

2023 AIA|DC Chapter Design Awards

Project Title: **Carver Hall**

Location: 211 Elm Street, NW, Washington, DC 20001

Date of Completion: 11/1/2020

Carver Hall, built in 1942 to house African American men supporting war efforts, was later acquired by Howard University as dorms. Carver Hall was restored and repurposed into 63 market rate apartments contributing to the evolution and preservation of a historical part of the community. A continuous line of structural columns runs down the center of the two upper floors. Already facing a slender footprint—35-feet wide versus the typical apartment building width of around 60 feet—the design team inventively arranged units by alternating the corridors along either side of the column line. This gives each apartment a sense of airiness and room for utilities, while making the circulation more experiential than simple straight hallways. Storage and lounge spaces, partially below grade but with 16-foot-tall ceilings and large clerestory windows, were converted into 14 loft style units with bedrooms above grade and expansive double-height living/dining areas.

DESIGN NARRATIVE: HOW DOES THIS PROJECT ADDRESS DESIGN FOR INTEGRATION, WELLBEING, AND DISCOVERY? (150 WORDS MAX)

The story of Carver Hall is one of a historic building transformed for modern use. Through a major renovation, it provides market-rate housing in a walkable neighborhood, while restoring the streetscape and preserving community significance. Targeted interior renovations focused on resident quality of life. New window wells in terrace level apartments flood them with sunlight and fresh air. Removing walls opens sightlines on the ground floor creating a strong pull from the entry courtyard into the lobby and beyond toward the two-story common room, culminating in the new landscaped outdoor area. Reconfiguring those underused shared spaces and maximizing vertical square footage generated additional units and airy circulation. This renovation allowed architects, contractors, and developers to strategize repurposing the specific dorm typology. Expectations of college residents changed over the past 50 years, transforming Carver Hall suggests these buildings can be given new life as a new type of home.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: HOW DOES THIS PROJECT ADDRESS DESIGN FOR EQUITABLE COMMUNITIES AND ECONOMY? (150 WORDS MAX)

Carver along with its sister structure, Slowe Hall offer a total of 166 one-, two-, and three-bedroom units. Together these three-story apartment buildings provide the only high-density multifamily residences in the highly walkable and public transit oriented, iconic LeDroit Park neighborhood. By treating the project as a limited renovation and eliminating new building structure to enclosure construction costs from the budget, the developers allocated resources toward thoughtful design details to improve quality of life for the residents. For example, interior finishes and materials or all low-or no-VOCs promoting healthy indoor air quality, while oversized operable windows reduce reliance on artificial lighting and climate control. The multifamily buildings are surrounding by townhouses, so they generate diversity in building typologies for the passersby.

SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCE: HOW DOES THIS PROJECT ADDRESS DESIGN FOR ECOSYSTEMS, WATER, ENERGY, RESOURCES, AND CHANGE? (150 WORDS MAX)

An existing building contains significant embedded energy and resources. Renovation rather than demolition extends the lifecycle of these resources, preserves embedded energy, and reduces use of new materials. Old windows and doors were restored and single-paned glazing replaced with insulated glass. All appliances are EnergyStar certified, LED fixtures are used throughout, and new HVAC systems greatly increase energy efficiency. The renovation of this former dorm gives new purpose to an outdated building type. It required the careful configuration of units within the narrow dorm style wings, and a focus on developing several appealing gathering spaces both inside the new lobby as well as in the adjacent courtyard. Those public space offerings include a comfortable lounge/library, working or meeting areas, a communal kitchen for entertaining large groups featuring an adjacent private terrace, a heavily landscaped courtyard—and all amenities easily adapted to changing needs in years to come.

Would you like this project to be considered for a Jury Citation in any of the following categories? (For more information on the 10 Measures from the Framework for Design Excellence, please click here.)

