



Department of City Development
City Plan Commission
Redevelopment Authority of the City of Milwaukee
Neighborhood Improvement Development Corporation

Lafayette L. Crump
Commissioner

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Contact: Madison Goldbeck, 414-708-3820
For Planning Purposes

*****EMBARGOED until May 20, 2026 at 5:15 p.m.*****

29th Annual Mayor's Design Awards to spotlight projects shaping Milwaukee's future

MILWAUKEE - Milwaukee Mayor Cavalier Johnson will present the 29th Annual Mayor's Design Awards at the UW-Milwaukee School of Architecture and Urban Planning building on Wednesday, May 20, 2026, at 5:15 p.m. (CT).

The Mayor's Design Awards recognize design excellence throughout the City of Milwaukee. Award recipients are honored for adding value to their neighborhoods by restoring, constructing, or enhancing their properties in a way that respects the urban fabric and contributes to the character of their surroundings. Awardees range from large iconic buildings to small business storefronts and community-led public art installations.

The full list of 2026 Mayor's Design Awards recipients is below.

For additional information or questions, please email mayorsdesignawards@milwaukee.gov.

WHAT: 29th Annual Mayor's Design Awards Ceremony

WHEN: Wednesday, May 20, 2026 | 5:15 p.m.

WHERE: UW-Milwaukee School of Architecture and Urban Planning building | 2131 E Hartford Ave, Room 179, Milwaukee, WI 53211

WHO:

- Milwaukee Mayor Cavalier Johnson
- UWM Dean Winifred 'Elysse' Newman
- 2026 award recipients

MEDIA: Members of the media are invited to attend and cover the event. Doors open at 4:30 p.m.

2026 Mayor's Design Awards Recipients

*All information and pictures were provided by the nominator of the project.
Nominations are open to the public.*



Places & Spaces

The following projects have found unique opportunities to contribute to the character of their neighborhoods and have made our streets and public spaces more attractive and inviting by engaging the public, enhancing public infrastructure, and creating meaningful community spaces for all to enjoy.

In close collaboration with surrounding communities, **Milwaukee Recreation's Wick & Modrzejewski Playfields** have been completely transformed to create safe, accessible, and multi-functional recreational spaces. Both playfields now feature upgraded playground equipment, splash pads, sports courts, improved lighting and new gathering areas that serve residents of all ages.

Rogers Street Academy & Nativity Jesuit Pedestrian Malls demonstrates a new strategy for reimagining neighborhood streets as safe, people-centered community spaces. Both segments of adjacent streets have been transformed into public pedestrian malls including native landscaping, playfields, and outdoor learning spaces.

The **Brown Wilbert Vault Company 'Love You Moral Mural'** was created by Milwaukee artist Cory Nikolaus and transforms a long blank building façade into a bold visual landmark of the Garden District.

The **Washington Park Bridge Replacement** has restored connections within one of Milwaukee's most historic parks. The project replaced two lagoon bridges with new structures that reflect the park's historic character while meeting modern standards for safety and accessibility. The project also includes new lighting, improved pathways, and landscape restoration, enhancing the overall park experience.

The **South Shore Beach Relocation** represents over a decade of collaboration to improve conditions at one of Milwaukee's most popular beaches, including thousands of water samples collected by students from the UW-Milwaukee School of Freshwater Sciences to understand the root causes of persistent water contamination. The project relocated the beach 400-feet to the south, and added new public access infrastructure and stormwater management features.

King Drive Streetscape and BRUSH Mural Initiative has added to the vibrancy of one of Milwaukee's most historically significant corridors. New gateway monument signs and neighborhood banners, along with bright orange benches, planters and other pedestrian amenities elements add to the unique identity and pedestrian experience of the streetscape; while a series of incredible wall murals reinforce Bronzeville as Milwaukee's center of Black Art and Culture.

The **Downtown Dog Park** is part of a series of projects undertaken by the Downtown and Third Ward Business Improvement Districts to reconnect the area divided by a segment of Interstate 794, the Downtown Dog Park transforms underutilized land into a welcoming, pedestrian-friendly environment for both people and their pets. The project is the result of a multi-year fundraising campaign and includes a new segment of the Milwaukee Riverwalk.

Vibrant Corridors

The following projects are revitalizing Milwaukee's commercial corridors by constructing or restoring their properties in a pedestrian-friendly way that activates the public realm, adds new housing or employment opportunities and contributes to the vibrancy and diversity of our commercial districts.

Niche Book Bar, located along King Drive in the Bronzeville Cultural and Entertainment District, transformed a long-vacant City-owned building into a vibrant cultural destination that centers Black literature, storytelling, and community gathering.

The Allen Building is a new mixed-use infill development constructed on a long-vacant City-owned parcel on King Drive, contributing to the corridor's ongoing revitalization. The project includes both residential units and commercial space, reinforcing the historic street wall and supporting walkability.

Jackson's Soul Food Redefined Express brings new life to a formerly vacant and blighted City-owned property along Fond du Lac Avenue. With creativity and vision, the new owners transformed an abandoned car wash that many thought was not worth saving, into a vibrant local restaurant space. The full renovation of the property included a new transparent street façade, quality signage, and abundant landscaping.

