



# Suggestions for Physical Design Standards in Supportive Housing Developments

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When designing a supportive housing project, there are numerous considerations that will be critical to the successful operation of the building and the comfort of the tenants. This following list of suggested design standards is not a checklist of required items; each supportive housing project is unique, and architects, owners and service providers should make design decisions collectively, keeping cost constraints in mind. It is also important to note that good design is no substitute for good property management and services staff in supportive housing. Good design supports their work. Property managers could misuse some of the design suggestions listed to create a sterile, confining environment for tenants. This is not the goal of these suggestions. Rather, each suggestion is made with tenants' well-being in mind and should be evaluated in light of the needs of the specific population for the housing project. For example, a project might include play space for family projects, or narrower hallways for people with mobility and/or intoxication issues. In addition, it is very important to factor in the requirements of the projects' funding sources, many of which may have their own design standards.

The following list provides suggested design standards for supportive housing projects, especially single-site, multi-unit buildings.<sup>1</sup>

## *Appliances*

- Accessible to persons with disabilities
- Stove controls on front; Braille control labels; roll-under stovetops and sinks in some units
- Over stove/sink lighting reachable from wheelchairs
- Front-loading washers and dryers

## *Bathrooms*

- Private bathroom for each unit
- Heavy-duty toilet to reduce repairs from heavy use
- Overflow drains
- Grab bars in place of standard towel bars, if possible
- Emergency call cord (may be needed in only a few units unless serving the elderly)
- Adequate turning radius for wheelchairs in some units

## *Community space*

- Community spaces should be numerous, easily accessible and encourage use (for example, a game room with pool table and pingpong, a computer center, a craft room, TV/movie area, etc.)
- One large space with enough room for all tenants
- Wired for cable and phone

## *Doors and locks*

- Consider all ADA requirements, especially for entrance doors
- All exterior doors should be automatic self-locking – with levers rather than knobs for accessibility
- Entrance doors and apartment doors with a computerized key system (cards, buttons, etc.), with read-out capability
- Secure box for fire department keys
- Alarmed crash bars on all but main entrances
- Wide-angle door peepholes to expand ability to identify persons at the door



### *Hallways*

- Handrails on both sides desirable, and should be on at least one side
- Textured, impervious covering, up to at least 48 inches from floor, for upkeep and appearance purposes
- Stagger doorways (not directly opposite each other)

### *Heating and air-conditioning*

- Central heating and air conditioning to reduce maintenance costs and increase comfort
- No window units, if at all possible — may block means of egress, cause safety problems and are less cost-efficient
- Be certain any HVAC equipment is not near tenant units and/or windows
- Central hot water heater
- Especially in rehabs, be certain envelope of building is tight (roof, siding, windows, caulking, masonry)

### *Landscaping*

- Attractive and simple, utilizing low-water, native plants
- Easy long-term maintenance
- Doesn't interfere with safety or accessibility of entrances
- Create opportunities for tenant gardening, if possible
- Exterior water and electrical outlets very helpful

### *Laundry space*

- Fully accessible, central laundry areas, distributed throughout property and in well-trafficked, well-lit areas for safety
- About one washer/dryer per 15 to 20 persons
- Folding table or counters at accessible heights
- Sink, if possible
- Laundry supplies available for sale through vending machines

### *Lighting*

- Functional and inexpensive to replace
- Plentiful and easily accessible outside lighting
- Sufficient hallway and community space lighting for personal safety
- Lighting within units easy for tenants to change bulbs and to reach

### *Mailboxes*

- Low enough to be handicapped accessible
- Outgoing mail slot or box
- Shelf under boxes is useful
- Central, well-trafficked, well-lit area for safety and to encourage social interactions

### *Parking*

- Sufficient parking for tenants, staff and guests that is clearly marked and differentiated
- Parking stickers for tenants/residents
- Well-lit parking lot/spaces
- Handicapped parking exactly to accessibility standards with easy access to entry ramps

- Fire zone parking clearly marked on pavement and signs — consult with fire department for specific requirements
- Plan adequately for snow removal, trash truck entrance/exit
- Consider removable speed bumps in larger parking lots
- Consider where to put snow when plowing
- “No parking” signs where appropriate, and “No trespassing” signs may be useful to avoid outsiders using the limited parking. They should mirror signage in nearby private, market-rate housing developments

#### *Phone Service*

- Enough lines to accommodate fire alarm, elevator, security system, building entry system
- Wire all units for phone and cable
- If call system to tenant units, consider whether handsets will be needed and/or separate wiring. Have systems that can work for tenants who may not have phone service at all times

#### *Security*

- 24-hour video monitoring and recording and front entrance door-opening capability from front desk
- Include cameras in stairwells, outside entrances, as well as all floors
- Alarmed crash bars on all emergency exits
- Window stops on first-floor windows to prevent unlawful entrance
- Self-locking exterior doors
- With multiple entrances, add more cameras and possibly more after-hours staff
- Use lighting to enhance safety

#### *Signage*

- All signage should be included in the specs (unit doors, common area, offices, building(s) name/number, handicapped parking, no trespassing, etc.) and should be in Braille. Check other regulatory requirements regarding signs
- Property sign during construction should include funding source, handicapped logo, Equal Opportunity Housing logo, hearing-impaired access information and contact phone numbers
- No soliciting, no trespassing, no loitering signs, but should mirror signage in nearby private, market-rate housing developments

#### *Storage space*

- For tenants in building — securable
- Superintendent — storage and workspace for doing repairs
- General building storage for replacement mattresses, refrigerators, extra furniture
- Outside storage for snow blowers, lawn mowers, and other equipment that cannot be legally or safely stored indoors
- Secure storage for archived documents

#### *Windows*

- Tilt-in or other accessible windows for cleaning purposes
- Consider bars or other security measures for first-floor units (check fire regulations for acceptability)

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*Trash and Recycling*

- Include provisions for recycling by tenants
- Be certain all trash receptacles are in sanitary distance from tenant units and/or windows
- Plan carefully for inside and outside trash flow
- No garbage chutes

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<sup>1</sup> This information was prepared by Pat Jackson, Regional Coordinator of Supportive and Family Housing for Community Housing Management (CHM). She created this list as she worked with supportive housing sites throughout the state of Connecticut. CHM, a nonprofit housing management company, manages 386 units in 10 single site supportive housing projects in Connecticut, including many that serve people who were formerly homeless for the long term. Together with its sister company, Elderly Housing Management, CHM is committed to providing quality affordable housing to those who need it. Both CHM and Elderly Housing Management companies are part of the New Samaritan Corporation based in Hamden, Connecticut. For more information on any of these organizations, please visit their website at [www.newsamaritancorp.org](http://www.newsamaritancorp.org).