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APA OHIO PRESENTS OHIO PLANNING AWARDS

CLEVELAND, OH (September 26, 2025) – The Ohio Chapter of the American Planning Association (APA Ohio) is pleased to announce winners of the 2025 APA Ohio Planning Awards. The biennial awards program honors outstanding physical spaces that planners have made permanent through careful planning and unbridled imagination in Ohio.

APA Ohio presented the following awards at the 2025 APA Ohio Planning Conference on September 26, 2025 in Toledo, Ohio.

Award nominations were submitted, representing areas throughout the state, with multiple submissions in each of the categories. The applications were reviewed and scored by a jury of APA Minnesota members. They evaluated the nominations based on the following criteria:

- Demonstrate creative problem solving
- Are well presented, clear & accurate, and communicate ideas successfully
- Include an interactive public feedback process
- Demonstrate appropriate and applicable solutions to common issues
- Illustrate successful planning processes

The following nominations were selected as the 2025 APA Ohio Planning Award Winners:

Best Practice Innovation Award – Connected Communities

The Connected Communities initiative, launched by the City of Cincinnati Department of City Planning and Engagement in 2022 and adopted in 2024, was a comprehensive two-year effort to address the city's first population growth in 70 years amid housing shortages and rising costs. Developed entirely in-house by city staff, it combined robust community engagement—including 34 events, over 2,000 participants, and innovative tools like the interactive "Simcincinnati" game and StoryMaps—with best practices from research and other cities to shape progressive zoning reforms. These reforms expanded middle housing options, eased density and height restrictions, eliminated parking minimums, streamlined LIHTC projects, and introduced new design standards, focusing on areas near neighborhood business districts and future Bus Rapid Transit lines.

The process emphasized accessibility, interactivity, and consensus-building, resulting in a cost-effective, transferable model for other cities. By aligning with long-term plans like Plan Cincinnati and securing federal support, Connected Communities represents a bold, high-quality, and replicable example of how local governments can enact meaningful, community-driven policy change to foster more inclusive, connected, and sustainable growth.

Jurors commented, "This was an innovative plan to engage the community regarding housing in Cincinnati. This game allowed community members to understand complex zoning ideas and see the visual differences between housing types."

Comprehensive Plan Award – neXtPlan

neXtPlan, Xenia's 2024 Comprehensive Plan update, built on the success of the 2013 X-Plan to set a new standard for community-driven planning with limited resources. The process engaged over 900 participants through 20+ meetings, four online surveys, and innovative outreach including pop-ups, brewery trivia nights, QR codes, and story maps.

Organized in three phases—Xplore, Xchange, and Xecute—the plan blended robust data analysis, creative “guerilla marketing,” and partnerships with groups like Ohio AARP, the Dayton Foundation, and the Congress for New Urbanism, which facilitated a major design charrette. The resulting plan includes a Future Land Use Plan tailored to each of the City's 22 neighborhoods, six policy chapters on core topics from mobility to economic development, and a detailed Action Plan linked to an interactive dashboard that tracks implementation and feeds directly into annual budgets and capital plans.

By leveraging technology, partnerships, and creativity, neXtPlan demonstrated how even small teams can deliver a comprehensive, innovative, and highly interactive community plan that remains relevant through ongoing reporting and accountability.

Planning Student(s) Showcase – Reimagining Childcare by Reviving Spaces in Cincinnati

Asmita Gurung and Mitali Taraikar are awarded for their capstone project, *Reimagining Childcare by Reviving Spaces in Cincinnati*, which addresses the pressing childcare challenges identified in the 2025 APA Trend Report. Their project investigates cost, availability, access, and location issues in Cincinnati, while proposing an innovative, transferable approach that adapts vacant or underutilized buildings into childcare facilities. By combining policy and place-based strategies, the students create flexible, affordable, and accessible solutions that support neighborhood revitalization, sustainable building reuse, and mixed-use community hubs. Their work is grounded in rigorous research using national and local data, and is presented through both an interactive website and an engaging in-person exhibit featuring life-size models, movable comic-style displays, and puzzles.

The project exemplifies comprehensive planning, creativity, and interactivity, offering a replicable model for addressing childcare deserts in other municipalities while effectively communicating planning concepts to diverse audiences.

