

A good architect must be a good storyteller. A building without a story is mere construction.

The best architecture has meaning. Great spaces can make you feel like a part of the past, present, and future all at once; they are more than physical boundaries and materials. An architect helps create that meaning by ensuring storytelling is woven into the entire design process. We are all drawn to spaces that *feel* like they were put together with purpose, that everything is there *for a reason*.

Every project is unique, and the architect must determine the audience to understand where to begin. The story of a space must be authentic, not a sales pitch, helping turn the lines on a drawing into an experience. The vision may explain how the space will function (show a mother how she'll turn each corner in their new home when entering the new mudroom after a Saturday soccer game) or how a commercial building will define a public square (showing how light will unveil itself to patrons as the sun travels the day).

Memory is at the core of stories about building. One of my favorite French philosophers (not that I have many) is Gaston Bachelard who wrote in the *Poetics of Space* that, "Of course, thanks to the house, a great many of our memories are housed, and if the house is a bit elaborate, if it has a cellar and a garret, nooks and corridors, our memories have refuges that are all the more clearly delineated. All our lives we come back to them in our daydreams..."

Reading his book as a student encouraged me to think about my memories and their attachment to a physical space. The damp smell of my Grandmother's basement, the pile height of my parent's carpet as I tried to scrub paint, or the smell of mother's peonies in the Spring. These all contribute to a memory, a feeling, in a space. A simple story.

Architecture is rooted in memory. But by its very nature, new architecture, is about the future. The promise memories to come. Architecture is a story of hope – our attempt make tomorrow a bit better than today.

I offer here, two examples on how architectural storytelling in the real world. The first is a series of townhomes on a complicated site where the audience is an entire community. The second is a historic renovation, where the story centers on a single homeowner.

PART I - A Charged Development

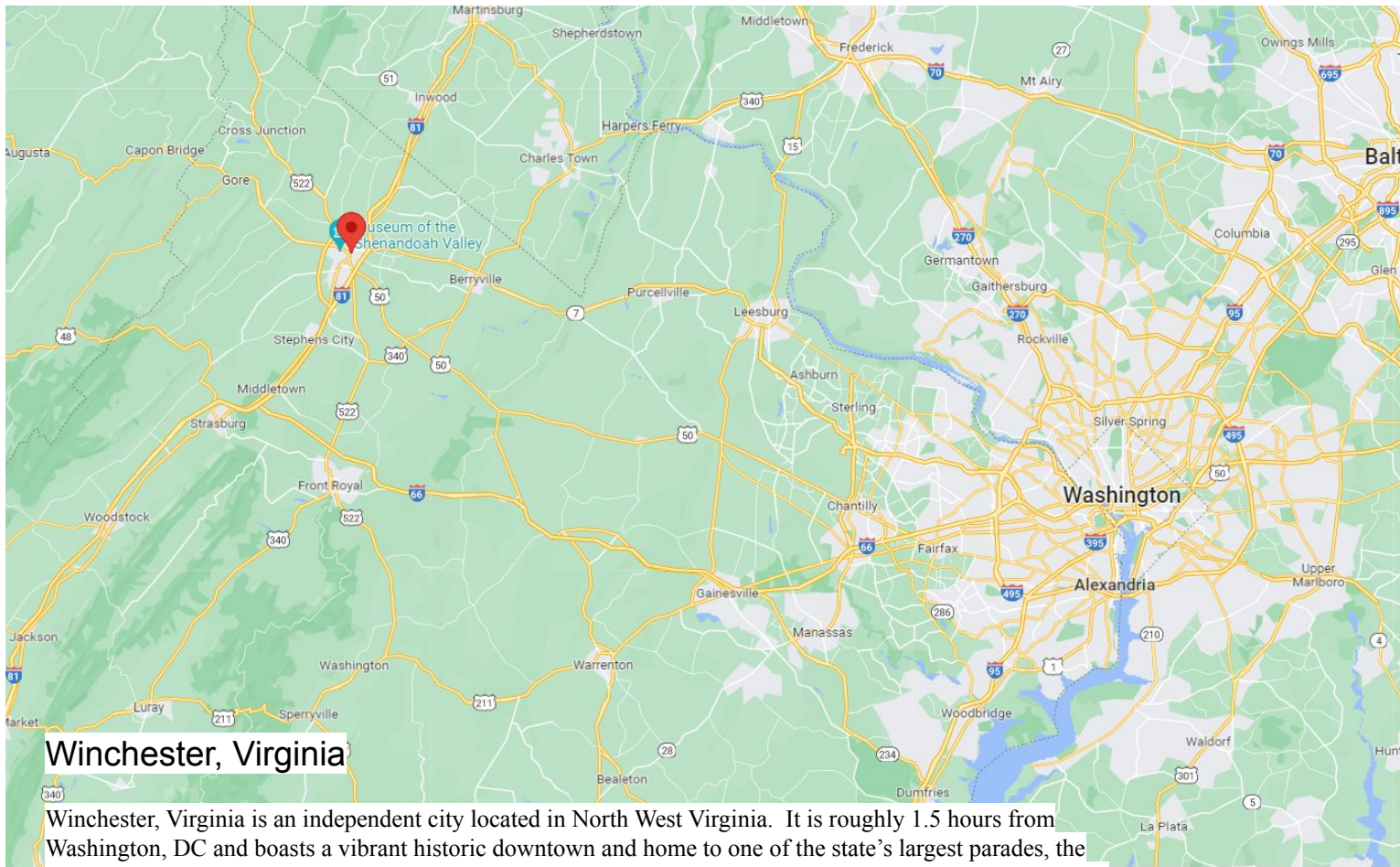
A Charged Development - Piccadilly Townes

This townhome project sits at one of the main gateways to Historic Winchester, Virginia. Currently under construction, the project grew out of a unique private/public development in a prominent downtown location.

