

# Invisible Citizens

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Special thanks to

Junko Yamamoto, Leeland McPhail, and Dennis Kim for  
.the wonderful insights and sharing their philosophy

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| Department of Architecture

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## *DESERT*

In that desert, he walked backward at times, feeling so lonely.

To see the footprints left in front of me...

Hortense Vlou



## Invisible Citizens

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I.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to consider the symbiotic relationship between resilient architecture due to inconclusive future upbringings. Understanding the residents as hosts of a structure is vital to designing despite the intervention of politics and the rights of ownership. By exploring the intersection of users' needs and imagining the future of a decaying architecture, design can be theoretically symbiotic to an existing structure, but can be envisioned as a starting point for the future. Addressing the pressing challenges faced by senior citizens residing in poorly managed and deteriorating buildings, where inadequate living conditions compel indifference to homelessness despite government funding, underscores the urgency for innovative solutions.

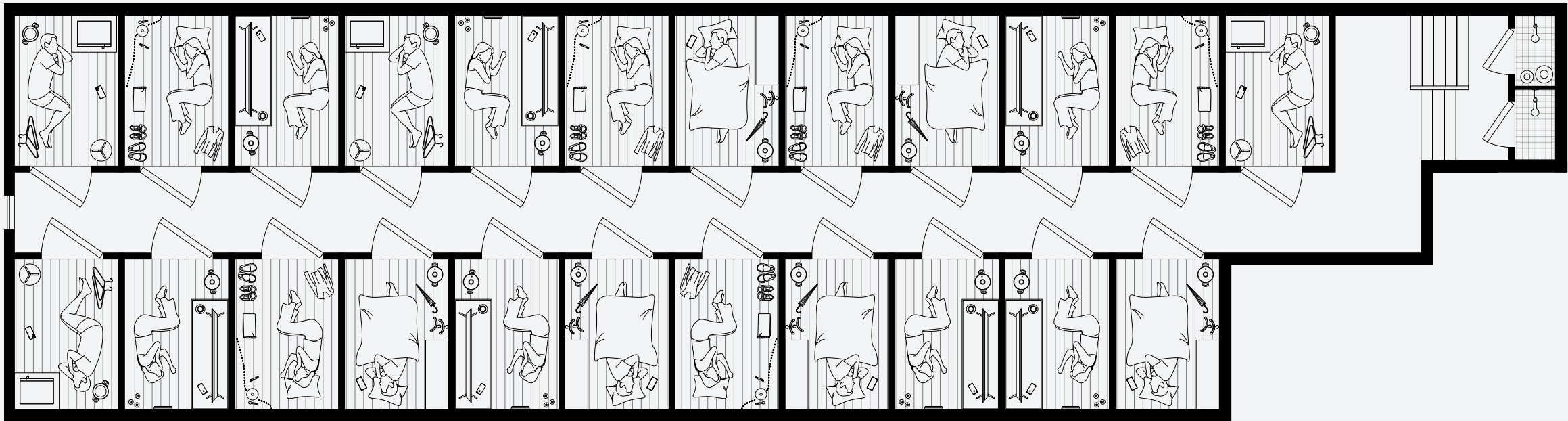
The ethical responsibility of architects is not limited to a simple renovation but rather should partake in the role of future development not bound to private ownership or changes in government policies. Architects should consider the theoretical possibilities of a decaying building. This would mean that before the case of full demolition of a building, a building should allow for change. One such way would be to create a foundation (literally and figuratively).



*Slice room*  
5" x 7" x 7"  
1:10 model

## II. TYPOLOGY

Slice room (jjokbang) is a type of very small room or cubicle commonly found in South Korea. The term "jjokbang" literally translates to "slice room" or "partitioned room," which reflects its small size and basic living conditions. This typology is typically associated with low-income housing and is often occupied by people facing economic hardships, including the elderly, the homeless, and those with very limited means.



