

# **2023 AIA | DC Chapter Design Awards**

**Project Title:** Langston Terrace Revitalization and Sustainability Plan

**Location:** In the Langston/Carver neighborhood of NE DC. Bounding streets are Benning Road NE to the south, H St NE to the north, 24<sup>th</sup> St NE to the East, and 21<sup>st</sup> St NE to the west

**Date of Completion:** Plan: July 2022 – March 2023, Implementation: Upcoming

## **Project Statement (150 words max):**

At the intersection of historic preservation, affordable housing, community engagement, public life, and sustainability, the revitalization of Langston Terrace addresses the changing needs of public housing in the 21st century.

This DC Housing Authority (DCHA) property in Northeast was the city's first public housing project and one of the country's first when it opened in 1938. Uniquely, it was created for African American families by an African American architecture and landscape team, in support of communal social progress and improved living conditions. The International Style campus was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1987.

The 11-acre site includes 274 apartment units in three- or four-level walkup buildings, one- and two-level townhouses, the original power plant (now decommissioned), and landscaping. Planning goals were to prioritize safety and security, improve health and wellness, achieve net-zero energy, expand programming, celebrate and evolve Langston Terrace's legacy, and foster inclusion and unity.

## **Design Narrative: How does this project address Design for Integration, Wellbeing, and Discovery? (150 words max)**

The historic, axial layout of Langston Terrace will be celebrated in some places, as with linear tree plantings and seating that will make the central courtyard more welcoming, but softened in others, by curvilinear paths, ADA ramps, and increased shade trees and plantings.

Residents' main concern is safety. Numerous strategies were developed with residents, including increased visibility through well-lit pathways and cleared overgrowth; improved social connectivity, fostered by seating, activity spaces, and grilling areas; subtle physical and landscape barriers; and the enhancement of existing measures like security cameras and selective fencing.

The campus originally included culturally-rooted public art, including a frieze titled "The Progress of the Negro Race" and several concrete animal sculptures, which will be bolstered through additional installations, wayfinding, and visible new structures on main roads. While some residents feel stigmatized by non-residents for living at Langston Terrace, creating a strong identity will celebrate the community's uniqueness.

## **Community Engagement: How does this project address Design for Equitable Communities and Economy? (150 words max)**

Residents were at the center of the planning process, and all engagements were planned and executed with a Resident Advisory Council (RAC). The team hosted three community engagement events, two

RAC-sponsored holiday events, eight RAC meetings, and a work day at the Langston Terrace Community Garden. Additionally, six paid summer interns from nearby Phelps High School contributed to the plan.

Because accessibility was a top priority, the plan identifies units that could be most easily converted to meet ADA standards, proposed walkout basement units, and proposed ramps and accessible routes throughout campus.

Improvements to existing shared interior and exterior spaces are designed to increase safety and accessibility while fostering a supportive community. New community facilities include new pavilions, a new building on the southeast corner of the site, the decommissioned power plant, as well as building improvements such as porches and canopies.

**Sustainability and Resilience: How does this project address Design for Ecosystems, Water, Energy, Resources, and Change? (150 words max)**

A key component of this planning process is to make Langston Terrace a more sustainable community, in terms of not only environmental sustainability but also financial and social sustainability. All sustainability improvements are focused on resident benefits, improving unit quality, meeting resident needs, and enhancing living conditions.

To create a net-zero community within the confines of the historic registry, the plan recommends sustainability upgrades with little to no effect on building exteriors. On-site solar generation will occur on rooftops and canopies. At the same time, energy demand is reduced through envelope improvements, high-efficiency building systems and appliances—such as all-electric heating, cooling, and domestic water systems—and site-wide energy strategies. Photovoltaic canopies will also improve resident comfort by creating outdoor places to gather sheltered from sun and weather. Increased tree cover and vegetation will increase perceptions of safety, provide edible plants, manage stormwater onsite, and create a more natural setting.

**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.](#))**

- Integration
- Equitable Communities
- Ecosystems
- Water
- Economy
- Energy
- Well-being
- Resources
- Change
- Discovery



# LANGSTON TERRACE

## REVITALIZATION AND SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

2022 2nd Street, N. W., Apt. 102  
Washington, D. C.  
October 24, 1935.

Mr. A. R. Glas,  
Director, Federal Housing Authority,  
Interior Department,  
Washington, D. C.

Dear Sir:

I hereby make application for a five room unit in the  
Langston Terrace housing project.

I am a widow and for quite a number of years I have  
supported my family, consisting of four daughters. Consequently,  
I have never been able to afford a really desirable home and would  
like so much to be included in this project which will permit  
people in circumstances similar to mine decent and adequate housing  
at a reasonable cost.

I have been an employee of the Veterans' Administration  
for more than sixteen years and my salary is \$1680.00 per annum.  
At present I am renting from the B. F. Saul Company, 925 Fifteenth  
Street, Northwest. I worked with Major C. C. Johnson, Secretary,  
12th Street Branch, Y. M. C. A., for a number of years and I furnish  
his name as a reference.

