

Project Description/Narrative

In response to the need for safe, affordable housing in the Center City of Rochester, this 168,000 square foot brick timber-framed, brick masonry former factory has been rehabilitated into Canal Commons; 123 units of affordable and supportive housing with community support space. The J-shaped floor plan wraps around an exterior landscaped courtyard on this 1.7 acre site.

Located in the Susan B. Anthony Preservation District (AKA the Madison Square / West Main Street National Historic District), just steps from the Erie Canal’s original route through the city, the building was constructed from 1900-1920 as the Utz and Dunn Shoe Company, a manufacturer of women’s shoes.

After subsequent uses as a pasta factory and storage warehouse, it sat vacant for the past 10 years, exhibiting continued dilapidation and deferred maintenance.

The original factory building was well-suited for conversion into apartments, without modifications to its character defining elements, while non-contributing additions were strategically removed. Building massing, dimensions, volume, fenestration, and materials were maintained.

The main lobby (and central organizing feature) is accessed from both Canal Street, and from the Courtyard through a new steel and transparent glass addition. The Courtyard also serves as a children’s play area, exhibiting carved wood sculptures and hands-on displays. Concrete and brick paved walkways tie into the existing walkable neighborhood.

A therapeutic environment is provided with an abundance of natural light, textural original elements such as timber framing, wood decking, brick walls, and steel fire doors. Generously-sized shared common spaces are provided for socializing and respite. Circulation and wayfinding is straightforward. Fenestration at lounge areas frame views of the Downtown skyline. 1-and-2 bedroom apartment layouts are efficient yet spacious, with high ceilings and monumental double-hung windows. Hardwood floors echo the original factory flooring, and period-style lighting fills the spaces.

Brownfield Cleanup Program tax credits, historic tax credits, NYS HFA bond financing and NYS HHAP funding were utilized. Canal Commons has brought in a critical mass of new residents, contributing to the re-birth of this established urban neighborhood .

AIA's Framework for Design Excellence

2) Design for Equitable Communities: How does this project contribute to creating a walkable, human-scaled community inside and outside the property lines?

Canal Commons is the adaptive use of a former factory in an established, historic urban neighborhood. Prior to its redevelopment, the dilapidating vacant structure sat idle, created a void zone covering nearly 2 acres. With its new life as affordable apartment housing, the building activates the block with 123 living units, tied into the urban fabric with concrete and brick paved walkways. The residents will patronize the existing essential services on the adjacent blocks, and will walk or bike to Downtown. Public transportation is at the south end of the block. The building wraps around an exterior landscaped courtyard, with creative play area sculptures, further activating the site.

Inside, the large windows frame views of the surrounding neighborhood and Downtown. The building is organized around a central spine, with the main lobby serving as the organizing element for circulation and wayfinding. The building layout and program serves as its own human-scaled community within the community of the neighborhood. Human scale is emphasized by the retention of original historic textural elements such as timer columns and beams, wood flooring and decking, brick and stone masonry walls.

5) Design for Economy: How does the project efficiently meet the program and design challenges and provide “more with less”?

The 125-year-old former factory's dimensions and proportions allowed for a near seamless conversion into residential units. Historic building elements and details were retained and restored, which would be cost prohibitive to be built in the present day, notwithstanding the current lack of skilled tradespeople. The floor plans maximize the number of residential units while also allowing for generous shared common space, which serves as circulation, socializing and respite spaces. Existing glazed roof monitors and historically accurate fenestration bathe the interior with natural light. By using the existing building structure, layout, fenestration openings, and materials, the project was able to achieve a highly-efficient building organization with aesthetically-pleasing details.

9) Design for Change; Is the building resilient, and able to accommodate other uses in 50-100 years?

This historic masonry and timber-framed structure, constructed in 1900-1920, is remarkably resilient. Originally built as a women's shoe factory, it later served as a pasta manufacturer, storage warehouse, and now repurposed as an apartment building. This is due to the substantial, durable building materials, open floor plan and large window openings. It has already accommodated multiple uses in its first 100 years, and will be able to accommodate other uses in the next 100 years.

AIA Rochester Community Impact Award

Canal Commons has a significant impact on the community. The following goals have been achieved:

1) Adaptive Re-use of an existing building of historic value.