*Speculation of slice room*

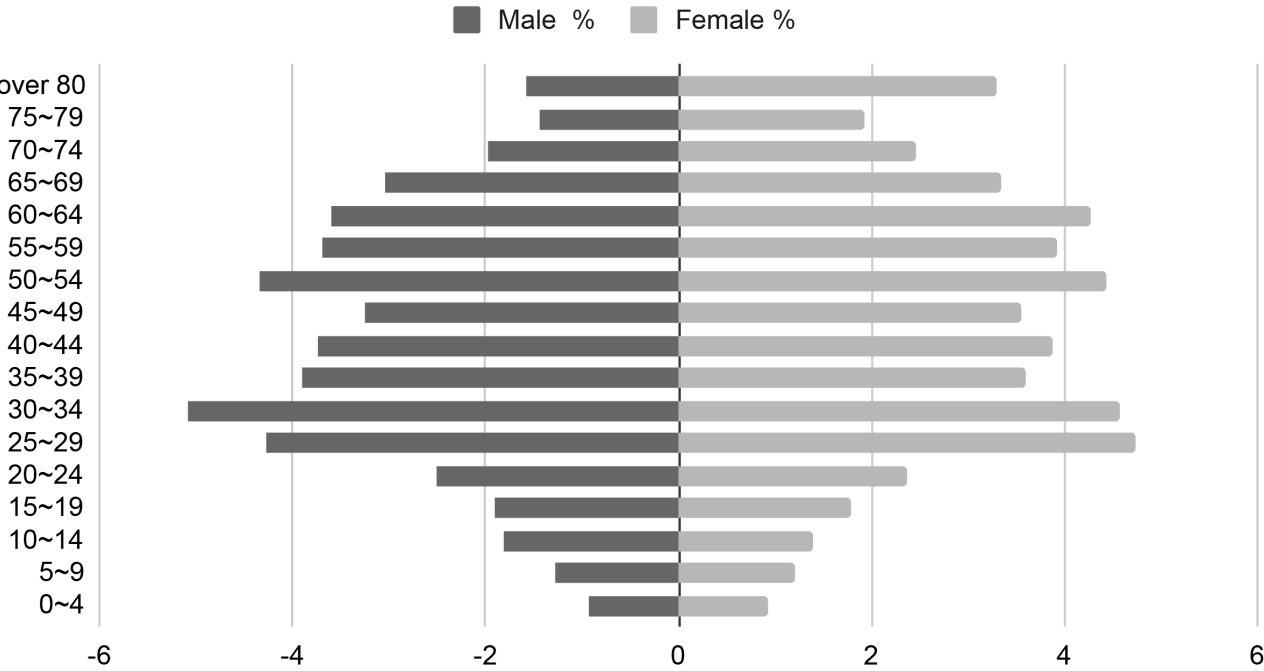


“Top 5 Small Village Dense Areas”

Map of Seoul

- 1. Yeongdeungpo-dong, Yeongdeungpo-gu
- 2. Donui-dong, Jongno-gu
- 3. Changsin-dong, Jongno-gu
- 4. Namdaemun, Jung-gu
- 5. Dongja-dong, Yongsan-gu

Huam-dong, Yongsan-gu Age Distribution



In urban South Korea, many financially struggling seniors find refuge in what are known as slice rooms. These are essentially narrow, double-loaded corridors filled with 32-square-foot rooms. These typologies are prominently located within the central precincts of urban cores, particularly due to their proximity to transportation hubs, which raises their per-square-foot value. Despite this, slice rooms remain attractive to this demographic because of their zero-deposit policy.

The focus of this research is Dongja-dong, an area adjacent to Seoul Station, a major railway hub. This location has become a sanctuary for the homeless, a problem that has been escalating since the Asian IMF Crisis of 1997. The persistence of homelessness led to the implementation of a mayoral policy in November 2008 aimed at establishing a welfare system to alleviate this issue.

Data indicates that a significant majority of these residents are over the age of 65.





*Seoul Station*  
photo by The Seoul Research Database





Slice room typologies exist throughout Seoul South Korea

*Photography of the corridors*

It is estimated that there are 4,294 small cramped dwellings in these top five areas, with a population of 3,546 residents



# III.

## CONDITION

The state's definition of homelessness includes individuals who have been without a fixed abode for an extended period, have used homeless shelters, or live in unstable housing. Slice rooms fall into the third category, thus their residents are officially considered homeless. Data indicates that a significant majority of these residents are over the age of 65.

Within this community, only two complexes offer actual living spaces, which are small and shared by 23 residents. These residents rely heavily on non-profit organizations and the local church for basic necessities, such as air conditioners in the summer and tools for home repairs.

Rent is collected by building managers, who are also tenants, and then passed on to the owners. Due to neglect, these buildings are not properly maintained. Furthermore, over half of the government pension for low-income residents is spent on rent, leaving them without the financial means to move to better housing options.





