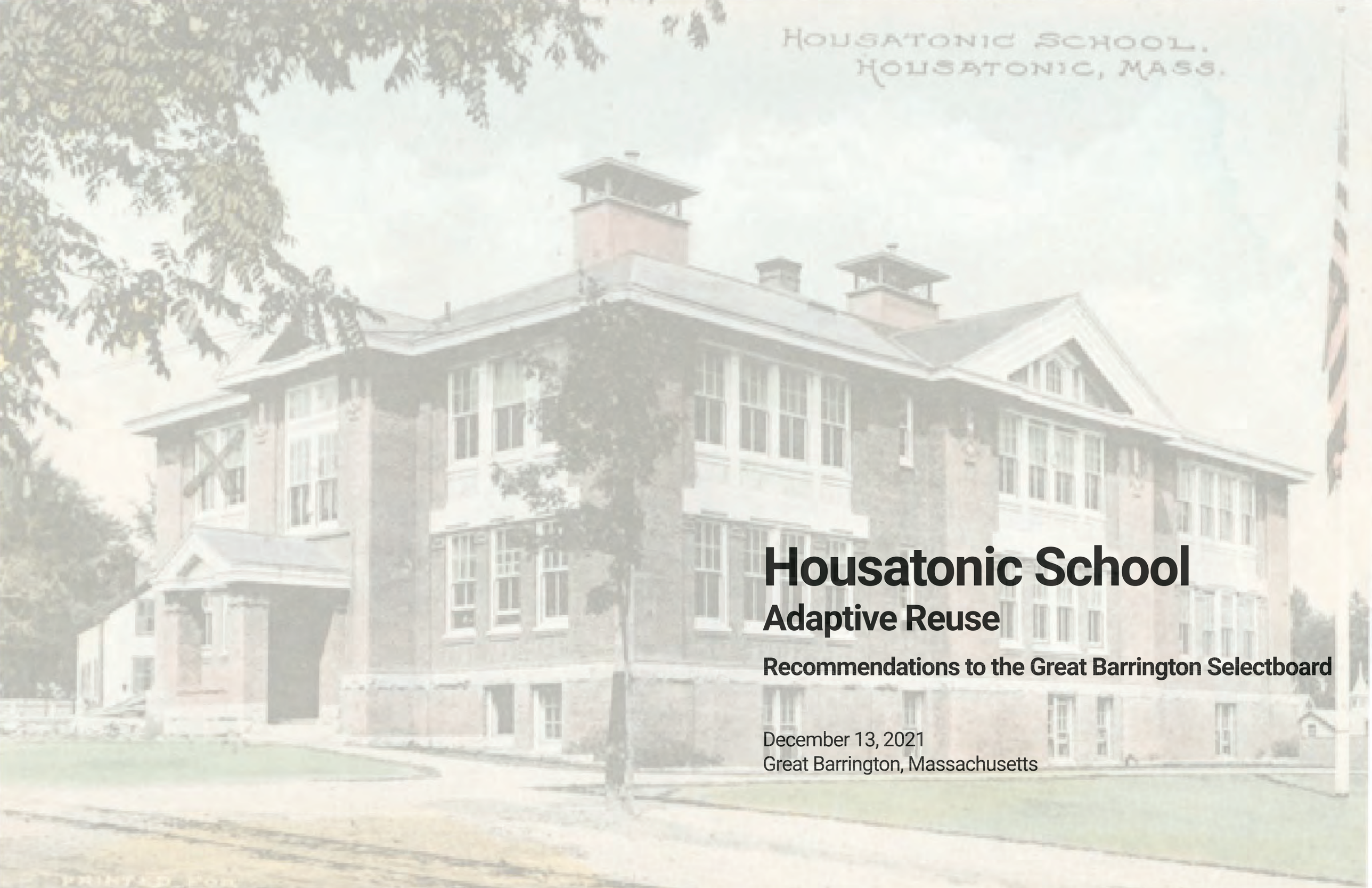

Housatonic School

Adaptive Reuse

Recommendations to the Great Barrington Selectboard

December 13, 2021
Great Barrington, Massachusetts

Housatonic Improvement Committee
Report to Great Barrington Selectboard on the Adaptive Reuse of the Housatonic School Building

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Housatonic Improvement Committee

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Executive Summary

The Housatonic Improvement Committee was chartered by the Great Barrington Selectboard in December 2019 "to foster the social, and cultural well-being of Housatonic." Committee members were appointed over the next several months and we began meeting in June 2020. The Selectboard charged us to make a recommendation for the future use of the Housatonic School.

