ARCHITECTURAL FOUNDATION SAN FRANCISCO

2026 HIGH SCHOOL DESIGN COMPETITION

Welcome

Dear High School Student & Educator,

We are pleased to invite you to participate in the Architectural Foundation of San Francisco's fifty-seventh annual High School Design Competition. This is an exciting competition where high school students put their design skills, creativity, spatial and analytical thinking and craftsmanship to the test. With the guidance of instructors – or in some cases for those who opt to treat this creative challenge as an independent study endeavor – students conceptualize a design and communicate their solutions through drawings, models and writing. Participation in this design exercise is open to all high school levels students throughout the world. This competition provides young thinkers with the opportunity to engage in what is a very unique learning project.

The Architectural Foundation of San Francisco is a nonprofit educational organization that involves students in a mentored appreciation of architecture, engineering, construction and the design process. San Francisco reigns as one of the most architecturally significant and beautiful cities in the world. The environment of architectural diversity is extremely important to the vitality of this great city. Everywhere, the vibrant and complex layering of landscape, color, cultures and light produces experiences that unexpectedly reveal themselves. Since its inception in 1990, the Architectural Foundation of San Francisco has endeavored to reach out to the general public both locally and globally to establish an open dialogue on the architectural future of this community and beyond.

To receive more information about the Architectural Foundation of San Francisco, please visit www.afsf.org or email Executive Director, Alan Sandler, at alan@afsf.org. For specific competition-related inquiries and/or to receive competition updates, please contact Ryan Lee at ryan@afsf.org. Please utilize the live links (in red) embedded in this PDF for reference.

Thank you for your interest and we look forward to seeing your designs!

Sincerely,

Ryan Lee
Competition Chair & Author
Vice President – Board of Directors, AFSF
Senior Associate, Woods Bagot

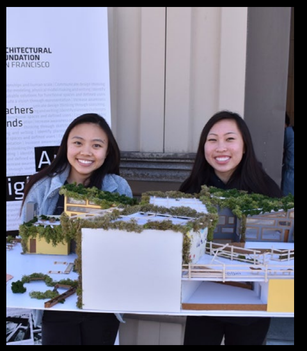
Alan Sandler
Executive Director, AFSF











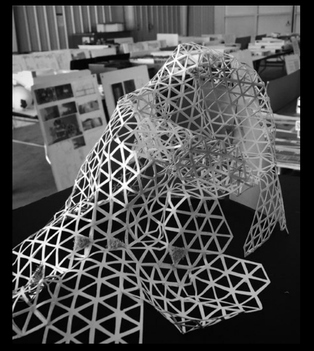
Competition History

For fifty seven years, there has been an architectural design competition for Bay Area high school students, which has since expanded its participation field to include global entries. This annual event challenges students to think critically and conceptualize a design for a new built intervention, requiring students to submit drawings, models and a written description capturing their design approach and ultimate solution. Every year hundreds of students from various high schools throughout the world participate. Many of San Francisco's leading architects, engineers and builders participated in the annual event when they were in high school and credit the competition with helping influence their career paths.

In 1969, the American Institute of Architects San Francisco Chapter established the Annual High School Architectural Design Competition. In 2000, sponsorship of the competition was transferred to the Architectural Foundation of San Francisco (AFSF).

Over the years, AFSF has seen design technology evolve. When the competition began, drawings and renderings were completed in pen and ink – using hand-drafting tools – and line weight and lettering styles were emphasized in the judging process. With the introduction of Computer Assisted Design (CAD) made widely available in classrooms in the early 2000's, students began incorporating computer-generated drawings on their presentation boards. Currently, most students utilize 3D modeling as a design tool, be it modeling in programs such as SketchUP, Rhino and/or Build Information Modeling (BIM) designs completed in Autodesk Revit Architecture and rendered in Enscape or Lumion. In 2011, AFSF created a new category for the competition, allowing students who used 3D modeling software to include digital renderings as a part of their submission, with a separate prize given for Best 3D Representation. At the Architectural Foundation of San Francisco, we're committed to encouraging our participants to utilize the best tools and resources available that foster innovation. AFSF has always embraced the future. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is just one more exciting addition to the design toolbox, ready to help us reach new heights of innovation and problem-solving. While it's not required to implement AI into your design process to participate in this competition, you are not dissuaded from its use if it helps enhance your creative process.

With the world upended in 2020, AFSF pivoted the competition to an all-virtual offering, enabling students to present their design proposals through digital slide decks and video descriptions. The virtual submission process opened up the entry pool to high school students from throughout the world to take part in this now fifty-seven-year-old event. Constantly evolving to adapt to the current learning climate, this competition has always served as a forum for students to not only think critically about the built environment but to also execute creative solutions for real-world challenges.






Competition Summary

Program
This is an architectural design competition sponsored by the Architectural Foundation of San Francisco.

Design Challenge
You are tasked with designing a mixed-use development at Seawall Lot 300/301 at Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco, CA.

Eligibility
The program is distributed to all high school students throughout the greater San Francisco Bay Area and participation is both encouraged and welcomed from all high school-level students interested from throughout the world.

Educational Objectives
- Increase your awareness of the relationship between space, human scale and function
- Gain experience in communicating your planning and design ideas through drawings and models
- Recognize the varied problems in planning and designing functional spaces for defined uses
- Develop design skills through sketching, hand drawing, computer-aided design platforms and model making
- Evaluate real-world challenges and the various factors that drive design thinking

Costs
No entry fee and no pre-registration is required.

Awards
This is a judged competition with monetary awards.

Schedule
January 7, 2026 | competition announcement
May 8, 2026 | competition entries due
May 10, 2026 | winners announced – details will be communicated to teachers and posted on www.afsf.org

Contact
Ryan Lee | Competition Chair and Author | ryan@afsf.org

Competition Sponsorship

Sponsor
This year's 2026 competition is sponsored by Forge Development Partners | Sustainable and affordable living for the urban environment.

Forge Development Partners is creating high-tech, sustainable workforce housing solutions for people in the urban core. We are creating a new urban housing model that achieves environmental sustainability, affordability, and quality. Forge is committed to making our buildings and the construction process less impactful to the environment and local community, while also providing tremendous benefits for the building residents, not sacrificing quality, technology, or amenities.

DESIGN CONTEXT

Design Context

Climate Action Plan

San Francisco's Climate Action Plan (CAP) is the city's comprehensive strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase resilience to climate change. It lays out a transition to a sustainable, low-carbon future by setting ambitious goals to cut emissions from buildings, transportation, and waste. The plan also prioritizes expanding renewable energy and energy efficiency, promoting public transit, biking, and walking while preparing for rising sea levels and extreme weather through targeted infrastructure improvements. The plan also emphasizes equity — ensuring vulnerable communities benefit from climate investments — and calls on local government, businesses, and residents to work together to meet emissions-reduction targets. Last released in 2021, San Francisco is now updating the plan for 2025 and beyond.[1]

1 Climate Action Plan

Image Ref: Presidio Tunnel Tops

Design Context

Fisherman's Wharf

The Climate Action Plan and accompanying waterfront projects seek to strengthen Fisherman's Wharf against sea-level rise while lowering emissions and boosting overall sustainability through infrastructure improvements, updated development standards, and enhanced public access. Major initiatives include expanding public climate-change awareness, transitioning fleets to electric or hydrogen power, and advancing new built efforts such as the Pier 45 revitalization — all centered on resilience, supporting local industry, and improving the visitor experience in line with the city's climate objectives.[1]

