



RUMSEY AQUATIC CENTER
CFA CONCEPT SUBMISSION - 31 DECEMBER 2025

TRANSFORMING AN OUTDATED, UNDERSIZED FACILITY INTO A STATE-OF-
THE-ART AQUATIC CENTER

History

The William H. Rumsey Aquatic Center, located near Eastern Market, honors Dr. William H. Rumsey, a community leader who started his career maintaining the Dunbar pool and later served as an education adviser to Mayor Walter E. Washington. In 1974, he became Deputy Director of the District’s Recreation Department and co-founded the Black History Invitational Swim Meet in 1987, a landmark event in D.C.’s recreational history.

Designed by Eugene Delmar and constructed in 1972, the facility includes an eight-lane pool, a kiddie wading pool, and a community room. Over the years, it has faced repairs for structural and HVAC issues. Despite being a vital part of the Capitol Hill community, the center’s outdated design—marked by inadequate locker space, limited spectator accommodations, and underutilized grounds—has spurred calls for modernization and redevelopment.

Proposed Development

The proposed redevelopment of the Rumsey Aquatic Center will begin with the demolition of the current facility to make way for a state-of-the-art building. The new design will include two pools, expanded and improved locker rooms, and additional community amenities, such as a senior center and community room, to better serve the area’s diverse needs.

The surrounding plaza will also be revitalized to accommodate Eastern Market vendors, create a more welcoming environment for facility users, and enhance the neighborhood’s green spaces. This reimagined area will feature bio-retention systems for stormwater management, increased tree coverage, and additional greenery to promote environmental sustainability and community engagement.



EXISTING AQUATIC CENTER (TO BE DEMO’ED)

ZONING ANALYSIS

ADDRESS: 635 North Carolina Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20003

SQUARE: 0872

LOT: 0800
The lot is a tax lot which requires sub-dividing to convert to a record lot. The lot is also shared with Eastern Market.

WARD: 6

ANC: 6B (SMD - 6B02)

ZONE: MU-4, Mixed Use Zone
Provides for mixed use developments that permit broad range of commercial, institutional, and multi-family residential development at varying densities.

OWNER: DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
200 14th Street NW, 8th Floor
Washington, DC 20009

CURRENT USE: Special Purpose - Misc

LAND AREA: 74,496 SF (full lot)
48,657 SF (Rumsey Aquatic Center)

GROSS FLOOR AREA: 20,584 SF Existing

ZONING STANDARDS

LOT OCCUPANCY: 60% Maximum

FLOOR AREA RATIO: 1.5 Maximum

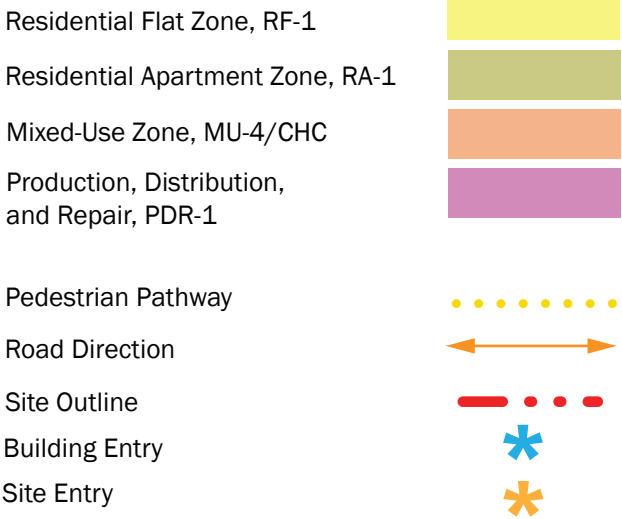
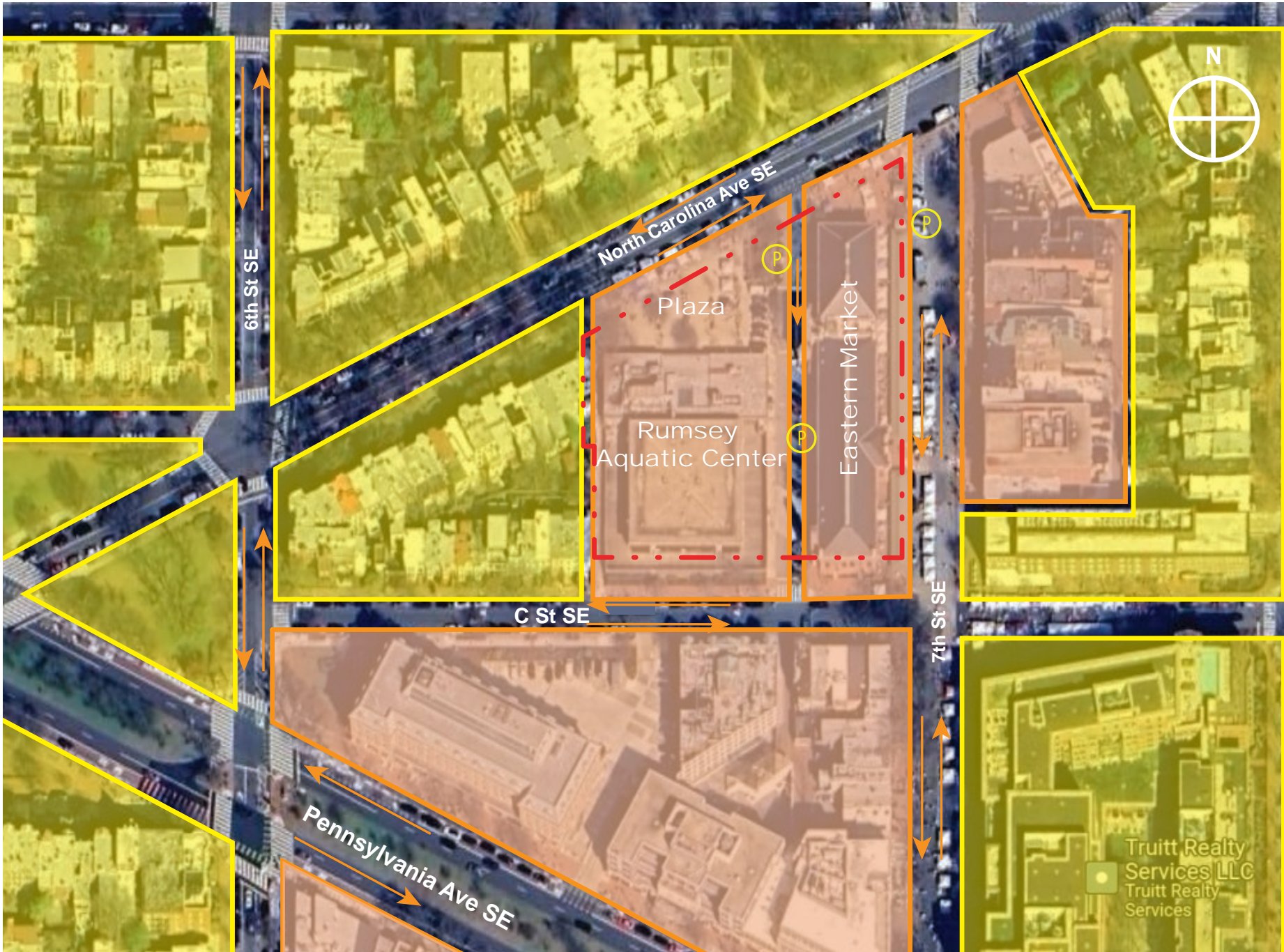
HEIGHT: 50 FT Maximum

PENTHOUSE HEIGHT: 12 FT Typ; 15 FT Mechanical

REAR YARD SETBACK: 15 FT Minimum

SIDE YARD SETBACK: 8 FT Minimum, if applicable

GREEN AREA RATIO: 0.3



EXISTING SITE

The William H. Rumsey Aquatic Center, located at 635 North Carolina Ave SE in southeast DC’s Capital Hill neighborhood, has been a staple for the community, serving as a hub for recreation and connection. With its 25-yard pool and a range of amenities including a community room and an outdoor plaza, the center caters to the diverse needs of its visitors.

Surrounded by the historic brick Eastern Market to the east, 2-story brick residential buildings to the north and west, and commercial buildings to the south, the center is seamlessly integrated into the fabric of the neighborhood.

Its strategic location ensures easy access for residents and visitors alike, whether by car, bike, or public transportation. Nearby bus stops, situated within a one-block radius, link the center to key thoroughfares such as 8th St SE and Pennsylvania Ave SE. Additionally, the Eastern Market Metro Station, just a four-minute walk away, provides convenient rail access, emphasizing the center’s commitment to inclusivity and accessibility for all.

The existing facility is a brutalist style one story brick and concrete building. The tall pool building is set back from the lot line and separated from the sides + rear public space by a forbidding brick wall.