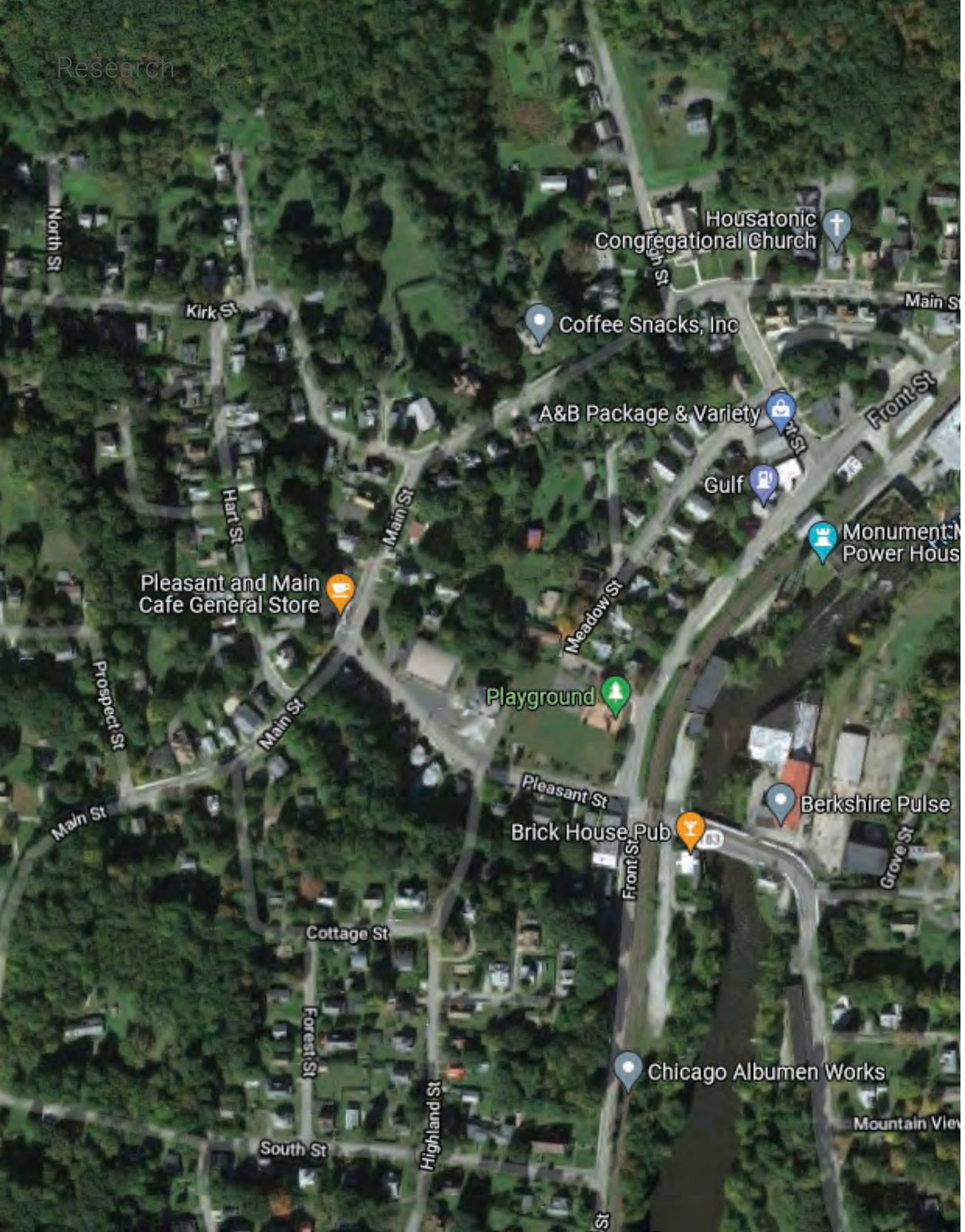
We began informing ourselves about the building and the needs and wants of the community by accessing existing documents – studies, proposals, planning reports, informative websites, and site plans. (See page 5). After numerous meetings with public input, we formally eliminated the idea of razing the building and opted for a plan that would include a variety of uses including market-rate or below market-rate housing rather than luxury housing, maker's space and workshops, retail and office spaces, flexible space for a variety of uses, and a food service space.

To explore if and how those uses would fit into the building, we asked the Western Massachusetts AIA to organize a design charrette. In October 2021, five volunteer architects spent several hours sketching plans for how the building could accommodate the proposed mixed uses and if the renovation for those uses was financially feasible. The team of architects were able to design spaces that met the parameters we had chosen and they, broadly, estimated the price per square foot of renovating the space. Since then, we've learned that the renovation costs might be much higher and the Town would need to furnish funds to make the renovations to the building. At this point, we know that the Town is responsible for any hazardous material abatement including asbestos, lead paint, and mercury light switches and it has $600,000 earmarked for the envelope of the building. We have provided rough financial projections using conservative numbers for income. We believe that the building can generate rents to support a $3M - $4M renovation. We look to the Town to put a package together to augment what is already committed to make this a viable project.

With this report, we present ideas for the building's re-use with two alternatives for housing on the top floor, flexible space on the first floor, and tenant space, public restrooms, and a commercial kitchen on the ground floor with a private entrance and exit for resident and each floor accessible via elevator. We have provided rough financial projections using conservative numbers for income.

We hope that the building can become viable and serve as an anchor for the Housatonic village center and be useful to the Town of Great Barrington.

Research



To inform our path forward and to give the architects context for reuses of the Housatonic School, we explored the following resources:

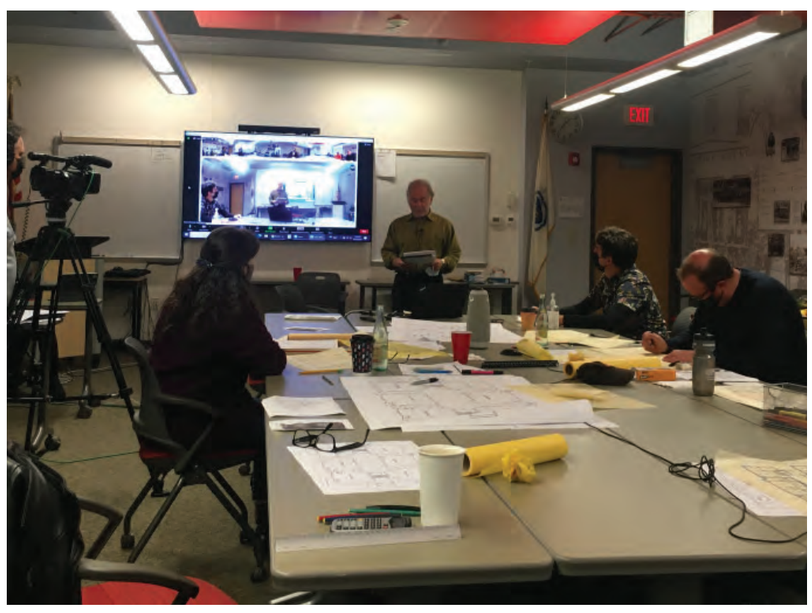
- Community Master Plan Volume I and II
- Berkshire Blueprint 2.0
- Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy and Update
- Berkshire Mall Reuse Study
- Ramsdell Library Draft Capital Plans
- Housatonic Visioning Report 2004
- Photos and drone footage
- Existing site plans and floorplans
- Zoning and parking information
- Berkshire Edge article 5-11-17
- RFP Housatonic School
- Proposal from the CDCSB and Green & Green 2010
- Greyhouse Partners Proposal 2019
- Multicultural Bridge Proposal 2010
- Site Improvements Proposal
- Environmental Site Assessment Phase 1
- Flow test Summary 2014.08.27