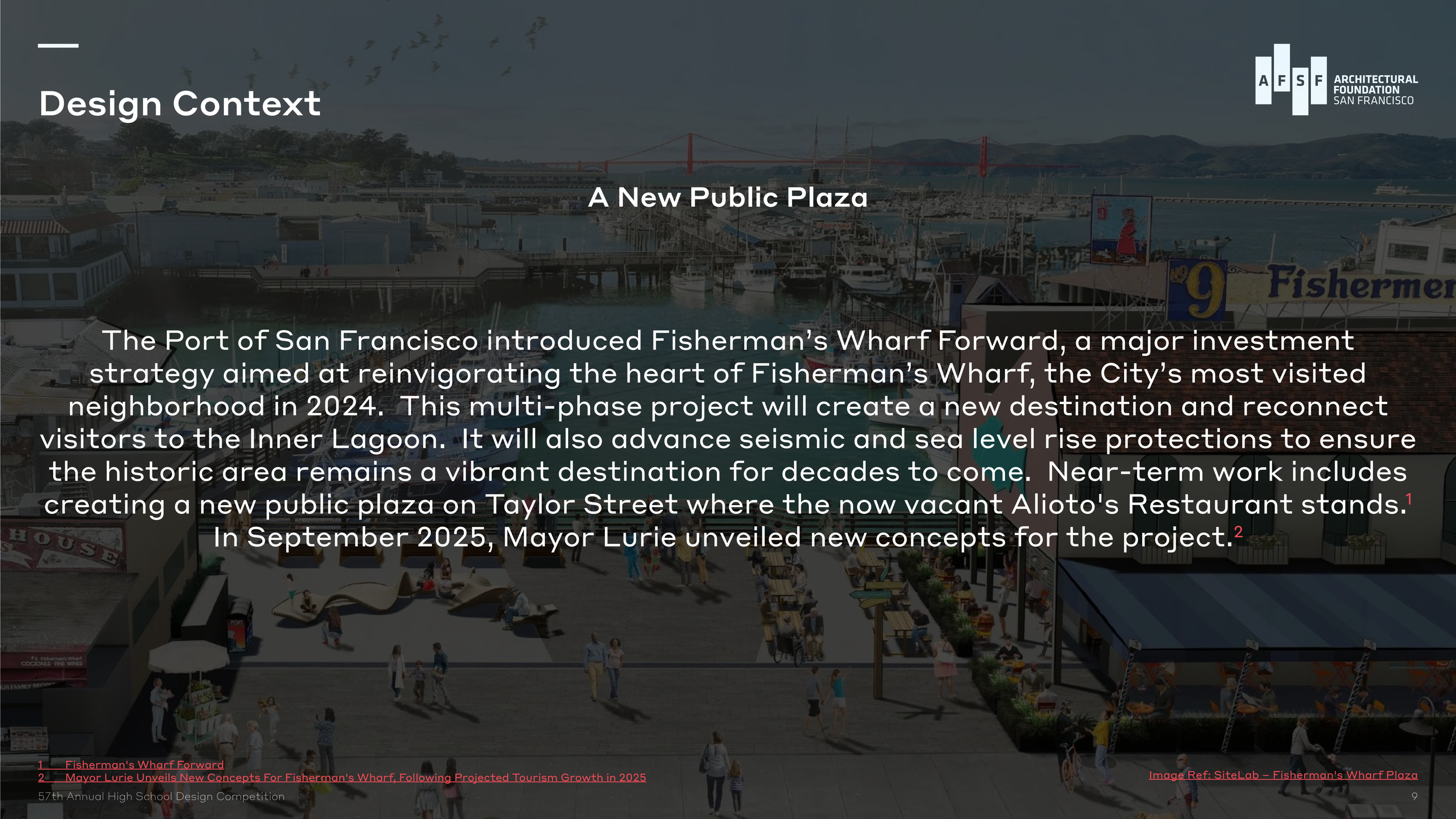
1 Mayor Breed Announces the Advancement of Landmark Project to Revitalize San Francisco's Historic Fisherman Wharf

Image Ref: The Tour Guy

Design Context

A New Public Plaza

The Port of San Francisco introduced Fisherman’s Wharf Forward, a major investment strategy aimed at reinvigorating the heart of Fisherman’s Wharf, the City’s most visited neighborhood in 2024. This multi-phase project will create a new destination and reconnect visitors to the Inner Lagoon. It will also advance seismic and sea level rise protections to ensure the historic area remains a vibrant destination for decades to come. Near-term work includes creating a new public plaza on Taylor Street where the now vacant Alioto's Restaurant stands.[1] In September 2025, Mayor Lurie unveiled new concepts for the project.[2]



1 Fisherman's Wharf Forward
2 Mayor Lurie Unveils New Concepts For Fisherman's Wharf, Following Projected Tourism Growth in 2025

Image Ref: SiteLab – Fisherman's Wharf Plaza

Design Context

Fisherman's Wharf Revitalized

In December 2024, the city of San Francisco announced the advancement of Fisherman's Wharf Revitalized, a landmark project that "aligns with the Port's goals of reenergizing the waterfront, supporting the fishing industry, increasing public access to the bay, advancing seismic and flood protection efforts, and making the area attractive to diverse groups of people," according to Port of San Francisco Executive Director Elaine Forbes. Adjacent to the new public plaza as part of Fisherman's Wharf Forward, the proposed project includes separate developments at Pier 45 and Seawall Lot 300/301, which is bounded by The Embarcadero, Taylor Street, and Jefferson Street.[1]

1 Mayor Breed Announces the Advancement of Landmark Project to Revitalize San Francisco's Historic Fisherman Wharf

Image Ref: SiteLab – Fisherman's Wharf Plaza

Design Context

Pier 45

For Pier 45, which is the hub of fish processing in San Francisco, the project proposes renovating Shed A and reconstructing Shed C to include fishing industry storage, a processing facility with a public viewing area, parking, expanded public access along the eastern apron. The redevelopment will also house the “Fisherman’s Wharf Experience,” an attraction with a seafood market, food hall, exhibits telling the story of the fishing industry and Fisherman’s Wharf, and an events and performing arts space. The development would also invest in the pier’s infrastructure, which would improve the facility’s resilience to earthquakes and sea level rise. The project would preserve space for the existing Musée Mécanique and U.S.S. Pampanito attractions.[1]

1 Mayor Breed Announces the Advancement of Landmark Project to Revitalize San Francisco's Historic Fisherman Wharf

Design Context

Seawall Lot 300/301

Seawall Lot 300/301 (SWL 300/301) sits east of Fisherman’s Wharf Forward's new public plaza and south of Pier 45 and serves as the basis for your design intervention to create a new mixed-use development. The lot is broken up into two parcels – Triangle West, which proposes to house a new public square and visitor's center and Triangle East, which proposes a new restaurant below short term vacation rentals. The two parcels will be connected by a new pedestrian-only promenade along the Embarcadero north of the site.[1] Currently the Triangle East lot of SWL 300/301 is occupied by the SkyStar Wheel, a 150-foot-tall observation wheel. For your design intervention, you may choose to locate program throughout any of the combined Triangle West and Triangle East sites of SWL 300/301.