When a community asset is demolished, it is lost forever. By adapting the existing building to its new use, a beautiful structure with historic value was saved and rehabilitated, maintaining the character of the urban fabric and bringing new life to the district. The story continues to its next chapter as a once thriving women's shoe factory is converted into new apartments. Historic images of its past life as the Utz and Dunn shoe factory and surrounding neighborhood are showcased throughout the building as a reminder of its important past.

2) Redeveloping a vacant, dilapidated building.

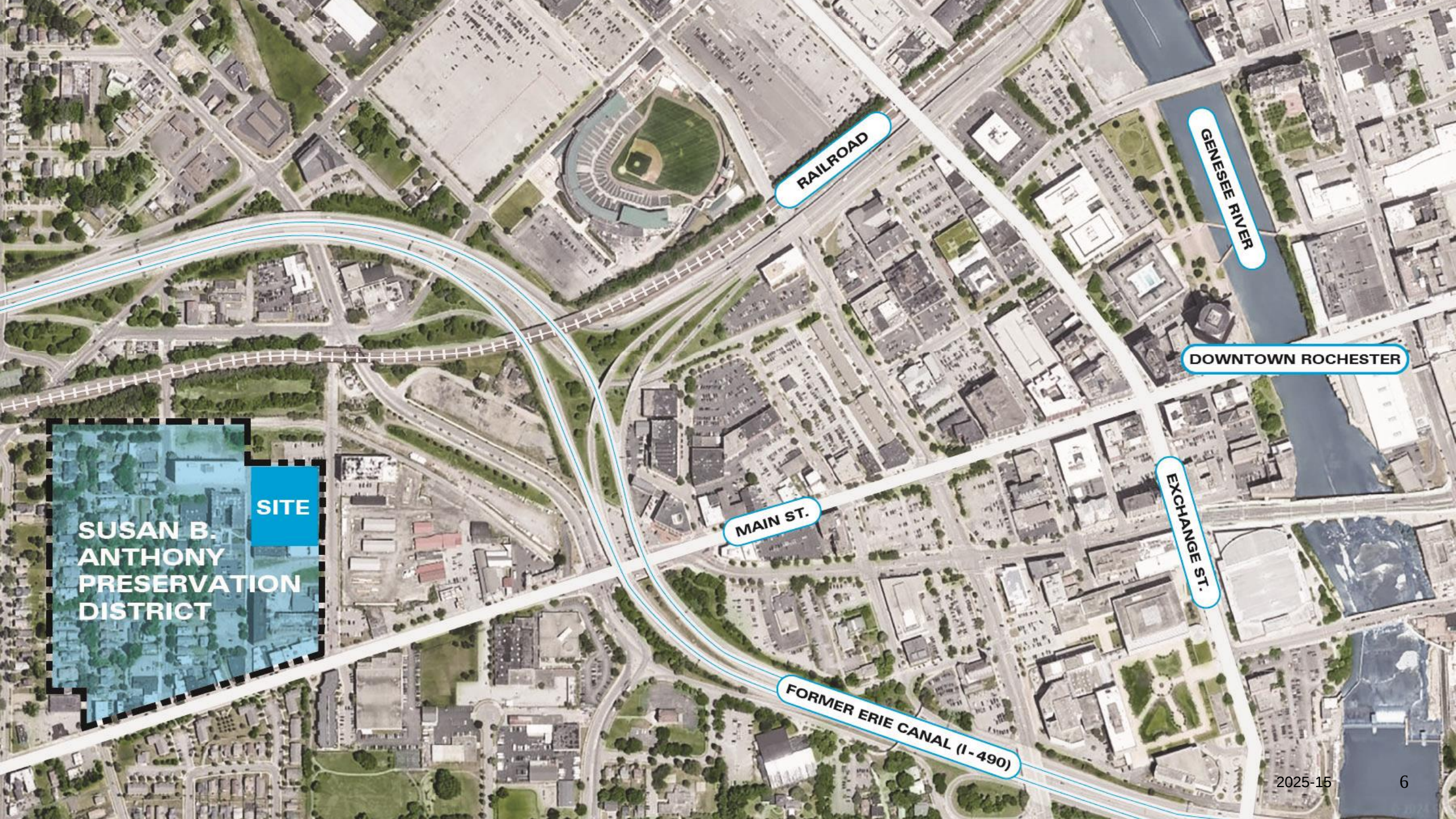
The empty building sat on 1.7 acres and created a dead zone in the neighborhood. Its redevelopment reactivated the streets with new residents, and enhanced the beauty of the building and neighborhood by restoring its character-defining elements.