- Equitable Communities
- Well-being
- Resources
- Change
- Discovery

CARVER HALL

A Cultural Legacy In LeDroit Park

211 ELM STREET

HISTORIC RESOURCES

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- HOWARD U. CAMPUS
- CARVER HALL
- SLOVE HALL
- METRO



⊕ Vicinity Map: LeDroit Park, Washington, DC

CARVER HALL

AIADC Chapter Design Awards 2023



“It represents how the commitment to the rigors of preservation when matched with openness to creative solutions can result in a project of excellence that services both the past and present.”

- Historic Preservation Consultant on Carver Hall

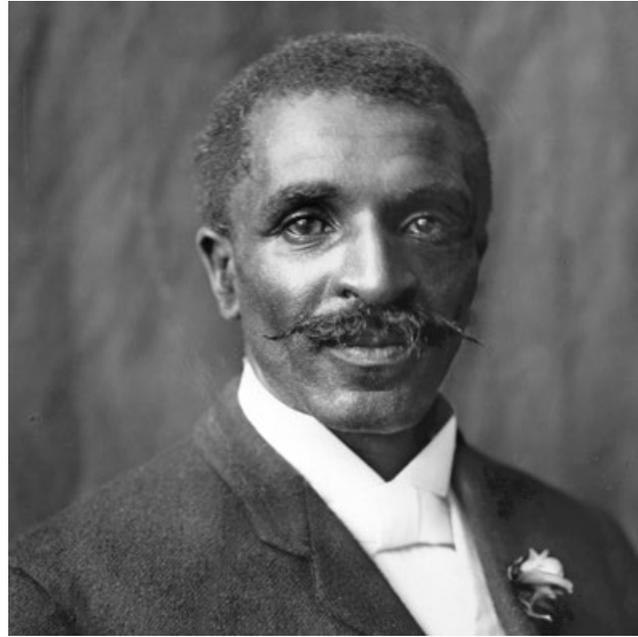
PROJECT NARRATIVE

Through significant renovation and adaptive use, historic Carver Hall now provides 63 modern apartments at below market rent in a walkable, transit-rich district neighborhood while preserving the streetscape, history, and significance to the community. Designed by noted architect Hilyard Robinson (a D.C. Native and 1st African American architect to graduate from Columbia University in 1931), Carver Hall was constructed in 1942 to house single African American men who relocated to Washington to support the war efforts, and was later acquired by HBCU Howard University for student dorms. The U-Shaped building has centered columns appropriate for old-style single-room dorms, not providing adequate depth for typical kitchens, bathrooms, closets, and internal circulation. This forced an alternate configuration with “box car” wide rooms along the perimeter, and a corridor shift from one side of the column line to the other halfway down the wing. Storage and lounge spaces, partially buried at a cellar level with double-height ceilings and clerestory windows above grade, are converted to 14 new terrace-level loft apartments with bedrooms above grade and expansive 2-story living and dining areas.

By working as a limited renovation to alternation and eliminating new building structure and enclosure, the developers allocate costs thoughtfully on design that would impact quality of life for the residents. Indoor air quality was improved with low VOC finishes and improved efficiency ventilation systems. In addition, newly designed common amenity spaces include a library, working spaces, and entertainment areas that are arranged for access and views to the improved landscaping while allowing residents to use spaces for socializing and connecting to nature. Residents also have access to a fitness facility and equipment. These amenities can also be adapted for other uses as needs evolve.

This renovation allowed the architects, contractors, and developers to question, and propose, a new future for the very specific dorm typology. Despite a narrow footprint that is challenging to adapt, the renovation of Carver Hall suggests that these buildings can be given a new-life and be a new kind of home.

A CULTURAL LEGACY



George Washington Carver

1864 - 1943

The most prominent black scientist of the early 20th century.

The name “Carver” has been retained since the building was built in 1942.



Hilyard Robinson

1899 - 1968

Prominent African-American architect and engineer, a D.C. Native and 1st African American architect to graduate from Columbia University in 1931.

Designed Carver Hall during World War II.



“Shown greeting the First Lady [Eleanor Roosevelt] at George Washington Carver Hall, residential hotel for Negro men, is Hilyard Robinson, architect who designed the building. Looking on is W. Spurgeon Burke, resident manager of both Carver Hall and the Lucy Slowe Hall, May 1943.”