Yours very truly,

*(Mrs.) Fanny H. Alston*

Mrs. Fanny H. Alston  
2022 2nd Street, N. W., Apt. 102  
Washington, D. C.

LETTER REQUEST FROM AN ORIGINAL RESIDENT APPLICATION IN 1935



Original Langston Terrace Resident Council Officers  
(Langston Terrace Dwellings Oral/Video History Project)



Move in day at Langston terrace (Howard Univerity)



Children playing on Completed frog sculpture (National Archives Records Administration)

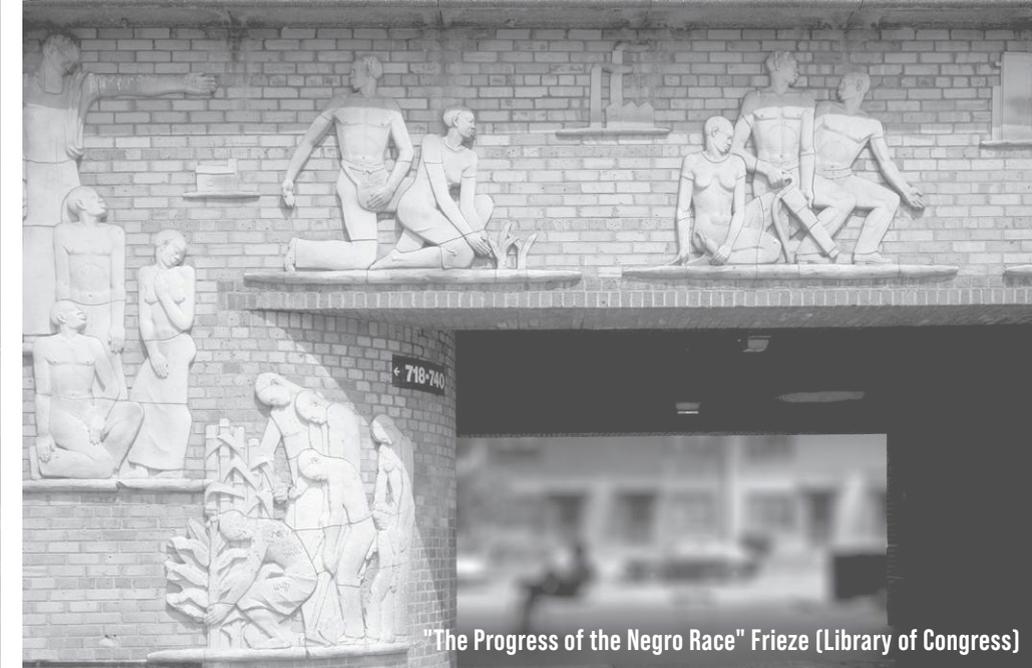
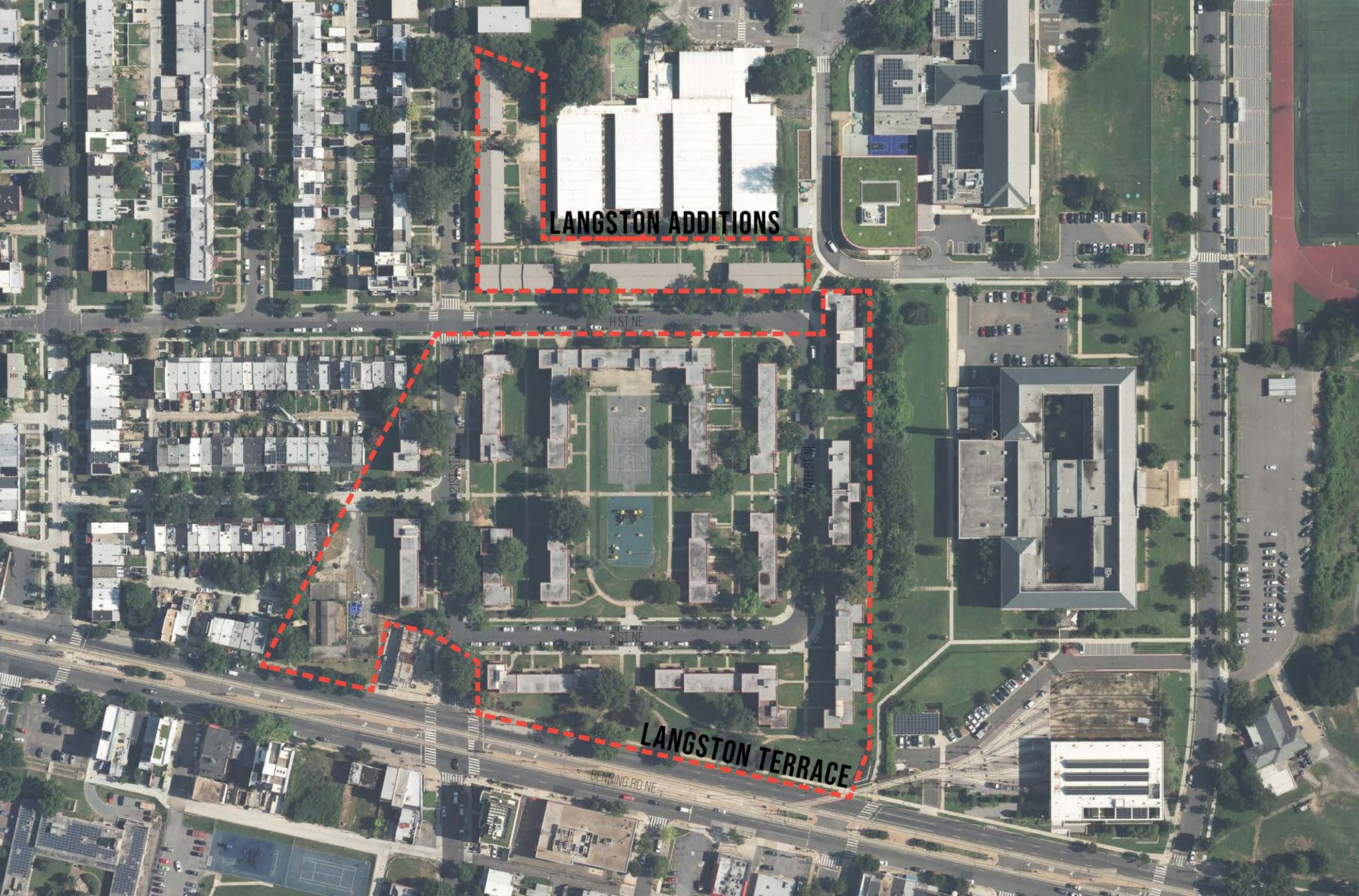