Monthly Expenses

monthly expense from the government: \$365  
- monthly rent: \$182

---

= remaining expense: \$183

View from the corridors



## IV.

# POLITICS

Attempts to stabilize rent through legislation have been largely unsuccessful. From 2013 to 2019, the Seoul Metropolitan Government tried to enhance housing stability with projects like “New Dream House.” However, these efforts were hindered by the fact that the buildings were privately owned, leading to evictions once contracts expired. The government’s approach, which involves providing financial support for redevelopment rather than owning the properties, complicates long-term rent stabilization and often results in increased rents and evictions.

Property owners in Dongja-dong oppose public redevelopment plans aimed at improving living conditions through public rental housing and temporary relocation during renovations. They argue that such measures infringe on their property rights and have formed committees to push for private redevelopment, even resorting to legal action. Tenants generally support the public redevelopment plan but are concerned about the adequacy of temporary housing during the transition. This ongoing dispute has stalled the redevelopment project.



*line for food distribution at Seoul Station*  
photo by Kyunghang news

## IMF Crisis

After the Asia IMF Crisis, many individuals became homeless as a result of the unstable job market.

## Homeless

'homeless individual' : an individual who has endured a significant period without a fixed abode, has availed themselves of homeless shelters, or has resided in such facilities for an extended duration.



*protest for the redevelopment*  
photo by Residents' Committee of Dongja-dong, Seoul



*New Dreams Childrens Park*  
photo by Sky Daily News

### New Dreams Childrens Park

Both the Seoul Station and the New Dreamss Childrens Park are hideouts for the homeless and a socializing hub for the residents of Dongja-dong.

## V. DESIGN

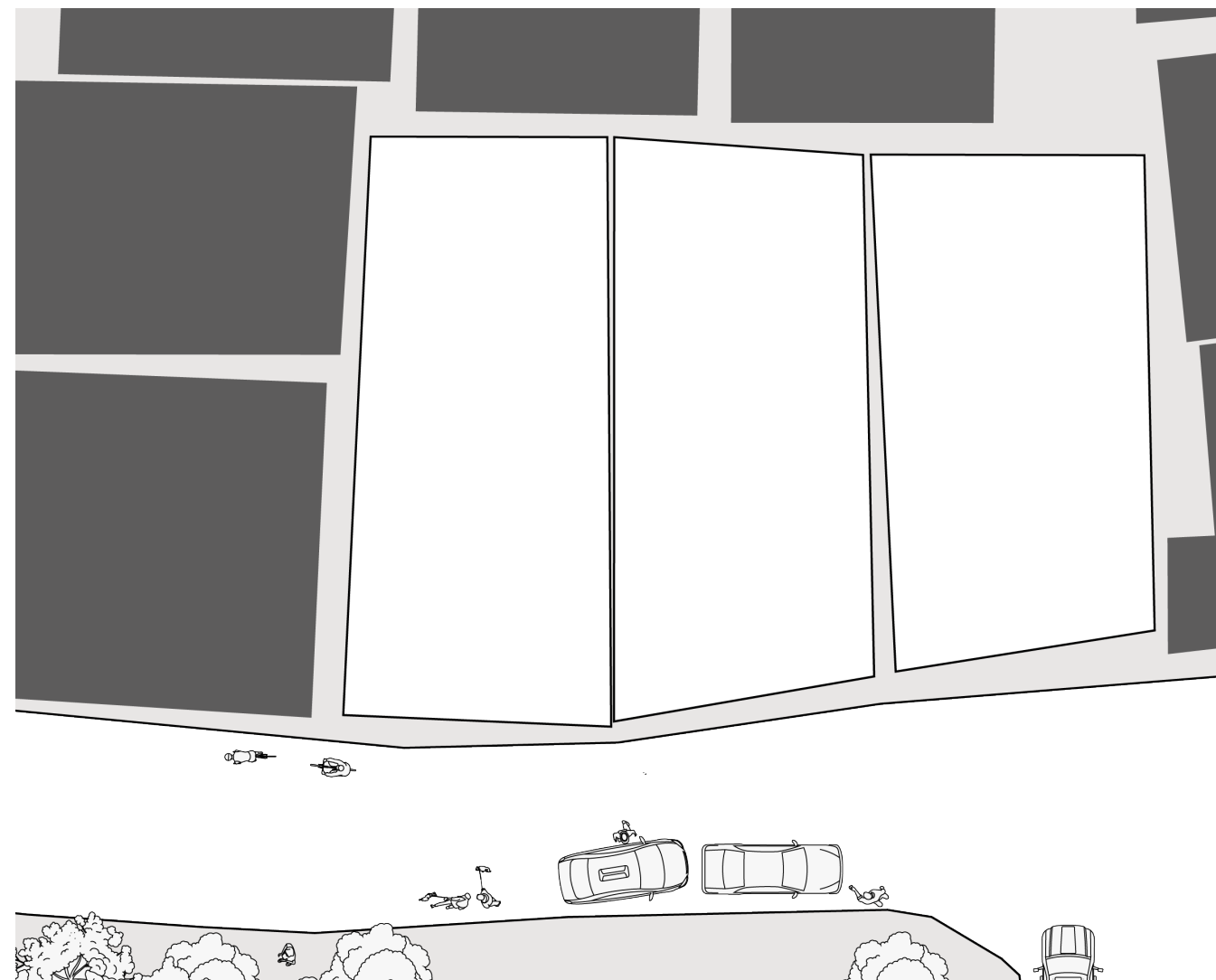
The selected site, 200 meters from Seoul Station, faces New Dream Children's Park, which ironically serves as a social hub for the homeless. The design strategy addresses the immediate needs of the tenants living in these deteriorating buildings. Currently, there is only one bathroom per floor, shared by 10 to 20 residents, resulting in unhygienic conditions. Many residents have expressed a desire for more bathrooms and adequate kitchen space.