1 Mayor Breed Announces the Advancement of Landmark Project to Revitalize San Francisco's Historic Fisherman Wharf

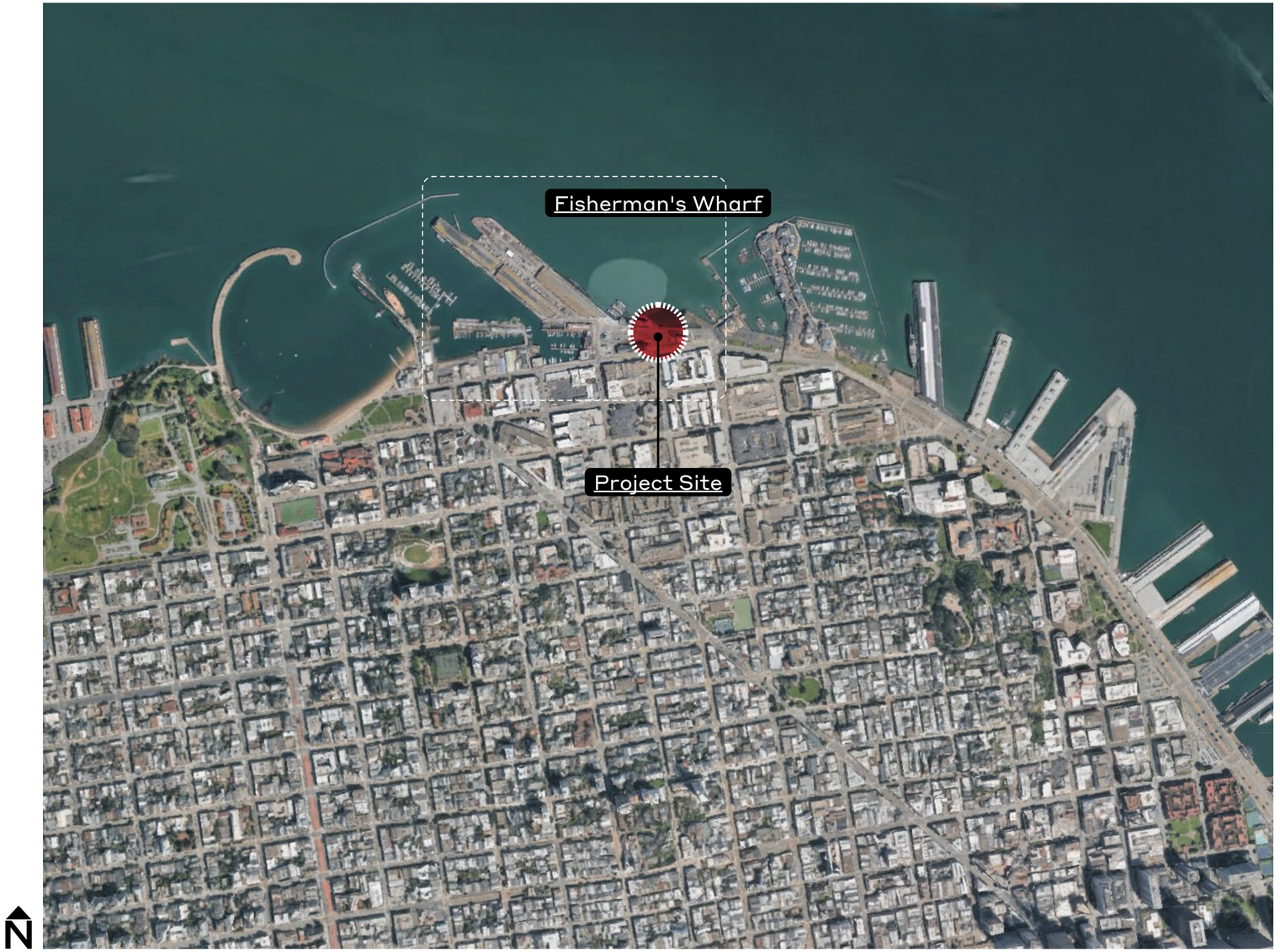
SITE CONTEXT

Site Context

Fisherman's Wharf

Fisherman’s Wharf is one of San Francisco’s most iconic waterfront neighborhoods, located along the northern edge of the city overlooking San Francisco Bay. Historically rooted in the city’s fishing industry, it remains home to an active fishing fleet and seafood markets, alongside popular attractions such as Pier 39, Ghirardelli Square, and Hyde Street Pier.

Today, the Wharf is a lively mix of working waterfront, tourism, and public space. Visitors are drawn to its restaurants, street performers, historic ships, bay cruises, and views of Alcatraz and the Golden Gate Bridge. At the same time, the area serves as a hub for maritime heritage, small businesses, and evolving waterfront uses, balancing its historic character with ongoing efforts to improve resilience, sustainability, and year-round vitality.



Your project site is Seawall Lot 300/301 in San Francisco's Fisherman's Wharf.

Site Context

Fisherman's Wharf Revitalized

Fisherman’s Wharf Revitalized (FWR) proposes a dynamic, mixed-use waterfront project that re-centers Fisherman’s Wharf around its commercial fishing and seafood heritage while creating new public spaces along the Bay. The project includes an experiential museum and event center on Pier 45 (Sheds A and C), featuring live fish and seafood processing, wholesale and retail markets, a global seafood-focused food hall, and interactive exhibits celebrating the industry’s history. A central public square on the Triangle/Seawall Lots 300/301, paired with expanded food and beverage offerings and a converted non-vehicular Embarcadero promenade, would create a resilient, vibrant public realm with enhanced access to and views of San Francisco Bay.[1]



Proposed program provided as part of Fisherman's Wharf Revitalized, LLC's request for ENA