The APA Ohio Awards Committee also recognizes the remaining student submissions as exemplary projects demonstrating outstanding merit. These projects include: *Patriot Park* (undergraduate City and Regional Planning Studio from the Knowlton School of Architecture at The Ohio State University), *The Guidebook on Multifamily Recycling* (students from Knowlton School of Architecture at The Ohio State University in collaboration with the Solid Waste Authority of Central Ohio), and *Reviving Our Waterfront Line* (2024 Master of Urban Planning and Development class from the Levin School of Urban Affairs at Cleveland State University).

Norman Krumholz Equity Award – Oberlin Social Equity Plan

The Oberlin Social Equity Plan is a comprehensive, community-driven initiative designed to address systemic inequities and promote fairness, inclusion, and equal access to opportunities for all residents. Building on Oberlin's long-standing commitment to justice, the plan began in 2020 under the City Manager's leadership and evolved through collaboration with community stakeholders, local nonprofits, Oberlin College students, and consultants. It involved extensive research, data collection, resident engagement, and independent assessment, identifying housing, jobs, health, and education as top priorities.

Guided by a steering committee, the plan translates 11 core principles into actionable strategies with defined objectives and responsibilities, while maintaining transparency and ongoing community involvement. Approved by the City Council in May 2025, the plan provides a living roadmap for advancing equity, addressing systemic barriers, and fostering social justice in Oberlin, with a focus on measurable impact and sustained community engagement.

Because We Plan Award – Downtown Franklin Master Plan

Completed in 2024, the Downtown Franklin Streetscape project in Franklin, Ohio, is a comprehensive and transformative revitalization of Main Street that demonstrates how strategic planning, strong leadership, and

community engagement can reinvigorate a historic downtown. Guided by the Downtown Master Plan adopted in 2023, the project upgraded infrastructure with ADA-accessible sidewalks, underground utilities, lighting, landscaping, wayfinding, and coordinated furnishings while preserving the district's historic character. Innovative placemaking features—including a Food Truck Pad, outdoor dining area, and programmable lighting system—enhanced walkability, economic vitality, and public gathering opportunities, fostering increased foot traffic, new businesses, and private investment.

The project was driven by proactive City leadership and extensive, interactive public engagement, ensuring that improvements aligned with community priorities for safety, accessibility, business support, and inclusivity. Its phased, high-quality implementation minimized disruption to businesses while creating a vibrant, flexible, and visually engaging public realm that serves as a model for small-city downtown revitalization, offering transferable strategies for other communities seeking economic, social, and cultural reinvestment.

Jurors commented that “this project benefits so many segments of the population in Franklin...I just love the look and feel of the new streetscapes!”

Specialized Plan Award – Metro Center Revitalization Plan

The Metro Center Revitalization Plan envisions transforming Dublin's aging office park into a dynamic, mixed-use destination that blends residential, commercial, cultural, and recreational uses while enhancing mobility, open space, and sustainability. Rooted in decades of planning and catalyzed by changing economic conditions, the plan emphasizes innovative approaches such as converting stormwater ponds into ecological, multifunctional landscapes and introducing amenity-rich, walkable environments that support social interaction and local entrepreneurship. Its comprehensive, transferable framework integrates detailed design guidance, phased implementation strategies, infrastructure improvements, and public-private partnerships, all informed by extensive, interactive community engagement.

By building on Metro Center's strategic location and historic significance while addressing challenges like high vacancies and limited connectivity, the plan provides a practical, high-quality roadmap for revitalization, serving as a replicable model for other suburban office parks seeking economic, social, and environmental renewal.

One juror commented on the “tremendous use of graphics to both demonstrate current issues and help the reader envision what could be.”

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About APA Ohio:

APA Ohio is a statewide, non-profit association of citizens and professional planners committed to promoting and enhancing planning and the quality of planning for all governmental entities in order to maintain and improve the quality of life for all Ohioans. APA Ohio is a state chapter of the American Planning Association (APA). APA Ohio encourages legislation and action programs to enhance sound planning at the state, regional and local levels. APA Ohio operates under the guidance of a volunteer Board of Trustees elected from the general membership. Chapter sections include Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Miami Valley and Northwest. Visit www.ohioplanning.org for additional information.