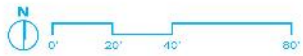
3) Introducing 123 new residential units in an existing, established walkable neighborhood.

The vacant building was devoid of life and is now vibrant and active with new residents. The building is tied to the neighborhood with sidewalks and streets, allowing residents to walk, bike and drive to nearby essential services. New building inhabitants enhance the safety of the neighborhood, with more 'eyes on the street.' The housing stock of the community is improved with this ambitious redevelopment.

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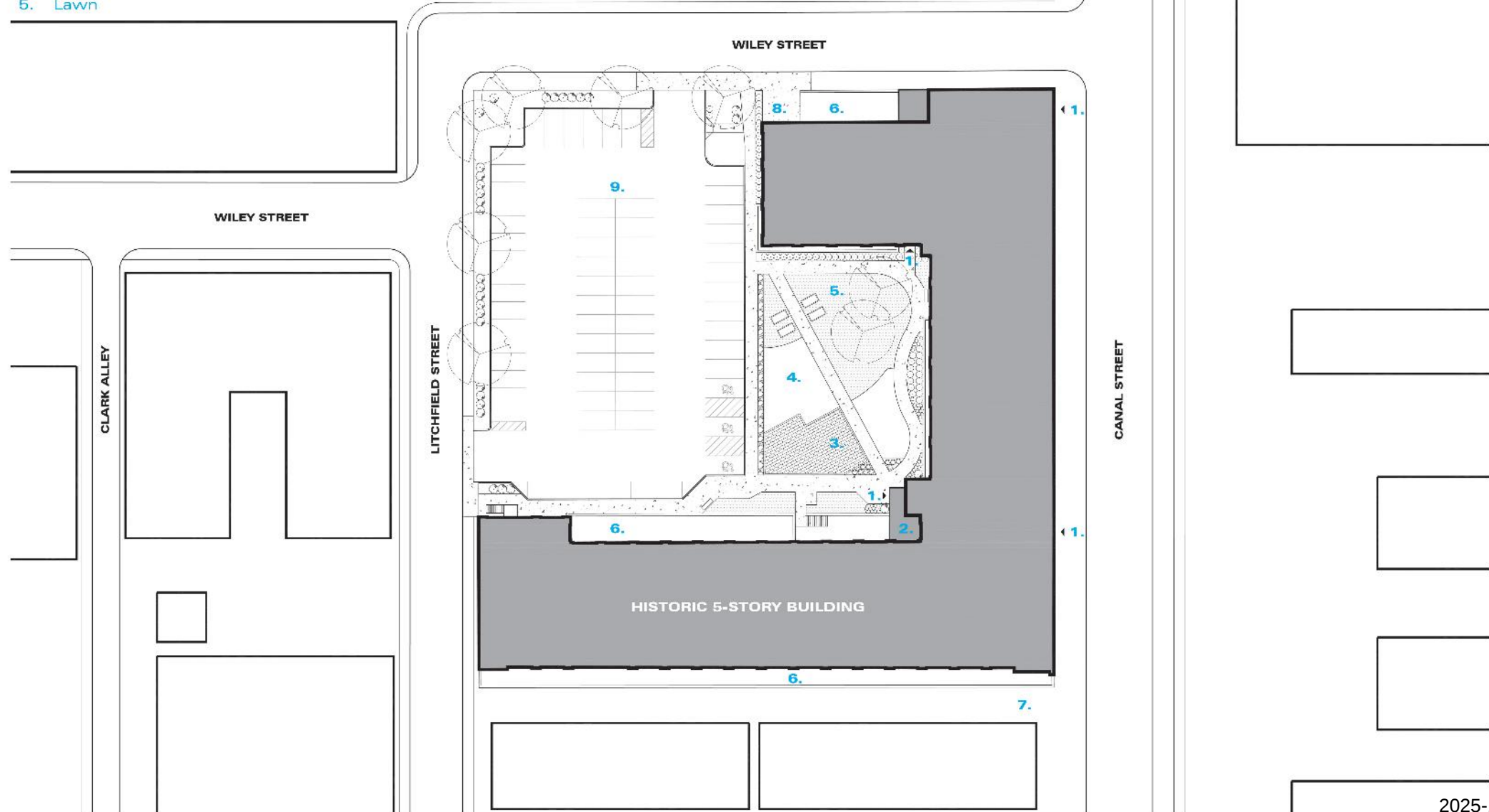






SITE PLAN

- | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Building Entrance | 6. Areaways |
| 2. New Addition | 7. Pedestrian Alley |
| 3. Pavers | 8. Dumpster Enclosure |
| 4. Playground | 9. Parking |
| 5. Lawn | |





BEFORE

“...sitting vacant for the past 10 years,
the structure exhibited continued
dilapidation and deferred maintenance.”



