.

Quotes may come from existing sources such as media coverage, public meetings, public opinion surveys, or project notes.

For quotes or mentioning individuals, firms, or agencies involved with the project submission please replace names with [NAME WITHHELD]. If your project is selected, CNU will follow up for quote identification.

4. **Response to Charter principles: (650 WORDS MAX)**

How does your project respond to and advance the principles of the Charter of the New Urbanism?

The Canons of Sustainable Architecture & Urbanism and the Charter Amendments are companions to the Charter and submitters can explain how the project advances the operating principles presented in these documents.

This requirement is not intended to generate a cursory checklist, but rather a thoughtful consideration of the way the project realizes the holistic vision embodied in the Charter.

5. **Lessons learned: (325 WORDS MAX)**

What lessons have you learned over the course of your project?

Provide details on lessons learned or expertise gained over the course of this project that will help this project serve as an example. Cite innovative ways this project overcomes common barriers to the creation of good urbanism and advances project excellence.

Please upload up to ten high-resolution photos (at least 2000x1840 px). These photos should explain the context of the project, the major elements of the proposal, and the character and quality of places created or envisioned, including images that show the site in use. If the project is built or complete, please upload photos of the built results along with photos of preexisting site or area conditions. It should be clear whether images represent present site conditions, expected site conditions, previous site conditions, or off-site precedents. If the "built result" for larger-scale projects is an adopted code, capital improvements plan, or other policy change, a PDF or active link to that work should be included.

Of the ten photos, the following three are required:

1. At least one site or area plan showing the project's land use, street networks, and other elements of its urbanism.
2. A map or aerial photo showing the larger context in which the project is located and clearly identifying the project's site boundaries.
    - For neighborhood-scale projects, inclusion of a context map is recommended. The map should cover at least one square mile or 2.5 square km, and should show the project within the built form of the surrounding area.

    - For smaller projects, a context map should show the project in relation to areas within walking distance (approximately 1/4 mile or 400m).
3. At least one image showing the design or plan in use by people. Photos are preferred unless the project is not yet complete (In the case of plans, research, and early-stage projects, a relevant image may be substituted e.g., a photograph of a charrette or civic engagement, a rendering showing how a project may be used, etc.).

In addition to the photos, please include captions for your images. Please upload a PDF or Word file of your captions. Note: **Do not identify the name of any of the individuals, firms, or agencies involved in the project in the image captions you upload to your application.**

DEADLINES AND FEES

Entries must be submitted digitally to CNU no later than 11:59 pm Eastern Time on January 22, 2027.

The entry fee is $300 per project for CNU members and $500 per project for non-members.

Student and faculty entries are $50 per project, which includes a one-year CNU student membership.

You will receive a system-generated e-mail after your entry materials have been received. Please make sure that the e-mail address listed on the Entry Form is correct.

RECOGNITION OF AWARD WINNERS

CNU recognizes all award recipients on its website, on CNU's online journal, Public Square, and at an annual awards ceremony. This year's ceremony will be tentatively held on Thursday, June 17, 2027 during CNU 35 Twin Cities. Winning project teams are invited to attend the awards ceremony.

While winners will be notified in March 2027 if their project is chosen, selection information is strictly embargoed until CNU announces the winners publicly.

CEREMONY VIDEOS

The Charter Award ceremony includes pre-recorded videos about each winning project. For the pre-recorded videos, we ask that each project record a brief video where one or more people involved briefly discuss the project. CNU requests that each video be no more than three minutes in length. For inspiration, you can watch the videos created by the 2026 winners here.

It is up to each project to determine what they'd like to say in their video, however, feel free to use the following talking points as a template:

- Why did you decide to submit your project for a 2027 Charter Award?
- What was the inspiration behind your project?
- What would you like those attending the ceremony to know about your project?
- How does your project exemplify great New Urbanism?

Visuals are encouraged in the pre-recorded videos, however, they are not required. Please submit all final videos two weeks before the ceremony. If you need any assistance with completing a video or would like to give remarks instead, please reach out to Lauren Mayer at lmayer@cnu.org at least one month before the ceremony.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

The Terms and Conditions listed below apply to all general and academic applications received.

GENERAL

1. CNU assumes no responsibility for technical or natural conditions that prevent the receipt of applications.
2. Applications shall be submitted digitally to CNU before 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time, January 22, 2027.
3. Writing supplements and photos must be free of firm logos, firm names, and names of team members.
4. An entry fee of $300 per entry for CNU Members and $500 per entry for non-CNU members is required for each application. Student and faculty entries are $50 per project, which includes a one-year CNU student membership.
5. All application fees are non-refundable and non-transferable.
6. All submitted materials will be retained by CNU for use as exemplars of the New Urbanism in publications (online or printed), programs or exhibits at the Congress, and CNU archives. The online application includes a waiver granting CNU rights to the material. CNU will retain all digital images for its permanent collection.
7. All illustrations and photographs must be signed off for via the digital Release Form during the application process. You will be required to input all copyright holder information and obtain clearance for use, should your entry involve more than one copyright holder.

ELIGIBILITY

1. As this is an international awards program, applications are encouraged from anywhere in the world and entry is open worldwide to any member of the public.
    - Applications must be in English.

2. Applications should be projects for a specific place that are built, planned, or envisioned and fit within one of the categories corresponding to the three scales addressed by the Charter.
    - Projects previously entered in earlier Charter Awards are allowed to apply provided they have not already won a Charter Award for that phase of work.
    - There is no time constraint on when the projects were implemented, completed, or published.
3. Anyone involved in the execution of a project, from design professionals and developers and government officials to representatives of civic institutions, are eligible to apply for a Charter Award.
    - The applicant must get approval from the project's principal designer and/or owner and the applicant must acknowledge to this effect on the online application.
    - Noncompliant entries will be disqualified.
    - CNU assumes no responsibility for failure of the applicant to obtain proper approval.
4. Entry is prohibited by jury members and their employees.
    - If any member of the 2027 jury, or members of their firm or organization, are or were part of a project's professional team or a participant in its implementation process, that project is ineligible for entry this year.
    - The onus is on the applicant to ensure no connection to the jury. If a connection is found, the application shall be disqualified.
    - Academic applications in which work was completed in a studio course taught or advised by a jury member are permitted, with such juror recusing him/herself from judging the application.
5. A project team is allowed to submit multiple entries in a given year.

JUDGING PROCESS

1. All applications will be vetted for eligibility and entry format requirements by CNU.
2. Qualifying applications will be advanced to the jury convened by CNU for the final selection of the Charter Awards. All decisions of the jury are final.
3. Upon request of CNU, any winner must provide CNU with any requested document in a timely manner in preparation for the awards announcement and award ceremony.

LICENSE

1. By entering the Charter Awards and signing the release form, each applicant grants CNU license to use the works under a “Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.5” license.
    - If materials entered are copyrighted, the copyright notice and the credits must be entered in the online application before submission of project.
    - Multiple Release Forms (within the application) may be required if entry materials come from multiple owners or copyright holders.
    - Under the terms of this license, CNU must include credit and any notice of copyright on all materials that CNU itself publishes, and will provide this information to other media.
2. CNU will not be responsible for the failure of other persons or media to follow the terms of the license.
3. No royalties or other amounts shall be paid by CNU for use of these materials.