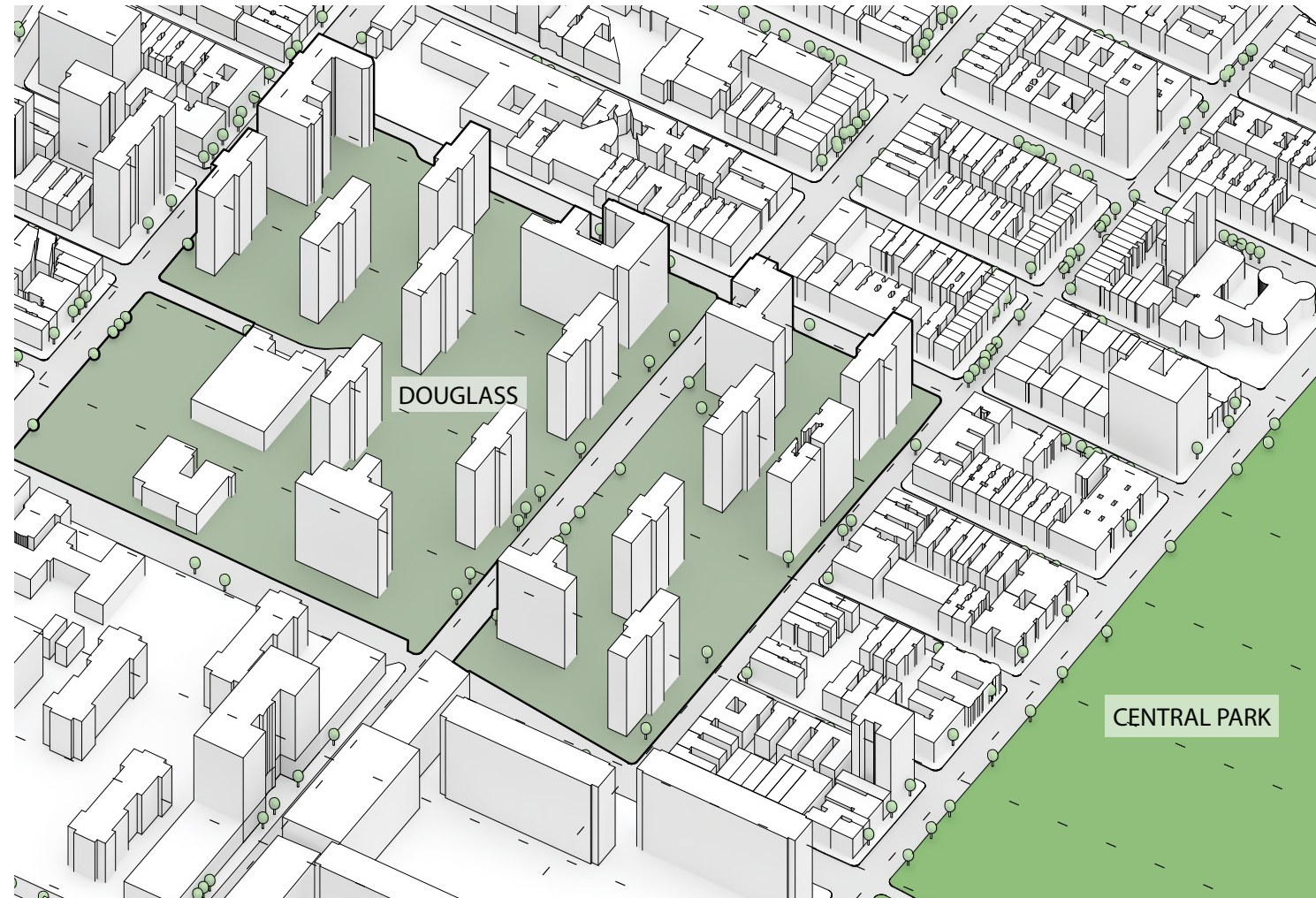


# FREDERICK DOUGLASS HOUSES

## A strong yet forgotten community in the Upper West Side

Lucas Coelho Netto



Location diagram

### INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

NYCHA Frederick Douglass I and II are home to over four thousand residents in Manhattan. Composed of eighteen buildings, most of them completed in 1958, the complex of high-rises stands out like a sore thumb amongst the low-rise brownstone buildings surrounding it in Upper West Side.