Historic View of Langston Terrace from G Street (Library of Congress)

# LANGSTON TERRACE

## HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Completed in 1938, Langston Terrace was DC's first public housing project and one of the first in the U.S. Uniquely, it was designed for African American families by an African American architecture and landscape architecture team. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1987. Applicants sought an environment that supported communal social progress and improved living conditions, aspirations which aligned with principal architect Hilyard Robinson and landscape architect David Williston, who conceived a site design that gave residents a sense of dignity and a functional layout for community interaction.



# LANGSTON TERRACE

## SITE OVERVIEW

Langston Terrace is located along Benning Road in Northeast DC's Carver/Langston neighborhood. The 11-acre campus comprises 274 units in two-to-four story townhouse and apartment-style buildings featuring distinct two-tone brick facades, flat roofs, and large windows, typical of the International Style. The original, decommissioned power plant still stands in the southwest corner of the site. The site also features several commissioned artworks including a terracotta frieze depicting "The Progress of the Negro Race" and five large animal figures placed throughout the central courtyard.



## Community Engagement

3 Community Events

2 Resident Council Sponsored Events

8 Resident Advisory Council Meetings

6 Phelps High School Summer Interns

1 Work Day at Langston Terrace Community Garden

## 6 PLANNING GOALS

Prioritize safety & security

Improve Health and Wellness

Achieve Energy Environmental Sustainability

Program for Today & Tomorrow

Celebrate & Evolve Langston's Legacy

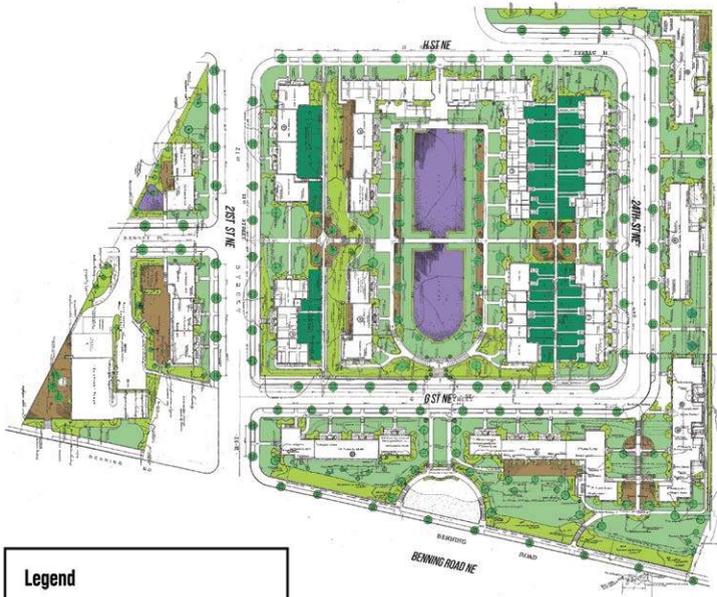
Foster Inclusion & Unity

# LANGSTON TERRACE

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

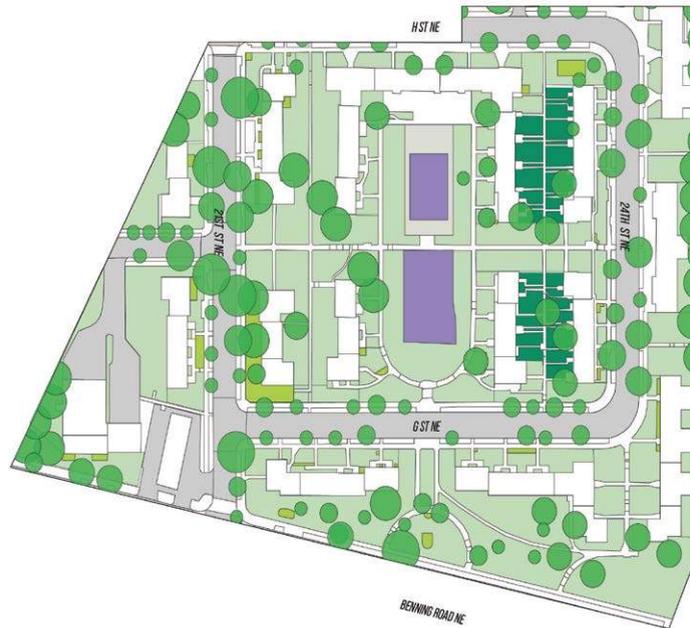
Residents were at the center of the planning process: all engagements were planned and executed with a Resident Advisory Council (RAC), which helped set the direction of the process, encouraged resident participation, and voiced community needs and issues. The team hosted a series of community engagement events, six paid interns from nearby Phelps High School contributed to the plan, and ideas were shared through the property management office. This resulted in six specific planning goals.

### HISTORIC DESIGN



Legend	
	Existing Buildings
	Trees
	Planting Areas
	Lawn
	Backyard Gardens
	Sitting Areas
	Recreation

### CURRENT CONDITIONS



### PROPOSED DESIGN



# LANGSTON TERRACE

## DESIGN FOR INTEGRATION, WELLBEING, AND DISCOVERY

The original site design by landscape architect David Williston complements the architecture and layout of Langston Terrace with a axial, rectilinear layout. The proposed design softens the rectilinear design and provides more buffer and private space for residents. Curvilinear lines also work to respond to residents' need for more nature in their backyards and helps to provide ADA access to more areas of the site. The historic design is celebrated with strong, linear tree plantings in the central courtyard, and an emphasis on the axes through heavier programming along those paths.



ADA Accesible Ramp (AAreas)



Overhead Canopy Structure (Lumos Solar)

