



The Post Office Is Now A House

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The Post Office Is Now A House

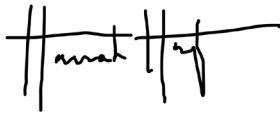
A Thesis Submitted to the Department of Architecture
Harvard University Graduate School of Design, by

Hannah Connolly Hoyt

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Architecture

January 2021

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Hannah Hoyt



Ron Witte,
Thesis Advisor

The Post Office Is Now A House

Hannah Hoyt
Harvard GSD
M.Arch Thesis
December 2020



Abstract

The Post Office Is Now A House positions the United States Postal Service's national network of 35,000 post offices as a site for exploring two progressive policies: the Green New Deal and the Homes for All bill, which call for adapting and upgrading existing buildings and constructing 9.5 million social housing units, respectively. By integrating social housing and other public programs, such as day cares or credit unions, alongside updated postal services, the post office can continue to play a vital role in local civic life.

Adapting post offices to meet these policy objectives requires a design approach that is at once repeatable, and thus nationally relevant, and highly specific, responsive to community aspirations and site constraints. Referencing the 20th century history of constructing post offices based on standard Federal plans, the project proposes a series of "assemblies," common relationships between old post offices and new housing, which can be adapted for different sites and regions.



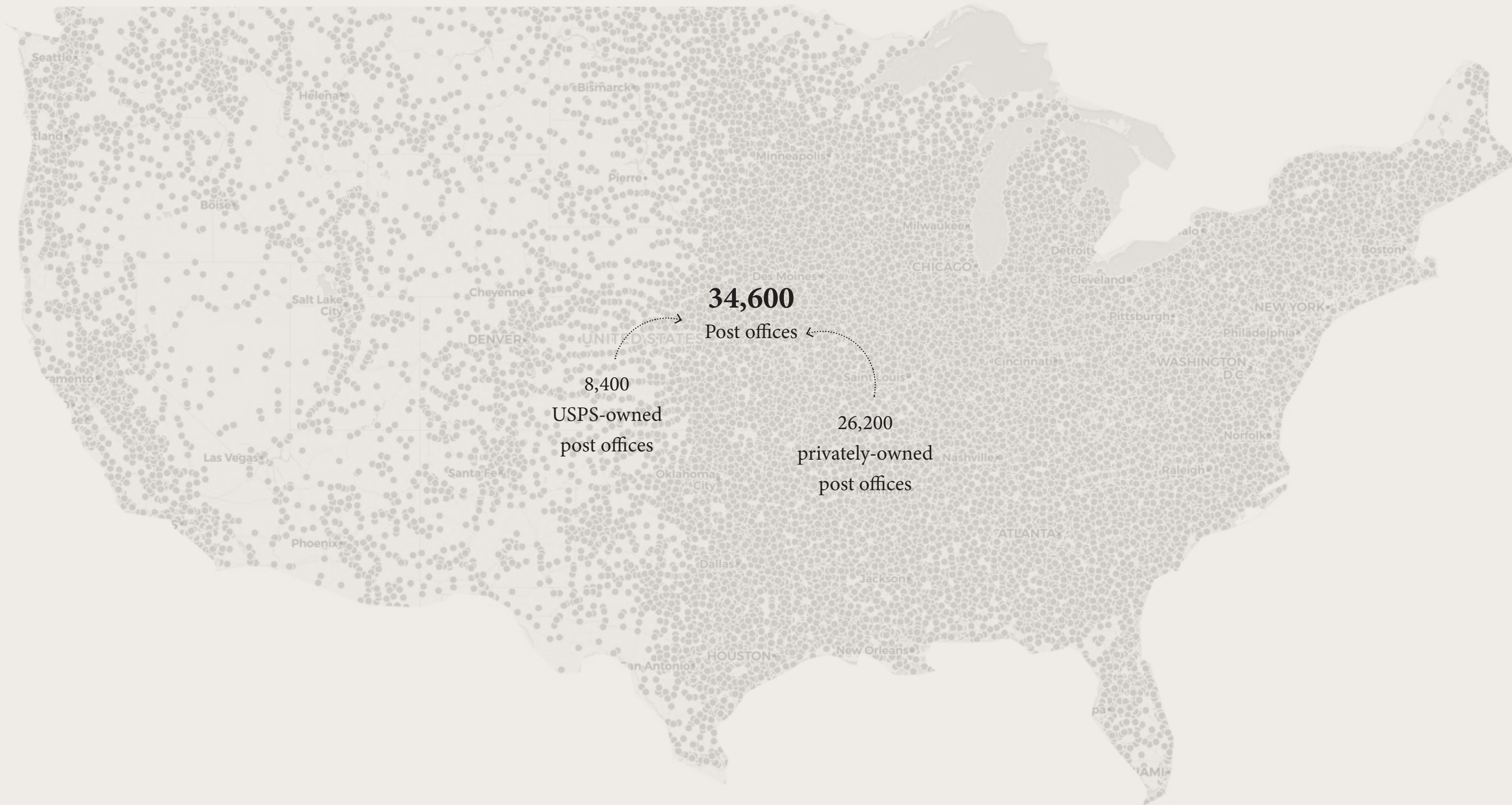


Figure 01. *Post Office Locations Nationwide*

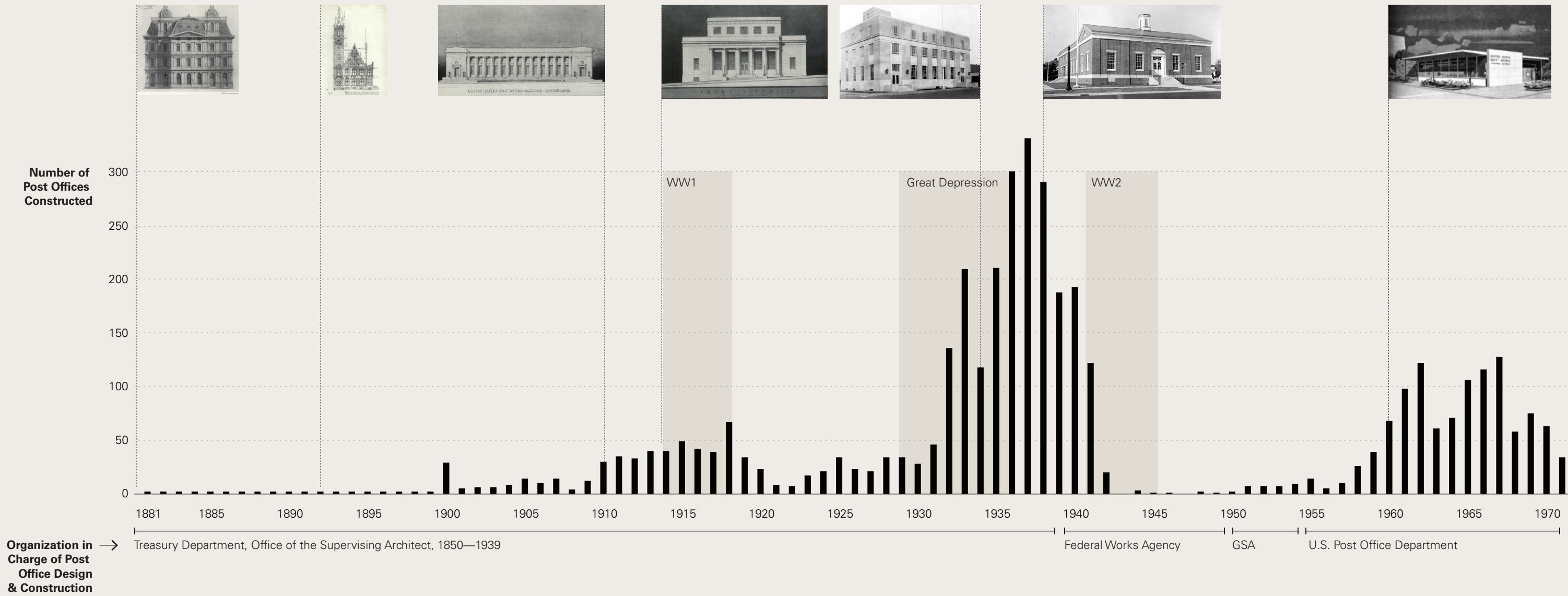
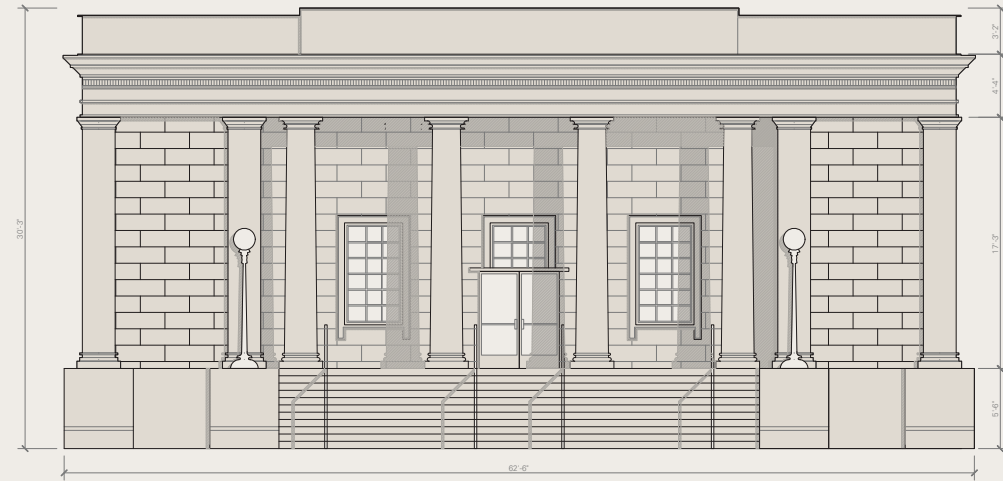


Figure 02. Post Office Construction by Year, 1880-1970



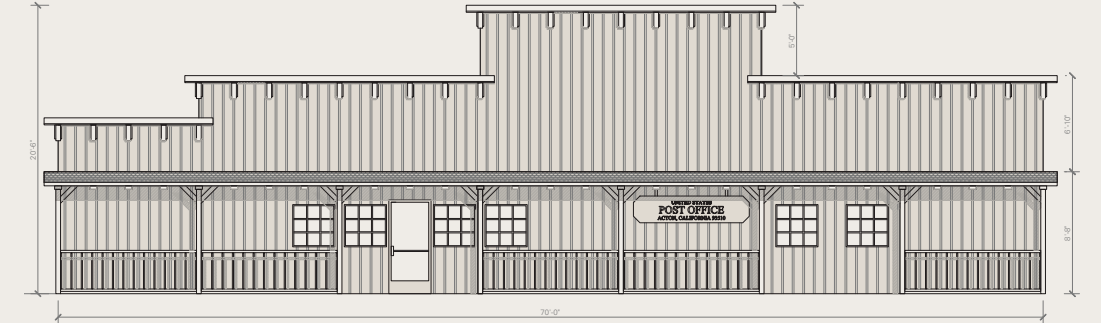
Figure 03. Post Office Rally, Chicago, 2020,
Amazon Warehouse, Robbinsville Township, New Jersey, 2017



Ansonia, CT



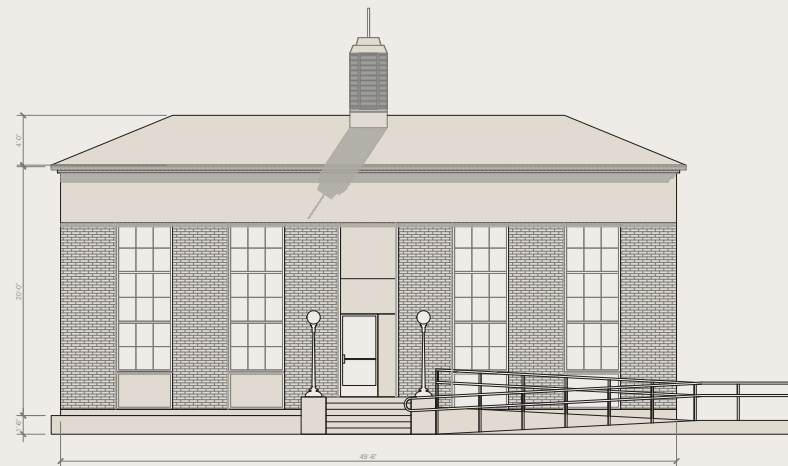
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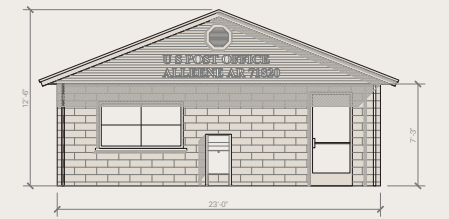
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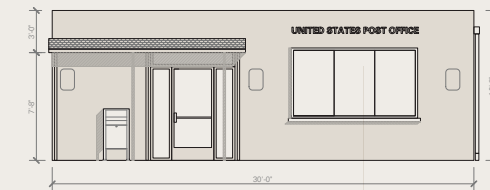
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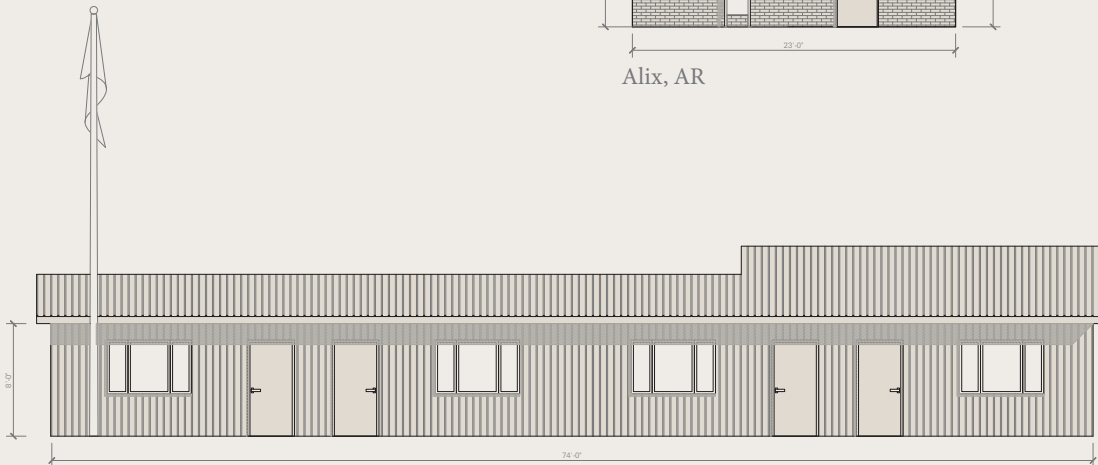
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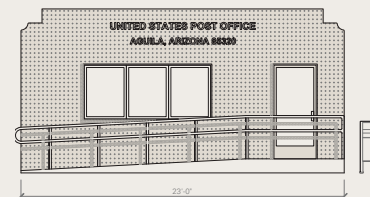
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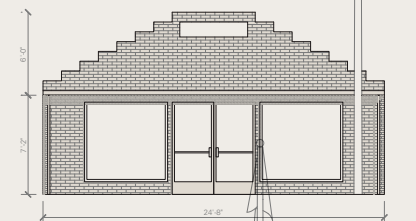
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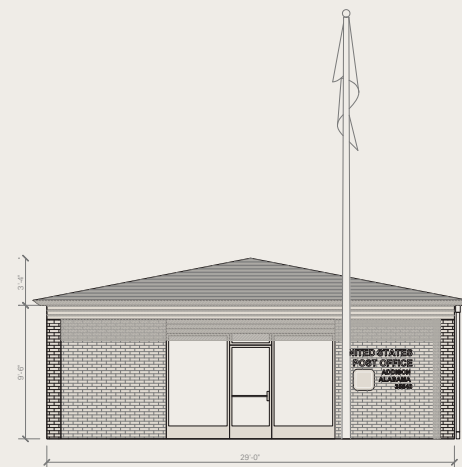
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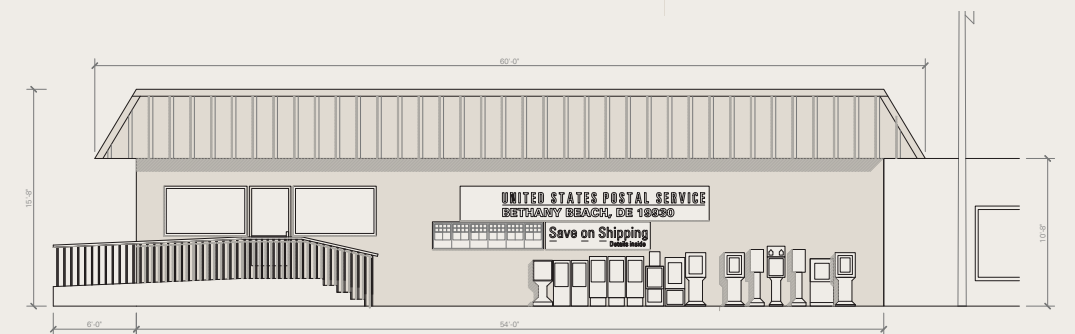
Aguila, AZ



Alford, FL



Addison, AL



Bethany Beach, DE

Figure 04. Post Office Elevations

H. RES. 109

Recognizing the duty of the Federal Government to create a Green New Deal.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FEBRUARY 7, 2019

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ (for herself, Mr. HASTINGS, Ms. TLAGA, Mrs. CAROLYN B. MALONEY of New York, Mr. VARGAS, Mr. LYNCH, Ms. VELÁZQUEZ, Mr. BLUMENAUER, Mr. BOYLE of Pennsylvania, Mr. CASTRO of Texas, Mr. YOUNG, Ms. JAYAPAL, Mr. KHANNA, Mr. TED LIEKE, Mr. PRESSLEY, Mr. WELCH, Mr. ENGEL, Mr. NEGUSE, Mr. MCGOVERN, Mr. POCAN, Mr. TAKANO, Ms. NORTHAM, Mr. CONNOLLY, Mr. LOWENTHAL, Ms. MATSUI, Mr. THOMAS, Mr. LEVIN of California, Ms. PINGREE, Mr. QUINN, Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN, Mr. GARCÍA of Illinois, Mr. COHEN, Ms. HAALAND, Ms. MENG, Mr. CARBAJAL, Ms. MUCARSEL-POWELL, Mr. MOULTON, Mr. GRIFFITH, Ms. SABLAN, Ms. LEE of California, Ms. BONAMICI, Ms. MALONEY of New York, Ms. SCHAKOWSKY, Ms. GOSAR, Mr. LARSON of Michigan, Ms. MCCOLLUM, Mr. DESAULNIER, Mr. DEFAZIO, Ms. ESHOO, Mrs. TRAHAN, Mr. GONCAREZ, Ms. WATERS) submitted the following resolution:

the Committee on Energy and Commerce, and the Committees on Science, Space, and Technology, Education and Infrastructure, Agriculture, Natural Resources, Financial Services, the Judiciary, Ways and Means, and Reform, for a period to be subsequently determined in each case for consideration of such provision as may be reported by the committee concerned.

8

(D) building or upgrading to energy-efficient, distributed, and “smart” power grids, and ensuring affordable access to electricity;

(E) upgrading all existing buildings in the United States and building new buildings to achieve maximum energy efficiency, water efficiency, safety, affordability, comfort, and durability, including through electrification;

(F) spurring massive growth in clean manufacturing in the United States and removing pollution and greenhouse gas emissions from manufacturing and industry as much as is technologically feasible, including by expanding renewable energy manufacturing and investing in existing manufacturing and industry;

(G) working collaboratively with farmers and ranchers in the United States to remove pollution and greenhouse gas emissions from the agricultural sector as much as is technologically feasible, including—

- (i) by supporting family farming;
- (ii) by investing in sustainable farming and land use practices that increase soil health; and

Figure 05. Green New Deal Congressional Resolution

H. R. 5244

To establish new units of public housing and private market affordable housing, to provide grants to combat gentrification and neighborhood destabilization, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

NOVEMBER 21, 2019

Ms. OMAR introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Financial Services

A BILL

To establish new units of public housing and private market affordable housing, to provide grants to combat gentrification and neighborhood destabilization, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

4 This Act may be cited as the “Homes for All Act
5 of 2019”.

6 SEC. 2. CONGRESSIONAL FINDINGS.

7 The Congress finds that—

1 (1) Every State and large metropolitan area in
2 the United States is facing a shortage of affordable
3 housing options for people who are very or ex-
4 tremely-low income.

5 (2) More than 18 million households—1 in 6—
6 are paying more than half of their income on hous-
7 ing and are considered severely cost-burdened.

8 (3) The current affordable housing shortage
9 facing the United States cannot be addressed solely
10 by the private market, necessitating significant Fed-
11 eral intervention and investment.

12 (4) The Federal Government must adopt a pol-
13 icy that guarantees the right to housing for all indi-
14 viduals, strengthen neighborhoods, and address the
15 failures of the free market in housing by building
16 new public housing and investing in private afford-
17 able housing.

18 SEC. 3. CONSTRUCTION OF NEW PUBLIC HOUSING.

19 (a) PURPOSE.—It is the purpose of this section to
20 fund the construction of 9,500,000 publicly owned dwell-
21 ing units over 10 years.

22 (b) REPEAL OF FAIRCLOTH AMENDMENT.—Section
23 9(g) of the United States Housing Act of 1937 (42 U.S.C.
24 1437g(g)) is amended by striking paragraph (3) (relating
25 to limitation on new construction).