What at first glance appears to be a healthy community for passers-by, with the recurrent street events, music, outdoor gatherings, and a sports court, is heavily contrasted by the presence of police cars around the perimeter and lawsuits against the city for poor living

conditions. Rats, bedbug infestations, collapsing walls and ceilings, mold, hunger, and broken radiators are a few of the complaints filed by residents over the last decade.

Unfortunately, authorities have not done much to reverse this scenario. Inhabitants find themselves abandoned in an imaginary deteriorating island, with boundaries established by rent prices and ethnography. Through a network of collective care, they help each other through the difficulties faced daily. With few vacancies and most residents living there for decades, it is a place where “everybody knows your name”.

Even though, residents are still dying out of hunger in their apartments. Some could not go downstairs to buy food because of accessibility issues and broken elevators due to lack of maintenance.

When top-down and power agencies do not take action, we often encounter bottom-top initiatives that try to revert negative scenarios. It is the case of Douglass’ Tenants Association, led by Carmen Quinones, ten main volunteers, and one “guardian” per building. Together, they try to lighten the burdens residents face: food distribution, daily visits, religious events, and sports activities are a few of the examples that create a bond in the community, and help them get by.

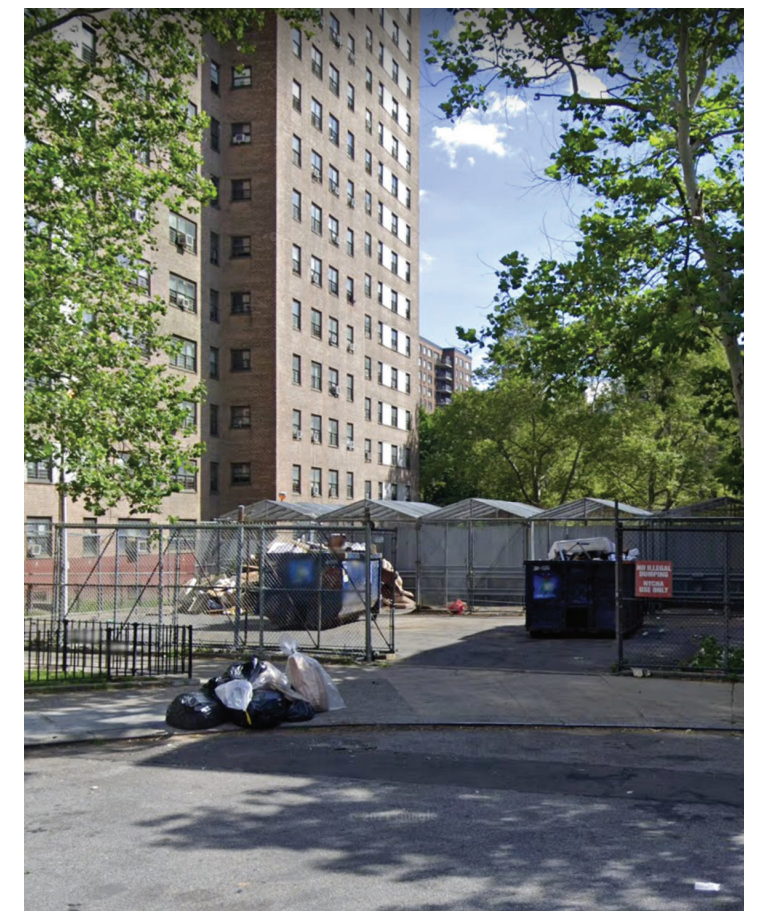
### PROPOSAL

This project aims to tackle two spatial issues of the site: the poor spatial quality of the apartments and the lack of indoor shared spaces for residents. The facade is deteriorating, there is not enough sunlight in the rooms and the apartments are considerably small. In addition, the only indoor common area is a semi-underground room, with no windows, where all administration happens. During winter, when outdoor gatherings are interrupted by the weather, the space host all sort of festive events, masses, and meetings.

