



**RE-VISIONING
THE OLD
BRANDON HIGH SCHOOL
AS A HOME FOR
THE BUILDING ARTS
+
ORGANIZING AROUND IT**

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ReBHS is a non-profit center for the study and support of the building and creative arts, and of the communities they foster.

It aims to provide tools, knowledge, expertise and space to help individuals and groups identify and solve problems in the built environment through education, direct action and community discourse.

Our mission begins with the old Brandon High School, whose restoration models our approach to community and built environment, and whose halls will one day give home to our activities.

Non-Profit Model

ReBHS was incorporated in Vermont in the Fall of 2023 as a Vermont Non-Profit Corporation. We are currently pursuing Federal 501c3 status for the organization — a top priority for the 2024 calendar year. The non-profit model serves ReBHS in its mission to improve lives through the provision of educational programming, resources, and services at little to no cost to those we serve while protecting the financial health of the corporation and ensuring the long-term care of its assets, including the historic Brandon High School. This attitude of service over profit is echoed in the significant role volunteer members play in all of our programming.

Membership & Community

ReBHS is a member-led organization. Members pay a small yearly fee or provide an in-kind contribution of labor. From our foundation, we have had a strong group of active members, each of whom provides a unique set of skills: builders, organizers, designers, communication experts, and social connectors. Members support the organization by serving on committees, which deal with specific programs and initiatives, and by staffing our events and programming. In the future, we plan to extend special access studio and shop space in the finished Brandon High School to our membership.

Though founded on a membership model, the organization serves a community much larger than that reflected in its membership roll. The programs of the organization, both active and planned, serve the broader Brandon, Vt. community by helping to solve everyday problems, contributing to residents' quality of life. Our programming also touches individuals beyond Brandon who seek ReBHS out for assistance on housing and building issues, and engages a regional, national and global audience through the production and dissemination of ideas-centered media about the built-environment.



Leadership

ReBHS Corp. is led by a board of directors, currently comprised of its three officers. The day-to-day operations of the organization are managed by an executive director, who serves by board appointment. Together, this leadership team represents decades of experience organizing community groups, managing non-profits, and directing major construction projects. The leadership, through personal investment and a commitment to extended terms of service, echoes and amplifies the membership's deep commitment to the longevity and health of our young organization.



Allen Pierce, President (*Philadelphia, PA*)

Allen is an architect, builder, professor, and scholar with fifteen years of experience in design and project management. He is licensed in New York, Pennsylvania, and Vermont, and is a LEED Accredited Professional in the area of Building Design + Construction. He is the Principal of the Philly-based design studio HEIMA and holds an appointment as assistant professor of architecture at Temple University, conducting research at the intersection of construction technology and human meaning-making. Allen is excited to revitalize the historic BHS building as a model of cooperation and conviviality for the Brandon community, and to bring it up to 21st century performance standards in his role as architect of record.



Joy Marcotte, Vice-President & Treasurer (*Brandon, VT*)

In college Joy worked on the restoration of a 14th c. church in a small village in northern France: a formative experience watching a community unite to save a historic building and bring it to modern-day use as a gathering space. After academic work in international development and anthropology, Joy worked in non-profits focused on human rights and environmental justice. She has taken part in community organizing efforts across the world including international volunteer work camps, a community theater and an educational cooperative. Joy has been working on construction projects in the US for 25 years, engaging all aspects of building, from hammer-in-hand to financial and legal management. She is a co-founding member of LivingStructure, a Brandon, VT-based low-profit design/build company.



Gary Smith (*Bristol, VT*)

Gary is a professional theater artist and administrator who has worked in New York and Regional Theaters with OBIE, TONY and Oscar award winning actors & directors. His guiding vision has been to use theater as a vehicle to create dialogue, awareness, and positive social evolution. He co-founded Pennsylvania's acclaimed Theater of the Seventh Sister & served as its Co-Artistic Producing Director for 30 years. He also created programing for the Lancaster County Council on Drug & Alcohol Abuse, the Dowingtown, Wilson, & Lewisburg School Districts, the Boys and Girls Clubs of Lancaster, Trinity Lutheran Church, & the Crispus Attucks African American Community Center. He has served as a Panelist for the PA Council on the Arts, where he evaluated grant proposals from across the state, and as President of the Middlebury (VT) Acting Company's Board of Directors.



Jeff Dardozi, Executive Director (*Brandon, VT*)

Jeff is a Vermont-based designer and builder. He is a managing member of LivingStructure, a design/build firm in Brandon, VT specializing in facilitating self-built housing. The focus of his work is in the architecture and social experience of self-built housing movements. He has over 45 years of experiencing designing & building residential dwellings, commercial & public space. From the moment he walked through the doors of the old high school Jeff felt the building's tremendous potential to be a place of imagination, creativity and to be a place where dreams can be made real.

Action Areas

Our present and future programs address four specific "action areas", which together define the scope and direction of the organization.

Education & Empowerment

Our central mission is to educate members of our wider community about the built environment and to empower them to make it their own.

Ideas & Advocacy

We seek to generate new ideas about the design, organization, & construction of the built environment, and to share them through exhibitions, events & other media.

Making Civic Space

We hope to create the kinds of open spaces within our building and our organization that foster civic discourse and play host to other community-centered programs.

Direct Action in the Built Environment

We seek to mobilize our resources and those of our membership to modify the built environment in our immediate community, manifesting new ideas and empowering others.



Housed Program

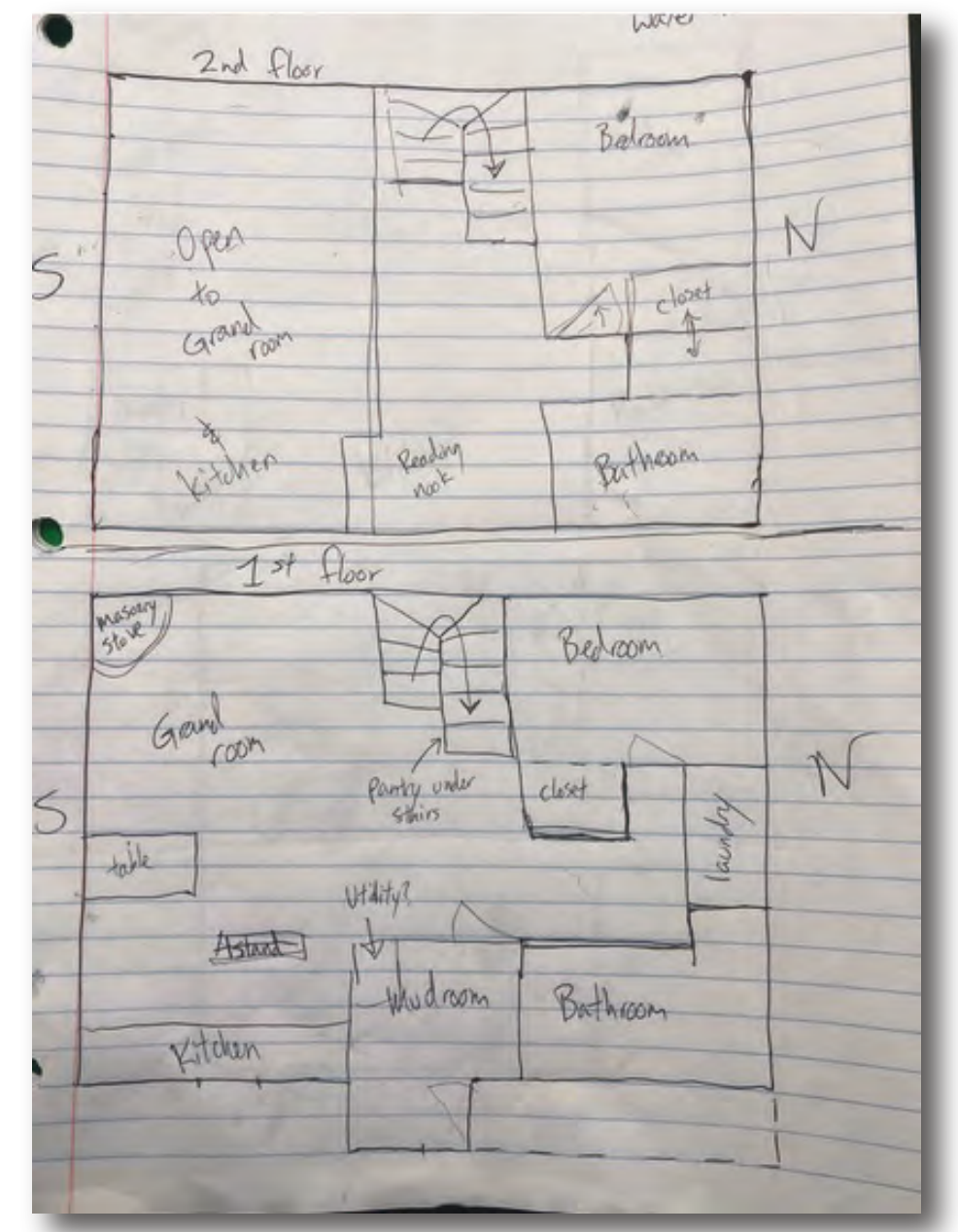
Housing is by far the greatest monetary cost members of our community face throughout their adult lives, whether they rent, mortgage or buy outright. It is also an important means of self-expression and existential comfort for many. The Housed Program, a central part of ReBHS' mission, seeks to educate and empower members of our community to develop their own housing, substituting the wealth of their own time and energy for capital, allowing community members to develop original structures that serve them better than market housing, which become significant sites for self expression and significant events for personal development.