Rumsey Aquatic Center Entrance



Private Alley between Rumsey & Eastern Market



South-East Corner of Rumsey



Parking lot



Interior Pool



Heritage tree & Front Plaza

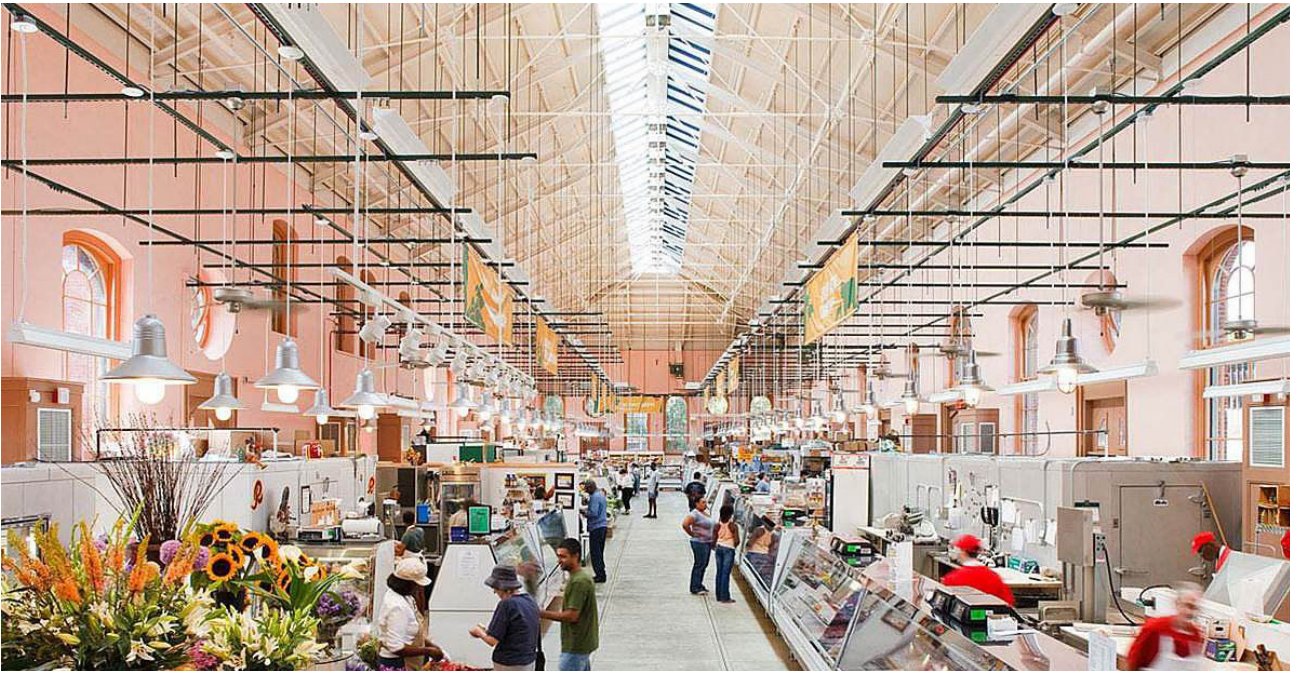


Art Wall

NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT



Eastern Market



Eastern Market - Interior Vendors



Private Alley - West



Pin Oak Heritage Tree + Brick Houses West of Rumsey



Single-Family Brick Rowhomes along North Caroline Ave.



Businesses along C Street

SITE CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

1. Site Constraints:

Because the Aquatic Center sits on a tightly constrained urban site, its layout must be carefully planned to maximize efficiency while staying within the existing building envelope. This is essential to comply with zoning requirements and to protect the critical structural root zone of the heritage Pin Oak tree.

2. Uses:

The Capitol Hill neighborhood—home to the iconic Eastern Market—continues to attract new residents, and its population is steadily growing. However, the programs offered at the existing Aquatic Center no longer meet the community’s needs. The current facility features a full-size pool, a wading pool, standard pool amenities, and a single community room. The upcoming Rumsey Aquatic Center will expand its offerings, introducing a wider variety of programs designed for people of all ages.

The site also includes a spacious plaza and a walkway encircling the pool. On weekends, the plaza becomes an extension of Eastern Market, bustling with activity. This space holds untapped potential for outdoor amenities and public art that reflects the neighborhood’s unique character. Similarly, the pathway around the pool presents an opportunity to enhance the site’s programmatic space, creating a more vibrant and engaging community destination.

3. ADA accessibility:

The one story brick building is ADA accessible. However, due to the elevation difference between the north and south side of the existing building, an ADA ramp will be needed at any of the southern exits.

4. Views:

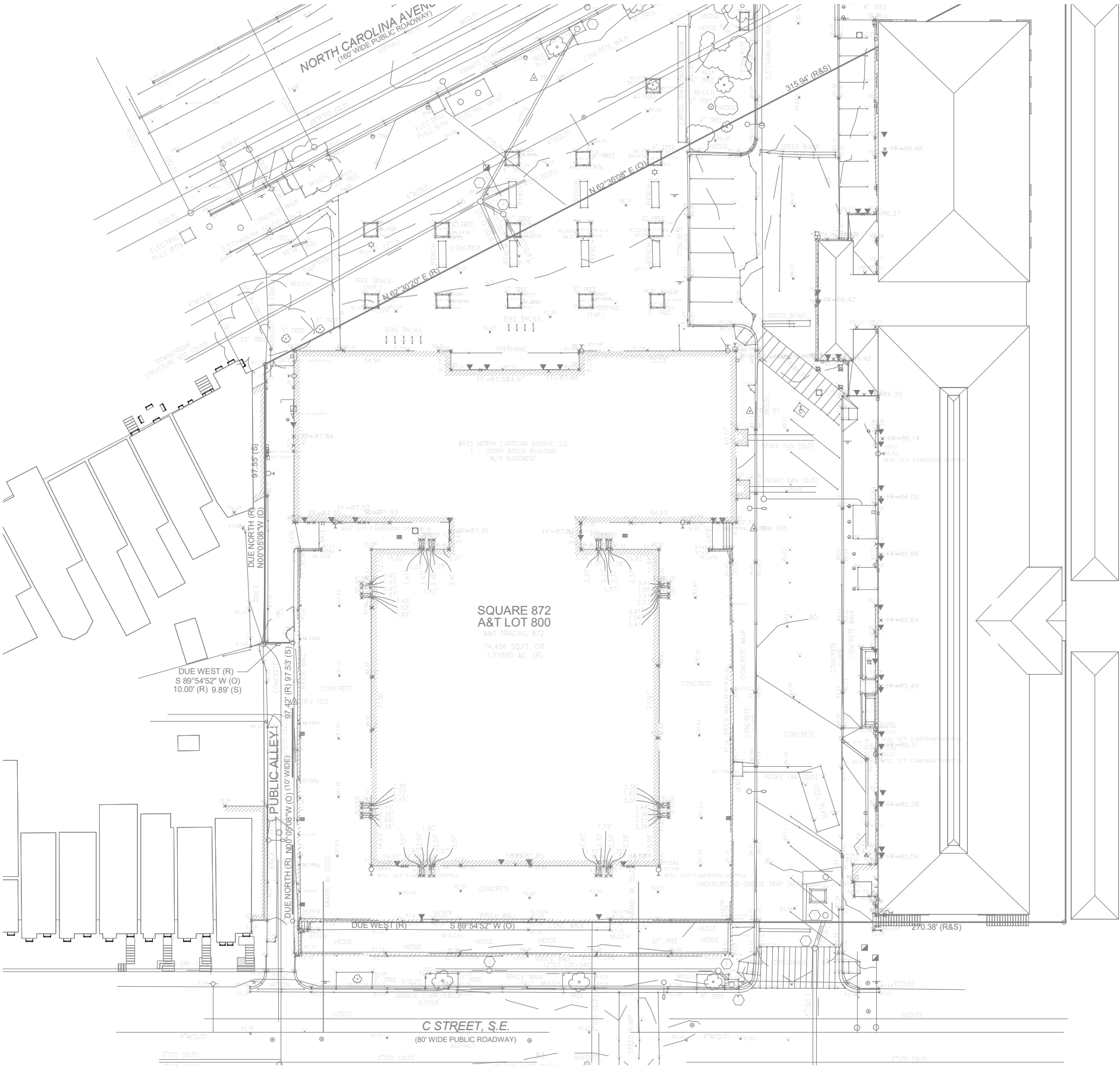
The site is situated within a vibrant residential and commercial neighborhood, with Eastern Market located directly east of the Aquatic Center. The plaza serves as a central gathering space, offering views of both the historic market and the diverse artwork displayed on the surrounding facades.

5. Solar Access:

The site benefits from good east-to-west solar exposure and prevailing southwest winds in warmer months. These offer opportunities for daylighting to enhance interior wellness and benefit from energy savings.



EXISTING CIVIL SITE PLAN
SCALE: 1" = 30'-0"



BUILDING FOOTPRINT ANALYSIS

1. Zoning Setbacks + Lot Occupancy

- Rear Yard: Minimum 15'-0" required
- Side Yard: Minimum 8'-0,"if applicable
- Lot Occupancy: Maximum 60%
Eastern Market = 17,800 sf
Rumsey ≤ 26,897 sf Maximum Footprint

2. Historic Preservation

- NE corner must remain one story to preserve the existing viewshed of Eastern Market.
- Front Façade Consideration: Aim to maintain the existing setback, with some flexibility to move it slightly forward if needed in areas outside of critical root zone
- All mechanical equipment to be shielded from view

3. Heritage Tree Protection

- NW corner must be preserved, ensuring no disturbance within the critical root zone.
- Structural Limitation: The existing footprint and footer location must remain unchanged.
- Building Restriction: Adding a story in this area is not possible, as the existing footing cannot support additional load.