A few years prior, against some opposition, several older buildings on the site were demolished to make way for a development that never came to be. This left a vacant lot that remained an open scar on the city's portfolio of historic structures.

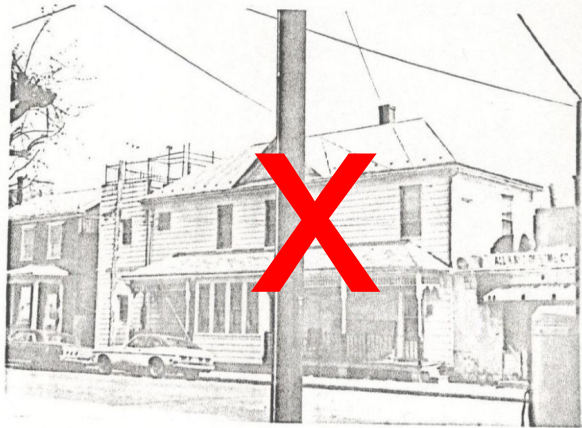
Our challenge was to take the empty space and controversial history to create a development for the future of Winchester while respecting the cherished past that remains in full display all around it.

Developer: Aikens Group
Architect: Four Square Architects
Contractor: H&W Construction



Winchester, Virginia

Winchester, Virginia is an independent city located in North West Virginia. It is roughly 1.5 hours from Washington, DC and boasts a vibrant historic downtown and home to one of the state's largest parades, the Apple Blossom Grand Feature Parade. The city was founded in 1744, has a population of around 28,000 and has been ranked as the fastest growing area in Virginia according to several online publications.



204 E. Piccadilly Street

Circa unknown (Demolished)

This one-story brick building held many businesses throughout its history. The latest was Polly's Cab which has since been relocated .



206 N. Kent Street

Circa 1840 (Demolished)

This building appears in Walter Kidney's book "Limestone, Sycamores and Architecture" and is a representative of the domestic architecture constructed in the City of Winchester in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. It was also the home of James W. Barr, a local bricklayer and Civil War veteran.

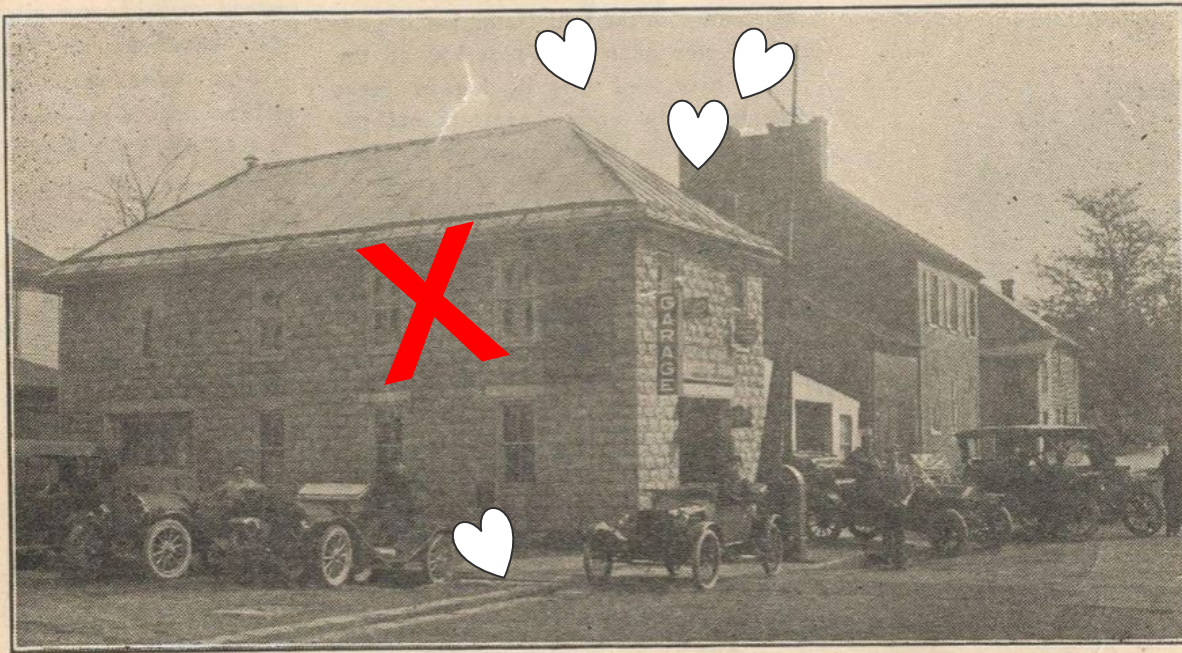
204 N. Kent Street

Circa 1905 (Demolished)

This single-family dwelling was an example of the domestic architecture constructed in the City of Winchester, especially in the eastern section of the City along N. Kent Street, at the turn of the twentieth century.

The Owner of a nearby garage was Harley "H.B." Sells who built this house as his dwelling.





