

AARP Design Competition

7/22/2026

In Fall 2026, the City of Albuquerque is hosting a design competition for design professionals and students, sponsored by the [AARP](#) and in partnership with the [University of New Mexico's School of Architecture and Planning \(UNM SAAP\)](#), the [Mid-Region Metropolitan Planning Organization](#), and the [New Mexico Chapter of the Urban Land Institute \(ULI NM\)](#).

This competition invites design professionals and UNM SAAP students to create a cottage development project as age-friendly housing. The winner will best demonstrate how their development concept provides opportunities for residents to age-in-place with good access to nearby services and amenities and fits into the context of the surrounding neighborhood.

Awards

The competition will award cash prizes for first place and honorable mention in two tracks:

- **Design Professionals:**
 - First Place: \$5,000 and a 1-year professional membership to ULI NM
 - Honorable mention: \$1,000 and a 1-year professional membership to ULI NM
- **Students:**
 - First Place: \$2,500 and a 1-year student membership to ULI NM
 - Honorable Mention: \$500 and a 1-year student membership to ULI NM
 - Note: Students may enter in teams of up to 3 members. If they win, they share prize money, but all members receive a one-year student membership to ULI NM.

Competition Website: <https://cabq.gov/cottages>



New Mexico

[How to Enter](#)

Age-friendly Housing: Cottage Development

Site Selection

Participants will design a cottage development on a subject property of their choice zoned R-1 in Albuquerque city limits. Sites may be undeveloped or vacant, or a redesign or redevelopment of existing development can be proposed.

- [Albuquerque Zoning Map](#)

Zoning Requirements

The project design must comply with zoning requirements in the City's Integrated Development Ordinance (IDO).

- [Cottage Development Use-Specific Standards](#)
 - Project size must be between 10,000 s.f. and 3 acres.
 - See the calculation in the IDO to determine the maximum square footage for the project that can be split into dwelling units.
 - Each dwelling unit must be between 650 s.f. and 1,200 s.f.
 - Dwelling units may be attached to one other dwelling unit (i.e., duplex).
- [Off-street Parking Standards](#)
 - ADA requirements must be met.
 - On properties in a Center or Corridor [i.e., Urban Center, Activity Center, Main Street area, Premium Transit area, or Major Transit area], no off-street parking is required beyond ADA requirements. See the [Zoning Map](#), Button 2 for Center/Corridor boundaries.
 - In other locations, 4 spaces are required for every 5 dwelling units AND 2 additional spaces are required for visitors (per project).

Universal Design

At least 2 dwelling units must incorporate universal design elements to support aging in place. Universal design helps to accommodate people throughout their lives and abilities.

- [AARP Guide on Universal Design: Housing Choices for Albuquerque's Older Adults](#)
- [AARP Universal Design](#)

Financial Feasibility

The competition will provide a pro forma template that will demonstrate the financial viability of the project or quantify the subsidy needed to construct/finance the project. The pro forma must be completed and submitted. Projects do not need to be financially viable to win.

- Pro Forma [Pending]

Deliverables

Entry Submittals

Entries will be submitted electronically and must include all of the following items to be eligible for judging.

1. Up to 2 PDF posters sized Arch D (24" × 36") that include, at a minimum, all of the following:
 - a. Site plan for the cottage development demonstrating compliance with the zoning requirements.
 - b. Floor plans and elevations for each type of dwelling unit.
 - c. A narrative description of the project, the site, and why the site was chosen.
 - d. A visual illustration (e.g., context map or rendering) showing how the project fits into the surrounding neighborhood.
 - e. A map or diagram illustrating how the project provides transportation access to nearby services and/or amenities to support mobility for its residents.
 - f. A narrative description of how the design fits into the neighborhood context and promotes access / mobility for residents.
2. A narrative summary and list of universal design elements incorporated into the design of at least two dwelling units to create age-friendly housing and support aging in place.
3. A completed pro forma.

Awards Event Pin-ups

To be eligible for awards, all participants must attend the awards event and pin up their entries, including prints of items #1-3 in the entry submittal above, at the participants' expense.

Timeline

Key Milestones

See descriptions of each milestone below.

- **Tuesday, September 1:** [Competition Kickoff](#) [In-person]
- **Tuesday, September 22:** [Competition Brief](#) [Virtual]
- **Friday, October 2:** [Deadline to Enter Competition](#) [Online]
- **Thursday-Friday, October 22-23:** [Charrette & Feedback Pin-up](#) [In-person]
- **Friday, November 13:** [Deadline to Submit a Competition Entry](#) [Online]
- **Friday, November 20:** [Awards Event](#) [In-person]
- **Spring 2027:** [Community Dialogue Event](#) [Virtual]

Competition Kickoff [Optional]

The competition will begin with a summit that provides background on the key drivers for this competition:

- Demographic Changes in Our Region and Their Impact on Housing Needs
- Age-friendly Housing Needs
- Zoning Changes to Meet Housing Needs

Event Details:

- **WHERE:** Fusion, 708 1st St NW, Albuquerque, NM 87102
- **WHEN:** Tuesday, September 1, 12:00 PM to 1:30 PM

While attendance is not required, those who attend will have the best understanding of the purpose of this competition.

Lunch will be provided.