-Office of War Information Photograph Collection (Library of Congress)





While the building required extensive upgrades and renovation, **the fundamental structure and most of the exterior envelope remained in very serviceable condition**, had a meaningful past, and contribute to a beautiful historic residential neighborhood.



BEFORE

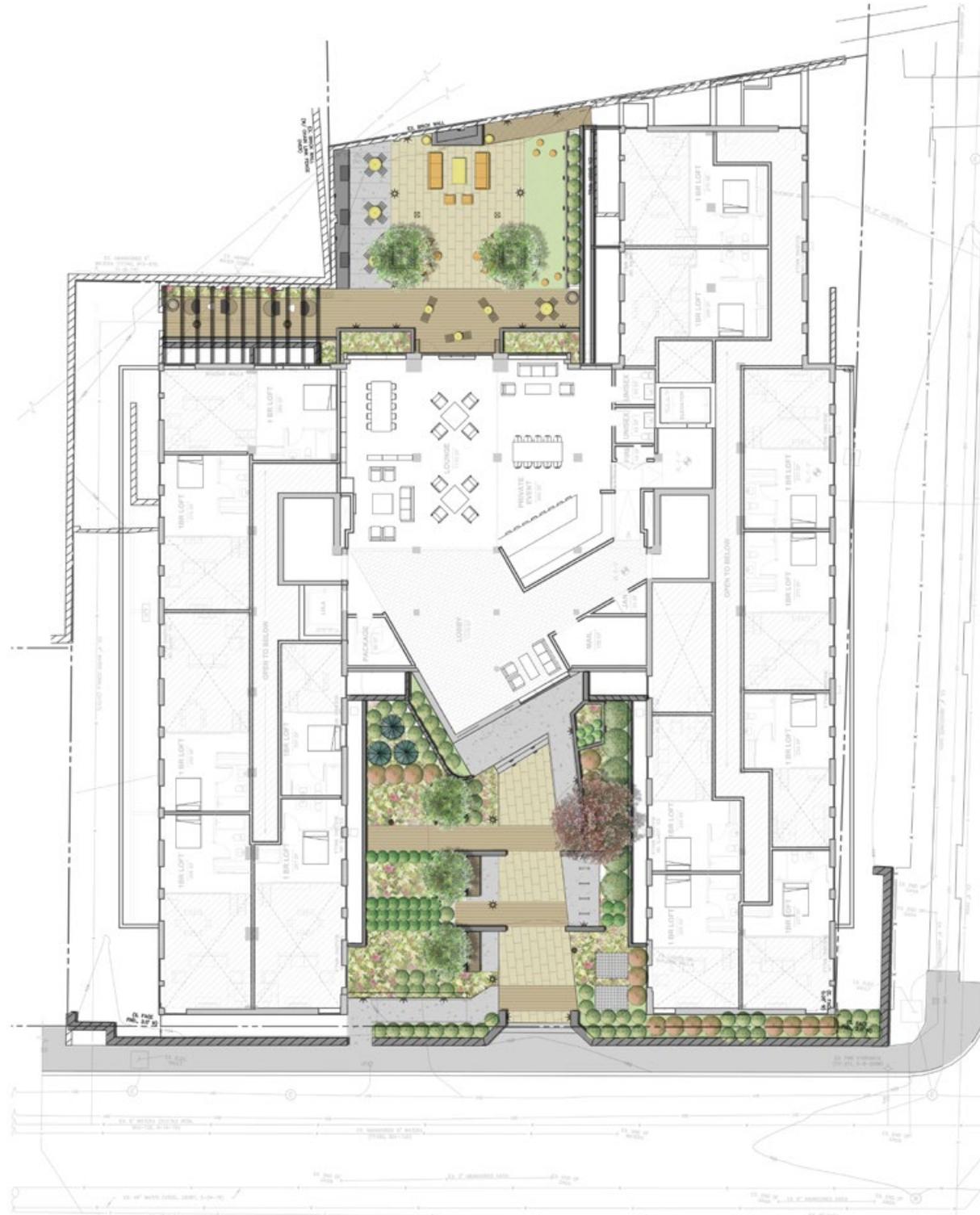


BEFORE



BEFORE

The design of the new entry was improved to enhance the visual connections of the space between the front and back courtyards.



