



*The New Jersey Chapter of the American Planning Association celebrates excellence in planning.*

## 2025 Great Places in New Jersey Guidelines and Nomination Instructions

**DEADLINE: FRIDAY, OCTOBER 10, 2025**

Submit Via: <https://forms.gle/M2VF1nFeh1MkJhnz7>

**Great Places in New Jersey celebrates downtowns, public spaces, streets, and neighborhoods of exemplary character, quality, and planning. These places represent the gold standard in terms of having a true sense of place, cultural and historical interest, community involvement, and a vision for tomorrow. Know of a downtown, public space, street, or neighborhood you think merits designation as a Great Place in New Jersey?**

### Program Rules

- Nominations will close on Friday, October 10, 2025.
- All entrants grant APA New Jersey the right to use all information related to the nomination submitted for marketing and public relations purposes.
- APA New Jersey reserves the right to limit the number of Great Place designations based on the quality of the nominations received.
- The Awards Jury is an independent committee appointed by APA New Jersey representing various professional fields. All nominations will receive careful consideration.
- 2025 Designees will be presented with a plaque, featured on the Great Places website ([greatplacesnj.org](http://greatplacesnj.org)), and highlighted in press releases, digital newsletters, and social media announcements.
- An awards reception will occur in December.

### Required Submission Elements

- Nominator's contact information
- List of partners (those who were instrumental in making the "Great Place" - elected/ appointed officials, professional staff, consulting firms, residents, advocacy groups, etc.).
- Great Place name, category, location, and brief description.
- Great Place narrative addressing the category criteria (two pages).
- Six images that demonstrate the qualities or characteristics that you are trying to highlight.

**Questions?** Contact APA New Jersey Executive Director, Sheena Collum, via email at [scollum@njplanning.org](mailto:scollum@njplanning.org) or call 848-932-2817.



## What Makes a Great Place?

Great Places offer better choices for where and how people work and live. They are enjoyable, safe, and desirable. New Jersey’s great downtowns, public spaces, streets, and neighborhoods are defined by many criteria, including architectural features, accessibility, functionality, and community activity. *Consider the following descriptions as guiding principles rather than a checklist of mandated characteristics.*

### Great Downtown

A downtown is the business district of the community. It generally provides various uses, including, but not necessarily limited to, retail stores, offices, government buildings, theaters, housing, parking facilities, public spaces, and other features that draw residents and visitors.

#### **Characteristics of a Great Downtown include:**

- Functions as the centerpiece in the everyday life of the community. It offers an array of places where people come to conduct business, meet their daily needs, go shopping, meet friends, and relax.
- Enjoys a reputation for excellence that reaches well beyond the community’s boundaries. It attracts visitors from a distance that reflects its physical size.
- Possesses tremendous vitality, with lots of people not just during the day but also in the evening and on the weekends.
- Offers special events and attractions throughout the year.
- Provides accessible transportation, walkability, parking, and parking alternatives.
- Receives support from the community to attract, retain, and grow businesses. Examples: “Buy Local” campaigns and façade improvement programs.

### Great Public Space

A public space may be a gathering spot or part of a neighborhood, downtown, special district, waterfront, or another area within the public realm that helps promote social interaction and a sense of community. Examples include plazas, town squares, parks, marketplaces, public commons and malls, public greens, piers, special areas within convention centers or grounds, sites within public buildings, concourses, or public spaces within private buildings.

#### **Characteristics of a Great Public Space include:**

- Offers high-quality attractions and amenities.
- It promotes social activity and creates a sense of community and neighborliness.
- It is safe, welcoming, and accommodating for all users. Encourages use and interaction among a diverse cross-section of the public.
- It has a unique character that makes it extraordinary or memorable.
  - Has design and architectural features that are visually interesting.
  - Reflects the local culture or history.
  - Relates well to surrounding areas and uses.

## Great Street

A street comprises a three-dimensional visual corridor, including how it relates to the adjacent development. Submissions should document the street’s character, form, and function. Streets of different types are eligible, ranging from pedestrian to arterial roadways, but each should have definable characteristics. Emphasis is placed on streets that service and consider all users —auto, pedestrian, bicycle, or transit riders.

### ***Characteristics of a Great Street include:***

- Balances the competing needs of the street — driving, transit, walking, cycling, servicing, parking, drop-offs, etc. with that of adjoining land uses.
- Capitalizes on natural features and the context in which it resides.
- Creates an atmosphere using design and architectural features. Such features should reflect the local culture or history.
- Encourages social activities such as festivals, parades, and open-air markets.
- Employs hardscape, landscape, street furniture, or other physical elements to create ambiance and atmosphere.
- Promotes safety of pedestrians and vehicles and promotes use over the 24-hour day.
- It is well maintained and capable of being maintained without excessive costs.
- Has a memorable character.
- To the extent feasible, it promotes sustainability through minimizing runoff, reusing water, ensuring groundwater quality, minimizing heat islands, and responding to climatic demands.

## Great Neighborhood

A neighborhood is a geographic unit within the municipality typically bordered by significant physical features, either natural or manufactured. Residents share the use of public facilities such as schools and shopping areas that facilitate social interactions. The neighborhood may be known by a commonly recognized name. Neighborhoods within municipalities of different types are eligible for nomination: downtown, urban, suburban, exurban, town, or small village.

### ***Characteristics of a Great Neighborhood include:***

- It has a memorable character that reflects the community’s overall personality and local history but sets itself apart from other neighborhoods.
- Design and architectural features are visually attractive. Older neighborhoods have retained their historic charm.
- It has a variety of functional attributes that contribute to a resident’s day-to-day living (i.e., residential, commercial, or mixed-uses).
- Accommodates a variety of modes of transportation (i.e., pedestrians, bicycles, cars) and provides access to multiple destinations that serve its residents.
- Encourages social activity and creates a sense of community and neighborliness.
- Provides and maintains a safe, secure environment (e.g., traffic calming, neighborhood watch organization, Safe Routes to School program).
- Promotes sustainability and responds to climatic demands.

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