Abandoned gardens accumulate trash, and broken furniture, increasing the number of rodents. The area is locked by the NYCHA and not allowed for intervention by the residents - who also do not have the budget to do so.

To tackle the apartments’ spatial quality, balconies are added all around the buildings, and the opening is made larger to compensate for the sunshade from the new additions and provide access to it. The second floor of the buildings is converted into common areas accessible by ramps and stairs, which also allows for bringing part of the senior residents to lower floors. Finally, three sub utilized outdoor areas are converted into new uses to support nearby activities.

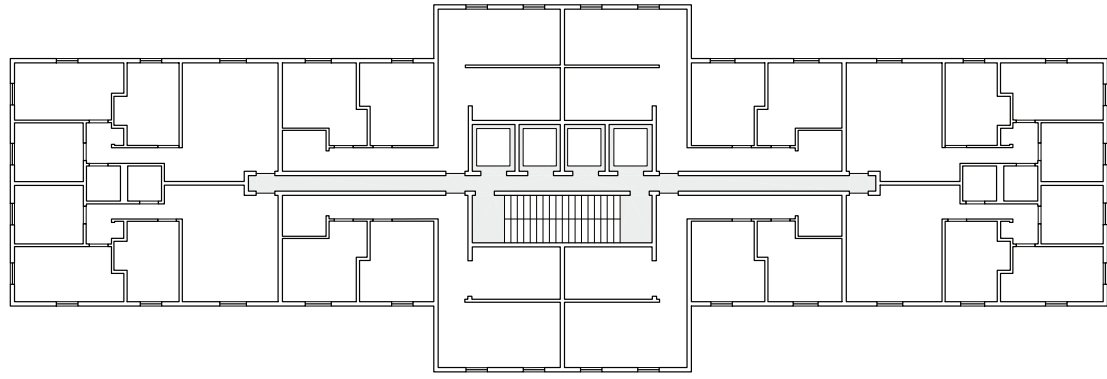
Residents need spaces to support the social infrastructure created amongst and by them.