CENTRAL GARAGE AND MACHINE SHOP—BEST IN WINCHESTER

202 E. Piccadilly Street

Circa 1840 (Demolished)

One of the most beloved buildings on this block was 202 E. Piccadilly. This corner building was erected 1908-1912 by Harley "H.B." Sells, a mechanic who owned and operated his own machine and auto repair and lending business. It was noted as one of the most popular garages in the city and the only one that was steam heated. "At this time the car was still a novelty, but it was seen as an integral point in getting wealthy Washington DC tourists to travel the scenic and historic roads of our area." At the time of demolition it housed a popular taco restaurant.

CONTEXT



THE SITE

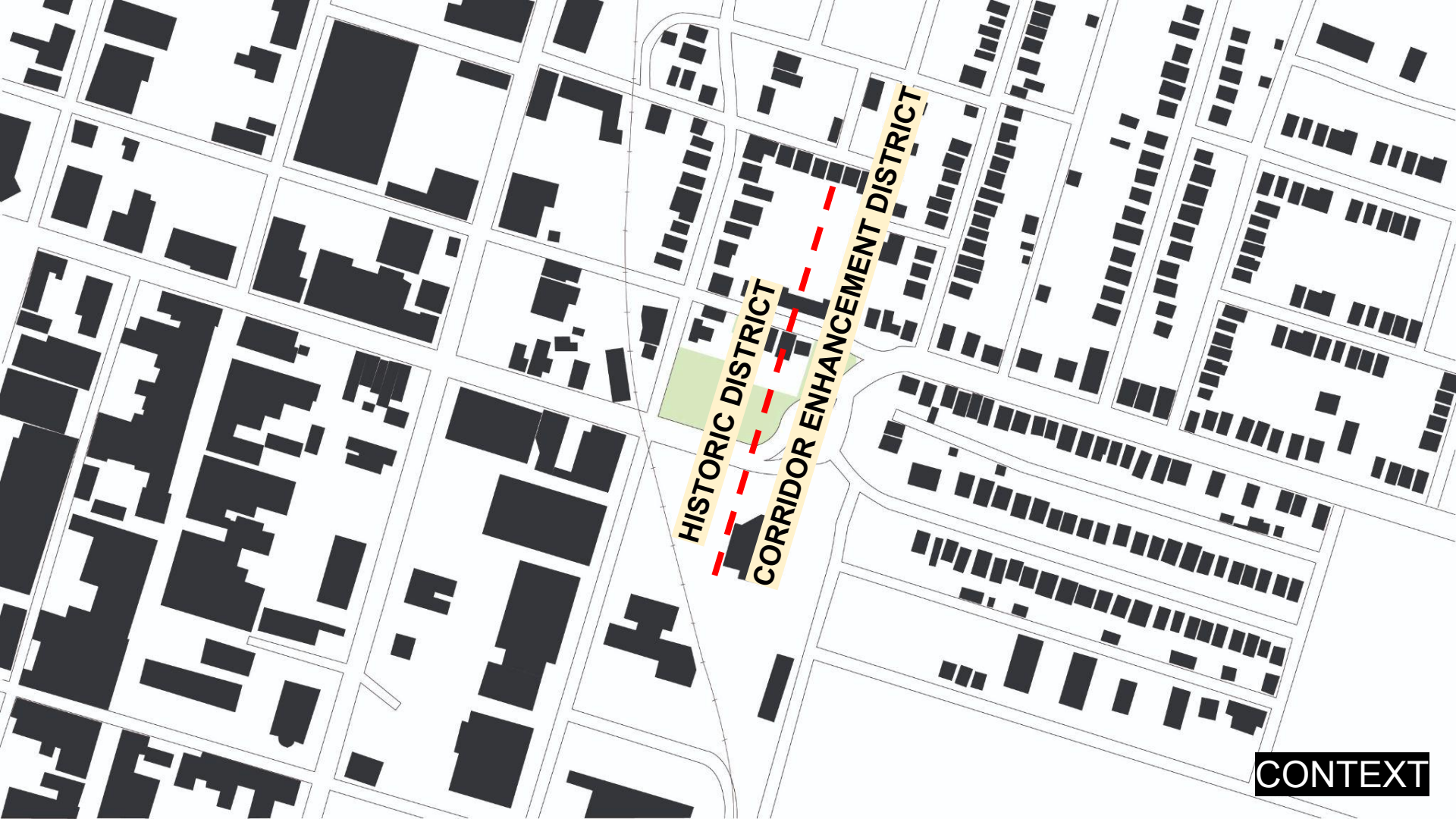
CONTEXT



HISTORIC WALKING MALL

MAIN ENTRANCE FROM I 81

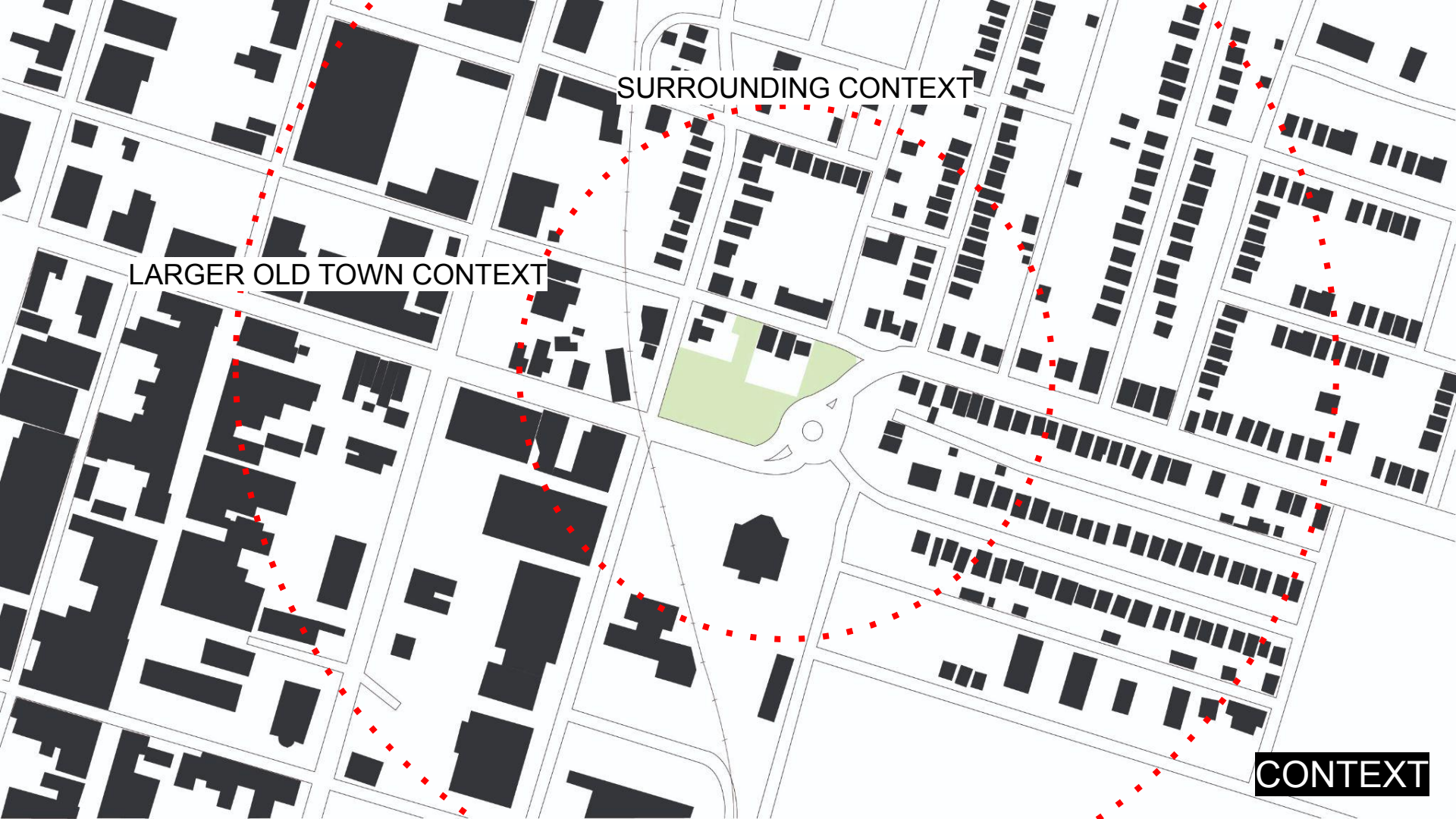
CONTEXT



HISTORIC DISTRICT

CORRIDOR ENHANCEMENT DISTRICT

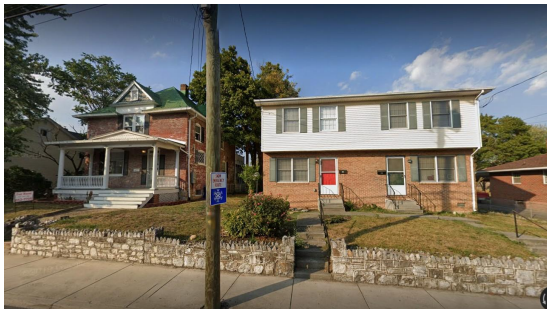
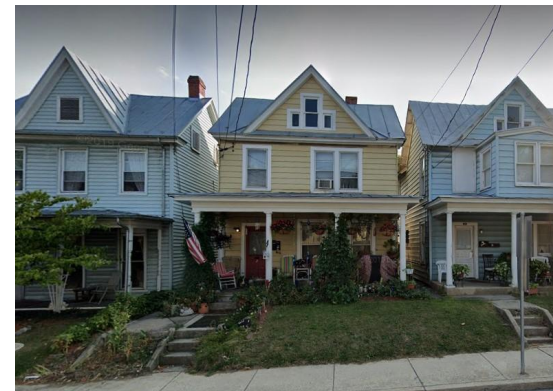
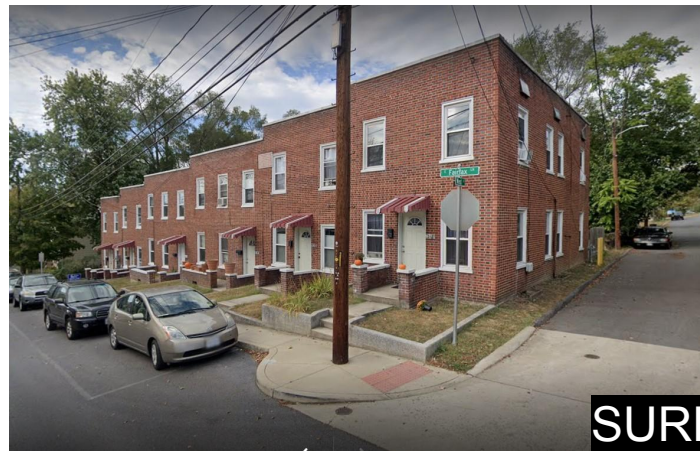
CONTEXT



SURROUNDING CONTEXT

LARGER OLD TOWN CONTEXT

CONTEXT



SURROUNDING PROPERTIES



LARGER OLD TOWN CONTEXT

START



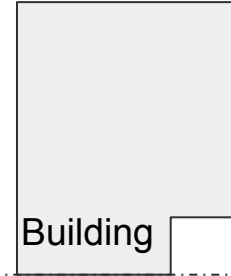
Large front yards with the main structures set back from the street are commonplace in the historic district.