We also read information from two on-line resources germane to our work:

- Strong Towns - https://www.strongtowns.org/journal/tag/Value+Per+Acre
- CORI - https://ruralinnovation.us

Design Charrette

Design Charrette



On Saturday, October 30th from the hours of 10AM to 2PM a charrette (an intense period of design and planning activity) was held at the Great Barrington Fire Station with the goal of imagining possible redevelopment options for the Housatonic school building.

The architects present were: Kerry Bartini (Berkshire Design; Pittsfield, MA), Wendy Brown (Pittsfield, MA), Robert Harrison (Berkshire Design & Bradley Architects; Pittsfield, MA), Bruce Moore (Red House Design; Great Barrington, MA), and David Whitehill (Kliment Halsband Architects; Northampton, MA).

The Housatonic Improvement Committee provided the design team members with an information packet about the school, its history in the community, and possible uses for the space. Several of the architects toured the school prior to the charrette. The charrette began with the architects asking questions of the residents and members of the Housatonic Improvement Committee to get an idea of the town's wants and needs. They discussed the building's accessibility and ADA compliance and then spent an hour in a collaborative design session.

The architects decided to work as a group, with each person addressing a different floor of the building and with one of the architects writing a summary, which they presented as a group, along with floor plans and recommendations.

The summary, floor plan ideas, and recommendations are included in this report, below.

The charrette participants summarized their design strategy and recommendations as follows:

Program: Mixed-use residential and non-residential

Without needing to know what the non-residential uses are, some parameters can be set:

- Residential use on second floor only
- Non-residential use on first floor
- Basement is public space to be non-residential support space

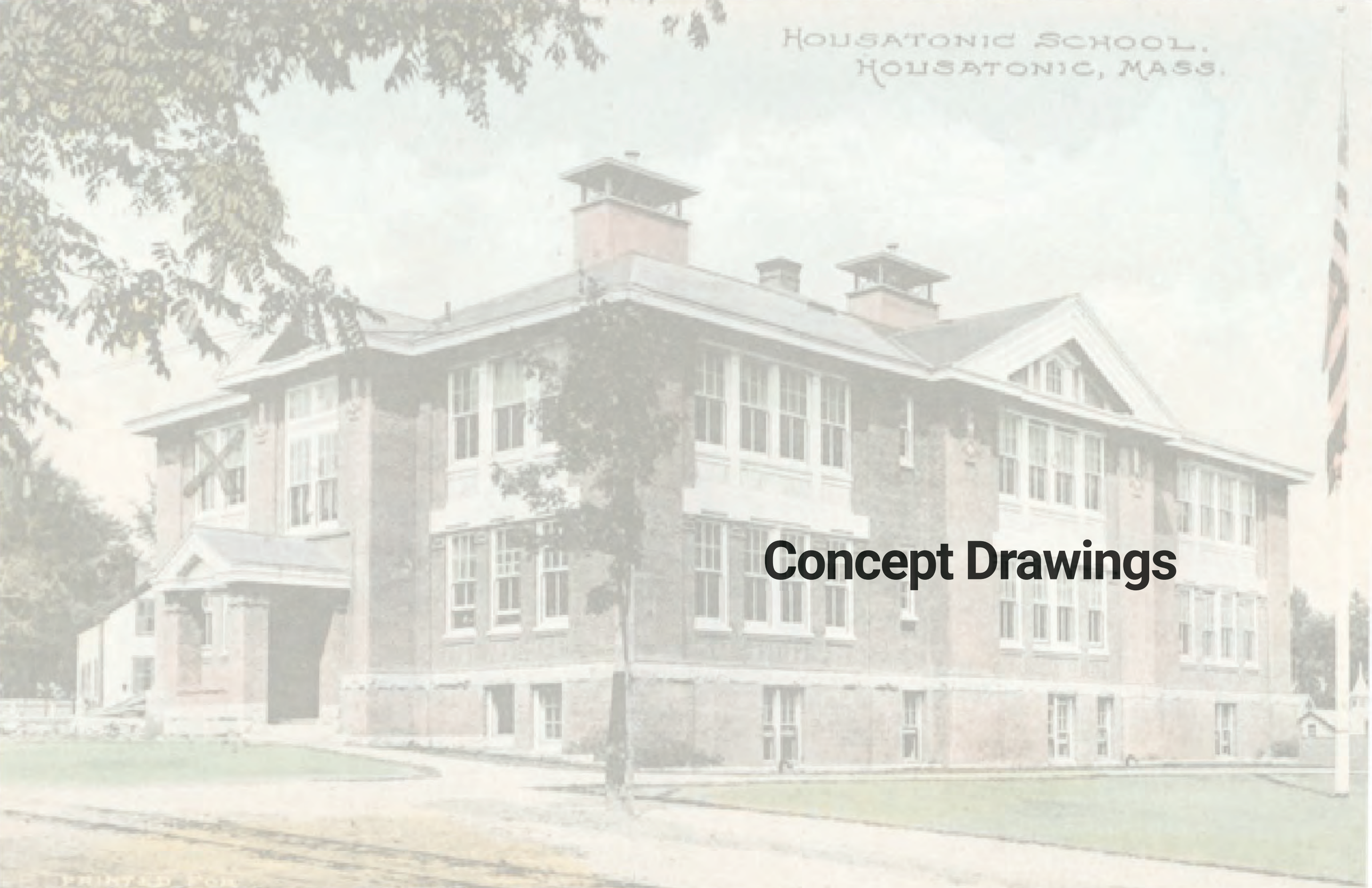
The whole building will need sprinklers. The first floor must be accessible while the basement must be accessible if it is to contain public spaces. This will require a 2-stop elevator. Elevator to the basement allows for public restrooms, community commercial kitchen and additional commercial spaces.