The Partnership Education Model

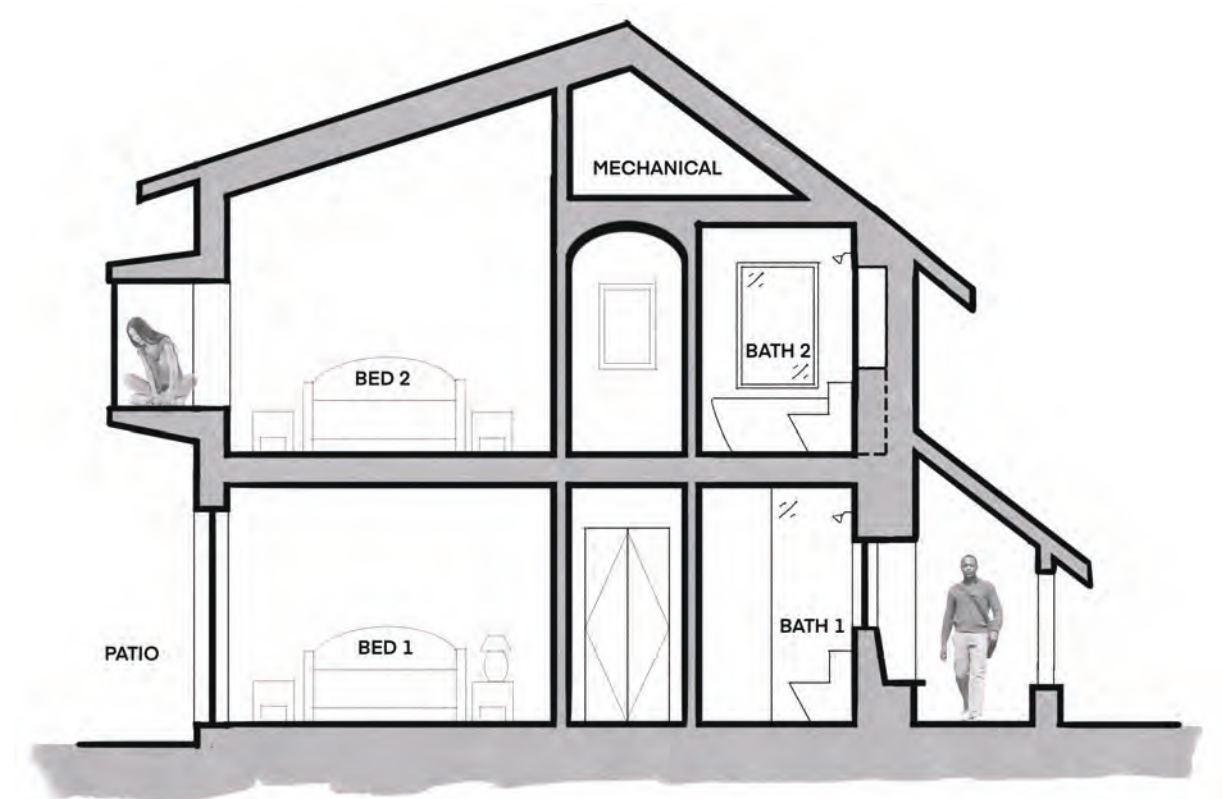
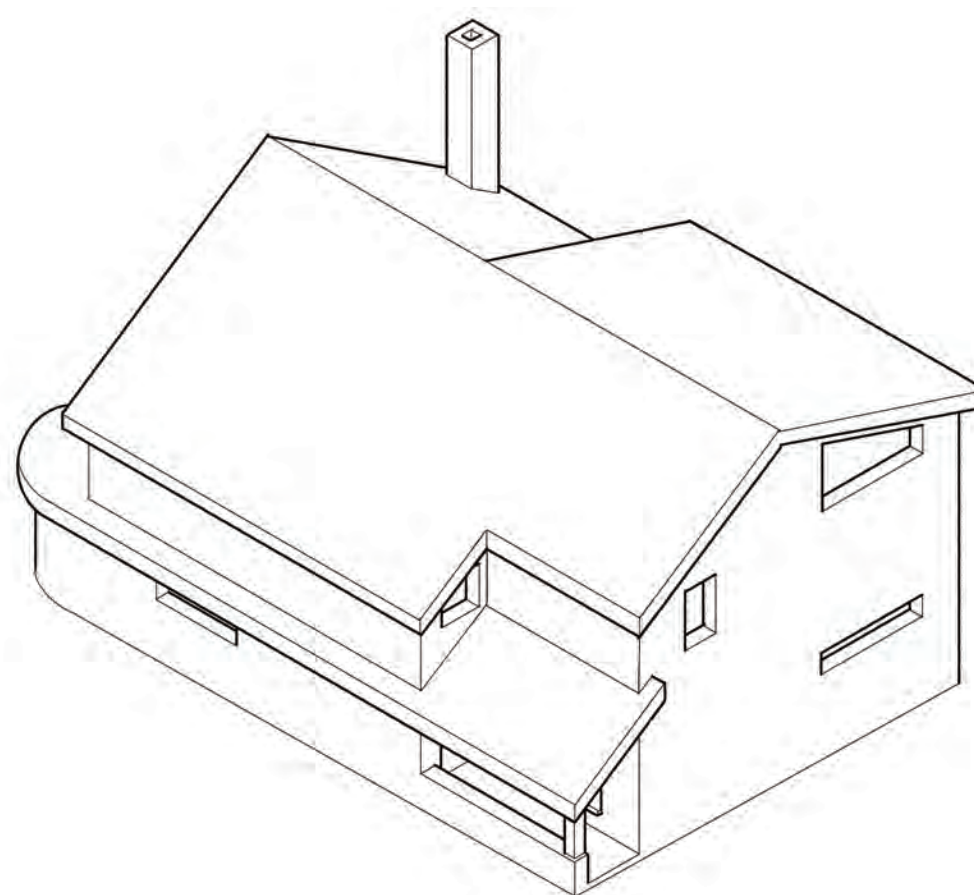
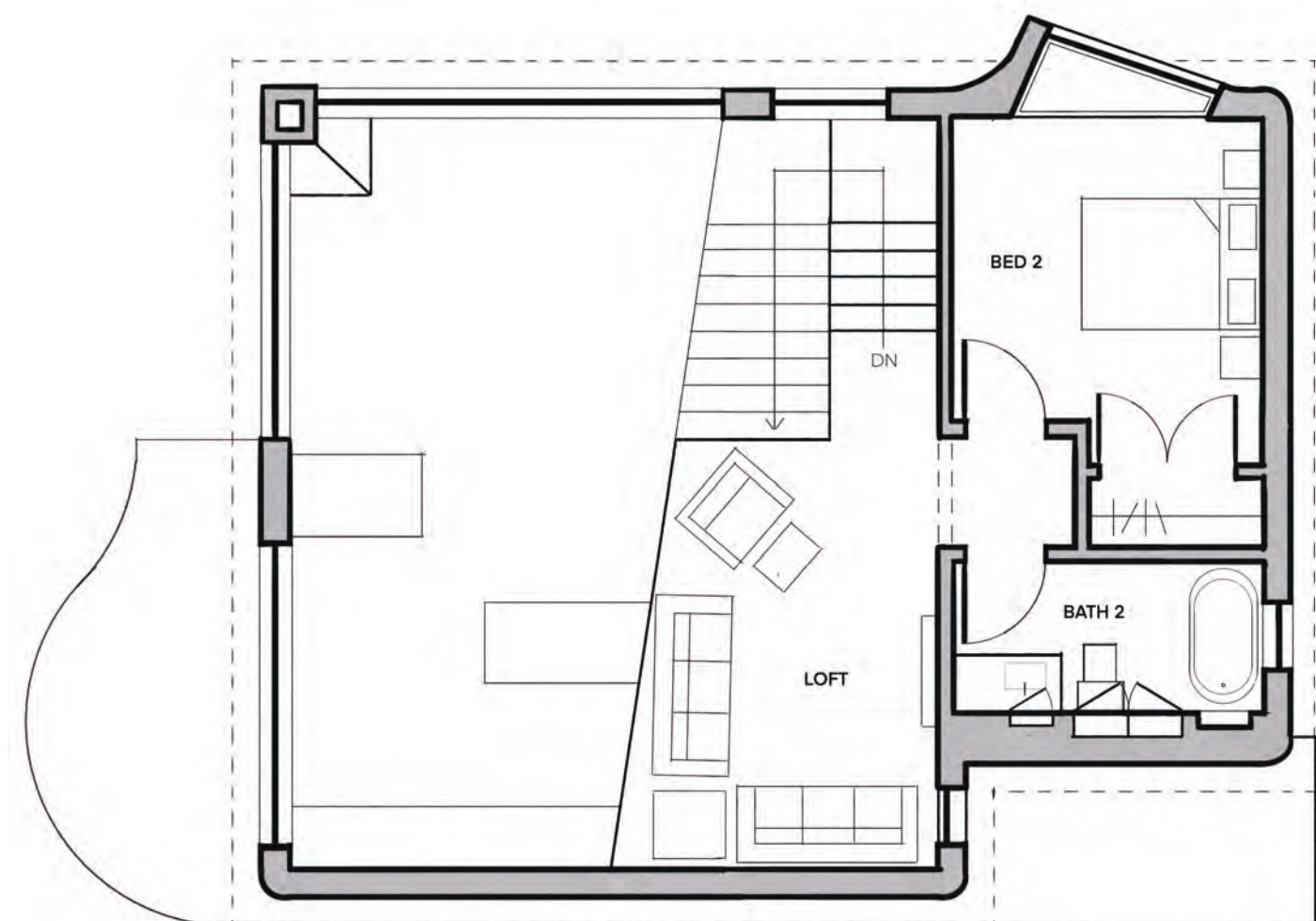
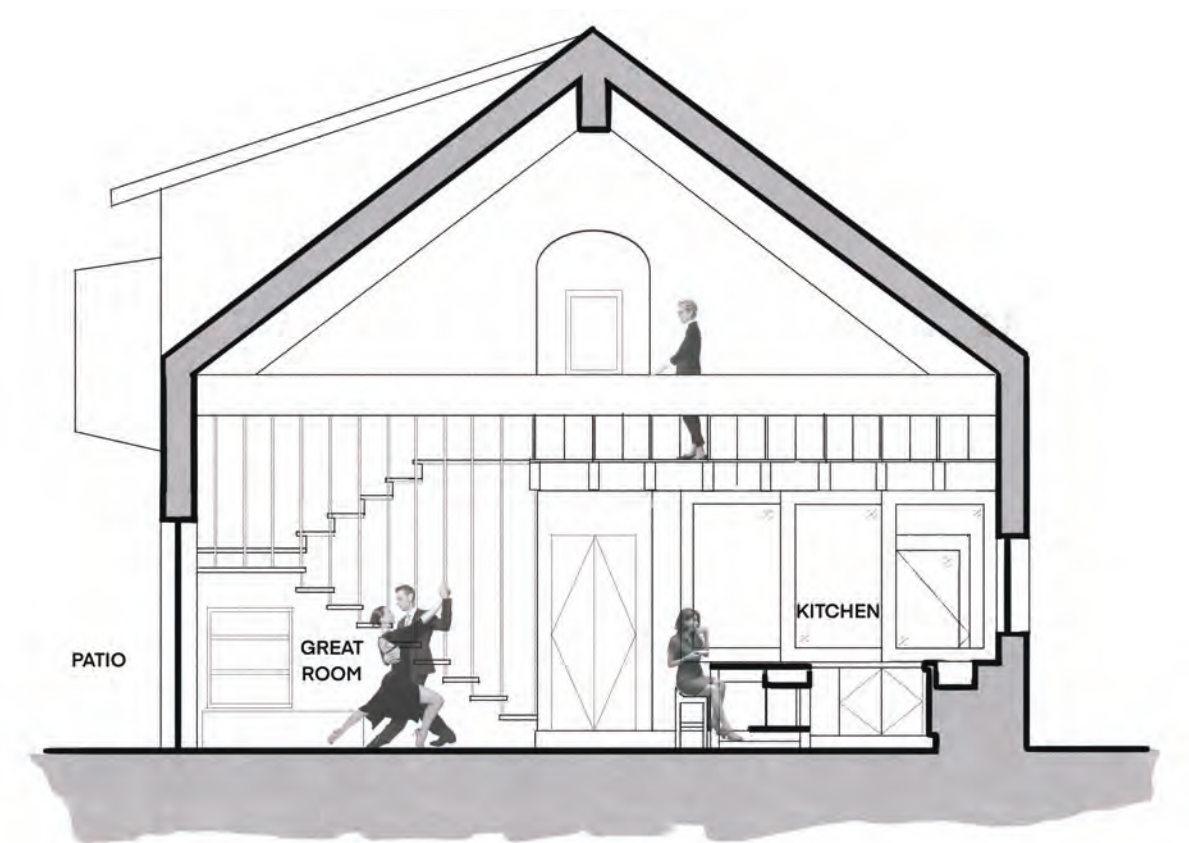
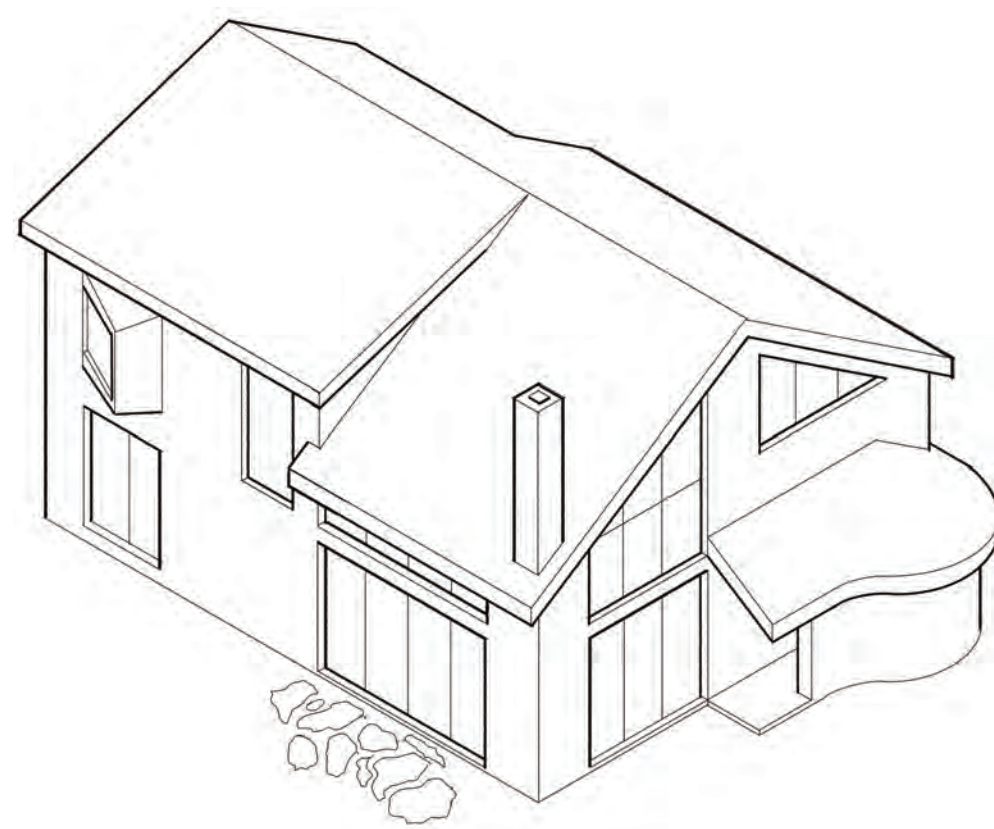
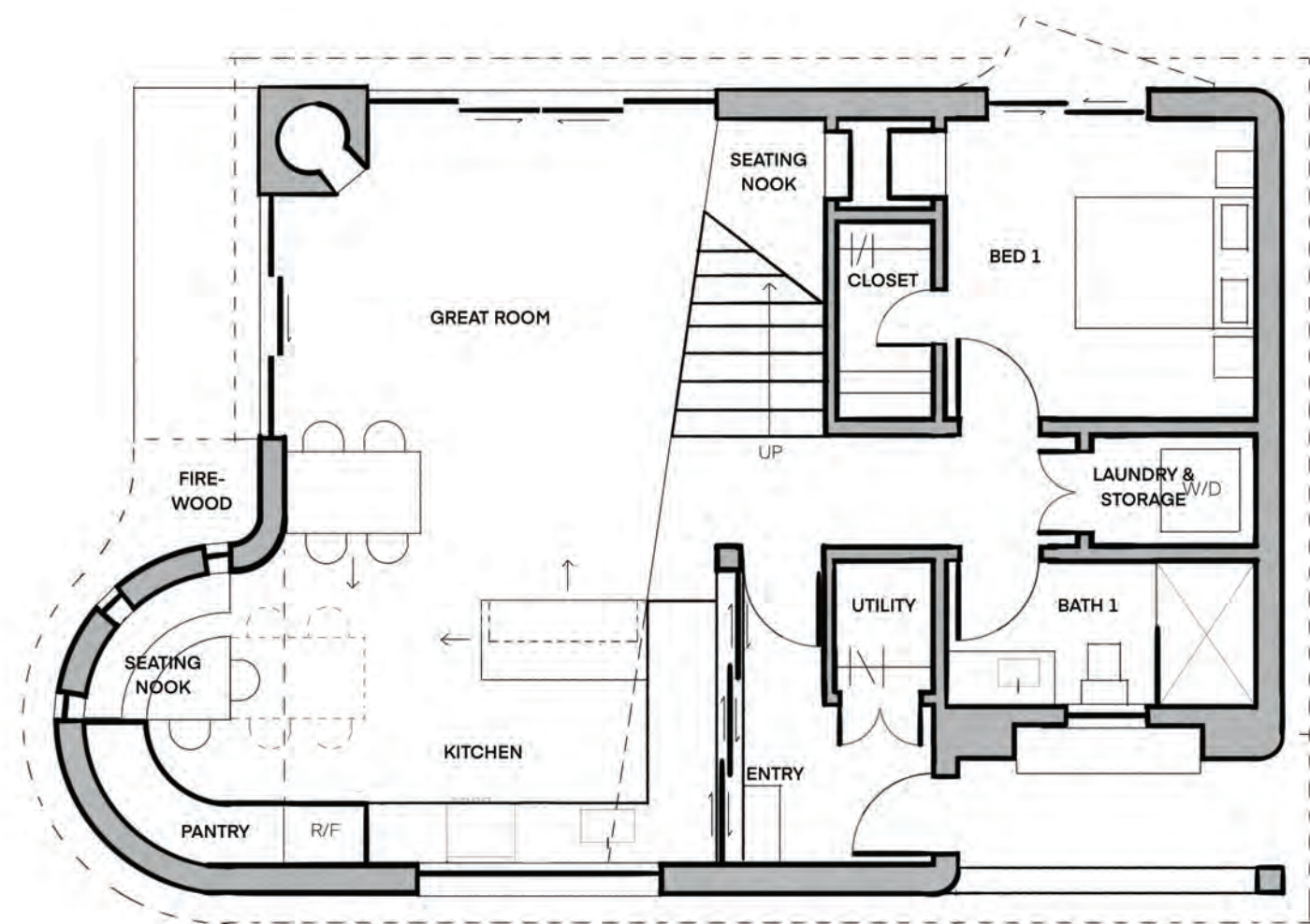
Through the Housed program, ReBHS partners with individuals and collectives who have the will, the energy and the resources to pursue self-build housing but lack the expertise of the professionals most people must pay to build on their behalf. Through this partnership, ReBHS members and staff, themselves members of this professional class, provide a project-specific education in design, construction, building science, horticulture and other related areas to our partner-neighbors, who are thereby empowered to pursue projects that might otherwise be beyond them and do so with the material efficiency, environmental performance, and aesthetic grace that are hallmarks of professionally-executed projects but are so often missing from traditional self-builds.