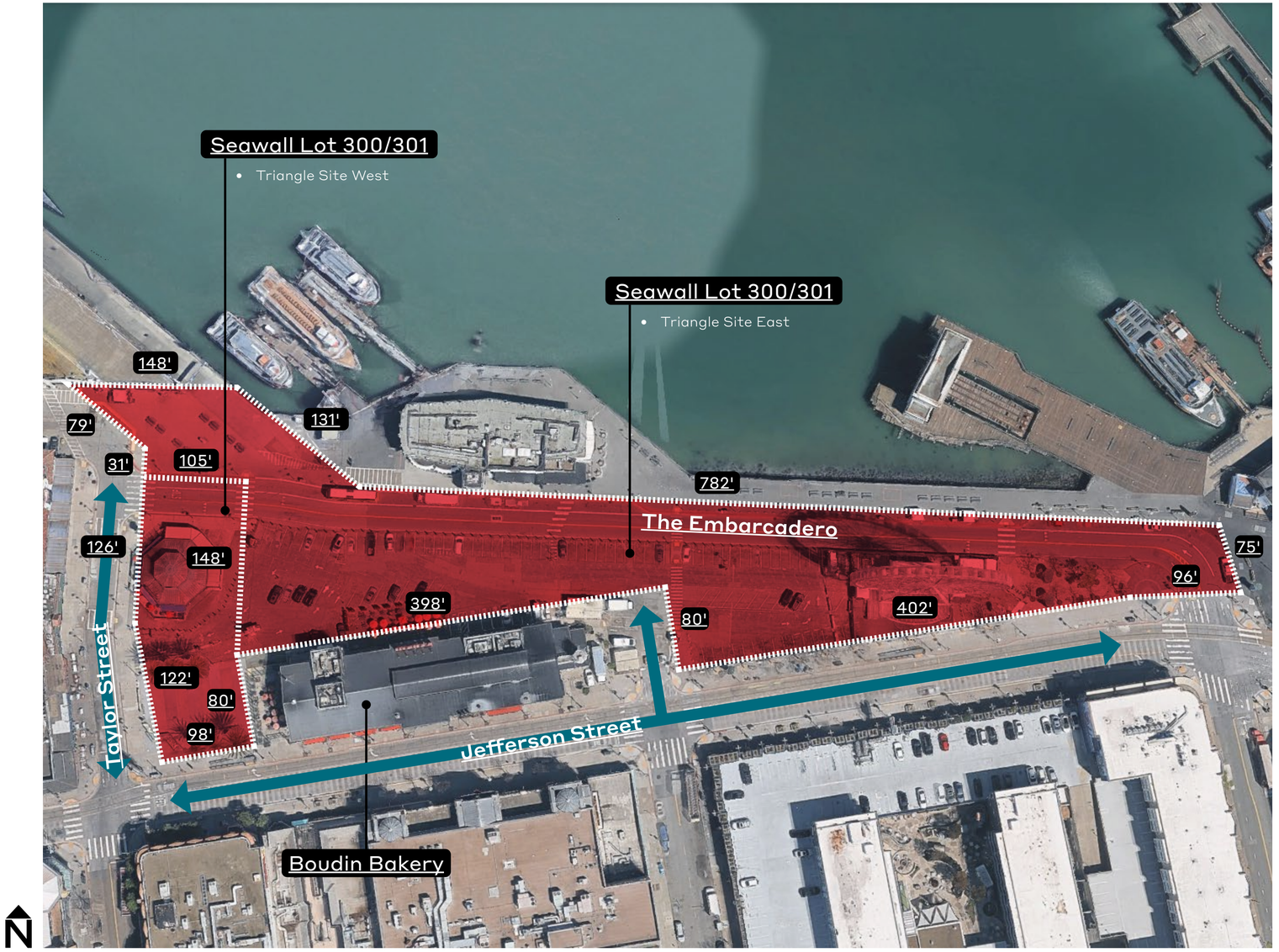
1 Fisherman's Wharf Revitalized

Site Context

Project Site

Your project site includes Seawall Lot 300/301 Triangle Site West and Triangle Site East. You many choose to work within the boundaries of each site or combine the two into one. Car access would remain along both Taylor Street to the west and Jefferson Street to the south. The Embarcadero to the north would be closed off to car traffic – your design should incorporate a pedestrian-oriented public promenade to connect the site from east to west in its place.

You may find a .dwg file for the site boundary in the competition Google Folder here to use as a reference.

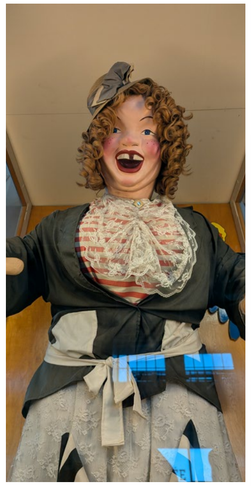


Your project site is Seawall Lot 300/301 in San Francisco's Fisherman's Wharf.

Site Context

Fisherman's Wharf

Additional site photos can be found on the Google Drive folder here.



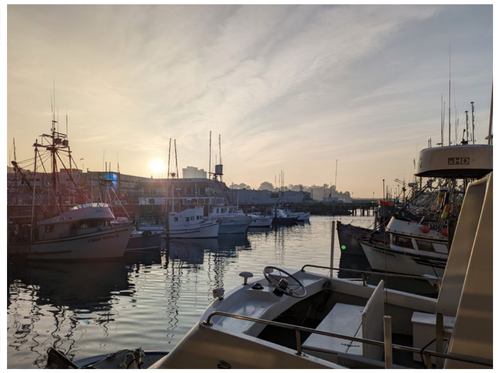


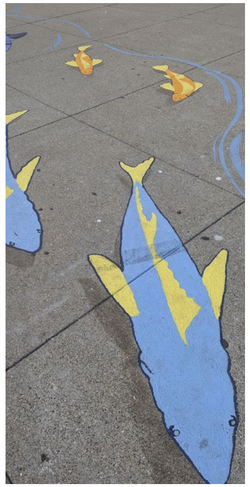






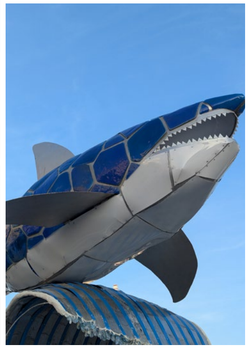
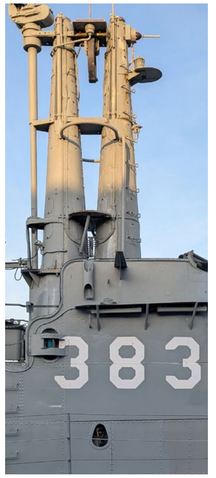


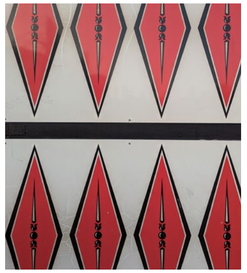











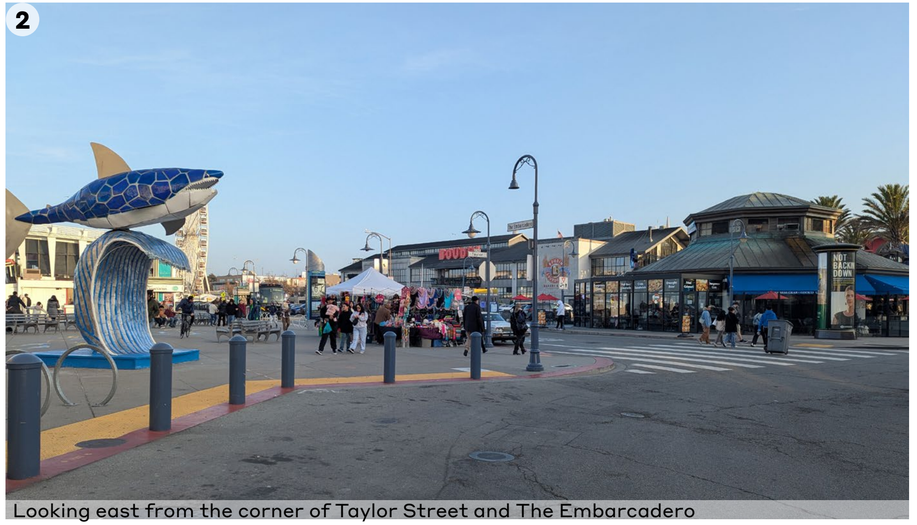
Site Context

Fisherman's Wharf
Seawall Lot 300/301

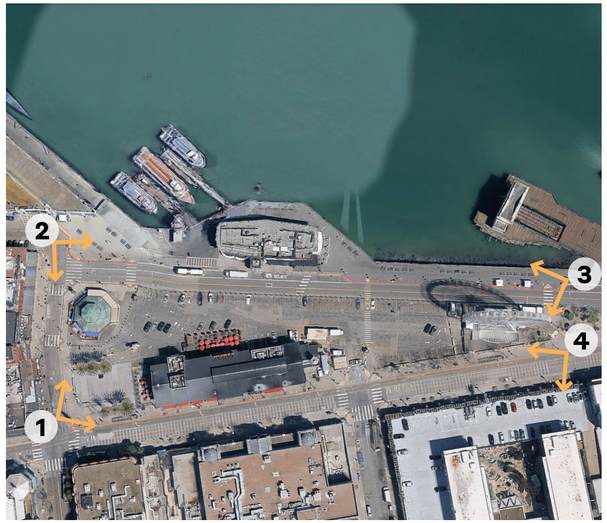
You are encouraged to further explore the site in person and/or use mapping tools such as Google Earth to better examine the existing context. Additional photos are saved on the competition project folder here for your reference.