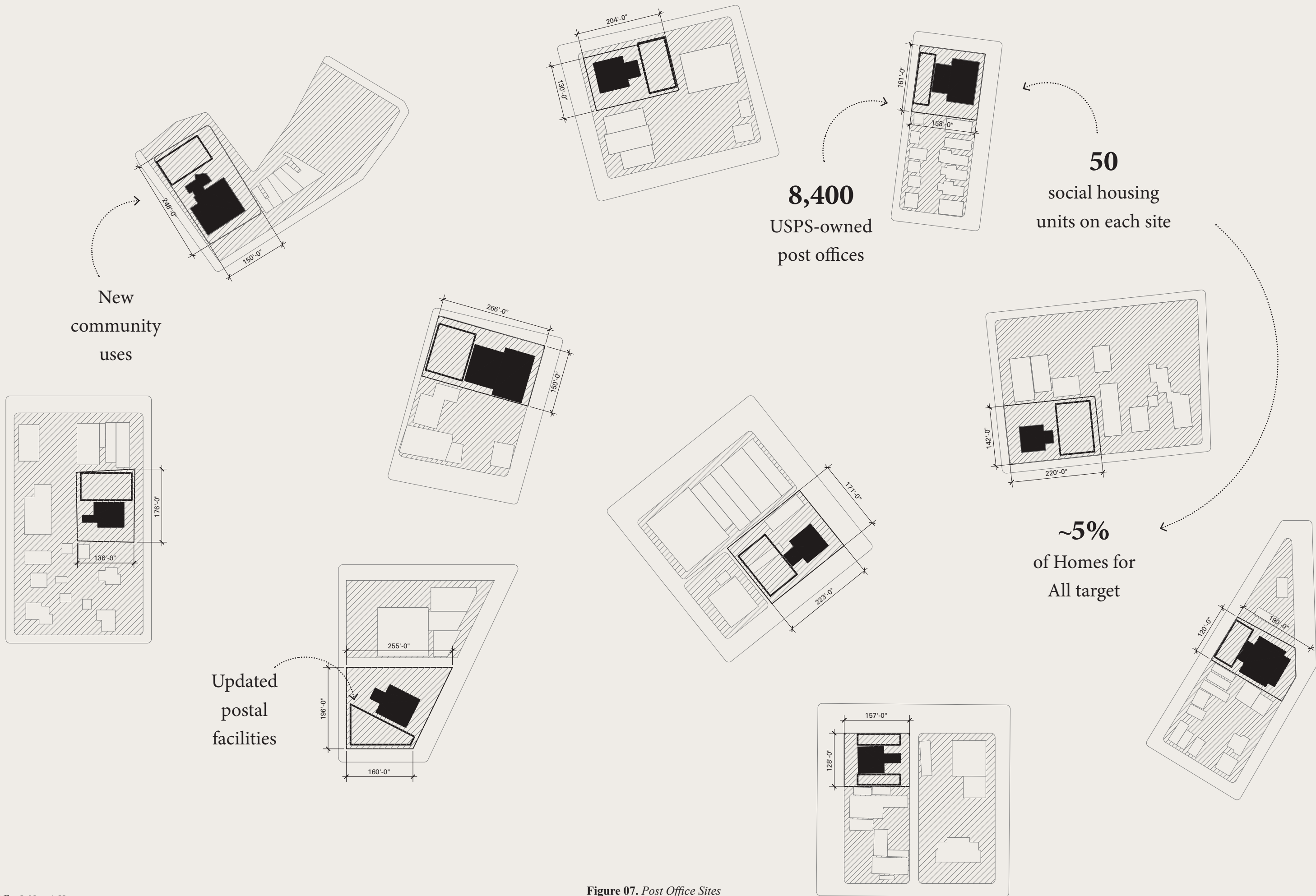


Figure 07. Post Office Sites

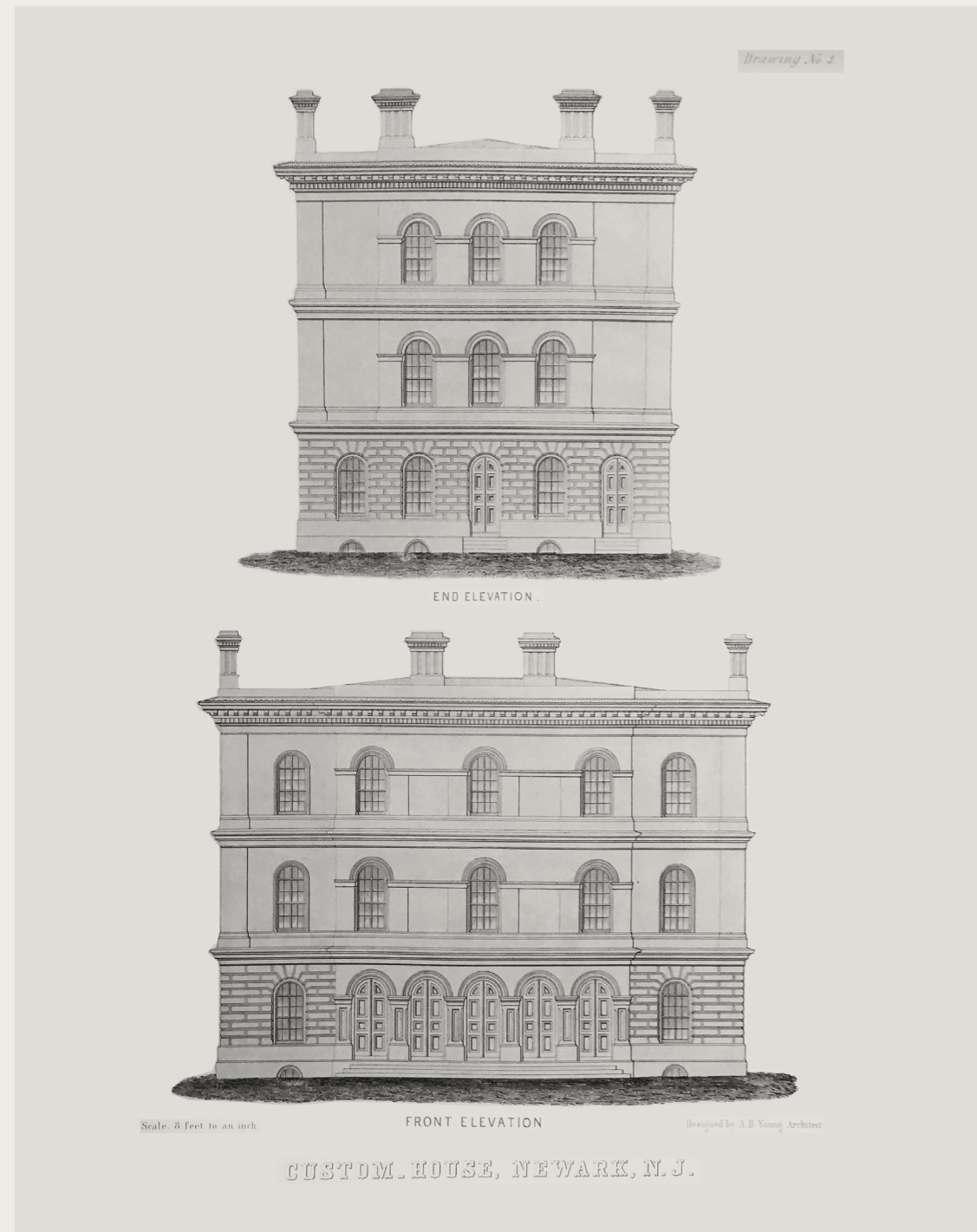
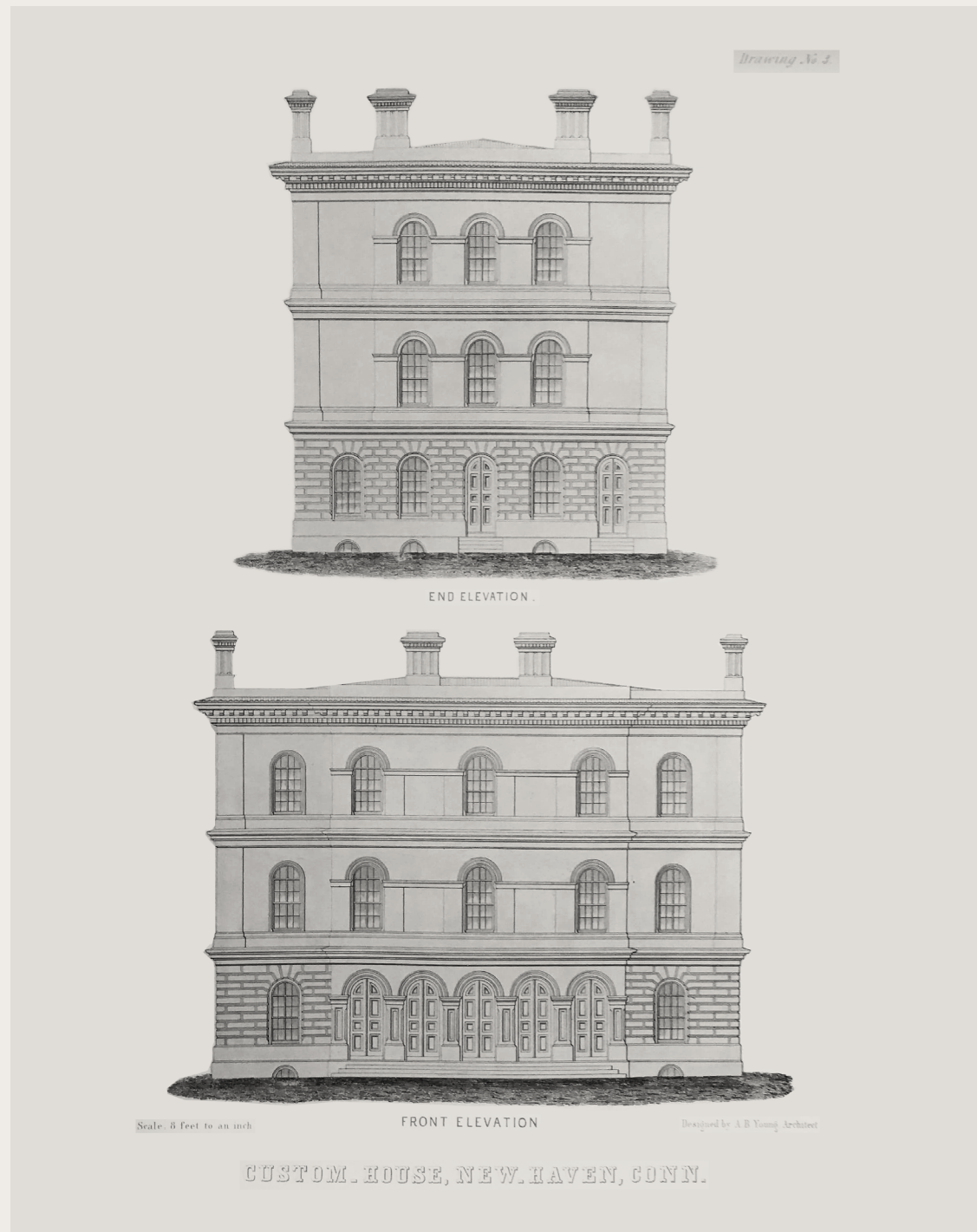
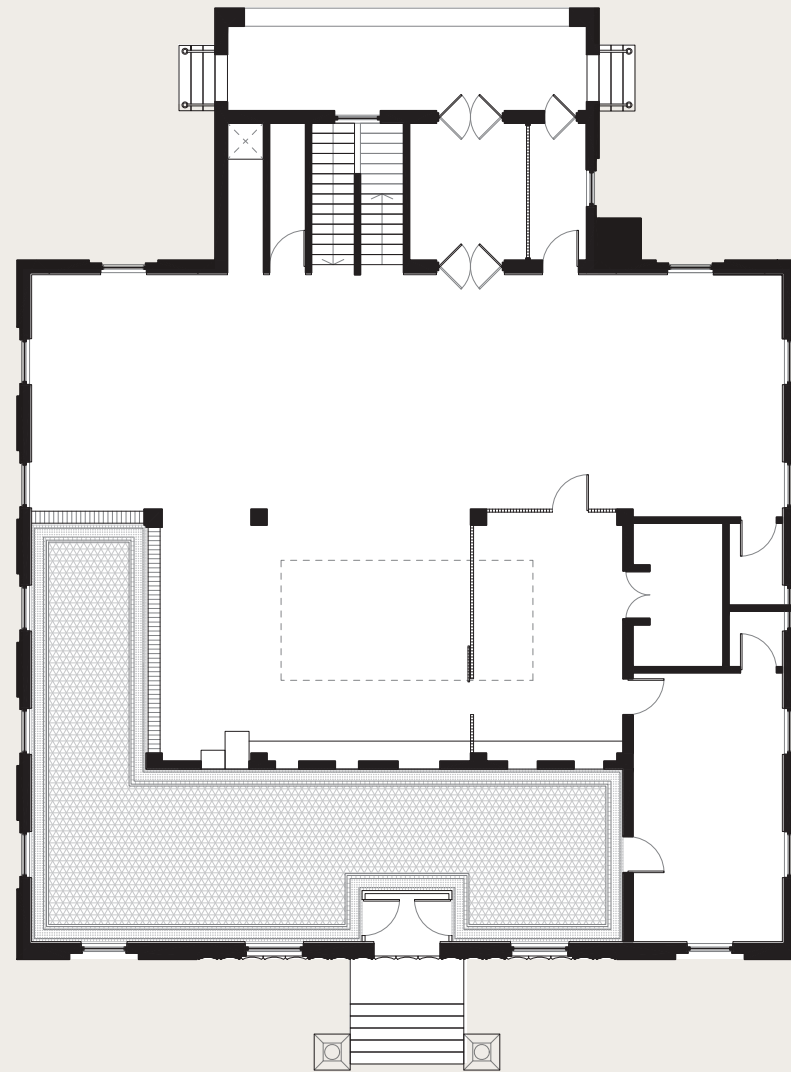
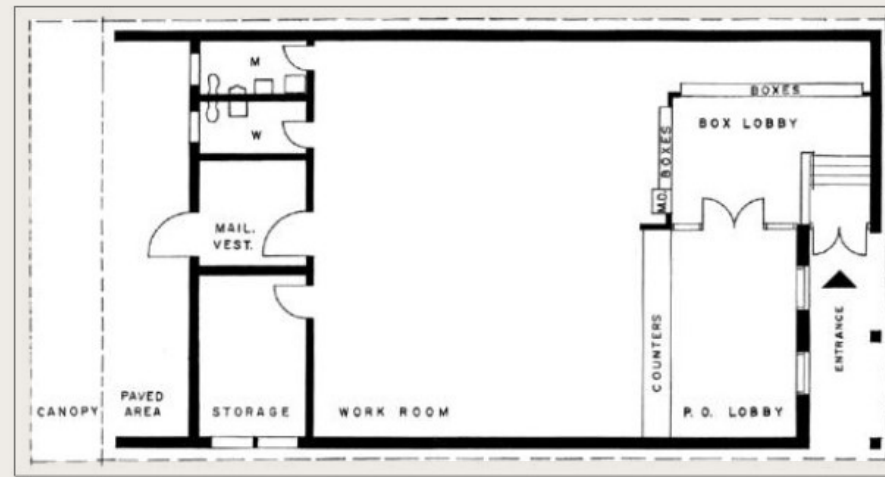
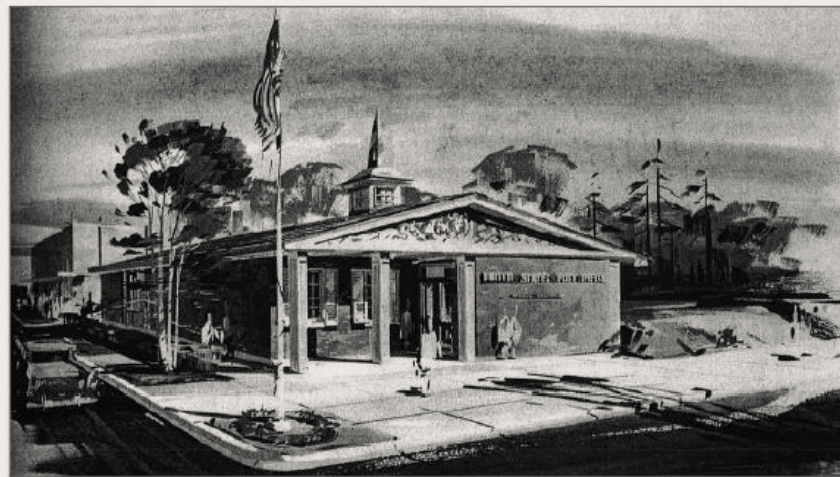
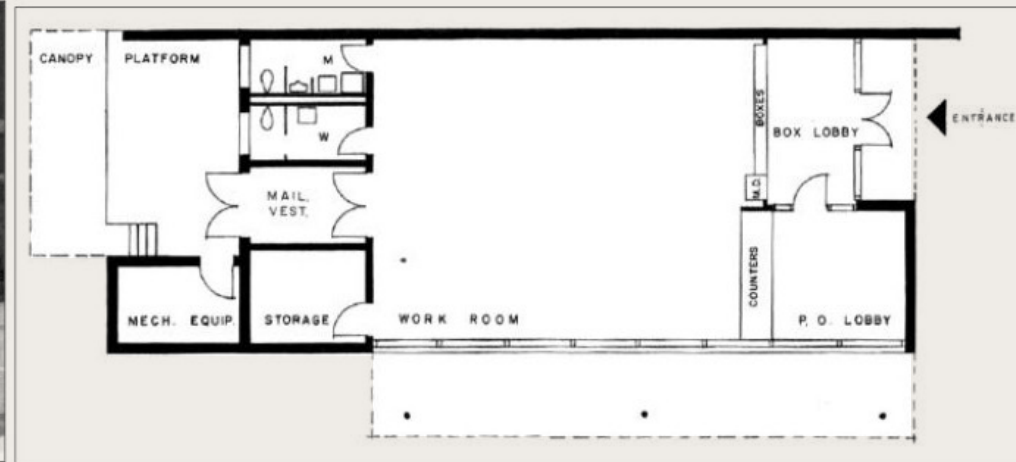
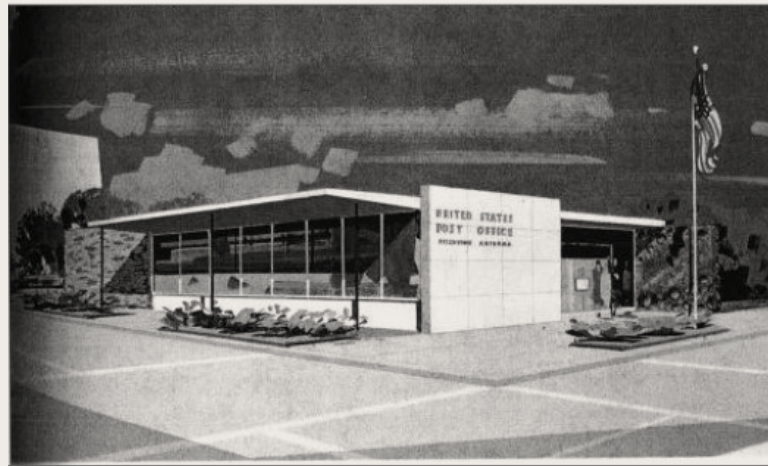


Figure 08. Post Office Elevations, 1855, Office of the Supervising Architect, United States Department of the Treasury



1/16" : 1'
0' 5' 10' 20'

Figure 09. *New Deal Standard Post Office Plan, 1936,
Public Buildings Branch, United States Department of the Treasury*

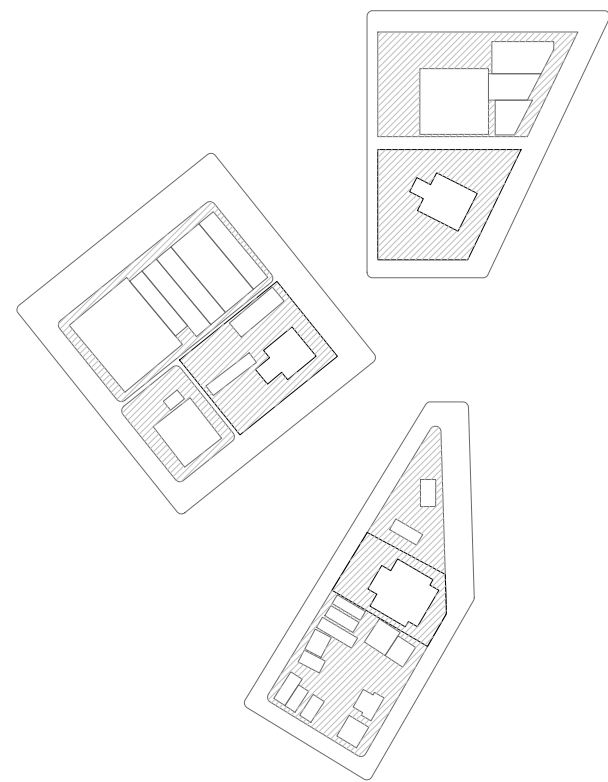


WANTED

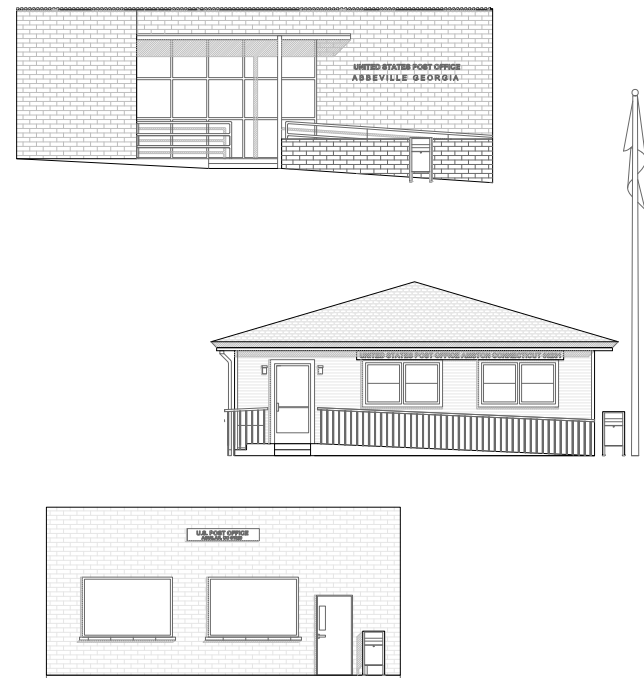
**MUST
BE ABLE TO
FOLLOW
THESE SIMPLE
(REALLY!)
PROCEDURES**

**1000 BUILDERS
BY THE U. S. POST OFFICE**

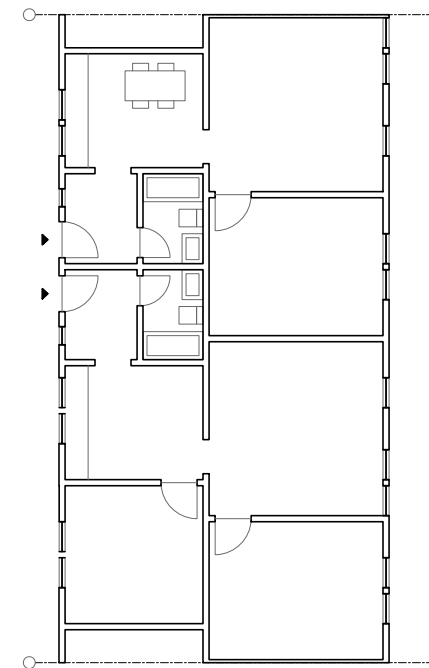
Figure 10. Building Designs Standard Manual, 1959,
Post Office Department, Builder Ads, 1967



Site



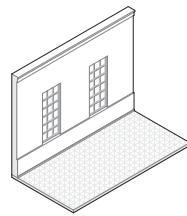
Adapted Post Office



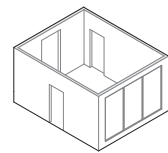
Housing

- After school program
- Daycare
- Job training
- Credit union
- Senior center
- Clinic
- Reading room
- Meeting space