Program Pilot: East Middlebury Ridge House

As an initial pilot for the program, ReBHS has partnered with a single limited-income landowner seeking to build a small ground-up home for herself on a semi-rural property in East Middlebury. Surrounded by timber and deeply knowledgeable about trees, this partner sought our help to design and build with the resources already present on her home site, and to understand the complexities of the design drawings and construction permitting she will need generate in order to start work under her own steam.



Design
When we first met, our partner was sketching floor plans on writing paper without scale or proportion. She well understood what she wanted from her home — the kinds of spaces and their relationships to one another — but wasn't yet thinking about the building's relationship to site, its massing or the sectional relationships that define light, views, acoustics and other significant intangibles. We worked closely with her on site and remotely to develop these design-thinking skills and begin to draw in scaled, well-proportioned ways.



Construction
We are now in the process of teaching our partner how to translate her initial design into something constructible, discussing not just specific, technical construction methodologies but also conceptual ways of organizing and drawing construction systems: grids, reflected ceiling plans, schedules, etc. Through this process we are teaching her to use Revit as a documentation tool and will soon begin shepherding her through the filing and permit process. Once construction begins, ReBHS members and staff will be regularly available to assist with any "how-to" questions and will help our partner find key educational resources related to specific aspects of her build.



Direct Action in the Community

As ReBHS works to develop our new, permanent home in the old Brandon High School and to get our major education & empowerment programs like HousED off the ground, we have sought opportunities to use our collective knowledge, energy and resources to positively affect our immediate community in Brandon through direct action. In the process, we have formed partnerships with a variety of other community and state-level organizations, developed a productive working relationship with the town government and successfully won grant-based funding for several initiatives that will take form over the next twelve months.

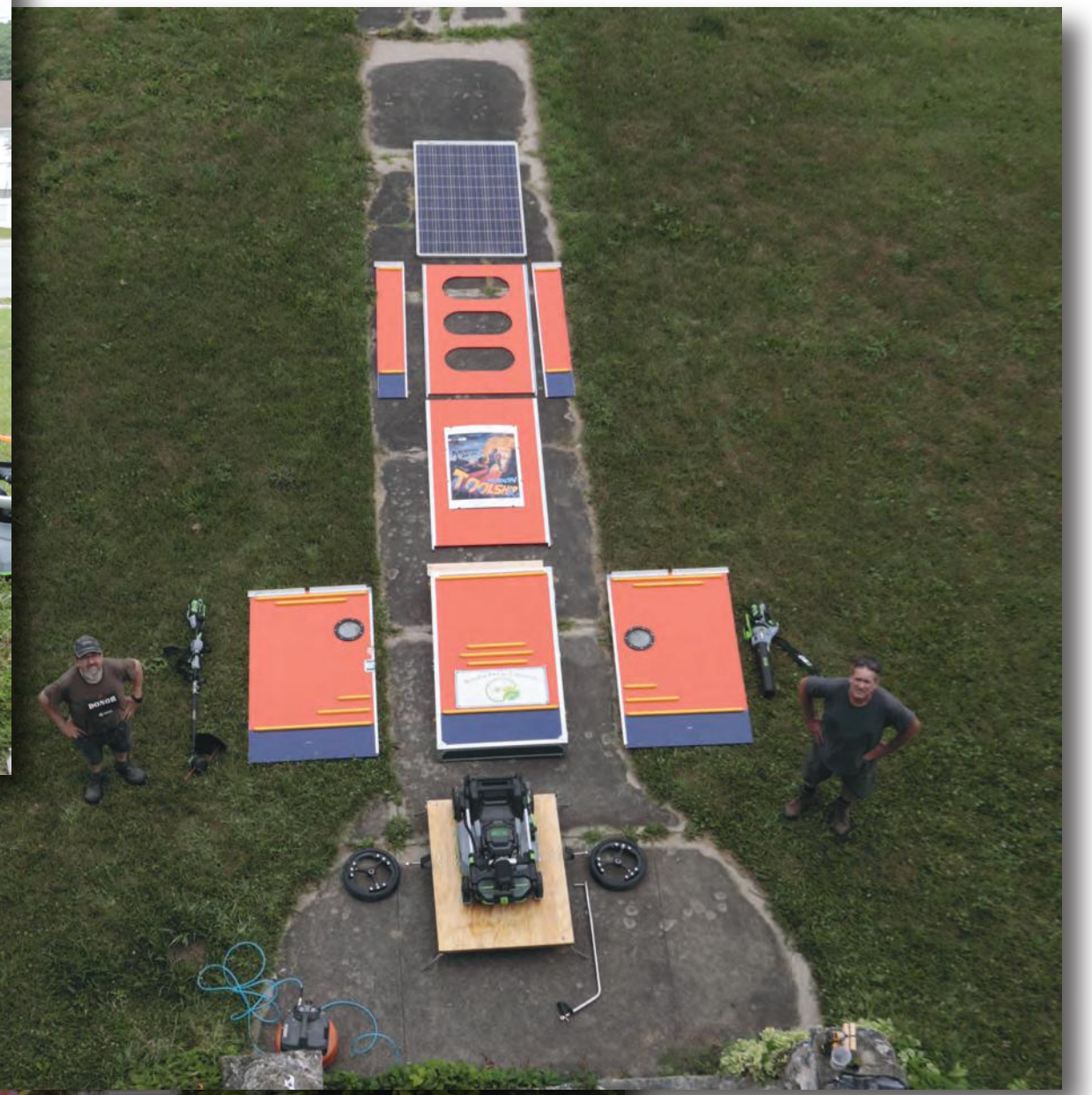
Brandon ToolShip

a partnership with
the Brandon Free Public Library

The Brandon ToolShip is a futuristic and funky mobile tool storage program designed to assist in promoting the use and adoption of electric lawn care equipment.

The idea behind the project is to increase access to these tools by taking them to people. The program offers easy and equitable access to the tools by regularly rotating the ToolShip throughout Brandon's neighborhoods during mowing season. This frees members from having to travel to the library to check out and 'test drive' the equipment.

The ToolShip is designed to be small, lightweight and house a single set of electric lawn care equipment that can be used by members of the Brandon Free Public Library. The ToolShip is adorned with original art and supported by a poster program by members of ReBHS that engage citizens in the program's mission, encouraging positive behavioral change.



Art Bikes of Brandon

winner of the
2024 Vermont Council of the Arts
Animating Infrastructure Grant

The Art Bikes of Brandon is an initiative designed to literally 'animate' the downtown infrastructure with kinetic art – in the form of art bikes – by creating and deploying eight art bikes among the town's bike racks as part of a free bike share program. These art bikes are high quality, durable and designed for bike share programs. They will be available for use by the public from Spring through Fall.

Our goal is to motivate people, especially youth, to experience art, the built environment, social connections and the natural world by riding art bikes. We want to create motivating and inspiring visual cues about healthy ways of seeing, experiencing and being in the world.

In the spirit of regenerative economics, the art bikes are auctioned off at the end of every season to fund the next season of new commissions. This will keep the program self-sustaining, provide new commissions for artists and build a critical mass of art bikes for future mobilization in parades, festivals and other events. The project has received strong support from the town and the community.





Programs to Educate & Advocate

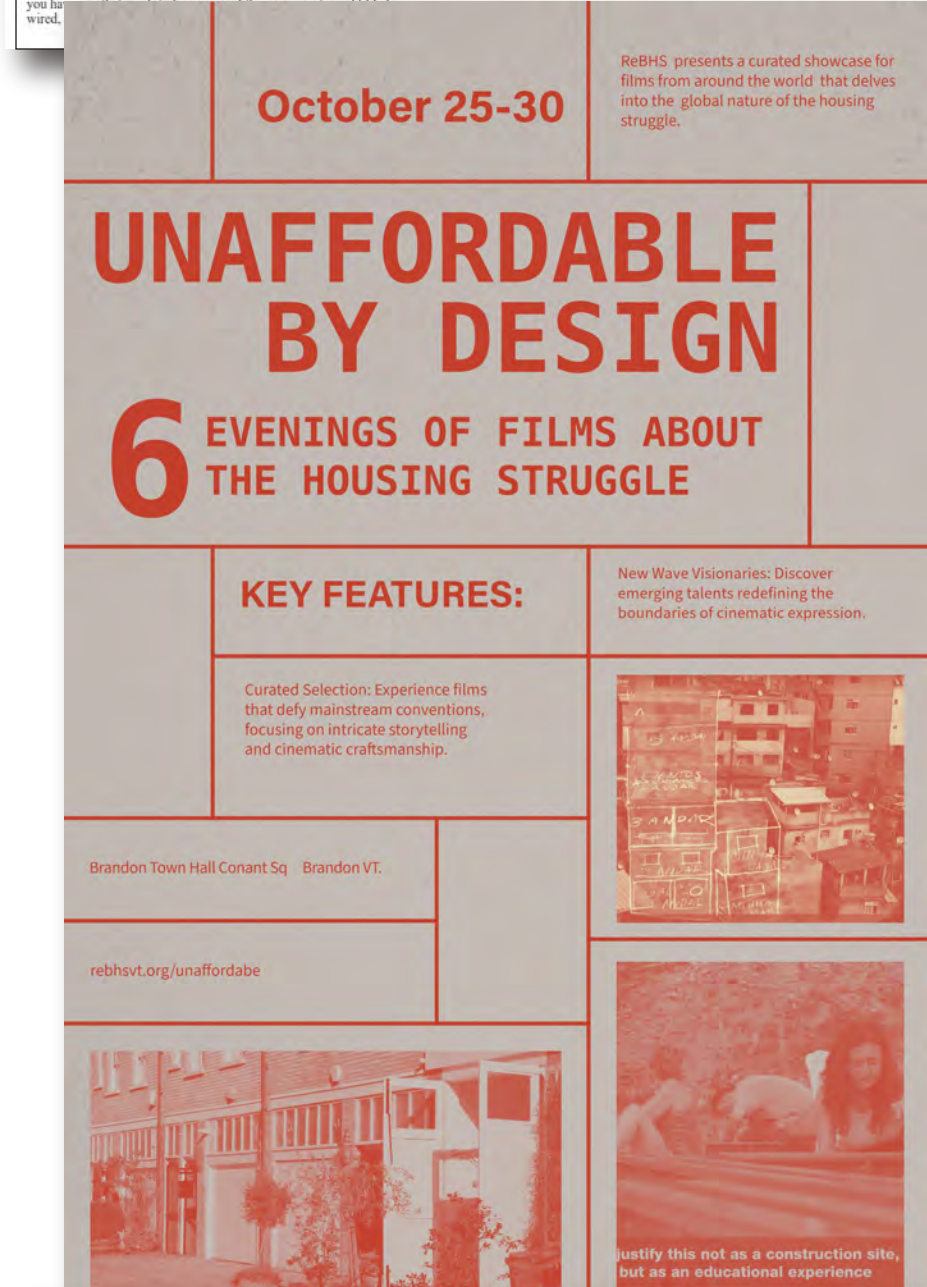
As a part of our two core action areas, Education & Empowerment and Ideas & Advocacy, we have begun developing a number of programs that, like HousED, we hope will form the core of ReBHS' work in the years to come. Some of these programs have already begun to run even in the absence of a permanent home. Some are in the process of seeking funding and community support. Some exist only as groundwork, awaiting the first phases of the High School renovation to begin serving the community.