⊕ Ground level landscape plan

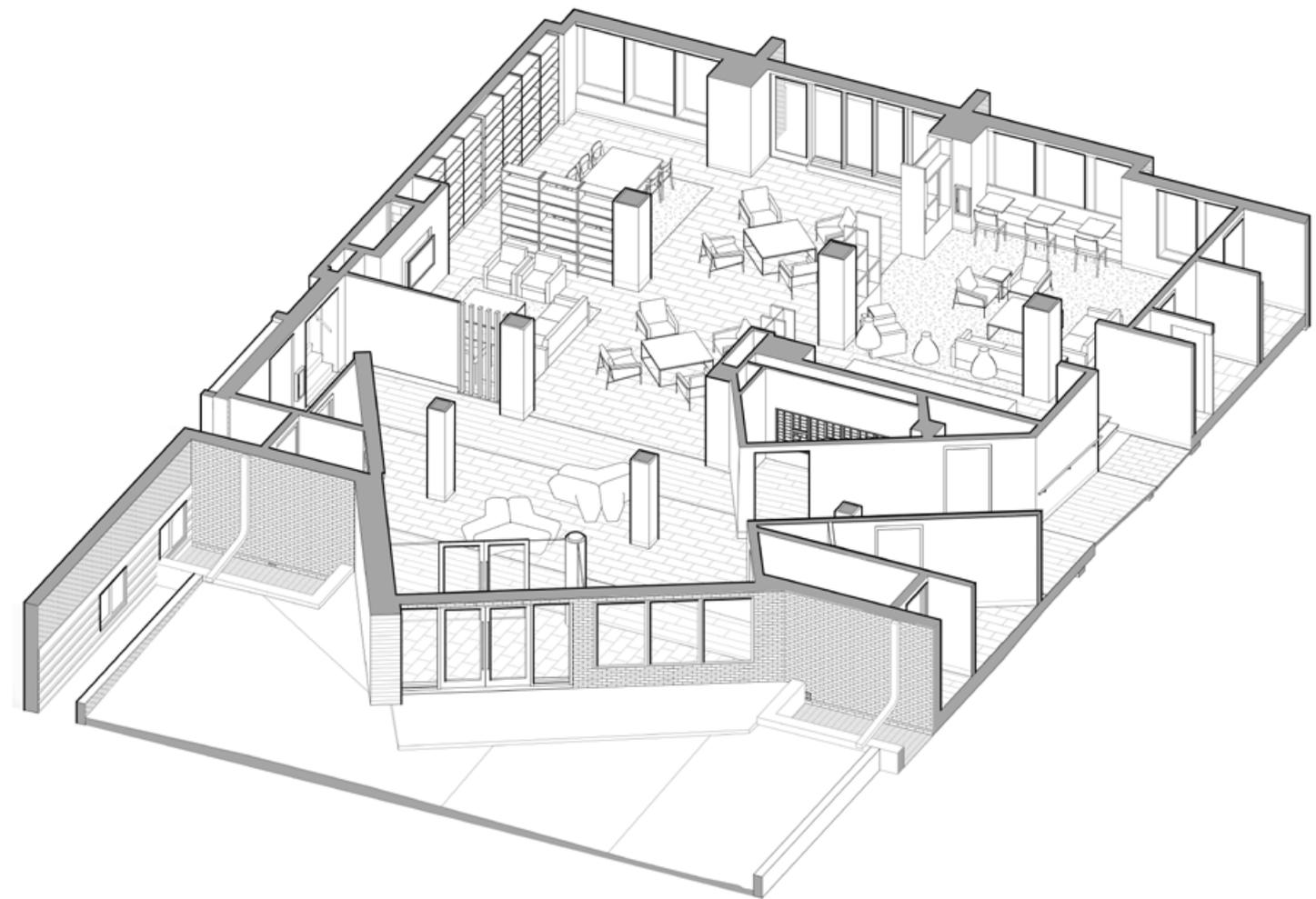


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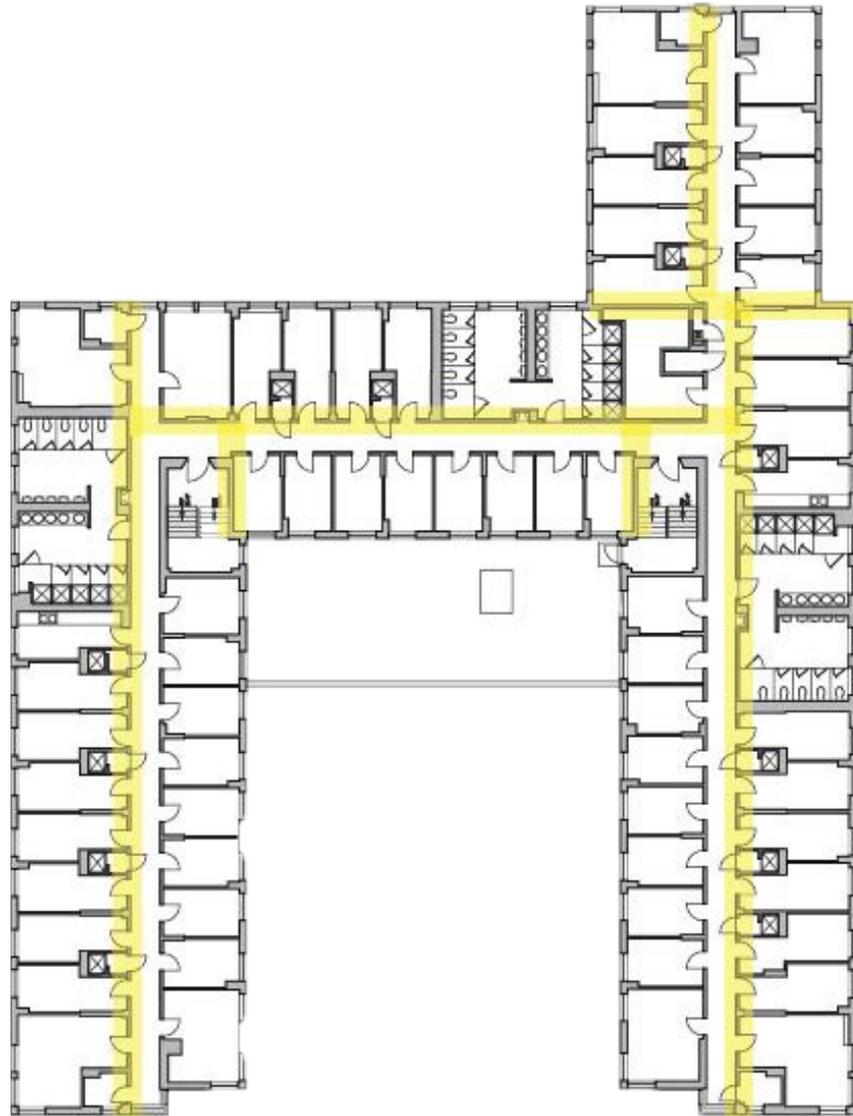
Open lobby and lounge maintain direct line of sight from main entry through to rear exterior courtyard.



The re-design modernized the amenities, made them more accessible, connected the buildings to their surrounding environments, and significantly increased the rentable square footage.