In response, the proposed design includes increasing the number of bathrooms, creating education and meeting rooms, and building a community kitchen and dining hall with a small indoor garden. The construction plan involves four phases, with a structure attached to the partially demolished existing building. This standalone structure can serve as temporary housing while the policy remains stalled and later as a foundation for redevelopment.





*Dongja-dong*



*existing site*

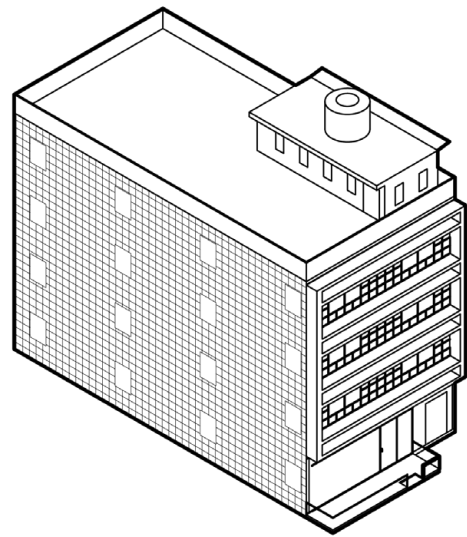
The public redevelopment plan converts the mixed-use buildings into fully residential ones, which does not align with the revenue goals of private property owners. The design retains a mixed-use typology, ensuring stable rent revenue from vendors. To counteract the issue of ghost tenants, the design significantly reduces the number of residential units. The new construction not only increases revenue through vendors but also creates job opportunities for tenants.