Repair Fair

Repair Fair is a one-day event in which community members can bring any broken or malfunctioning, easily-transported piece of their material world to ReBHS to have it fixed by ReBHS members and other volunteers who are expert in various crafts and trades. The "Repair Fair" concept is not original to ReBHS but we have sought to translate what is typically a passive service into an opportunity to teach those we serve about the inner-workings of the piece we are repairing, to engage them in the process of repair, and to empower them to take on repair and maintenance themselves in the future.

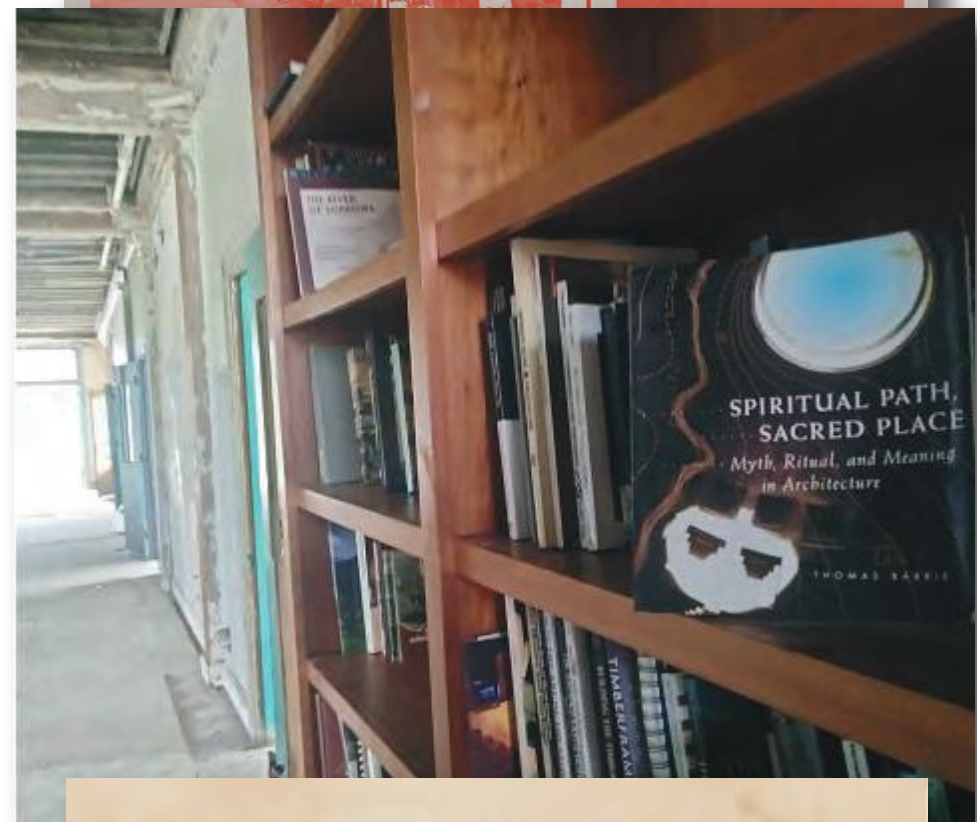
The first Repair Fair ran on Earth Day 2024 as a partnership with the Brandon Energy Committee and we are looking to host Fairs semi-annually going forward.



Built Environment Film Series

We are in the process of organizing a multi-day film series in Brandon that will play host to a variety of documentary and narrative films that raise important questions or introduce novel ideas about the built environment. The series will serve as a significant means of educating our community about alternate ways of building, dwelling, owning and living in the human-made world, linking our education and advocacy missions and providing a civic space for the discussion and further elaboration of the films' concepts.

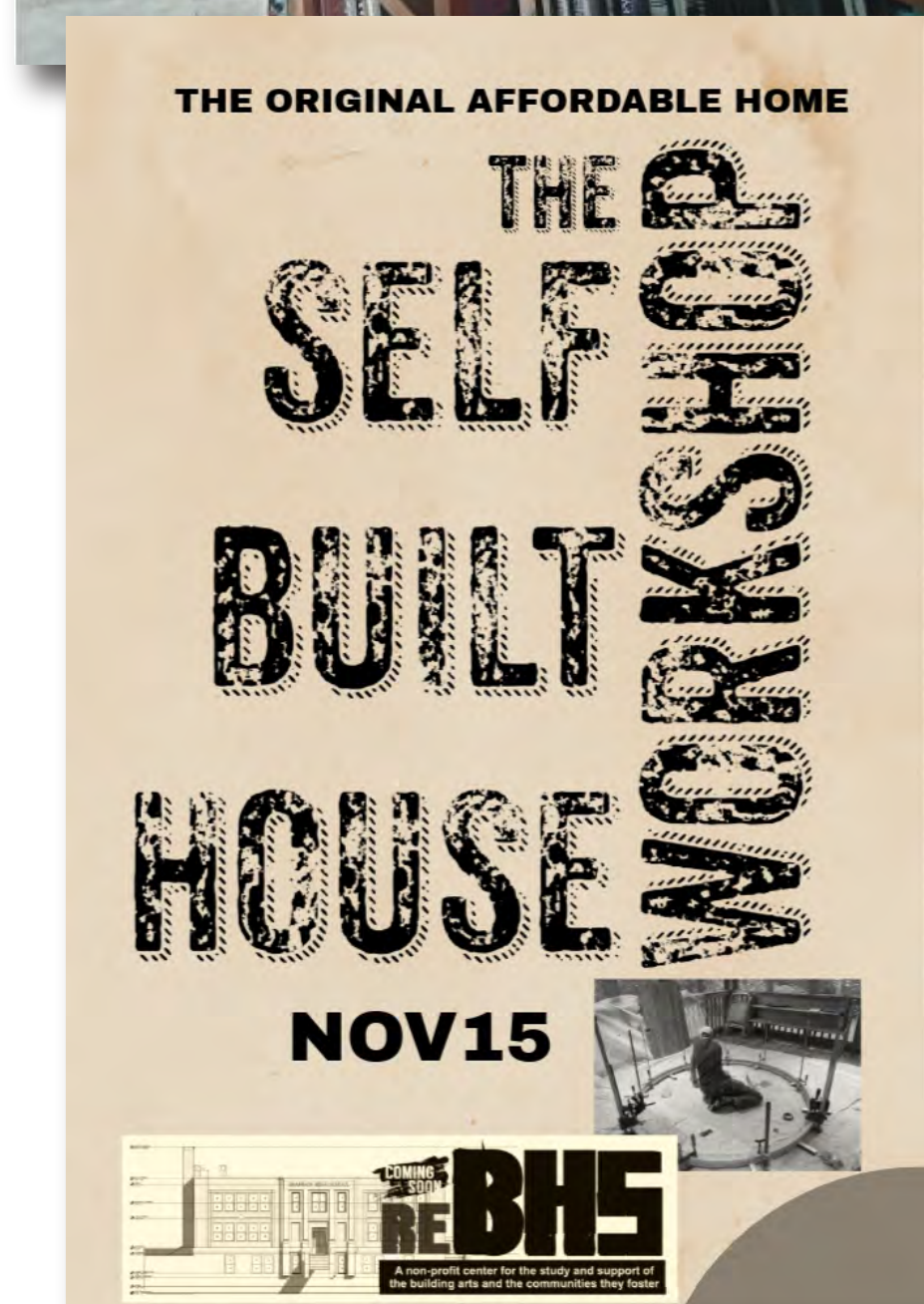
The first series is planned for Fall 2024. The screenings will be held at Brandon Town Hall and we have applied to Bissell Foundation for funding assistance. We hope the series will become an annual event going forward, to be hosted in the renovated High School in future years.



Built Environment Gallery & Resource Library

A major part of our vision for the old Brandon High School building is the creation of a permanent, publicly-accessible gallery and library, both centered on the built environment. These facilities will be open regularly, providing access to a variety of written and pictorial resources, and opportunities to encounter new ideas through curated art, history and technology exhibitions.

We have begun collecting and organizing library resources in the school building and continue to solicit donations from the community. In the future, the gallery will play host to the Film Series and provide a platform for the work of Visiting Fellows. Both programs await the completion of construction Phase III for full activation.



Visiting Fellows

As a means of sponsoring new ideas in the built environment, ReBHS hopes to host visiting fellows on a model much like a traditional artists' residency, open to artists, scholars and craftspeople alike. Fellows would be asked to develop a personal project in keeping with the ReBHS mission and to assist with the staffing and development of the organization's core programs. Fellows would be given short-term housing in the High School building and access to shared studios and workshops for the duration of their residency. Residencies would culminate in the presentation of the Fellow's work to the community (a lecture, a gallery show, the unveiling of a built work, etc.).

The fellowship program remains a dream for us pending the completion of the School renovation and sufficient funding for the first Fellow's stay.

Open Workshops

The lower levels of the old Brandon High School building will eventually contain a variety of digital and conventional tools, plus lots of flexible workspace to complete projects ranging from small kitchen gadgets to full building components. These shops exist to empower ReBHS members and others in our extended community to make, repair or modify their own built environments at will. Members in good standing will be eligible for shop training and thereafter have open shop access. Extended members of the community who seek support from ReBHS staff may be invited to use the shops with staff support. Fellows will participate in staffing the shops and will be invited to use them in support of their personal projects.

The designated shop spaces are already being filled with tools in support of the Brandon High School renovation project. After serving as a field shop for the renovation, additional safety measures and barriers to public access will be installed to ready the shops for everyday use.