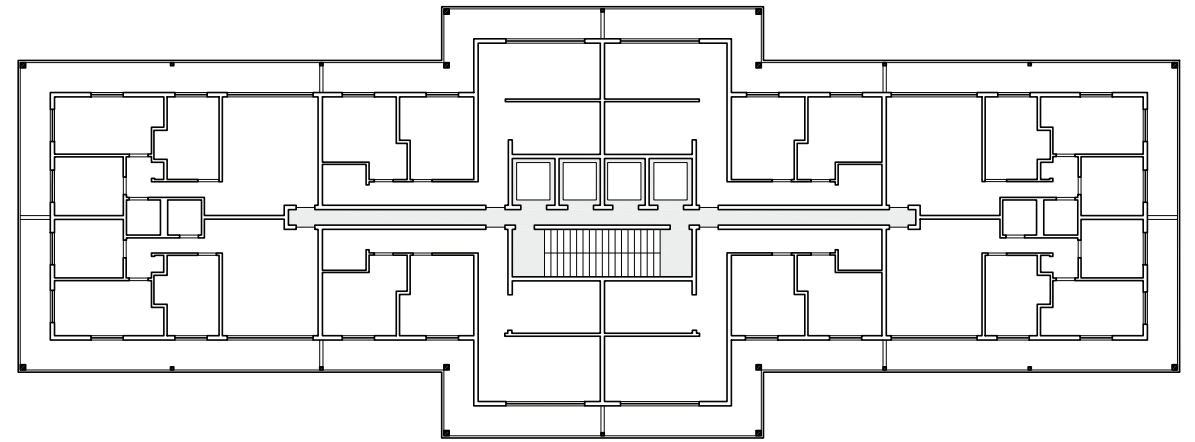
Douglass House



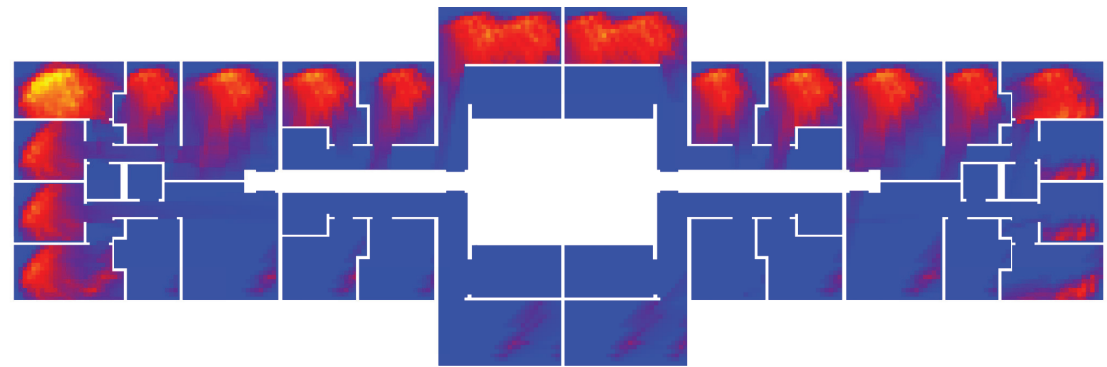
ORIGINAL PLAN - LAYOUT



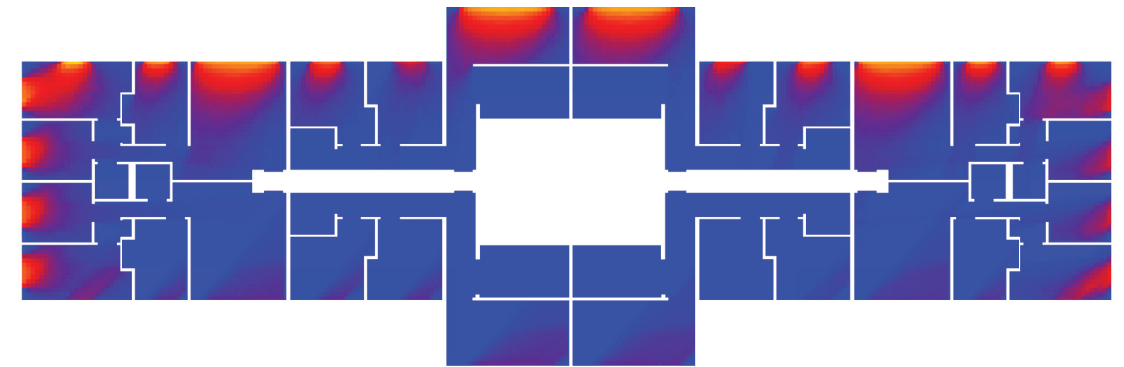
PROPOSED PLAN - LAYOUT



ORIGINAL PLAN - SUNLIGHT HOURS



PROPOSED PLAN - SUNLIGHT HOURS





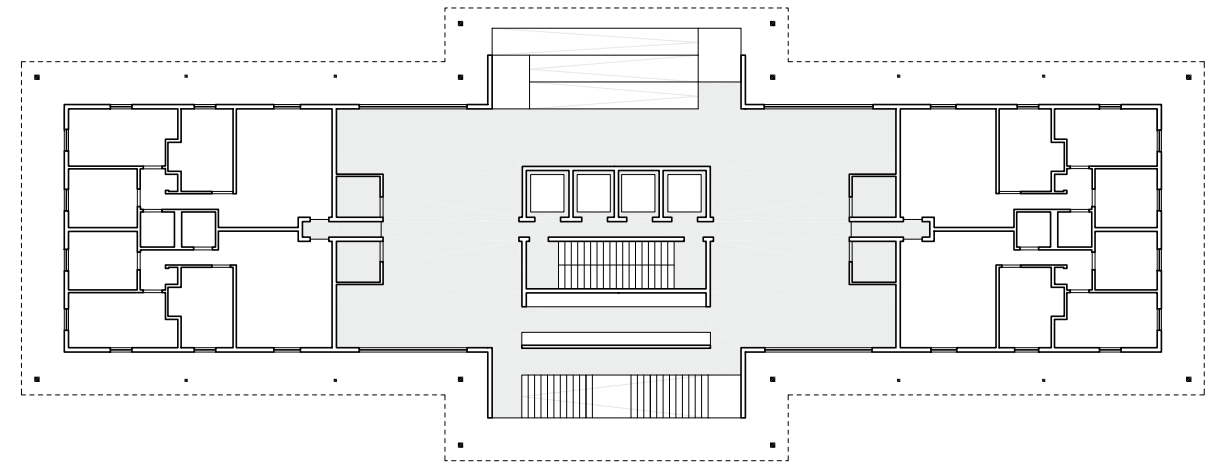
The new shared space on the second floor connects to the street level through accessible ramps and stairs. It serves as a space for meetings and events, as well as a collective kitchen with bathrooms and access to the building's vertical circulation core. It is also the floor of the new apartments destined for senior residents with mobility difficulties.

