

Design Strategies for Tackling Homelessness and Food Insecurity in Chicago: A Comprehensive Approach

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PREFACE

I grew up in the suburbs of Chicago coming into the city on weekends being confused by people living on the streets. As I grew older, I came to understand that these people were homeless, but still did not understand why we haven't developed a better system for these people to live. Then I came to learn about people not having access to nutritional foods in major cities across the country. These two topics encompass a vast variety of issues and complications, but I wanted to try to see if I could develop a way to tackle both issues through an interior design perspective. This project may have a long way to go, but it is a start to what could be put in place in neighborhoods suffering from low income and food insecurity.



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01

TOPIC

LITERATURE REVIEW

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Homelessness and food insecurity are issues in every metropolitan area in the country. Approximately 600,000 people in the US are without a shelter on a given night. (Fitzpatrick & Willis, 2020) This is coupled with the fact "Homeless persons have a higher risk of food insecurity than the general population." (Fitzpatrick & Willis, 2020) Food insecurity is defined as "access by all people at all times to enough food for an active healthy lifestyle." (Chicago Community Trust, 2019) Countless amount of people are lacking basic needs of shelter and food in a country where there is prosperity and great amounts of wealth. When people don't have access to food and shelter, they suffer constant stress worrying about where their next meal is coming from, a lack of privacy, and a general fear for their safety and security. Current services and policies do not provide adequate pathways out of these situations, causing these issues to continue to compile.

Understanding Homeless Shelters

The literature starts with a fundamental question: "Is shelter being used effectively both to provide immediate safety and to create quick paths to permanent housing?" (Martinez, 2021) Unfortunately, current shelters are offering minimal security and safety within congregate style housing, little community engagement to break stigmas around the Homeless, inadequate services to provide pathways out of homelessness, and no sustainable solution to end this cycle of homelessness. Each of these will be issues addressed in more detail, but there is one model that has proven to be relatively effective. A "housing-first" approach provides individuals and families access to permanent housing. "It is the most effective approach to ending chronic homelessness." (Miller, 2016) Once they are in a permanent housing facility, they can focus on addressing other issues. The idea is that anyone regardless of ability, treatment, or other barriers can get a roof over their heads, can achieve stability with the appropriate access to services. Housing first yields higher retention rates, reduces costly crisis services, and helps people achieve better health and social outcomes. (Miller, 2016) Within the housing first approach, shelters still fill a need. "Shelters must be low barrier, focus on assessment and triage, and intentionally link to permanent housing resources so that people move through to housing quickly." (Martinez, 2021) While people are transitioning to permanent housing, shelters can provide services such as healthcare and food, so when people have access to permanent housing, they are better

able to function and avoid returning to homelessness. With an individualized approach that focuses on safety and privacy, homeless "have successfully moved out and into permanent housing" as they are able to focus on caring for themselves and not living in a constant stress inducing environment. (Martinez, 2021) Shelters can also foster community engagement and growth by breaking down stigmas in people who don't want homeless in their neighborhoods and demonstrating that "residents of a homeless shelter in your community are your neighbors." (Schubach, 2017) Instead of having a barrier between the neighborhood and homeless people, a connection can form when shelters are able to provide safety and commerce for a neighborhood. (Schubach, 2017) When community gets involved, growth can take place. Individuals will have access to services and engagement to provide a better life for themselves. If this is all done in a sustainable way, the issues of homelessness and food insecurity can be tackled more comprehensively and effectively.

Issues of Homelessness and Shelter

There are many issues that arise with being homeless involving environmental, economic, social, and mental factors. The main issue being that these people have nowhere to call home. Without a shelter, they have no where to relax, regroup, or get back on their feet. Homeless people are left on the streets to brave the elements and fend for themselves when they have no means to be able to accomplish this. They don't know where their next meal is coming from let alone where they are going to sleep. They lack food insecurity as they have no income to provide for themselves. Not having a roof overhead or be able to have a nutritious meal is very stressful. Stress coupled with other physical and/or mental conditions that are often associated with being homeless is dangerous. "People who are homeless have higher rates of illness and die on average 12 years sooner than the general U.S. population." (NHCHC, 2019) Poor health is a major cause of homelessness as serious conditions can lead to employment issues, and no income means no way to pay medical bills, exhausting personal safety nets, and there are few options to help with health care or housing. "Poor health can lead to unemployment, poverty, and homelessness." (NHCHC, 2019) This vicious cycle never ends, and there are very few ways to support getting out of this state.

Shelters are one way to provide housing, but they lack adequate services to support those in need and come with their own set of problems. Shelters only supply a limited number of beds that are first come first serve. People facing homelessness may not want to go to shelters as their

efforts could be done in vain. Some shelters also have limiting rules and restrictions that can prevent people from accessing these beds such as a woman only shelter or allowing no pets. Another issue that faces homeless shelters is the aspect of violence. Conflict can arise when "a gathering of any number of people are in an enclosed space." (Pallet, 2020) In stressful times, especially with the stress of being homeless, violence can arise. Many women prefer shelters as a last option as they are victims of domestic and sexual abuse and not knowing who is in the bed next to them can cause a restless night's sleep. Lastly, shelters do not provide services to help with other aspects of homelessness such as healthcare, employment, or food security. Without healthcare, these people are only getting worse due to the overcrowding, a lack of privacy and security to recover, and a lack of overall support. "Recovery and healing are more difficult without housing." (NHCHC, 2019) Chronic health conditions start to develop due to malnutrition of food insecurity, not healing properly as there is no access to bathing, and "getting proper rest isn't possible on the street or in shelters." (NHCHC, 2019) Shelters solely provide a roof over head for one night with no guarantee of another. While temporary shelters many seem helpful, there needs to be a solution to aid in every aspect of being homeless to get these people back on their feet.

Security and Safety

Safety and privacy are main concerns for people staying with strangers every night as there is minimal security and tight quarters. "The physical environment contributes to the stress and difficulties" that people are facing with being homeless. (Martinez, 2021) The idea of "perceived crowding" takes effect and spaces feel cramped with people. (Berens, 2017) "Individuals feel they have little or no control over their social interactions" as their privacy is diminished. (Berens, 2017) With frequent fights and violence each night, it makes it hard to sleep as fear of possessions being stolen and a lack of privacy are constant. With these living conditions, people experience "avoidance behaviors and diminished ability to cope in social settings." (Berens, 2017) They are overstimulated in these shelters, and a sense of comfort and recovery are never achieved.

A shift from current congregate style housing to an individualized approach can be one solution to help minimize the fear revolved around homeless shelters. People who have moved into hotels or motels that were converted to shelters experienced "feeling like you have some control of your life." (Martinez, 2021) A sense of security, in the place you take shelter reduces stress and makes one less thing to worry about. Homeless people who

have medical needs also benefit from the privacy and safety of individualized housing as their "recovery of both physical and mental health improve" with the ability to sleep. (Martinez, 2021) Other ways to create safer and more beneficial environments include "eliminating negative factors" such as loud noises, minimal daylight due to the lack of windows, and hard flooring materials. (Berens, 2017) Reducing stress and fostering control can begin to support physical and mental health for these people. This also shows how interior design can be the pathway to improving conditions in these harsh physical environments, providing comfort rather than stress. Creating secure and safe spaces" balancing public and private areas can improve this feeling of comfort. (Berens) Having open spaces with visible private areas, appropriate lighting, and getting rid of dark corners and hallways can increase the sense of safety as visual permeability is improved to monitor the surroundings. (Berens)

Fostering Community

Homeless people often experience what is called placelessness. "Placelessness is the lack of connection to place as a sense of our identity and well-being." (Berens, 2017) They do not feel that they have a place in a community or their own sense of belonging. In order to fix this, "a larger community response must be brought to bear to end homelessness among our neighbors." (Miller, 2016) When a community comes together to support the homeless "shelter can become a more effective and efficient part of a systemic response." (Martinez, 2021) Support from neighbors and the community can erase a divide and become a coordinating system rather than another barrier to end homelessness.

One important present example is MLK1101 Supportive Housing in Los Angeles, designed by Lorcan O'Herlihy Architects (LOHA) constructed in 2019. MLK 1011 "prioritizes social equity, health, and well being of residents over isolation." (LOHA, 2019) The strategies of green design within this supportive housing complex "maximize space and benefit the entire community." (LOHA, 2019) The design includes a gathering space, an elevated community garden, two retail units to not only "encourage resident and neighborhood interaction," but also "generate income that will help subsidize the housing while providing workforce training" in efforts to transition the homeless back into society. (LOHA, 2019) These areas for community engagement and resident support are pivotal to allow the homeless a place in society. Stigmas around homelessness* can subside if residents are surrounded by a community that supports and embraces them and have access to systems that provide support.

*Stigmas around homelessness include the idea that shelters bring crime and violence, that homelessness is the result of unemployment; and attitudes of "not in my back yard" around the location of shelters. None of these attitudes are supported by empirical evidence. (Schubach, 2017)

Services to Tackle Homelessness

There are many services that could be provided to tackle homelessness that are not currently being addressed. There needs to be “a collection of individual programs to a community-wide response,” that focuses on what these people truly need. (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2019) This strategy is called “coordinated entry,” which is a “process designed to quickly identify, assess, refer and connect people in crisis to housing and assistance.” (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2019) With this approach, people can start to look at the problem comprehensively by looking at the complete needs of the individual. Establishing a plan to address what the process will look like, what goals are trying to be reached, and within what timeline things are going to be achieved. This way each person can be assessed on what their current well-being is, what services they may need, and what support can be provided to help them back on their feet. When people can get into a home quickly, “they are in a better position to address other challenges that may have led to their homelessness.” (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2019) They can start to focus on solving their chronic homelessness rather than dwell on it. Programs should be there to support their every need whether it revolves around mental or physical health, financial/employment support, long or short-term assistance and so on. When a coordinated entry approach is instilled to identify what these people need, the combination of services that address their needs can be laid out in order for them to set goals and achieve a pathway out of homelessness. This approach gathers all the necessary information about the individual to help them in the most efficient way possible. This way they can support themselves and not have to worry about health, money, food, or housing, because it is all provided for as long as they need.

Sustainable Solutions

In order to end homelessness and food insecurity, an effort to make solutions sustainable is needed. Sustainability is defined by “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” (McGill University, 2018) Sustainability is a balance between the environment, equity, and economy, which suggests a comprehensive approach to sustainability. “Creating a coordinating system that operates from the position of housing first approach, removing barriers to entry and based on the needs of each individual person and family is key.” (Martinez, 2021)

The old way of linear thinking “moving materials in one direction,” to solve homelessness and food insecurity cannot be sustained. An organization in Chicago called The Plant, has a mission to cultivate local circular economies. “A local circular economy is a collaborative economic practice sustained

by local circulation of materials, nutrients, knowledge, and money.” (Plant Chicago, 2011) The organization works with collaborative community of food businesses whether it be gardens, aquaponic farms in the city, and local healthy food distributors to provide the underserved community in Chicago. (Plant Chicago, 2011) Their main location is a reused Firehouse that showcases indoor/outdoor growing spaces, classrooms, a teaching kitchen, and meeting space to engage the community while teaching them sustainable practices. This organization provides numerous ways to gain access to nutritional foods and teaches the community how to provide for themselves. “Small businesses, ecosystems, and social justice are crucial components to circular economy.” (Plant Chicago, 2011) Because needs change from place to place and person to person, sustainability depends on taking a step back to articulate what is best for each community. “Homelessness is not experienced uniformly across all population subgroups.” (Fitzpatrick & Willis, 2020) If we can identify the specific needs of a community, and formulate a sustainable approach, it becomes possible to design comprehensively.

Conclusion

The twin issues of homelessness and food insecurity require a comprehensive approach that address a variety of issues and encompass a wide range of supports. This way of thinking reaches beyond traditional isolated approaches to health, violence prevention, shelter, and food systems in order to create the best possible outcome that touches all subjects. (Chicago Community Trust, 2019) Prioritizing well-being, and community engagement through a sustainable lens can lead to better solutions for individuals. Developing a coordinated system through the community and focused on each individual facing homelessness can start to address fundamental basic needs. Offering services that encompass a complete range of assistance is key to set people up for success. Everyone in need should have access to these solutions as no barriers should be in place, and for every need there should be a service provided. This is no small task, but this is why it needs to be a community wide effort. A comprehensive approach has many moving parts, because it provides a complete variety of solutions.

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CASE STUDY #1: PHILABUNDANCE

Started: 1984

Mission: No one should go hungry while healthy food goes to waste...End Hunger for Good

How: Work with community organizations to increase stability and long-term overall food security

Services:

- Education
- Food
- Job Training



CASE STUDY #2: PROJECT HOME

Started: 1989

Mission: Empower adults, children, and families to break the cycle of homelessness and poverty to enable all to attain their fullest potential

How: Offer supportive housing permanent, subsidized housing for those affected by homelessness

Services:

Housing

Health Care

Education

Employment Opportunitites

Service Coordination

Personal Recovery Services



Housing



Employment



Healthcare



Education

INTERVIEW

Chloe Sheraden

Works as a Development Associate at Project Home

Q: What is your role in Project Home?

A: I am a Development Associate in the Development Department at Project HOME.

Q: What does your day to day look like?

A: I process all of Project HOME's donations and acknowledgements.

Q: How long have you been with Project Home?

A: 2.5 years

Q: How did you find out about the organization?

A: Indeed, I think

Q: What is the most rewarding part of your role?

A: Knowing that what I do directly helps people and families who are facing homelessness. I also get the opportunity to staff events where my department works with the community so it's really rewarding to put faces to the people we're working to help.

Q: Do you have a favorite service that the organization provides? Which service do you think is the most beneficial for these people?

A: The Hub of Hope is a fantastic resource for a lot of people because they offer a sense of community, medical and dental services, lunch, and laundry. Since they work under Outreach, they can also get folks connected with other services.

Q: Is there anything that you wish was done differently within the organization?/ What does Project Home need more help with?

A: Project HOME always needs more donations. Here is our in-kind donations website for books for our social enterprises Bookstore and clothing for folks in need: <https://www.projecthome.org/donate-in-kind>

Q: Where does Project Home get the money to build new residences? Is it all donations or is there separate funding?

A: As with all non-profits, we have general operating funds, fund-specific operating funds, and capital funds. Our capital funds go into the actual construction of a building and are collected through private donations and federal grants.

Q: What is the most challenging part of your job?

A: Learning new data techniques.

Q: Has covid changed the way this organization operates?

A: Admin is working hybrid when possible but a lot of the rest of the staff is still on-site every day.

Q: Has a "not in my backyard" attitude ever been an issue for Project Home that you know of? Or do people embrace the developments going up?

A: To confirm, Project HOME isn't a homeless shelter but it is permanent housing. You need to meet a lot of criteria to be housed in PH housing, but we do bring folks in off the streets, making them formerly homeless. We offer short term shelters, safe havens, and recovery residences, as well but I don't know their surrounding community's feelings towards our presence.

Otherwise, from what I understand there has been a bit of not wanting formerly homeless folks in their backyards. Part of our history involves a long legal battle, actually, to secure our first residence as housing. <https://www.projecthome.org/news/free-last>

I think this mentality has changed over the years and it's more that people within neighborhoods are apprehensive of us entering communities and changing them from the outside in the name of helping others. We do a lot to make sure the communities we build residences in feel heard and safe, but I think there's definitely more of that than people being actually upset that homeless folks or formerly homeless folks are in their neighborhoods.

Q: How important sustainability is in the conversation of designing or development a new residence?

A: I am not sure about this, but I know we have won awards for our sustainability at newer residences. I'm not involved with planning and real estate, so I can't answer this question.