Though 2nd floor residential units do not need to be accessible, the incremental cost of a 3-stop elevator vs. a 2-stop elevator is worth offering the convenience for tenants.

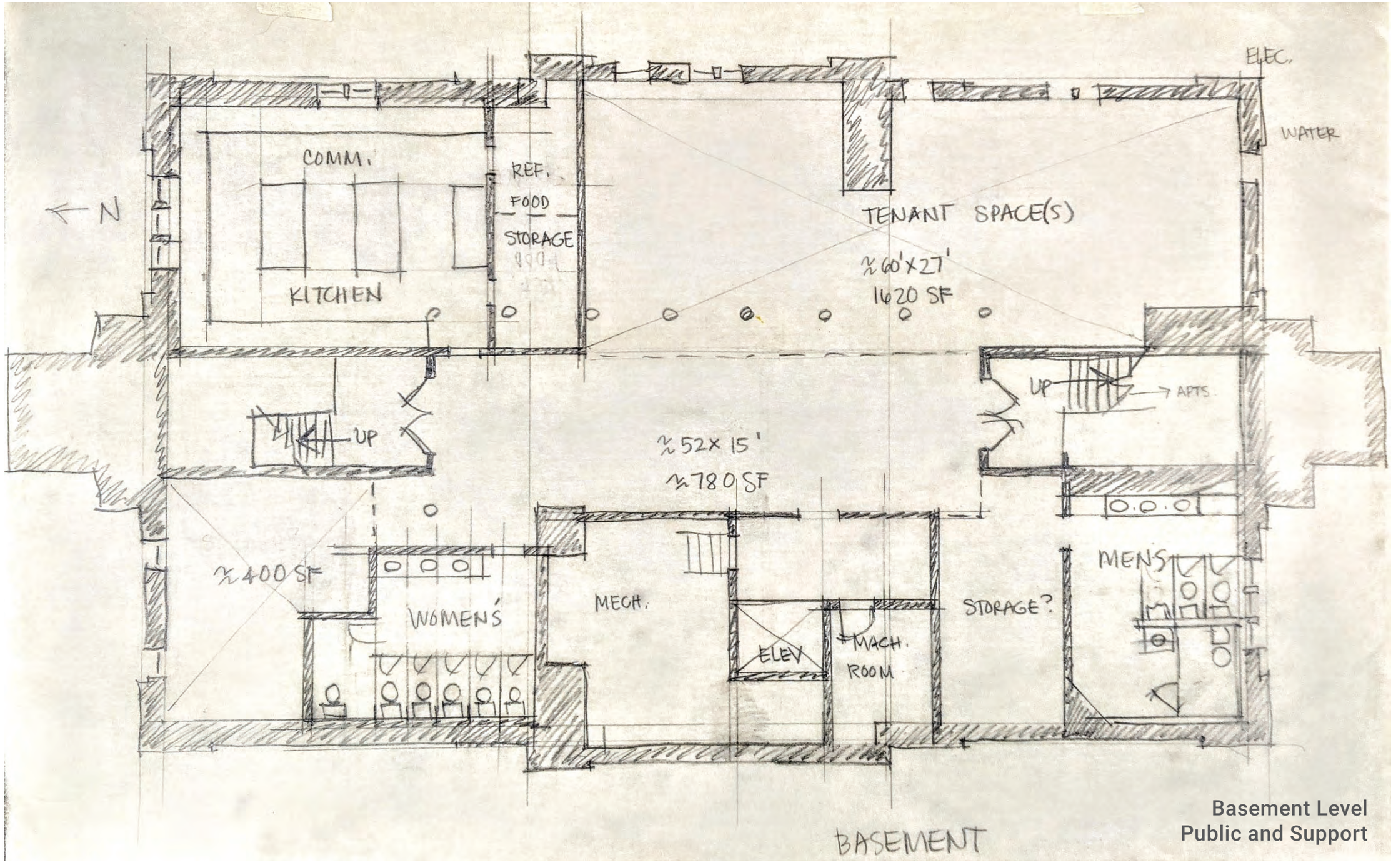
Basement:
Can be support space for first floor, non-residential spaces. If it is public space it will require handicapped accessibility. We envision restrooms, a commercial kitchen, common storage, possibly 1 or 2 commercial spaces on the east wall with nice windows and, also, mechanical spaces.

First Floor: Non-residential
Handicapped accessible from the outside with elevator lobby in new main entrance on the west side of the building, in the middle of the building. Commercial space with lots of glass or additional lobby space opposite the entry.