The exposed brick follows the building's original facade, wrapping the interior walls. The floors follow the concrete paving of the pathways as a continuation of the public space to a new level. And the core is clad in metal panels to reflect light around the spaces.

Externally, the balconies merge with the existing buildings through their geometry and materiality. The new handrail in dark steel follows the color palette and materiality of existing window frames, and the chamfered concrete slabs stand out as the new element introduced.

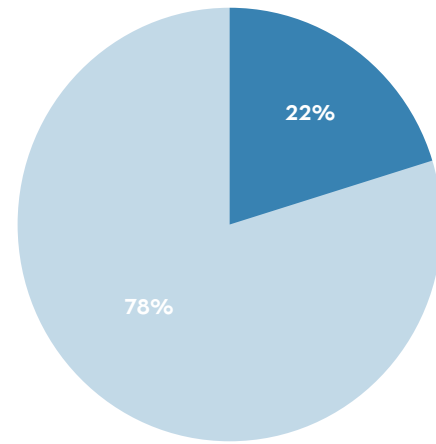
However, the balcony is not added to the first floor to emphasize the building's entrance and provide more light into the public spaces. Squared sectioned columns support the new structure and land on the ground 1.5m away from the original facade.

## PROPOSED PLAN - LAYOUT



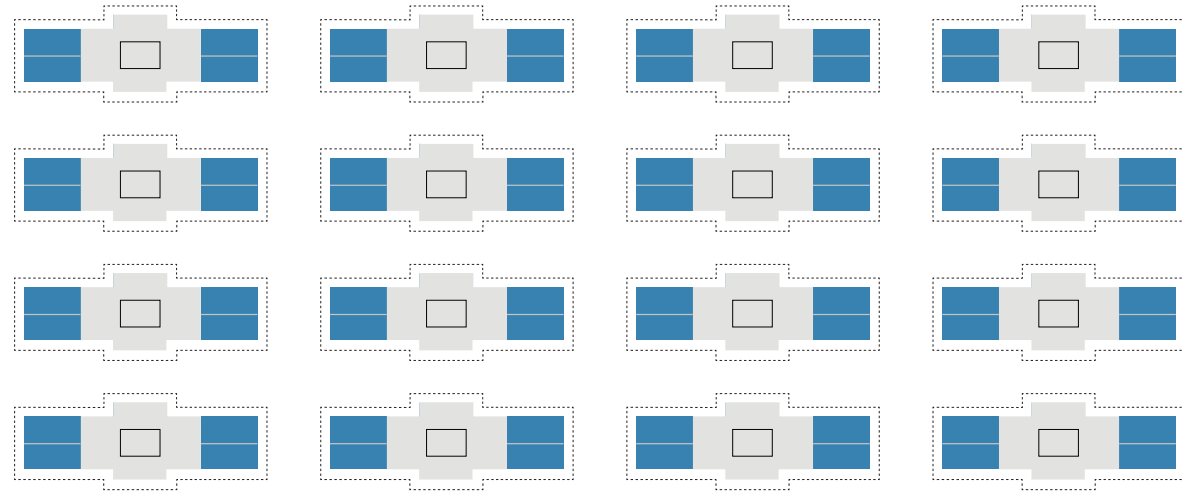


# SENIOR RESIDENTS



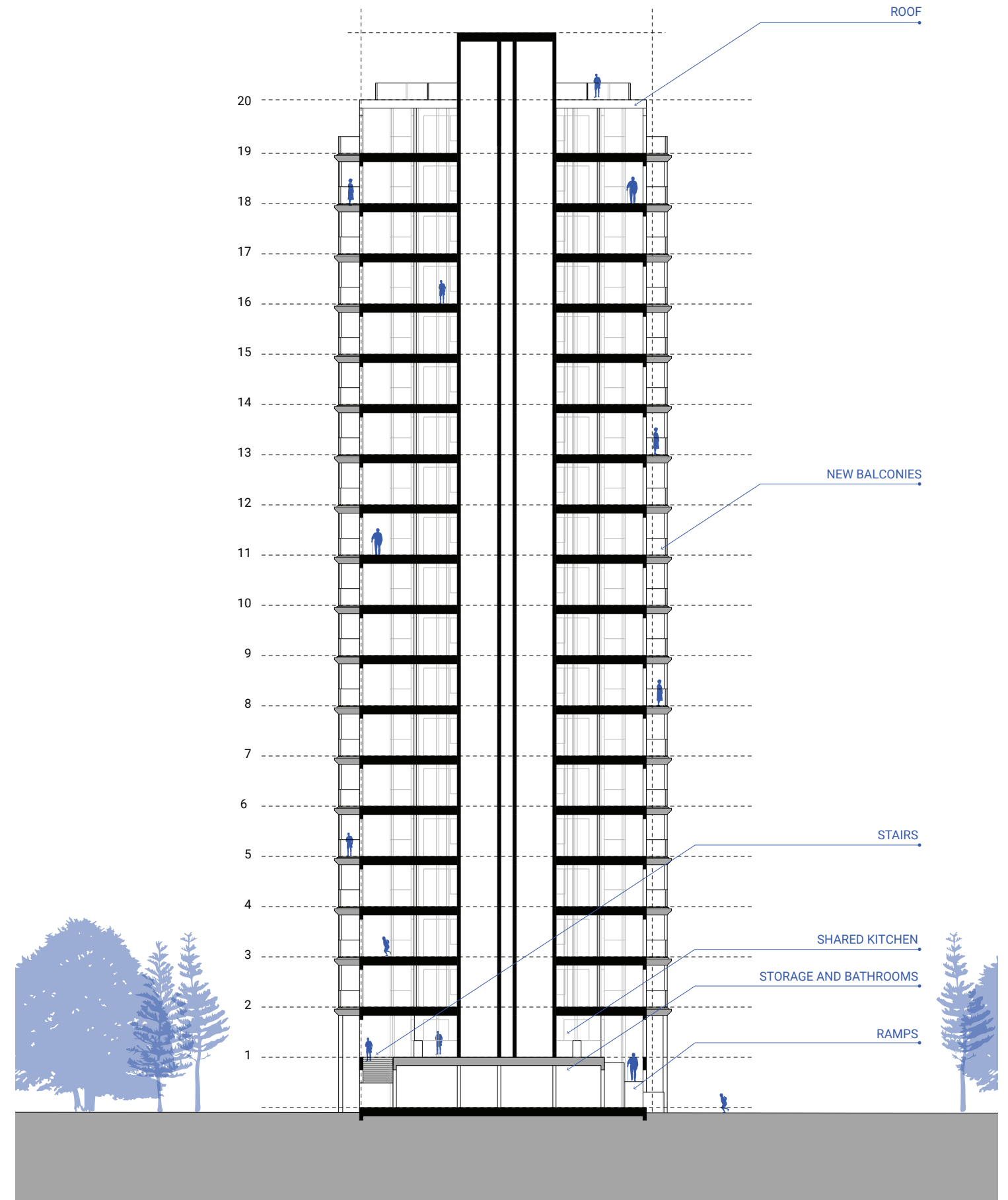
4204 total residents  
919 Single Seniors

Out of the 4204 residents in both Douglass I and II, 919 are seniors, which corresponds to approximately 22%. Several complaints of broken elevators deem them unable to get in or out of their homes, due to mobility issues.