Looking east from the corner of Taylor Street and Jefferson Street



Looking east from the corner of Taylor Street and The Embarcadero





Looking west from the north of the site along the Embarcadero



Looking west from the south of the site along Jefferson Street

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PROGRAM BRIEF

Program Brief

Your mixed-use development design will be a combination of both conditioned interior space as well as open exterior space. Please limit your design to two (2) stories maximum – you may use the roof of your first or second floor for exterior space if you so choose. Your design must include all of the following spaces listed below and square footage recommendations provided give a general idea of area/size relationships between uses. Additional spaces may be added at your discretion; however it must add value to the building program. Your project site totals 130,000 SF combined between SWL 300/301 Triangle Site West and East. Please reference Page 16 for your dimensions.

Site Program Summary

Category	Area (SF)	% of Site
Buildings (Gross SF)	38,000 SF	30%
Public Plaza	37,000 SF	28%
Public Promenade	21,000 SF	16%
Landscape / Buffers / Circulation	34,000 SF	26%
Total	130,000 SF	100%

Restaurant & Boba Bar (10,000 SF)

- Entry / Host / Waiting Area (500 SF): A welcoming arrival space that organizes guest flow, provides queuing during peak periods, and establishes a visual connection to the dining room and plaza beyond.
- Main Dining Area (4,500 SF): The primary indoor dining space designed for flexibility in table layouts and strong indoor–outdoor engagement with the public plaza.
- Boba Bar / Beverage Service (2,000 SF): A casual, counter-service beverage concept designed for quick service and high turnover, activating adjacent outdoor areas and supporting spill-out seating along the promenade.
- Kitchen (2,000 SF): Dedicated space for core food production, food prep and refrigeration, dry goods storage, and separate areas for dishwashing.
- Office / Administration (200 SF): A small management office for scheduling, accounting, and daily restaurant operations.
- Staff Lockers & Break Room (400 SF): Support space for employees, including lockers and a break area, contributing to staff comfort and retention.



Dezeen – Breeze block partitions frame Florida restaurant by Kimmel Eshkolot



Dezeen – Shaded Solarcentric shields Wood Gardens cafe with maritime motif

Program Brief

- Internal Circulation (400 SF): Includes service corridors, wall assemblies, and clearances necessary for efficient movement and code compliance.

Visitor's Center (6,000 SF)

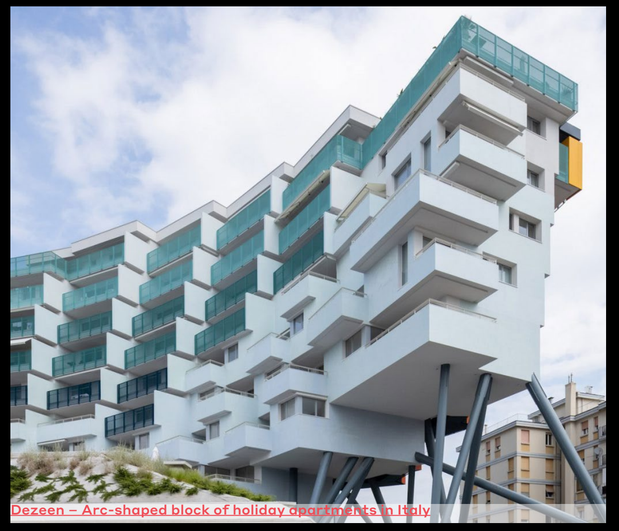
- Entry Lobby & Reception (1,300 SF): A welcoming gateway space that orients visitors upon arrival and establishes the identity of the site through graphics and views into exhibit areas. Include an information & concierge desk for staffed service providing wayfinding, local information, and visitor assistance.
- Exhibit Hall / Gallery (2,300 SF): The main educational space featuring permanent and rotating exhibits that interpret the site, district, and broader regional context of Fisherman's Wharf.
- Multi-Use Program Room (900 SF): A flexible classroom or presentation space supporting school groups, lectures, community meetings, and special programming.
- Retail Kiosk (350 SF): A small retail component offering maps, merchandise, and educational materials that support visitor engagement and modest revenue generation.
- Staff Offices (800 SF): Workspace for visitor center staff, educators, and administrators, designed for daily operations and program coordination. Include secure storage for exhibits, materials, equipment, and archival content.
- Staff Break Area (200 SF): Amenities for staff comfort, including seating and kitchenette functions.
- Internal Circulation (150 SF): Includes service corridors, wall assemblies, and clearances necessary for efficient movement and code compliance.

Shared Building Support & Circulation (6,000 SF)

- Includes public restrooms – provide a multi-stall all gender restroom to share between the visitor's center and restaurant. Shared area also accounts for vertical circulation and internal corridors serving all building uses as needed.



Dezeen – WXY Architecture creates welcome centre for NY nature preserve



Dezeen – Arc-shaped block of holiday apartments in Italy

Program Brief

Short-Term Vacation Rentals (16,000 SF)

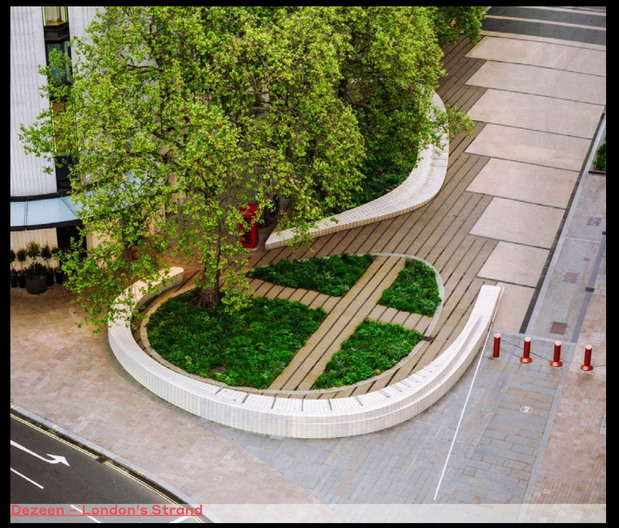
- Eight (8) One-Bedroom Units at ~1,600 SF each (12,800 SF): Your typical 1-bedroom unit should include an entry/foyer, living/dining area, kitchenette, bedroom, and bathroom. You may choose to include an outdoor balcony at your discretion.
- Residential Lobby / Lounge (1,200 SF): A semi-private arrival and waiting area for guests, providing seating, wayfinding, and separation from public uses.
- Recreation Room (800 SF): Space dedicated for shared guest use away from private dwelling units for social gathering.
- Property Management / Operations Office (400 SF): On-site office supporting reservations, guest services, and daily operations.
- Housekeeping & Linen Storage (500 SF): Dedicated space for cleaning supplies, linens, carts, and turnover operations.
- Trash, Recycling & Service Room (300 SF): A screened service area for waste handling, designed to minimize guest and public interface.