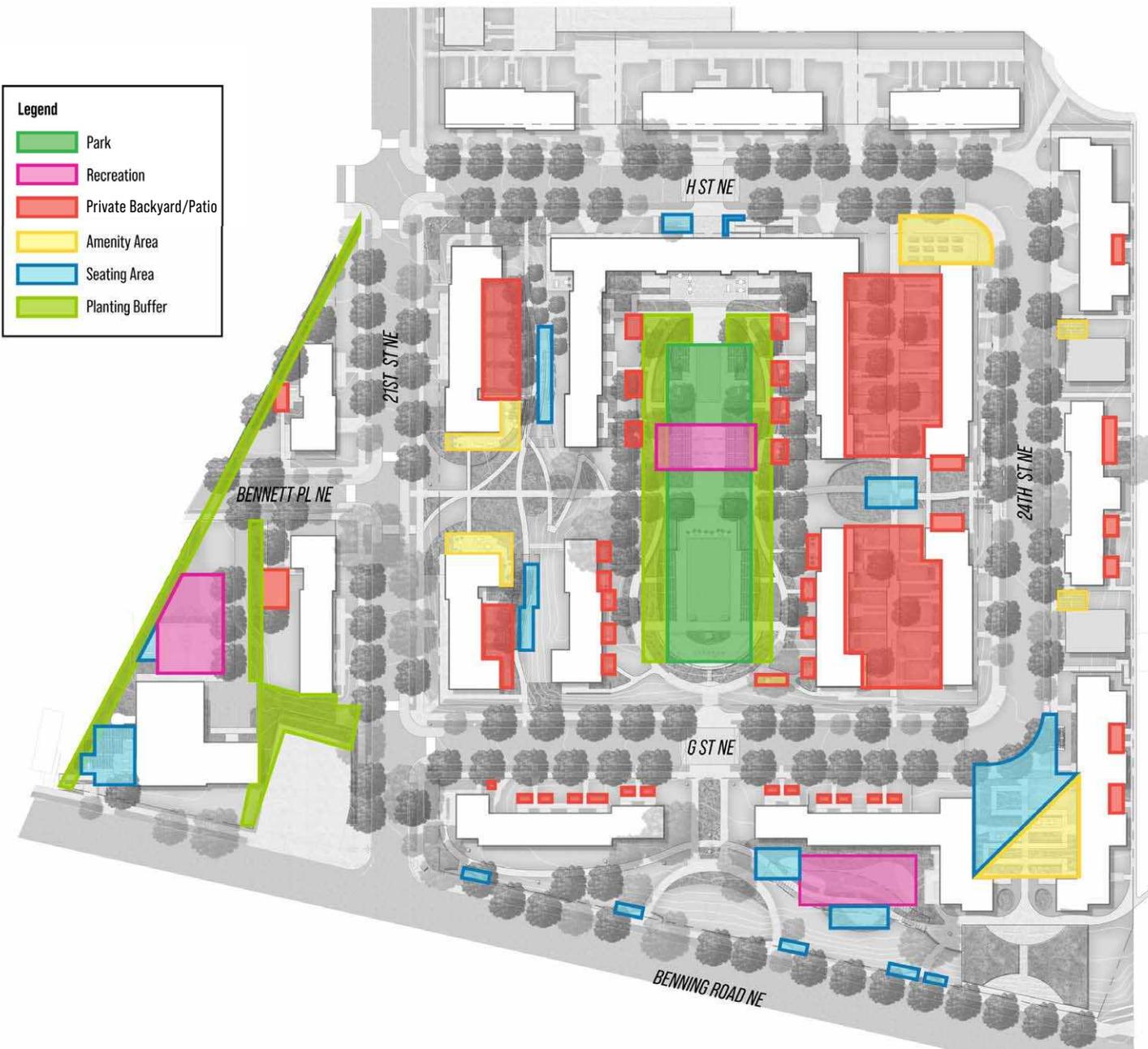


Playground (ASPECT Studio)



Passive Recreation (Kinneer Landscape Architects)

- Legend**
- Park
  - Recreation
  - Private Backyard/Patio