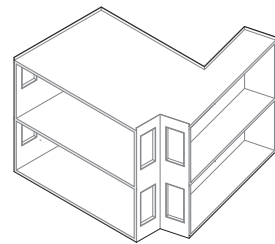
Community Program



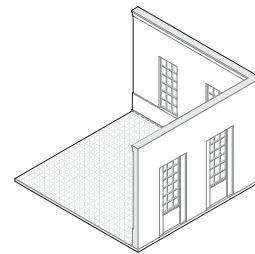
Assembly 01. *Cut and Fill Wall*



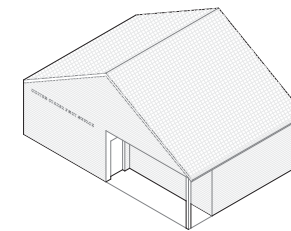
Assembly 02. *Folded Face*



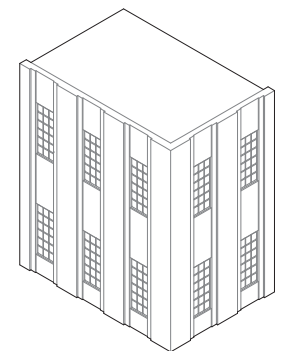
Assembly 03. *Split Stair*



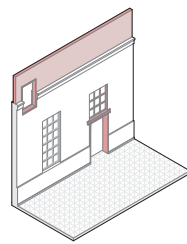
Assembly 04. *Stitching Stair*



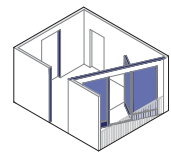
Assembly 05. *Kissing Corner*



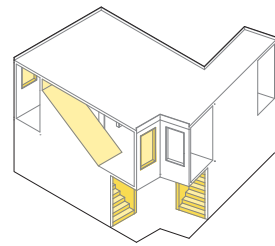
Assembly 06. *Overlap Addition*



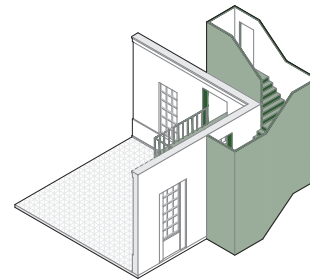
Assembly 01. *Cut and Fill Wall*



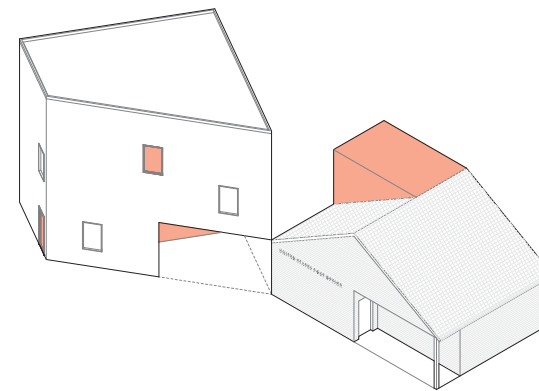
Assembly 02. *Folded Face*



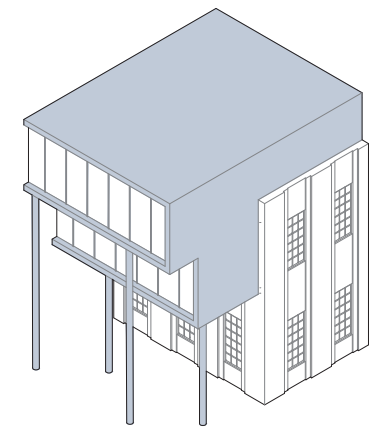
Assembly 03. *Split Stair*



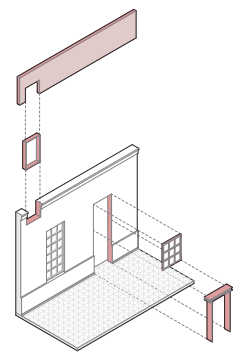
Assembly 04. *Stitching Stair*



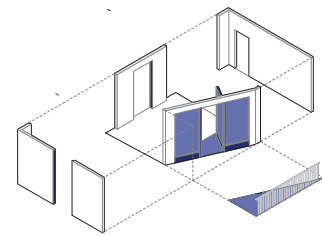
Assembly 05. *Kissing Corner*



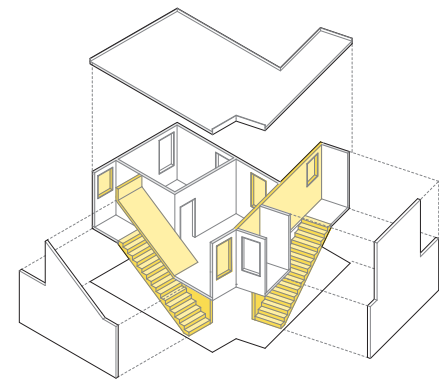
Assembly 06. *Overlap Addition*



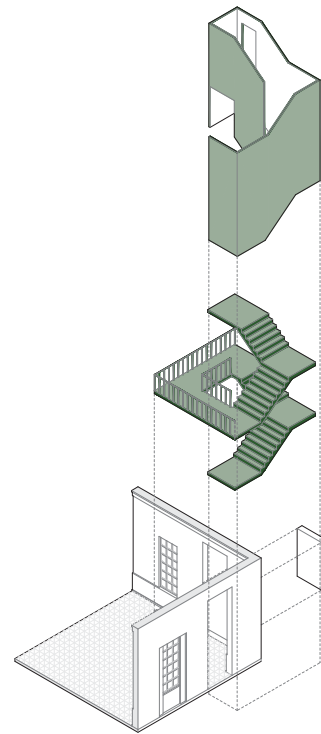
Assembly 01. *Cut and Fill Wall*



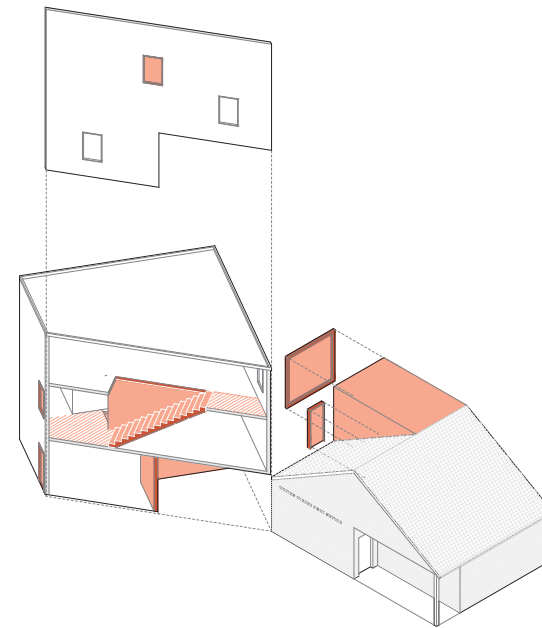
Assembly 02. *Folded Face*



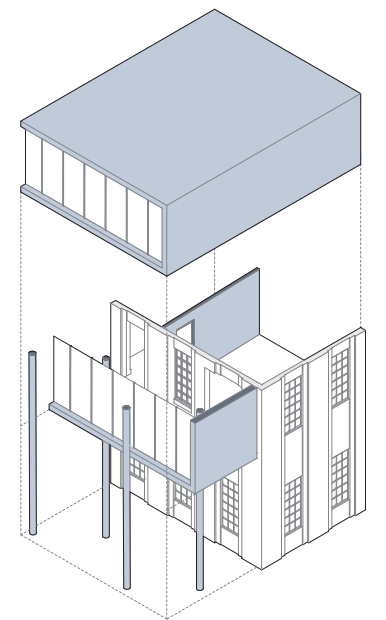
Assembly 03. *Split Stair*



Assembly 04. *Stitching Stair*



Assembly 05. *Kissing Corner*



Assembly 06. *Overlap Addition*



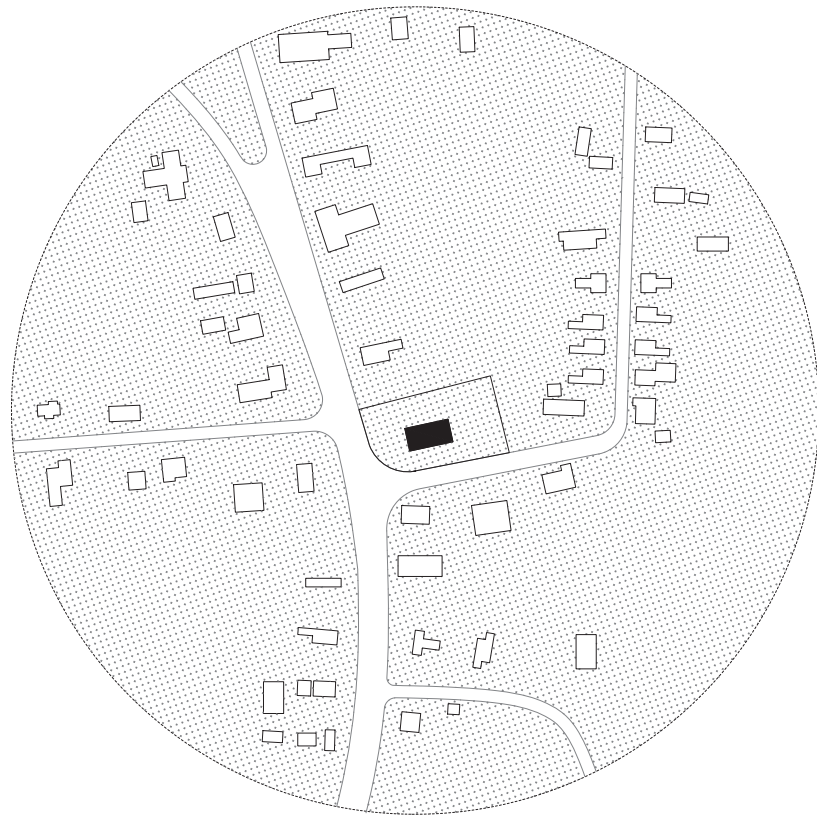
Montague, Massachusetts
"1000 Series," 1969
Branch Post Office



Natick, Massachusetts
New Deal, 1937
Branch Post Office



Cambridge, Massachusetts
New Deal, 1935
Main Post Office

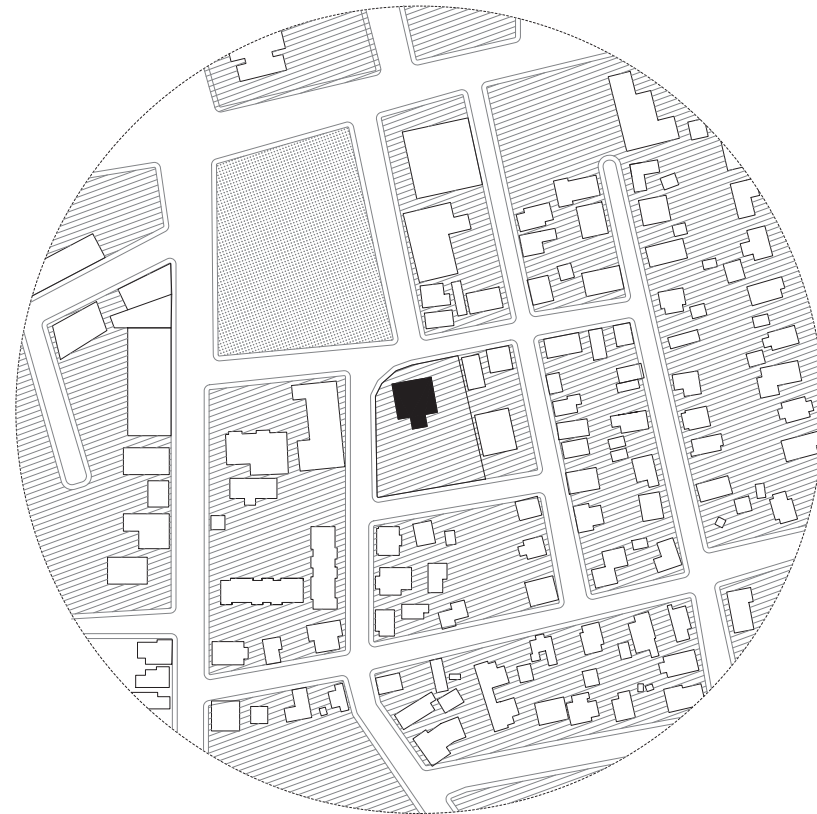


Montague, Massachusetts

Rural

2,000 SF Post Office

26,000 SF Site

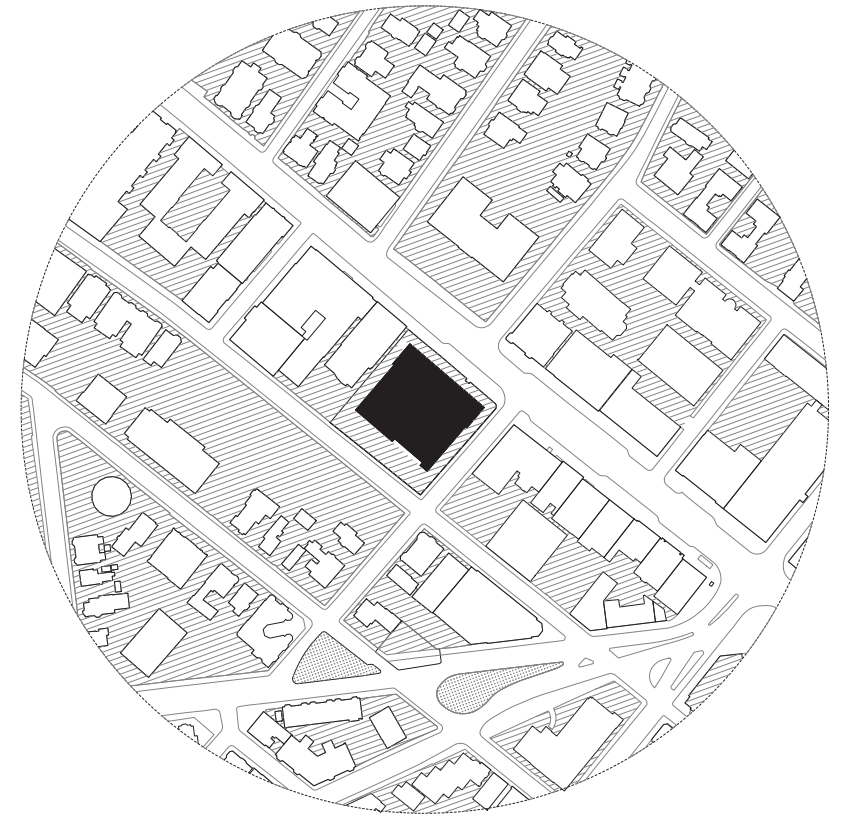


Natick, Massachusetts

Suburban

4,700 SF Post Office

31,500 SF Site



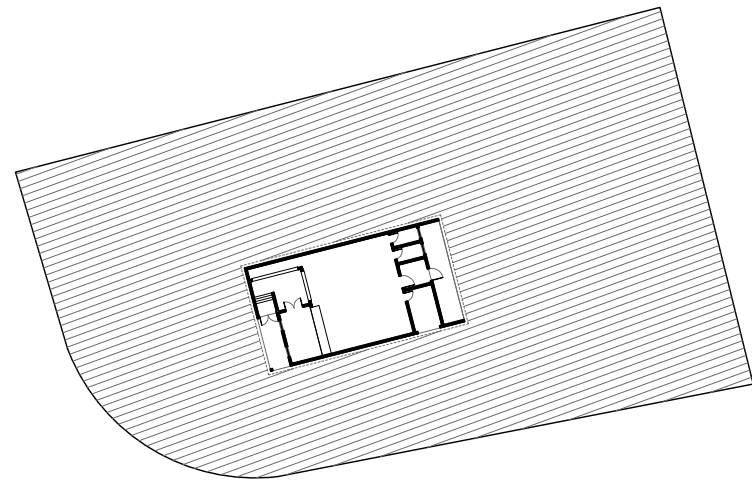
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Urban

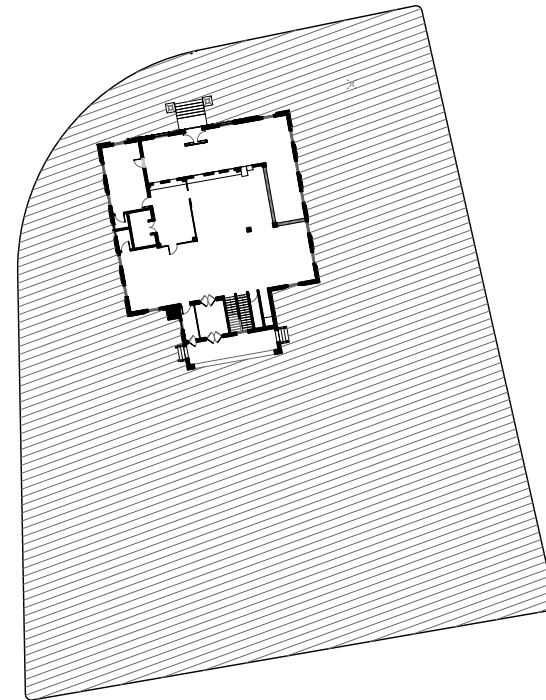
50,000 SF Post Office

37,500 SF Site

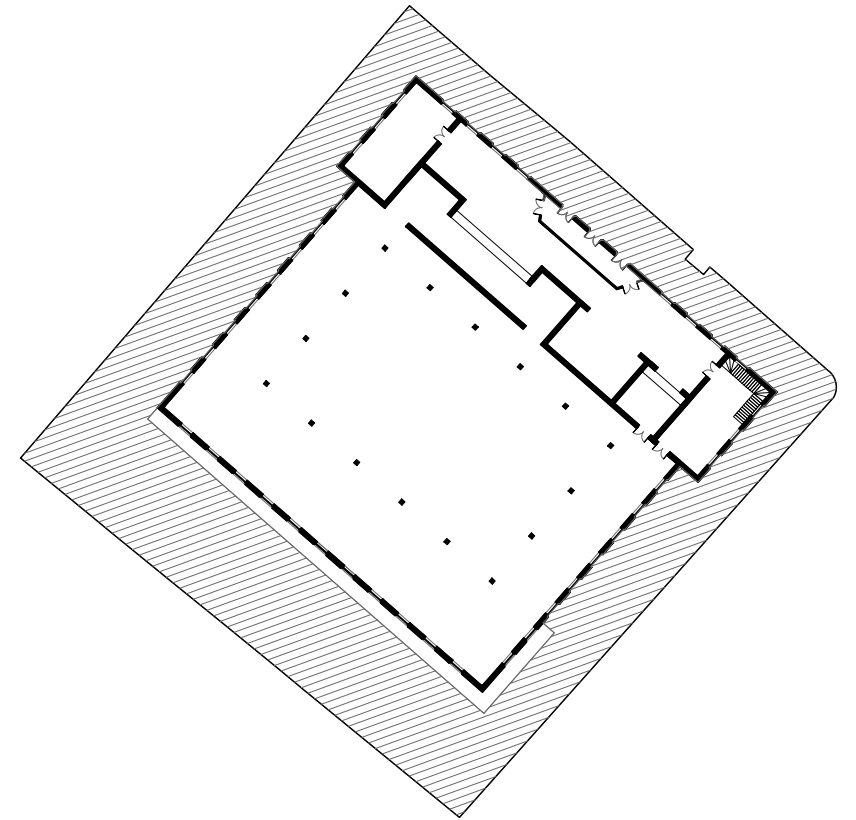
Figure 15. Site Context



Montague, Massachusetts
 Rural
 2,000 SF Post Office
 26,000 SF Site

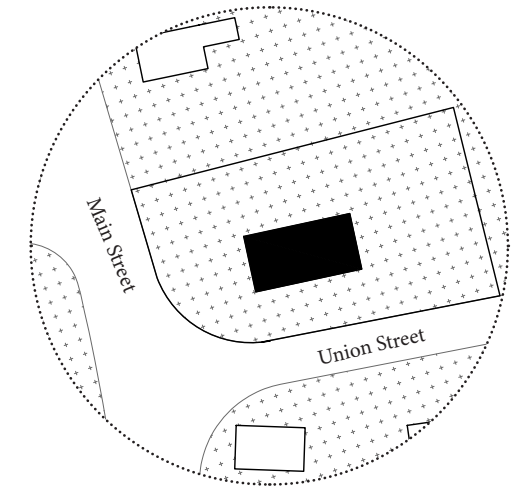


Natick, Massachusetts
 Suburban
 4,700 SF Post Office
 31,500 SF Site



Cambridge, Massachusetts
 Urban
 50,000 SF Post Office
 37,500 SF Site

Figure 15. Site Context



Main Street



Corner of Union & Main



Union Street

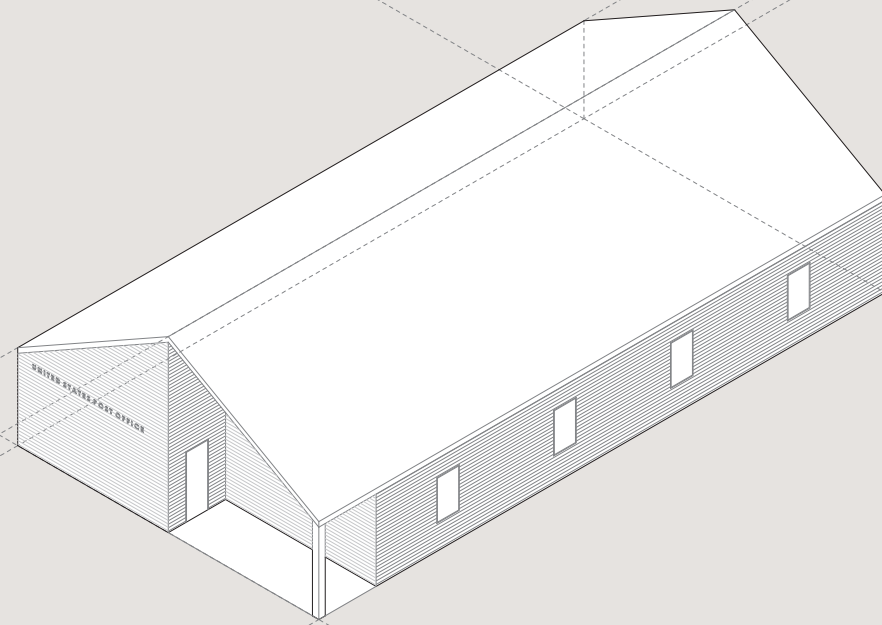
Figure 16. Exterior Views, Montague, Massachusetts



Assembly 05. Kissing Corner
Montague, Massachusetts



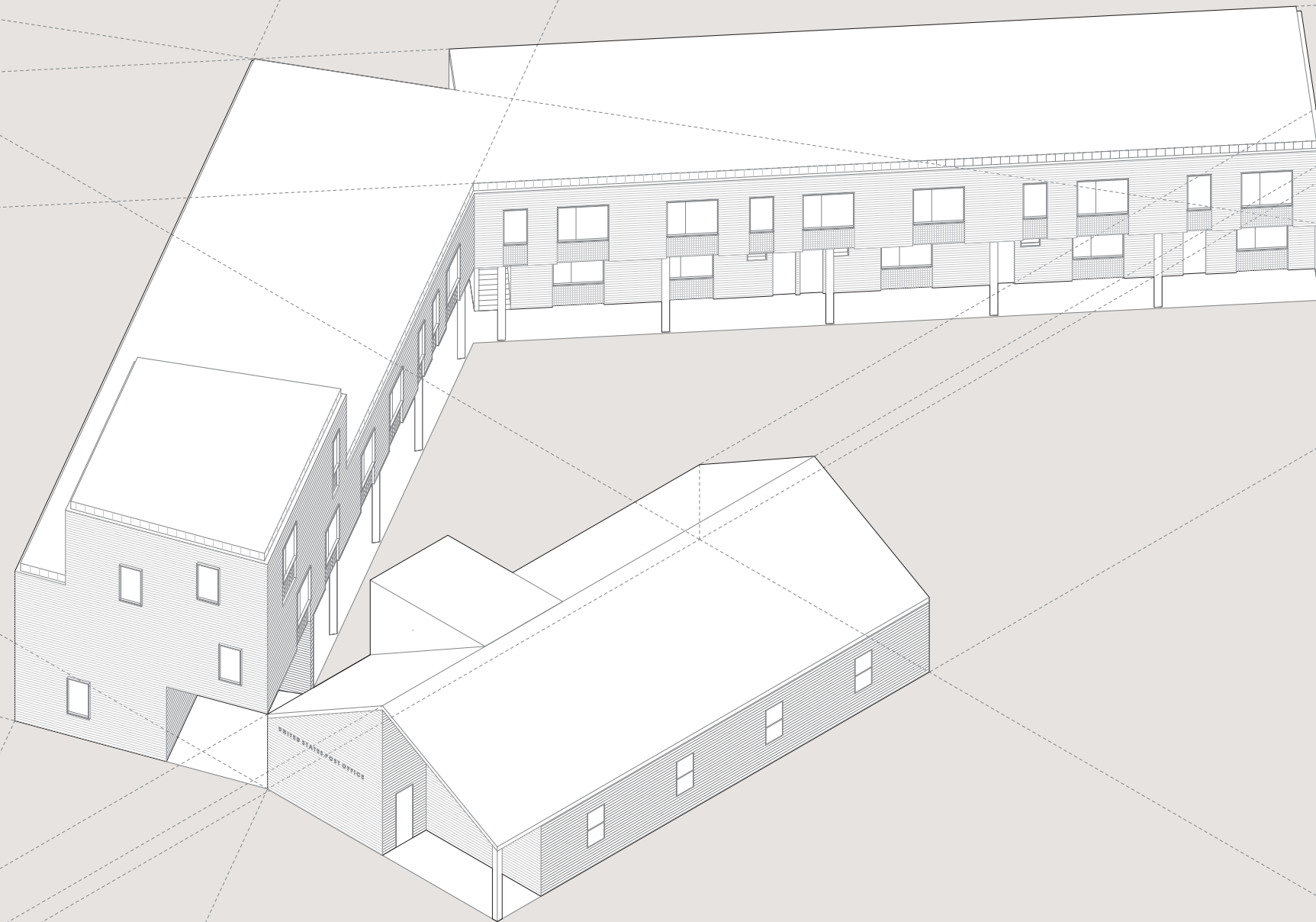
Assembly 03. *Split Stair*
Montague, Massachusetts



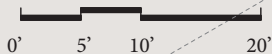
1/16" : 1'
0' 5' 10' 20'

The Post Office Is Now A House

Figure 17. Axonometric,
Montague, Massachusetts



1/16" : 1'

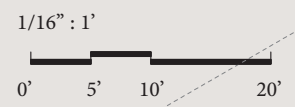
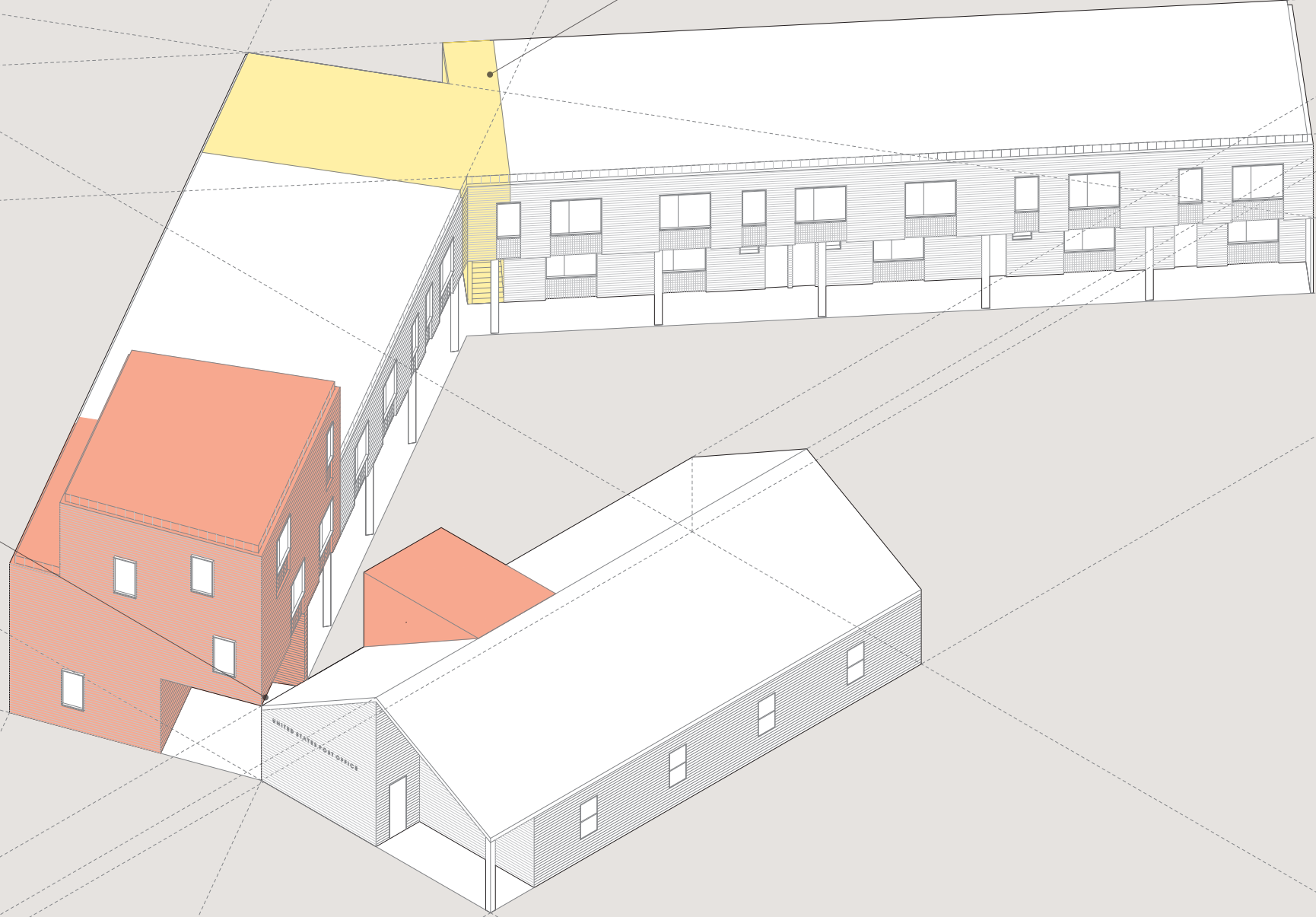