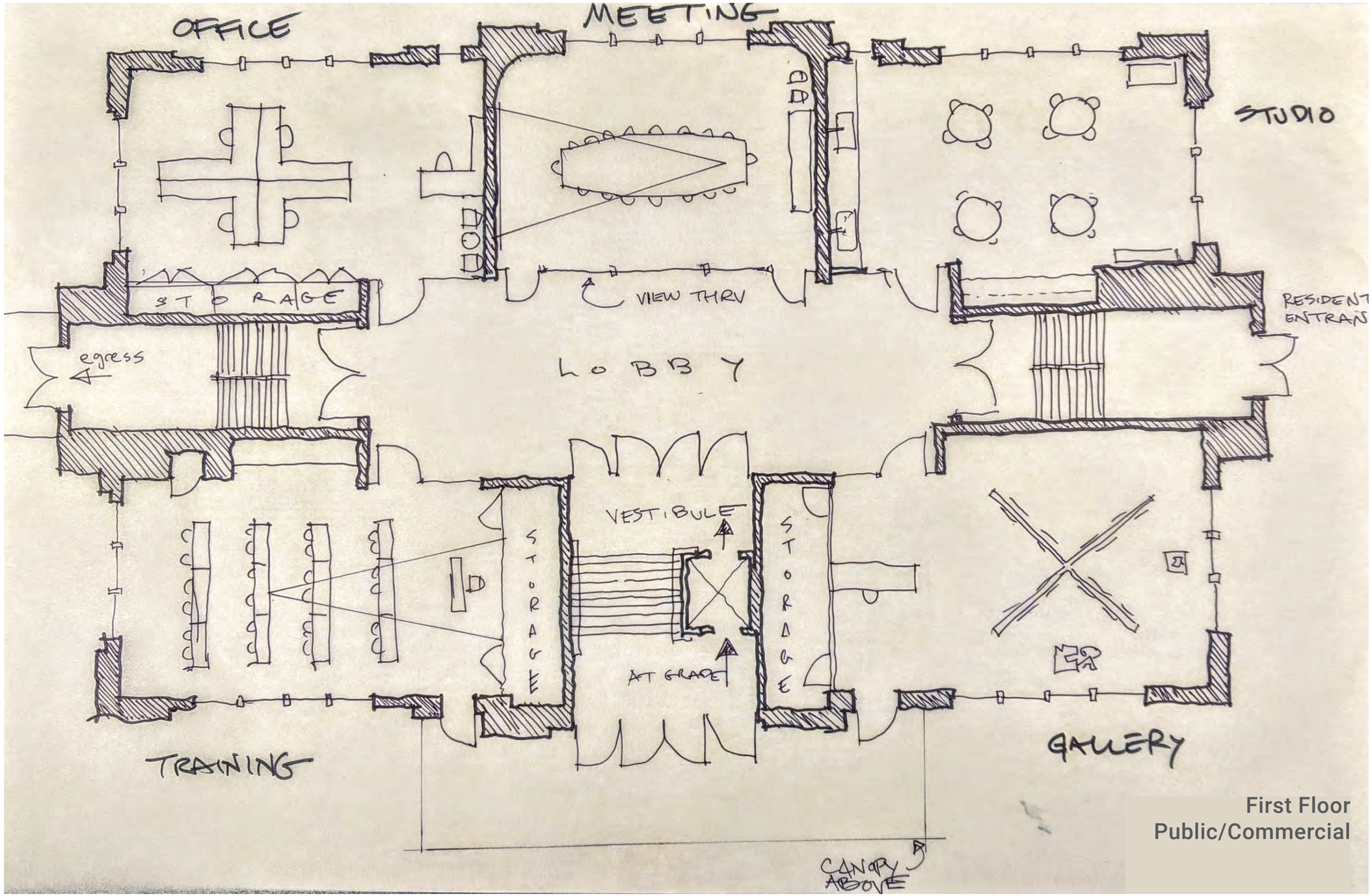
Second Floor: Residential
We can envision 6, 7, or 8 units with a separate, dedicated stair access from the south side. Handicapped access will be from the shared lobby elevator. Emergency egress from the north stair.