4. LEED Regulations & Appendix Z Compliance

- Shared Heat Exchange: Potential for collaboration with Eastern Market

5. Plaza Space Usage & Requirements

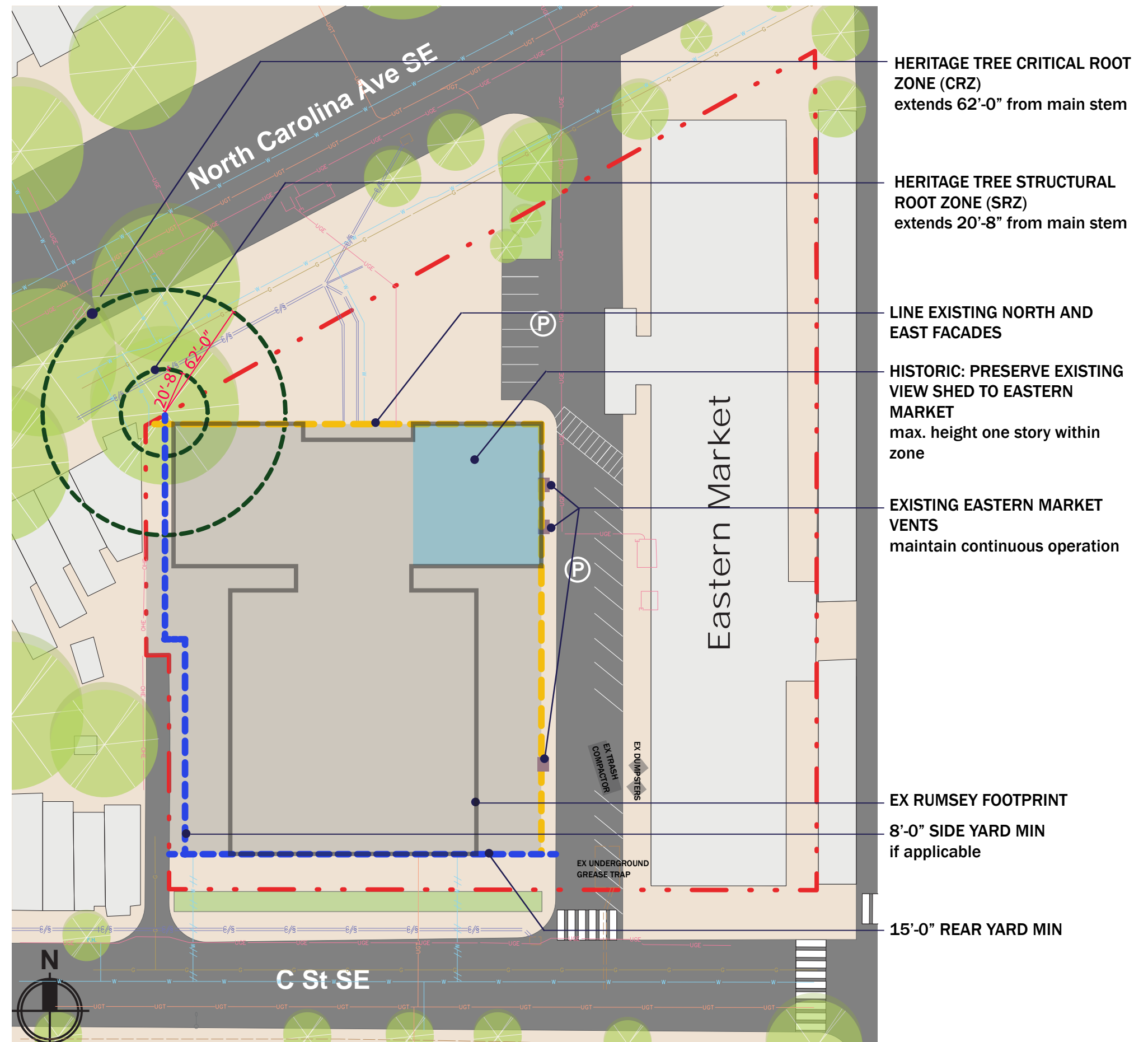
- Plaza Space: Currently used by Eastern Market vendors; space cannot be reduced

6. Client Programming

- Existing aquatic center: 20,854 sf (as per the 2009 Faithful & Gould Survey)
- Owner to provide approved programming

7. Existing Vents

- The three existing vents along Rumsey's eastern facade serve Eastern Market and must remain operational throughout construction. The new design should fully accommodate these vents.



EXISTING PLAN ANALYSIS + PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

PLAN

(6 LANE SWIMMING POOL) + (SMALLER WADING POOL)

- DPR STAFF OFFICES
- LOCKER + SHOWER ROOMS
- UTILILITES
- POOL EQUIPMENT + CHEMICALS
- LOBBY + CIRCULATION
- 6-LANE SWIMMING POOL
- WADING POOL
- LARGE MULTI-PURPOSE ROOM
- STORAGE

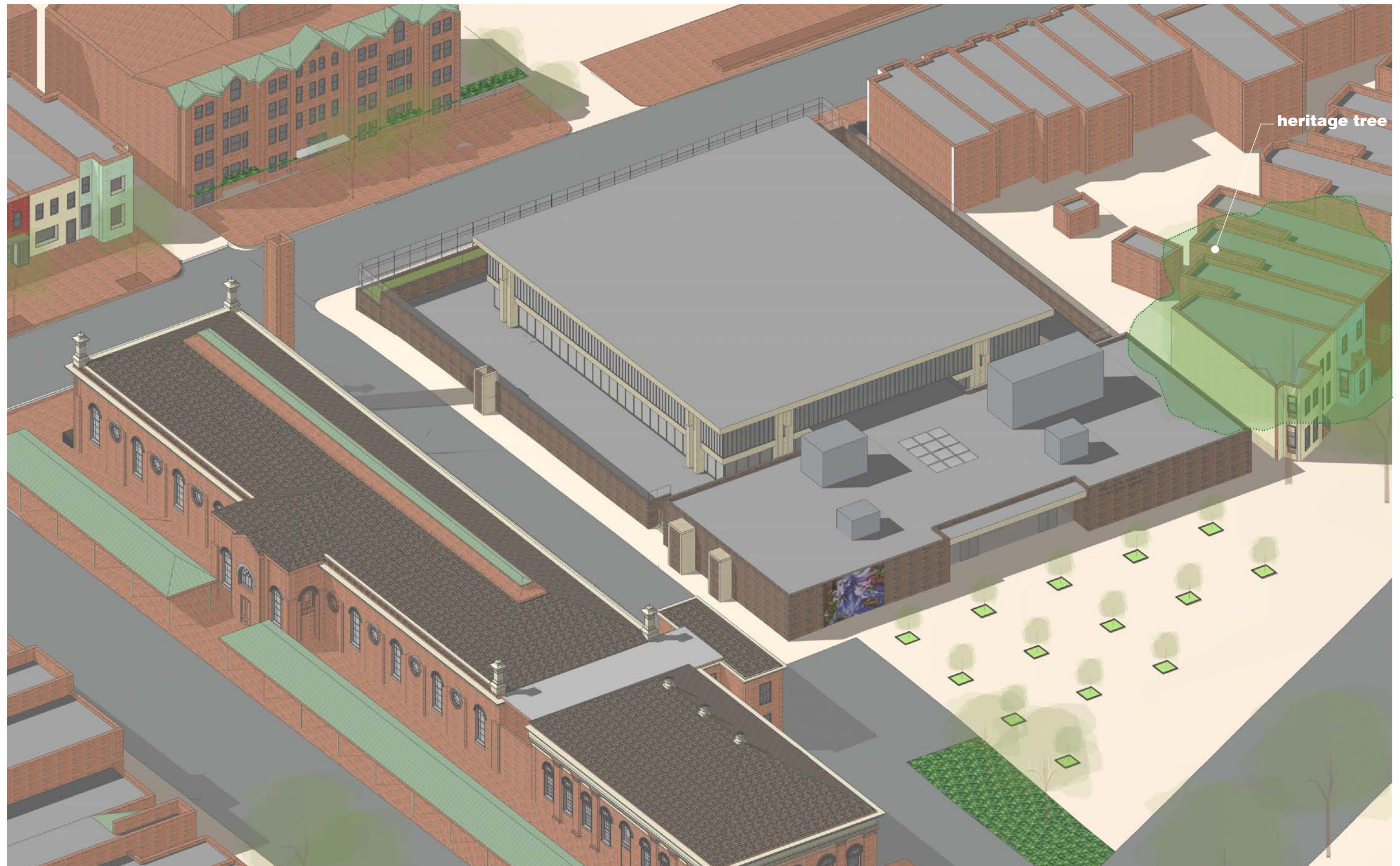
The current design features a one-story brick building set at the back of a large plaza, lacking a clear transition from the vibrant urban neighborhood and market to the aquatic center. It includes a small multipurpose room, wading pool, offices, restrooms, showers, lockers, and a mechanical room. Pool equipment and mechanical rooms are positioned to the west for easy access via the alley and interior.

The double-height entrance leads to a central six-lane pool, enclosed by three lattice brick corridors that provide privacy but limit visual connection to the exterior.

To enhance the design, the following improvements are proposed:

- Plaza Redesign – Enhance exterior amenities with landscaping, rain gardens, seating, and art to create a welcoming entry.
- Massing & Facade – Use either a minimal modern aesthetic with glass and steel or a contextual approach matching existing materials, forms, and scale.
- Connectivity – Increase transparency with more glass to improve natural light and strengthen visual ties to the exterior.
- Functionality – Optimize layout for efficient circulation, accessibility, and logical grouping of spaces.