MLK1101

Located: Los Angeles

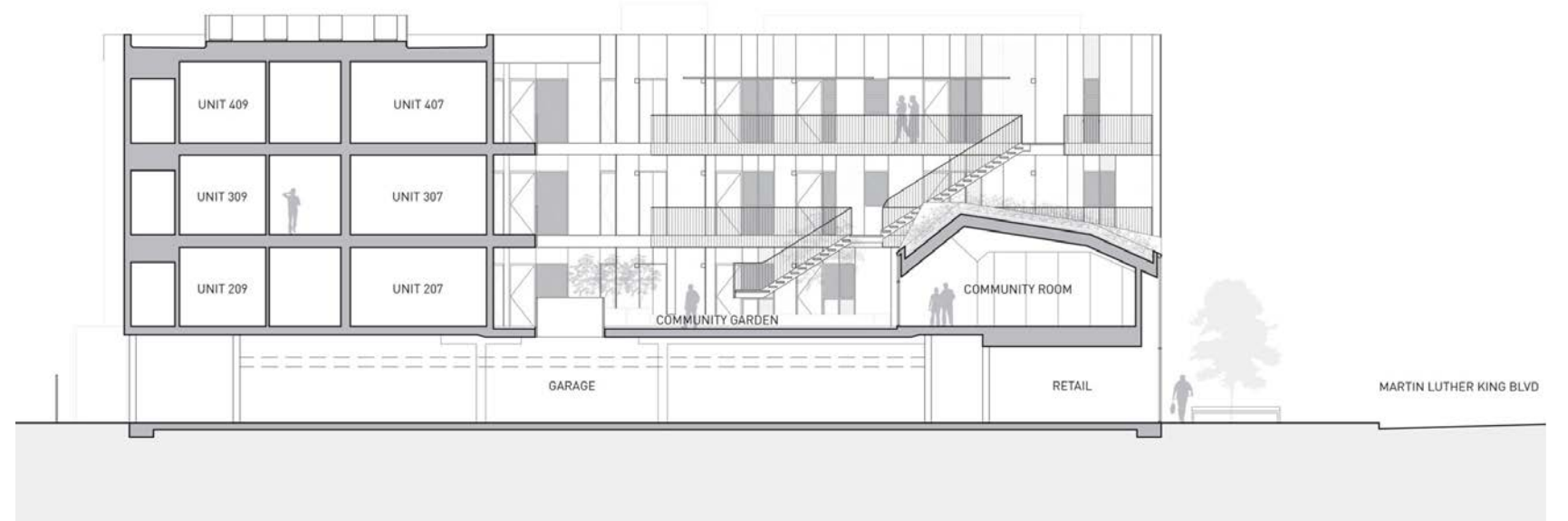
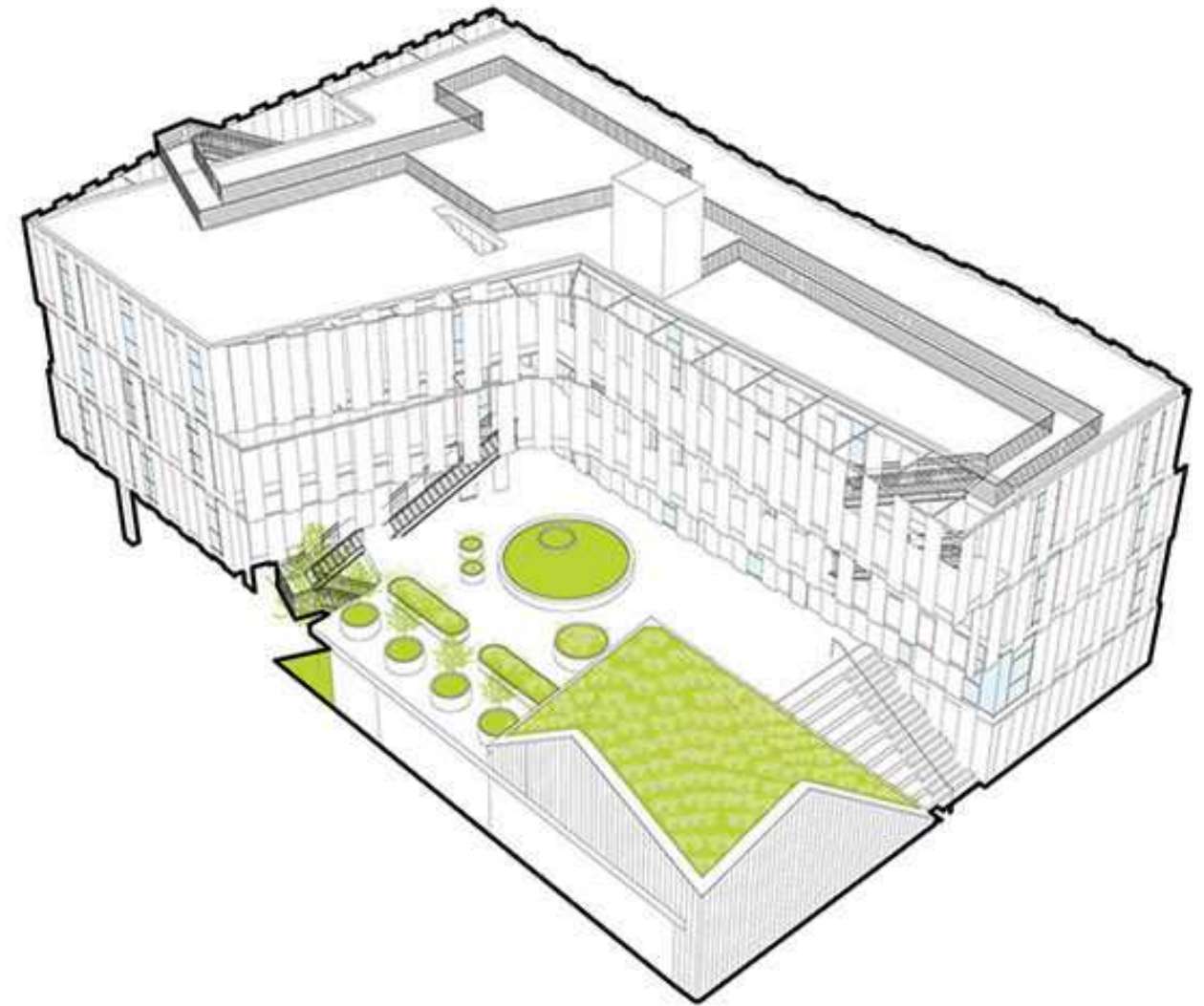
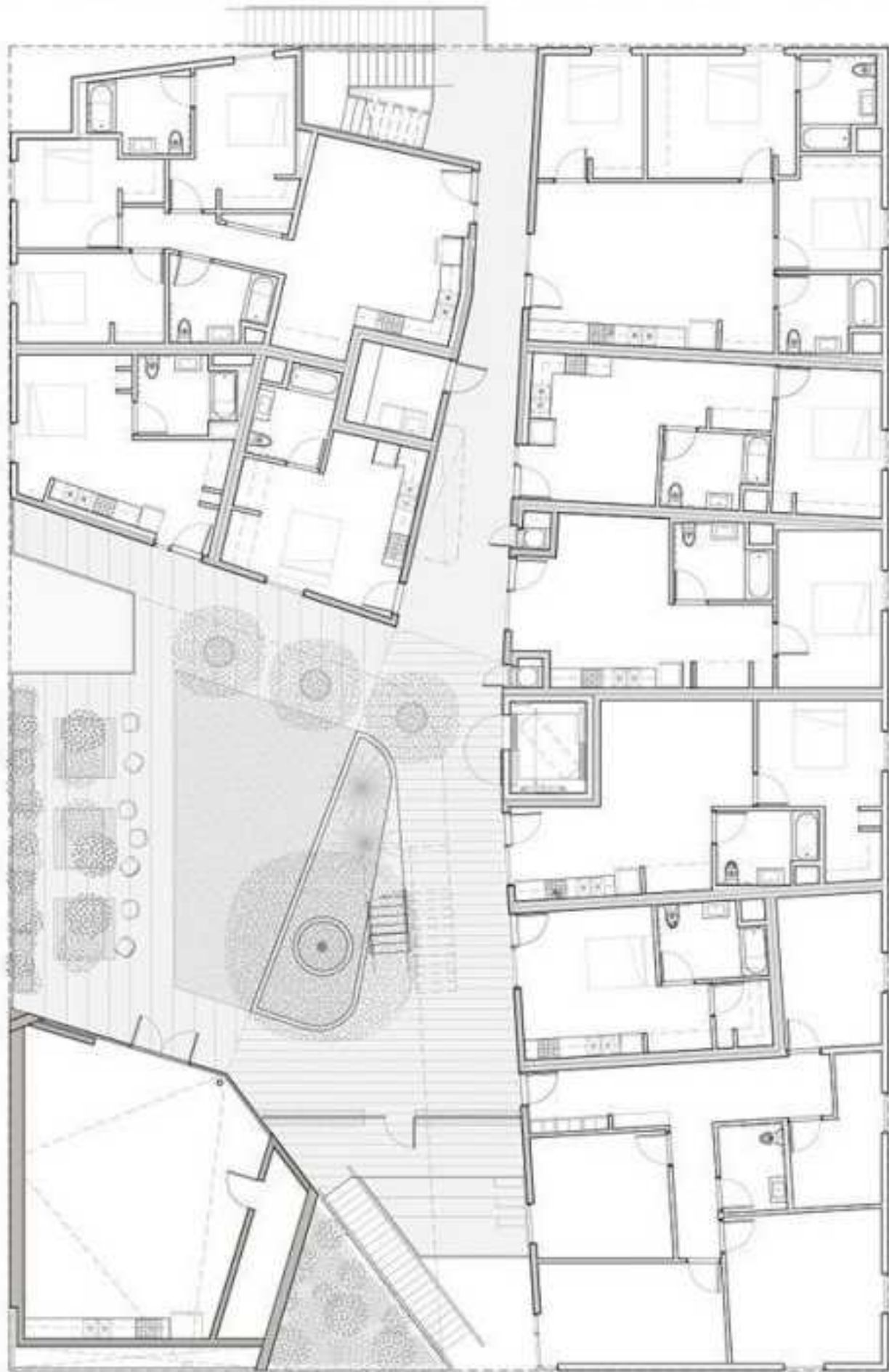
Opened: 2019

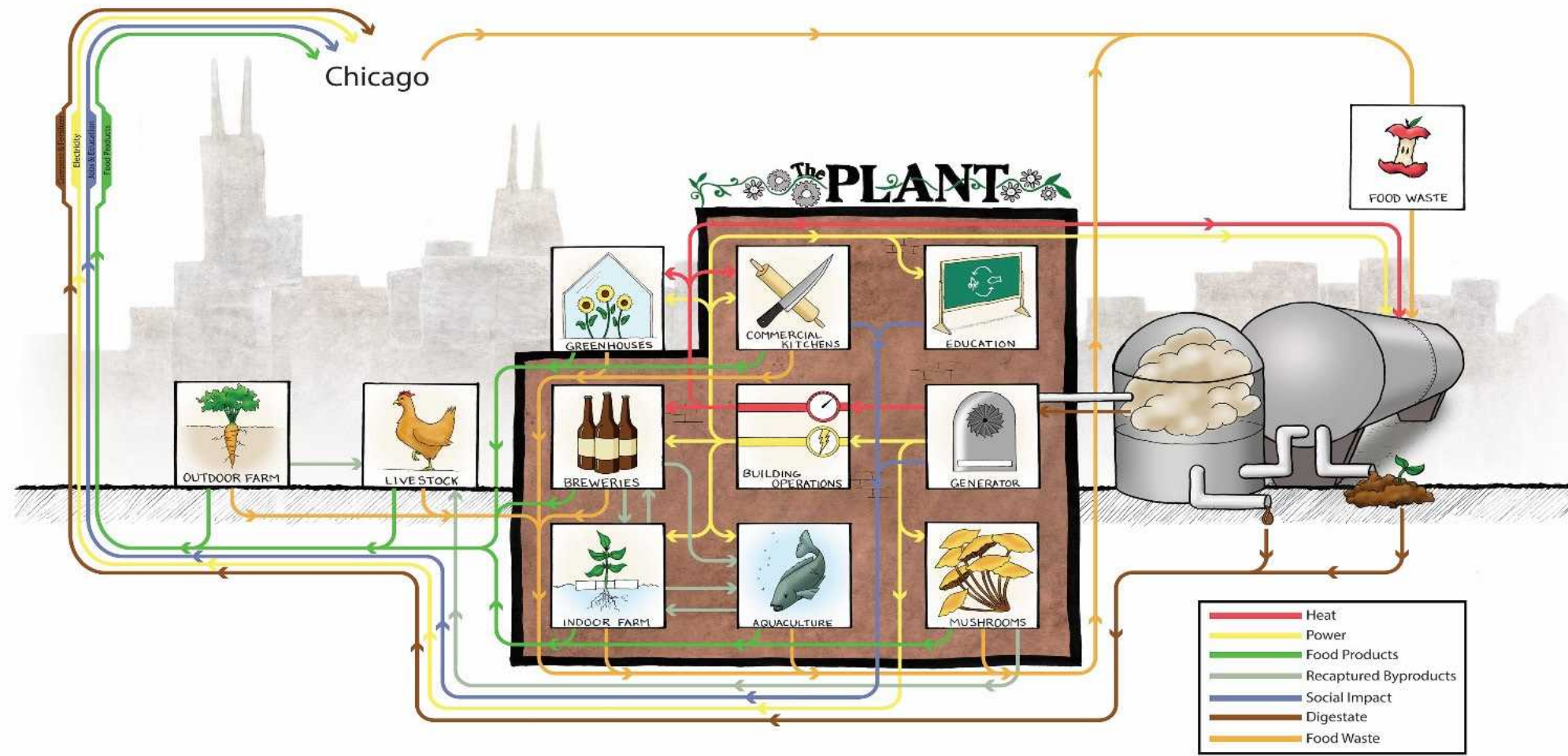
Architect: Lorcan O'Herlihy Architects

Units: 26 units for previously homeless veterans and low-income families

Structure: 34,000 SF that features 26 affordable housing units with accessible kitchens and living spaces. Shared amenity space for cooking and classes. An outdoor community garden to promote neighborhood interaction. Two retail units to generate income and provide workforce training for residents.

Certifications: LEED Gold





The Plant

Located: Chicago

Opened: 2011

Mission: To cultivate local circular economies. *"We envision a paradigm shift in production, consumption and waste driven at the local level, generating equity and economic opportunity for all residents."*

How: Work with local businesses to equip people with the tools to live more sustainably through community-driven, hands-on programs, and innovative research projects that revolve around food education.

02

DESIGN AGENDA

DESIGN INTENT

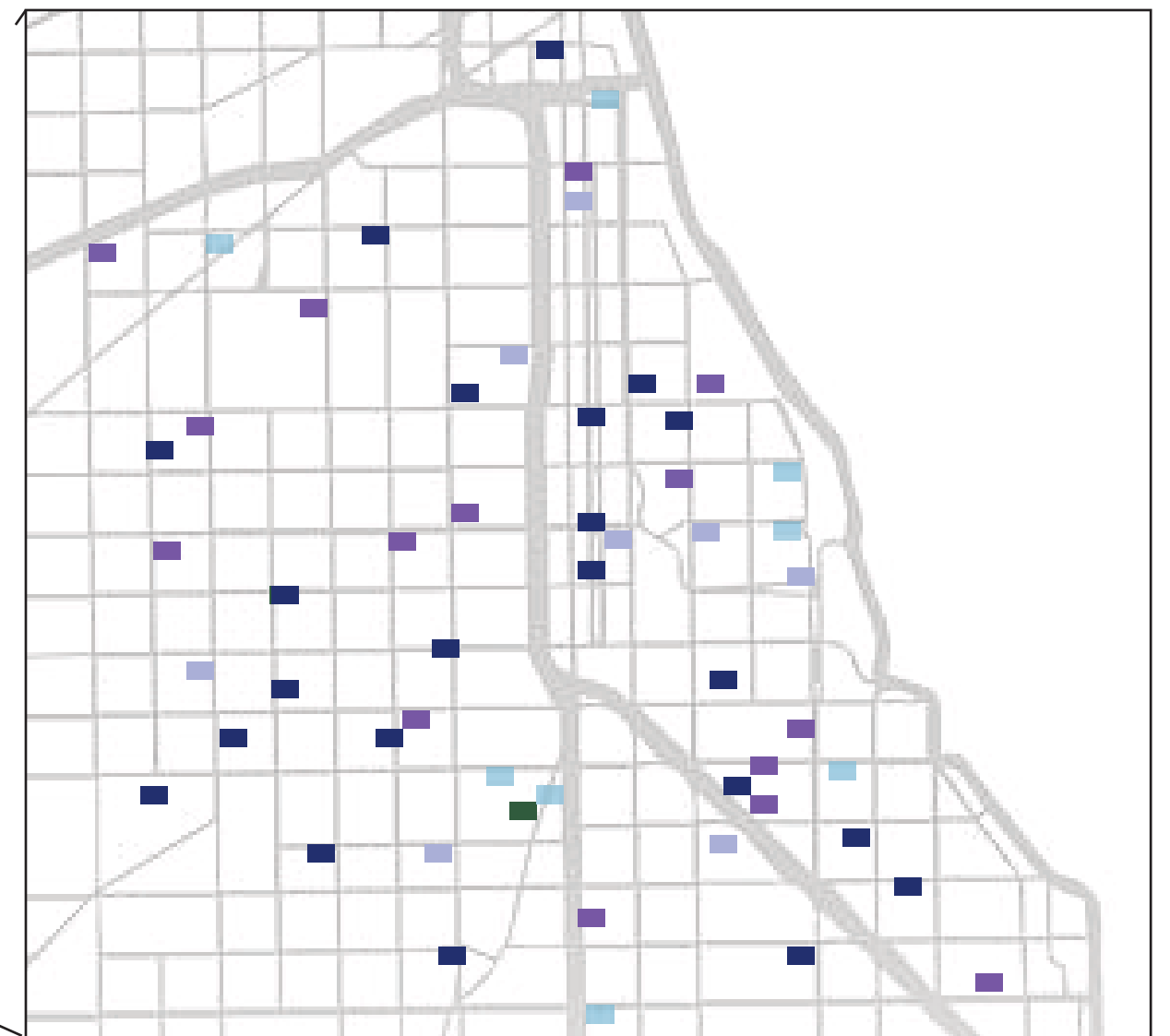
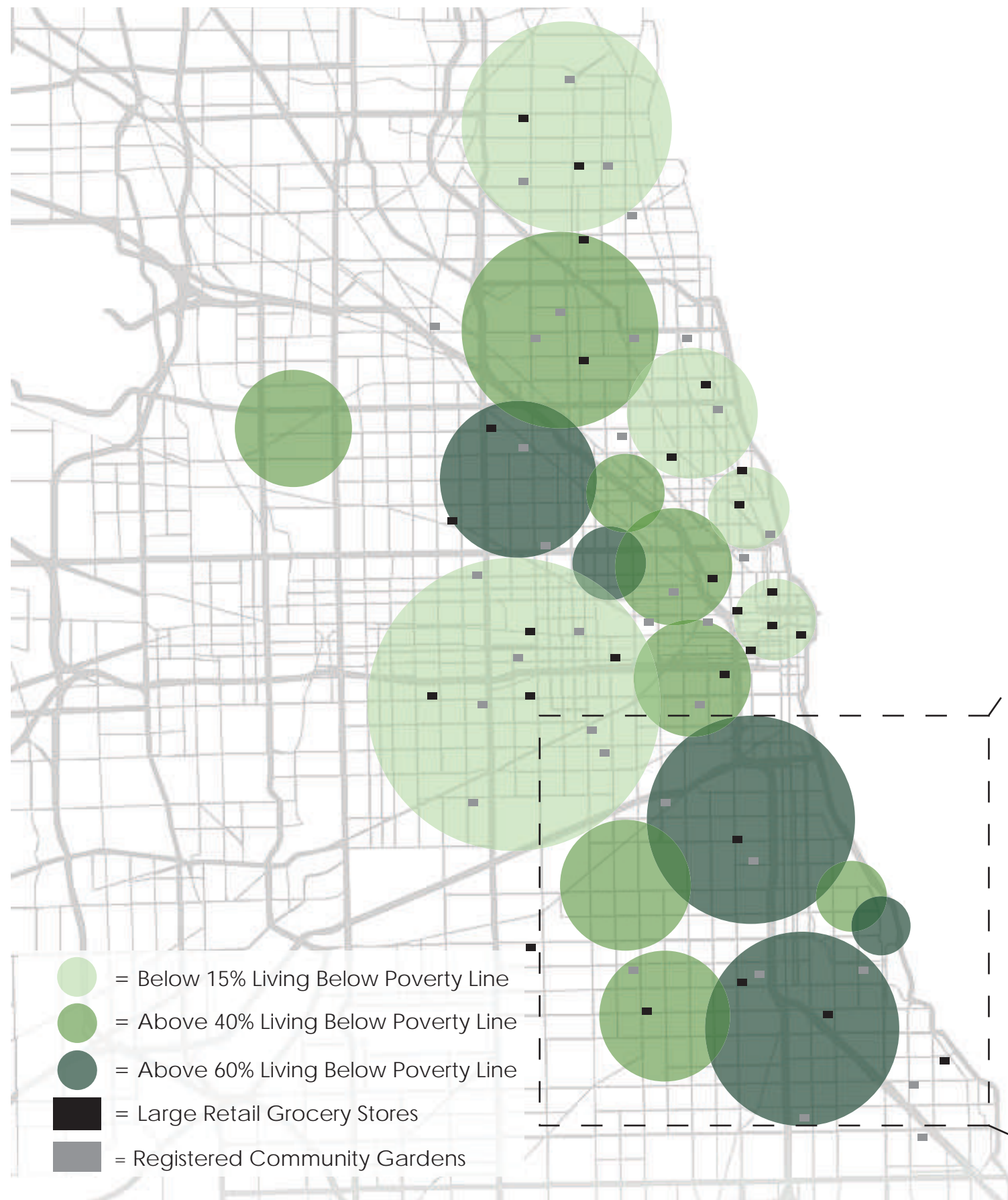
DESIGN PROBE: SCALE

