

LIVABLE COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE + ABUNDANT HOUSING LA ANNOUNCE NATIONAL SINGLE STAIR ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN COMPETITION

*Designers to Reimagine Multi-Family
Building Designs for Chance to Win Up to
\$30,000*

LOS ANGELES, CA, UNITED STATES,
March 18, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ --
Livable Communities Initiative and
Abundant Housing LA, together with a
consortium of affordable housing
development advocates, today
announced the inaugural [2025
National Single Stair Architectural
Design Competition](#), open to
professional or aspiring architects and
designers (age restrictions apply) that
can reimagine multi-family building
designs using single-stair
configurations. Entrants may submit up to three designs for different lot sizes for a chance to
win a \$10,000 award for each winning entry. Entries are being accepted now through June 29,
2025.



Photo Credit: Mark Ostrow

This single stair design concept originates from North American building code stipulations, which mandate that residential multifamily structures must have access to two stairs above three stories, in addition to other fire and life safety code requirements. This second exit requirement has given rise to a distinct architectural approach in North America – the “double-loaded corridor” floor plan, a layout where lengthy, straight hallways run down the middle of a building with all the units off the corridor, like a hotel. Another design approach is a “single-loaded corridor” which runs down one side of a building, with all the units off one side of the corridor.

Commonly found in hotels or student dorms in other parts of the world in North America, the double-loaded floor plan is alone in being the predominant method for constructing multifamily

housing. However, narrow lots – such as commercial parcels on main streets in high opportunity neighborhoods – are too space-constrained to fit a second stair, requiring the need to combine parcels into a larger lot. This practice, known as land assembly, can be quite costly and in Los Angeles it has resulted in up to a 40% increase in land acquisition costs and extensive building timelines that impede housing development.

“We need high quality housing for families with ample air and light – homes that people actually want to live in and that they can afford. Single staircase reform allows for better quality in affordable housing, with homes that are more livable and offer a real range of sizes, not just tiny, cramped units and things that just aren’t good for people’s well-being – like windowless bedrooms,” said Ed Mendoza, policy director of the Livable Communities Initiative and research associate for California YIMBY.

The current two staircase exit route requirement in multi-family housing has had a profound effect on what gets built in North America. While many cities have tried to increase zoning for housing in high opportunity neighborhoods to deal with housing shortages, this push could be thwarted by the difficulties in developing the available lots.

“This contest not only encourages architects and designers to innovate bygone multi-family building designs but also represents a unique opportunity to demonstrate to developers and city planning managers what the future could look like – denser development on smaller scale lots and apartment buildings with larger housing options for families,” said Azeen Khanmalek, executive director, Abundant Housing LA.

Rules

- Anyone over 18 years of age is eligible to participate in the competition.
- Entrants who have business relationships with jury members or competition advisors must not discuss their entries with those individuals. Entrants affiliated with a sponsoring organization are eligible to enter. However, immediate family members of jury members' design firms are not eligible to enter.
- Entries will be judged on overall quality, creativity, and relevance.
- There will be three different lot size options in the competition, each with its own award for the winning design. An entrant may submit a design for any of the lot sizes to be eligible to win that award. If an entrant submits designs for all three lot sizes, they become eligible to win in multiple site categories.

- Portland Award (50 x 100' lot): \$10,000
- San Francisco Award (25 x 110' lot): \$10,000
- Austin Award (45 x 135' lot): \$10,000

- For detailed specs on design requirements (e.g., lot coverage, setbacks, height, building code, etc.) and detailed judging criteria, please visit [contest website](#).

Winners will be announced in late summer 2025, at which time the award-winning designs will be highlighted at an event to be announced.

ABOUT AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT CONSORTIUM

Livable Communities Initiative (LCI) is a nonprofit organization consisting of a group of urbanists, architects, developers, and advocates who want to reimagine Los Angeles and address the housing, mobility, and climate crisis at the same time. Abundant Housing LA (AHLA) is a grassroots nonprofit organization working to solve Southern California's housing crisis by advocating for more housing at all levels of affordability. They are composed of community members whose primary interest is making housing more affordable. Arnold Ventures, a primary sponsor of the competition, is a philanthropic organization that supports research to understand the root causes of America's most persistent and pressing problems, as well as evidence-based solutions to address them. LCI, AHLA, and Arnold Ventures, together with a consortium of like-minded affordable housing development advocates, have come together to launch the inaugural 2025 National Single Stair Architectural Design Competition, to reimagine multi-family building designs.

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