Dezeen – Wingardhs perches Swedish forest hotel suites on steel stilts

Public Plaza (37,000 SF)

- The public plaza serves as the social and civic heart of the development, providing a flexible, open gathering space for daily use, community events, performances, and seasonal programming. Framed by active ground-floor uses of the adjacent visitor's center and restaurant, the plaza should include a mix of hardscape, seating, shade, and landscaping to encourage lingering, support outdoor dining, and accommodate both informal gatherings and larger programmed events. Consider your plaza's proximity relative to the newly proposed plaza just west of your project site as described on Page 9 – is it an extension of it, or would you located elsewhere to create multiple public amenity locations?



Dezeen – London's Strand

Public Plaza (21,000 SF)

- Replacing the previously car-accessible Embarcadero Street, the public promenade is a pedestrian-focused linear public space that connects the site from east to west encouraging movement, exploration, and pause. Intended for strolling and viewing, consider integrating seating, wayfinding, and interpretive elements to create an engaging public experience that prioritizes accessibility and strengthens connections between buildings, open spaces, and the surrounding context.

Design Considerations

Formulating your Big Idea

When putting together your slide deck, this is your opportunity to communicate your thinking and craft your overall narrative. Below is a list of design considerations for you to contemplate.

- How does the overall site context inform your design strategy? Can you take cues from the history, maps of the area, the people, view corridors, environmental conditions, etc.?
- How are your program components arranged? Is there logic to your spatial adjacencies?
- Pedestrian access – where are people coming from and how does your design intervention entice visitors to the site? The site will be free of any parking as users will be encouraged to use public transportation and micromobility and/or walk to the site.
- Architectural context – as is it relates to the surrounding built environment, does your design intervention blend in, stand out or fall somewhere in between and why?
- How is your design intervention future-proof? How does your proposal consider the future of transportation or climate change? Are there components of your building that are modular and potentially able to be reconfigured for another use at another site if need be?

These are all some but not all considerations for you to think about in conceiving of your big idea.

Sustainability & Construction Methods:

A fundamental goal of this exercise is to also embrace sustainability and consider the lifespan of the building. In order to reduce the overall impact of the building on the natural environment, your design intervention should consider integrating innovative green building strategies that help increase energy and water efficiency, use renewable energy and materials and reduce consumption, pollution and waste. The building should consider careful building orientation, natural daylighting, smart shading systems, water conservation and photovoltaic solar collectors among other strategies. Where possible, the building and site should showcase green building methods used to educate the public on sustainable architecture. Research into the US Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating system is encouraged.

You are also encouraged to contemplate various methods of design and construction for this competition. You may consider but are not limited to any of the following solutions for your design intervention: modular/prefabricated, stationary or portable architecture. You may choose to design a single structure as a whole or a cluster of several building components placed throughout the site that link the program in a cohesive manner.

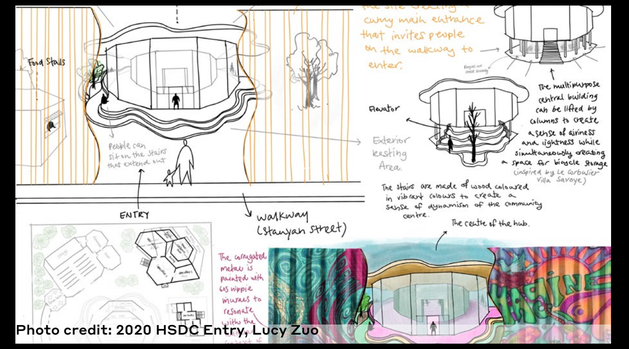


Photo credit: 2020 HSDC Entry, Lucy Zuo


Photo credit: Crissy Field Center, Project Frog


Photo credit: San Francisco Public Utilities Commission HQ

Precedent Study

Malka

Kimmel Eshkolot Architects

Malka in West Palm Beach, Florida is a restaurant and cultural space designed by Kimmel Eshkolot Architects that fuses Mediterranean atmosphere with contemporary design. Housed in a preserved 1930s industrial building, the 10,500-square-foot space uses custom perforated concrete block partitions, lush greenery, and warm material textures to blur indoor and outdoor dining areas, creating a setting that feels both vibrant and intimately layered. Central to the layout is an open-fire hearth around which dining spaces and communal experiences are organized.







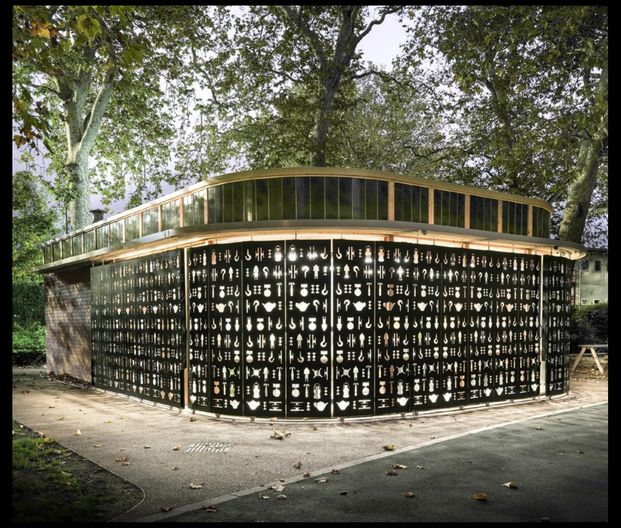
Precedent Study

Island Gardens Cafe

Shahed Saleem

The Island Gardens Café in east London, designed by Makespace Architects, is a new public café replacing an older brick building at the south tip of the Isle of Dogs with views across the Thames toward Greenwich. Its design responds to the site's maritime and industrial heritage through a curved glazed frontage and traditional faience tile cladding that references local historic materials, creating a light-filled, open space connecting interior and park views.







Precedent Study

Arverne East Welcome Center

WXY Architecture

The WXY-designed welcome centre in Queens sits at the heart of the Arverne East nature preserve on the Rockaway Peninsula and reimagines a traditional beach facility as a resilient, community-focused public building. Elevated above flood levels and clad in locally sourced wood that will naturally age with its surroundings, the roughly 6,000 sq ft structure includes public toilets, a park ranger station, flexible community space, and offices for local organisations, all organised around a wraparound porch that connects visitors to the beach, preserve and boardwalk. The design emphasises sustainability — with net-zero energy systems like rooftop solar and geothermal heating/cooling — and social infrastructure that welcomes beachgoers, residents and community groups alike, helping anchor the first phase of a larger mixed-income and net-zero neighbourhood project.







Precedent Study

The Building Descending the Stairs

ElasticoFarm and Bplan Studio

Le bâtiment descendant l'escalier is a mixed-use residential and commercial building by ELASTICOFarm in the seaside resort of Lido di Jesolo near Venice, Italy, that reimagines holiday apartments by lifting the eight upper floors above street level on a "forest" of steel columns. This creates a large open, partially covered public space beneath that blurs the urban edge and encourages sociability, while the arc-shaped residential block above features generous terraces with views toward the Venetian lagoon and Dolomites — combining private living with lively communal and public realms.