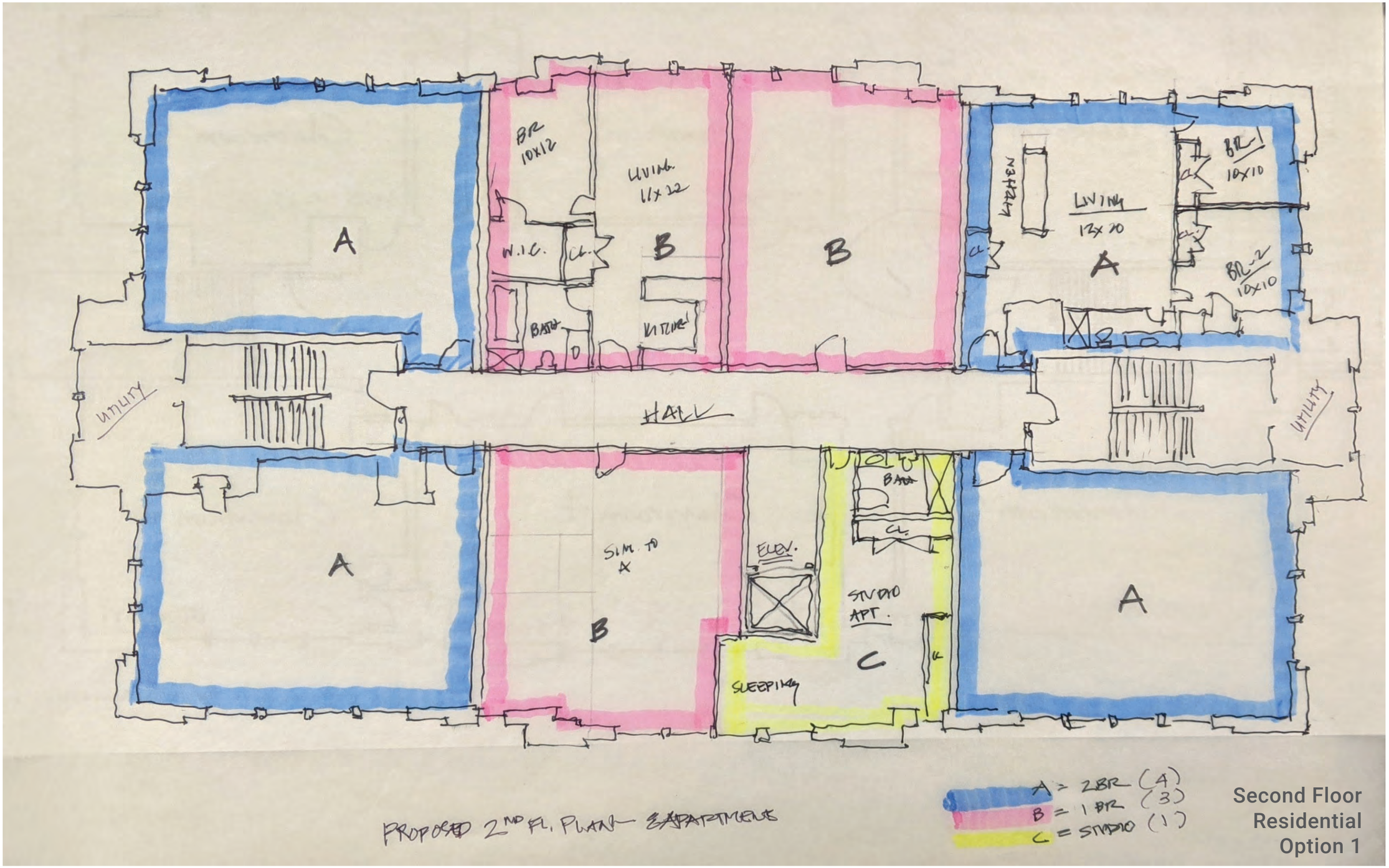
Concept Drawings



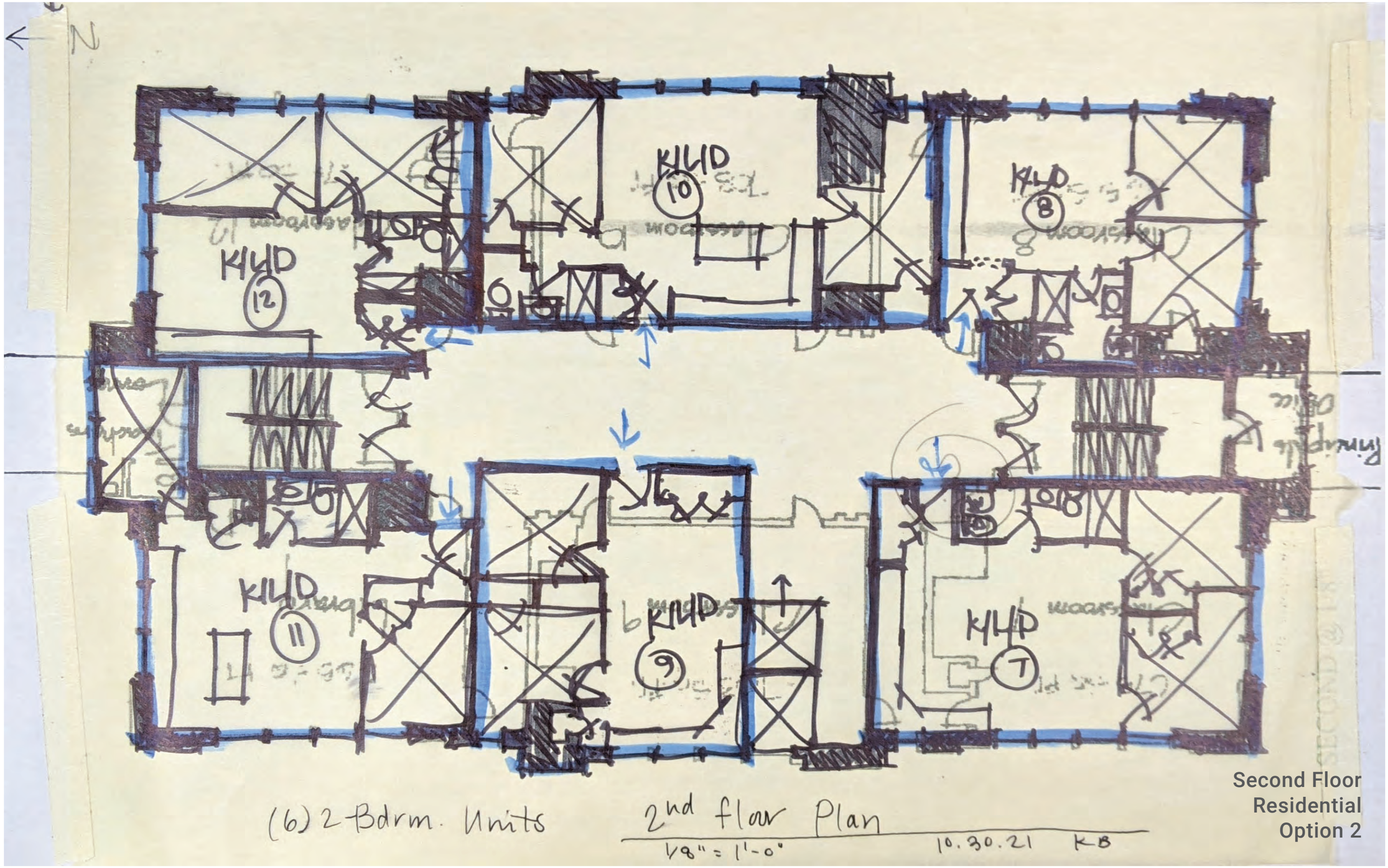
Basement Level
Public and Support



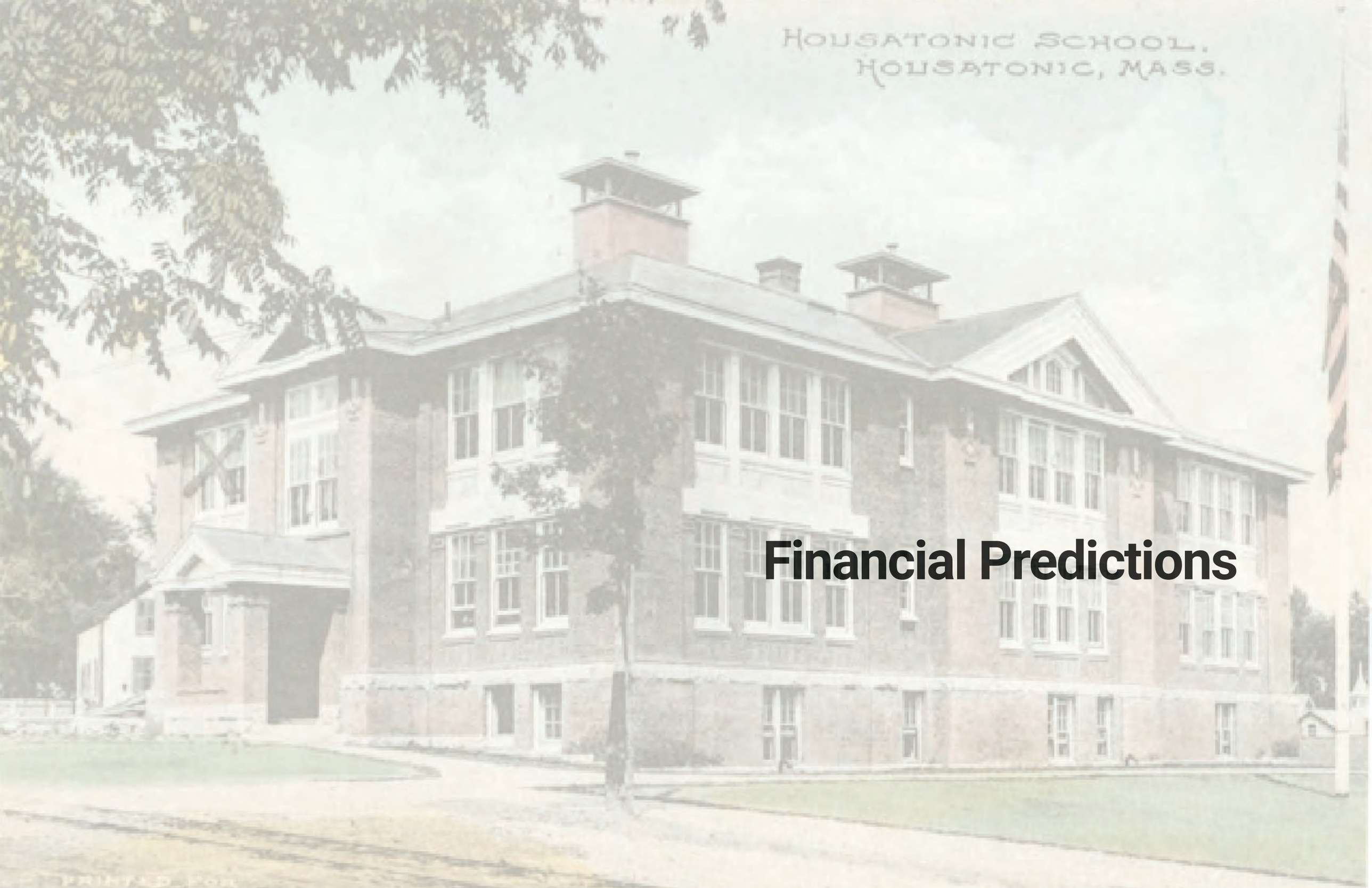
First Floor
Public/Commercial



Second Floor Residential Option 1



Second Floor Residential Option 2



Financial Predictions

Financial Predictions

One of the main considerations is how the building could support debt associated with renovations. It is worth highlighting that there is $600,000 in designated Town funds earmarked for the building's envelope. The Town is also the responsible party for mitigation of any hazardous materials (e.g., asbestos, lead paint, and similar). There may be other funds which can be secured through grants or other sources like Community Development Block Grants, Community Impact Funds, the Community Preservation Act, and American Rescue Plan Act funding. The Town could also appropriate funds or use general capital funds.

If the Town were to borrow the funds to renovate the building, the interest rate would be 2%. To make financial predictions, we used the interest rate of 2% amortized over 30 years for various investment levels from $2M to $7M.

Borrowed Amount	Interest Rate	Debt Service per Month
$2,000,000	2%	$7,493
$3,000,000	2%	$11,089
$4,000,000	2%	$14,583
$5,000,000	2%	$18,480
$6,000,000	2%	$22,177
$7,000,000	2%	$25,873

Residential Housing: For discussion purposes, we projected residential rental revenues by using rental rates at 80% of the 2021 Area Median Income (AMI) for Great Barrington as shown in the highlighted row in the chart below.