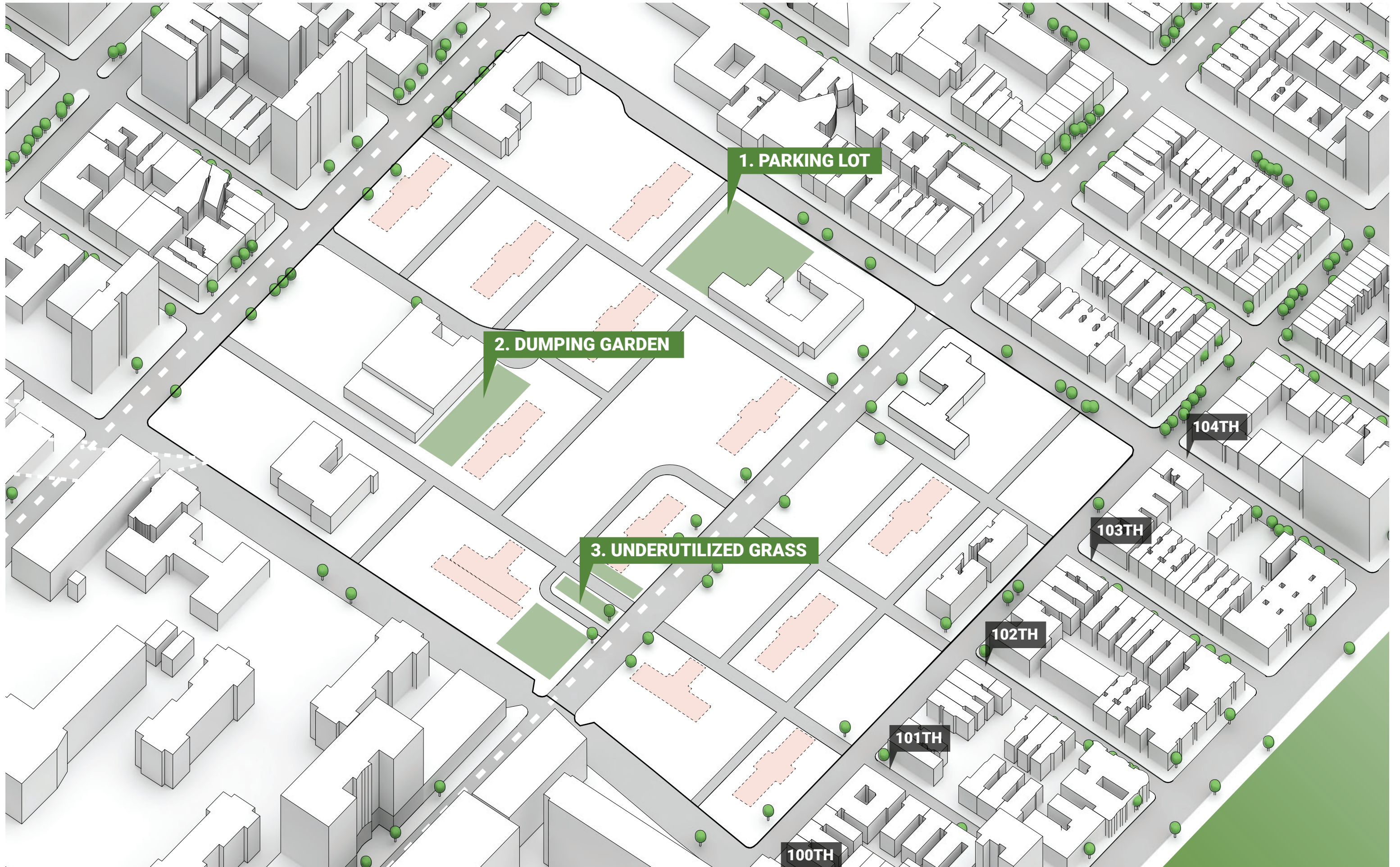


16 buildings  
64 apartments  
128 senior residents (15%)

With the new common space on the second floor of each building accessible by ramps, we can convert the remaining units into senior apartments. This would allow having 15% of the senior residents to live in apartments that do not rely in elevators and are closer to the shared areas and nature.