“The main lobby is accessed from both Canal Street and the Courtyard through a new steel and glass addition.”



SECTION A

- 1. Vestibule
- 2. Entrance Lobby
- 3. New Stair
- 4. Community Room
- 5. Corridor
- 6. Apartment Unit
- 7. Areaways
- 8. Historic Roof Monitors









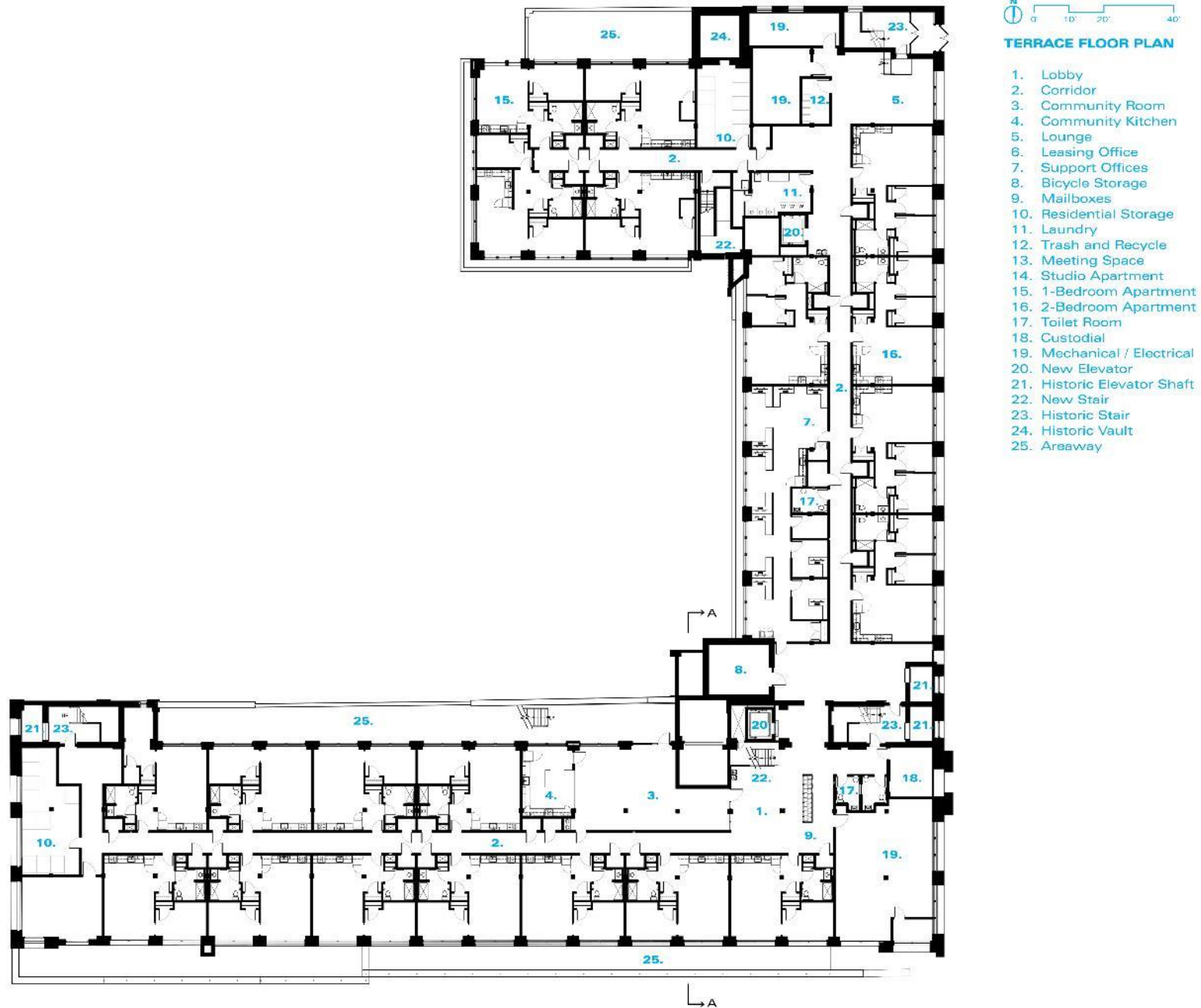
"A therapeutic environment is provided with abundant natural light, natural materials and textural original elements such as timber framing, wood decking, brick walls, and steel fire doors."