PROCESS



In trying to maximize the potential of a small lot and taking advantage of zero lot line setbacks, the buildings were brought to the property line. This also doesn't allow base plantings which can collect trash from passing traffic in a heavy pedestrian and vehicular thoroughfare.

FINAL

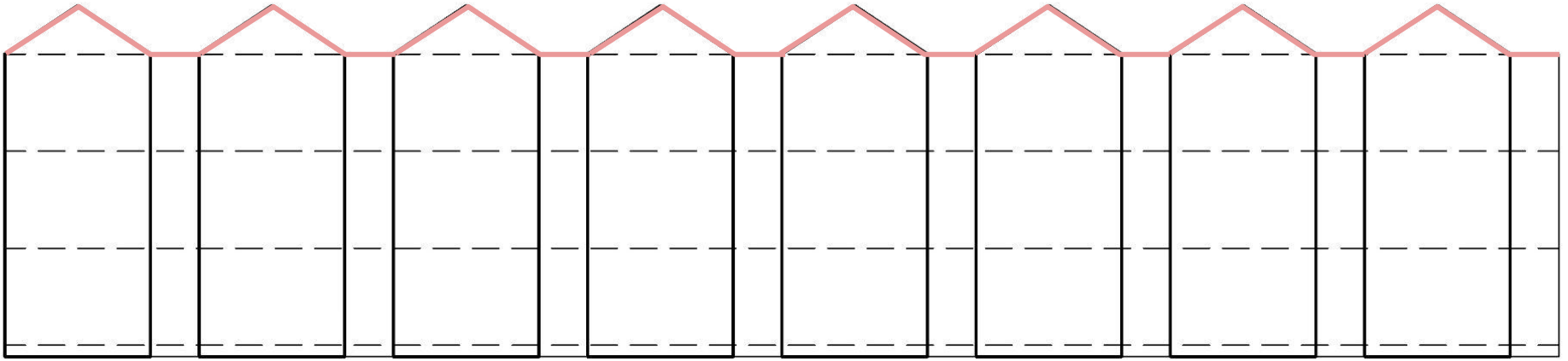


To add a break in the facade and make the buildings more approachable to people, the entrances were stepped back providing a covered porch.