DESIGN PROBE: EXPERIENCE

DESIGN PROBE: MATERIALS

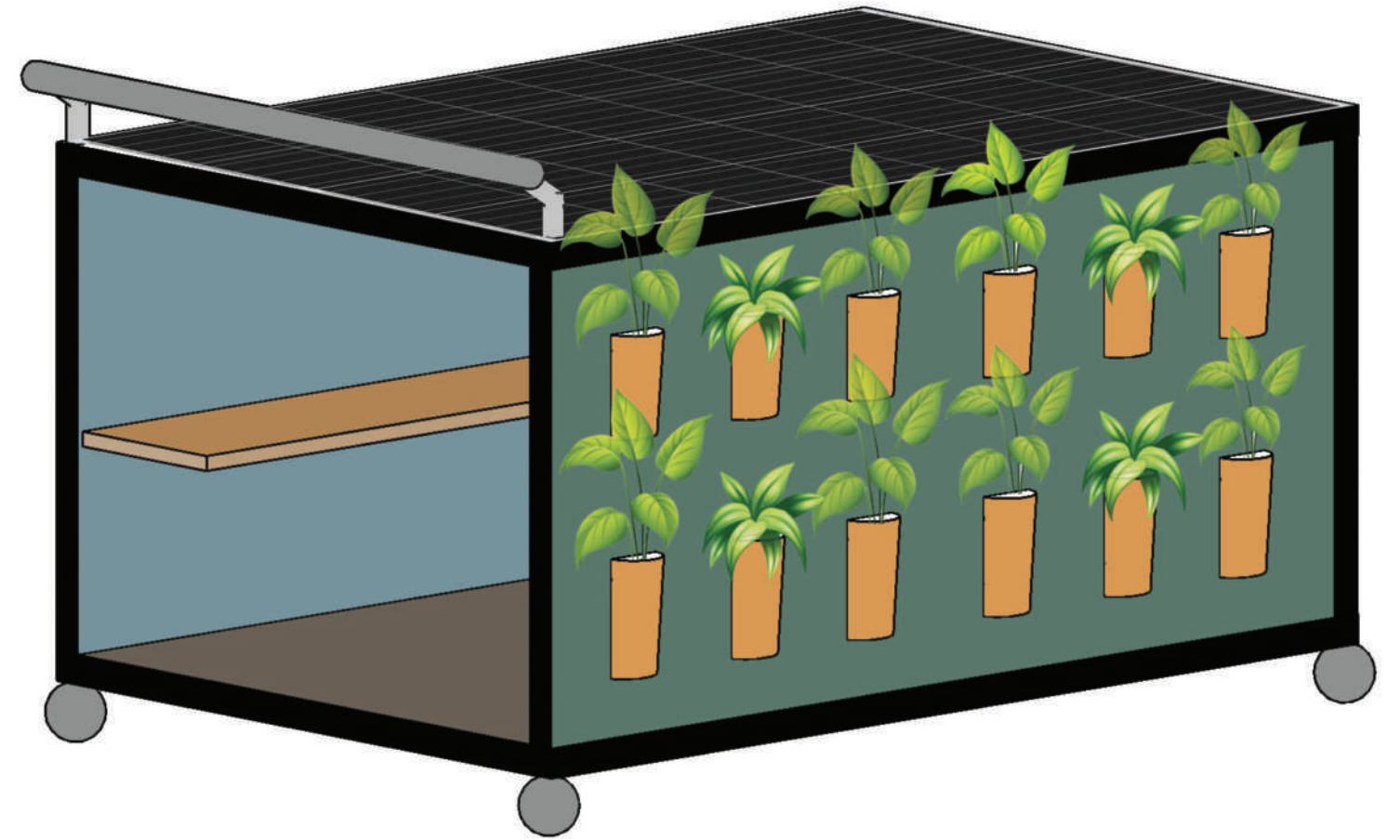
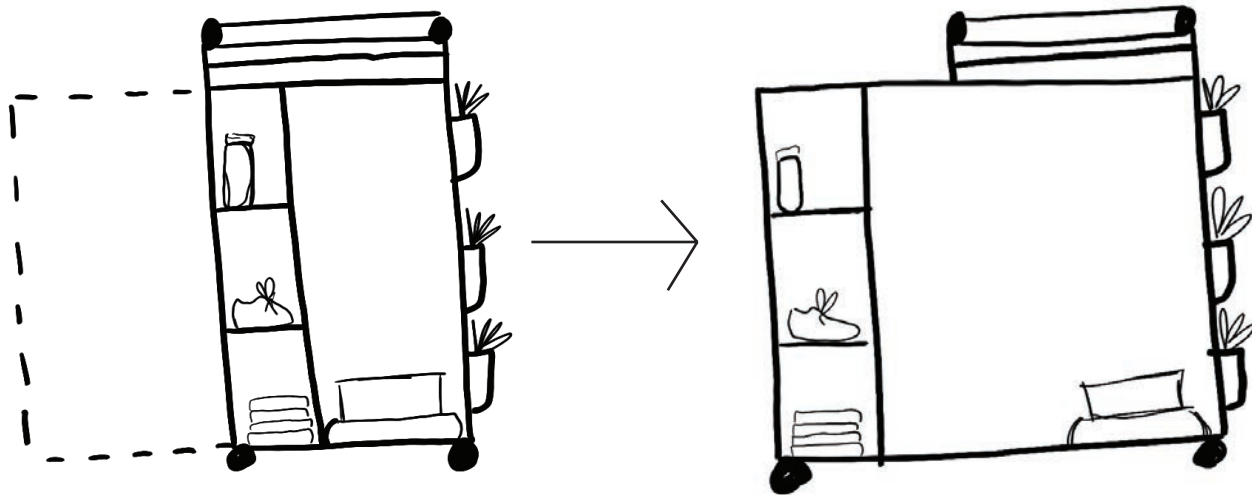
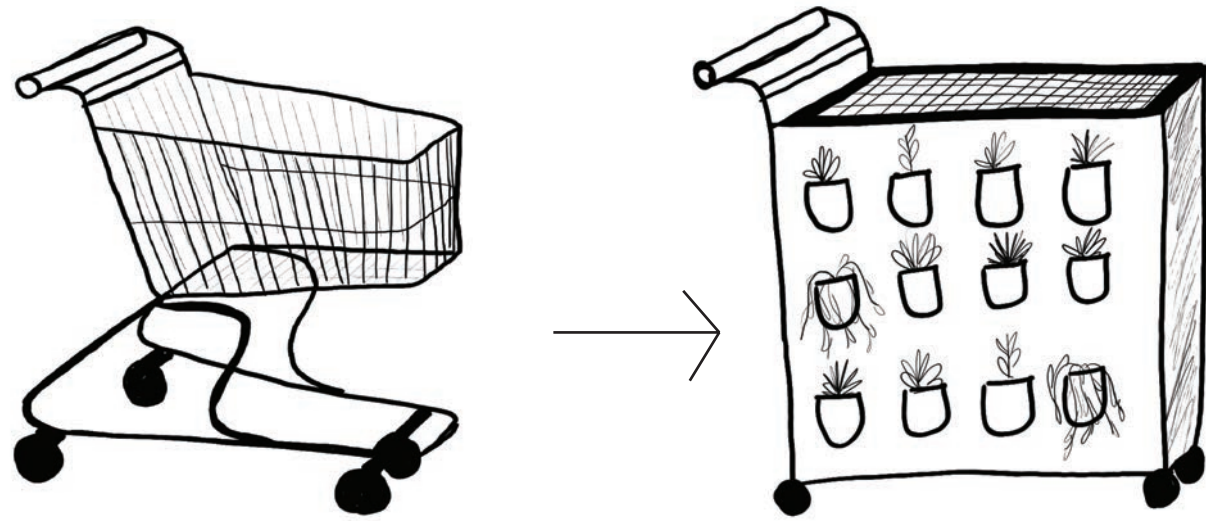
DESIGN PROBE: SCALE

MAPPING HOMELESSNESS & FOOD INSECURITY IN CHICAGO



DESIGN PROBE: SCALE

CONVERTIBLE SHOPPING CART SHELTER



Features:

- Solar Panels
- Storage
- Security

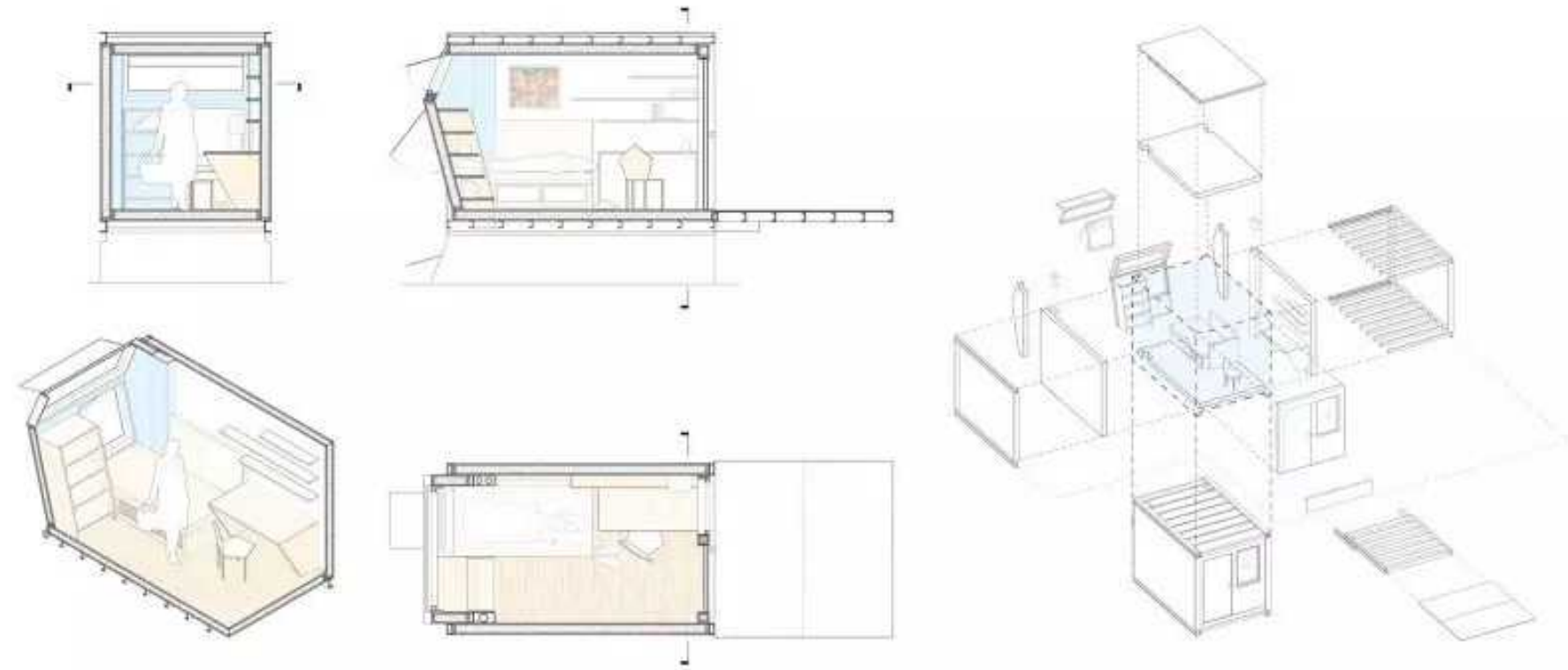
Privacy
Garden
Comfort

DESIGN PROBE: EXPERIENCE

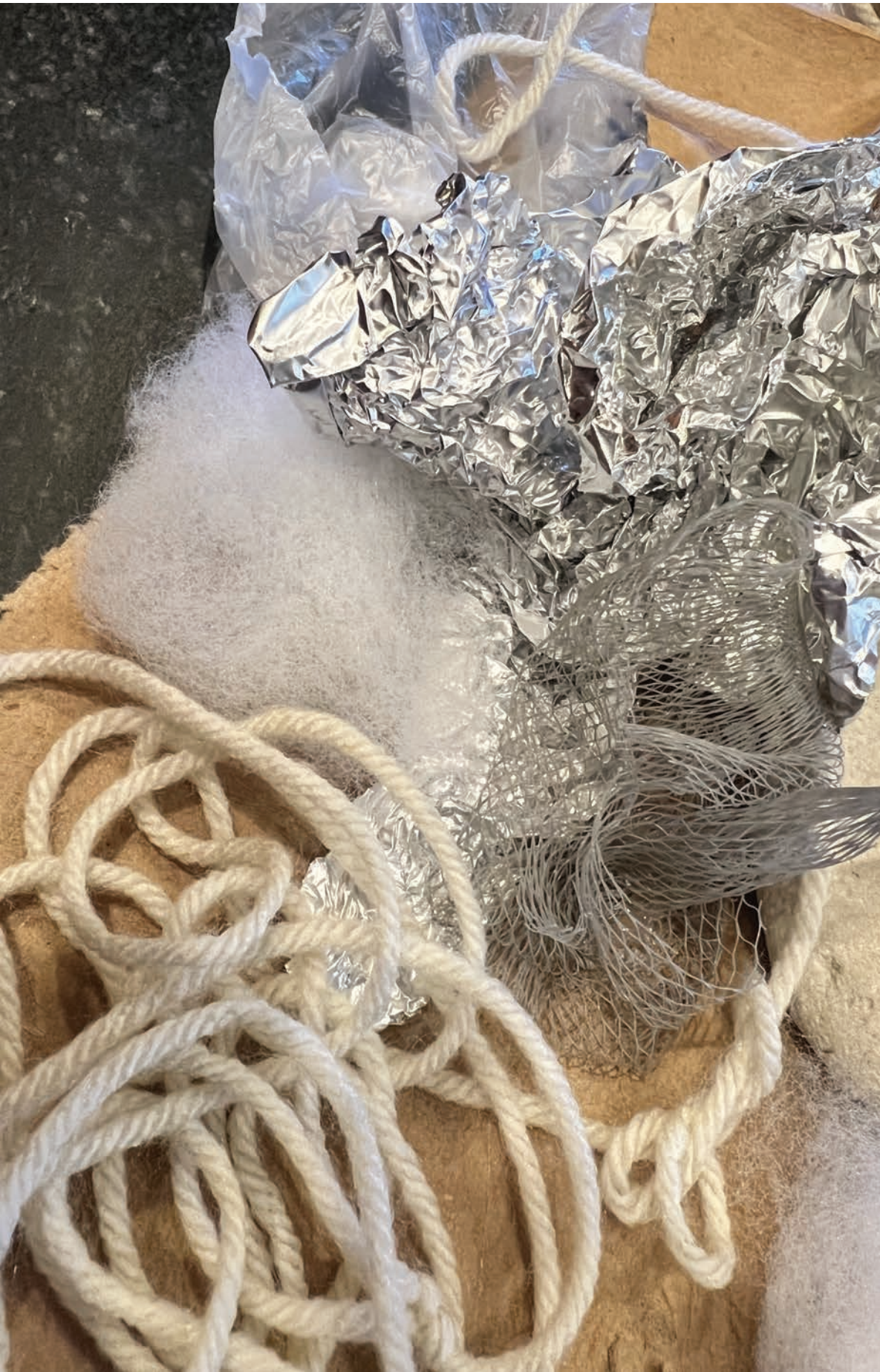
Through research and my interview, I have listed a few take aways from people experiencing homelessness and food insecurity. The design of a space for people struggling needs to keep in mind the trauma that these people have experienced. Trauma informed design includes, safety, trustworthiness, transparency, peer support, collaboration, empowerment, and gender issues. All these categories need to be considered in order for growth to develop for these individuals. They need a space to recover and feels secure, while offering a sense of community to reach out to others that may be going through the same circumstance. In order to incorporate a sense of food security, the space also needs to be sustainable, so the next people that come in can also grow. All this criteria may not fit into one space, so working with organizations and communities to offer educational, healthcare, and job support is critical.

I found a temporary housing solution based in Los Angeles that starts to accomplish a trauma informed, secure, and sustainable sense of living. These pods cost \$25,000 to build, and are designed to be stacked on top of one another to create unique communities. These pods are also convertible to add a dining, separate bedroom, or bathroom if you need more space. These pods were developed by a class as a final project from University of Southern California in 2017. These pods have not been built, but they have a lot of potential.

If I were to create space for the homeless, while also helping the community with food insecurity, I would build a community of these pods that could accomodate individuals and families suffering from homelessness. I would make sure the interior was built with recovery and wellness in mind. I would add seperate pods for farming, and work with the community to develop a program so people living in these pods could work to give food back into the community. This way people can develop independence, and no one in the area has to go hungry.



DESIGN PROBE: MATERIAL



03

SITE

CONTEXT + BACKGROUND

COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS

SITE DOCUMENTATION

SITE PROXIMITY MAP

- ★ = Site
- ✚ = Healthcare/Hospitals
- 📖 = Schools
- 🛒 = Grocery Stores
- 👮 = Police Station
- ✚ = Churches
- = Food Distribution
- 🚇 = CTA Red Line
- 🚇 = CTA Green Line



ANTHONY OVERTON ELEMENTARY

The site had to be located in neighborhood of Chicago where poverty and food insecurity are high. The building needed to be within walking distance of public transit, so if people could start to develop a sense of independence. There needed to be healthcare facilities near by in case people in the building needed emergency medical assistance. The neighborhood that the site would be located was an area that needed to have a sense of community restored as this site would encourage community engagement. Lastly, the building had to be large enough to accomodate a large program.