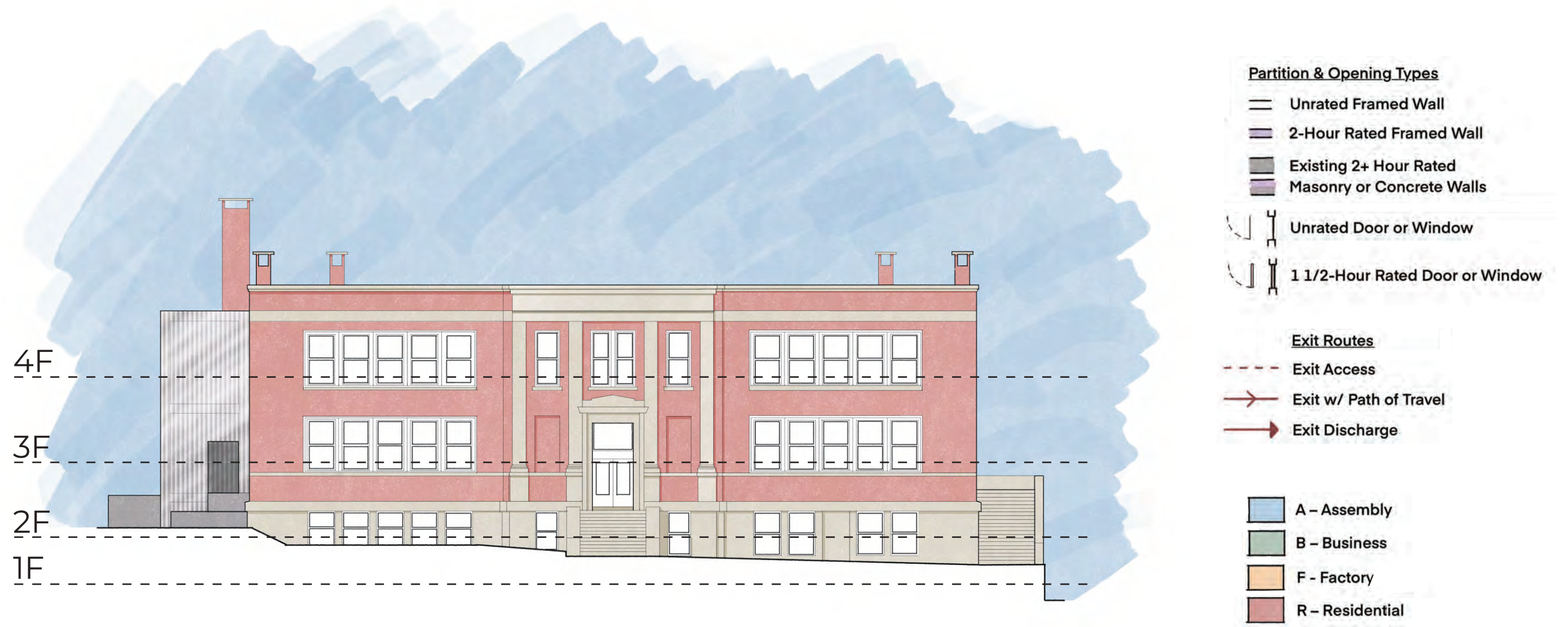
re: Brandon High School

Program & Design

Though ReBHS is already finding success, funding, partnerships and community buy-in across several programs and all of our Action Areas, we remain homeless as an organization. Over the next few years, one of the organization's primary focuses will be the complete renovation of the 1916 Brandon High School building — the structure that originally brought us all together — as a permanent home for our mission, our membership, and our community. The more we have come to know the building, the more perfect it has felt for the mission and needs of ReBHS: a truth borne out through our collective redesign and reprogramming of its myriad spaces.

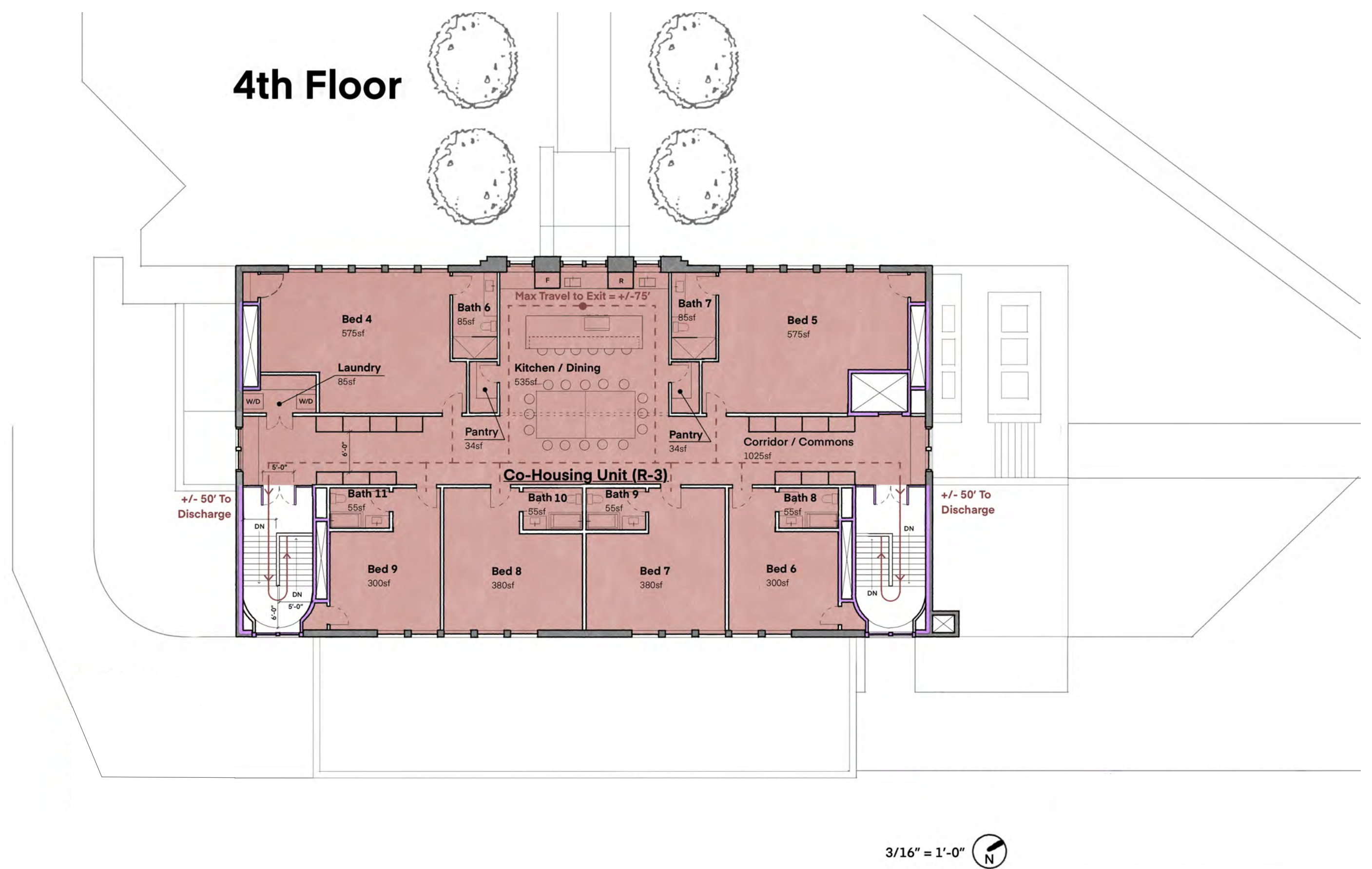
Space for Ideas

Ultimately, the School will serve as a home for new and emerging ideas about the built environment: how it is controlled, financed, built, inhabited, perceived. It will play host to a library and gallery dedicated to these questions. It will house and give workspace to visitors from across the nation and world who have gathered to debate and develop these ideas. It will provide space for Brandonites to develop their own ideas about the built environment, as individuals and collectively.