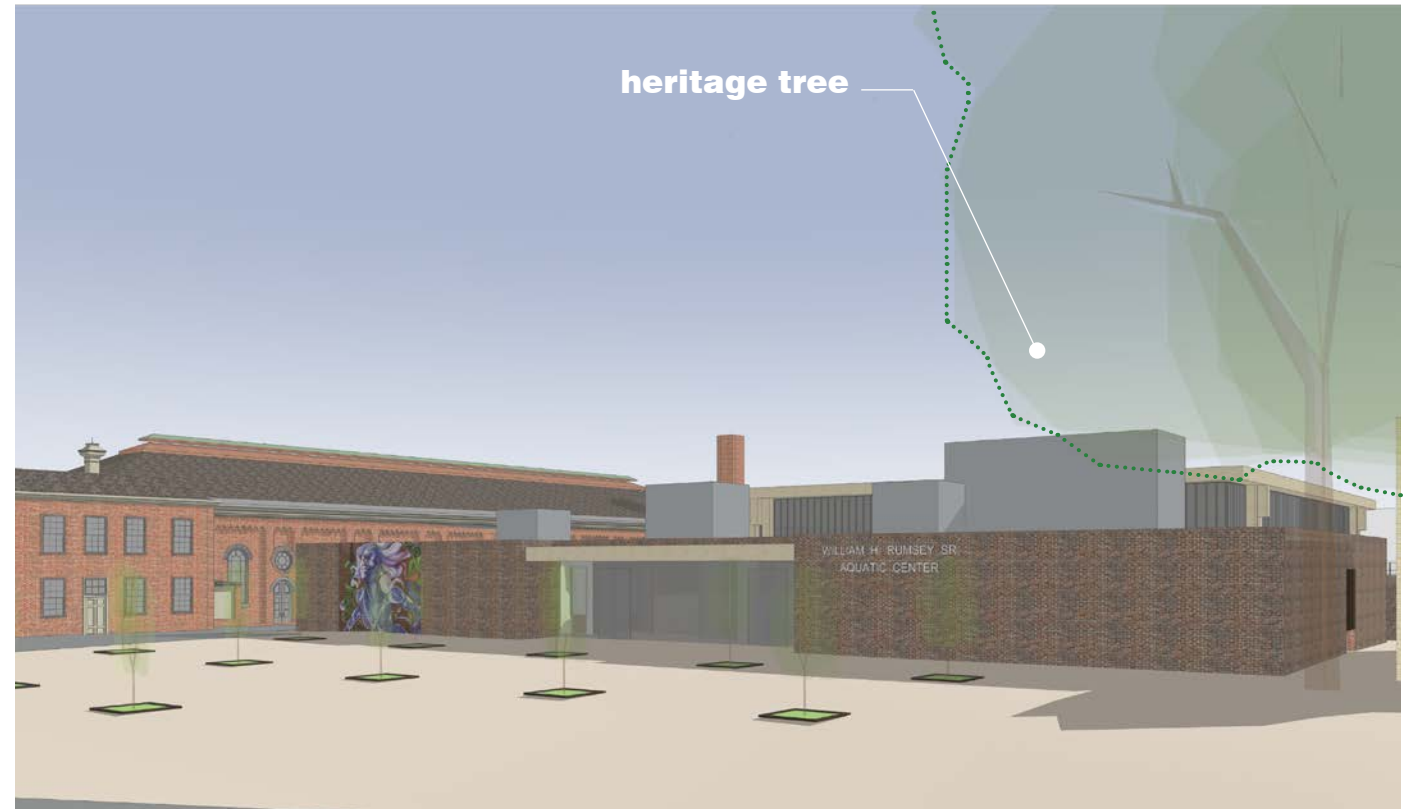


heritage tree

Existing Birds Eye View



EXISTING NE CORNER AND ALLEY VIEW



EXISTING VIEW TOWARDS EASTERN MARKET



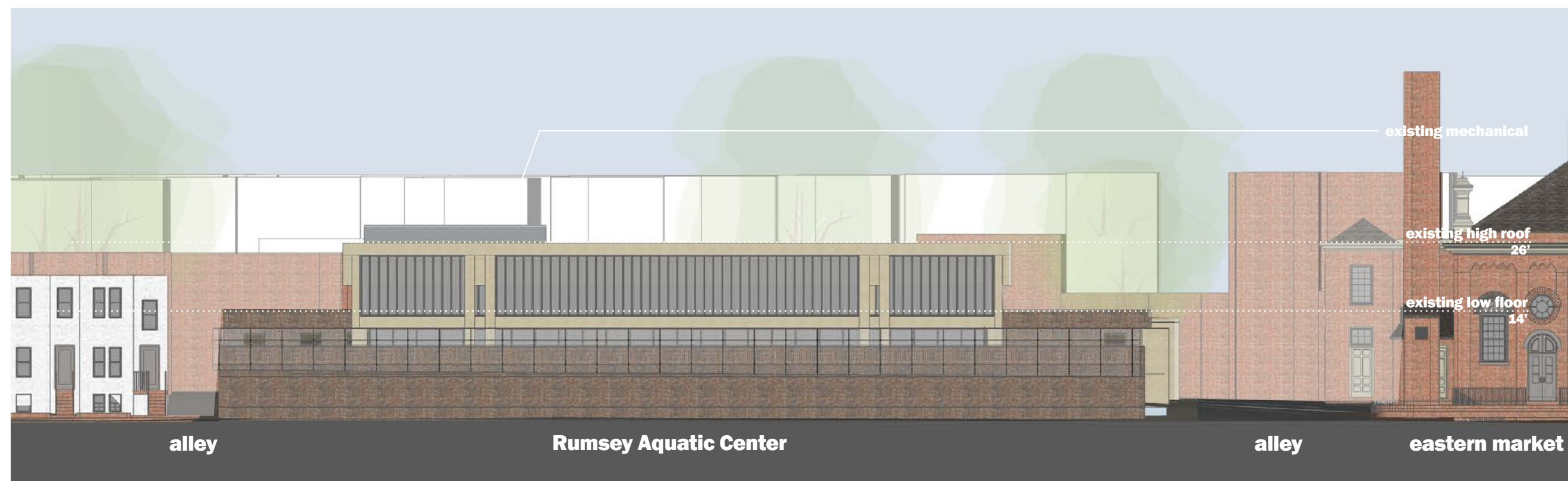
EXISTING ALLEY VIEW FROM C STREET



EXISTING C STREET VIEW



EXISTING NORTH ELEVATION [ON NORTH CAROLINA AVENUE]



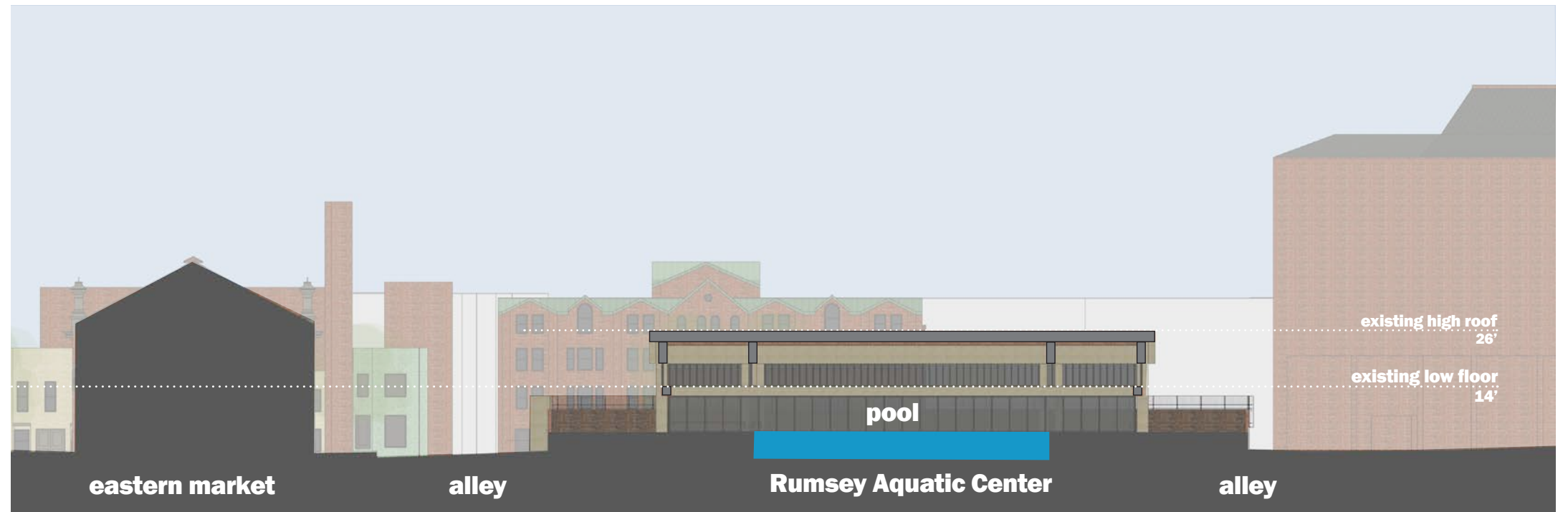
EXISTING REAR ELEVATION [C STREET SE]



EXISTING EAST ELEVATION [ALLEY WITH EASTERN MARKET]



EXISTING WEST ELEVATION [ALLEY]



EXISTING | E-W SITE SECTION



EXISTING | N-S SITE SECTION

PROPOSED SITE PLAN

SCALE: 1" = 30'-0"



PROGRAM:

- Full size 8 lane swimming pool.
- A smaller leisure / therapy pool.
- Locker rooms, a family changing room, and bathrooms adjacent to the pools and splash pad
- Large Multipurpose/Recreation Room.
- Small to Medium Multipurpose/Recreation Rooms.
- Tech Lounge.
- Staff Office.
- Lobby with Reception Desk
- Senior center with kitchenette and other amenities.
- Utility Spaces and Pool Support Rooms.
- Storage
- Fitness Room

- Two Stories, 10,000 sf Second Floor for Community Programming
- Incubator Space

