



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Urbanarium announces winners of Decoding Timber Towers

\$50,000 in prize money was distributed to winners from across North America

SEPT. 16, 2025 (VANCOUVER, CANADA) — In a special ceremony this evening, **Urbanarium** announced the winners of their fourth global ideas competition **Decoding Timber Towers**, which challenged participants to consider innovative residential and mixed use design solutions that use mass timber — an engineered wood product that is both sustainable and low-carbon. A total of 44 submissions were submitted from six countries: Brazil, Canada, Mexico, New Zealand, South Africa, and the United States. Participating teams spanned from students to mid- and large-sized architecture firms.

“At a time when we urgently need low-carbon, livable, and affordable housing, it is vital to share ideas and pursue scalable solutions,” says juror Natalie Telewiak, Principal at MGA | Michael Green Architecture. “The Decoding Timber Towers competition delivered just that — provocative proposals that challenge regulation, reimagine mass timber at scale, and spark strategies for change. What stood out to me in the jury process was the diversity of perspectives and the quality of submissions, each thoughtfully advancing the conversation. This kind of ambitious, collaborative discourse is exactly what we need to address the pressing realities of both housing and climate.”

The winners of Decoding Timber Towers were decided after a week of submissions review and during a rigorous day of deliberations by a jury of architects, planners, engineers, developers, community leaders, and sustainable and Indigenous housing experts. New to the competition this year is the **DIGITAL Prize (\$10,000)** — named partially after DIGITAL, Canada’s Global Innovation Cluster for digital technologies and its Housing Growth Innovation program — which was awarded to submissions that demonstrated innovation in both systemization and standardization of housing construction. Two teams tied for the prize: one that proposed pre-fabricated components in a factory environment, and one that proposed a unique on-site pre-fabrication area.

The winners are:

- 1st Place Winner: \$15,000 + DIGITAL Prize (Tied): \$5,000 — Total \$20,000
Timber Commons by MT3 | Toronto, Canada
Team members: Ben Feldman, Carol Cochrane, Carol Phillips, Jaewon Kim, Jay Zhao, Jillian Weinberger, Kayley Mullings, Luis Quezada, Phil Silverstein, Will Klassen
- 2nd Place Winner: \$10,000
KAPLA by Team Softwood | Canada-wide
Team members: Conrad Speckert, Glenn Lu, Jennifer Davis, Joshua Giovinazzo

- 3rd Place Winner: \$5,000 + DIGITAL Prize (Tied): \$5,000 — Total \$10,000
Culture House by 637427 | Vancouver, Canada
 Team members: Aster Cai, Elvis Lin

Honourable Mentions: \$2,000 prize each

- Fluvial Formwork by Adjacent Brick Rows | Burnaby, Canada
 Team members: Benjamin Beckwith, Cameron Lockhart, Elisabeth Baudinaud, Jessica Little, Mike Knauer
- TwoUp by DIALOG | Vancouver, Canada
 Team members: Brady Dunlop, James Jiang, Katie Theall, Paul Giles, Ryan McClanaghan, Sideqa Haqani, Yury Kulikov
- FAM-1 by familyandfriends | Vancouver, Canada
 Team members: McKean Shave, Richard Ranta, Robert Ferguson
- AWR by RWA | Vancouver, Canada
 Team members: Andrea Bolin, Cindy Brenneis, Lian Gilles, Mohneesh Vidhani, Tanita Cherian, Simin Lofti
- Timber Town by Studio Oh Song | Brooklyn, United States
 Team members: Ericka Song, Justin Oh

Jury notes on *Timber Commons* by MT3:

This team's modular point tower showed careful consideration of the multifaceted competition requirements. This design introduces a scalable modular system, a true kit-of-parts, that thoughtfully integrates volumetric units, floor cassettes, and prefabricated structural façade elements. This adaptable system allows for diverse interpretations across different sites, offering both flexibility and repeatability. Timber Commons goes beyond modular efficiency by incorporating integrated sustainable systems, including a solar chimney for natural ventilation. The linear cladding reduced the glazing for energy efficiency and the column-free space gave interior flexibility for increased livability. Importantly, the project reframes affordability not only in financial terms, but in the dignity of belonging: weaving together community spaces and creating places where people can thrive.