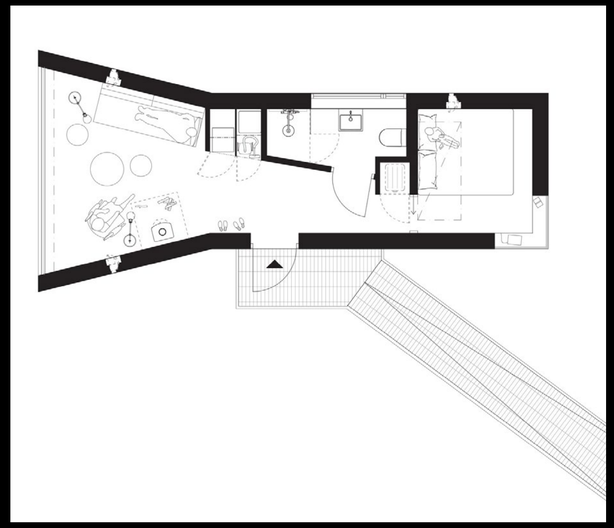
Precedent Study

Trakt Forest Hotel

Wingårdhs

The Trakt Forest Hotel by Swedish studio Wingårdhs features five minimalist timber suites elevated on steel stilts deep in the pine woods of Småland, creating the sensation of floating among the treetops while leaving the forest floor largely untouched. Each cabin uses locally sourced wood, panoramic windows and simple Scandinavian interiors to frame views of the surrounding landscape and connect guests closely with nature, with access via narrow woodland paths and an overall design focused on tranquillity and immersion in the forest environment.







Precedent Study

London's Strand

LDA Design

On London's Strand in Westminster, a series of undulating wooden benches have been installed as part of the area's transformation into a more pedestrian-friendly public space, offering versatile seating that can be arranged for different uses — from casual resting spots to stretches or waiting areas — and helping activate the newly opened civic realm along the historic thoroughfare. The flowing timber forms not only enhance comfort and flexibility for the public but also contribute sculptural interest to the redesigned streetscape.







Links

Organizations:
- Fisherman's Wharf Revitalized

Resources:
- Climate Action Plan
- Port of SF Fisherman's Wharf Revitalized – Request for ENA
- Port of SF Fisherman's Wharf Forward
- SITELAB – Fisherman's Wharf Plaza
- SITELAB – Fisherman's Wharf Recovery

Press:
- SF Gov – Mayor Breed Announces the Advancement of Landmark Project to Revitalize San Francisco's Historic Fisherman Wharf
- Mayor Lurie Unveils New Concepts For Fisherman's Wharf, Following Projected Tourism Growth in 2025
- SF's iconic Fisherman's Wharf is getting a $10M makeover. Here's what it will look like

Precedent Studies:
- Dezeen – Breeze block partitions frame Florida restaurant by Kimmel Eshkolot
- Dezeen – Shahed Saleem shields Island Gardens cafe with maritime-motif screens
- Dezeen – WXY Architecture creates welcome centre for New York nature preserve
- Dezeen – ElasticoFarm and Bplan Studio design arc-shaped block of holiday apartments in Italy
- Dezeen – Wingårdhs perches Swedish forest hotel suites on steel stilts
- Dezeen – Undulating wooden benches provide versatile public seating on London's Strand

ARCHITECTURAL FOUNDATION SAN FRANCISCO

PARTICIPATION GUIDELINES

Deliverables

This year's competition will include an online submission process. You may choose to enter as an Individual or as a Group participant. As a Group Entry participant, you may work in teams ranging between 2-3 people. The final deliverable for entry into the collective is a Google Slides Presentation. *All deliverables must be captured in a Google Slide deck for presentation, not just a PDF*. To better explain your thinking to the judges, you are also required to submit a brief video describing your project (no more than 2 minutes maximum). This as an opportunity to talk about your overall goals and aspirations for your design, your design process, what you enjoyed most about undertaking this challenge, etc.

Please use the AFSF template provided via the link below and make a copy to save out a new file. Only label your slides with a project title. Do not list your name or school – you will fill this information out on the Google Entry Form when you submit. In this slide deck, you may present your design ideas by incorporating any of but not limited to the following items to best describe your design solution.

AFSF Google Slides Template

Design Proposal

- Drawings — sketches, diagrams, scaled 2D drawings (hand drawn or computer-aided drawings) in plan, elevation, section, axon, and/or perspective. Scaled drawings must indicate a scale bar and north arrow for reference.
- Models — images of physical models and/or digital models. This can be a single final model, a series of studies, or both.
- Renderings — hand drawn illustrations and/or digitally rendered models.
- Collages and Image References — digital and/or scanned or photographed collages, image references to convey design intent.
- Photos — to best support your site research

Design Description

Design Solution Title – Give a project title to your design that best describes your design solution and strategy.
Design Narrative – What is your “big idea” concept for this project? Compose a thoughtful and concise description of your design solution and strategy. This may include your design inspiration and what you are trying to achieve with your design. This is your opportunity to articulate any other ideas you may have that aren’t as easy to read from your drawings and models alone such as building material choices or site ideas relative to the greater master plan. 500 word limit.

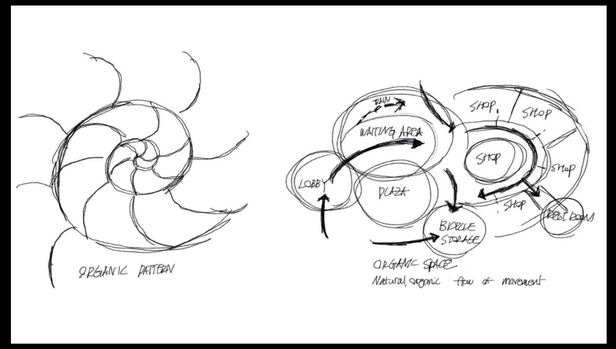
Video

As described above, .mp4 format

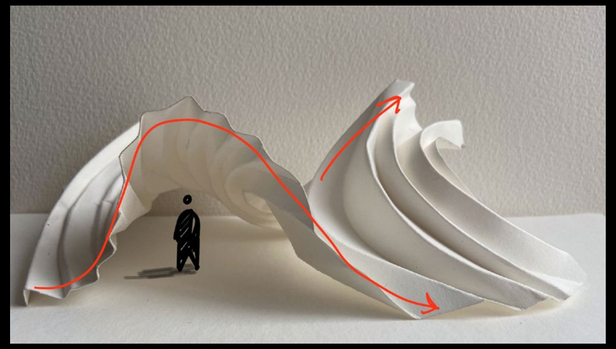
Artificial Intelligence (AI):

As mentioned previously when describing the history of this competition, AFSF has always embraced the use of the latest software and technology at your disposal to communicate your ideas. You may implement the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) design tools if it helps enhance your creative process. We just ask that if you do choose to use AI tools available to you that you describe what tools you used and how you integrated them into your process, this should be captured in your written explanation as part of your submission in any participation category.

