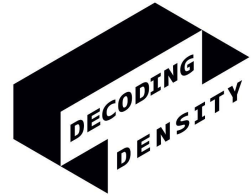




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For Immediate Release

Urbanarium launches Decoding Density, an ideas competition that will shape future housing codes

Open to all, international contest addresses two of the most existential problems today: climate change and housing affordability

DEC. 11, 2023 (VANCOUVER, CANADA) — Urbanarium announces Decoding Density, the third installment of Canada’s largest affordable housing competition series, with prizes totalling \$44,000. The competition highlights and challenges current building codes in order to explore apartment designs that emphasize outdoor space, communal-oriented features, and low-energy approaches to comfort and livability. Watch the latest [About Here video](#) for more context on how one current building code in North America is getting in the way of housing solutions.

“This is a unique chance for residents to help shape the very neighborhoods in which they live,” says Amy Nugent, executive director of Urbanarium, a charitable organization dedicated to engaging Metro Vancouver residents in urban planning. “Our ideas contests make real-world impacts — the Missing Middle and the Mixing Middle Competitions helped inform new legislation that requires local governments to update zoning bylaws allowing small-scale, multi-unit housing. Decoding Density is seeking to innovate building codes at a time when BC has just announced that they are reviewing building codes in order to make more homes for people faster.”

Decoding Density asks participants to consider six-storey plus wood-frame structures. The form has many benefits: simple, low-carbon construction, less excavation for underground parking, better contextual fit in low density neighbourhoods, and less shadowing than condominium towers. However, there are many building code restrictions that make it challenging to construct buildings that reflect the needs of individuals and families today. For example, cross-ventilation and access to sunlight are difficult to achieve within standard building footprints. Competition entrants are challenged to propose creative, liveable, and sociable housing forms, while highlighting the existing policies that are stopping their development.

“We would like for the public to appreciate that the apartment buildings that are going to start appearing in their neighbourhoods don’t need to be simple boxes that fail to optimize the value of their site but rather benefit from and contribute to their communities,” says Marta Farevaag, competition co-chair.

Decoding Density is expected to attract submissions from students, young professionals, firms, and multidisciplinary teams from around the world. Final submissions may impact future policy changes and will offer unique networking opportunities — including a feature in Uytae Lee’s popular [About Here](#) series. The first place overall award is for \$12,000, second place is \$8,000, third place is \$4,000, and five honourable mentions will receive \$2,000 each. In addition, a Planners Prize of \$10,000 will be awarded.

Early bird registration is open now through Dec. 29. — participants who register early will pay a reduced entry fee of \$95. Competition registration closes on Jan. 19, 2024 and submissions are due on April 13, 2024. Winners will be announced in a presentation on April 16, 2024.

The competition jury includes:

- Alfred Waugh, Architect AIBC
- Cedric Yu, Architect AIBC
- Francis Bula, Urban Issues/Housing Journalist
- Inge Roecker, Architect AIBC and Associate Professor, SALA, UBC
- Ly Tang, Senior Development Manager, Rize Alliance Properties
- Marta Maj, Principal, Timber Engineering Inc.
- Richard Henriquez, Architect AIBC
- Sara Muir, Program Manager, UBC, Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions
- Shirley Shen, Architect AIBC

An advisory panel of planning professionals selects the winner of the Planners Prize:

- Dr. Gary Hack, Fellow of the American Institute of Certified Planners
- Edward W. Kozak, General Manager Planning and Development, City of Burnaby
- Kevin Spaans, Assistant Director of Development Planning, City of Vancouver
- Patrick Klassen, Community Planning Manager, City of Surrey
- Suzanne Carter-Huffman, Program Manager, Urban Design, City of Richmond

To learn more about Decoding Density and register, visit decodingdensity.com.

Sponsors



About Urbanarium

Urbanarium was first founded in 1985 by a group of urbanites passionate about city making. A registered charity since 2015, the mostly volunteer-run organization’s mandate is educational,

informing and engaging the residents of Metro Vancouver to help guide community decisions. Through a variety of programs, very often in partnership with other organizations, Urbanarium provides the region with stimulating information and creative solutions for how our urban system works, the forces acting upon it, and what alternative futures might be realized.

Social media

Facebook: [@urbanariumvancouver](#)

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YouTube: bit.ly/urbanariumYT

Press kit and photos

bit.ly/DecodingDensity

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