



Suggestions for Design Standards in Supportive Housing

The following list provides suggested design standards for supportive housing projects, especially single site, multi-unit buildings. Pat Jackson, Regional Coordinator of Supportive and Family Housing for Community Housing Management (CHM) 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.

This list of suggested design standards is not a checklist of required items. Each supportive housing project is unique and design decisions should be made by architects, owners, and service providers cooperatively, keeping in mind cost constraints. 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. Some of the design suggestions listed could be misused by property managers to create a sterile, confining environment for tenants. This is not the goal of these suggestions. Rather, each suggestion is made with the well-being of tenants in mind.

In addition to the list below, you might find the following websites of use in designing supportive housing projects:

www.designadvisor.org (*best practices and suggestions in the design of affordable housing*)

www.andnet.org/materials.html (*how to use environmentally sustainable materials in affordable housing*)

Appliances

- Handicapped accessible
- Stove controls on front
- Over stove/sink lighting reachable from wheelchair
- Front loading washers and dryers

Bathrooms

- Private bathroom for each unit
- Heavy-duty toilet to reduce repairs from abuse
- Overflow drains
- Grab bars in place of standard towel bars if at all possible
- Emergency call cord (May be needed in only a few units unless serving the elderly)

Community space

Community spaces should be numerous and useful (for example, a game room with pool table and ping pong, a computer center, a craft room, TV/movie area, etc.)
One large space with enough room for all tenants
Pre-wire for cable and for phone

Doors and locks

Consider all ADA requirements, especially for entrance doors
All exterior doors should be automatic self-locking
Entrance doors and apartment doors with a computerized key system (cards, buttons, etc.) with read out capability
Knox box for fire department keys
Alarmed crash bars on all but main entrances

Floors

No hardwood
Linoleum squares or carpet squares work better from upkeep/replacement standpoint

Hallways

Handrails on both sides desirable, and should be on at least one side
Textured impervious covering up to at least 48" from floor desirable for upkeep, appearance purposes

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 and cause safety problem
 Possible problems with losing heat in winter
 Often more expensive upkeep, and of lower quality/effectiveness

Landscaping

Attractive and simple
Easy long-term maintenance
Doesn't interfere with safety or accessibility of entrances

Laundry space

Central laundry area
About one washer/dryer per 15-20 persons
Folding table
Sink if possible

Lighting

Functional and inexpensive to replace
Plentiful and easily accessible outside lighting
Sufficient hallway and community space lighting for personal safety
 Inside lighting 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

Offices

- One private, lockable office per staff person
- One small conference room that is large enough to accommodate small meetings of three to five people
- Enough space for several lockable file cabinets and other office equipment
- Wiring sufficient to accommodate phone, fax, copier, and computer
- 24-hour staff office large enough to accommodate monitoring equipment, computer, locked in-house box for internal messages
- 24-hour staff office must have good view of front entrance, buzzer for front door

Parking

- Sufficient parking for tenants and staff that is clearly marked
- Well-lighted parking lot/spaces
- Handicapped parking exactly to accessibility standards
- Handicapped parking easily accessible to ramp
- Fire zone parking clearly marked on pavement and signs
- “No parking” signs where appropriate
- 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 trespassing” signs may be useful to avoid outsiders using the limited parking

Phone Service

- Enough lines to accommodate fire alarm, elevator, security system, building entry system
- Pre-wire all units for phone (and cable)
- If call system to tenant units, consider if handsets will be needed and/or separate wiring

Security

- 24-hour video monitoring and front entrance door opening capability from front desk
- Include cameras in stairwells and 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
- When multiple entrances add more cameras and possibly more after-hours staff

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, also; check other regulatory requirements regarding signs
Property sign during construction should include funding source, handicapped logo,
EOH logo, hearing impaired access information, and phone numbers for
contact

Staffing

24-hour staff attendants/desk coverage is most desirable
On site administrator with appropriate number of hours allotted
Properly trained case managers
Competent superintendent with enough hours or assistants to properly keep the
building

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 Marshall
regulations for acceptability)

Other general considerations:

Consider possible population-specific design choices (eg, play space for family
projects, narrower hallways for people with mobility and/or intoxication
issues)
Consider funding sources concerning all design standards listed here (HUD,
DECD, USDA-RD, CHFA, LIHTC)
Especially in rehabs, be certain envelope of building is tight (roof, siding, windows,
caulking, masonry)
Carefully check references for quality and longevity of building for General
Contractor to be used
Adequate budget for replacement reserve, operating reserve, insurance, 24-hour
staffing, other site staff
Parking stickers for tenants/residents
No soliciting, no trespassing, no loitering signs
Set up tax exempt status if possible for operating budget savings
Owner/sponsor ideally should provide general charge card (Visa/MC) for site
manager. Should initially set up standard charge accounts in building
name using sponsor/owner references if necessary (ie Home Depot,
Maintenance Warehouse, Staples/Office Max)
Exterior water and electrical outlets very helpful (in more urban areas, this is
sometimes restricted by building code or abused by people in the

neighborhood)

Be certain all trash receptacles are not in unsanitary distance from tenant units and/or windows

Plan carefully for inside and outside trash flow

Be certain any HVAC equipment is not near tenant units and/or windows

Soda machine desirable

Central hot water heater

No garbage chutes