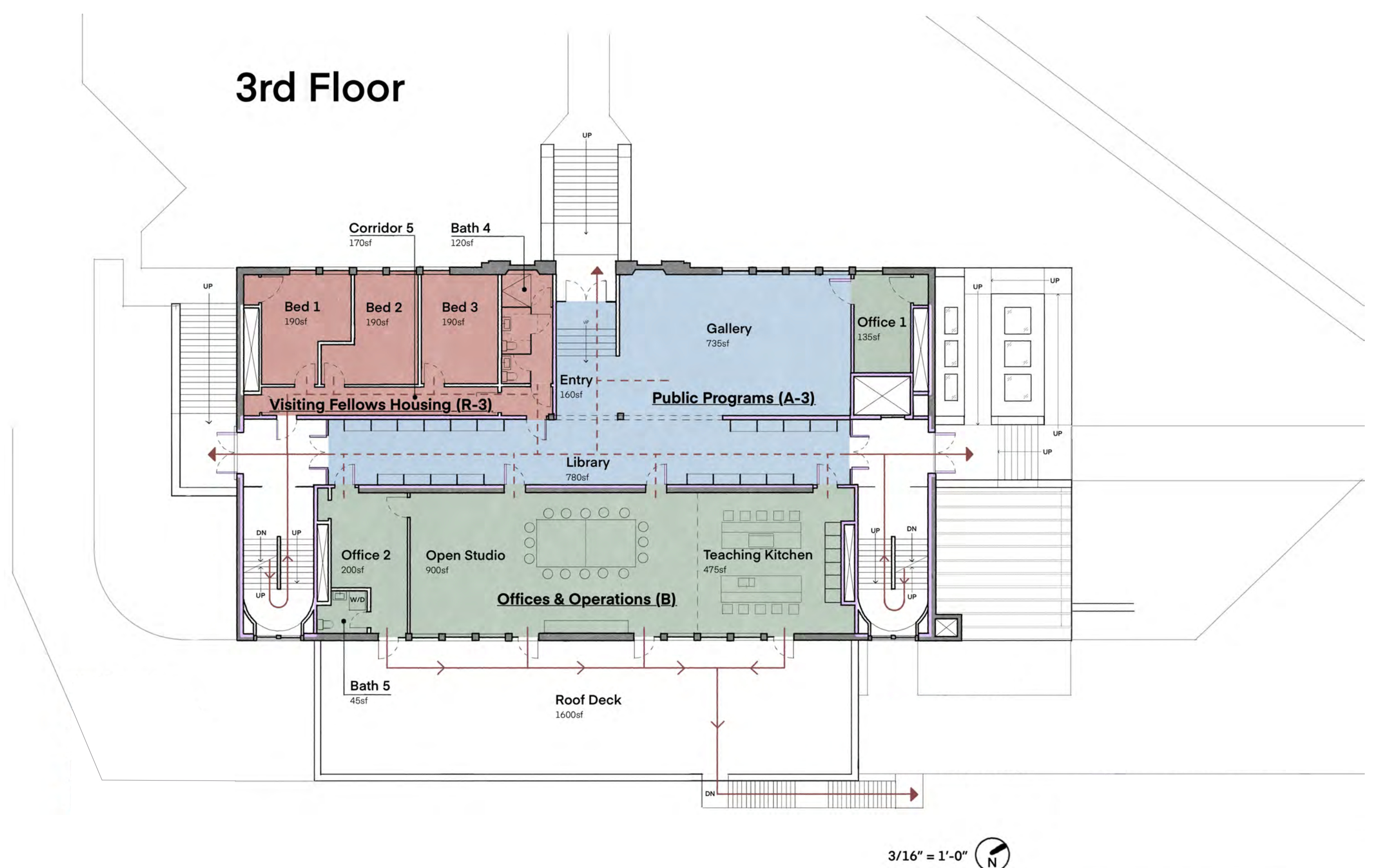
A Partnership for Housing

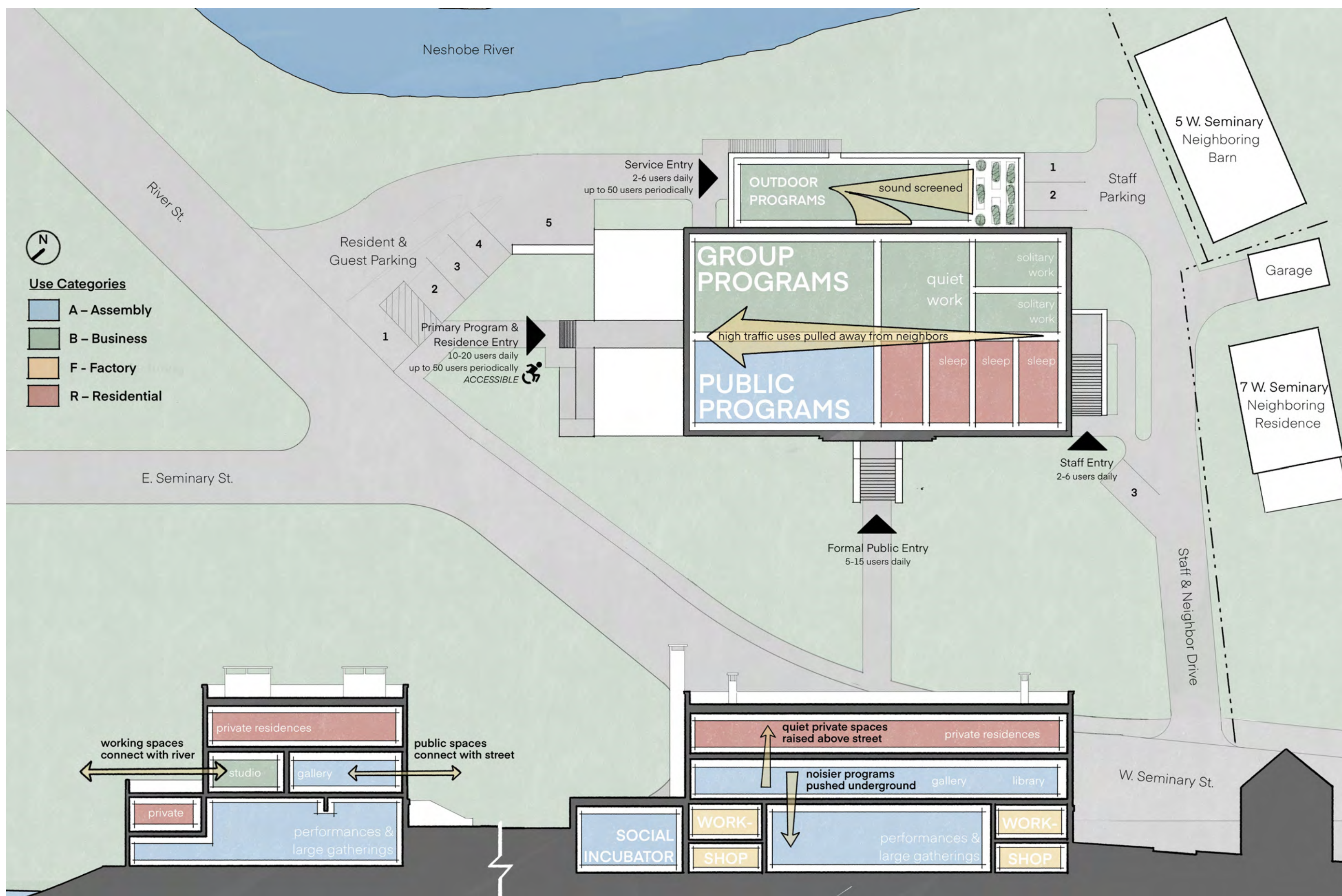
The upper floor of the school will be set aside for future occupation as housing. We imagine this housing to be managed by a separate organization operating as a tenant of ReBHS or a junior stakeholder in the building itself. Housing would be developed along the same lines as the rest of the building: cooperatively organized, financed, and constructed. Beyond that, the housing organization and tenants will be able to determine their own best design and use of space, allowing for community input and guided by ReBHS' knowledgeable staff.



Facilitating Fellowship

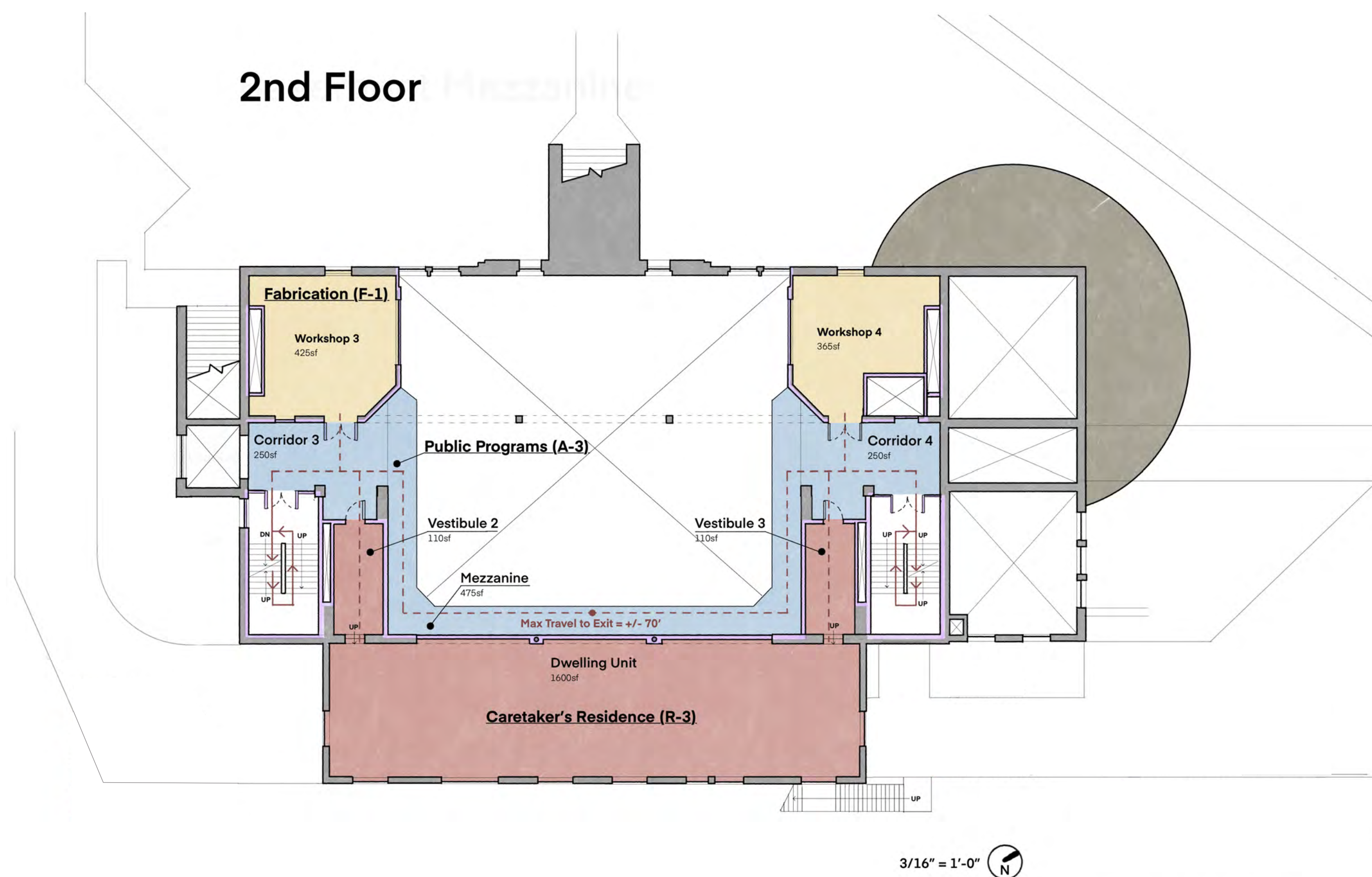
The primary, street-connected floor will house most of ReBHS' public-facing program, administration and clean, quiet workspaces. It is at this level that the town and the organization meet, and community gathers. Much of this floor would be open to the public on a regular basis and other community groups would be invited to use the gallery and studio spaces semi-regularly through limited partnerships. This floor would also serve to house visiting fellows and provide space for their work.