The Post Office Is Now A House

Figure 17. Axonometric,
Montague, Massachusetts

Assembly 03. Split Stair

Assembly 05. Kissing Corner

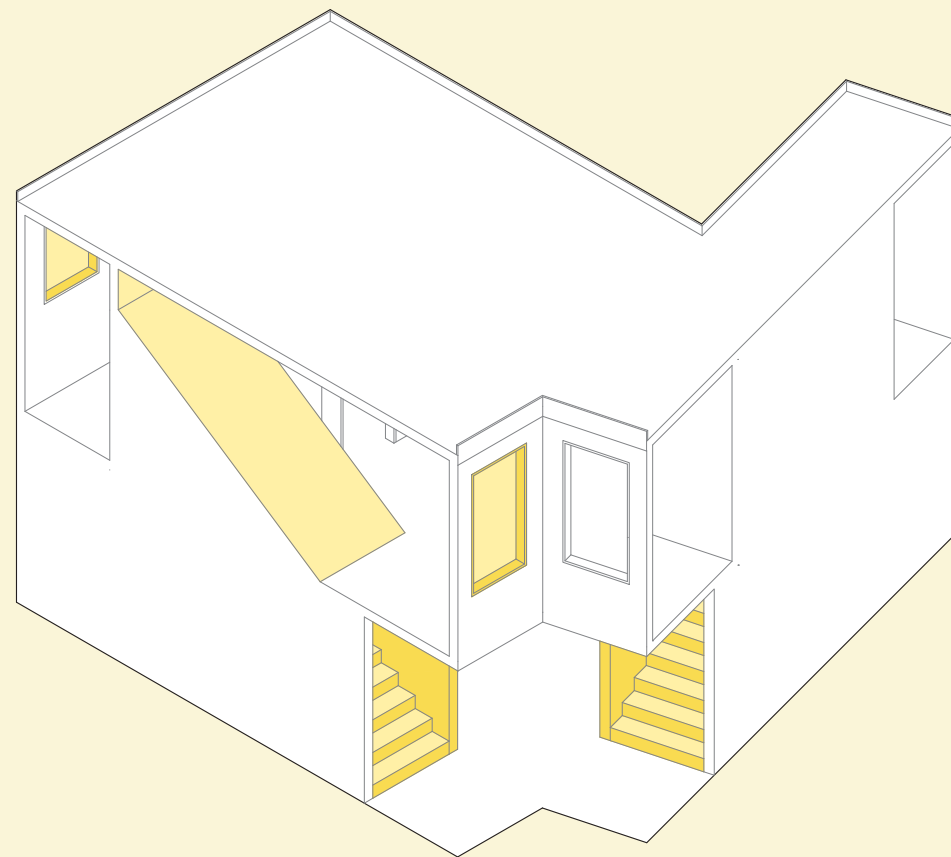


The Post Office Is Now A House

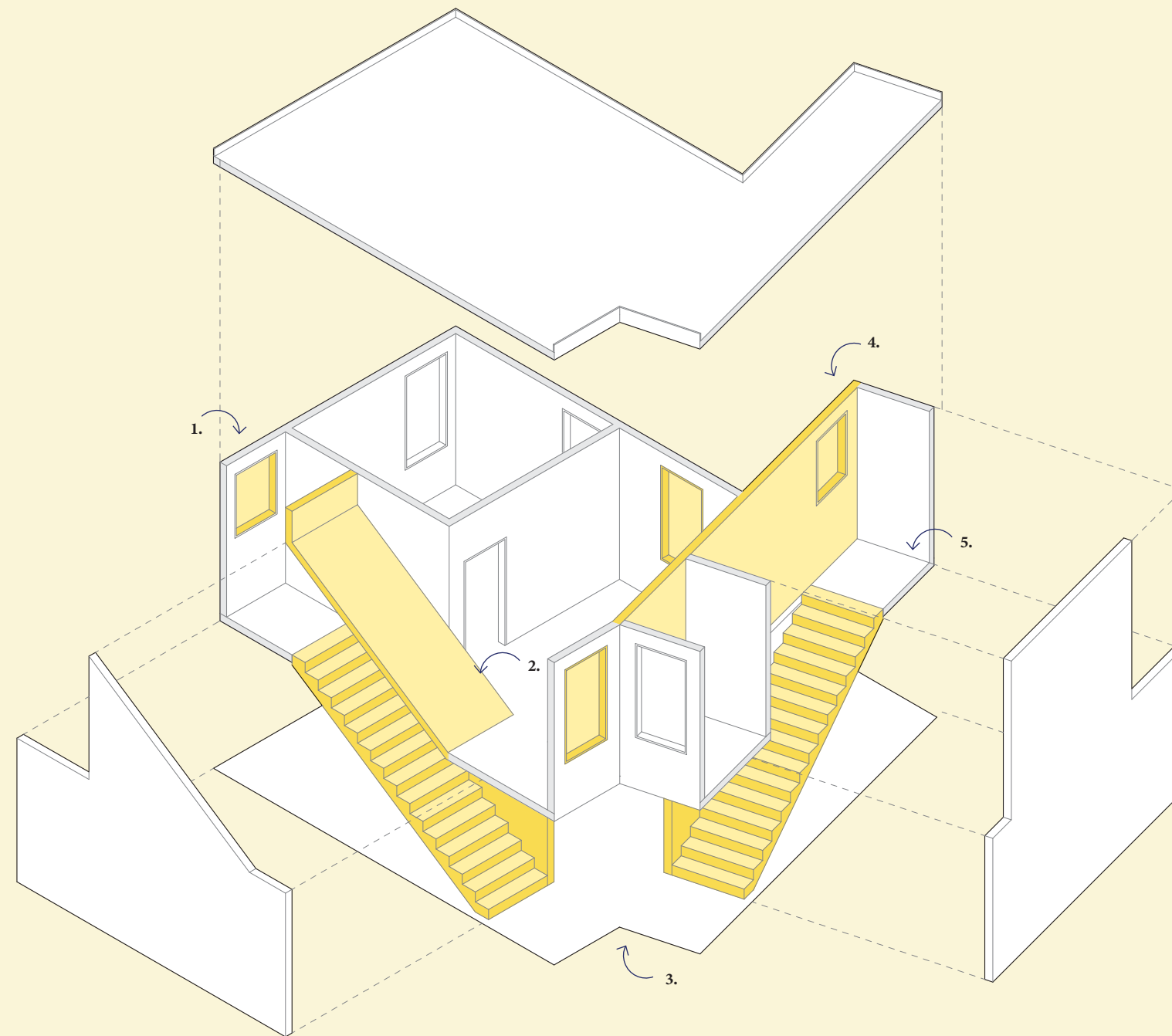
Figure 17. Axonometric, Montague, Massachusetts



Assembly 03. *Split Stair*
Montague, Massachusetts

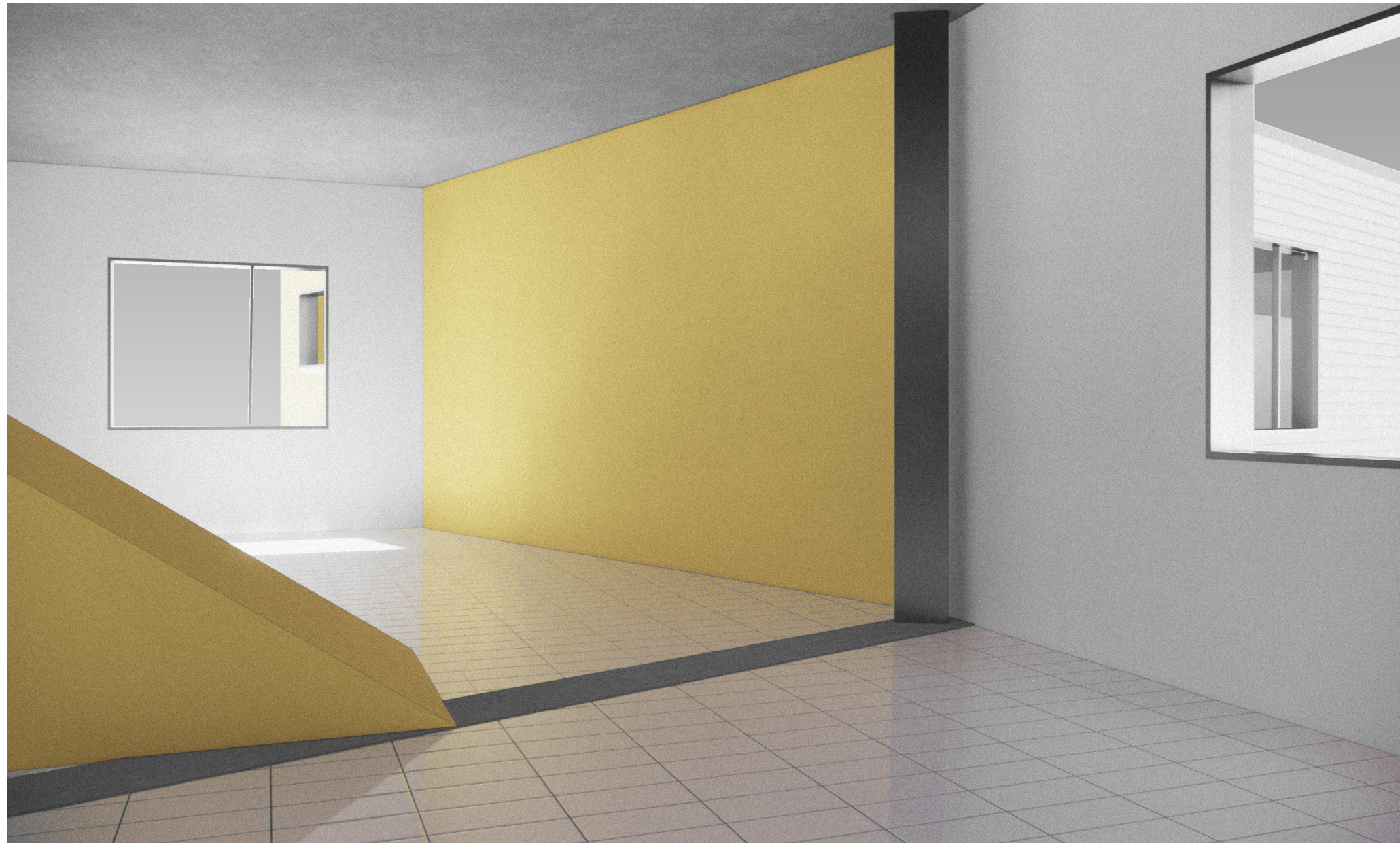


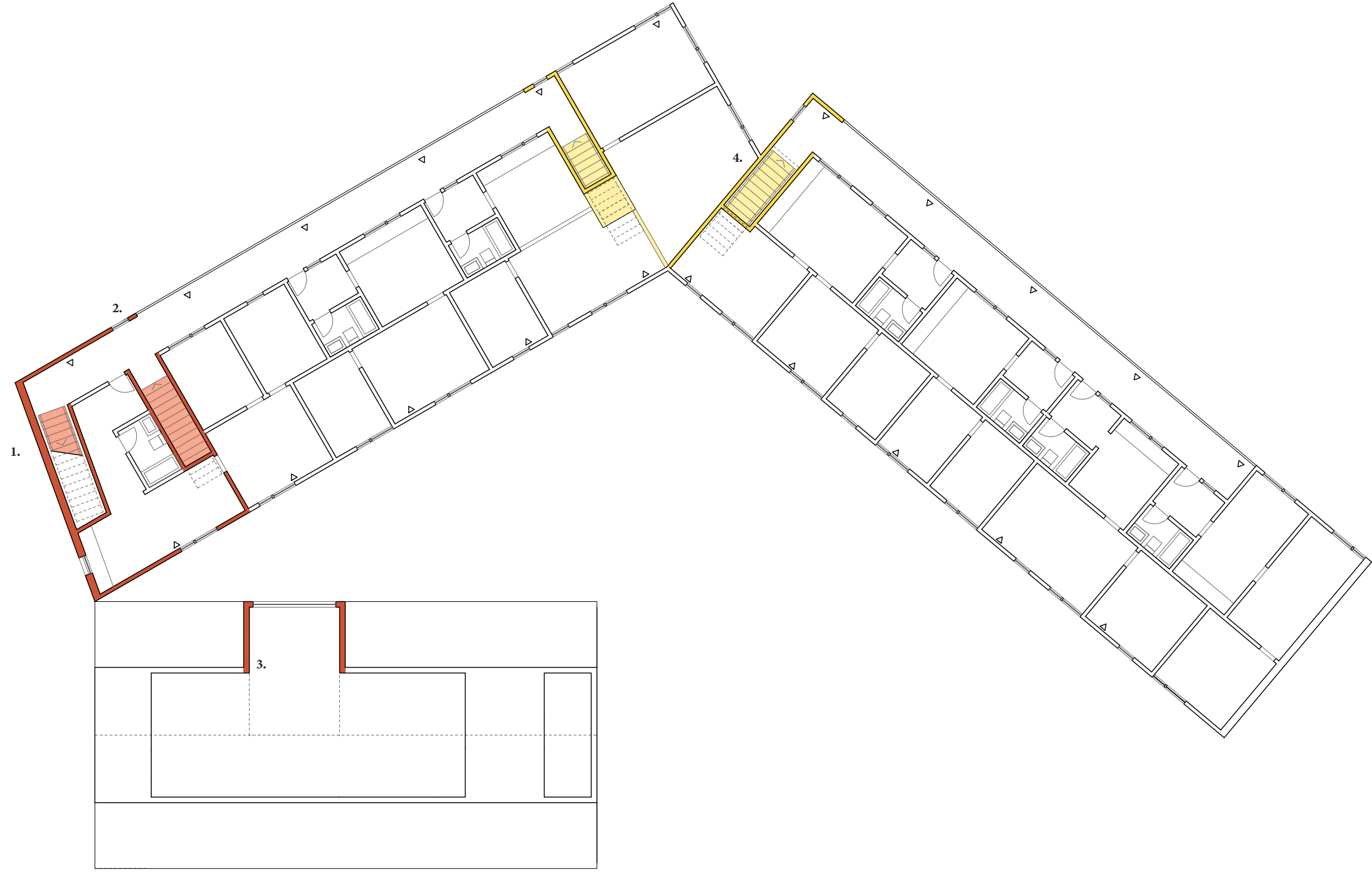
Assembly 03. *Split Stair*
Montague, Massachusetts



- 1. Window framing view at top of stairs
- 2. Split stair passing through unit
- 3. Angle of intersecting volumes, adjusted based on site
- 4. Angled wall indicating split stair
- 5. Landing to corridor

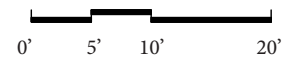
Assembly 03. Split Stair
Montague, Massachusetts





- 1. *Kissing corner stairs to third floor*
- 2. *Kissing corner window framing view from stair*
- 3. *Kissing corner dormer window overlooking housing*
- 4. *Rooms formed by split stair*

1/16" : 1'

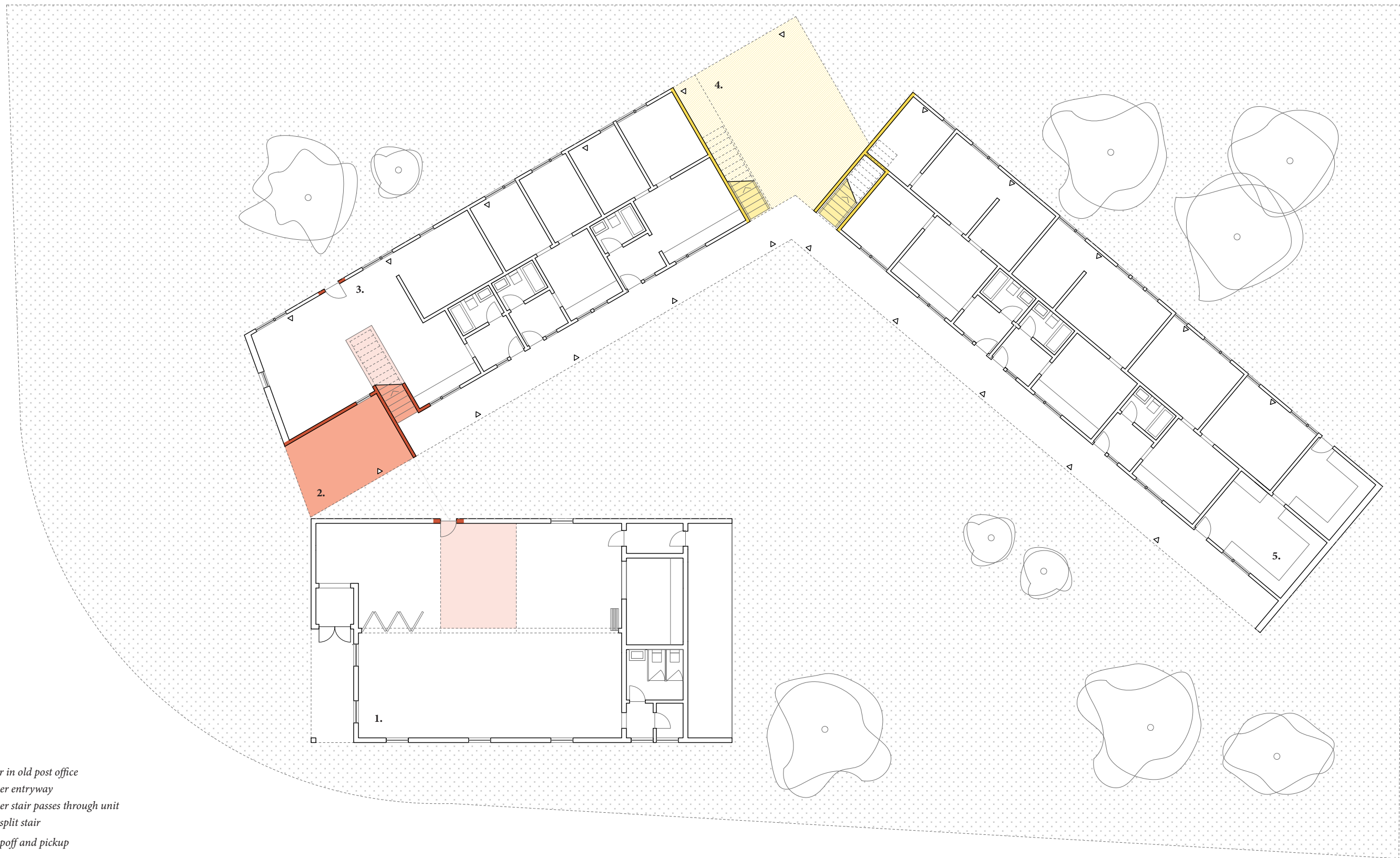


The Post Office Is Now A House

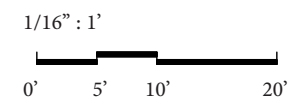
Figure 18. *Second Floor Plan,
Montague, Massachusetts*



Assembly 05. Kissing Corner
Montague, Massachusetts

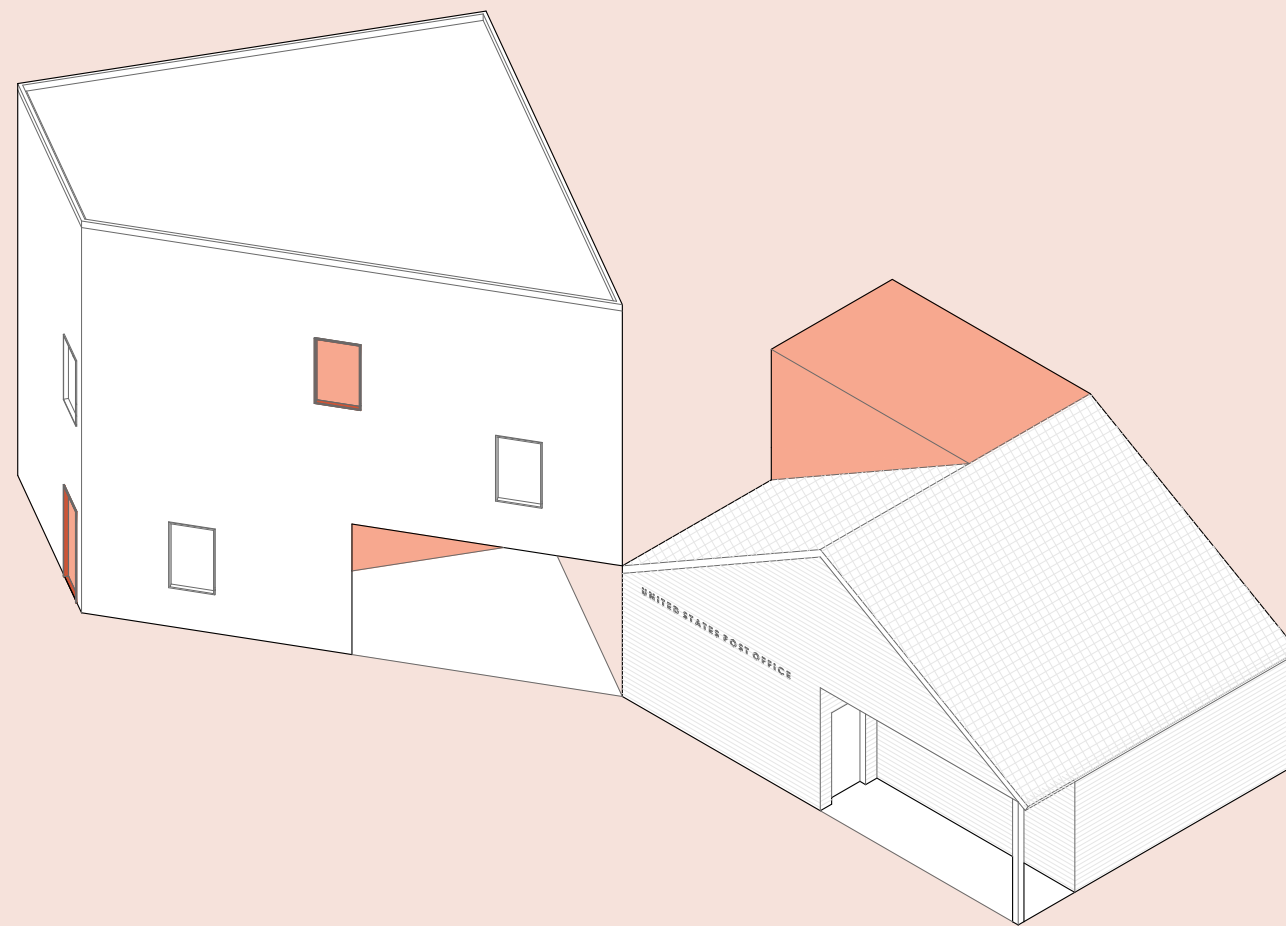


- 1. Senior center in old post office
- 2. Kissing corner entryway
- 3. Kissing corner stair passes through unit
- 4. Patio below split stair
- 5. Package dropoff and pickup