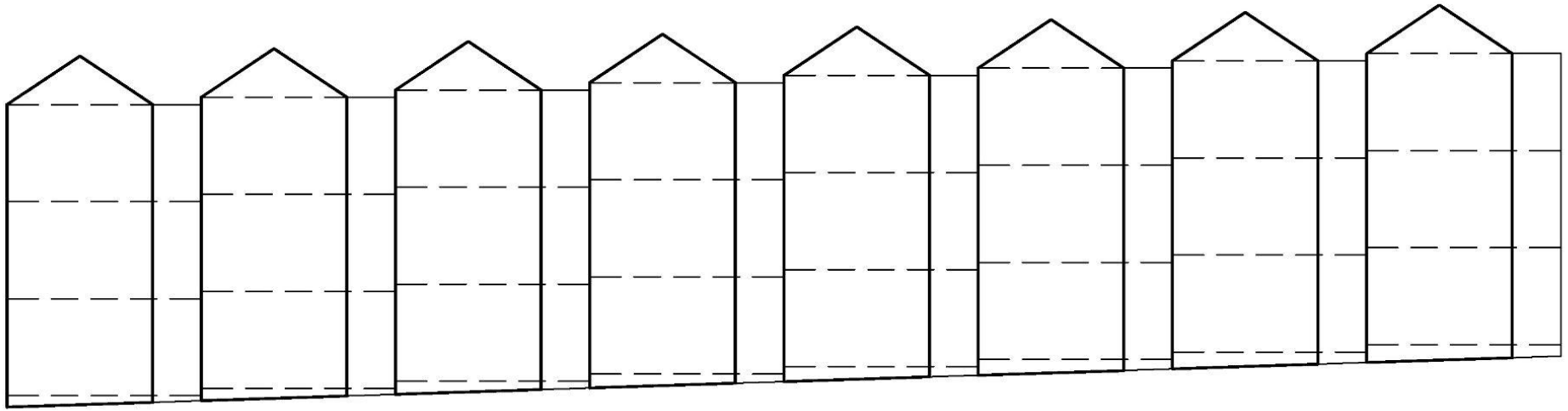
Facade Musings

307-317 NATIONAL AVE



Rhythm and Repetition

ELEVATION DIAGRAM



Actual Topography

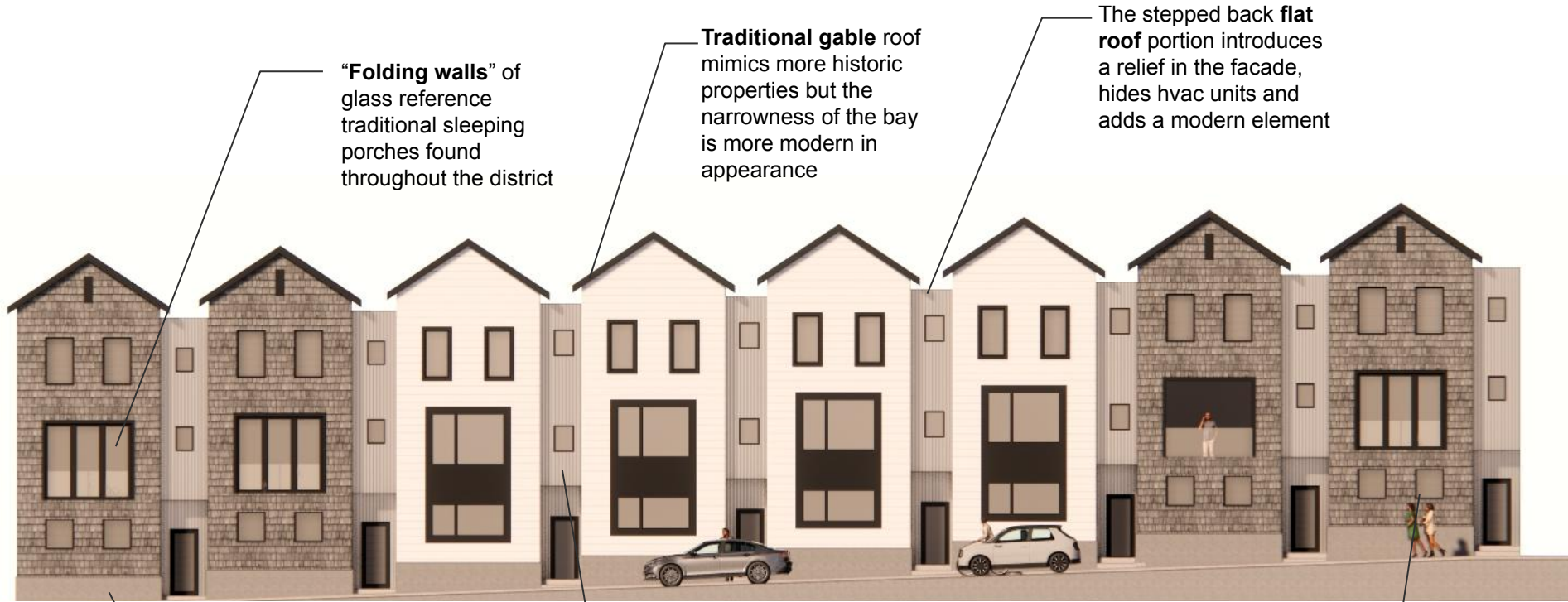
ELEVATION DIAGRAM



ELEVATION DIAGRAM



PROPOSED ELEVATION



“Folding walls” of glass reference traditional sleeping porches found throughout the district

Traditional gable roof mimics more historic properties but the narrowness of the bay is more modern in appearance

The stepped back **flat roof** portion introduces a relief in the facade, hides hvac units and adds a modern element

“Rustication” of the foundation is a traditional element of architecture found in Greek and Roman antiquity. It also provides a strong buffer against the street.

Corrugated look metal panel references some of the industrial buildings found a few blocks away and

High windows on the entry level limit visibility from pedestrians on a high traffic street

PROPOSED ELEVATION



ORIGINAL PERSPECTIVE



FINAL PERSPECTIVE



FINAL PERSPECTIVE

PART II - Intersecting Stories

Intersecting Stories

This project is a merging of **two separate stories**: One of an old neglected house begging for new life and the other of an owner trying to finally make a home that felt truly hers.

Owner: Undisclosed
Architect: Four Square Architects
Contractor: Carroll Construction Co



The house

For the longest time I passed by this property, but paid no attention to it. It sat in the shadow of a large oak tree, and the original German lap siding had been hidden for a fleetingly popular pebble-dash siding. All of the shutters had been removed and the once adorable trim had been painted to disappear.

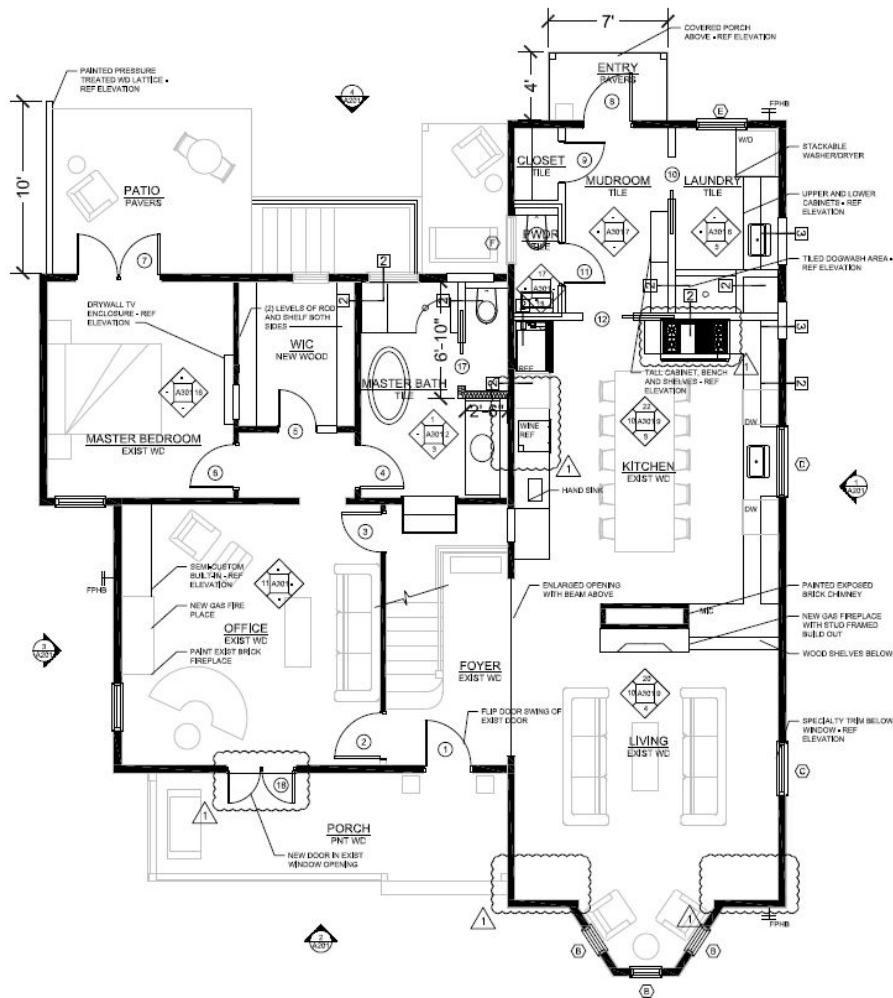
The house was originally finished in 1885 for the daughter of the builder (who lived nearby). Over the years it had been adulterated, turned into four apartments and made to all but disappear.