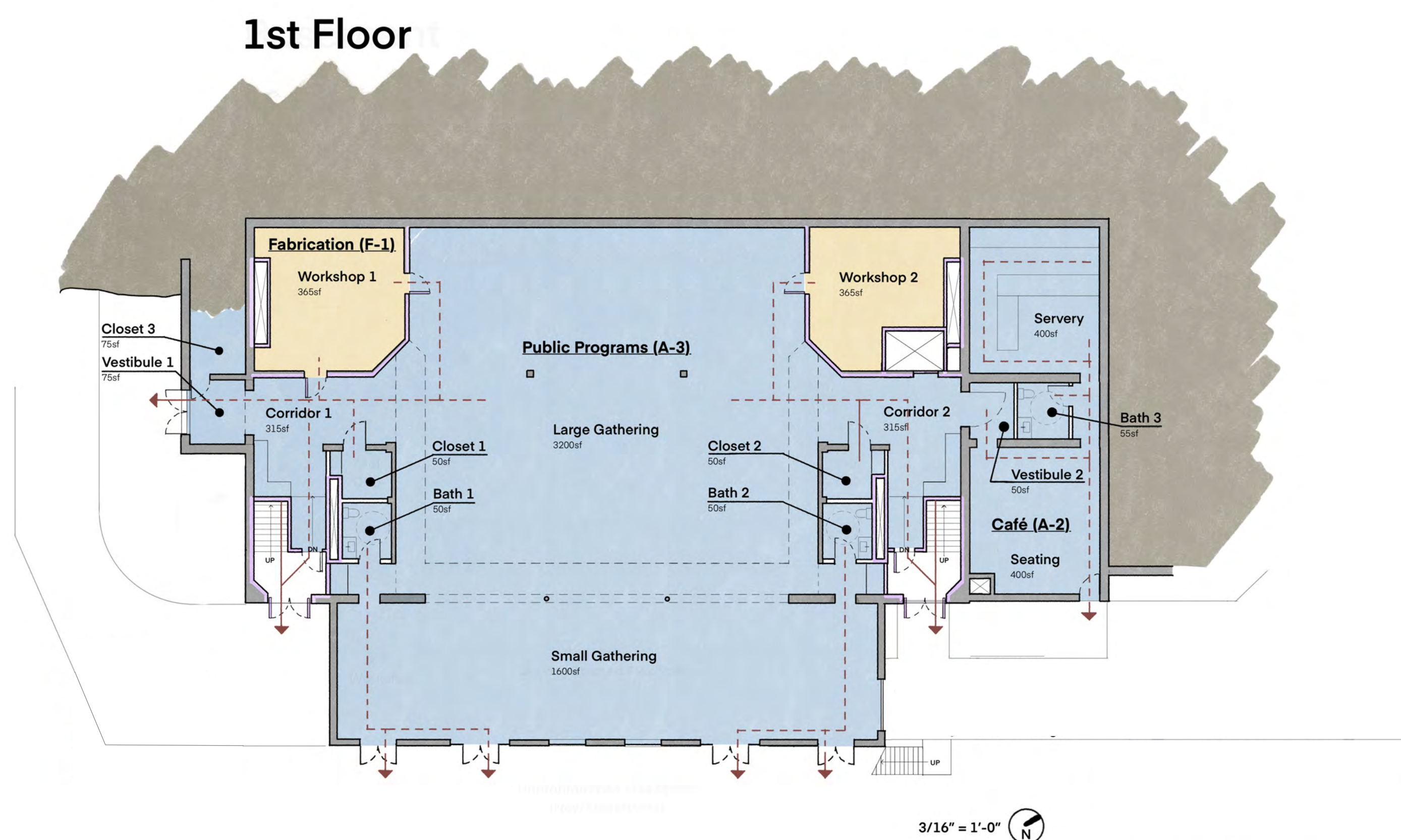
A Good Neighbor

The program for the renovation has been carefully developed to acknowledge the school's site: It is both a historic edifice requiring careful restoration and it adjoins the Neshobe River, necessitating careful attention to environmental impact. It will be both a central part of downtown Brandon, contributing to the town's cultural life, and a close neighbor to private residences, demanding courtesy and quiet. In many ways, the building's existing design — high in the front, low in the back, with many accessible entrances and exits — perfectly facilitates these many modes and we have leveraged a careful study of the building's historic form to have minimal impact on its exterior and the surrounding site.



A Home for Making

The lower floors of the School building, which historically housed a hybrid gym-theater and the school's mechanical innards, are perfectly suited to the kinds of built-environment work ReBHS will host. Former mechanical rooms serve well as workshops, set below ground to muffle sound and made entirely of fireproof concrete. The large gym provides a flexible empty center that might one day see the assembly of a timber house frame and another a public lecture from a visiting fellow. Myriad small closets and corridors provide ample storage for the tools, materials and other resources ReBHS will set at the disposal of the community, facilitating making at many scales and by many means.



Openings for Community

The lowest floor of the School building, which opens up to the Neshobe River at grade, provides a number of opportunities for communion and conviviality. The double-height large gathering space can serve equally as a site for a modern-day barn raising and a theater performance. The small gathering space may host a kids camp or a reading group. The old boiler room and coal bin, now exposed to the sky, will ultimately be occupied by a café, providing a casual gathering space for a range of communities from modern-day high schoolers without place to rest after school to gallery visitors debriefing after an energizing opening.



re: Brandon High School

Project Timeline

The renovation of the High School will take place over several years as funding, permits and partnerships develop. The majority of work on the building will be performed by volunteers, where and when appropriate, under the leadership of ReBHS members with decades of construction experience. This approach to the project will not only help reduce the cost of the project, it will also serve as a model for the kinds of user-empowered projects our organization exists to promote. Volunteers will gain in knowledge of building and confidence to act in the built environment as they help to get ReBHS into its permanent home.

Phase I: Pre-Planning

Complete: 2024

Phase I includes a full scope of planning activities for organization development, project funding and technical services.

Funding scope includes identifying funding opportunities, tax credits, public/private partnerships. Technical services scope includes additional environmental assessments to identify any remaining hazards (Phase I&II assessments have been completed), legal council for ACT 250 and DRB navigation as well as architectural, engineering and historic preservation services as required.

Phase II: Core & Shell

Begin: Spring 2025

The historic building is in sound structural condition but will require considerable effort to arrest ongoing deterioration. This phase of the project will focus on the preservation of the historic facade and repair of the exterior shell, new roof, restored windows and doors, new roof structure over the boiler room and coal bins, sidewalks and parking.

Once hazards have been remediated from the interior, the focus of the interior core work will be on creating a clean, structurally sound and safe environment to begin the fit out of the interior spaces. This includes strengthening/repair of structural elements that have been compromised through age and water damage such as flooring, joists, beams and columns. Upgrading services such as water/sewer, electrical and fire safety. Improving the grounds through landscaping and accessibility to the buildings for ADA compliance are also key to improving our relationship with our neighbors and the town.

Phase III: Base Program Areas

Begin: Summer 2025

The key objective for Phase III is for ReBHS is to have a home in the form of office and meeting space that can then serve to focus and energize its efforts. The Main Level of the building is designated as office and meeting space and fellows housing. The completion of this space will allow us to organize more effectively and begin to carry out our core program work.

Phase IV: Partner Housing

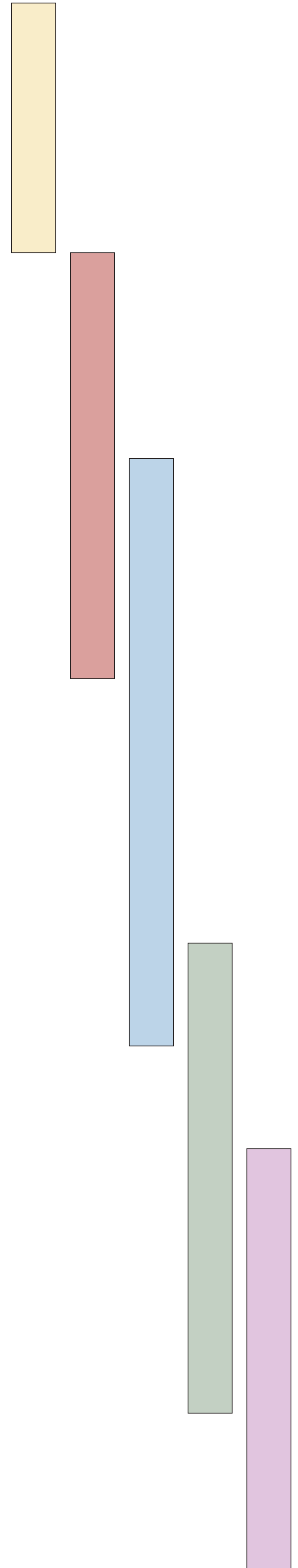
Timing TBD

Once ReBHS has a home, work will begin on organizing the development of much needed residential housing on the 2nd level of the building. This 5000 square foot space is currently envisioned as a creative co-living space designed to meet the emerging needs of a new housing paradigm. Co-living is a successful housing model that offers more affordable and flexible living spaces.

Phase V: Permanent Shops and Community Space

Timing TBD

The basement levels of the high school have been one of key obstacles in the revitalization of the building due to the limited appeal and viability for these levels to be utilized for residential use. These levels comprise almost 50% of the square footage of the building. ReBHS' vision for this space is for them to become beehives of creative activity and social interaction that know no bounds. The space is designed to flex with the needs of individuals and groups. A workshop to learn how to make a door one afternoon can segue into a theater performance by evening or a town-wide community event hosting hundreds. And the unique cafe in the old boiler rooms serves as the furtive social networking/incubator where casual conversation can lead to the next great idea.





re: Brandon High School

Funding & Partners

ReBHS is actively seeking ideas for the funding and execution of the High School Renovation, and is eager to establish partnerships with individuals and organizations who also see the enormous value in restoring this historic structure as a home for our programs. At present we see the project advancing with funds from local, state, & federal government, with grants from private organizations, and with our own savings, generated through donations, membership fees and program revenue. We leave the remainder of this sheet blank in anticipation of further ideas and in celebration of the many unknowable courses our organization and our building may yet take.