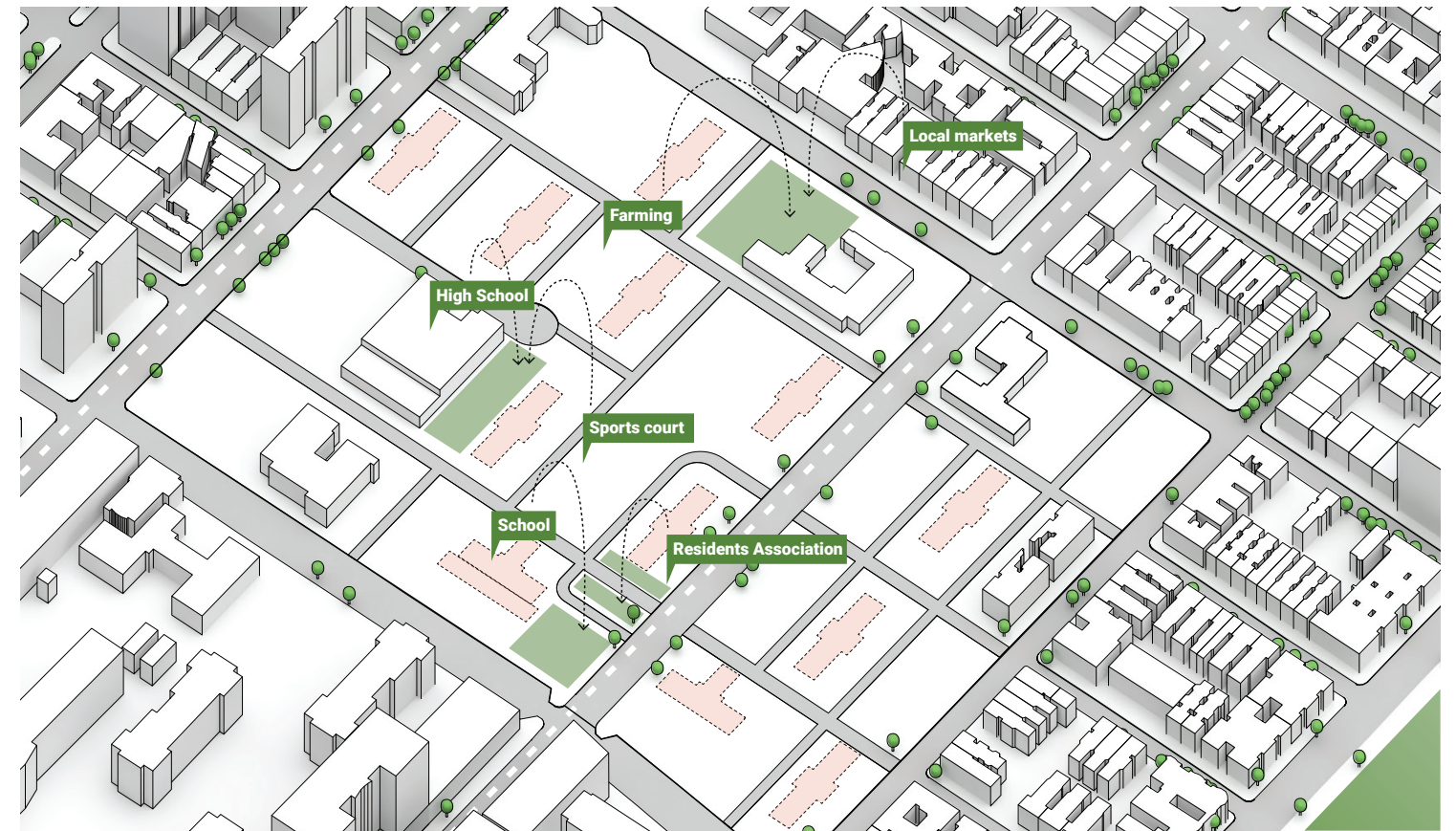








Bi-weekly free food distribution organized by the RA



Food distribution

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