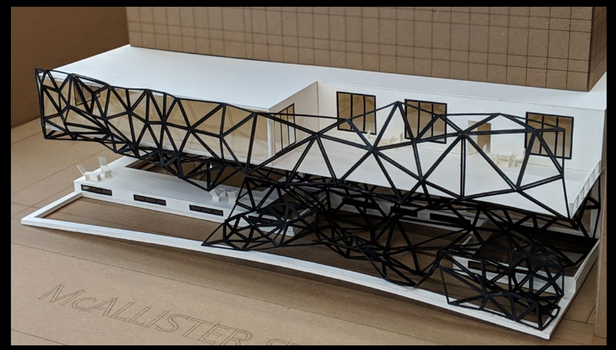
HSDC Student Work Examples

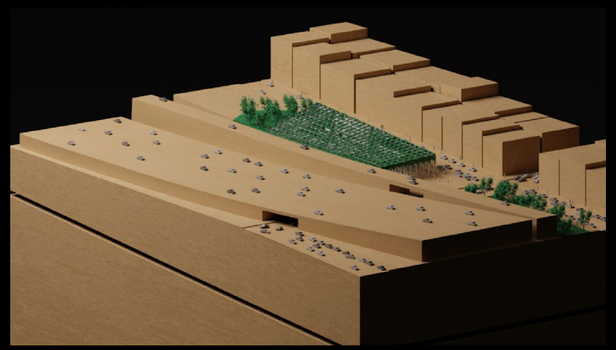






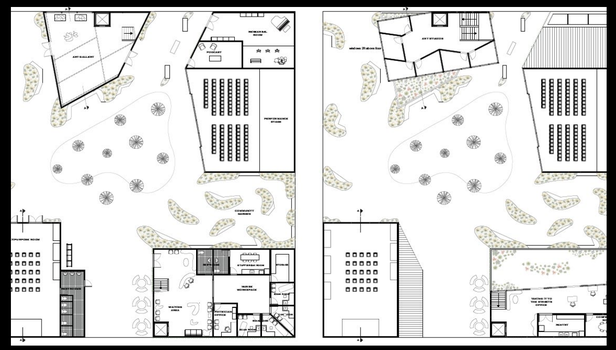




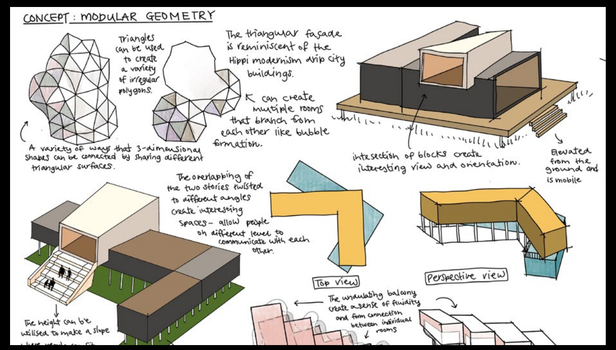














Judging Rubric

Below is a breakdown of judging criteria that will be used to evaluate your submission.

Big Idea

- What is the narrative for your design? Each project should be grounded in a big picture idea that may be inspired by your interest such as the site, the program, the users, design composition, history, view corridors, etc. – anything that most interests and inspires you. Develop a concept for what you're trying to achieve and make that evident in your process studies, drawings, models and written description.

Design Function

- How does your design function and is it conducive to a realistic working solution? Consider programmatic adjacencies (which spaces are next to each other and why?), circulation routes to and from spaces and access to light, air and views. User experience should be carefully considered – think about the different types of people who may be visiting aspects of your design proposal and how their interactions might differ from one another.

Design Aesthetics

- Do you have a compelling solution that visually carries your big idea forth? Consider spatial composition in plan, elevation, section and perspective views. How does your design read from multiple vantage points on site? Is there a specific use of color and/or patterning that brings your design to life? Consider materiality in addition to form.

Technical Execution & Presentation Clarity

- Is your design thinking clearly presented through well-executed drawings and/or models? Use your presentation skills to curate a well-thought-out and compelling project in your design deck.

Process

- Did you include images of your thought process leading up to your design solution? From conception to execution, the journey is just as important as the final product and we would like to see some of your process work. Document study models, include diagrams, sketches, whatever it may be that helped lead you to your conclusion and helps you narrate your thinking.

Submission & Resources

Submissions are due by Friday May 8, 2026 at 6pm PST.

You are required to submit your entry via the Google Form link below:
Entry Form

Please label your slides with your Project Title only, and not your name, to ensure an anonymous review process during judging. Participant information will be captured in the entry form. Your submission should include your *Google Slide deck for presentation, not just a PDF* and your short (2) two-minute length video description of your project. If you have any inquiries prior to submission, please send an email to Ryan Lee (ryan@afsf.org) for further clarifications. Thank you.

Project Resources
- Google Drive Project Folder
- Google Slides Presentation Template
- Maps
- Revit Software Instructions

Software Resources
Autodesk Education
SketchUp

Schedule

Competition Start Date
January 7, 2026
Competition packet is distributed to high schools in the San Francisco Bay Area and posted to the AFSF's website (www.afsf.org).

Design Period
January 7, 2026 – May 8, 2026
Students work on their designs, drawings and models. Progress critiques may be scheduled with the Competition Chair, Ryan Lee. Please email Ryan (ryan@afsf.org) to schedule a review.

Competition Entries Due
Friday, May 8, 2026 by 6:00pm PST
Students will need a Google account to enter and must complete the entry form and upload their files here: Entry Form.

Judging
Saturday, May 9, 2026
Judges Only. A distinguished panel of judges will review every submission virtually to determine the award winners.

Awards Ceremony
Saturday, May 10, 2026
Details for a virtual Awards Ceremony will be communicated to all when we get closer to the date and will be posted on AFSF's website (www.afsf.org).

All are invited to attend including entrants, their family, friends and school faculty members. Winners will be announced and awards will be presented at this time.

Awards

Awards will be given for the best proposals in each Design Challenge category.

Best Individual Entry
Awards for best Individual Entry submitted design solution – design solution, graphic presentation including 2D drawings, 3D model, written description, video
1st Place* | $200
2nd Place | $150
3rd Place | $100

Best Group Entry
Awards for best Group Entry submitted design solution – design solution, graphic presentation including 2D drawings, 3D model, written description, video
1st Place | $300
2nd Place | $200
3rd Place | $100

Certificate of Participation
A Certificate of Participation will be distributed to all entrants

*CCA Summer Scholarship
Through the generosity of California College of the Arts, the Best Individual Entry 1st Place winner will be offered a full-tuition scholarship to CCA's 2026 Summer Pre-college Program in Architecture & Interior Design. CCA's Pre-college Program is a four-week intensive studio experience offered in July/August, Monday through Friday. The student will earn 3 units of college credit. The value of the scholarship is $5,000 per student.

As stated prior, please note that depending on which option you choose to enter as, you will only be eligible for certain award categories. The award categories, listed above, are broken up into the two ways in which you may choose to enter the competition.

Please note that Judges may also award Honorable Mentions to any participant(s) in any submission category at their discretion and reserve the right to adjust awards and categories as they best see fit to provide recognition for projects entered into the competition.

AFSF Board of Directors

High School Design Competition Committee

Ryan Lee
ryan@afsf.org
Competition Chair & Author
Vice President – Board of Directors, AFSF
Senior Associate, Woods Bagot

Alan Sandler
alan@afsf.org
Executive Director, AFSF

For questions regarding the 2026 AFSF High School Design Competition, please feel free to contact Ryan and Alan at the email addresses listed above.

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Thank you for participating in the AFSF's 2026 High School Design Competition. Best of luck to you all!