Address: 221 E 49th Street, Chicago IL, 60615

Neighborhood: Bronzeville

Built: 1963

Architects: Perkins & Will

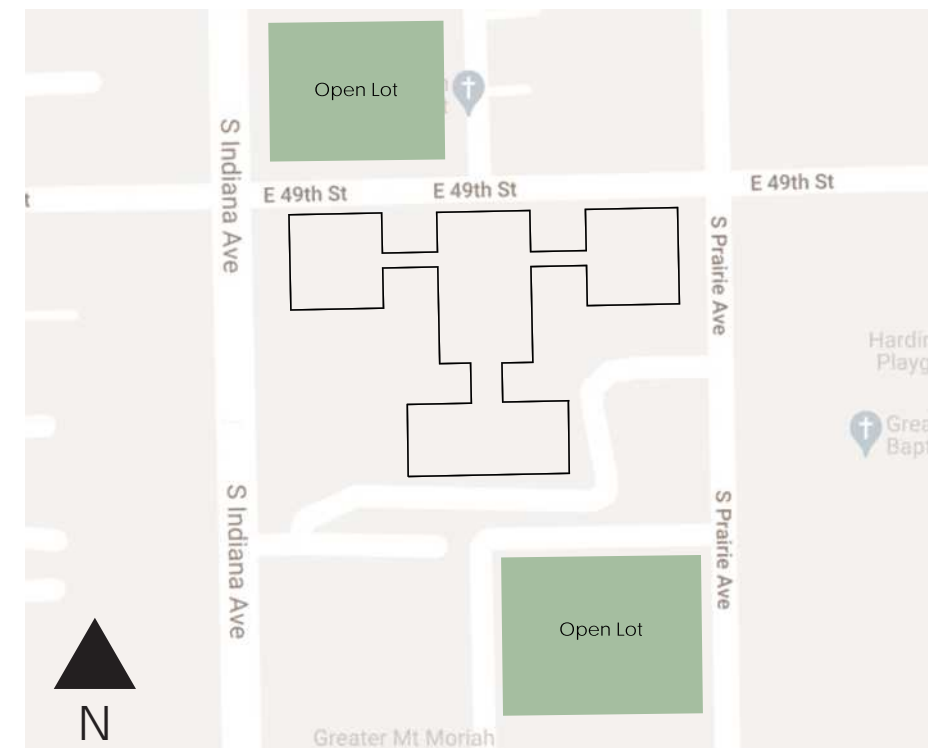
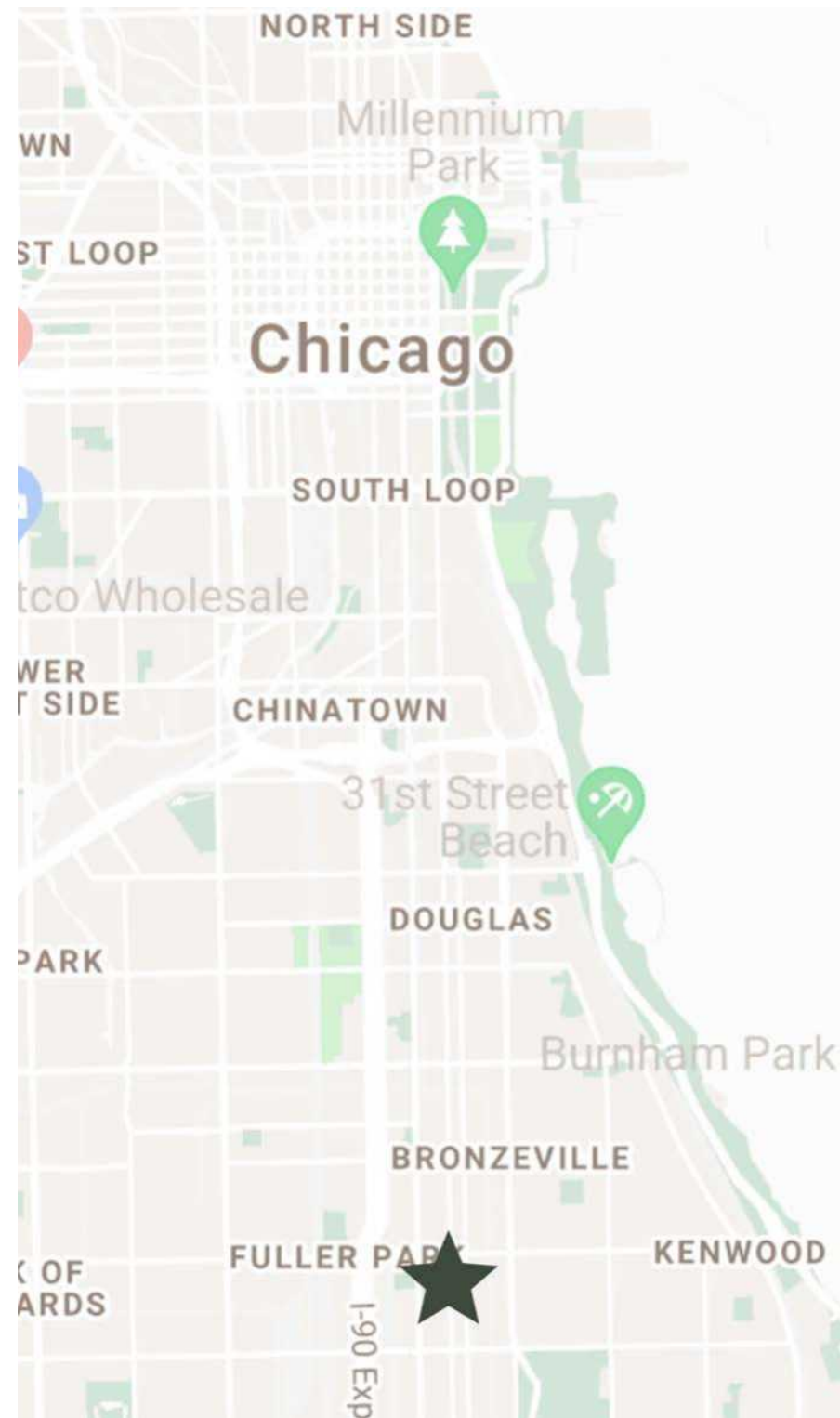
Square Footage: +/- 60,000

Lot: +/- 2.3 acres

Occupancy: Educational

Stories: 3

Overall Height: 33 ft

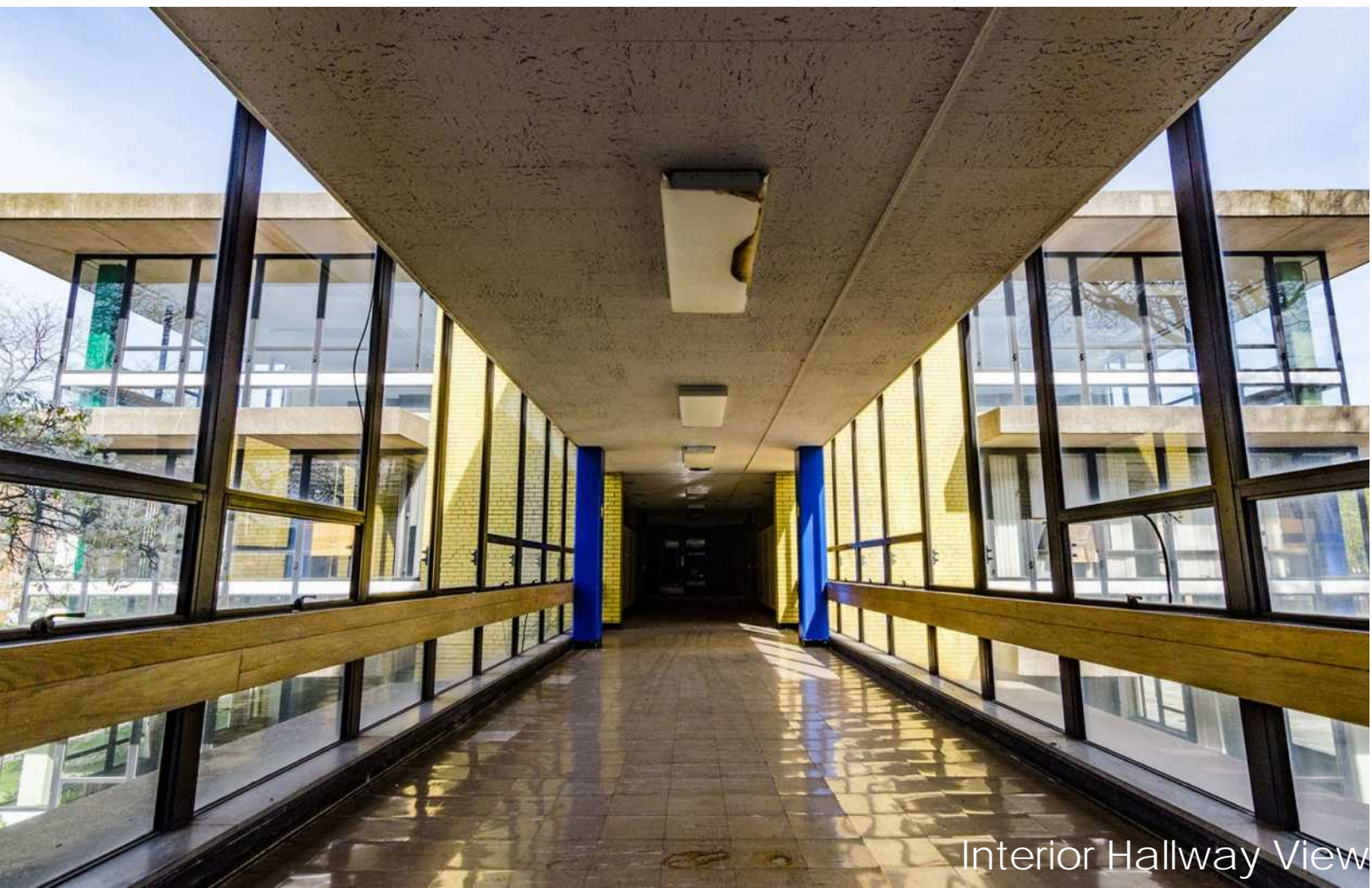




Exterior Hallway View



Exterior Classroom View



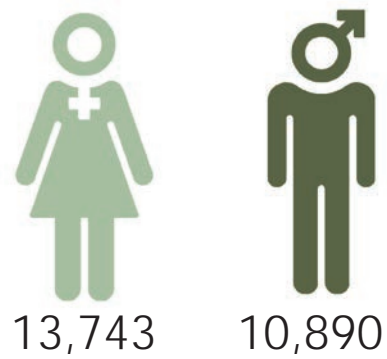
Interior Hallway View



Interior Classroom View

BRONZEVILLE DEMOGRAPHICS

Total Population: 24,633



Median Age: 34

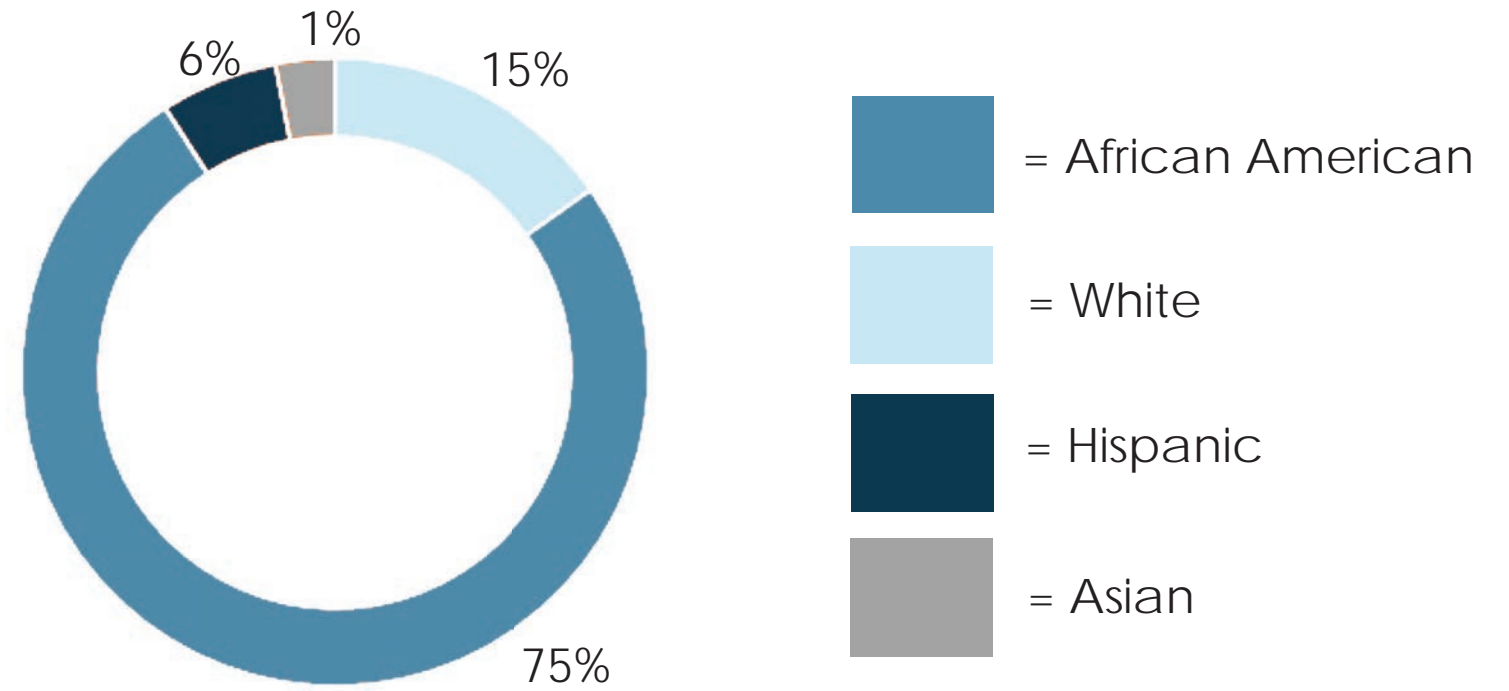
Total Household: 11,428

Median Household Income: \$37,353

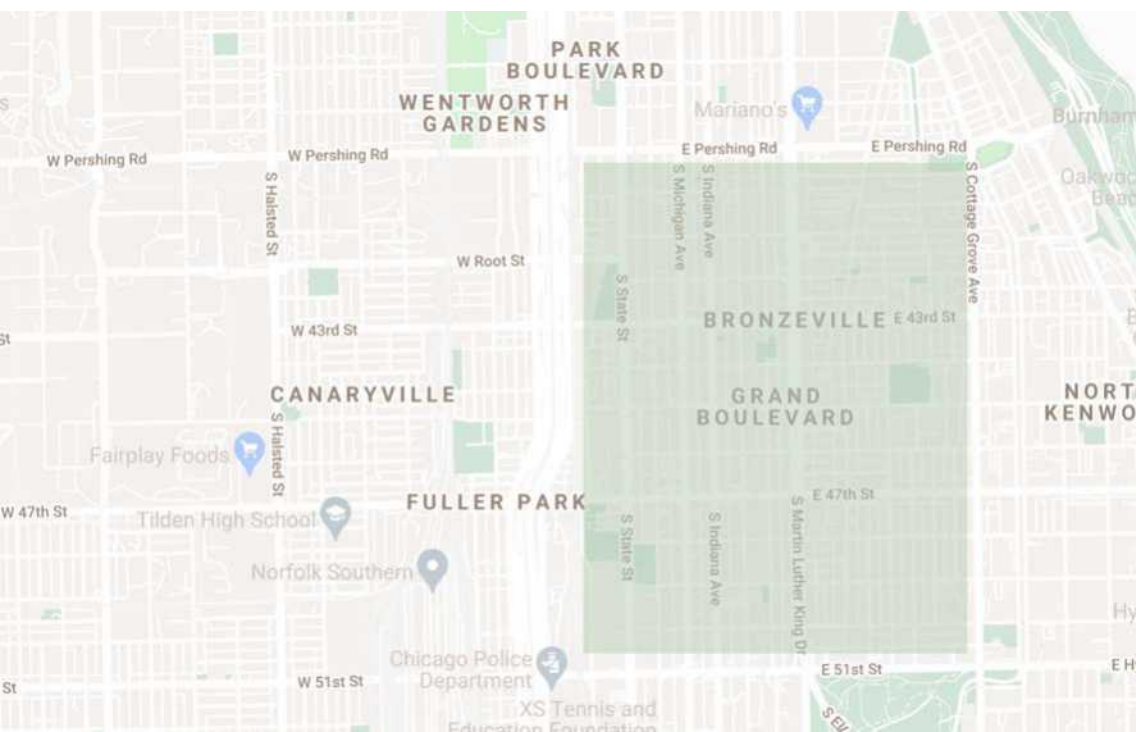
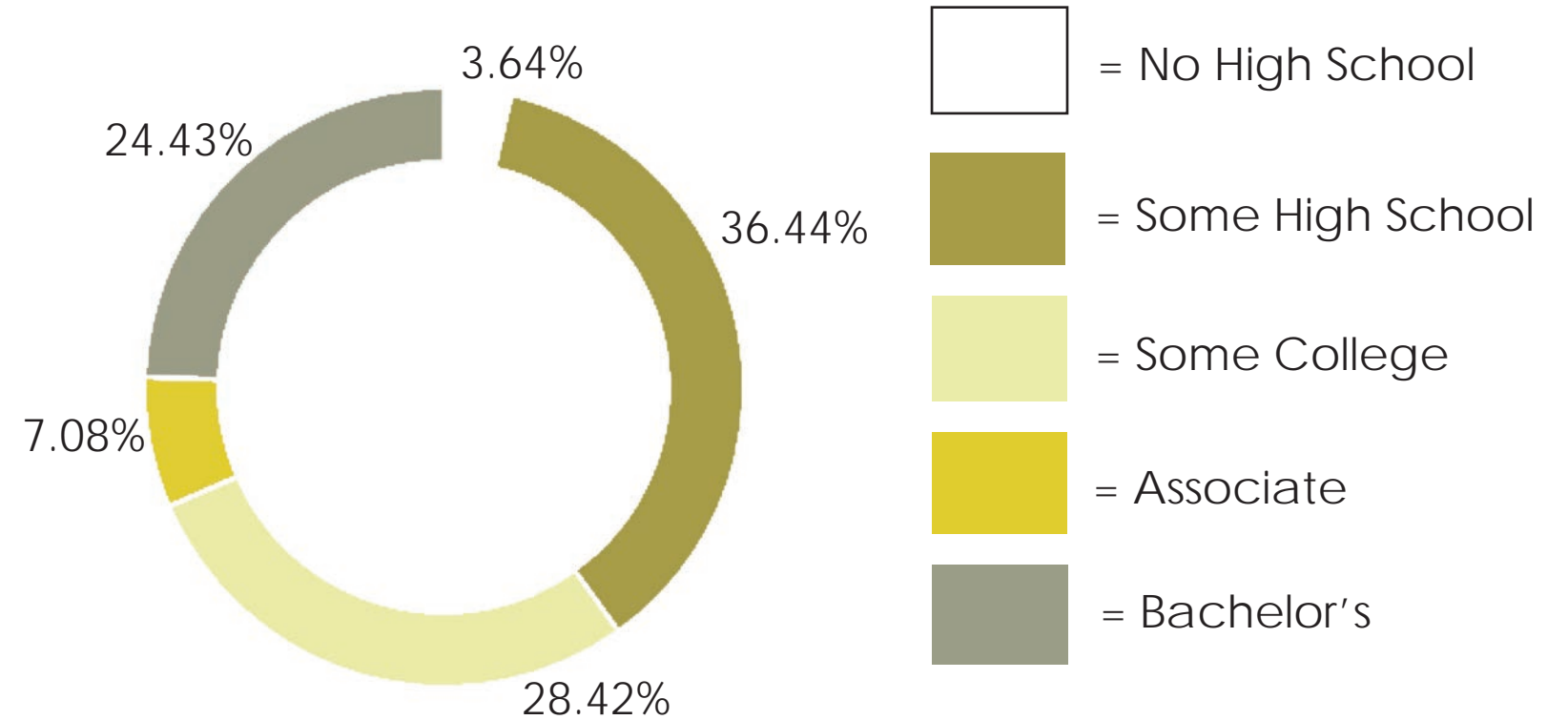
Living Below Poverty Line: 42%