  - Amenity Area
  - Seating Area
  - Planting Buffer



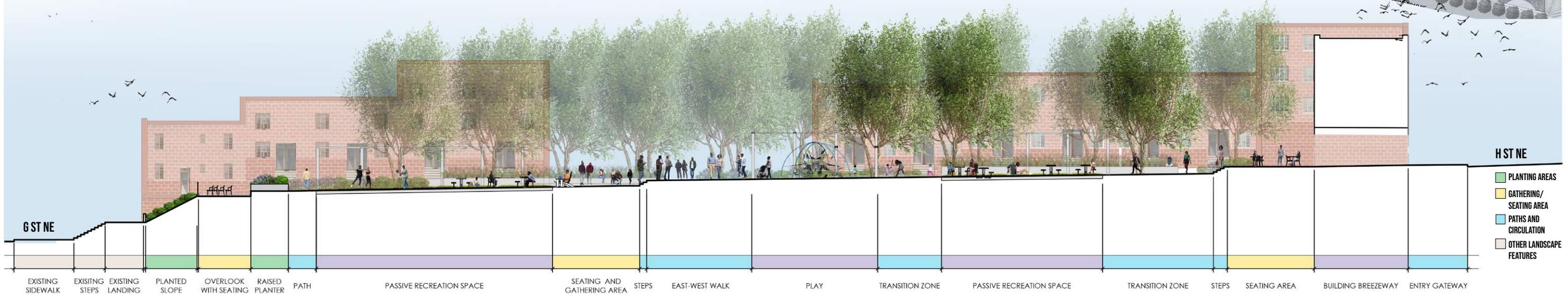
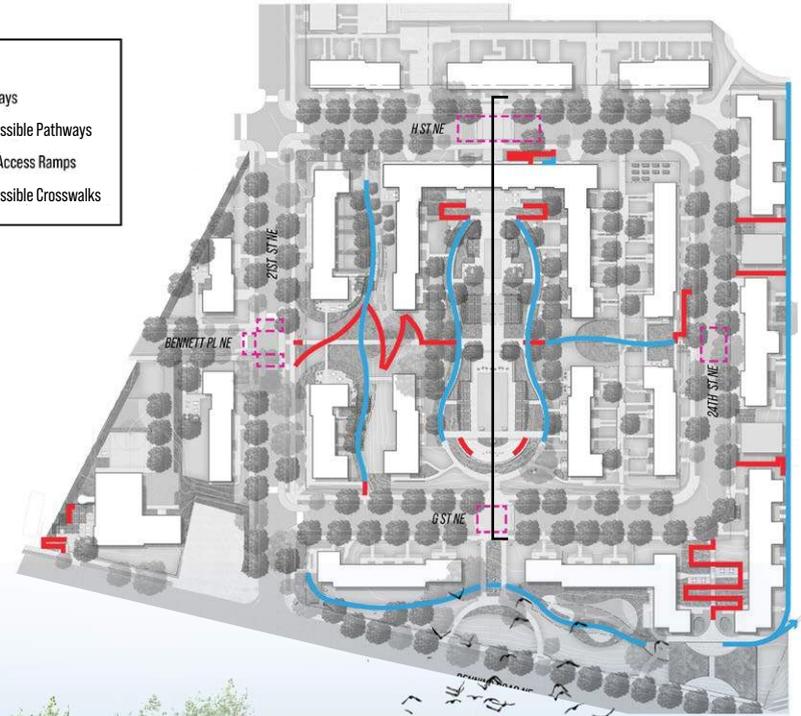
# LANGSTON TERRACE