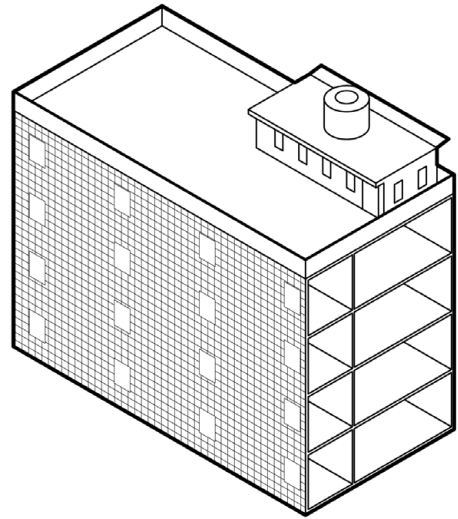


*context axon*  
S-map Seoul

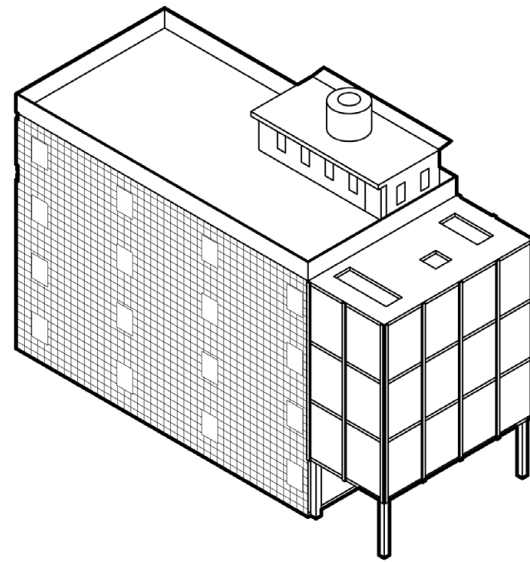




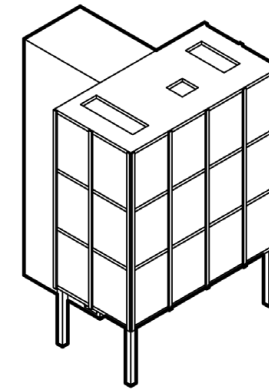
1. existing



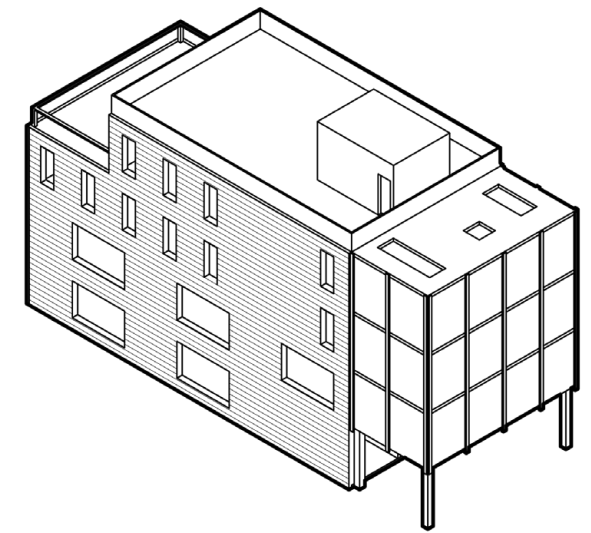
2. partial  
removal



3. addition

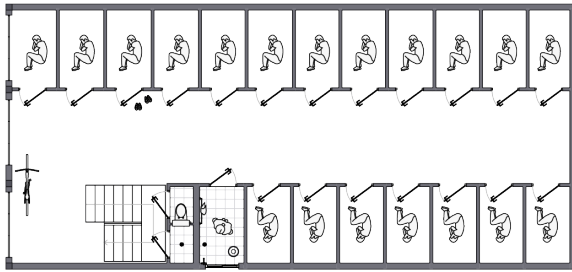