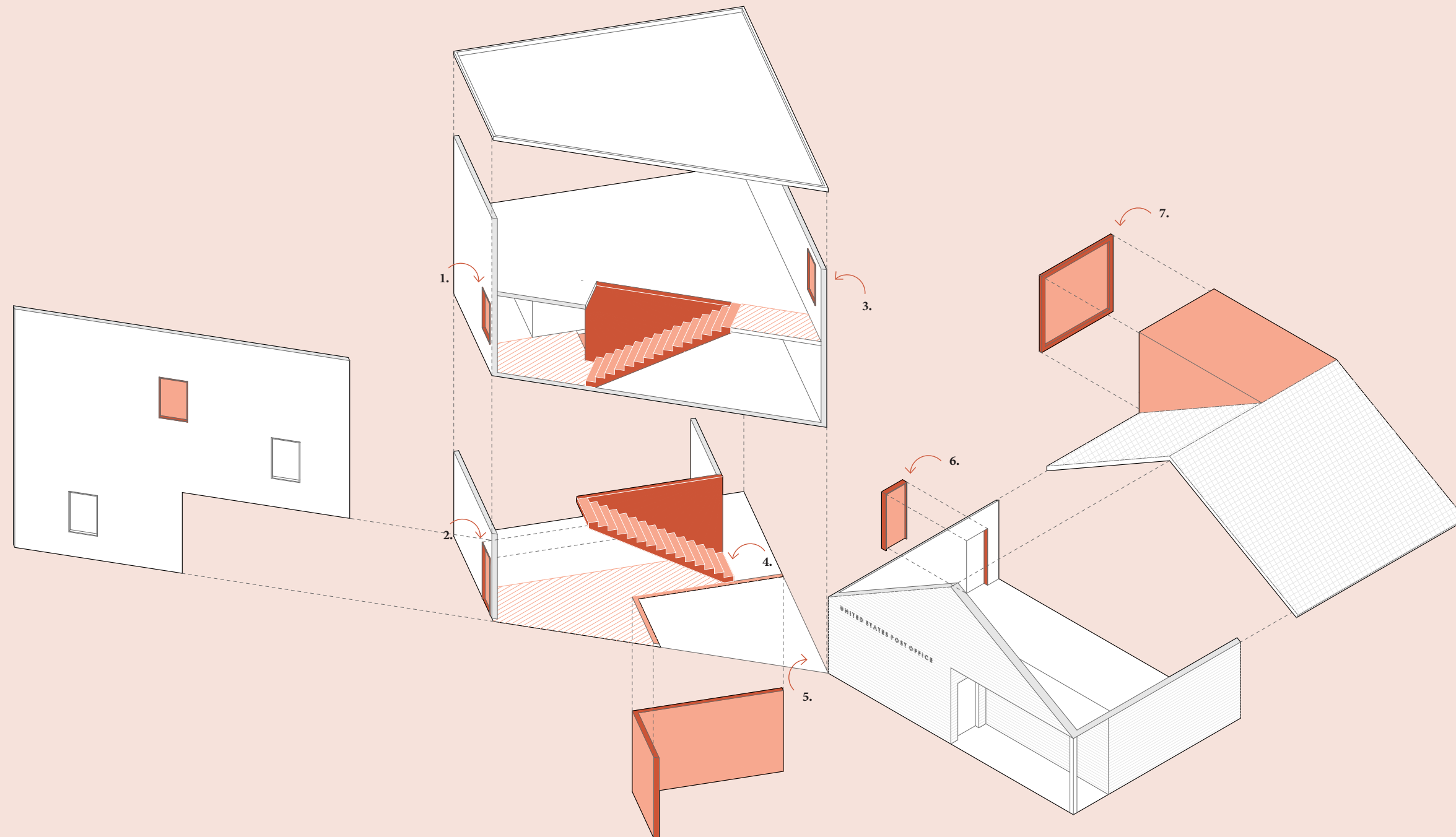


The Post Office Is Now A House

Figure 19. Ground Floor Plan,
Montague, Massachusetts



Assembly 05. Kissing Corner
Montague, Massachusetts



- 1. Window framing view from first floor stair
 - 2. Exterior door from unit
 - 3. Window framing view from second floor stair
 - 4. First floor stair
 - 5. Gateway formed by kissing corner
 - 6. New door in existing post office to access stair
 - 7. New dormer framing housing view
- The Post Office Is Now A House

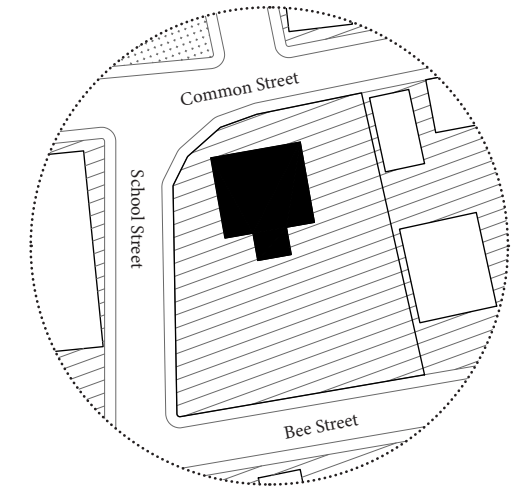
Assembly 05. Kissing Corner
 Montague, Massachusetts



Assembly 05. Kissing Corner
Montague, Massachusetts



Assembly 05. Kissing Corner
Montague, Massachusetts



Common Street

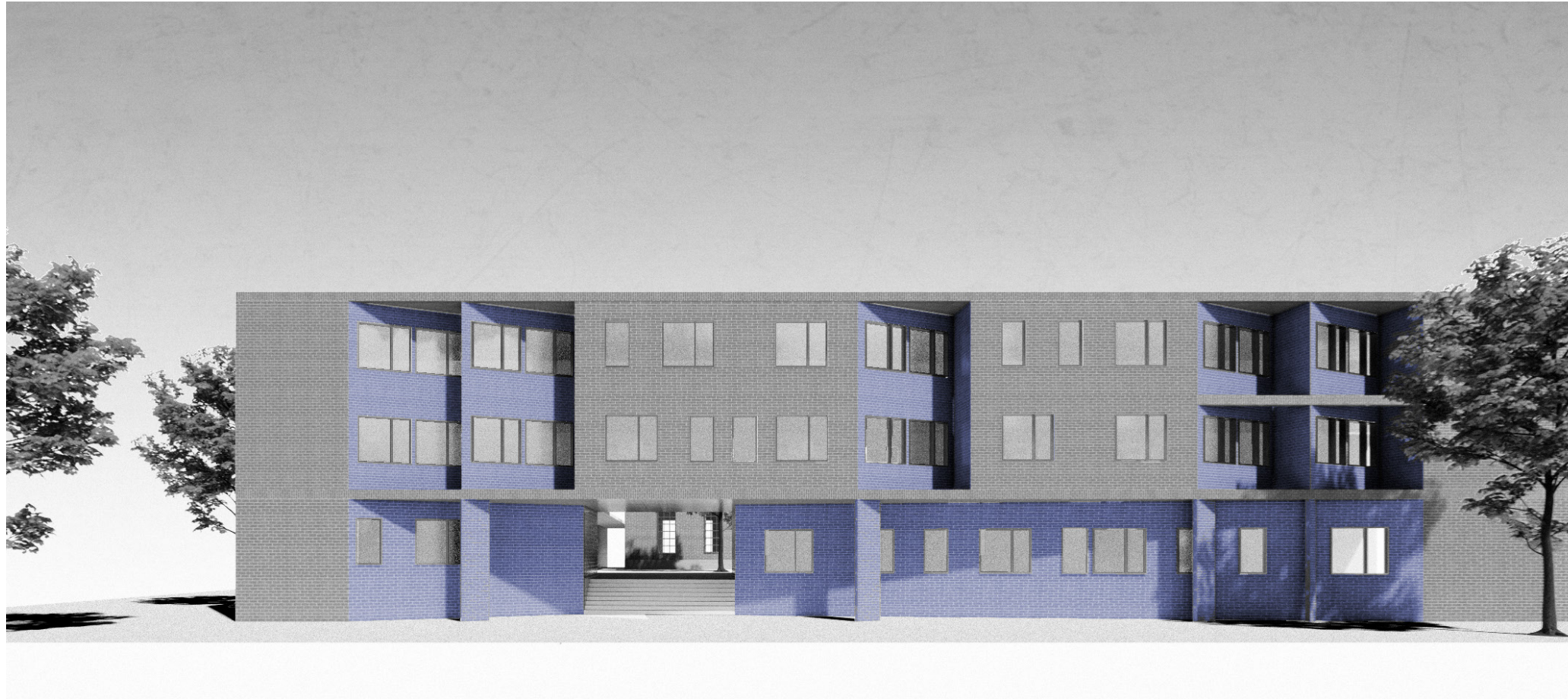


Corner of Common & School

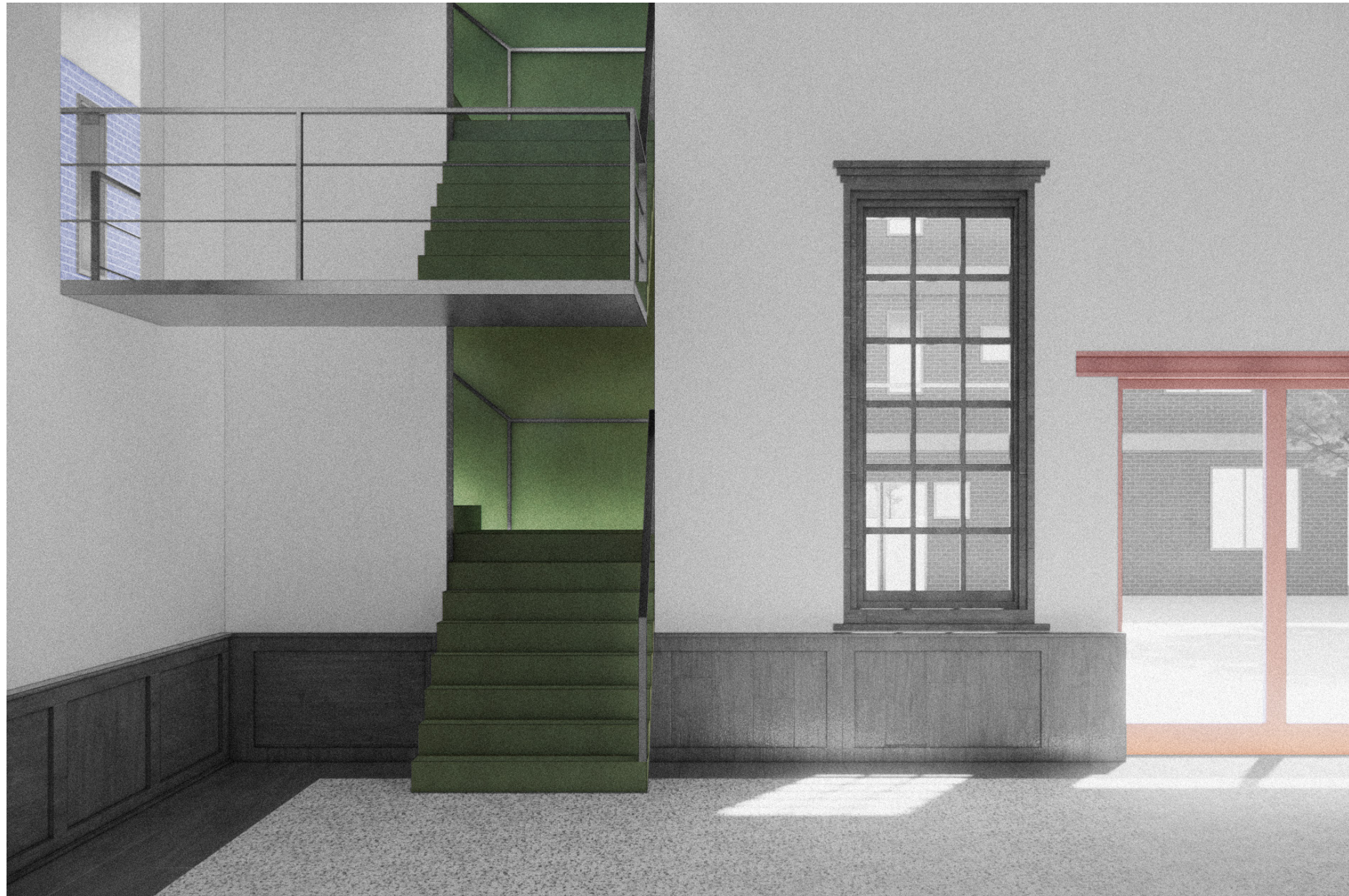


Bee Street

Figure 20. Exterior Views,
Natick, Massachusetts



Assembly 02. *Folded Face,*
Natick, Massachusetts



Assembly 04. *Stitching Stair and Assembly 01. Cut and Fill Wall,*
Natick, Massachusetts

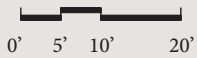
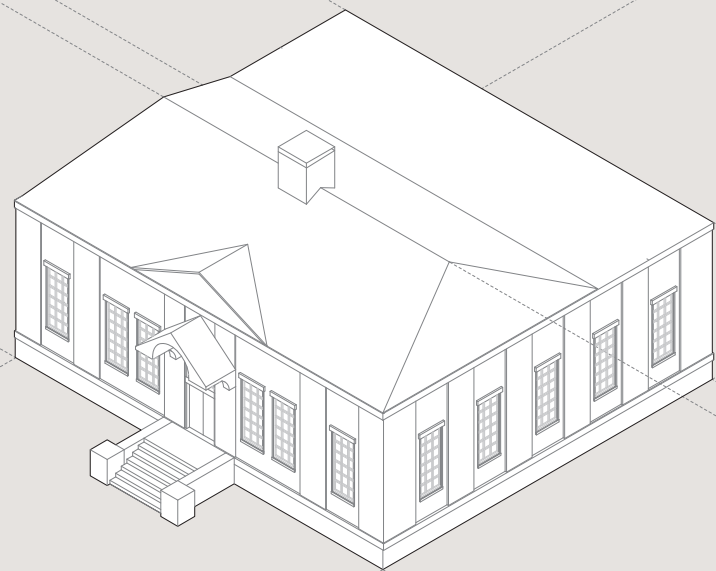
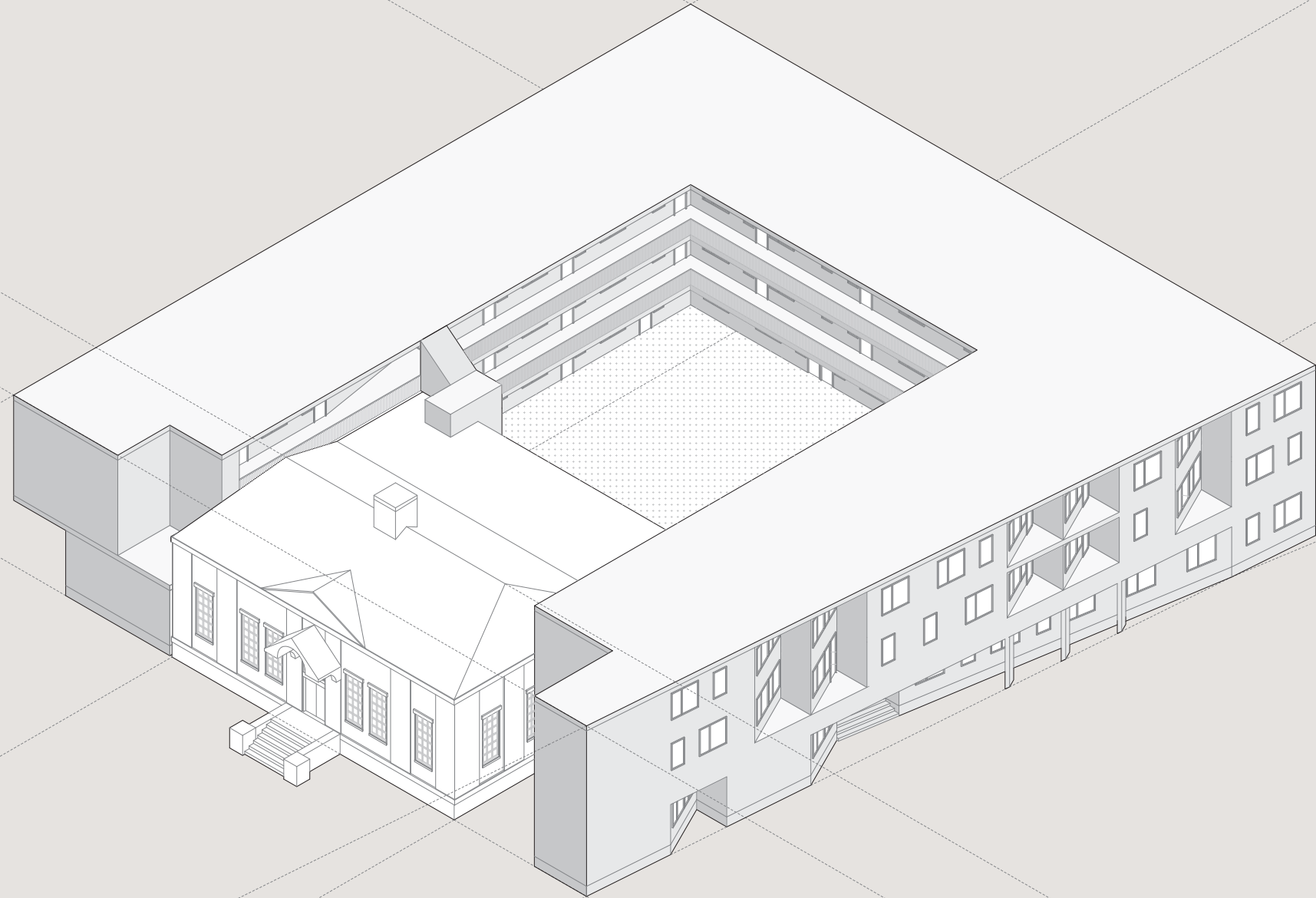


Figure 21. *Axonometric,
Natick, Massachusetts*



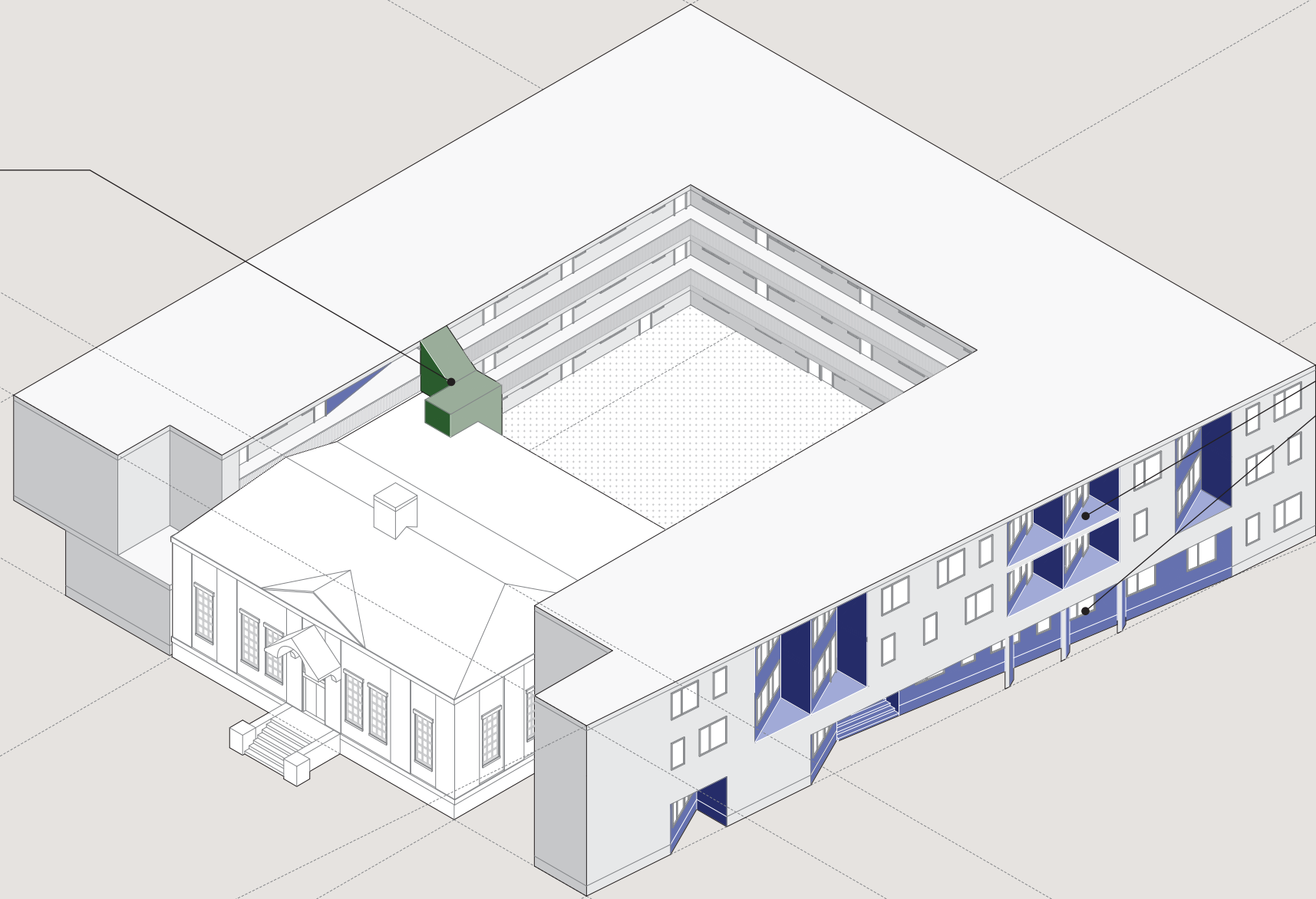
0' 5' 10' 20'

The Post Office Is Now A House

Figure 21. Axonometric,
Natick, Massachusetts

Assembly 04. *Stitching Stair*

Assembly 02. *Folded Face*



0' 5' 10' 20'

The Post Office Is Now A House

Figure 21. *Axonometric,
Natick, Massachusetts*



- 1. Afterschool area, access to second floor reading loft
- 2. Afterschool multipurpose space
- 3. Credit union and post office
- 4. Post office back of house
- 5. Afterschool space, access to stitching stair
- 6. Courtyard
- 7. Folded face entryway