DESIGN FOR INTEGRATION, WELLBEING, AND DISCOVERY

Community members at Langston Terrace have a desire to feel a sense of ownership over their space, while also maintaining open areas that cater to a multitude of uses. This is achieved with the addition of private stoop expansions and added porches that are building and unit-specific that provide a place for residents to make a small space their own. Flexible spaces throughout the site, such as the open lawn, the expanded Benning Terrace, and the street treatment on 24th street, give residents a place to host event small and large, formal and casual.

**Legend**

- Existing Pathways
- Proposed Accessible Pathways
- Proposed ADA Access Ramps
- Proposed Accessible Crosswalks



Central Courtyard (North-South Section) - Proposed

# LANGSTON TERRACE

DESIGN FOR EQUITABLE COMMUNITIES AND ECONOMY

Accessibility is currently one of the largest challenges at Langston Terrace. Proposed interventions would create connectivity throughout the site, including a celebrated east-west axis that welcomes residents to the central gathering space. The proposed plan seeks to maintain recreation spaces for all ages, subdivide large exposed spaces into more usable zones, and create a clear division of private front stoops and public community areas.

TODAY



## WALKOUT BASEMENTS

Basement units with individual entries along the backs of some apartment building could be added to increase the number of accessible units.



PROPOSED CHANGES

TODAY

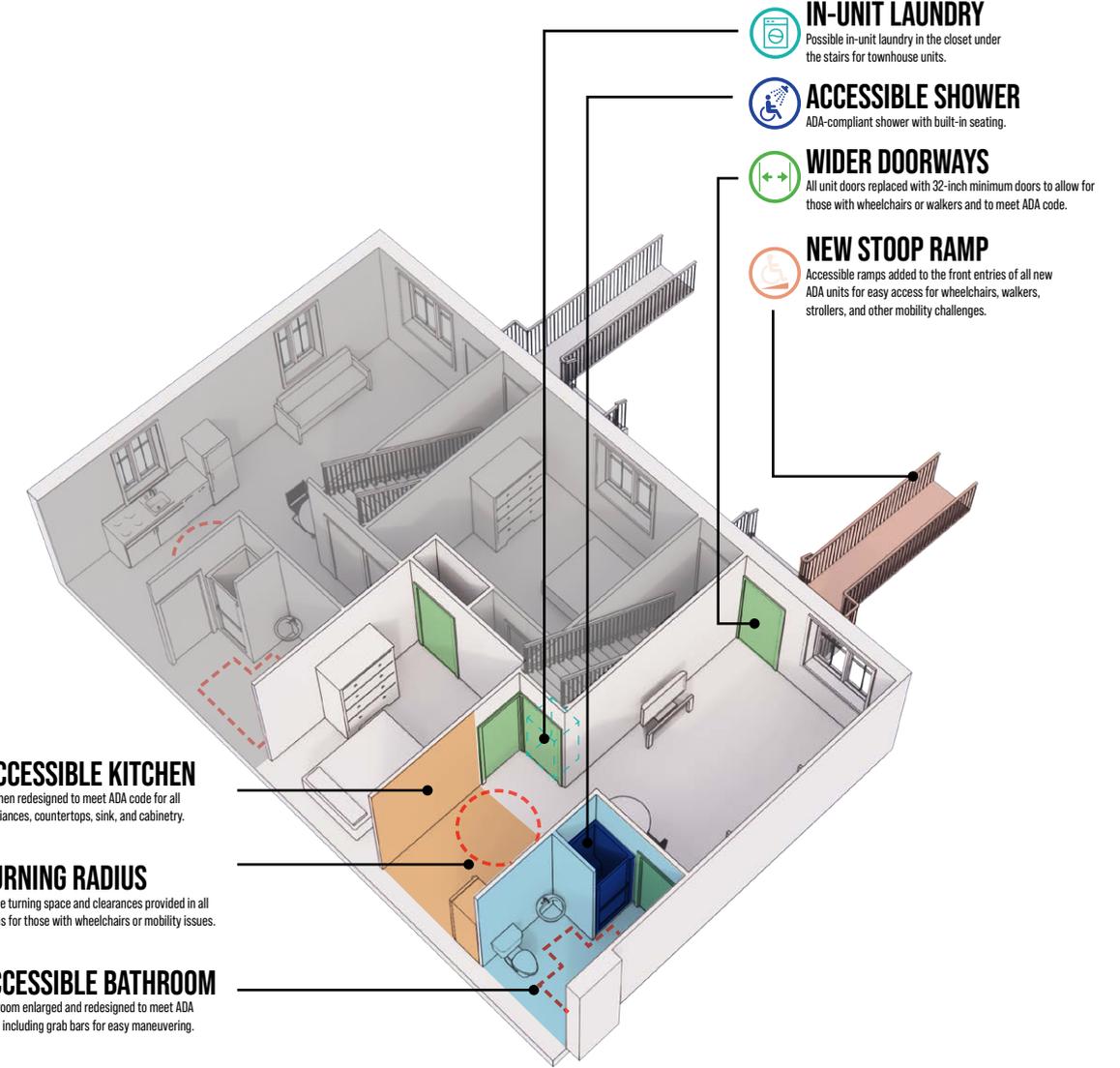


## STOOP RAMPS

Some of the one-level townhouse units could be easily made accessible units by adding ramps to the front door.



PROPOSED CHANGES



**IN-UNIT LAUNDRY**  
Possible in-unit laundry in the closet under the stairs for townhouse units.

**ACCESSIBLE SHOWER**  
ADA-compliant shower with built-in seating.

**WIDER DOORWAYS**  
All unit doors replaced with 32-inch minimum doors to allow for those with wheelchairs or walkers and to meet ADA code.

**NEW STOOP RAMP**  
Accessible ramps added to the front entries of all new ADA units for easy access for wheelchairs, walkers, strollers, and other mobility challenges.

**ACCESSIBLE KITCHEN**  
Kitchen redesigned to meet ADA code for all appliances, countertops, sink, and cabinetry.

**TURNING RADIUS**  
Ample turning space and clearances provided in all rooms for those with wheelchairs or mobility issues.