Wash-N-Spin Laundromat is a story of perseverance and determination. After a vehicle crashed into the building collapsing the entire front façade, the new owners worked tirelessly to restore the building and reconstruct the façade, bringing this important neighborhood amenity back to life.

METZ CPA Milwaukee is an adaptive reuse of the former Lyric Theater on West Vliet Street, which faced persistent vacancy and potential demolition. The historic façade has now been restored, and the building renovated, to provide office space for multiple local businesses.

A long-standing dental practice on West Oklahoma Avenue, **Milwaukee Family Dental**, has transformed their 1960's era building through strategic façade enhancements and new signage. This project represents a creative approach to improving the corridor.

The Giving Tree Garage repurposed an unremarkable garage space in Walker's Point into a vibrant, community-centered gathering space. Through the addition of murals, outdoor seating and flexible programming space, the project demonstrates how creative, adaptive reuse can reinforce human-scale design and transform forgotten spaces. The name is inspired by one of the only large trees in the area, which was preserved and became the focal point of the project.

Urbanism Redefined

The following projects have made extraordinary contributions to the City's built environment by constructing or restoring places that enhance the City's built environment, expand opportunities for education or employment, and facilitate social connections; while raising the bar for major development and contemporary architecture in the City.

The major renovation of the iconic theater complex, the **Milwaukee Repertory Theater and Associated Bank Theater Center**, balances historic preservation with cutting-edge modern design. The project added an inviting new main entrance, expanded lobby, restored theater spaces and an education center.

The **Urban Ecology Center - Washington Park Branch** is a community hub and newly expanded facility dedicated to connecting urban spaces with the natural world and includes a multi-level mezzanine and open lobby built around a central tree, an observation deck and green roof, new classrooms and offices, and a library, solarium, and assembly space.

Milwaukee County's **Marcia P Coggs Health and Human Services Center** is a stunning new facility in the King Park neighborhood that offers a range of services including behavioral health, child and family services, housing programs and an on-site food pantry.

The **Martin Luther King Library & Apartments** is the latest in a series of new library branches to anchor larger mix-use projects. This new landmark development on King Drive features an 18,000 square foot library and 93 affordable apartments across three buildings.

Everything Begins at Home

In declaring 2026 the Year of Housing, Mayor Johnson is focusing the City's development efforts on housing supply, affordability and quality – and the momentum is clear. The following projects create a wide range of new housing opportunities that strengthen neighborhoods and enhance the quality of life for residents.

Elevation 1659 was built on a challenging site near the intersection of Water and Brady Streets. The design carefully navigates the site's unique shape and steep topography, integrating into the landscape while maintaining a pedestrian-friendly street presence. The project adds 76 new apartments to the lower east side, responding to strong demand for new housing in the area.

Evoni Apartments, a modern five-story development, adds 261 new apartments to Milwaukee's Historic Third Ward, transforming a long-vacant site and former rail yard into a vibrant residential community. The project included construction of a new public street segment with a protected bike path and enhanced streetscaping.

Vets Place Central on the Near West Side represents a major investment in housing and supportive services for Milwaukee's veterans. The project renovated an existing structure and added a large 4-story addition, creating 81 private residential units for veterans along with community spaces and supportive services designed for long-term stability.

LaMarr Franklin Lofts is a five-story mixed-use development that adds 55-units of affordable housing at a former City-owned vacant lot on North Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, and overcame several challenges including environmental concerns and a large funding gap due to escalating costs. The project is named after long-time community leader LaMarr Franklin, ensuring his legacy will live on for decades to come.

The Corliss represents the largest privately-owned affordable housing development in Wisconsin's history. The project sits in the Harbor District adjacent to the Bay View neighborhood and adds 576 units of affordable housing across 8 new buildings. The project includes high-quality materials, modern amenities and a public bike and pedestrian connection through the site.

While large new buildings are an important part of meeting Milwaukee's growing housing needs, the City also understands the importance of preserving and repairing Milwaukee's traditional residential neighborhoods that offer opportunities for homeownership and allow families to thrive. The **CDA Scattered Sites Project** does just that, building 20 new duplexes for 40 families on former vacant lots in Milwaukee's Midtown Neighborhood. The homes will be rented at affordable rates for 15-years with tenants having an option purchase at a discounted price after that time.

Homes MKE is a citywide initiative transforming vacant, city-owned houses into high-quality, affordable homeownership and rental opportunities across Milwaukee's neighborhoods. To date, over 70 properties have been renovated and marketed to future homeowners, with plans to complete 105 homes by the end of 2026. Fifteen individual development teams are working with the City of Milwaukee to carry out this work, including: ACTS Housing, Advance Builders, CME Development, Ezekiel CDC, Financial Freedom, Maures Development Group, Milwaukee Community Land Trust, One5Olive, MLK EDC, Rico Love Foundation, Servant Manor, Strong Blocks, TAS Solutions, Walnut Way, and Walters Realty Group.