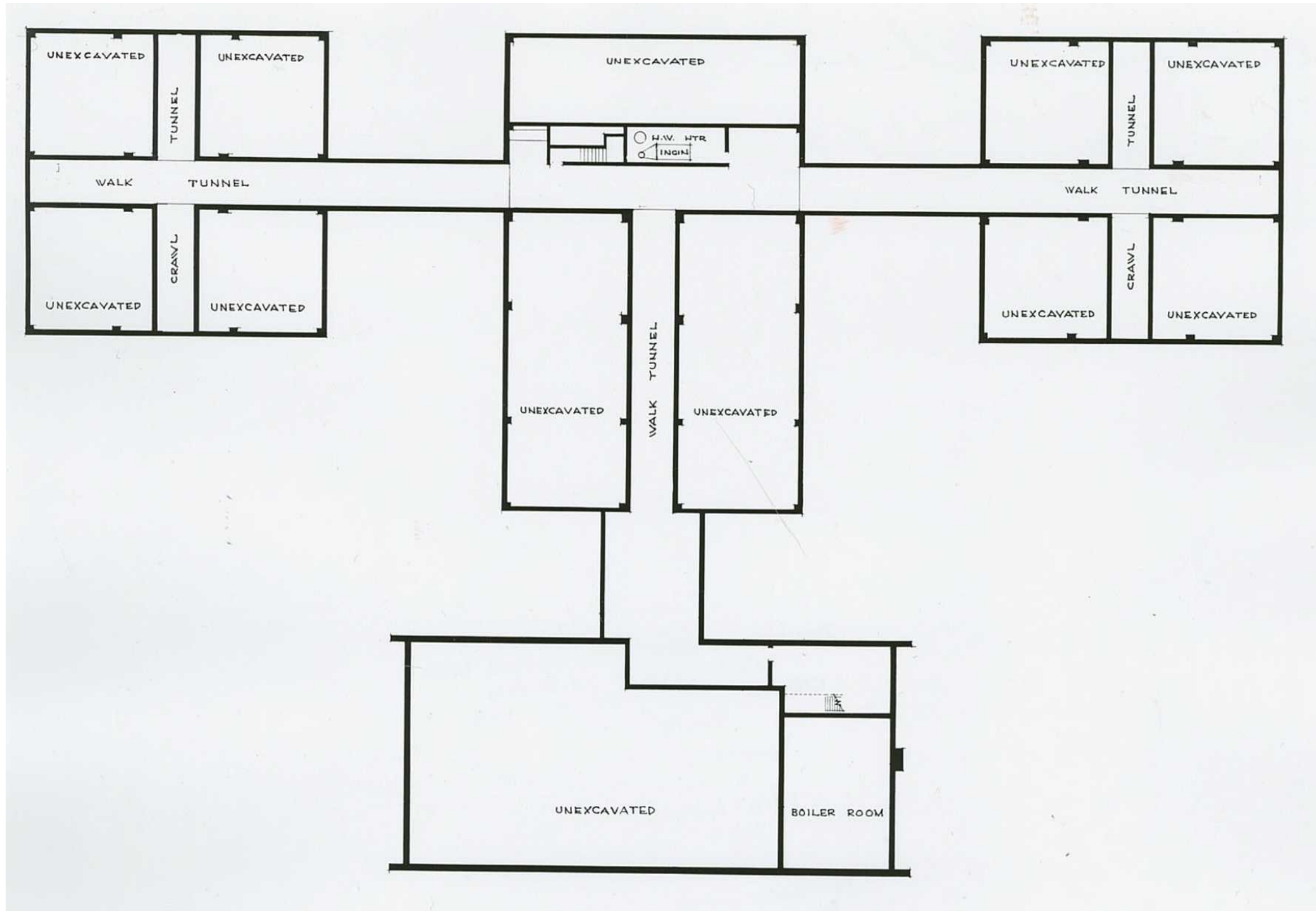
Unemployment Rate: 11.6%

Race & Ethnicity:



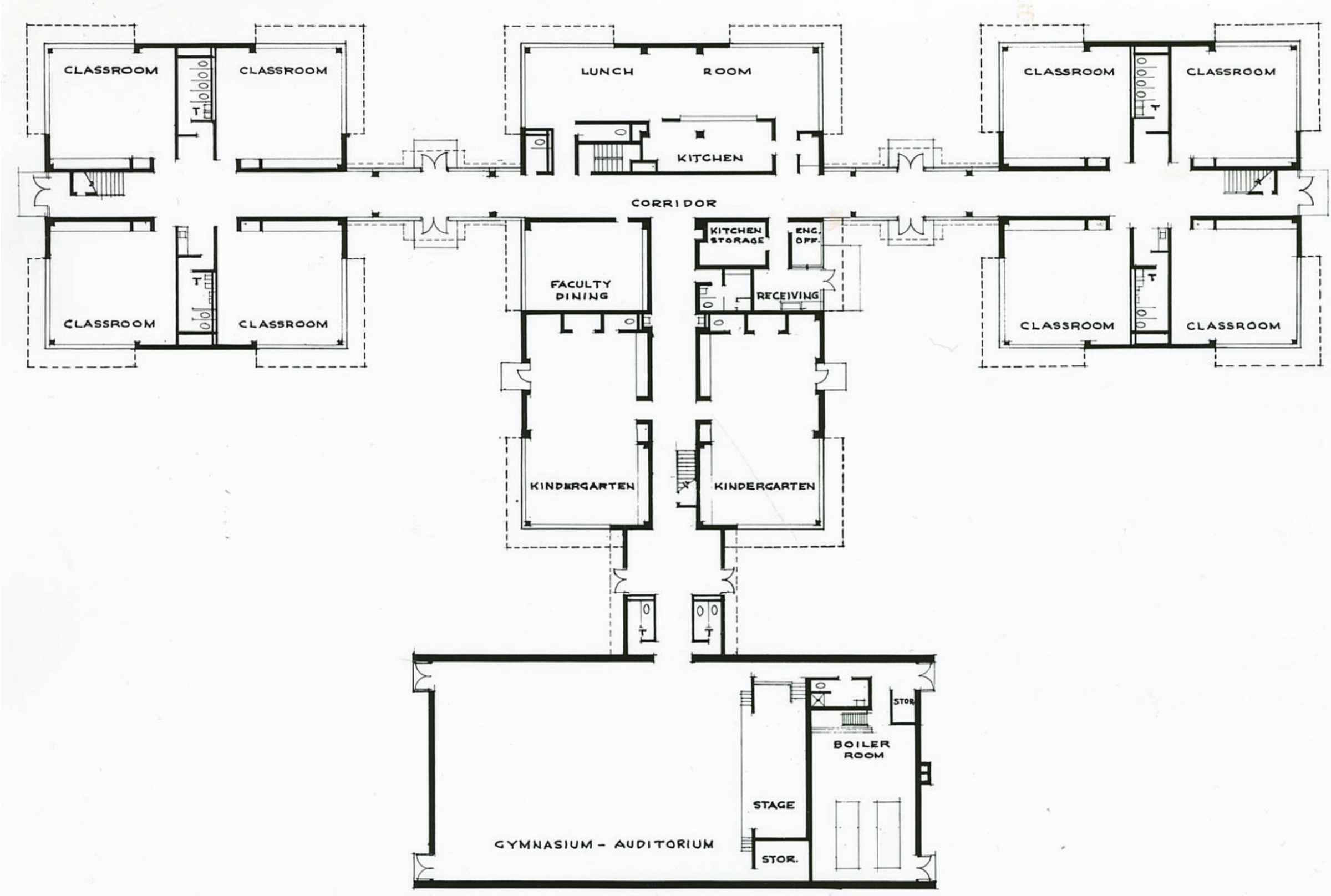
Education:





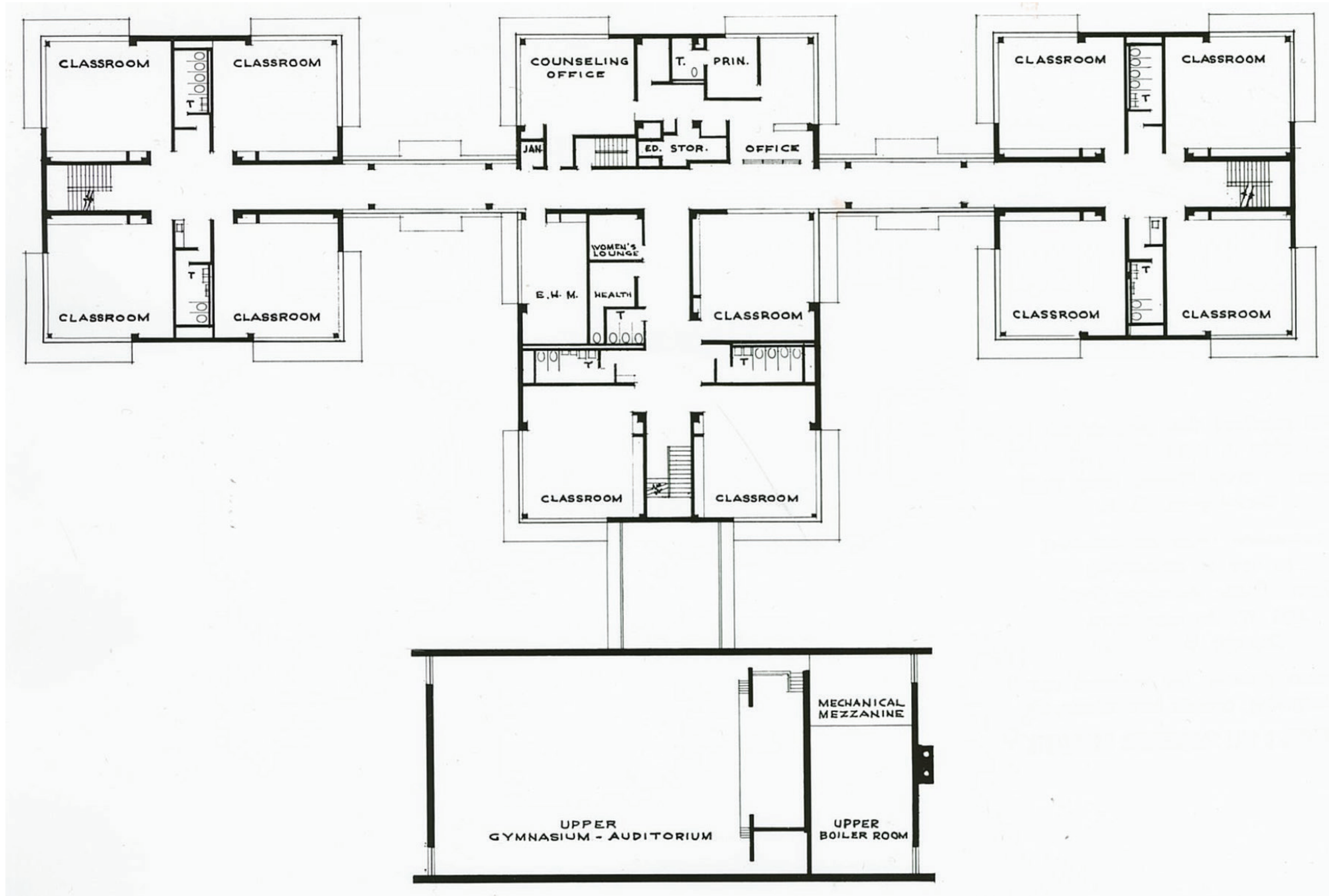
Basement





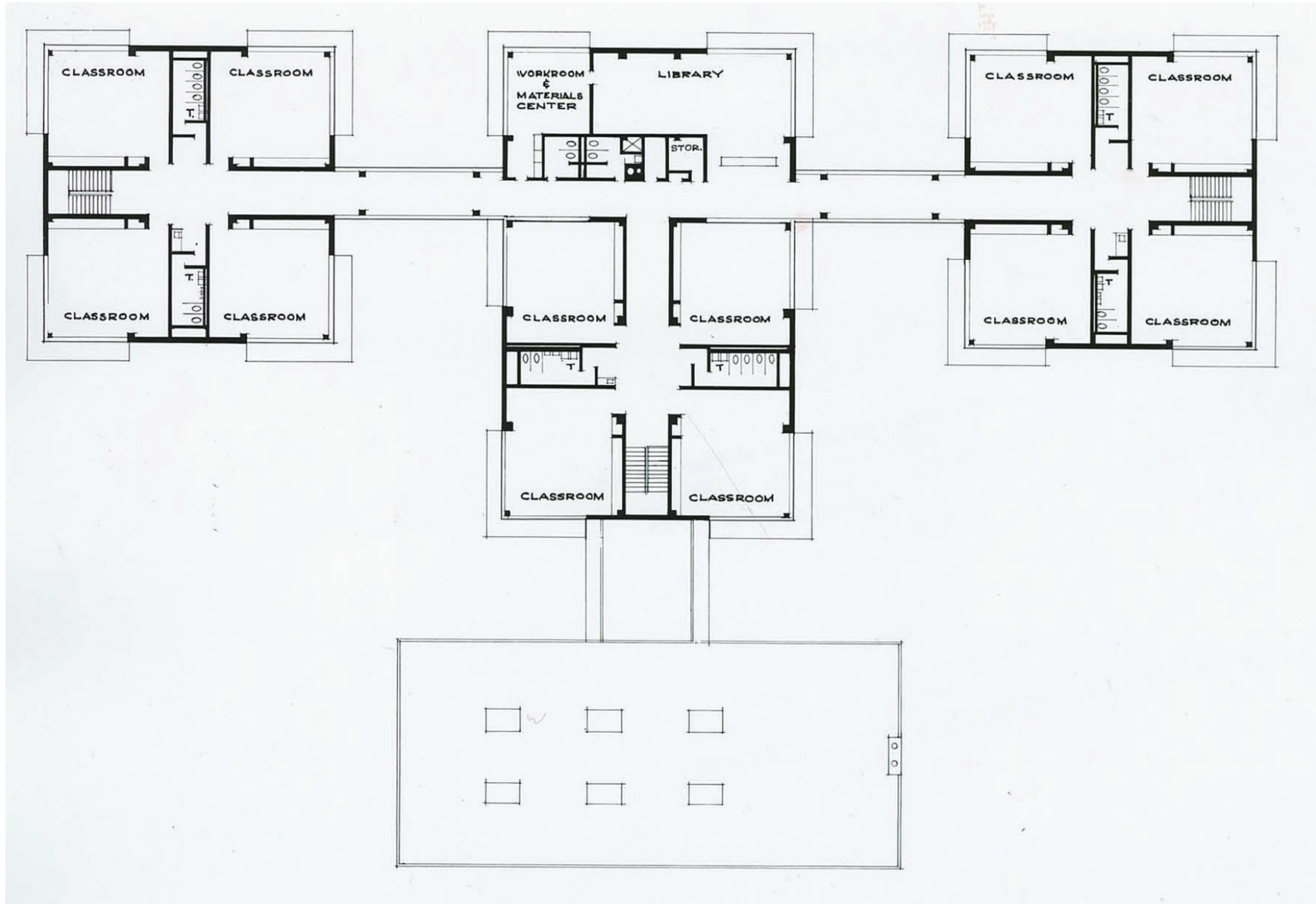
First Floor





Second Floor





Third Floor



04

PROGRAM

MASTER LIST OF SPACES

BUBBLE DIAGRAM

BLOCKING DIAGRAMS

MASTER LIST OF SPACES



	Community	Wellness	Residential
SQ FT	11,900	2,700	21,000
Occupancy	Assembly	Business	Residential
Employees	12	15	6
Privacy	Public	Semi-Private	Private
Building Support			5,932
Circulation +/- 30%			9,000
Total Sq Ft			50,532

COMMUNITY

Spaces that bring in the community for services that are needed in the area. These rooms will foster a sense of community between the residents and neighbors.



LOBBY/WAITING	600
---------------	-----

CAFE	2,000
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TEACHING KITCHEN	1,000
------------------	-------

PLAY SPACE	500
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MULTI-PURPOSE	800
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COMMUNITY GARDEN	7,000
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11,900

WELLNESS

Spaces that offer services to provide aid with mental and physical health for all ages.



GROUP THERAPY 600

2 PRIVATE THERAPY ROOMS 400

ART THERAPY 600

FAMILY COUNSELING ROOM 300

CASE MANAGEMENT 300

JOB SUPPORT 500

2,700

RESIDENTIAL

Spaces dedicated only to the residence. Comprised mainly of housing units, but also offer areas of relaxation and community within the residential floors.