Area = 29,000 sf | First Floor = 19,000 sf | Second Floor = 10,000 sf

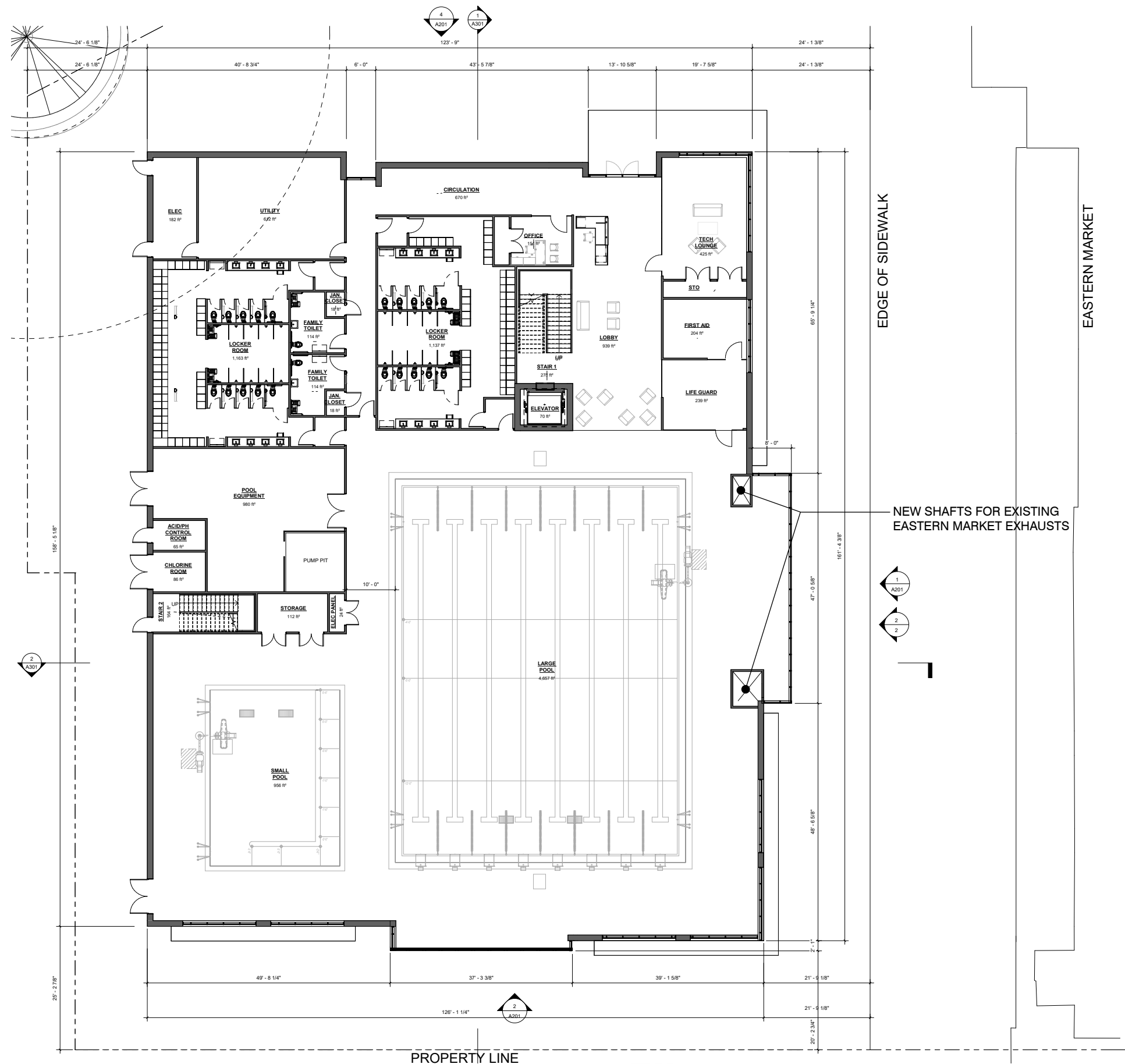
Two-story building with brick, storefront and curtain wall. Metal roof with large skylights, green roof.

8" intensive green roof. Stormwater management BMPs will be implemented at the north, east and south area. New trees, permeable pavers, street lamps, and benches will enhance the plaza and promenade.

Steel framework on a concrete foundation. The roofs are supported by steel beams and joists, while the natatorium roof uses steel long-span trusses.

Reuse existing 208Y/120V 3-phase 1600A service with necessary equipment rework and relocation. Provide exterior utility vault, power based on room functions, and emergency power for egress lighting. Include fire alarm system with battery backup and emergency phone system. For elevator, provide battery lowering. High-efficiency LED fixtures throughout.

SOW narratives continued on the next sheet...



SCALE: 1" = 20'-0"

CONCEPT | SECOND FLOOR PLAN

SOW narratives continued from the previous sheet...

MECHANICAL:

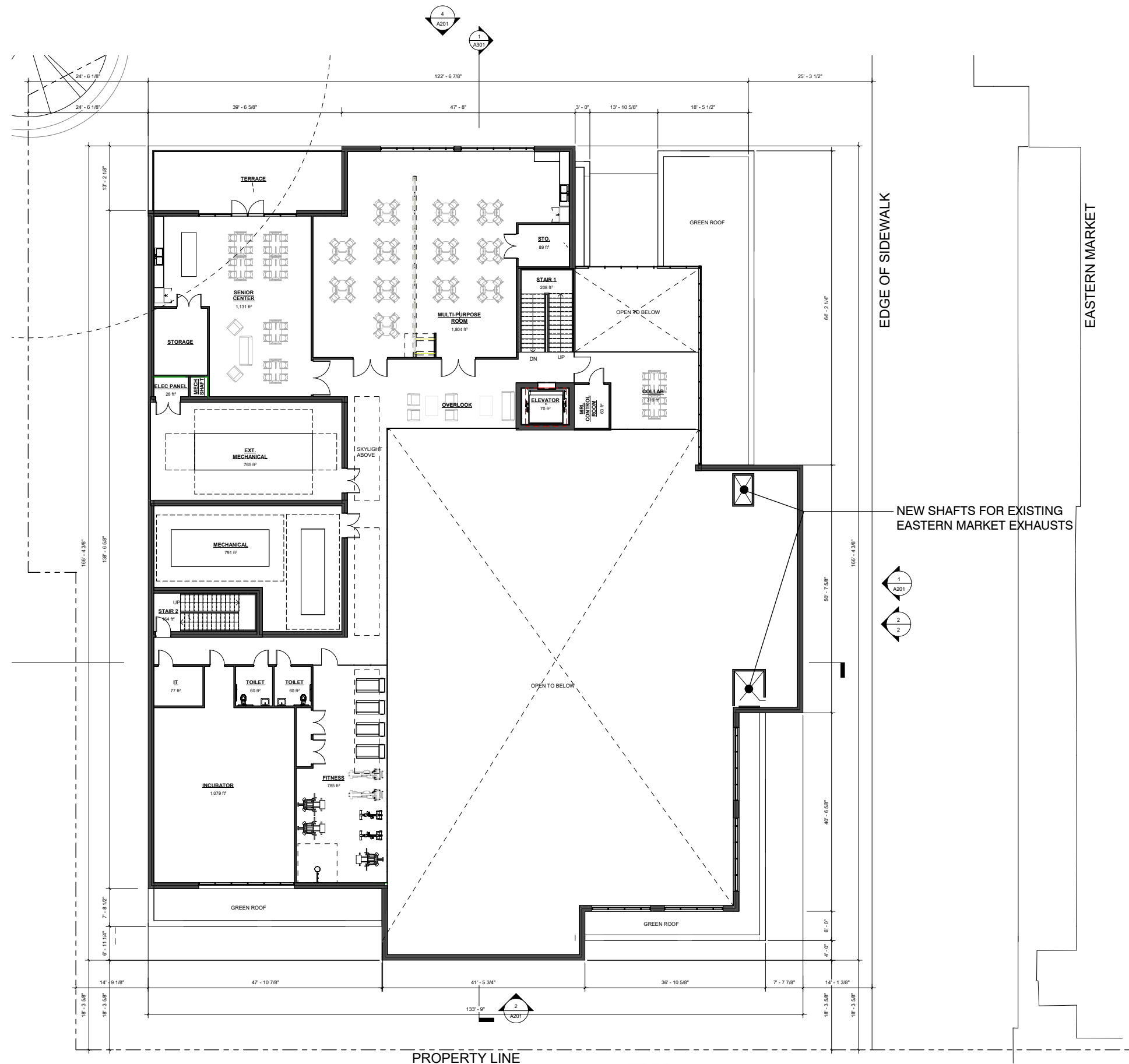
Heating and cooling will be provided by a central heat recovery heat pump plant, supplemented by air-source heat pumps and an electric backup boiler. Chilled and heating hot water will be distributed via a four-pipe hydronic system serving fan coil units in each zone. Ventilation will be provided by hydronic air handling units with energy recovery. The pool will be served by a dedicated air handling unit, with pool heating provided via a heat exchanger on the heating hot water loop and supplemental air-source heat pumps as required.

PLUMBING:

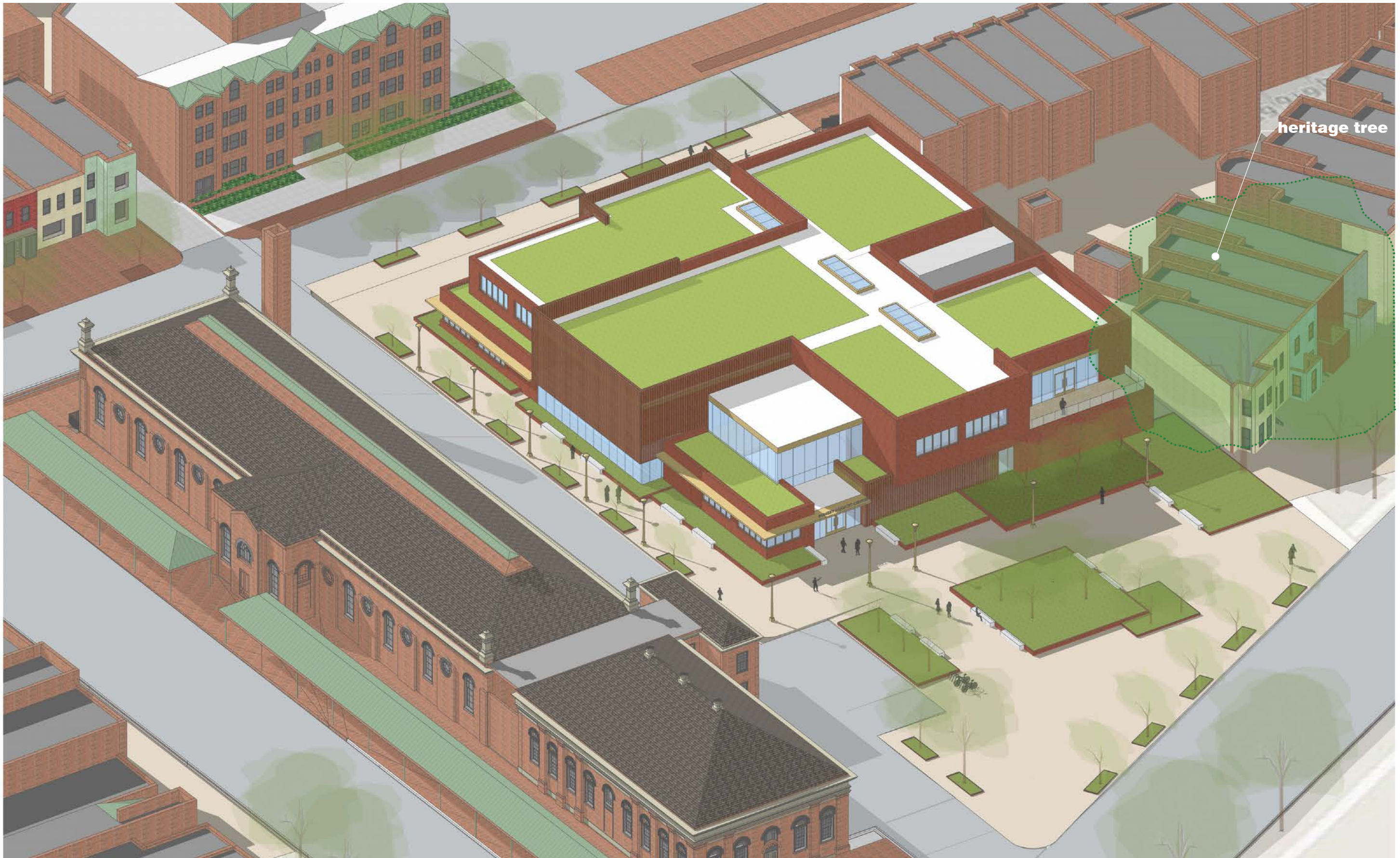
New 4" domestic water service, makeup water lines for pools (1.5"–3"), low-flow fixtures, and floor drains. Emergency eyewash and shower stations in chemical storage areas. Floor sinks in utility spaces. Roof drainage connected to stormwater infrastructure. Overflow drains discharge to daylight, with a foundation drainage system and sump pump if needed. No natural gas connections.