Competition Brief

The details of the competition will be explained during a virtual session, with time for questions and answers for those considering entering the competition.

Event Details:

- **WHERE:** Zoom Webinar [[Registration Link](#)]
- **WHEN:** Tuesday, September 22, 12:00 PM to 1:30 PM

While attendance is not required, those who attend will have the best understanding of the requirements of this competition. The webinar will be recorded and posted on the project webpage.

A second in-person competition brief is being planned for UNM students but open to all during the same week. Details are pending. Refreshments will be provided.

Deadline to Register

Participants must register to be part of the competition by **Friday, October 2 by 5:00 PM**.

- [Online Registration Form](#)

By registering, participants are agreeing to share their entries with the competition partners, and winning entries may be used, with attribution, by the City of Albuquerque for illustration purposes and for AARP for promotional purposes.

Student entry bonus: The first 20 students to enter, and later submit a competition entry, will receive a free 1-year membership to ULI NM.

Optional Charrette and Feedback Pin-up

UNM will host a working space for all competition participants, with experts on site to offer guidance on **Thursday-Friday, October 22-23 from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM** in Room P104. Refreshments will be provided.

All participants are encouraged to participate in a pin-up on **Friday, October 23 from 4:00 PM to 6:00 PM**. Experts will walk around and give feedback.

Attendance is not mandatory, but participants may benefit from feedback from experts.

Deadline to Submit a Competition Entry

Participants must submit an entry to the portal below by **Friday, November 13 at 5:00 PM**.

- Submittal Portal [pending]

Awards Event [Mandatory]

To be eligible for awards, participants must attend the awards event and pin up their printed entries. Winners will be announced after an open house, and winning participants will have an opportunity to present their entries. Refreshments will be provided.

- **WHEN:** Friday, November 20, 3:00 PM to 5:00 PM
- **WHERE:** UNM SAAP Room P104

Community Dialogue Event

ULI NM will host an online forum in early 2027 for winners to share their entries with a broader audience, and a panel of experts will discuss what we learned from the competition and potential next steps to encourage age-friendly housing in Albuquerque. Details to come.

Competition Partners

AARP

This design competition is funded through the AARP Community Challenge Grant. The [AARP Community Challenge](#) grant program is part of the nationwide [AARP Livable Communities](#) initiative that helps communities make immediate improvements and jump-start long-term progress in support of residents of all ages.

In 2017, AARP designated the City of Albuquerque as an Age-Friendly City. Since then, AARP has partnered with the Department of Senior Affairs to create an Age-friendly Plan and a [design guide for age-friendly housing in Albuquerque](#).

City of Albuquerque

City Departments are partnering on this competition to serve our individual missions and to meet the shared goal of providing housing that people need and can afford.

Senior Affairs

The [Department of Senior Affairs](#) provides resources that help our community thrive while embracing aging. Senior Affairs has a long-standing partnership with AARP to help seniors live with dignity, stay healthy, and engage with their community. This competition helps implement the Age-friendly Action Plan, which identified providing affordable, age-friendly housing and housing options for seniors as a key priority.

Planning

[The Planning Department](#) reviews development projects, helps communities plan for the future, and prepares updates to the City's zoning code to shape the built environment. The Urban Design & Development Division is a partner in this competition to test the viability of recent zoning updates that allow cottage development on smaller lots in Albuquerque as a housing option for multigenerational living, aging in place, and intentional communities as neighborhood-scale infill development.

Metropolitan Redevelopment

The [Metropolitan Redevelopment Agency](#) provides opportunities for public/private partnerships on development projects that can catalyze community development in areas that need investment. The MRA is a partner in this competition to explore how cottage development may deliver infill housing options that are generally challenging to the private market.

Health, Housing, & Homelessness

The [Department of Health, Housing, & Homelessness](#) develops affordable housing and provides homeless services. HHH is a partner in the competition to explore how cottage development may deliver lower-cost housing units for rental or co-ownership.

University of New Mexico's School of Architecture and Planning

[UNM's School of Architecture and Planning](#) provides undergraduate and graduate degree programs in architecture, planning, and landscape architecture. UNM also offers ULI's Urban PLAN as a course offering in the fall and spring semesters. As educators to the next generation of designers, each program is encouraging students to enter the competition, individually or in teams.

Mid-Region Metropolitan Planning Organization

The [Mid-Region Metropolitan Planning Organization](#) (MRMPO) works with jurisdictions throughout the Albuquerque area to help plan the future of our multimodal transportation systems. MRMPO is partnering in this competition to help encourage and promote a housing option that is well connected to destinations and that can be both affordable and well-suited for smaller households and aging in place.

New Mexico Chapter of the Urban Land Institute (ULI-NM)

ULI-NM is a membership organization focused on cities and what makes them the best versions of themselves. ULI members are professionals involved in urban development, including design professionals, developers, financiers, Realtors/brokers, and planners. ULI-NM offers programming and networking opportunities to young and emerging professionals through its Young Leaders and NEXT groups. ULI is excited to partner in this competition as a way to visualize a new housing option and identify potential barriers to developing housing that people need and can afford. Because of their expertise, ULI members are encouraged to enter the competition as participants, attend events, or volunteer to be judges. ULI provided the pro forma for the competition to be able to compare the viability of the cottage development projects.