(8) ~1000 SQ FT 1 BEDROOM 8,000

(12) ~800 SQ FT 1 BEDROOM 9,600

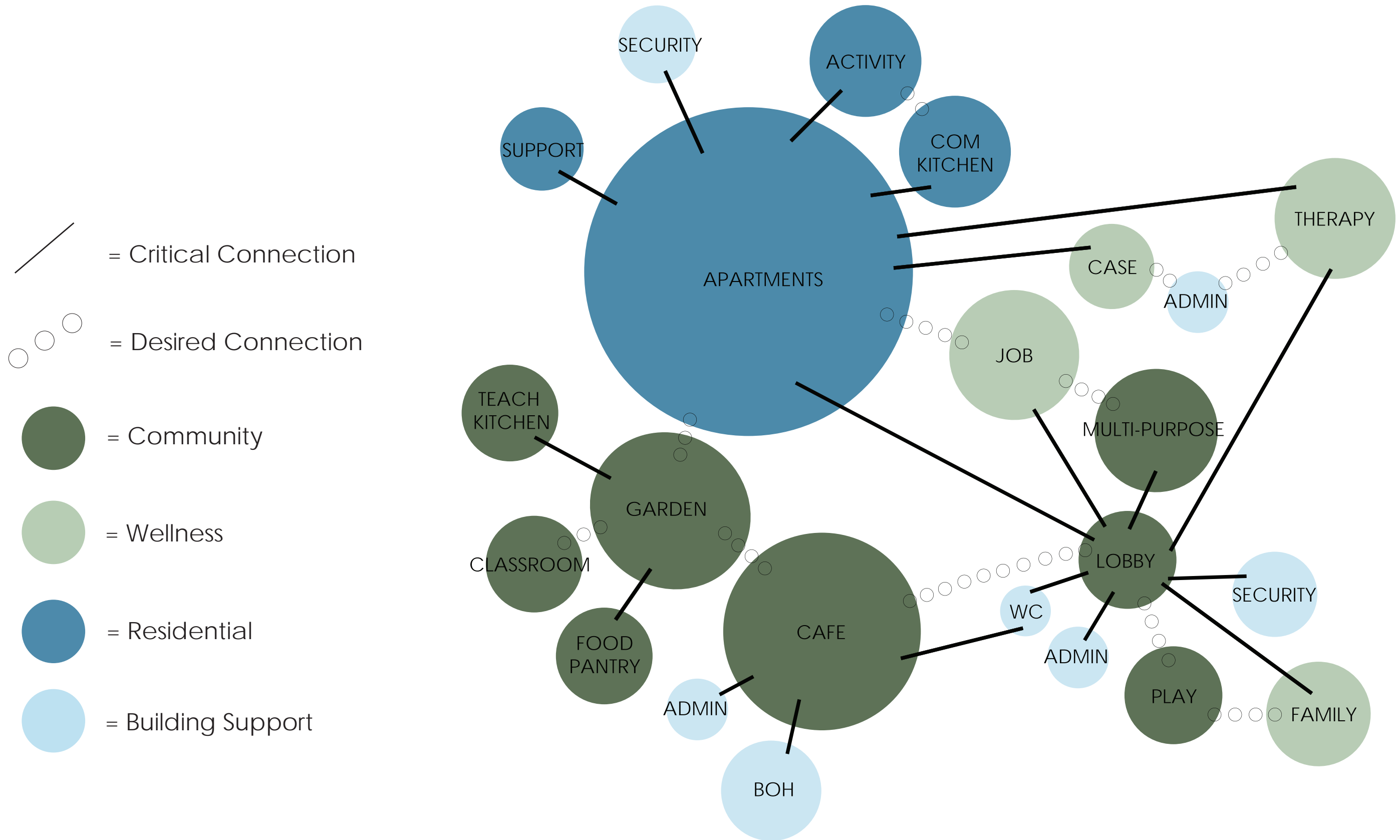
LOUNGE/ACTIVITY 1,000

CO-HOUSING KITCHEN 2,000

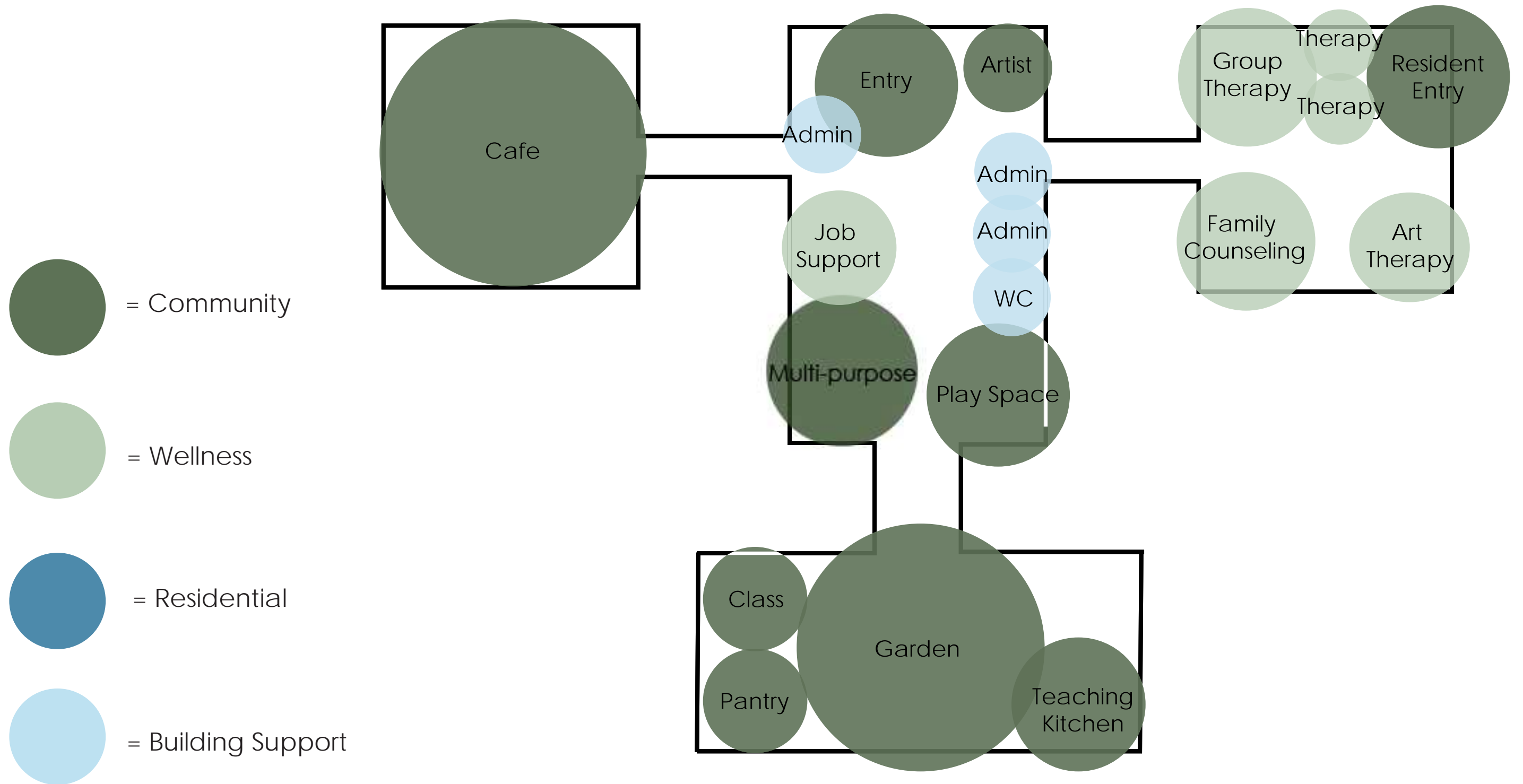
RESIDENT THERAPY ROOMS 400

21,000

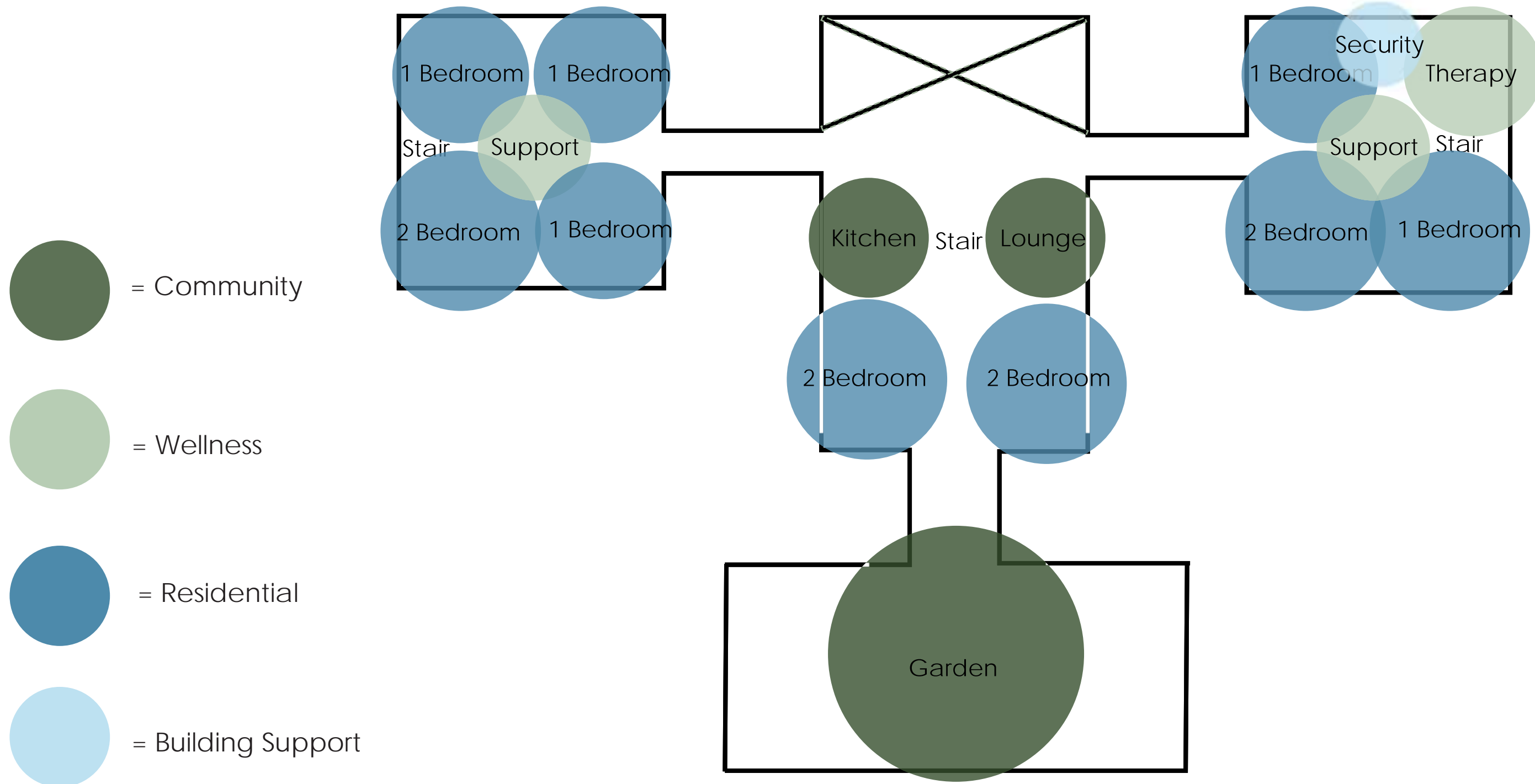
BUBBLE DIAGRAM



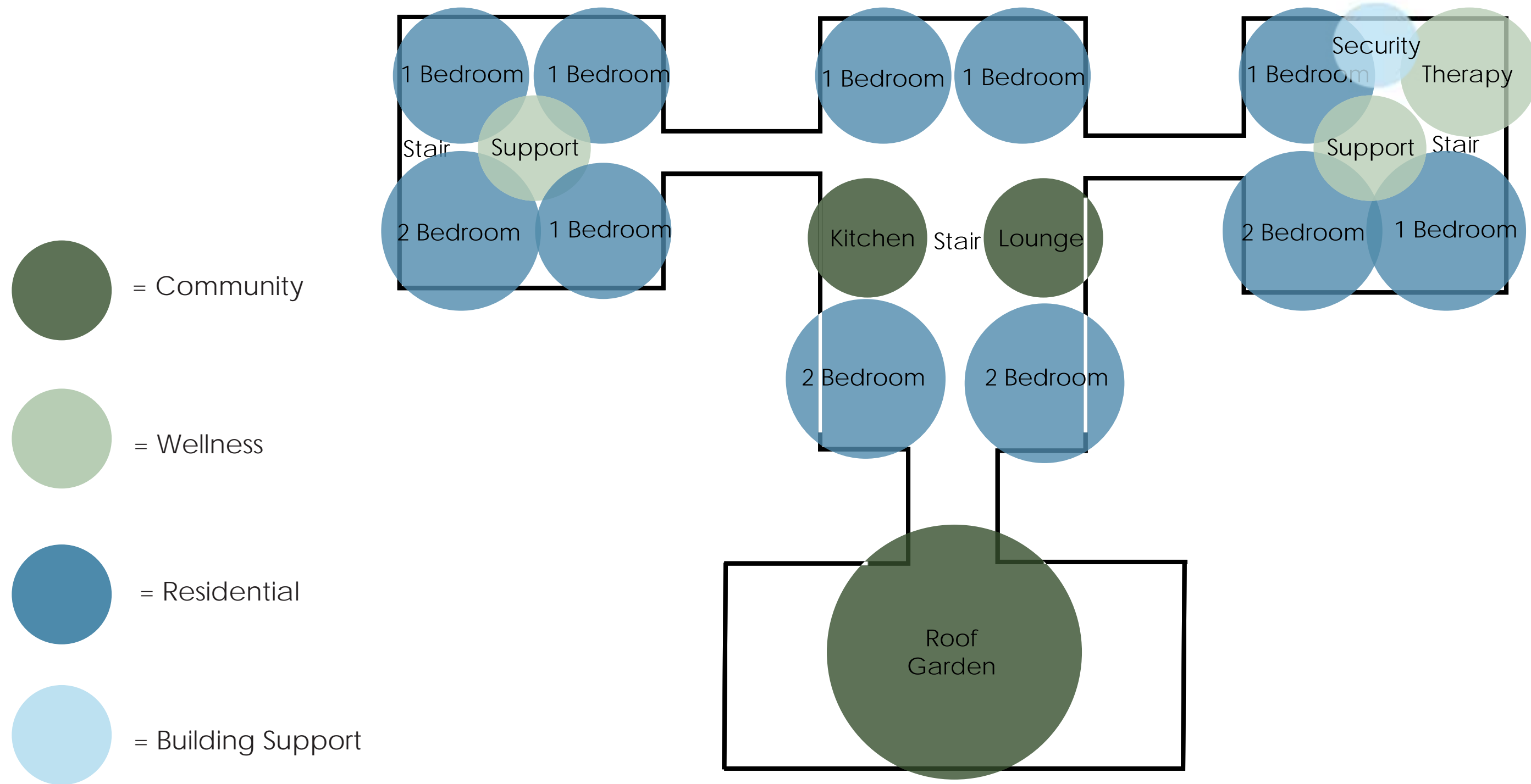
FIRST FLOOR BLOCKING



SECOND FLOOR BLOCKING



THIRD FLOOR BLOCKING

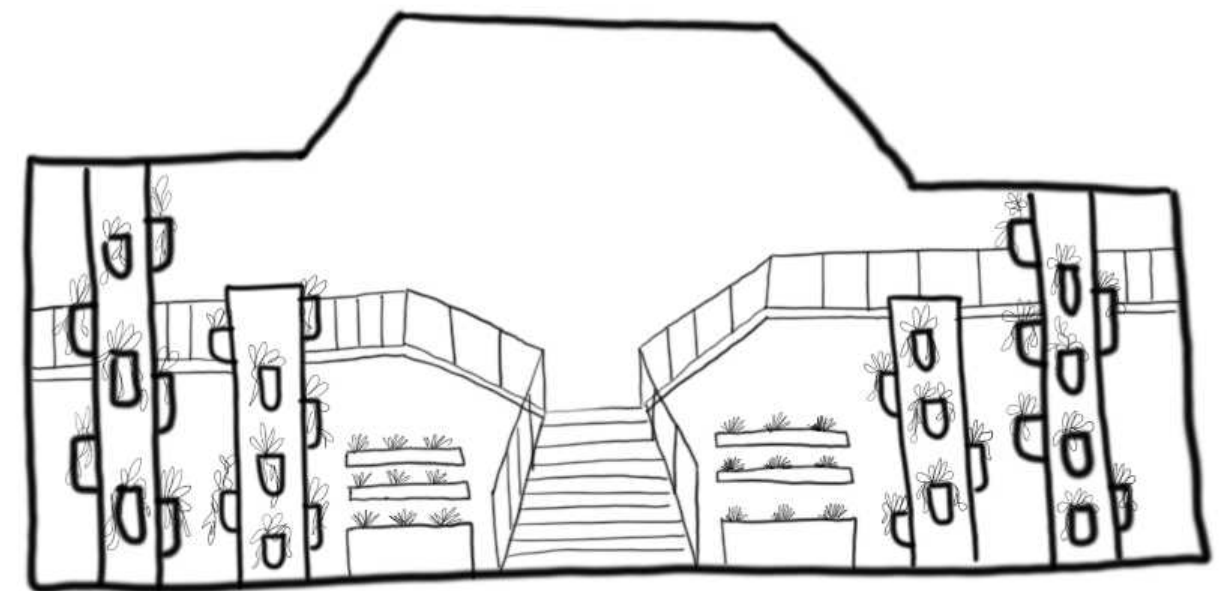


05

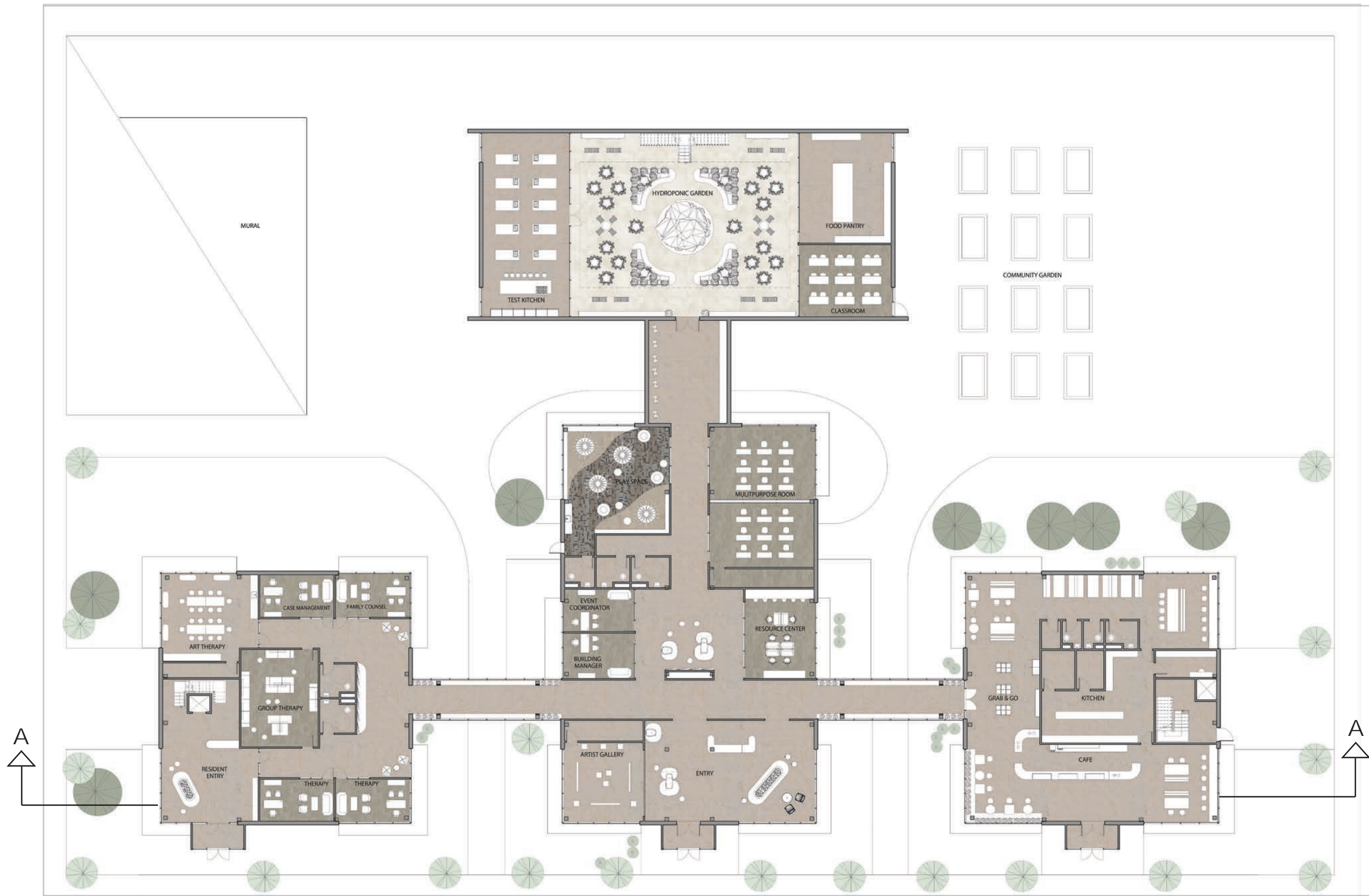
DESIGN DOCUMENTATION
DEVELOPMENTAL SKETCHES
FLOOR PLANS
RCPS
SECTIONS
RENDERINGS
MATERIALS & FURNITURE