4. existing  
removal

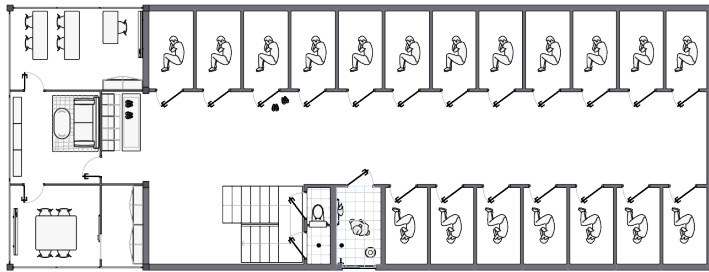


5. new  
construction

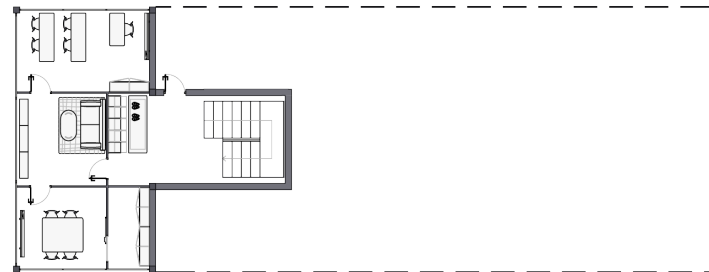
*assembly diagram*



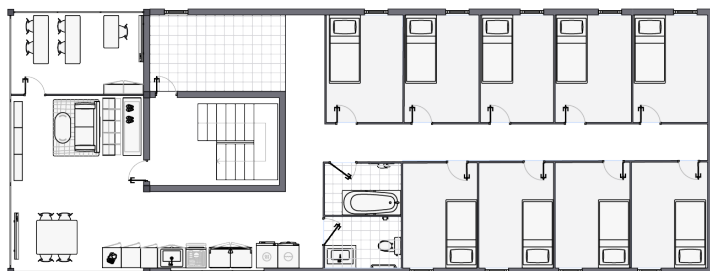
existing  
floorplan



addition

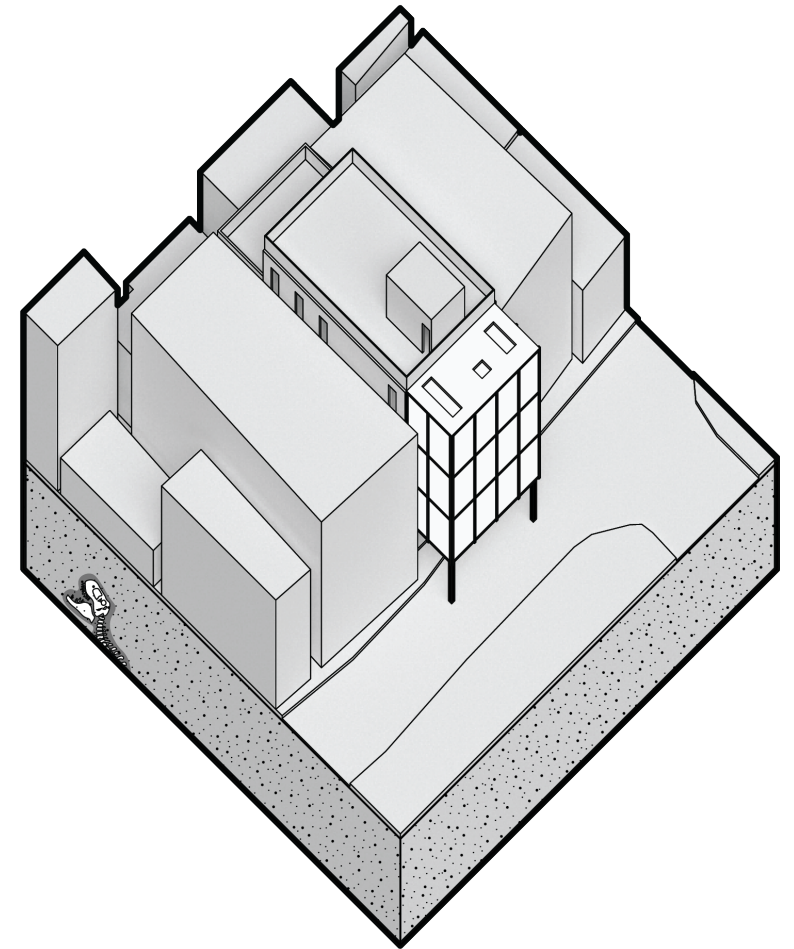