MAIN ENTRY AND LOBBY

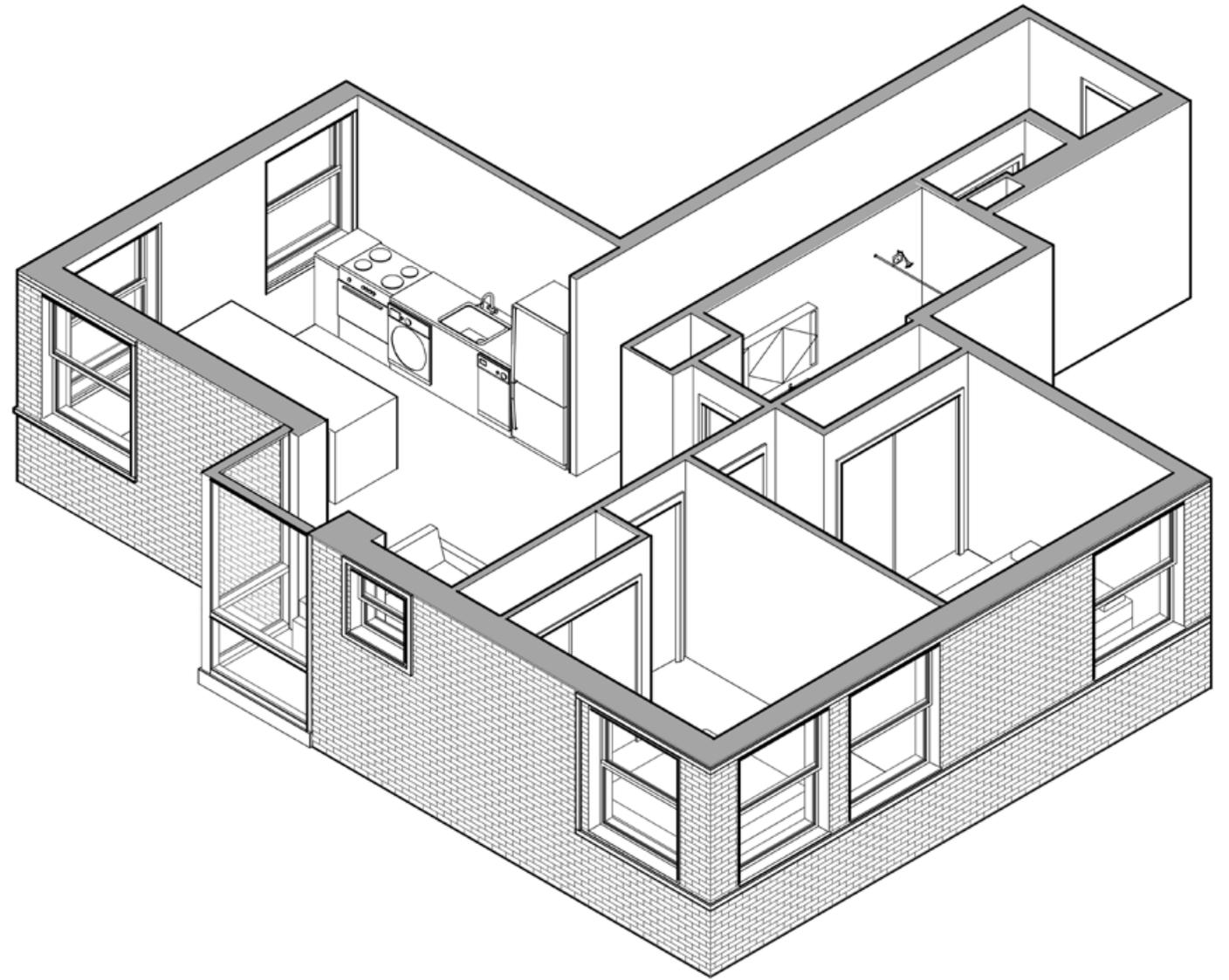


 Carver Hall **existing** typical floor plan
Double-loaded corridor plan (one dorm room on each side)



Carver Hall **new** typical floor plan
Shifting the corridors to either side of the beamline allowed for additional space within each apartment.





2-BEDROOM UNIT

CARVER HALL

A Cultural Legacy In LeDroit Park