INSPIRATION IMAGERY

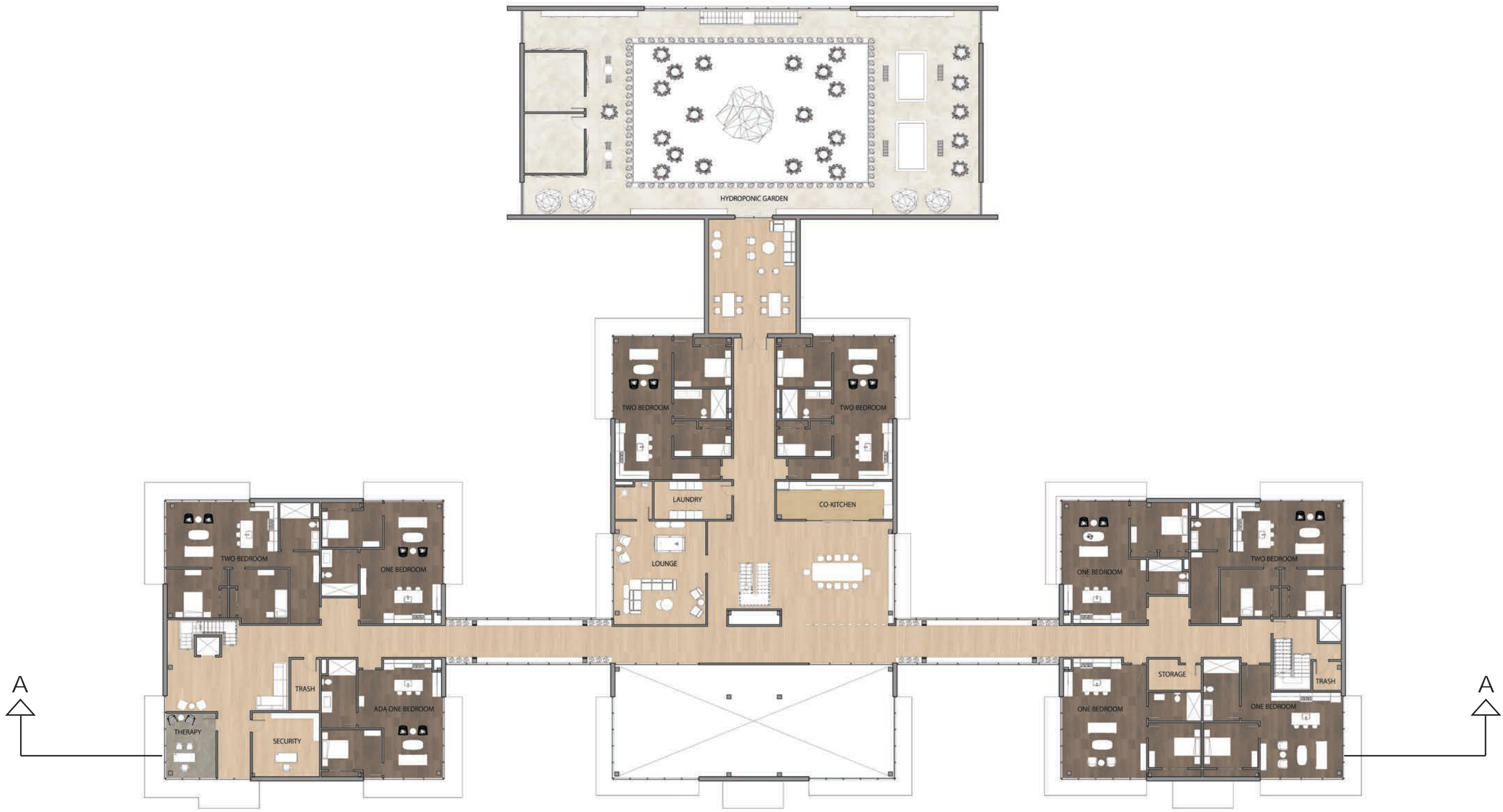


DEVELOPMENTAL SKETCHES



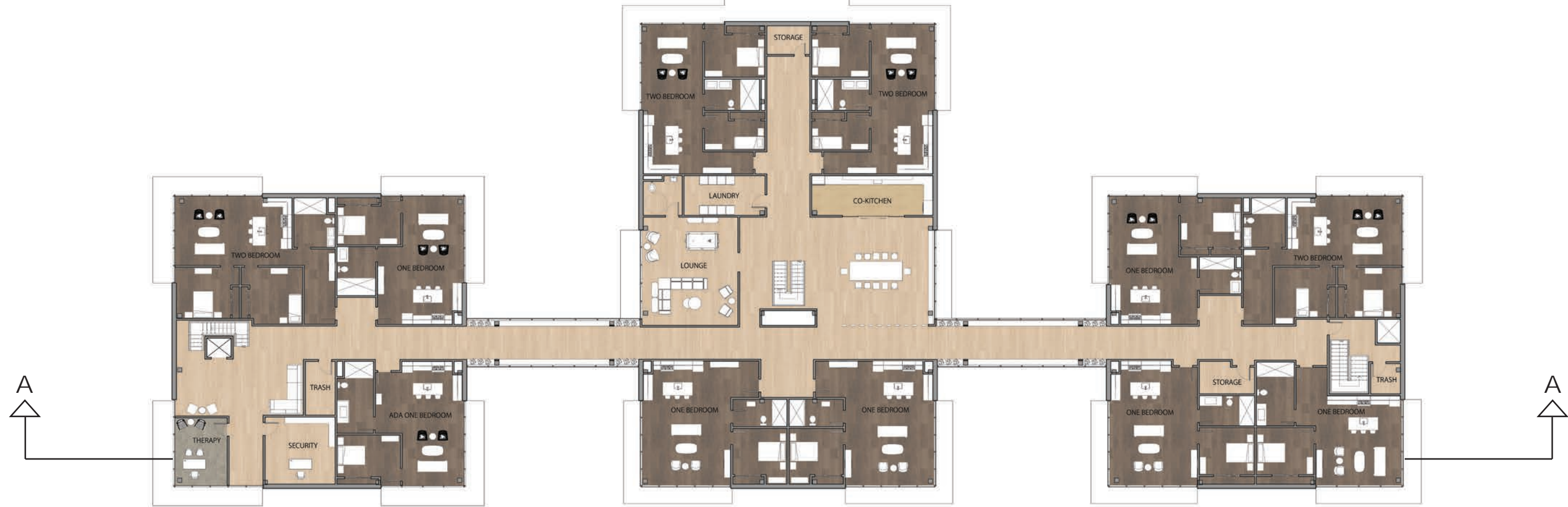
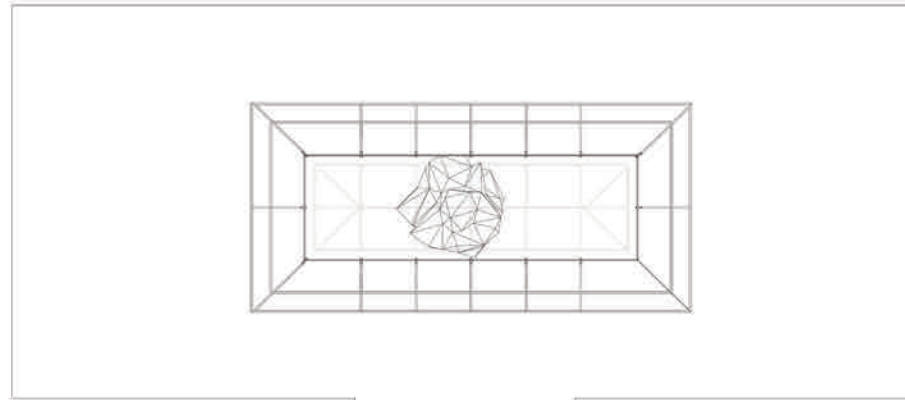
FIRST FLOOR PLAN