- In the Option 1 floor plan with four 2-bedroom apartments, three 1-bedroom apartments, and one studio apartment, and with only one person living in each space, the rents per month equal $9,400. If there were a mix of 1, 2, 3, or 4 persons renting the units, the gross rentals would be higher.
- In the Option 2 floorplan, there are six 2-bedroom apartments. The rents per month equal $7,050 with only one person living in the spaces or $9,060 with three persons living in an apartment.

The conservative estimate of income from residential rentals is $7,050 to $9,060.

Area Median Income for Great Barrington, MA
Calendar Year 2021

Household Size								
	1 person	**2 people**	**3 people**	**4 people**	**5 people**	**6 people**	**7 people**	**8 people**
100% of AMI	$58,730	$67,120	$75,510	$83,900	$90,612	$97,324	$104,036	$110,748
80% of AMI	$46,984	$53,696	$60,408	$67,120	$72,490	$77,859	$83,229	$88,598
60% of AMI	$35,238	$40,272	$45,306	$50,340	$54,367	$58,394	$62,422	$66,449
50% of AMI	$29,365	$33,560	$37,755	$41,950	$45,306	$48,662	$52,018	$55,374
30% of AMI	$17,619	$20,136	$22,653	$25,170	$27,184	$29,197	$31,211	$33,224
Monthly Incomes								
	1 person	**2 people**	**3 people**	**4 people**	**5 people**	**6 people**	**7 people**	**8 people**
100% of AMI	$4,894	$5,593	$6,293	$6,992	$7,551	$8,110	$8,670	$9,229
80% of AMI	$3,915	$4,475	$5,034	$5,593	$6,041	$6,488	$6,936	$7,383
60% of AMI	$2,937	$3,356	$3,776	$4,195	$4,531	$4,866	$5,202	$5,537
50% of AMI	$2,447	$2,797	$3,146	$3,496	$3,776	$4,055	$4,335	$4,615
30% of AMI	$1,468	$1,678	$1,888	$2,098	$2,265	$2,433	$2,601	$2,769
Affordable Monthly Housing Costs for those housholds (i.e., 30% of their monthly income)								
	1 person	**2 people**	**3 people**	**4 people**	**5 people**	**6 people**	**7 people**	**8 people**
100% of AMI	$1,468	$1,678	$1,888	$2,098	$2,265	$2,433	$2,601	$2,769
80% of AMI	$1,175	$1,342	$1,510	$1,678	$1,812	$1,946	$2,081	$2,215
60% of AMI	$881	$1,007	$1,133	$1,259	$1,359	$1,460	$1,561	$1,661
50% of AMI	$734	$839	$944	$1,049	$1,133	$1,217	$1,300	$1,384
30% of AMI	$440	$503	$566	$629	$680	$730	$780	$831

https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/il.html
Berkshire County, MA (part) HUD Metro FMR Area

Financial Predictions

For retail and office space rents proposed for the first floor, we relied on a recent study of commercial real estate rentals compiled for prime retail space in Great Barrington center, and adjusted the rents downward. The appropriate rents for Housatonic range from $12 to $15 per square foot for office or healthcare space and $10 to $15 per square foot for retail space. In the following projections we have optimistically used the upper end of the range for each space for a total of an estimated $5,795 per month in rental income:

First Floor Space	Square Footage	Annual Rent per Square Foot	Annual Rent	Monthly Rent
Classroom 3 - Meeting	703	$15	$10,545	$878.75
Classroom 1 - Office	675	$15	$10,125	$843.75
Classroom 6 - Gallery	675	$15	$10,125	$843.75
Classroom 2 - Training	665	$15	$9,975	$831.25
Clasroom 5 - Studio	665	$15	$9,975	$831.25
Basement Office	400	$15	$6,000	$500.00
Maker's Space (4 @ 400sqft each)	1600	$8	$12,800	$1066.00
Total Rent				**$5,794.75**
Kitchen		TBD		

The space on the ground level has the possibility of generating rental income as well, except for the mechanical rooms and public restrooms. Those spaces include a kitchen, a 400 square foot space, and tenants' space which could be rented as workshops or storage. At this point, we do not have income projections for these spaces.

The proposed plan for the first floor leaves five classrooms intact as potential commercial rentals. They are shown with different purposes on the plan. The space on the ground level has the possibility of generating rental income as well, except for the mechanical rooms and public restrooms. Those spaces include a kitchen, a 400 square foot space, and tenants' space which could be rented as four workshops of 400 square feet each. We do not have projections for the rental rates for the kitchen.

The projected rental income for the whole building, conservatively, is between $12,845 and $14,855 per month.

There are about 21,000 square feet in the building or approximately 7,000 square feet per floor with an estimated $350 per square foot renovation cost. We estimate that with architectural fees, project management fees, and the costs of bringing the building up to current building codes, the renovation costs are likely to be over $7,000,000.

Recommendations & Path Forward

Recommendations

- We recommend that the Select Board require, through the RFP language and/or deed restrictions, that the adaptive reuse of the school building include public community space.
- We recommend that the RFP reflects the design charrette and keeps the historic footprint of the building, to the best extent possible.
- We recommend that the Select Board acts proactively to promote the availability of the building, both prior to and during the RFP Process.

Path Forward

- Phase II environmental work will begin as soon as a scope and funds are available.
- The Town will actively identify and pursue potential grant funding for the renovation of the building.
- The Town will move forward with securing the roof with tarps and board the windows to prevent any further damage.
- In the event that there is not a favorable response to the RFP the Select Board will bring the project back to the HIC prior to demolition.

Notes

- The Selectboard has established that the lot lines for the school are not to be moved and there will not be any encroachment on the sledding hill, or any other part of the park during the redevelopment project.
- A parking study has been done by the Town and while it is outside of the scope of this report, we believe that adequate parking for all likely uses of the school building is feasible.