FIRE:

NFPA 13 sprinkler system with full coverage, using a dedicated 4" water system, backflow preventer, and wet-pipe system for each room.



SCALE: 1" = 20'-0"



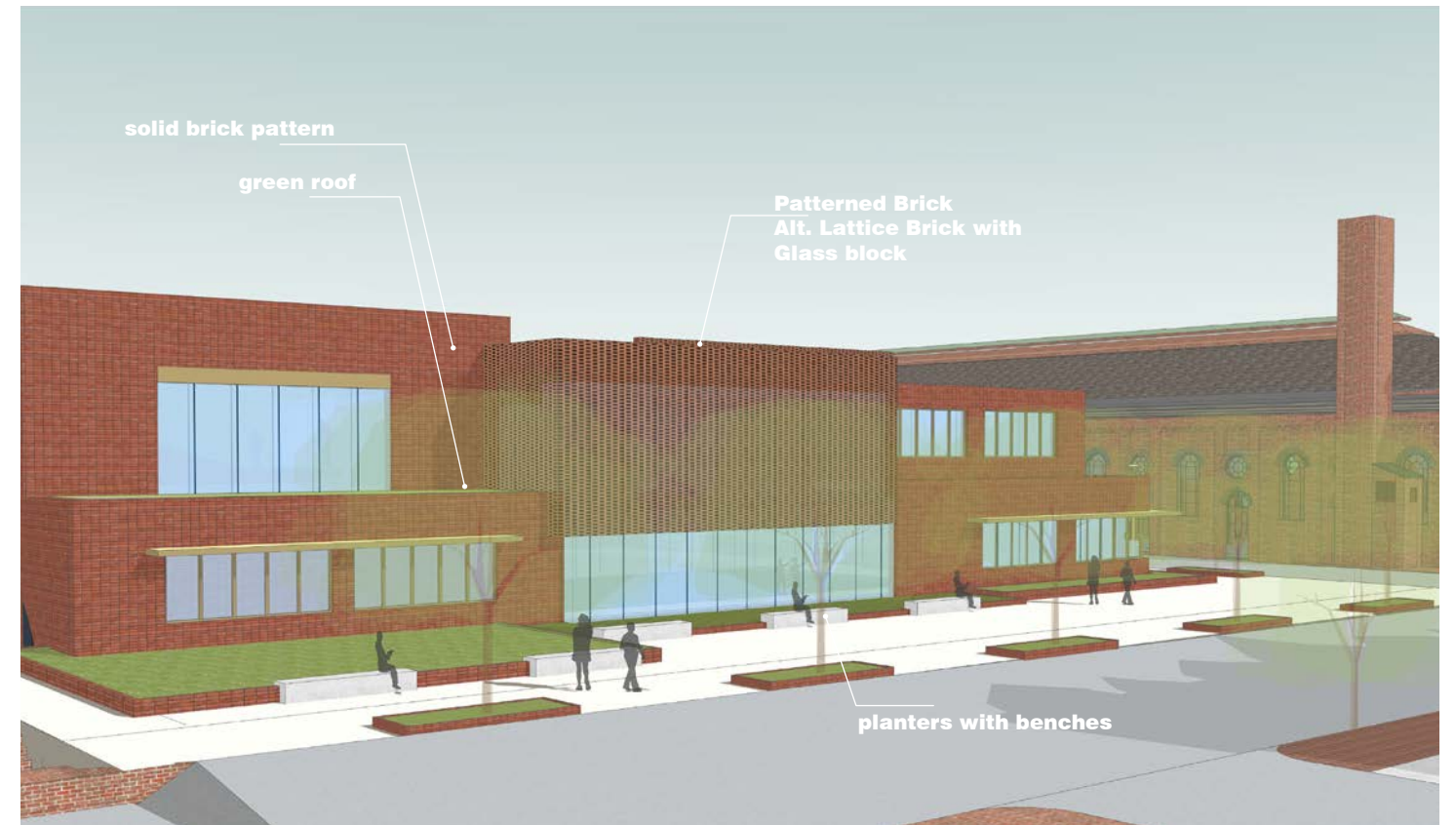
CONCEPT | BIRDS EYE VIEW



CONCEPT | VIEW TOWARDS EASTERN MARKET FROM NORTH CAROLINA AVE SE



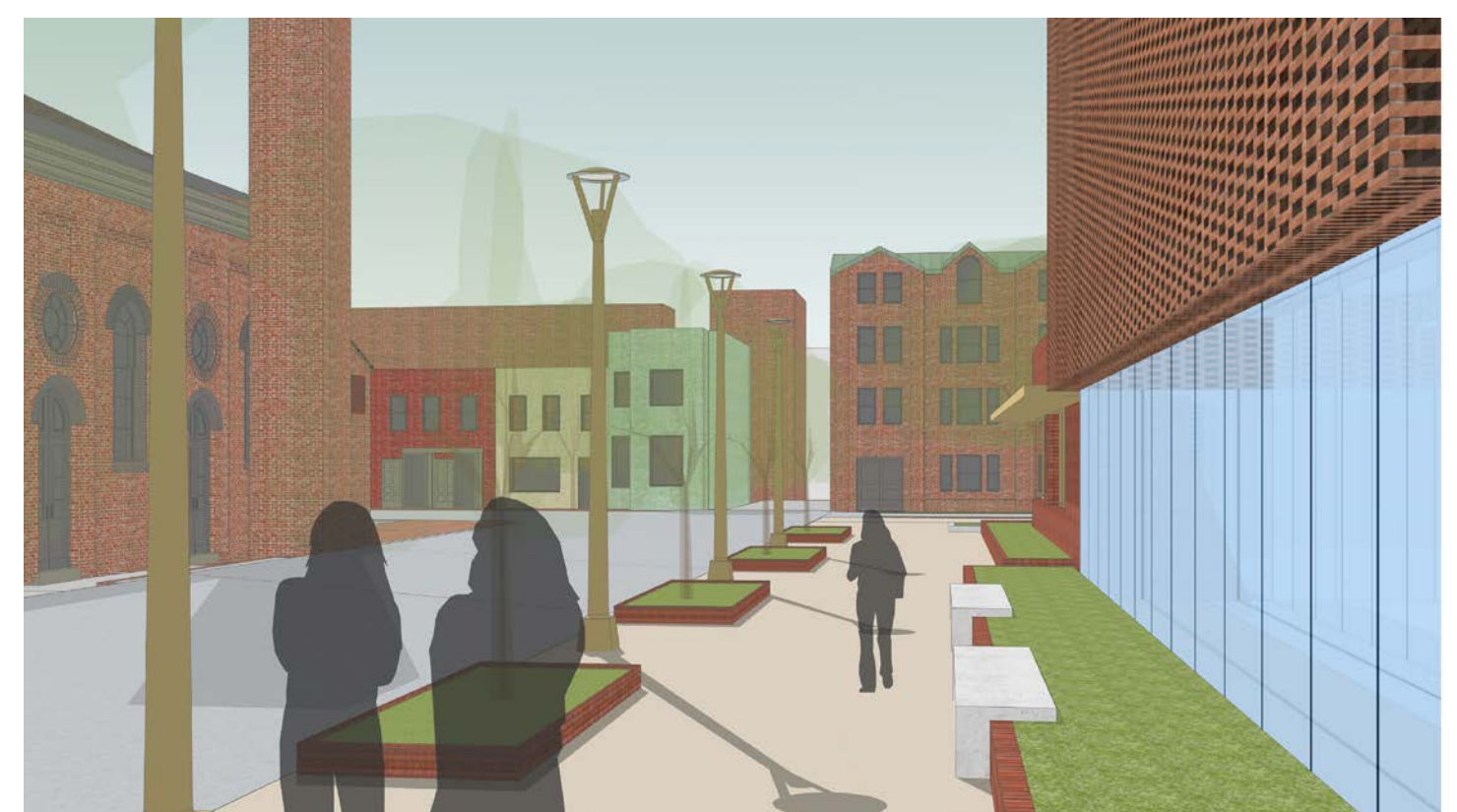
NE CORNER AND ALLEY VIEW



C STREET VIEW



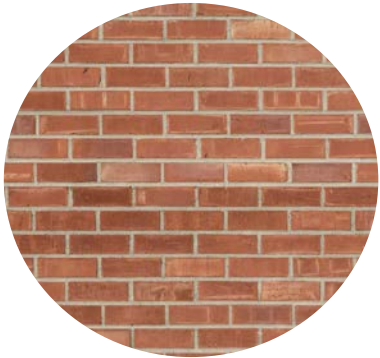
ALLEY VIEW FROM C STREET



EASTERN MARKET PROMENADE



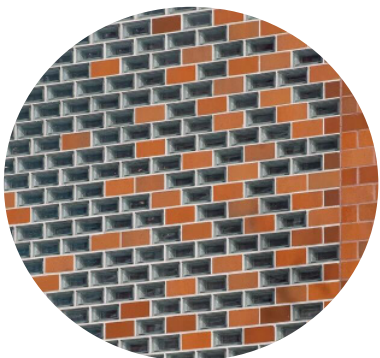
FRONT ELEVATION [NORTH CAROLINA AVE SE]