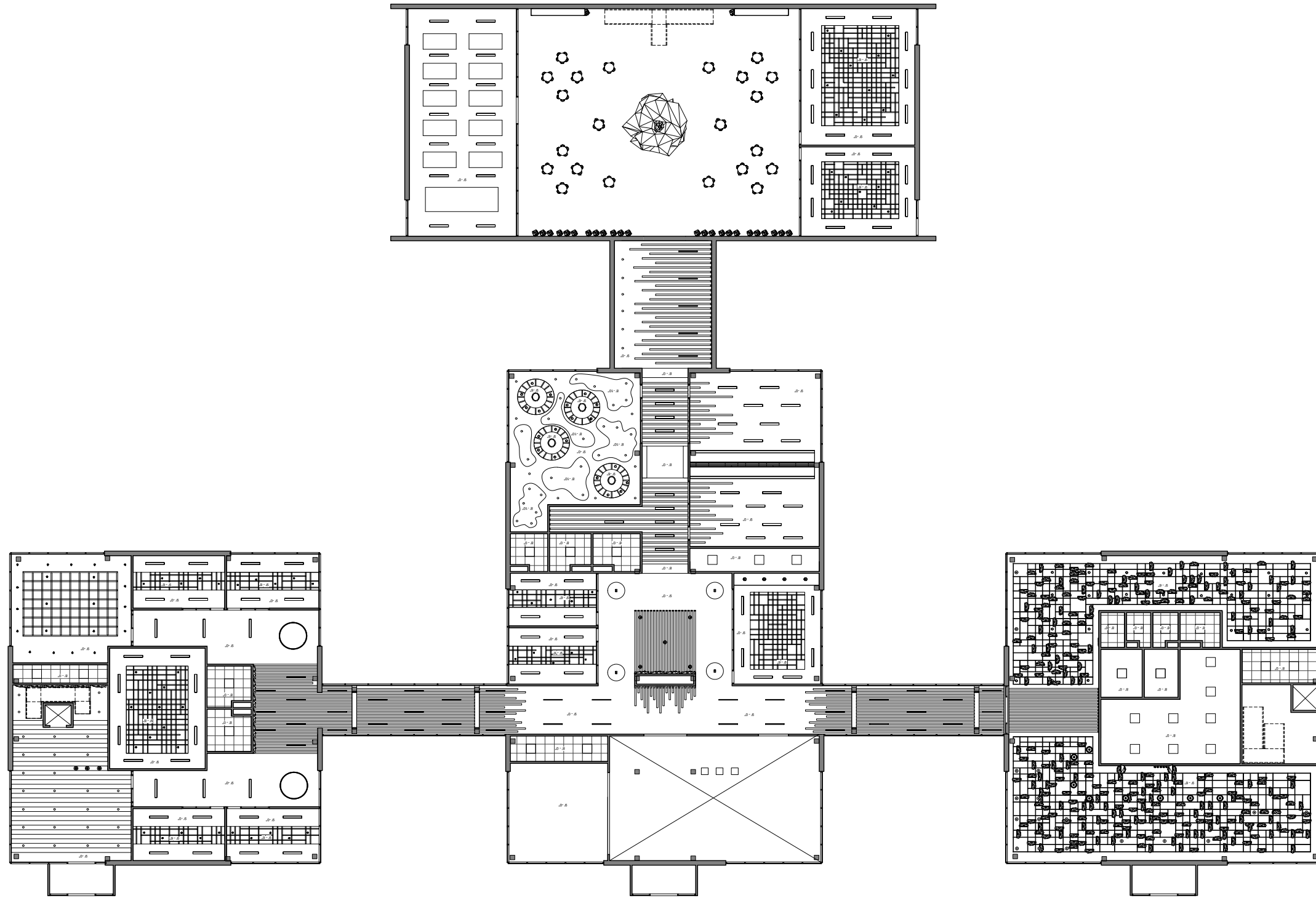
SECOND FLOOR PLAN





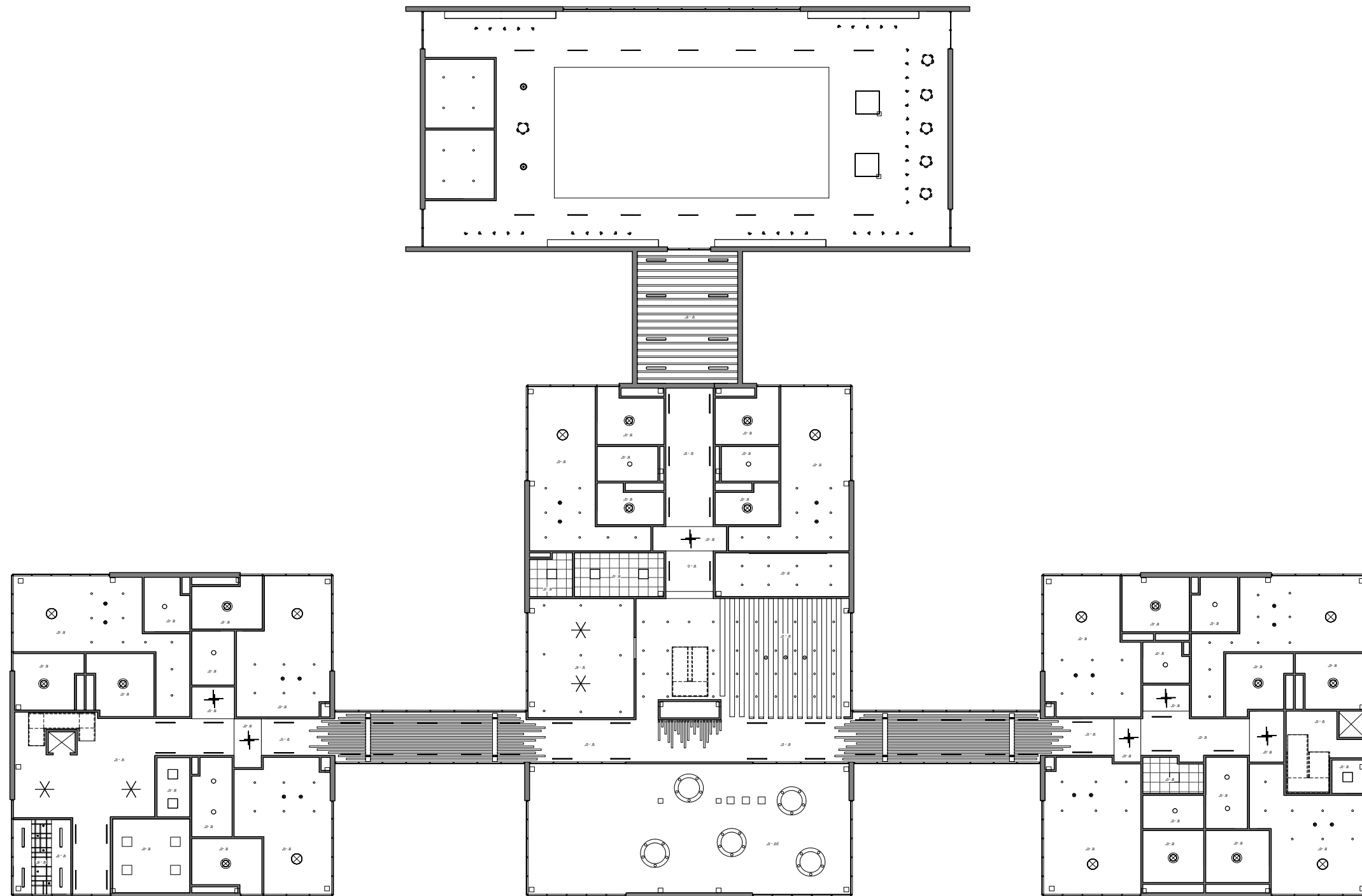
THIRD FLOOR PLAN





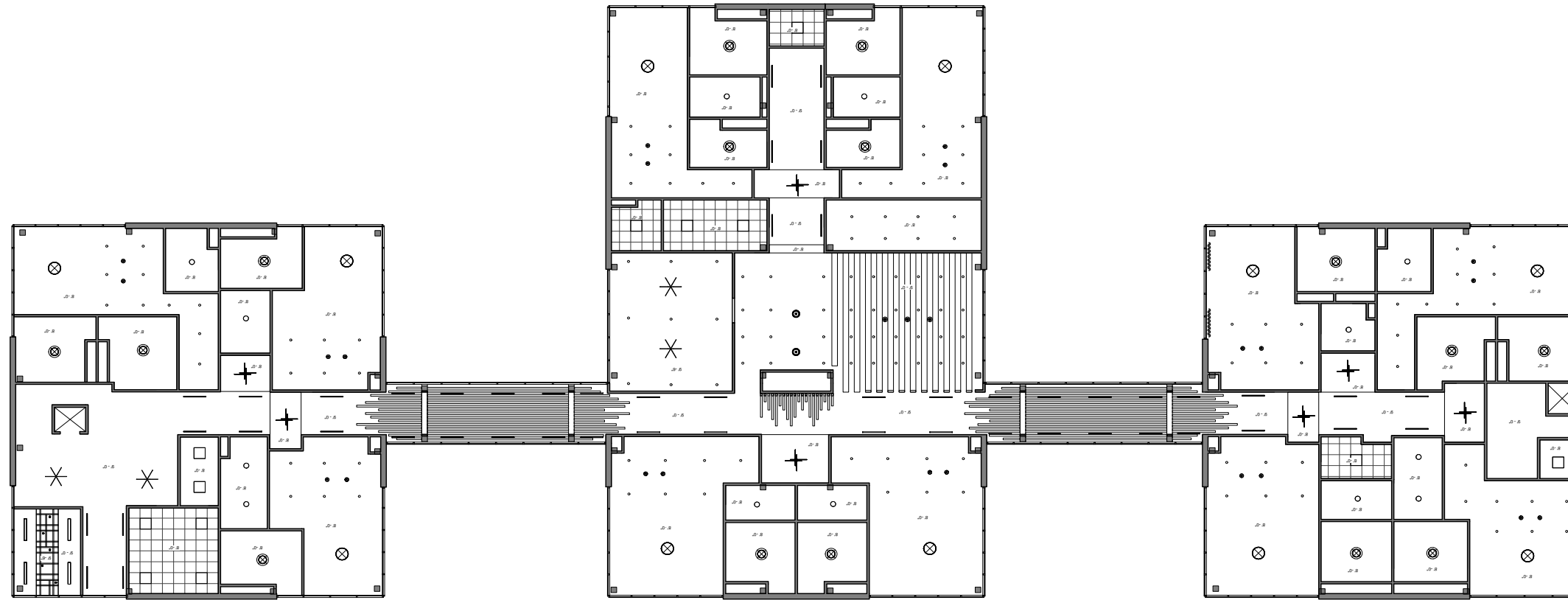
FIRST FLOOR REFLECTED CEILING PLAN





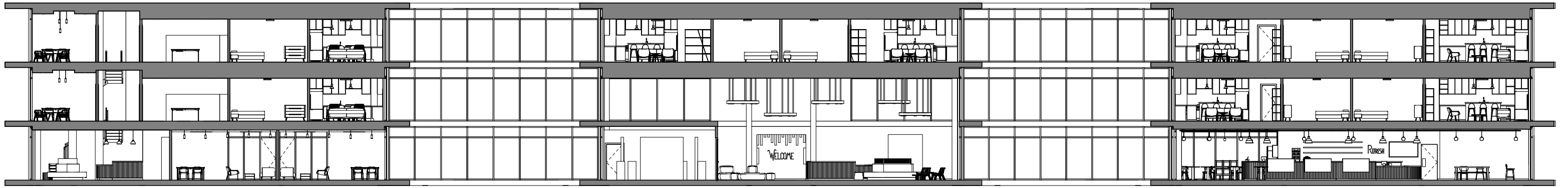
SECOND FLOOR REFLECTED CEILING PLAN



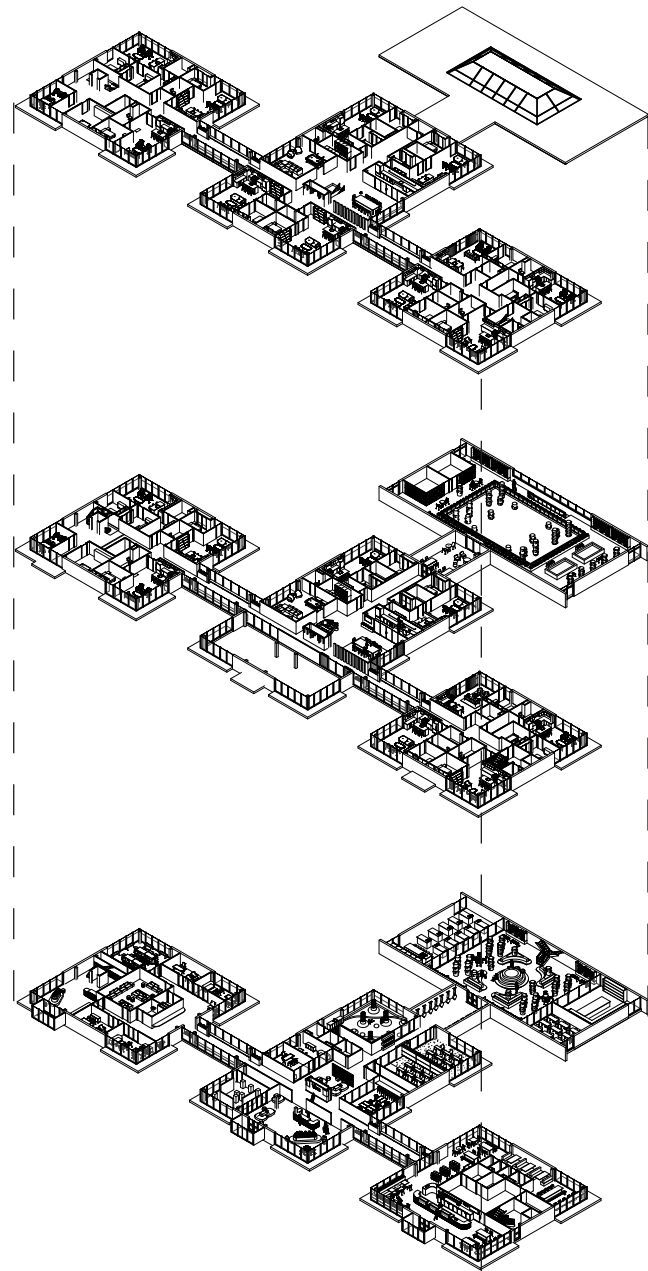


THIRD FLOOR REFLECTED CEILING PLAN





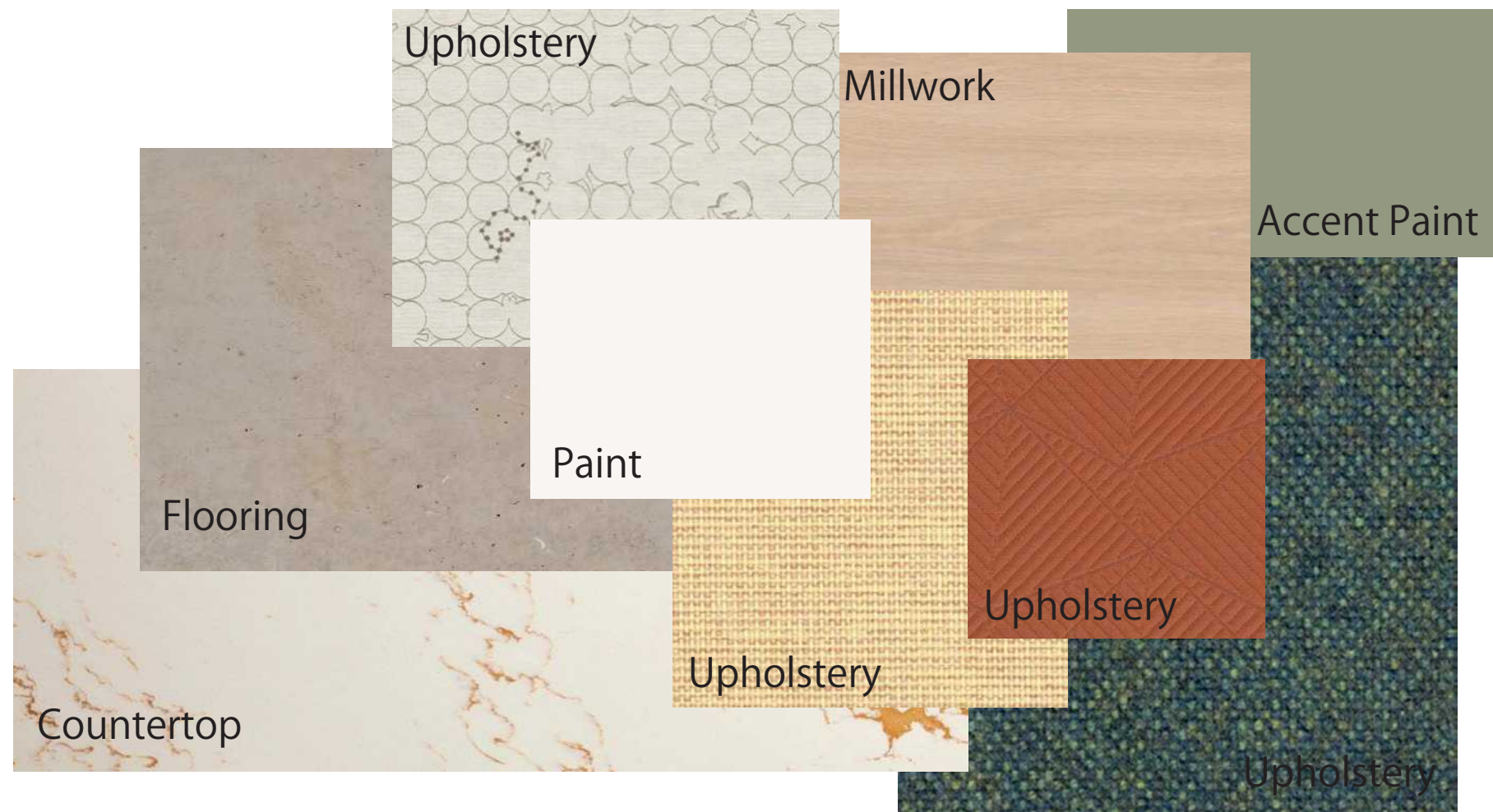
SECTION A-A



EXPLODED AXON



ENTRY



ENTRY MATERIALS & FURNITURE



CAFE





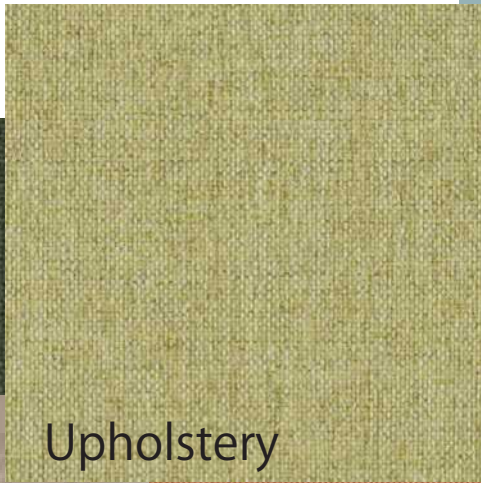
PLAY SPACE



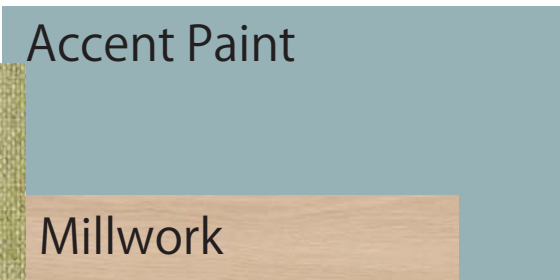
HYDROPONIC GARDEN



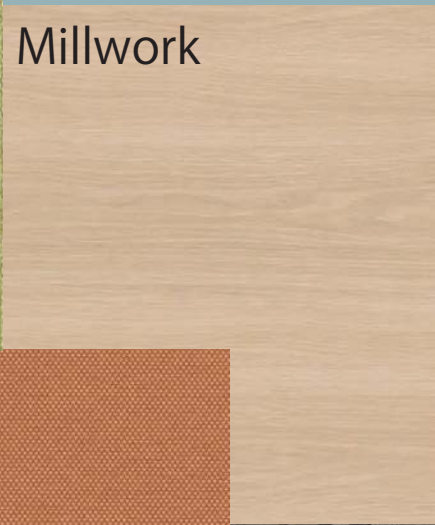
Upholstery



Upholstery



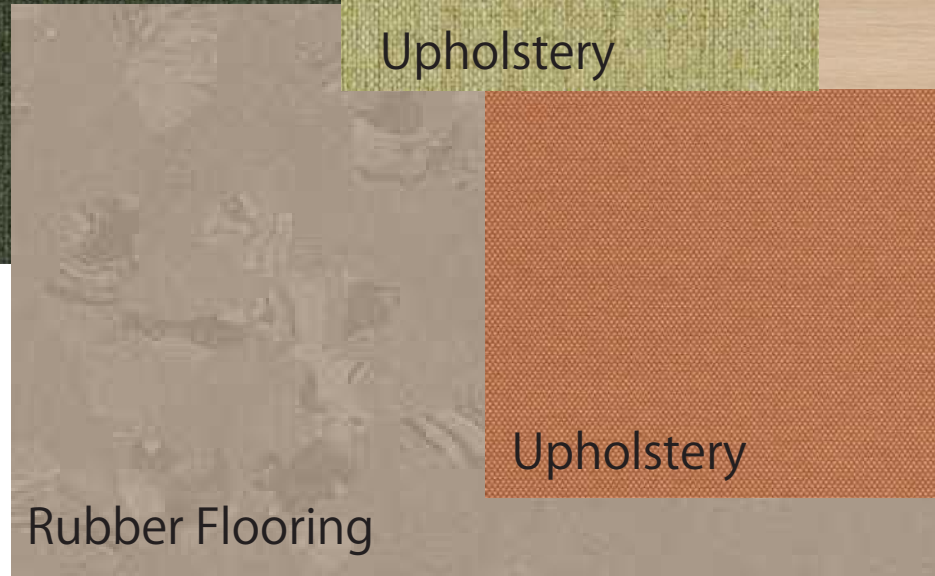
Accent Paint



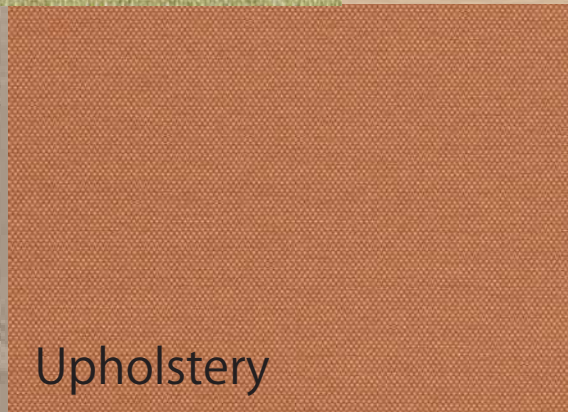
Millwork



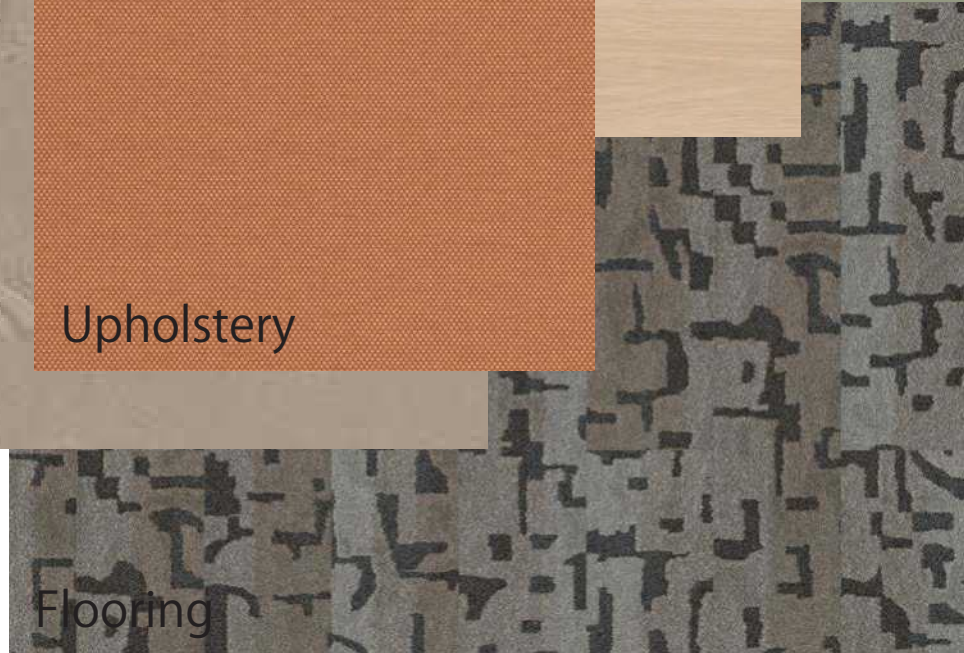
Accent Paint



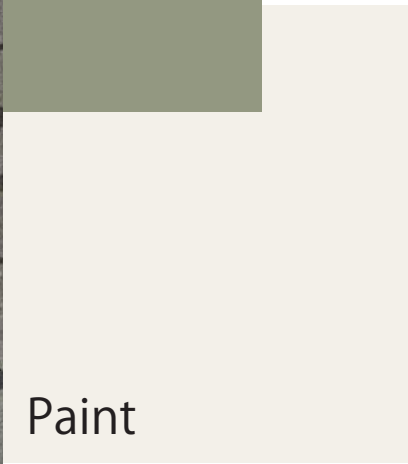
Rubber Flooring



Upholstery

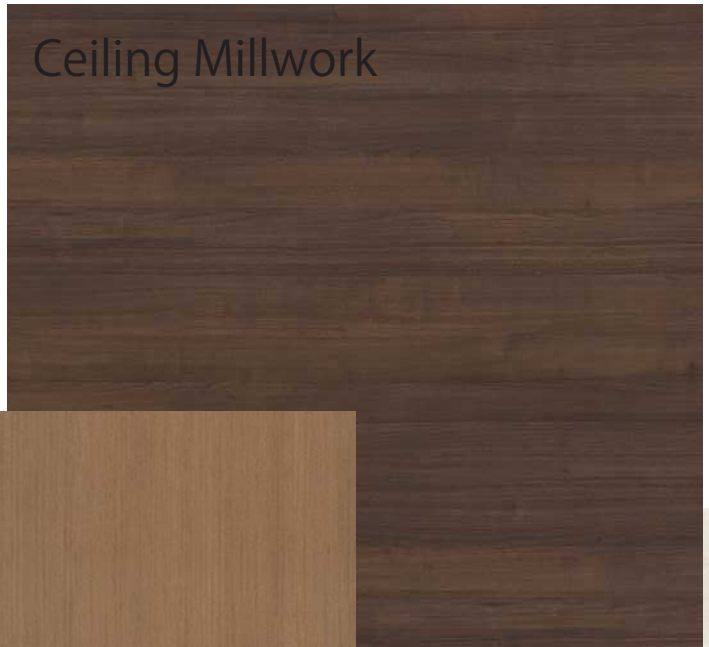


Flooring

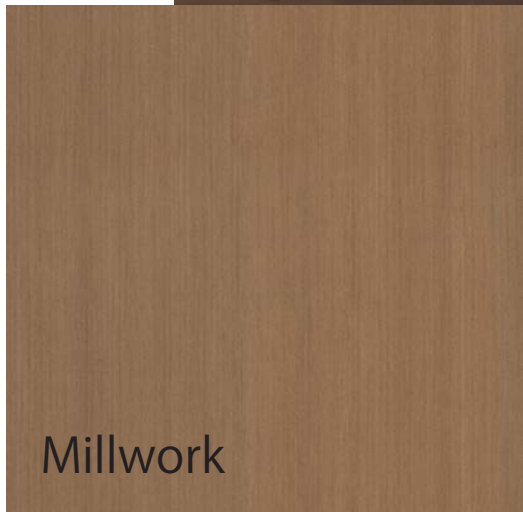


Paint

HYDROPONIC GARDEN MATERIALS



Ceiling Millwork



Millwork



Flooring

PLAY SPACE MATERIALS



CO-KITCHEN



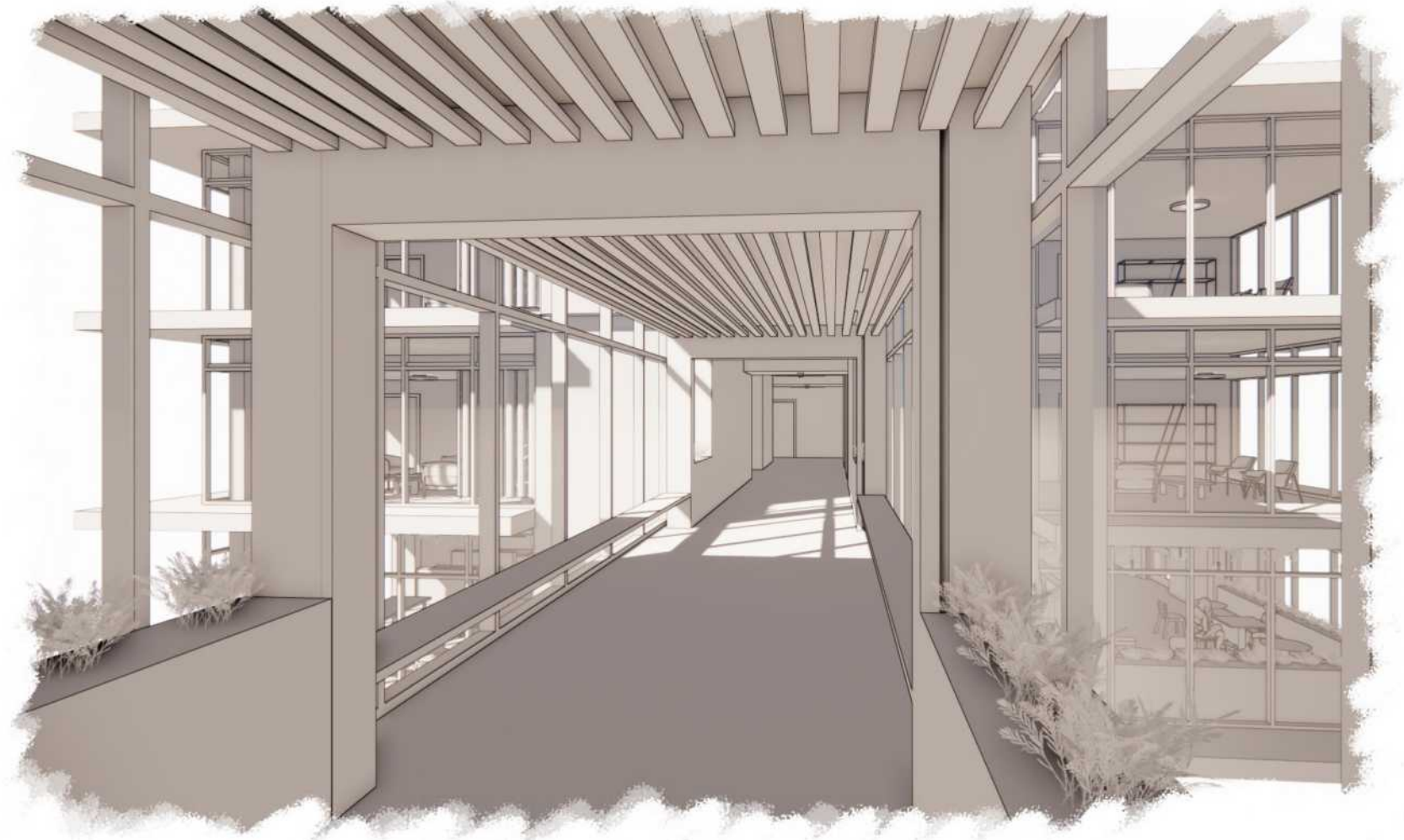


LIVING UNIT





ENTRY LOUNGE



CORRIDOR

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