**ACCESSIBLE BATHROOM**  
Bathroom enlarged and redesigned to meet ADA code, including grab bars for easy maneuvering.

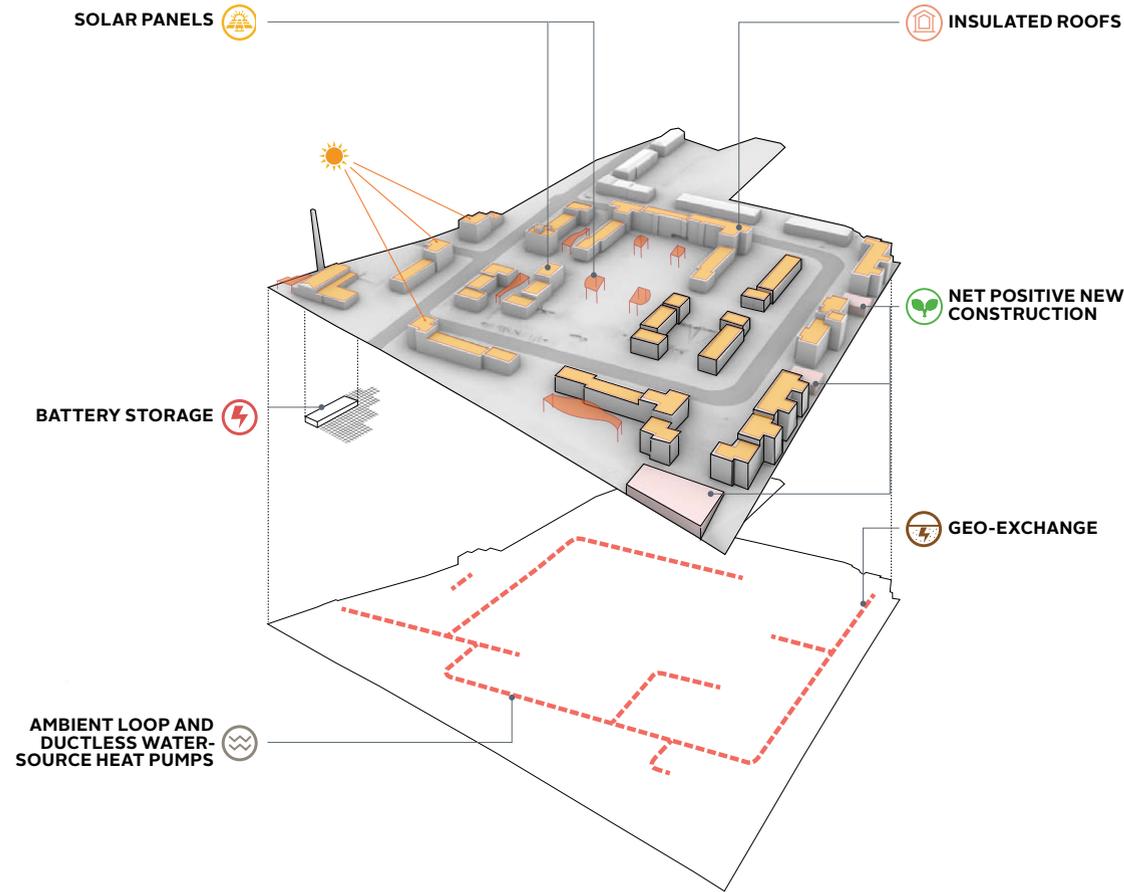
# LANGSTON TERRACE

## DESIGN FOR EQUITABLE COMMUNITIES AND ECONOMY

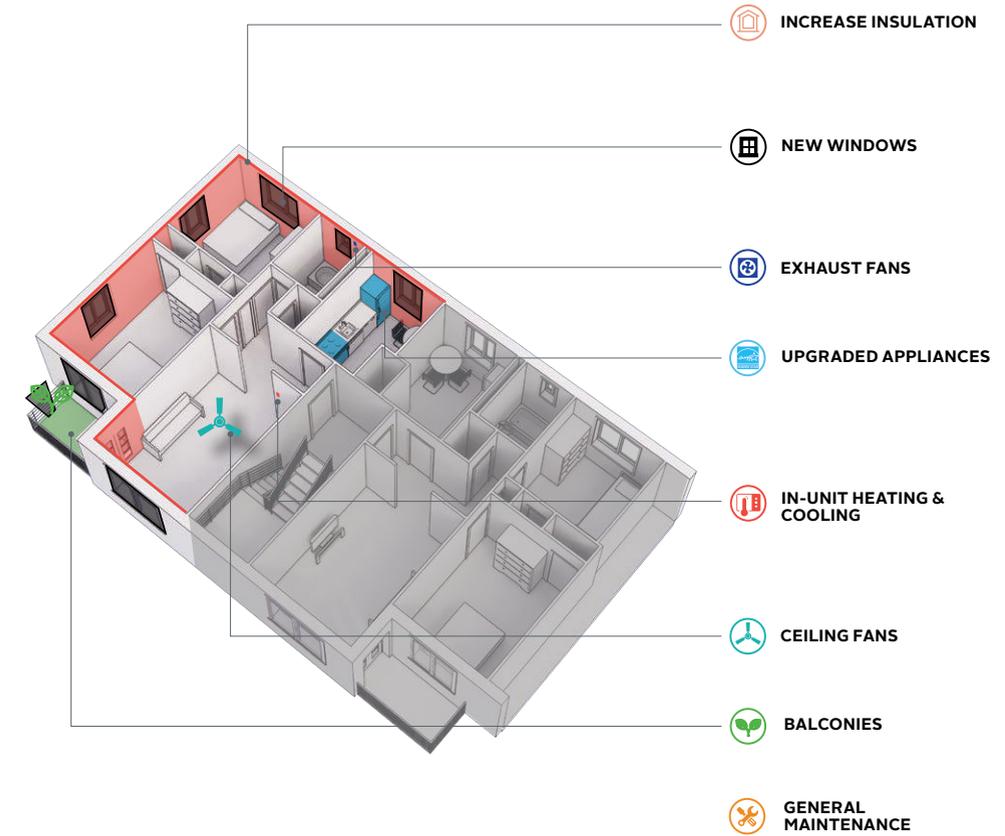
Site accessibility issues extend into the buildings as well: currently Langston Terrace has no accessible units. All townhome units have at least one step between the sidewalk and the door and the apartment buildings are designed similar to a split-level where the first floor is up half a level and the basement is down half a level. To meet DCHA's ADA requirements, 6% of units (11 one-bedroom units, 6 two-bedroom units, and 1 three-bedroom unit) will be reconfigured to meet ADA standards.

- Rooftop Solar
- Shade Structures with Bifacial Solar Panels  
*(7,500-12,500 GSF of surface area depending on density of panels and areas designed with trellis only. Meets energy production targets, assuming highest level of building upgrades.)*
- New Buildings to be Designed to Net-Zero

### SITE UPGRADES



### UNIT UPGRADES



# LANGSTON TERRACE

DESIGN FOR ECOSYSTEMS, WATER, ENERGY, RESOURCES, AND CHANGE

One of the main challenges of this project was achieving DCHA's goal of creating a net-zero community while also working within the confines of a property that is on the historic register. The final plan recommends sustainability upgrades that have little to no effect on the exterior of the historic buildings, while also maximizing benefits for residents in their units and across the site. Upgrades are categorized from the scale of the site, to the whole building, to the individual unit.



*Proposed Multi-Purpose Space in Power Plant.*



*Proposed Community Pavilion along Eastern Edge*



*Proposed Entry to Power Plant Community Center.*

# LANGSTON TERRACE

DESIGN FOR EQUITABLE COMMUNITIES AND ECONOMY

To create public gateways into Langston Terrace, the plan recommends several new community buildings. Two new community pavilions along the site's eastern edge provide new fully accessible space for the Langston Resident Council, as well as a service provider or other amenities. In addition, the long vacant Power Plant can have a new life as a DC Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) Small Community Center, with fitness, classroom, multi-purpose spaces, and a community kitchen with outdoor dining.