The Client - New Owner

The new Owner of this house was a previous client, someone I knew well. She was living on a gorgeous, large property, but it no longer fit and never fully felt unique to her. In our discussions she explained how she always lived in homes that were the brainchild of someone else. She was ready for her own story to be told.

This house was meant to be her “forever home” where she could age in place, entertain her family, and welcome overnight guests.



The Client's Story

Every residential project begins with fully understanding the client's needs and preferences. This is both functional (how many bedrooms, baths, etc) as well as emotional (how should the space feel). A house should be loved, and to do that we need to understand how to connect the two.

When we started to develop the new layout, we forged a traditional (sometimes stuffy) Dining Room in place of a rustic kitchen table where grandkids can do crafts as grandma finishes dinner.

For the Owner's dogs we used a pocket door in the mudroom to corral them after yard play and installed a raised dog wash that makes it easy to scrub away a day's worth of dirt.

For the Owner's suite we added french doors that can be flung open onto a private patio to unwind after a day's exhaustion. The vintage chandelier over the soaking tub is a reminder of time gone by, while the modern curbless shower will be easy to navigate with age.

As we started to finish out the project, the Owner revealed that when she was younger her older sister was always the one who got to wear pink, while she was always forced to wear yellow. When it came to picking colors, we knew pink had to be prevalent throughout the house. Instead of painting entire walls pink (which gives me a cavity just thinking about) we introduced it as an accent which actually makes it stand out more.

The hope is always that the Owner enjoys a home that is truly *her*, and the history of the house is once more celebrated.

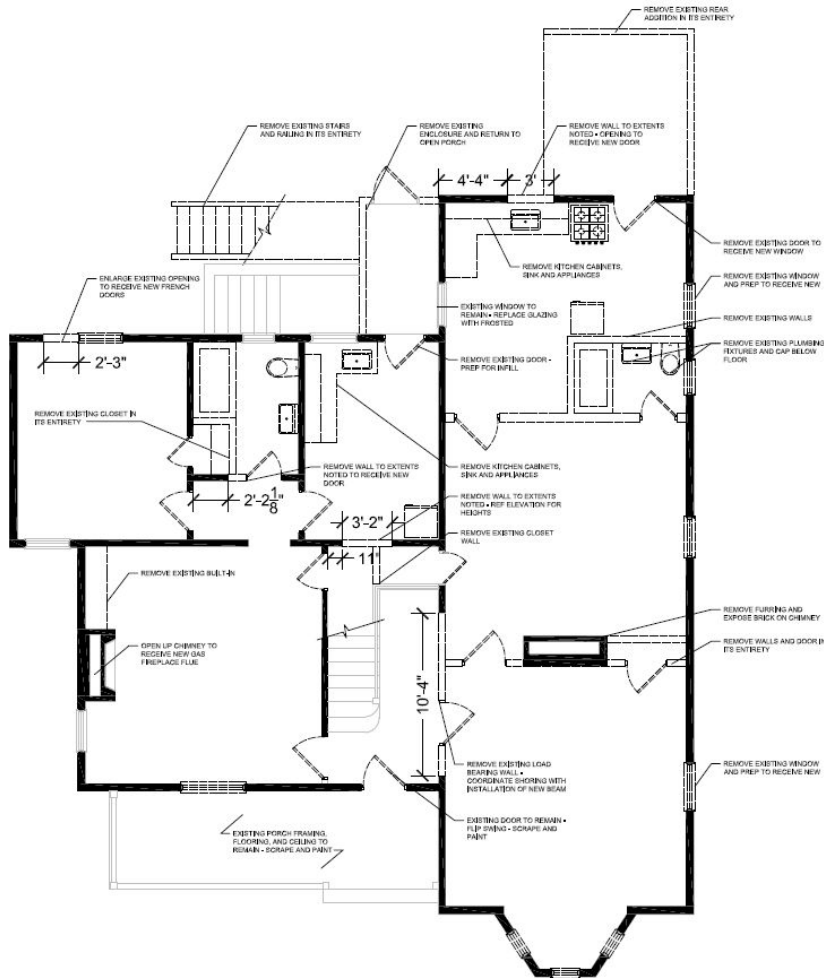
The House's Story

Prior to undertaking any renovation on an old structure we try to understand the original building and meticulously document it. Still, the building doesn't often truly reveal itself until you start demolition.

Once you start gently removing all the years of change you will often uncover many hidden secrets within the building.