Red Solid Brick



Patterned Brick



Lattice Brick W/Glass Block



Bronze Storefront



REAR ELEVATION [C STREET SE]



EAST ELEVATION [ALLEY WITH EASTERN MARKET]



Glass Railing



Outdoor Bench



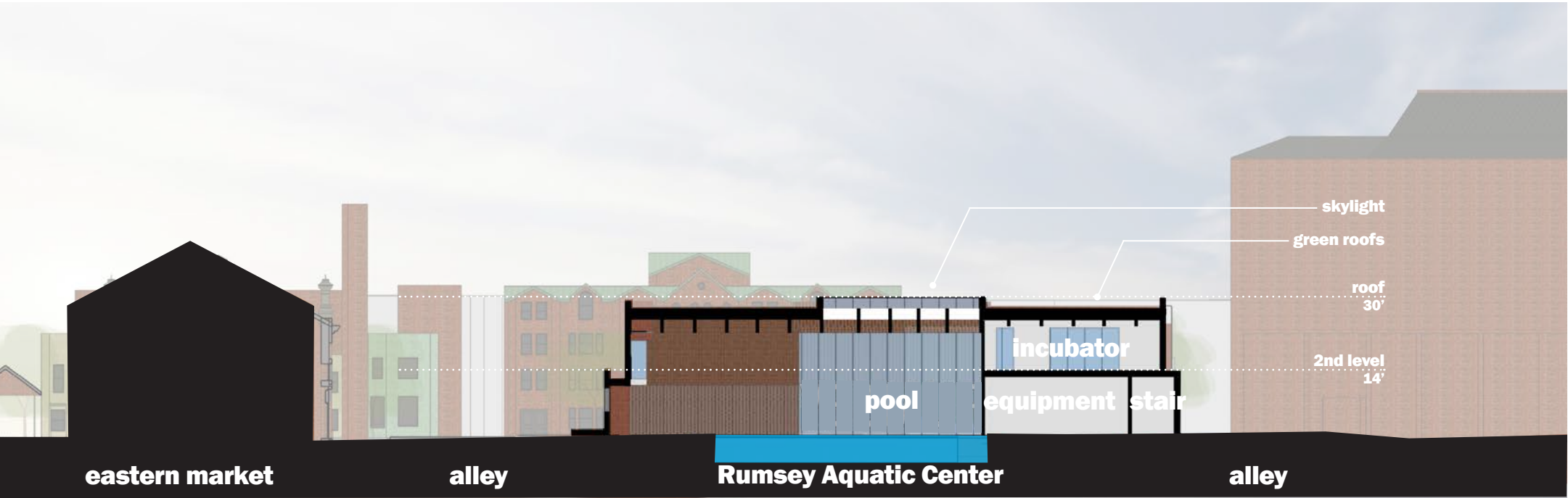
WEST ELEVATION [ALLEY]



Green Roof



Stormwater management BMP



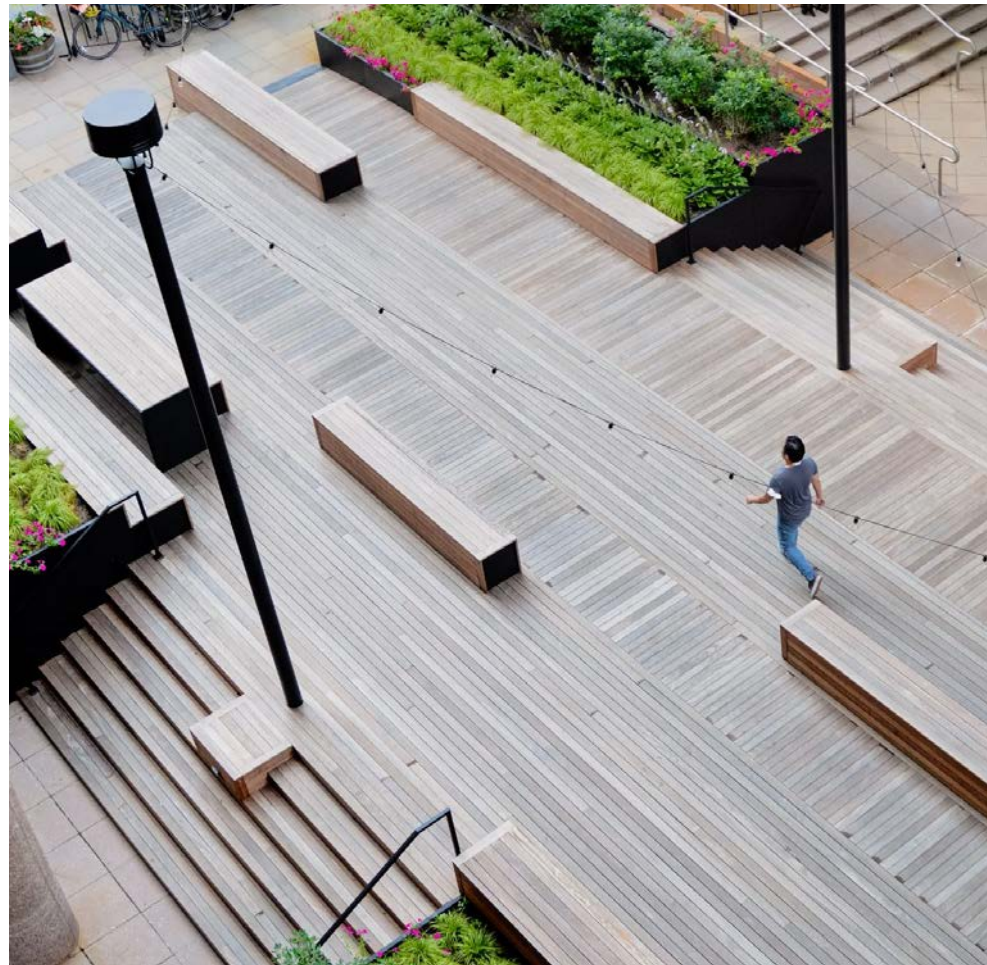
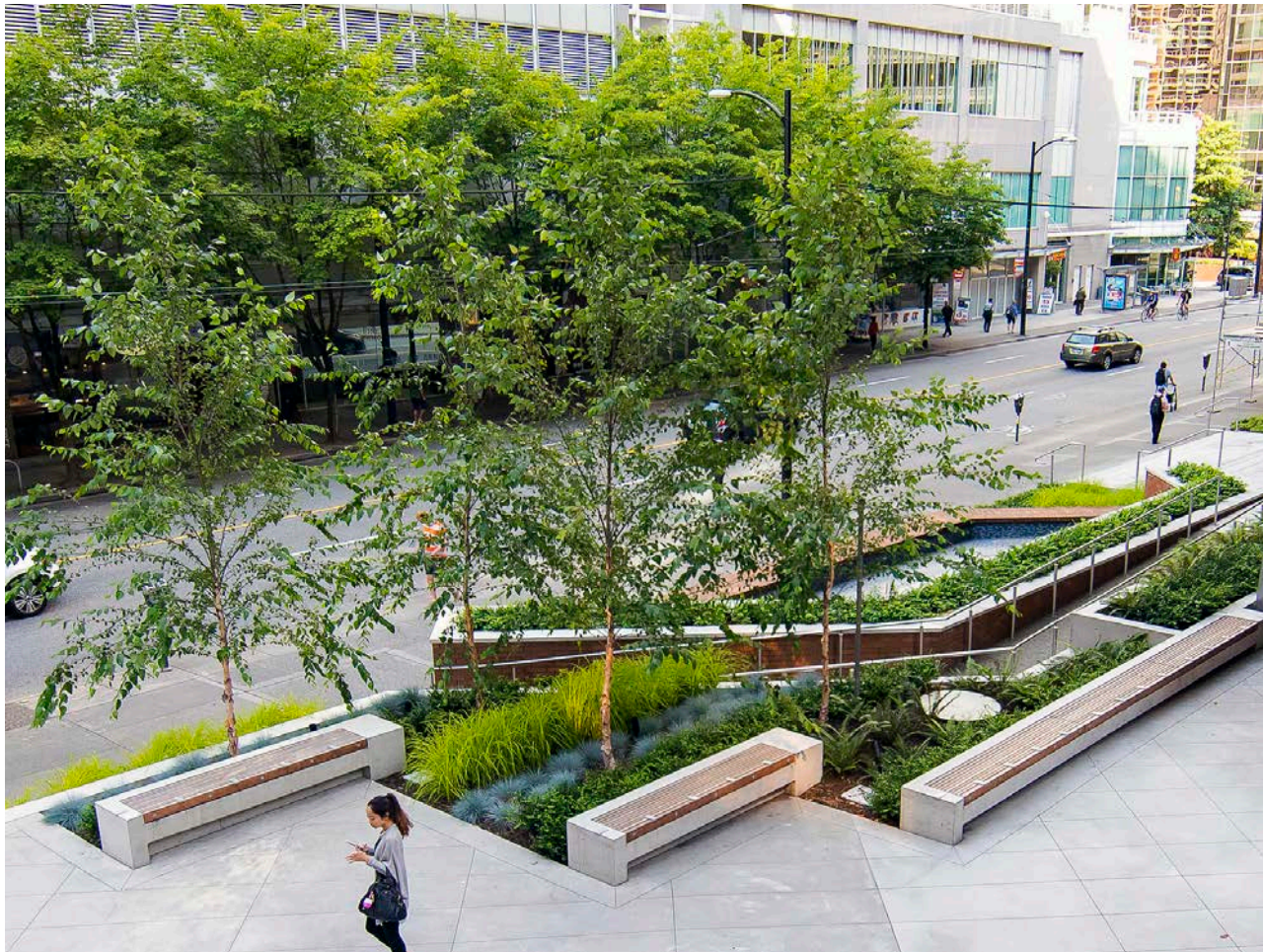
CONCEPT C | E-W SITE SECTION



CONCEPT C | N-S SITE SECTION



BUILDING PRECEDENTS



PLAZA PRECEDENTS

Property Overview

We are awaiting additional materials detailing the history and development of the Capitol East Natatorium (Rumsey Aquatic Center) from the DC Archives and will update this fact sheet accordingly.