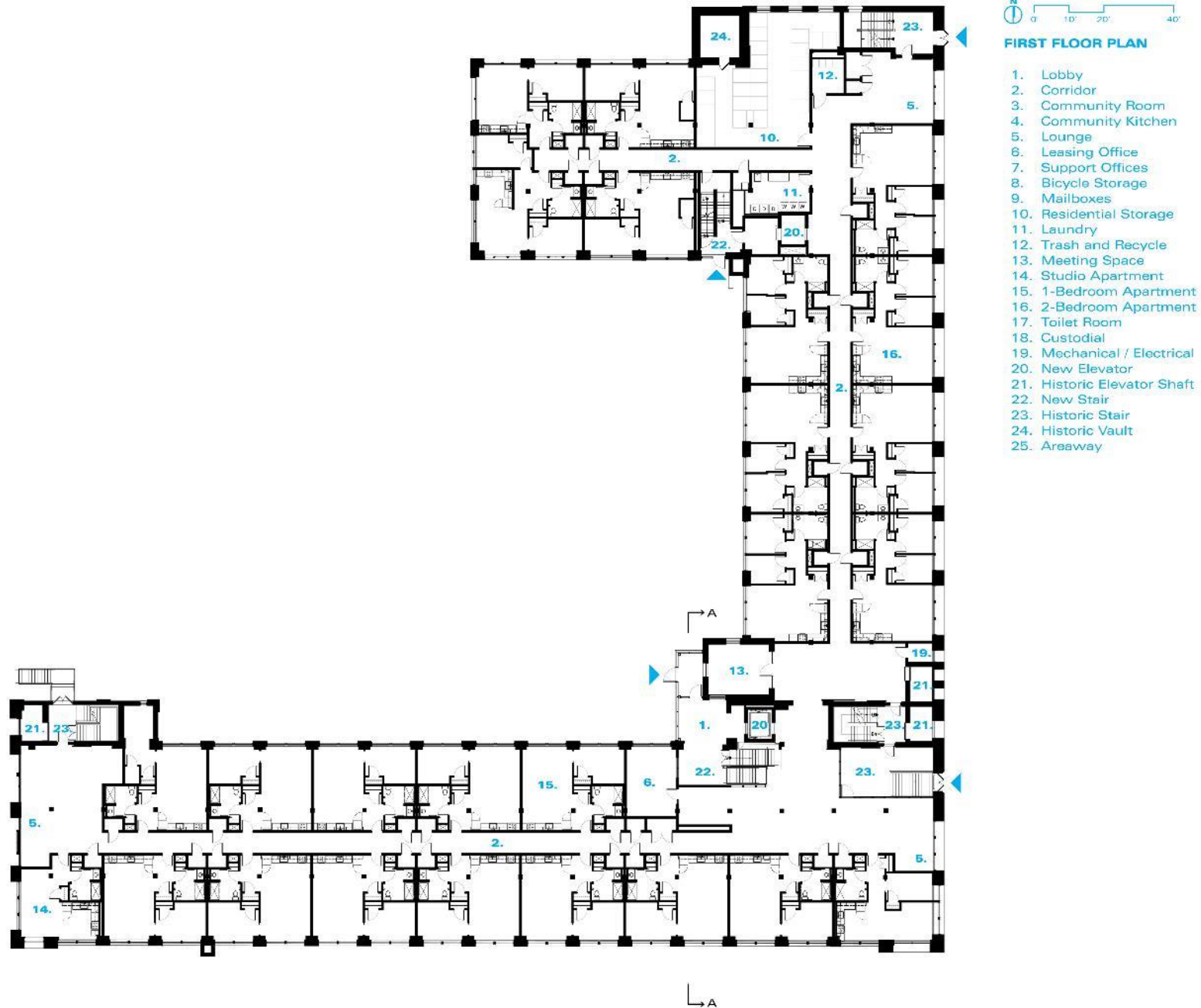


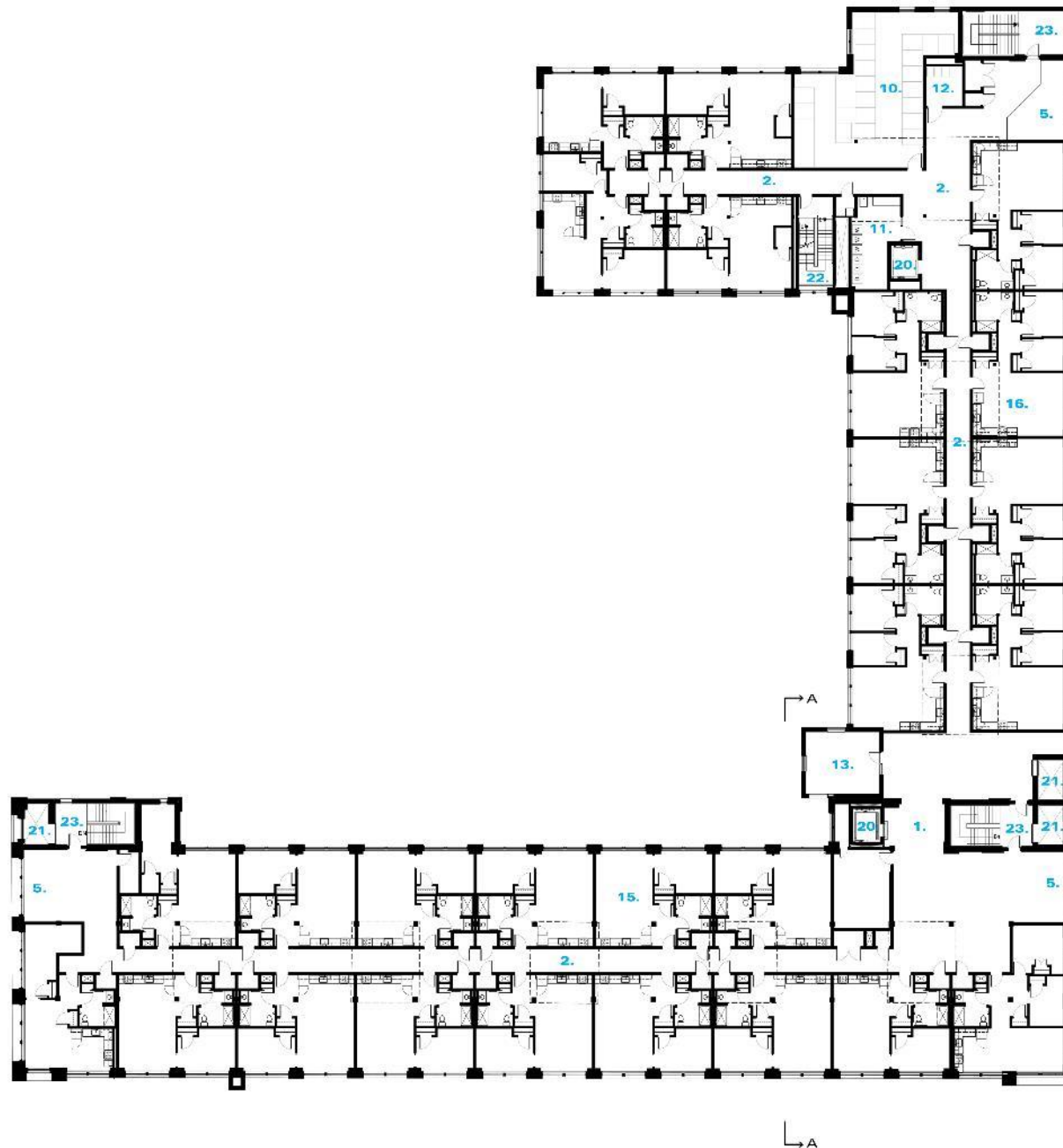
"Apartment layouts are efficient yet spacious, with high ceilings and monumental double-hung windows."











TYPICAL UPPER FLOOR PLAN

1. Lobby
2. Corridor
3. Community Room
4. Community Kitchen
5. Lounge
6. Leasing Office
7. Support Offices
8. Bicycle Storage
9. Mailboxes
10. Residential Storage
11. Laundry
12. Trash and Recycle
13. Meeting Space
14. Studio Apartment
15. 1-Bedroom Apartment
16. 2-Bedroom Apartment
17. Toilet Room
18. Custodial
19. Mechanical / Electrical
20. New Elevator
21. Historic Elevator Shaft
22. New Stair
23. Historic Stair
24. Historic Vault
25. Areaaway



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