DIGITAL Prize Rationale: *The Timber Commons team's understanding of modular and flat pack structural capabilities led to development of a scheme that demonstrates a high level of systemization shifting critical work into controlled factory environments. The jury noted that this team had drilled down to understand present challenges and streamline tall timber construction. The proposed kit of parts offers flexibility for use in design of different building typologies and allows differing site interpretations. With development, the kit of parts is almost implementable tomorrow.*

Jury notes on *KAPLA* by Team Softwood:

Juror Richard Henriquez's comment expressed an all-jury sentiment, "This project actually looks like a timber tower!" With a concrete podium and 18 storey tower, the scheme was incrementally sensitive to its urban context. Floor plans showed modular efficiency with steel pre-fab clip-on balconies and exposed ceilings. The single exit staircase for all 18 floors followed a European precedent demonstrated safe through over a hundred years of use in Europe. KAPLA combines a limited equity housing co-operative, land trust and non-profit development model to remove the project from speculation and focus on making this housing increasingly affordable over time. A great

example on how performance based alternatives can create more low carbon and more beautiful housing.

Jury notes on *Culture House* by 637427:

The jury applauded this affordable cultural project's use of hybrid panelized modular prefabrication, with its creative approach of locating a factory on the project site. The costing technical advisors flagged this project's ambitious construction schedule, while also acknowledging the major cost advantage of the on-site factory, which would be cost-effective in saved transportation costs, achieving quicker site-adjacent quality control and offering time efficiencies for building inspections, with inspectors walking next door to review CLTs. Juror Natalie Telewiak particularly liked this team's approach that showed a strong understanding of regulations and offering rigorous detail in decoding recommendations.

DIGITAL Prize Rationale: *The Culture House team's strong understanding of codes and heavy timber constructability challenges still to be cracked, led to an extremely innovative and promising level of systemization for further study and implementation. Their project engaged hybrid, panelized, modular prefab components with the added level of innovative systemization that incorporated on-site prefabrication. Juror Ian Boyle commented, "Culture House is where we need to go to crack this nut."*

During the deliberations, the jury identified a number of potential changes to codes and regulations that could be made to increase the affordability, sustainability, and sociability of future housing. These included addressing zoning hindrances to intergenerational living, permitting single-exit stairs, increasing maximum permitted heights, and more. For a summary of potential impacts, [click here](#).

The three winning proposals and three honourable mentions will be showcased at next week's international [Woodrise 2025](#). Amy Vilis, Director of Housing Growth Innovation at DIGITAL; Travis Hanks, Principal and Co-founder of Haeccity Studio Architecture; and Sailen Black, Senior Green Building Planner at the City of Vancouver and a Woodrise speaker, will do an on-stage presentation of the DIGITAL Prize on Sept. 23 at 10:30am.

The winning proposals can be viewed online this week at www.decodingtimbertowers.com. A publication about the finalists and a solutions video by [About Here](#) will be launched on Nov. 24, 2025 at The Polygon Gallery.

The competition jury included:

- Andrew Lawrence, Structural Engineer | Arup Fellow, Director, Arup
- Brenda Knights, Housing Developer | CEO, BC Indigenous Housing Society
- Emilie Adin, Planner | President, Planning Institute of British Columbia
- Ian Boyle, Structural Engineer | Principal, Fast + Epp
- Dr. Gary Hack, Planner | Professor Emeritus, UPenn, MIT
- Mingyuk Chen, Architect, AIBC | Associate Director, LWPAC
- Natalie Telewiak, Architect AIBC, AIA | Principal, MGA | Michael Green Architecture
- Norm Leech, Community Leader | Executive Director, Frog Hollow Neighbourhood House
- Richard Henriquez, Retired Architect, AIBC | Founding Principal, Henriquez Partners Architecture
- Sailen Black, Architect, AIBC | Senior Green Building Planner, Planning, Urban Design and Sustainability, City of Vancouver

Sponsors



About Urbanarium

Urbanarium was founded in 1985 by a group of planners and architects passionate about city making. A registered charity since 2015, the board-led organization's mandate is to motivate residents, government and industry to take informed action to improve their cities. Through a unique suite of participatory programming: competitions, debates and studios, Urbanarium inspires creative and pragmatic urban solutions for the urgent challenges of affordable housing and climate change. Visit urbanarium.org.

Social media

Instagram: [@urbanariumvan](https://www.instagram.com/urbanariumvan)
YouTube: [bit.ly/urbanariumYT](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCbitlyurbanariumYT)
LinkedIn: [@urbanarium](https://www.linkedin.com/company/urbanarium)
Facebook: [@urbanariumvancouver](https://www.facebook.com/urbanariumvancouver)

Press kit and photos

bit.ly/DecodingTimberTowers

Press contact

Ines Min
604 440 0791
ines@inesmin.com