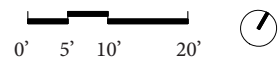
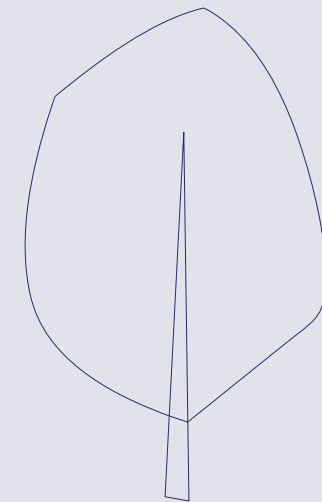
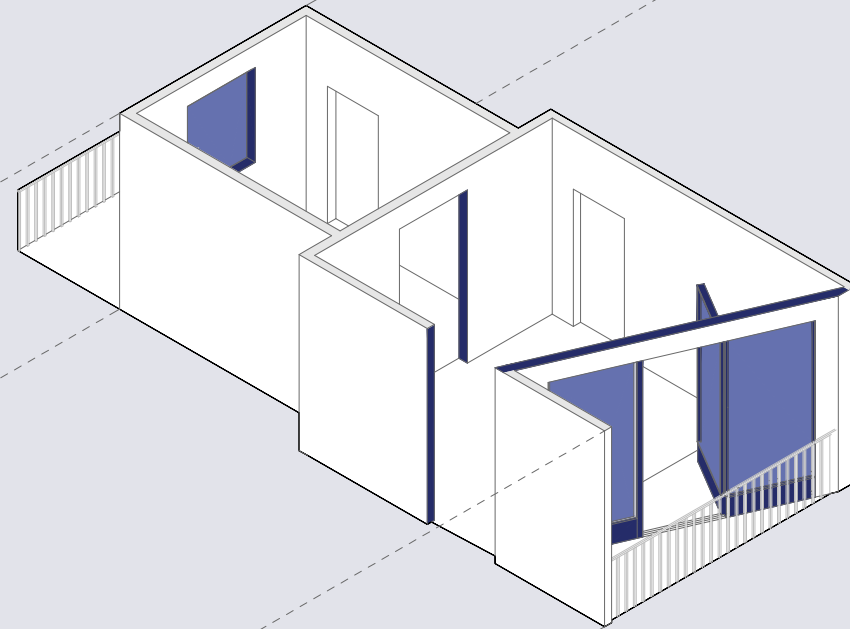
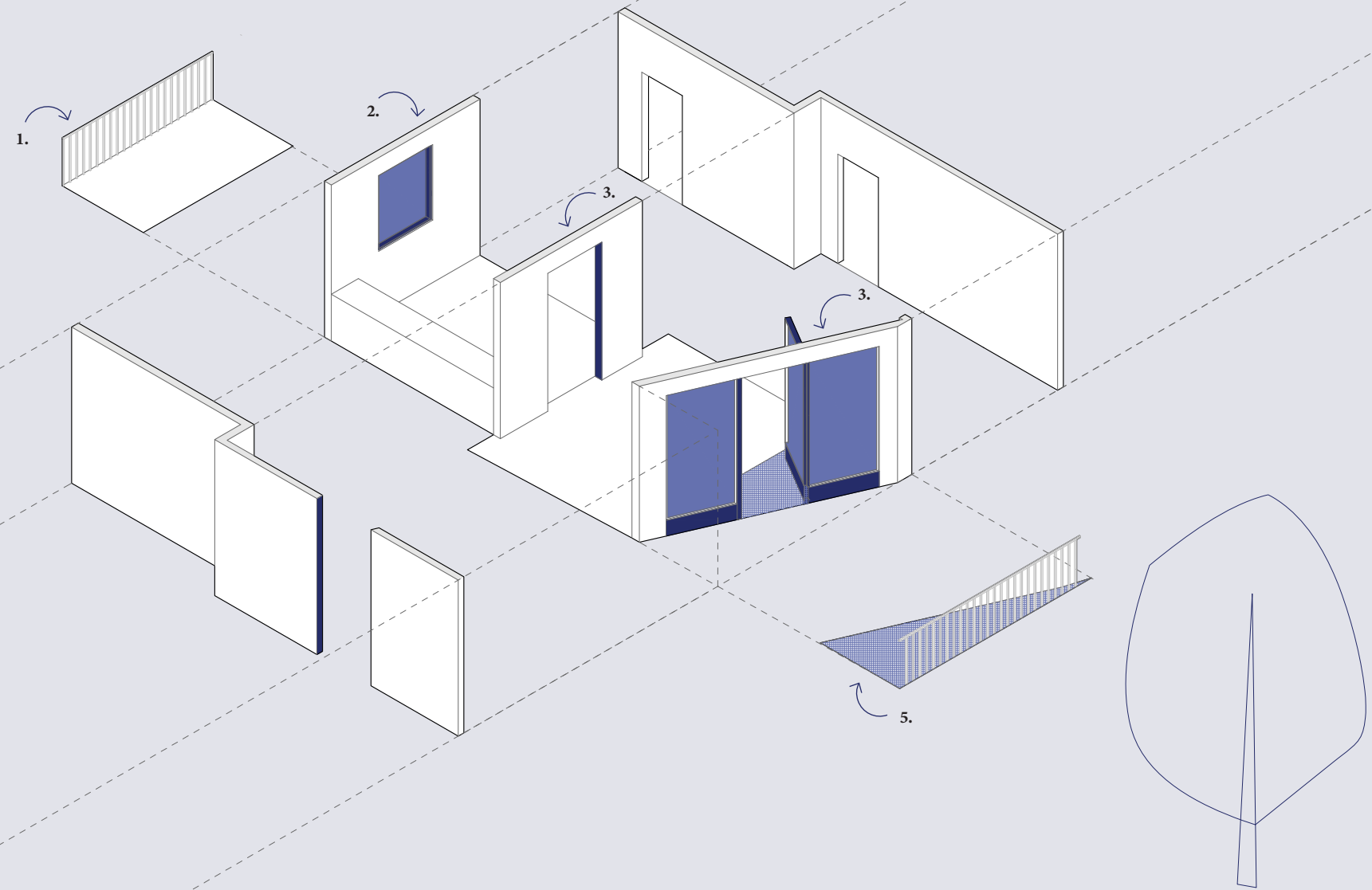


Figure 22. Ground Floor Plan,
Natick, Massachusetts



Assembly 02. *Folded Face,*
Natick, Massachusetts



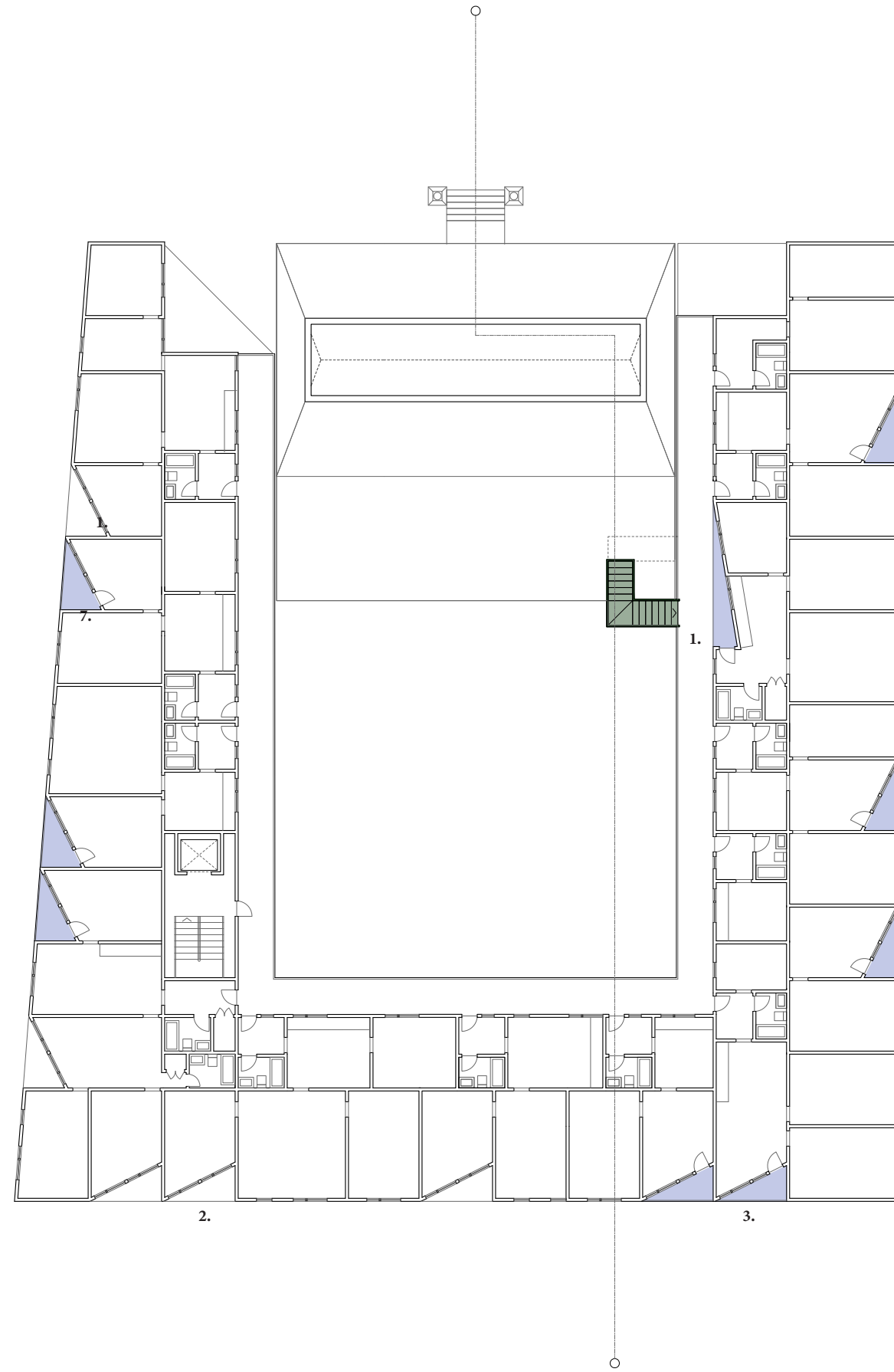


- 1. Open air corridor
- 2. Kitchen window
- 3. Doorway framing folded wall
- 4. Folded window wall framing view of tree
- 5. Balcony

Assembly 02. *Folded Face,*
Natick, Massachusetts



Assembly 02. *Folded Face,*
Natick, Massachusetts



- 1. *Folded face forms apartment entrance*
- 2. *Folded face frames view of tree*
- 3. *Folded face forms balcony*

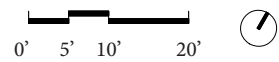
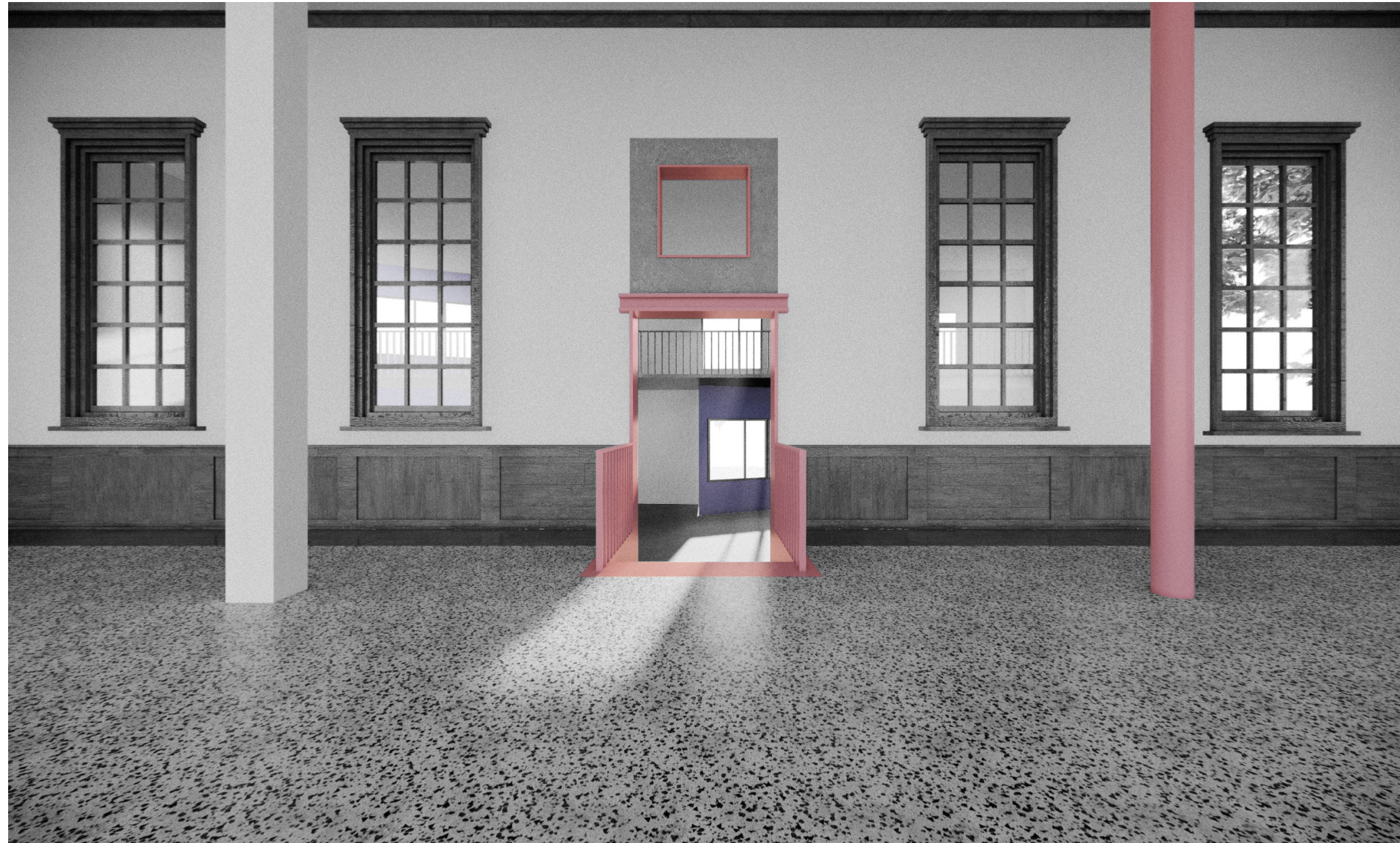


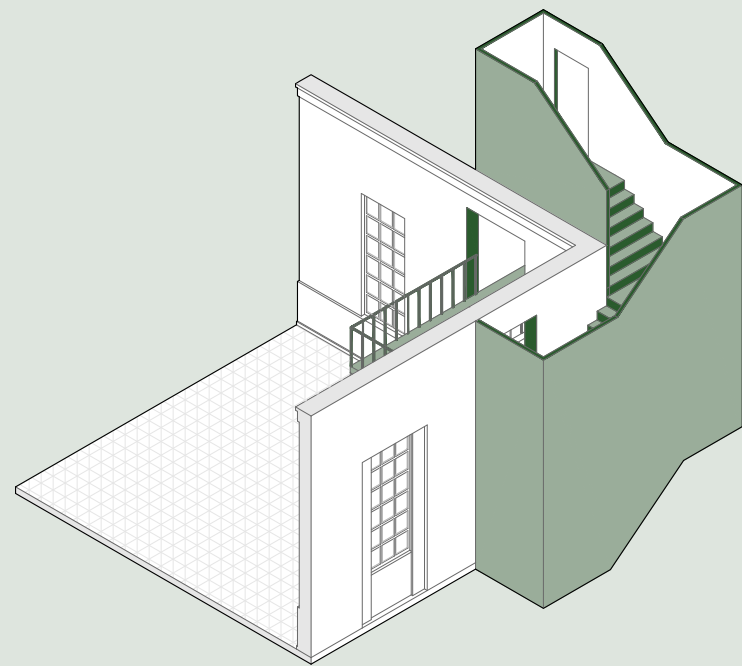
Figure 23. *Second Floor Plan,
Natick, Massachusetts*



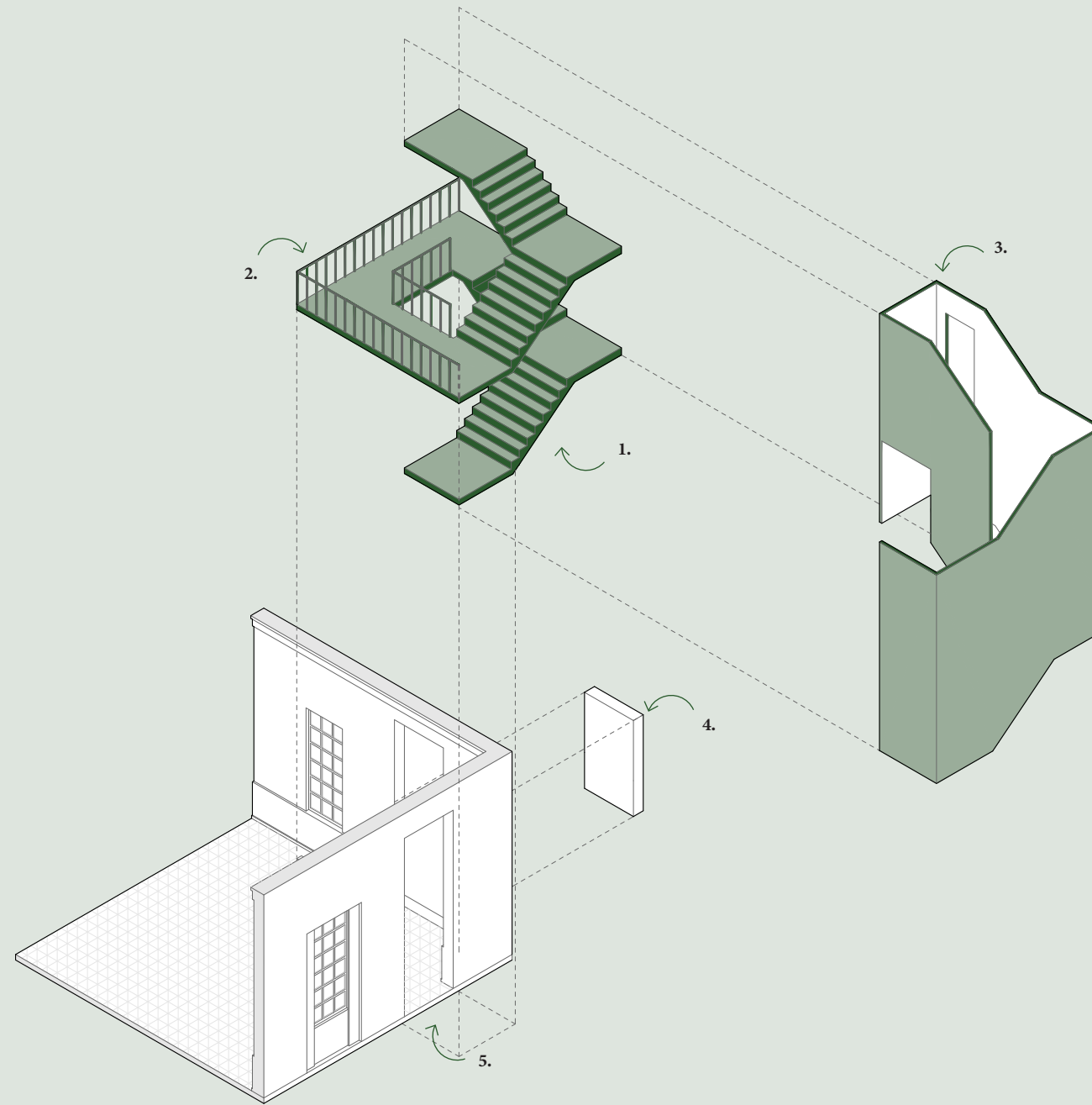
*Assembly 02. Folded Face and Assembly 01. Cut and Fill Wall,
Natick, Massachusetts*



Assembly 04. *Stitching Stair,*
Natick, Massachusetts

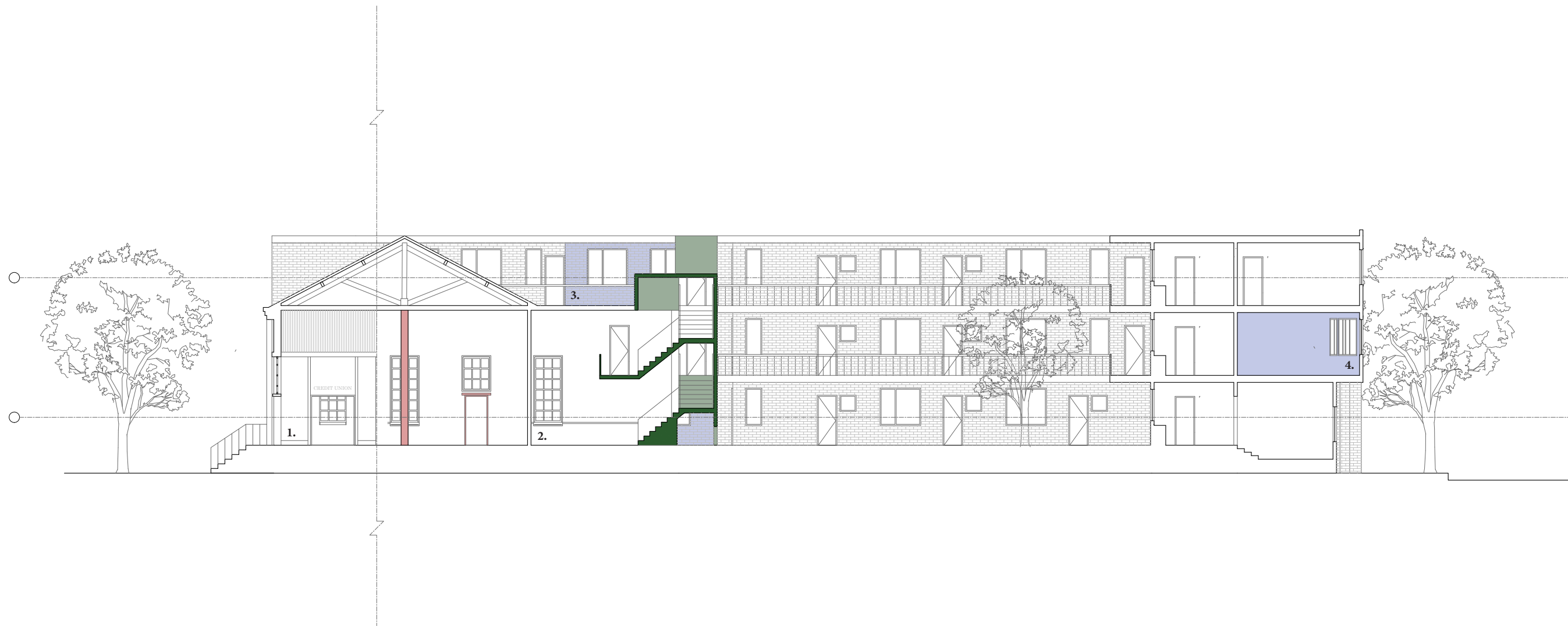


Assembly 04. *Stitching Stair,*
Natick, Massachusetts



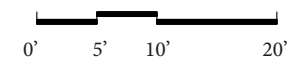
- 1. New stair, landings enable 1.5 story spaces
- 2. Walkway through existing building
- 3. Stair enclosure
- 4. Modified existing wall
- 5. Stairwell entrance replaces window

Assembly 04. Stitching Stair,
Natick, Massachusetts



- 1. Post office and credit union
- 2. Afterschool multipurpose space
- 3. Folded face entrance near landing of stitching stair
- 4. Folded face frames view of street and tree

1/16" : 1'

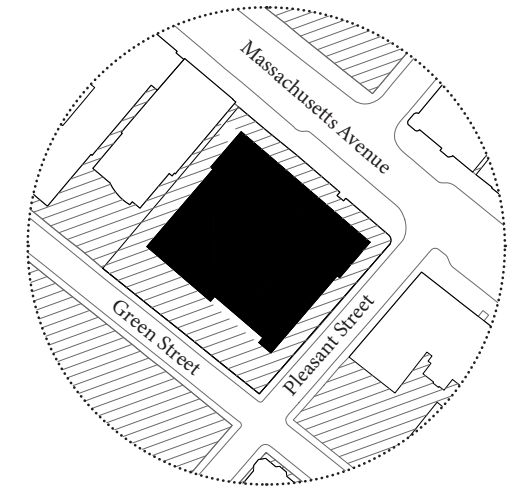


The Post Office Is Now A House

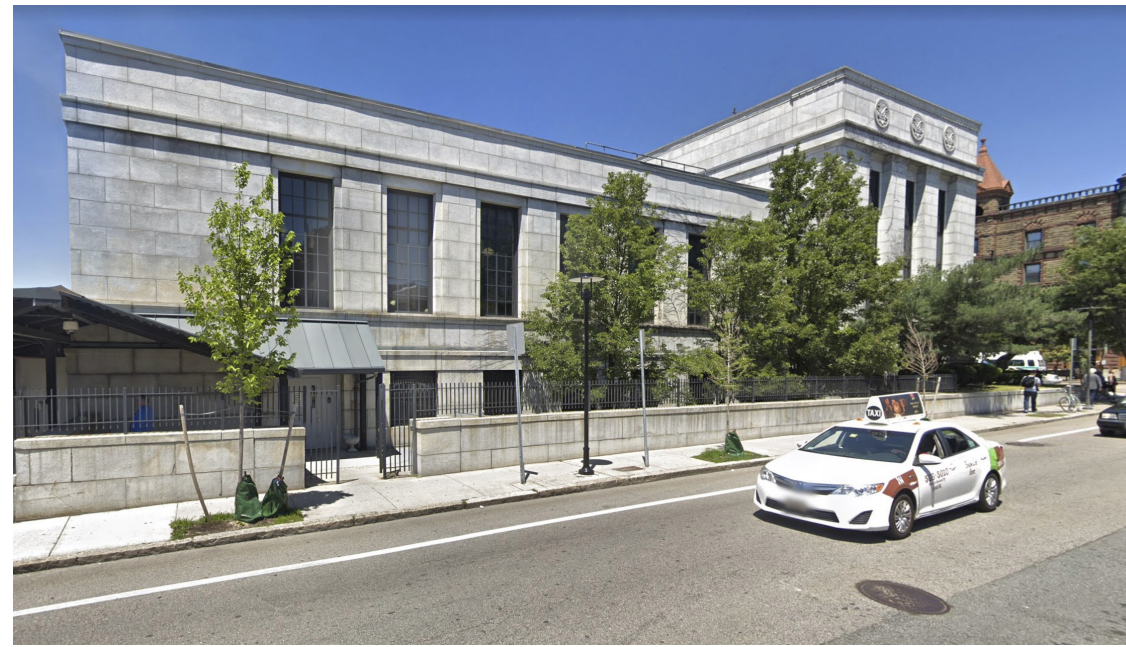
Figure 24. Section AA,
Natick, Massachusetts



Assembly 01. *Cut and Fill Wall*, **Assembly 04.** *Stitching Stair*, **Assembly 02.** *Folded Face*
Natick, Massachusetts