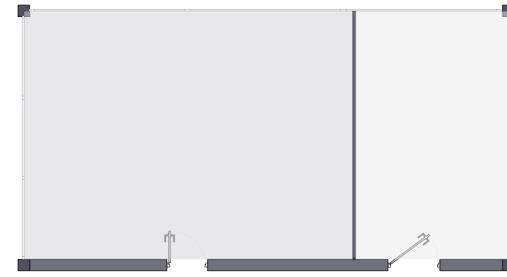
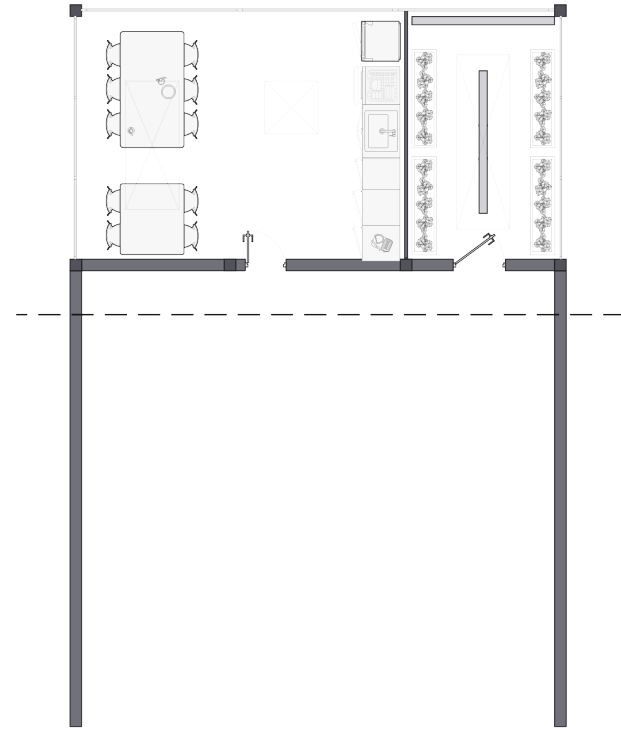
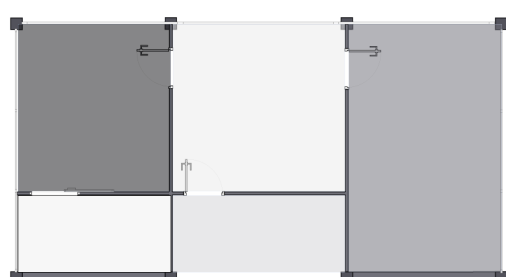
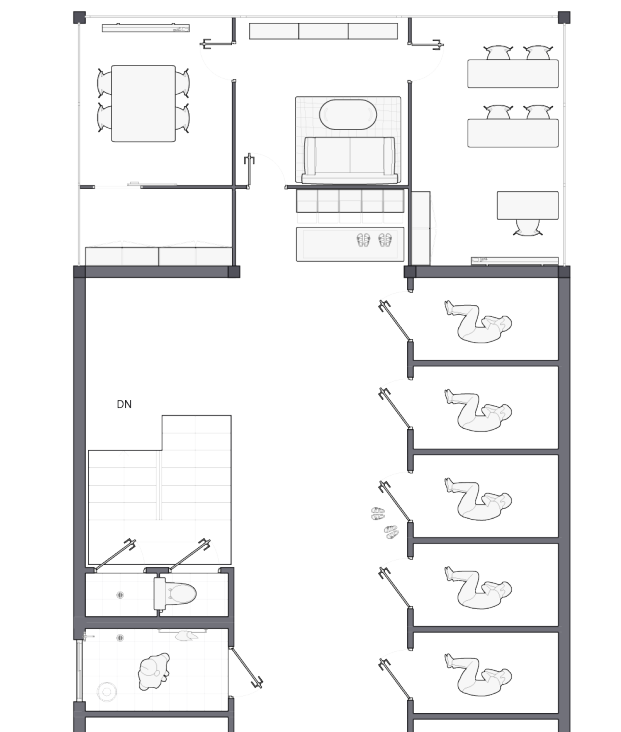
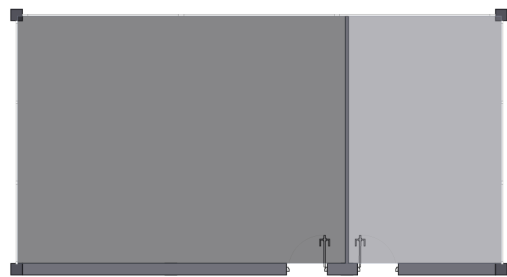
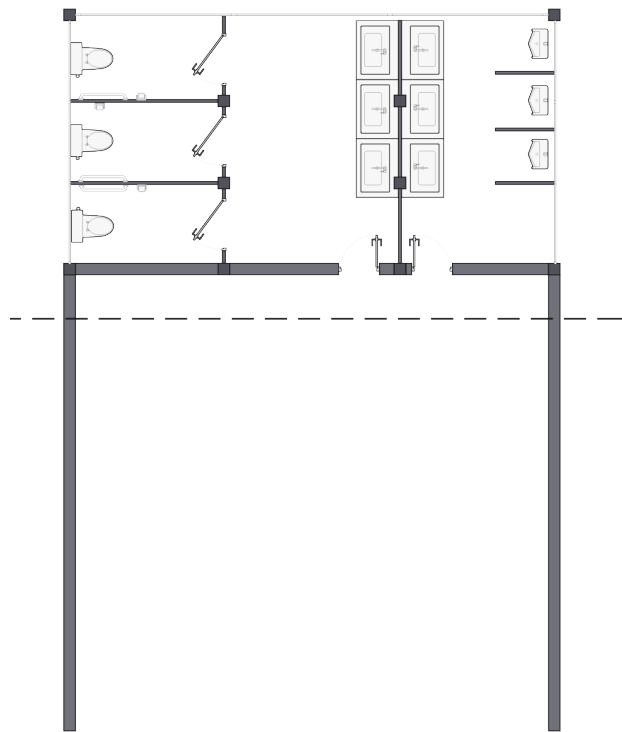
existing  
removal