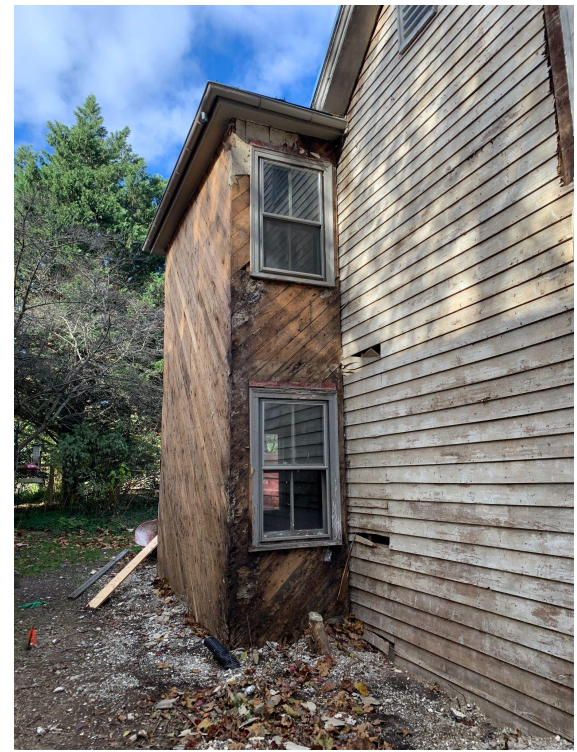
During this demolition we uncovered the following:

- A two-sided fireplace
- A second entrance door on the front
- The original German lap siding
- The original exterior of the house (had been covered during an addition)





Amongst many years of change, many of the home's original elements remained intact. The gingerbreading along the porch, the intricate stained woodwork along the stairs, and the cast iron tub all were contributing elements.



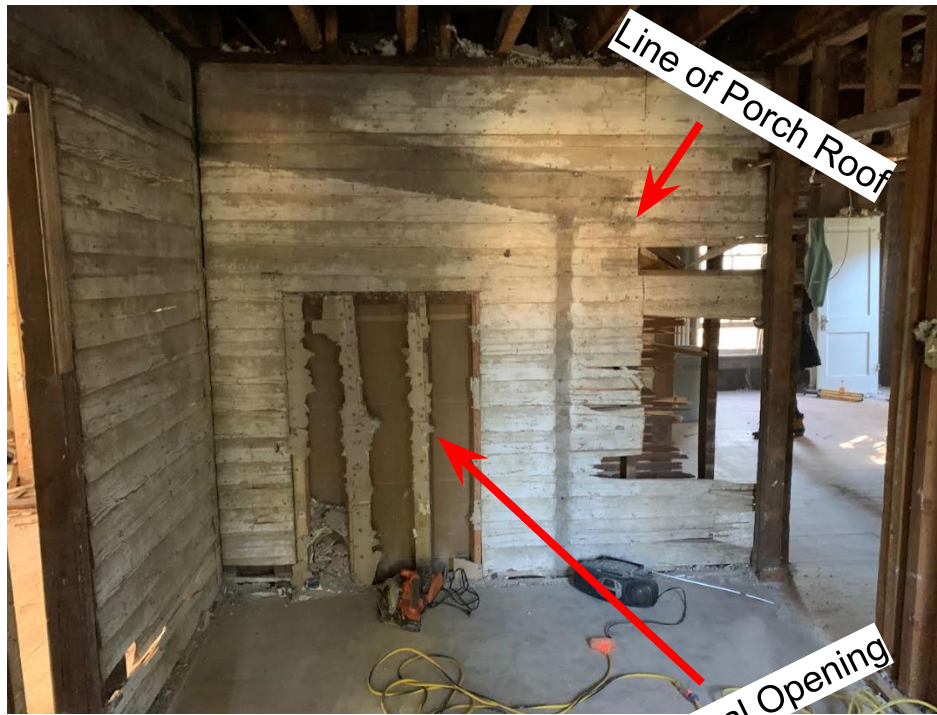
Demolition

The first part of any renovation is stripping away the years of neglect and abuse. This is one of the most rewarding parts of the process. Here we discovered a two-sided fireplace and the original lap siding.

DEMOLITION AND DISCOVERY



DEMOLITION AND DISCOVERY



Line of Porch Roof

Original Opening



Opening
references
original and
floods the stair
with natural light

Original siding
was left exposed

DEMOLITION AND DISCOVERY



As with many families, most of the Owner's gatherings center around the kitchen. Here, we opened the kitchen up (in a historically sensitive way) to the Living Room and instead of using a modern island, proposed a classic kitchen table.



1885 - Using a vintage look hexagon tile, we added the date the house was finished in the mudroom to encourage conversation about the house's history.

PUTTING IT BACK TOGETHER



The gorgeous trim was painted pink with some additional navy accents to add a slight modern edge. The original front door was scraped....and scraped, patched and painted. Two Bevlo gas lanterns adorn the front door and recessed lighting adds a soft glow throughout the night to welcome guests.



The sleeping porch, which had been turned into a back entrance, was returned to its best life as a separate, second story porch to catch summer breezes and offer respite to overnight guests.

PUTTING IT BACK TOGETHER



The Owner raises bees (and turned me onto them). To personalize her day to day entrance we carved a bee into the gate. The bee greets visitors and gives them a glimpse into the Owner's personality.



Fencing the front yard allows the client's dogs to run freely from front to back and takes advantage of a smaller lot.

PUTTING IT BACK TOGETHER