Massachusetts Avenue



Pleasant Street



Green Street

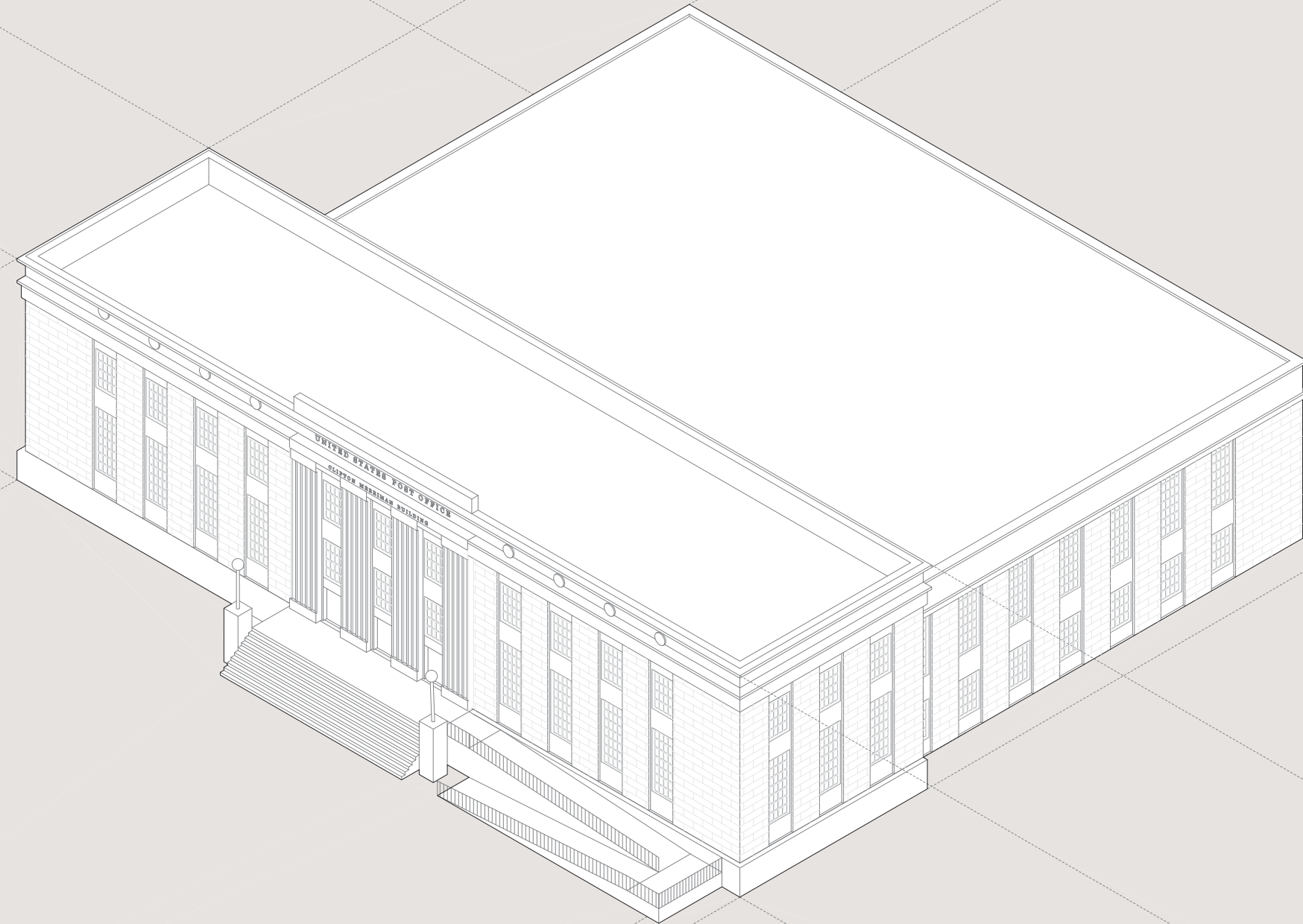
Figure 25. *Exterior Views, Cambridge, Massachusetts*



Assembly 01. Cut and Fill Wall
Cambridge, Massachusetts



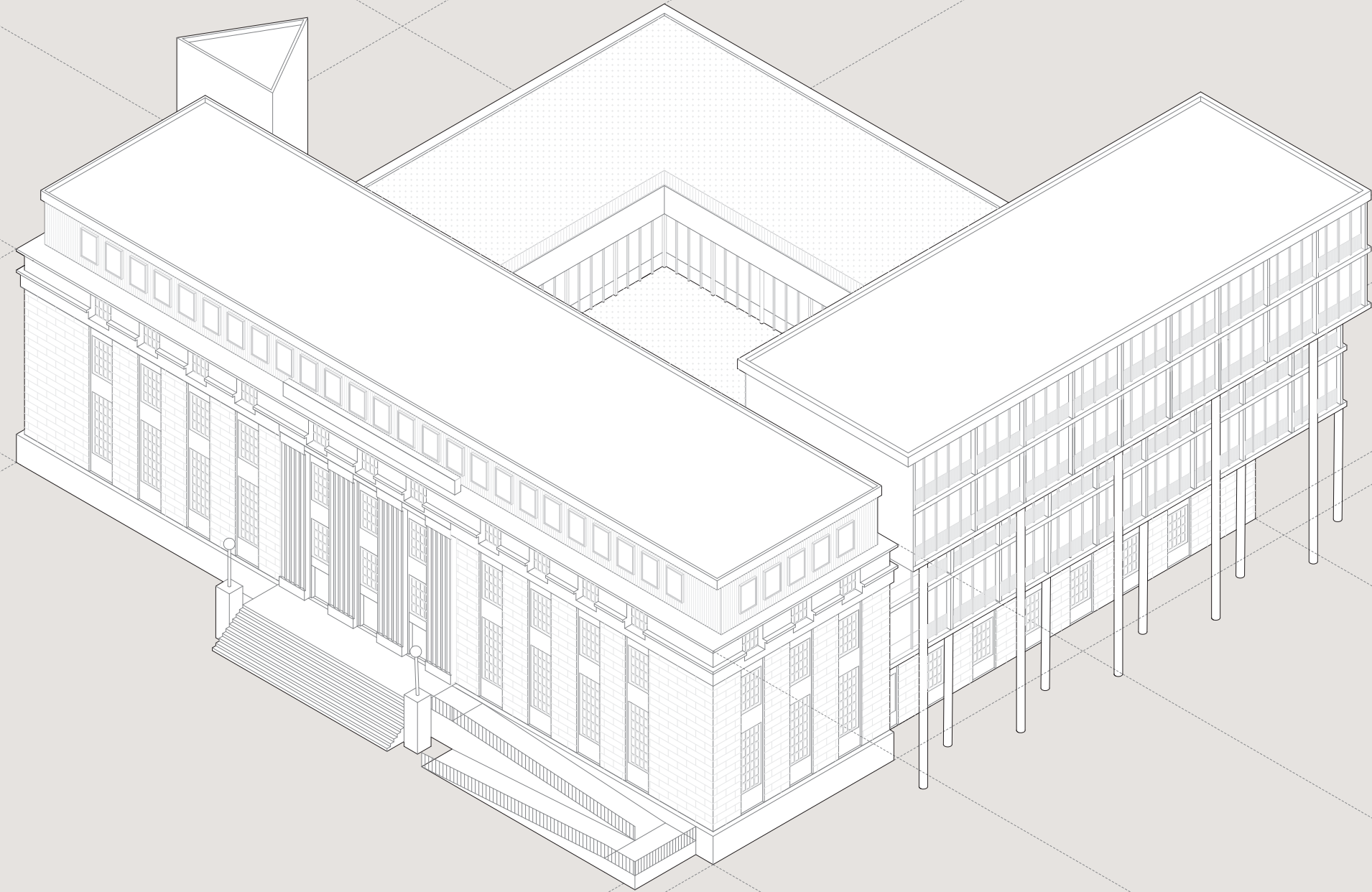
Assembly 06. *Overlap Addition*
Cambridge, Massachusetts



0' 5' 10' 20'

The Post Office Is Now A House

Figure 26. Axonometric,
Cambridge, Massachusetts



0' 5' 10' 20'

The Post Office Is Now A House

Figure 26. Axonometric,
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Assembly 04. *Stitching Stair*

Assembly 06. *Overlap Addition*

Assembly 01. *Cut and Fill Wall*

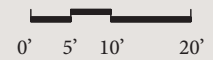
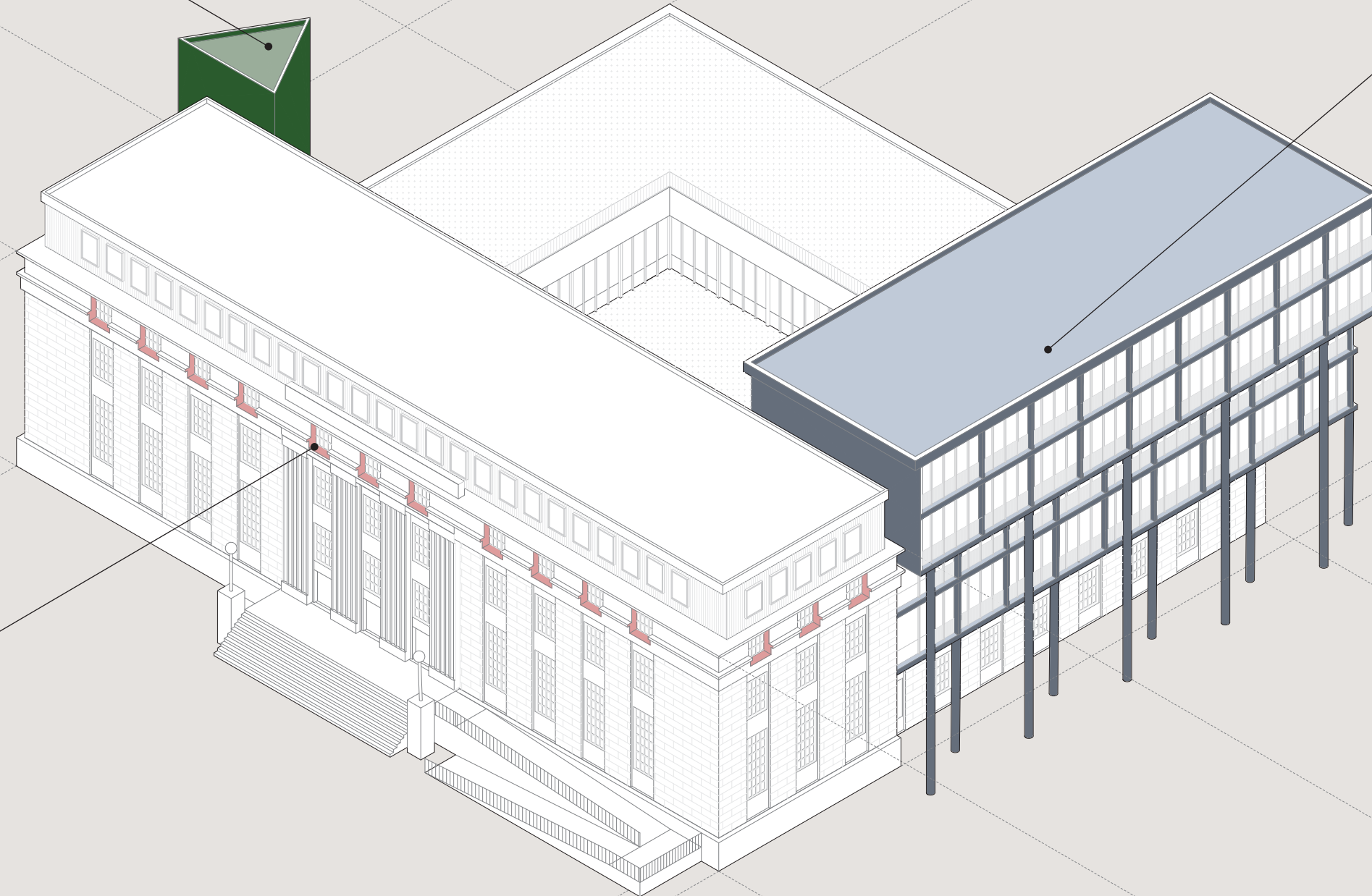
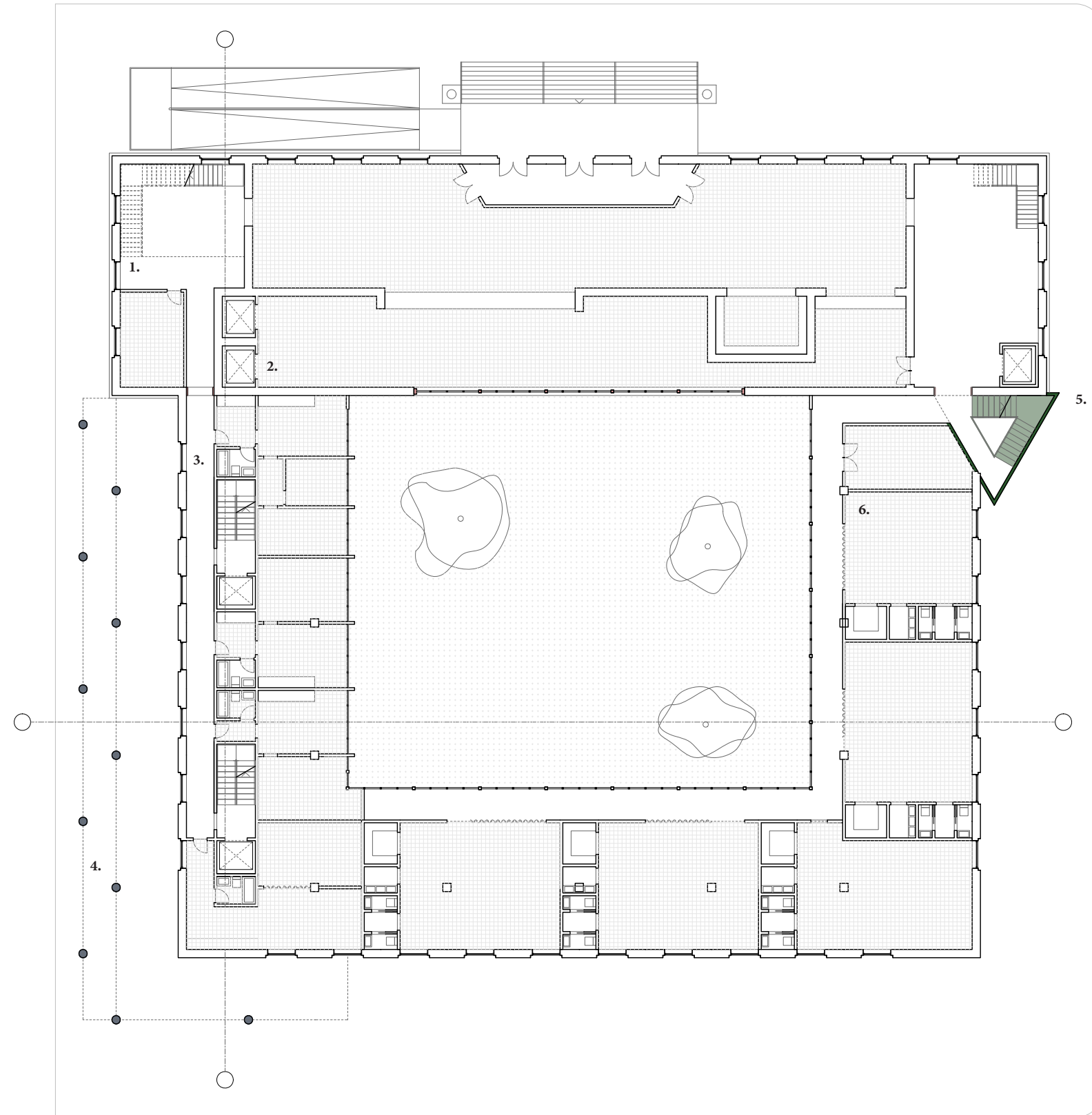


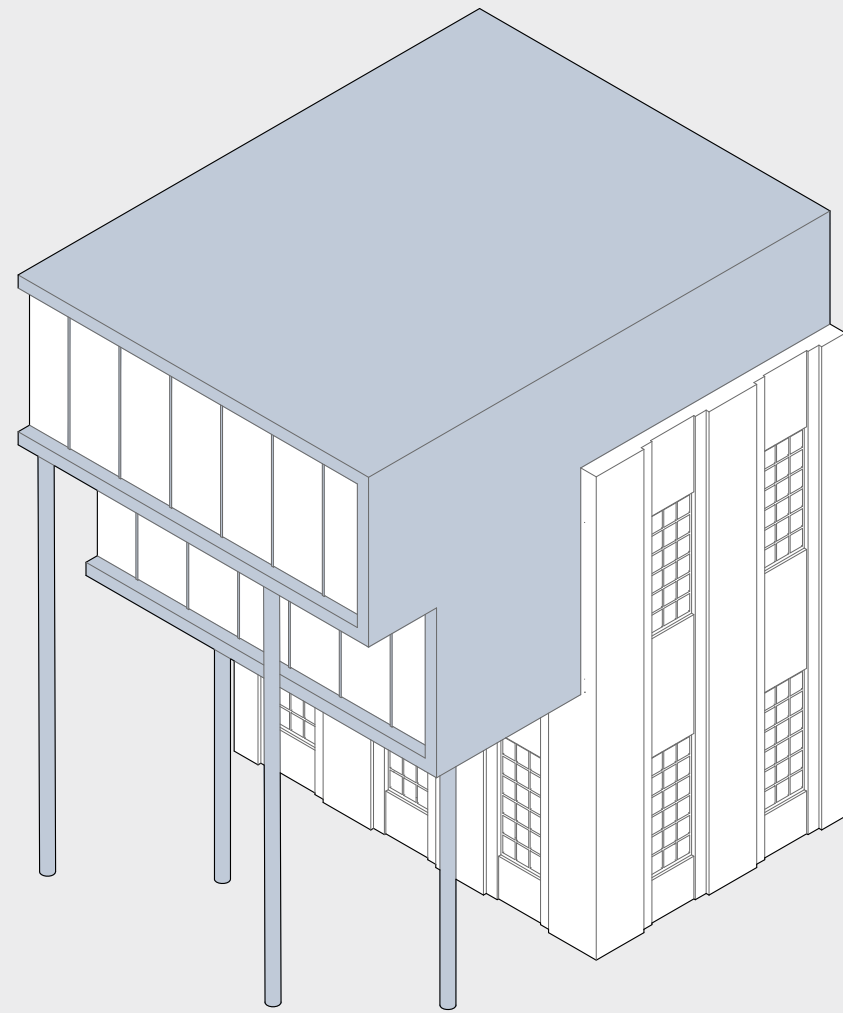
Figure 26. Axonometric,
Cambridge, Massachusetts



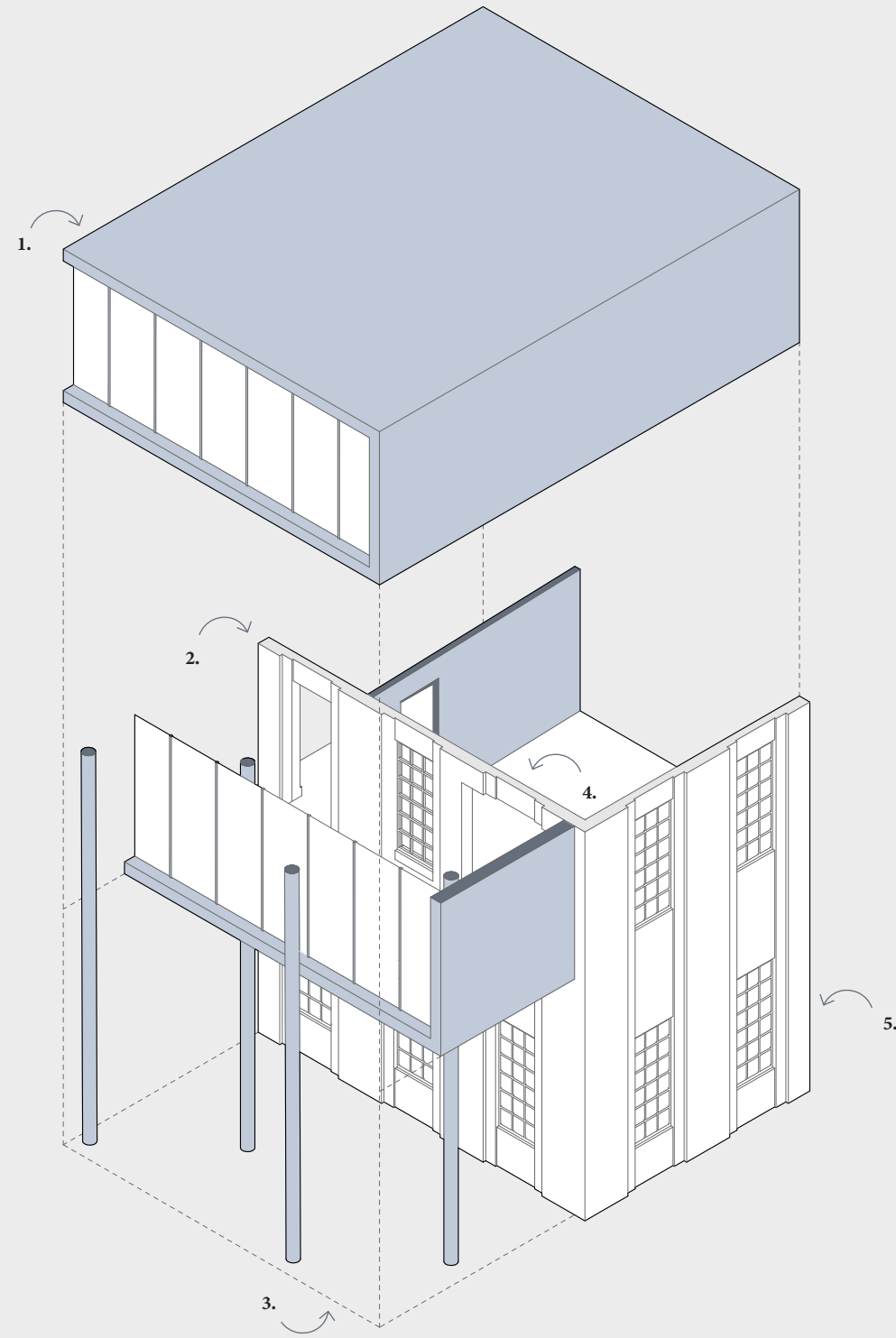
- 1. Access to second floor housing
- 2. Post office front of house & access to basement facilities
- 3. Stair cores provide direct access to housing
- 4. Columns of the overlap addition visible from housing hallway
- 5. Stitching stair provides direct access to pre-school and housing
- 6. Pre-school

0' 5' 10' 20'

Figure 27. Floor 1 Plan
Cambridge, Massachusetts



Assembly 06. *Overlap Addition,
Cambridge, Massachusetts*



- 1. Upper level units
- 2. Overlap level
- 3. Columns supporting overlap form colonnade
- 4. Existing windows provide openings in overlap
- 5. Ground floor uses uninterrupted

Assembly 06. Overlap Addition,
Cambridge, Massachusetts



Assembly 01. *Cut and Fill Wall* and **Assembly 06.** *Overlap Addition*
Cambridge, Massachusetts



- 1. Overlap addition
- 2. Basement level postal delivery and sorting
- 3. Cut and fill doorway frame view from post office front of house
- 4. Pre-school play terrace
- 5. Pre-school classroom