The Capitol East Natatorium (present-day Rumsey Aquatic Center) is located at 635 North Carolina Avenue, SE, in the Capitol Hill neighborhood of Washington, DC. Construction of the building began in June 1969, and it officially opened to the public in August 1970 as the first year-round, racially integrated public swimming pool in the District.¹

Plans for a New Pool

Beginning in 1964, Molly Kux, a Capitol Hill resident and mother helped spearhead the campaign for the construction of a recreational facility in the neighborhood, motivated by concerns that local children had limited places to play in the populated city. Kux, who served as chairman of the community development program for local advocacy group Circle on the Hill, highlighted that for the 43,000

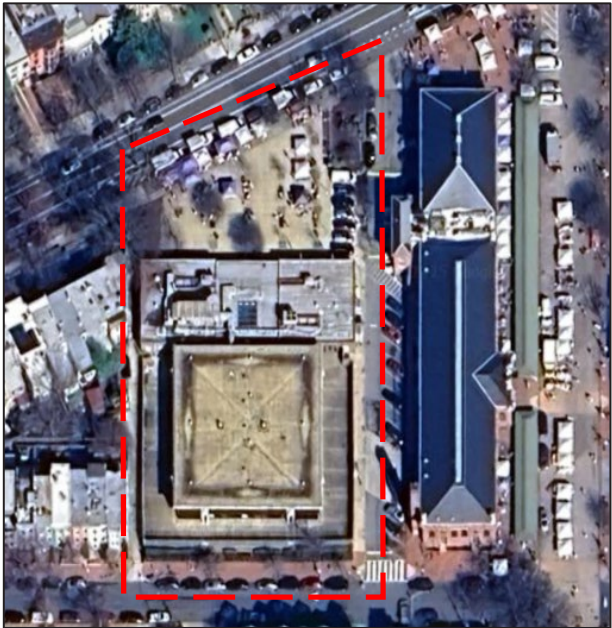


Figure 1: Rumsey Aquatic Center property, outlined in red (Google Earth)

residents of Capitol Hill, there should be forty-three acres of recreational space, compared to the twelve that were made available at the time. Along with the nearly 100 local women that comprised Circle on the Hill, Kux appealed to the National Park Service and the DC Recreation Department to advocate for the addition of more recreation facilities in the neighborhood, including a pool which the group felt was suited to appeal to a wide age range.²

The battle for a recreation center was intertwined with the city's dilemma regarding the future of the Eastern Market. In 1964, the DC Health Commissioner declared the market "a menace to public health" and advocated for its replacement with a large supermarket and on-site parking. The lease for the market was set to expire the following year and discussions regarding its demolition prompted a strong adverse response from the Capitol Hill community. Plans to retain Eastern Market, and construct a recreation facility, including a swimming pool intensified in the

summer of 1964. A new group called the Emergency Recreation Council for Capitol East (ERC) formed from forty-five organizations in the area, united in the common cause of alleviating what they called a "recreation gap" in the Capitol Hill community. The group's advocacy efforts helped encourage the Recreation Department to develop a plan for the area including a list of desirable land, cost estimates, and coordination with the National Capital Planning Commission.³

The ERC, which comprised of White and Black residents of the Capitol Hill neighborhood faced resistance to the construction of the pool from the exclusively White Capitol Hill Restoration Society (CHRS). CHRS opposed the project in favor of preserving what they anticipated to be a developing commercial strip centered around Eastern Market. Some CHRS members indicated that the opposition may have been in part racially based, as they raised concerns over Black children frequenting the market after swimming in the adjacent integrated pool.⁴ Instead, the CHRS proposed a renovation of Firehouse No. 8 building as a community center and the conversion of the East Capitol Street Car Barn at Fifteenth and East Capitol Streets for swimming and other recreational purposes. ERC feared that the District would not have funding for both projects, and the protests of the CHRS would doom the natatorium project.⁵

Design and Construction

Despite CHRS's objections, the Recreation Department authorized \$54,000 for planning and \$769,500 for construction of the Capitol East Natatorium. Although completion of the facility was anticipated for the summer of 1969, delays with the design prolonged construction, with the Natatorium opening to the public in August 1970.^{6,7}

Following the authorization of funds for the natatorium, the Department had selected local architect Eugene A. Delmar (1928-2018) for the design of the building. Delmar studied at Columbia University before moving to the DC area and establishing his own firm, Delmar Architects, in 1959. He was a fellow of the American Institute of Architects, and was prominent in local circles, serving as president of the Maryland Society of Architects, as well as the Potomac Valley Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. Delmar was primarily known for his designs of office buildings, multi-family residences, and schools.⁸



Figure 3: Rendering of Capitol East Natatorium (Delmar Architects)



Figure 2: Demolition of Firehouse No. 8 in preparation for construction of Capitol East Natatorium (The Washington Post)

³ "Eastern Market Will Remain if District Can Afford the Cost," *The Washington Post-Times Herald*, March 29, 1965.
⁴ Sam Smith, *Captive Capital; a colonial life in modern Washinton*, (Bloomington: Indiana Press, 1974), 83
⁵ "Storm Brews Over Recreation Center," *The Washington Post-Times Herald*, January 12, 1968, B1.
⁶ "3 Swimming Pools Delayed," *The Washington Post*, April 8, 1969, C1.
⁷ "Pool Opens," *Washington Post-Times Herald*, August 2, 1970, D3.
⁸ "About the Firm – Founded in 1959," *Delmar Architects*, accessed January 28, 2025, <https://www.delmararchitects.com/copy-of-the-firm>.

¹ "Pool Opens," *Washington Post-Times Herald*, August 2, 1970, D3.
² "A Ring Leader on Capitol Hill," *The Washington Post-Times Herald*, March 8, 1946, F1.



Figure 4: Capitol East Natatorium following completion (Delmar Architects)

Delmar revised the plans for the Natatorium, incorporating these recommendations, and resubmitted his new drawings to the CFA, which approved them at the Commission meeting on June 4, 1968.¹¹ Dick Wolf, a member of the CHRS later stated that famed architect Gordon Bunshaft of the CFA was ultimately responsible for the final design of the natatorium, as he drastically altered Delmar’s plans for the building.¹² Bunshaft, a Pritzker Prize winning architect, served as a member of the CFA from 1963 to 1972. He was a longtime partner of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, and is credited with ushering in a new era of Modernist skyscraper design and corporate architecture.¹³

Upon completion of the Capitol East Natatorium of 1970, the building quickly encountered numerous issues including, but not limited to, several smashed windows, and overcrowding. Delmar stated that he was aware

Delmar submitted designs to the Department of Buildings and Grounds (DBG), as well as the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) in February of 1968.⁹ His initial design of the building consisted of four linked windowless blocks, housing two interior pools and community rooms. Delmar felt that by breaking up the masses, the building blended with the neighborhood which was comprised of small brick row houses. CFA members disagreed, stating that the design was overly complicated and oppressive. They requested that the architect develop a singular design that was reflective of the function of the building. At a CFA meeting on February 20, 1968, member Aline Saarinen expressed criticism of Delmar’s initial design which, he felt, did not reflect the idea of a swimming pool. He stated that the building should be redesigned “in terms of a bright and beautiful structure” that conforms to and enhances the surrounding neighborhood.¹⁰



Figure 5: Interior of Capitol East Natatorium following completion (Delmar Architects)

that the natatorium would be the subject of vandalism and informed the *Evening Star* the CFA demanded that he abandon his original plan of a windowless building with a skylight, aimed at avoiding the issue.¹⁴

Continued Use

In spite of the many maintenance and crowding issues posed by the Capitol East Natatorium, the facility quickly became an important feature of the Capitol Hill community. As the first year-round, integrated pool in the District, the natatorium was selected as the location for the annual Black History Invitational Swim Meet. The meet was co-founded in 1987 by the DC Department of Parks and Recreation, along with the United Black Fund, Inc. with the goal of providing youth with an opportunity to meet positive role models, and to create a positive outlet of expression.¹⁵ The building was renamed the Rumsey Aquatic Center in honor of the former director of the DC Department of Recreation and Parks, Dr. William Rumsey.¹⁶

⁹ “What Goes on Here,” *The Washington Daily News*, February 21, 1968, 5.

¹⁰ United States Commission of Fine Arts Meeting Minutes, November 1, 1967, to April 30, 1968, accessed January 28, 2025, <https://archive.org/details/uscommissionoffineartsminutes>.

¹¹ United States Commission of Fine Arts Meeting Minutes, May 1, 1968, to February 28, 1969, accessed January 28, 2025, <https://archive.org/details/uscommissionoffineartsminutes>.

¹² Hilary Russell, “Part II. A Deep Dive into Rumsey Pool’s Turbulent Beginning,” *Capitol Hill Corner*.

¹³ “Gordon Bunshaft, FAIA (1909-1990),” *US Modernist*, accessed January 28, 2025, <https://usmodernist.org/bunshaft.htm>

¹⁴ “Natatorium a Beautiful White Elephant; New Capitol Hill Pool Flooded with Complaints,” *Evening Star*, August 15, 1970, A-3.

¹⁵ “Black History Invitational Swim Meet,” *Department of Parks and Recreation*, accessed January 28, 2025, <https://dpr.dc.gov/service/black-history-invitational-swim-meet#:~:text=This%20unique%20event%20was%20co,honor%20of%20Black%20History%20Month>.

¹⁶ Hilary Russell, “Part II. A Deep Dive into Rumsey Pool’s Turbulent Beginning,” *Capitol Hill Corner*.



Honoring the Legacy of the William H. Rumsey Aquatic Center Through Integrated Art and Graphics in the New Lobby



LOBBY PERSPECTIVE | PRESERVING EXISTING RUMSEY AQUATIC CENTER HISTORY