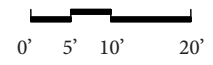
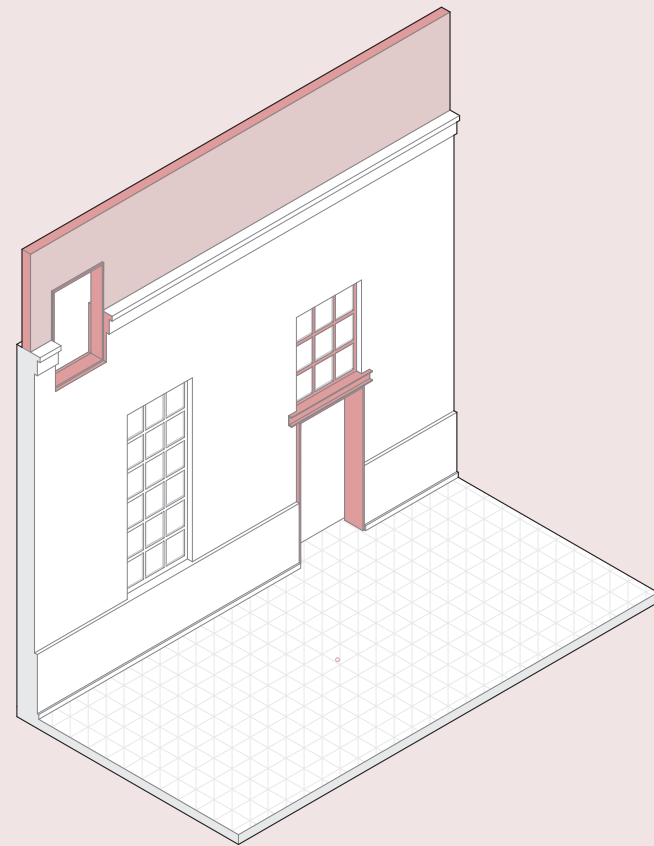
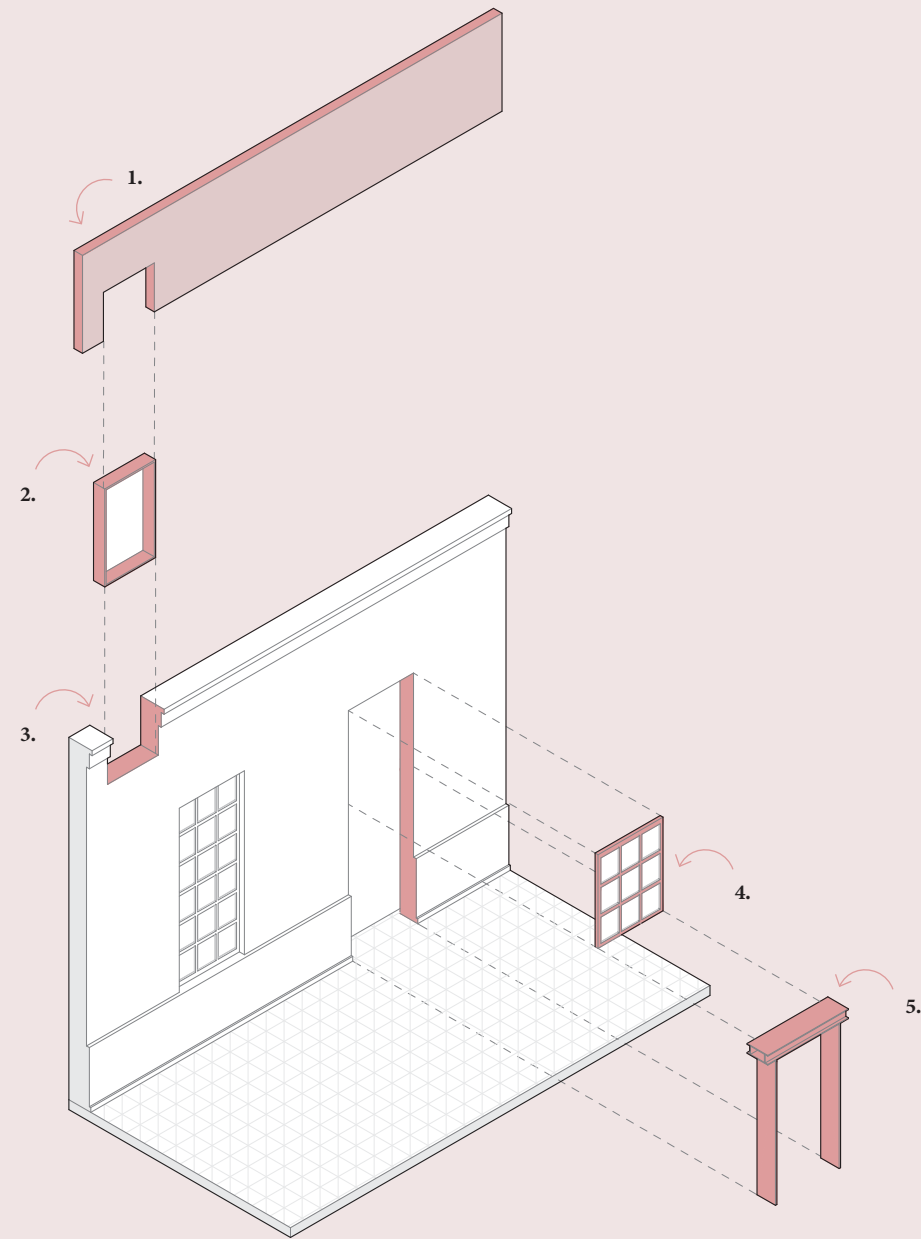


Figure 28. Section AA
Cambridge, Massachusetts

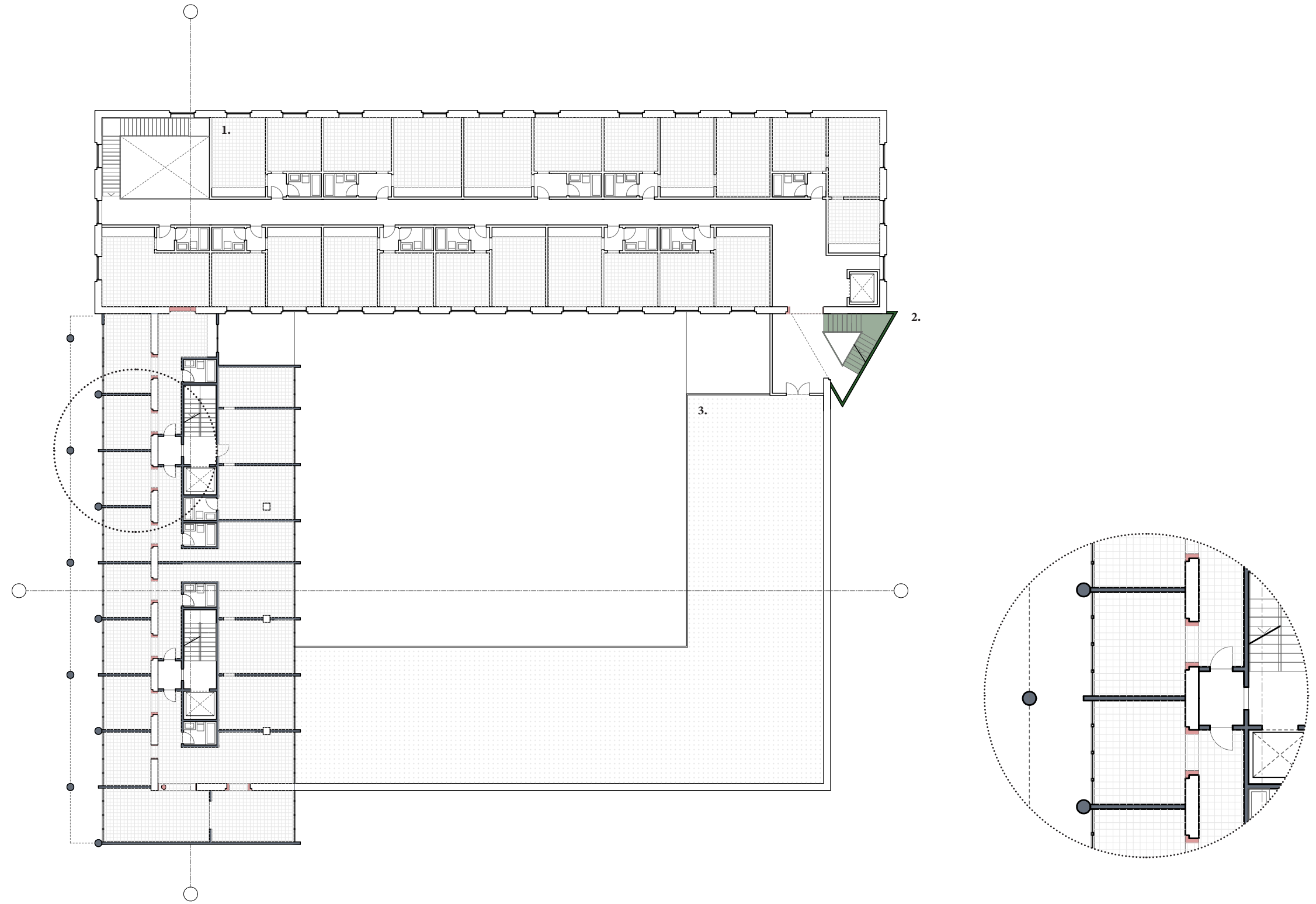


Assembly 01. *Cut and Fill Wall,
Cambridge, Massachusetts*



1. New wall
2. Window frame linking new and existing
3. Cut into existing building
4. Modified existing window
5. New door frame replaces old window

Assembly 01. Cut and Fill Wall,
Cambridge, Massachusetts



- 1. Post office office level adapted for 1-bedroom units
- 2. Stitching stair bridges 6' height difference between front and back of building
- 3. Play terrace for preschool

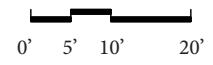
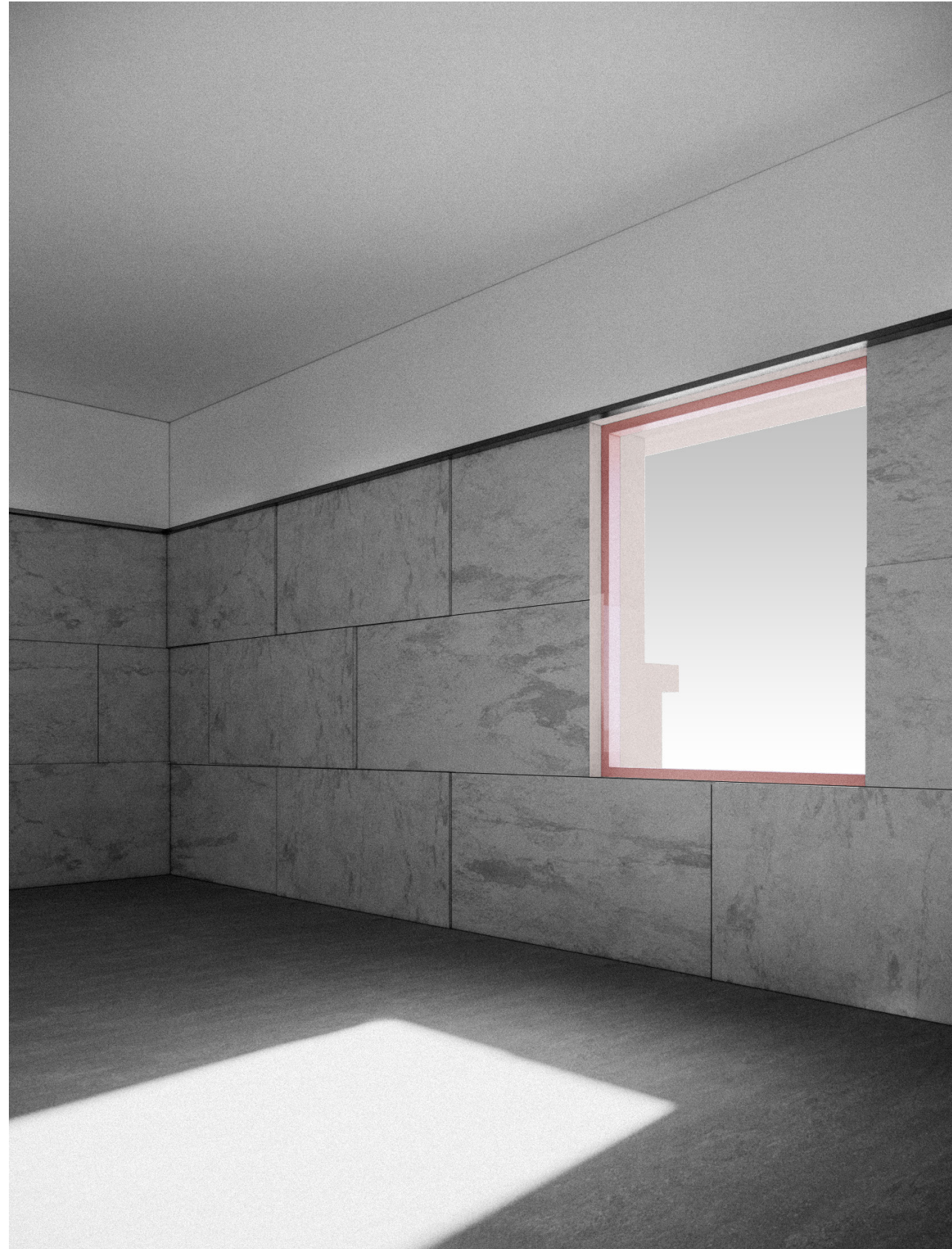
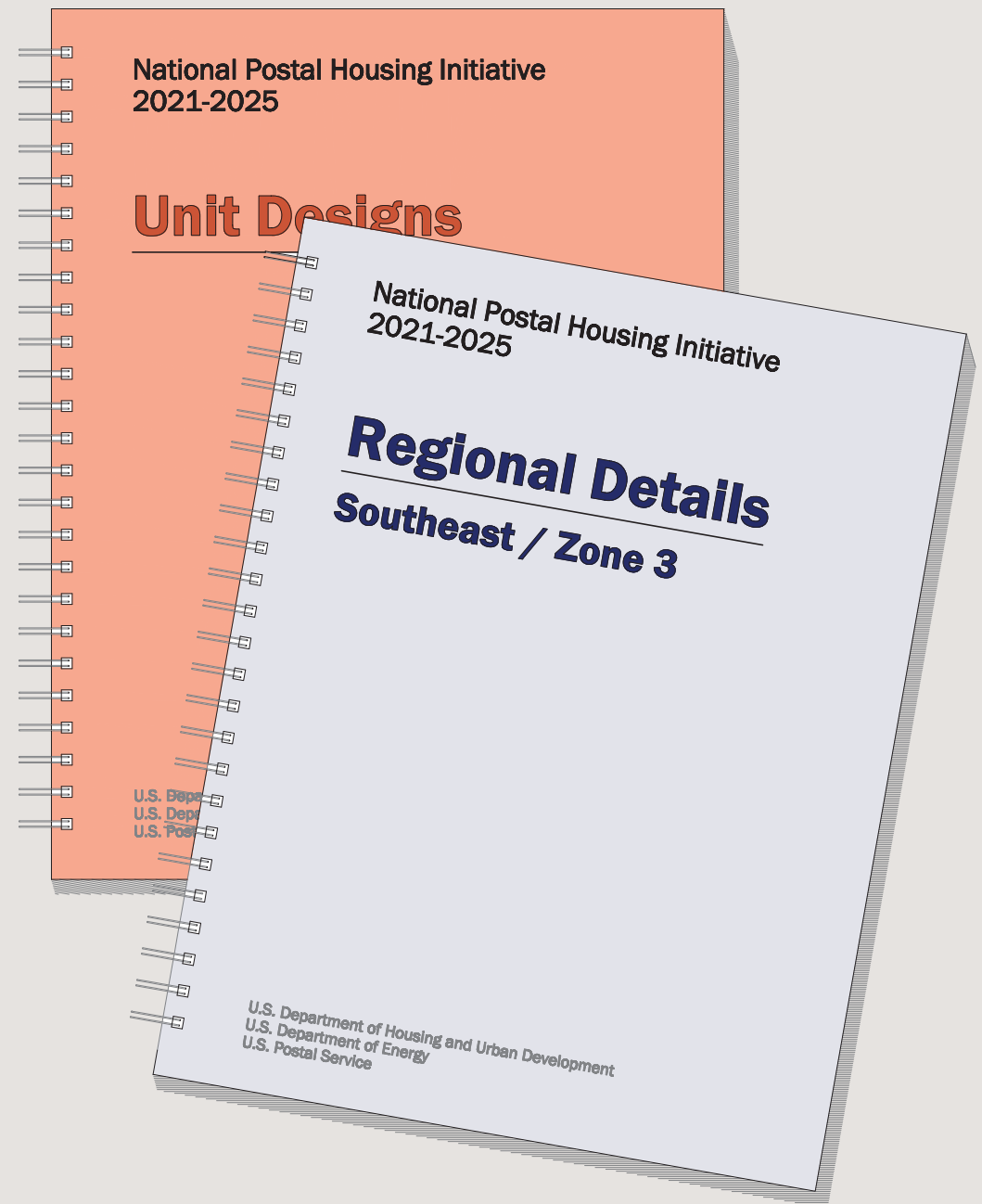
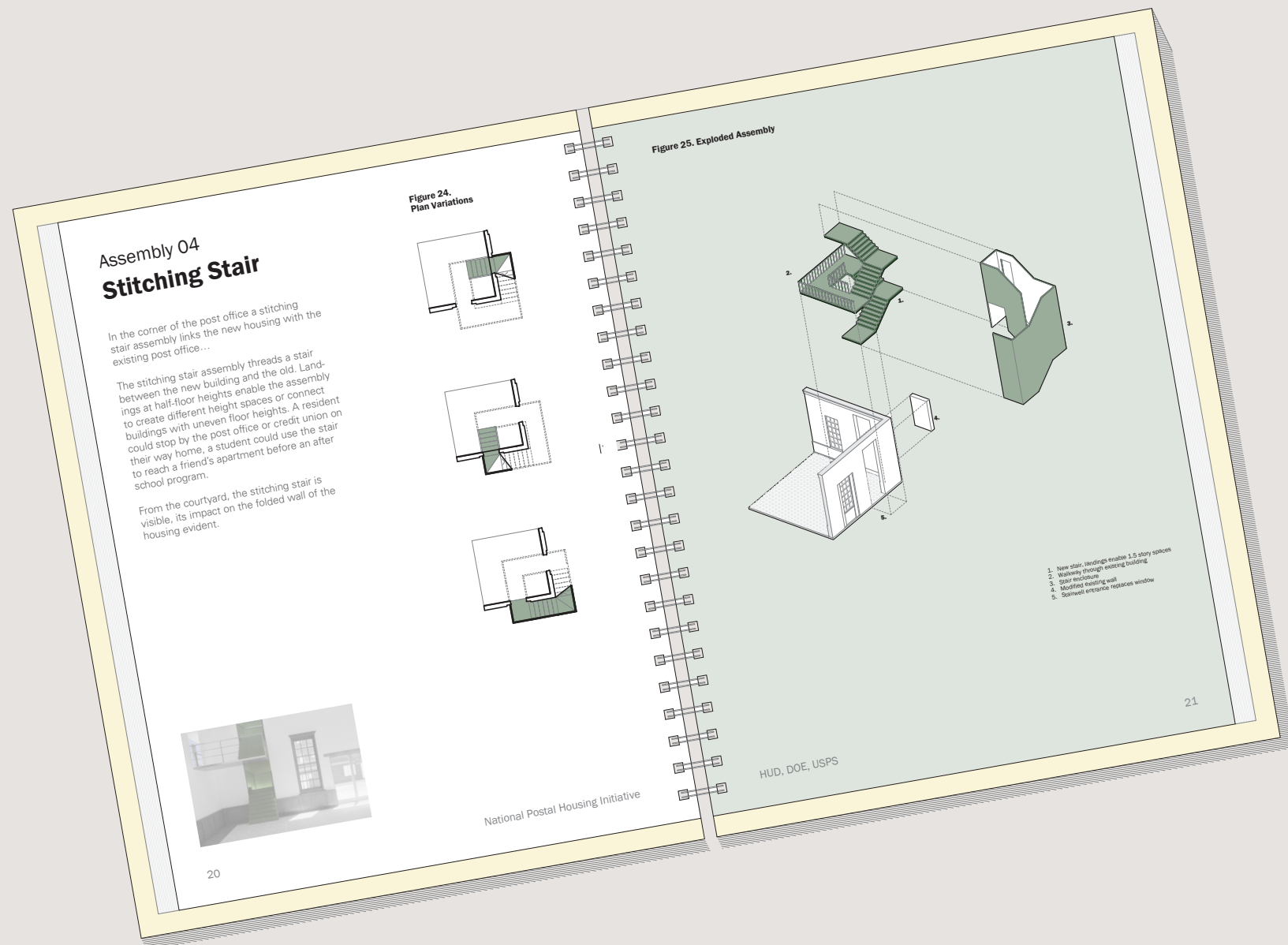


Figure 29. Floor 2 Plan
Cambridge, Massachusetts



Assembly 01. *Cut and Fill Wall*
Cambridge, Massachusetts



**Figure 30. National Postal Housing Initiative
Washington, D.C.**

Thesis Credits & Sources

Citations and attributions are listed below for any work shown in the thesis project that is not exclusively my own.

Labor

[Slides 31, 33, 44, 45](#)

Assistance with plan drafting from Anna Kaertner.

Citations

[Slide 1](#)

Title references: Moreno, Joaquim, Tim Benton, Nick. Beech, and Centre Canadien D'architecture. *The University Is Now on Air, Broadcasting Modern Architecture.* Heijningen : Montréal: Jap Sam Books ; Canadian Centre for Architecture, 2018.

[Slide 3](#)

Figures: USPS. FY2019 Annual Report to Congress. [Washington, D.C.]: 2019, 14, 15.

Map Layer: "USPS Post Offices Map," SSH1: Carto DB. <https://nyu.carto.com/u/ssh1/builder/d1a0fad9-5c1d-4bf6-b427-95bc0d465ffa/>

[Slide 4](#)

Sources for Chart Data: United States Postal Service Office of Real Estate. *History of Post Office Construction 1900-1940.* Washington D.C.: July 1982.

Sources for Chart Data: URS Group, Inc. Draft Report: USPS Nationwide Historic Context Study: Postal Facilities Constructed or Occupied Between 1940 and 1971. Prepared for U.S. Postal Service, September 2012.

Images: Craig, Lois A., and Federal Architecture Project. *The Federal Presence : Architecture, Politics, and Symbols in United States Government Building.* Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1978.

[Slide 5](#)

Left: Rhodes, Steve. "Save the People's Post Office protest at National Postal Forum in San Francisco." Licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0. Accessible at <https://search.creativecommons.org/photos/4d9d2a77-c757-463d-a103-2058834c9850>.

Right: Lewis, Scott. "Amazon Warehouse." Licensed under CC BY 2.0. Accessible at <https://search.creativecommons.org/photos/4652a4e6-62a4-40d7-ac6f-079286924170>.

[Slide 7](#)

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Government to create a Green New Deal. HR 109. Introduced in House February 12, 2019. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-resolution/109/text>.

[Slide 8](#)

U.S. Congress. House. Homes for All Act of 2019. HR 5244. Introduced in House November 21, 2019. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/5244/text?r=6&s=1>

[Slide 9](#)

Note: Drawing style references the Starter Home project by OJT Architects. "Starter home." Accessible at: <https://www.officejt.com/our-work/starter-home>

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Young, Ammi B. *Plans of Public Buildings in Course of Construction under the Direction of the Secretary of the Treasury including the Specifications Thereof.* Nos. L, 5, 7-8, 11-18, 21, 25-26, 28-38 and 9 Unnumbered. Washington, 1855. ↪

[Slide 11](#)

Plan drawing based on the plan of the 1936 Mesa, Arizona post office. Scans of original Treasury Department drawings received courtesy of Ronald Peters / Historic Streetscapes, Mesa, Arizona.

[Slide 12](#)

URS Group, Inc. Draft Report: USPS Nationwide Historic Context Study: Postal Facilities Constructed or Occupied Between 1940 and 1971. Prepared for U.S. Postal Service, September 2012. Plans from Building Designs, 1959, page 47.

[Slide 13](#)

United States Postal Service. Handbook AS-503 Standard Design Criteria. Washington D.C.: United States Postal Service, 2010, 13, 26, 9.

[Slide 18](#)

Montague: Google. Street view Images of Montague Post Office. 2020.

Natick: Ebay, "Post Office Natick Massachusetts Postcard MA Vintage Unposted/" <https://www.ebay.com/itm/Post-Office-Natick-Massachusetts-Postcard-MA-Vintage-Unposted-/233184470237>

Cambridge: Digital Commonwealth, "Cambridge's new \$1,000,000 post office, the city's first federal building which will be formally dedicated Tuesday night." Cambridge Historical Commission, 1935. Accessible at: <https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/search/commonwealth:wd377744q>.

[Slide 19](#)

Plans drawn based on Google Maps aerial views.

[Slide 20](#)

Plans drawn based on following sources:

Montague: URS Group, Inc. Draft Report: USPS Nationwide Historic Context Study: Postal Facilities Constructed or Occupied Between 1940 and 1971, page 72, 51.

Natick: New deal post office plans from Ronald Peters / Historic Streetscapes, Mesa, Arizona.

Cambridge: United States Department of the Interior. National Register of Historic Places Inventory: Nomination Form for Central Square Post Office, Cambridge, MA. May 12, 1986.

[Slides 21, 38, 56](#)

Streetview photos from Google Maps.

[Slides 27, 32, 45, 51, 58, 65](#)

Note: Scale figures from an entourage file. Source unknown.

Additional Works Referenced in Developing the Thesis:

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United States Department of the Treasury. "Mesa, Arizona Post Office Drawing Set." Washington D.C.: 1937. Provided by Ronald Peters of Historic Streetscapes, Mesa, Arizona.

United States Postal Service Office of Real Estate. *History of Post Office Construction 1900-1940.* Washington D.C.: July 1982.

URS Group, Inc. *Draft Report: USPS Nationwide Historic Context Study: Postal Facilities Constructed or Occupied Between 1940 and 1971.* Prepared for U.S. Postal Service, September 2012.