new  
construction

*construction phases*

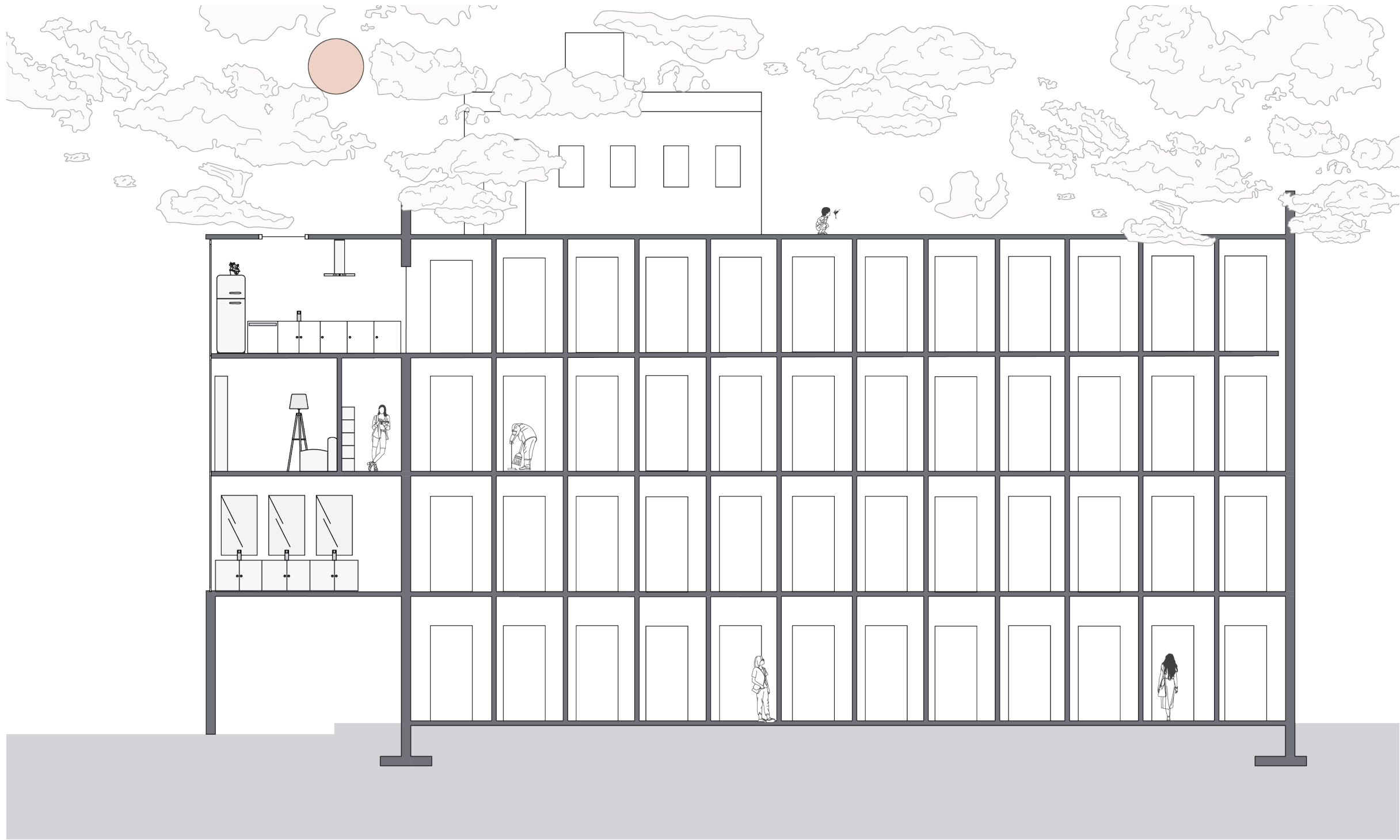




*addition diagram*

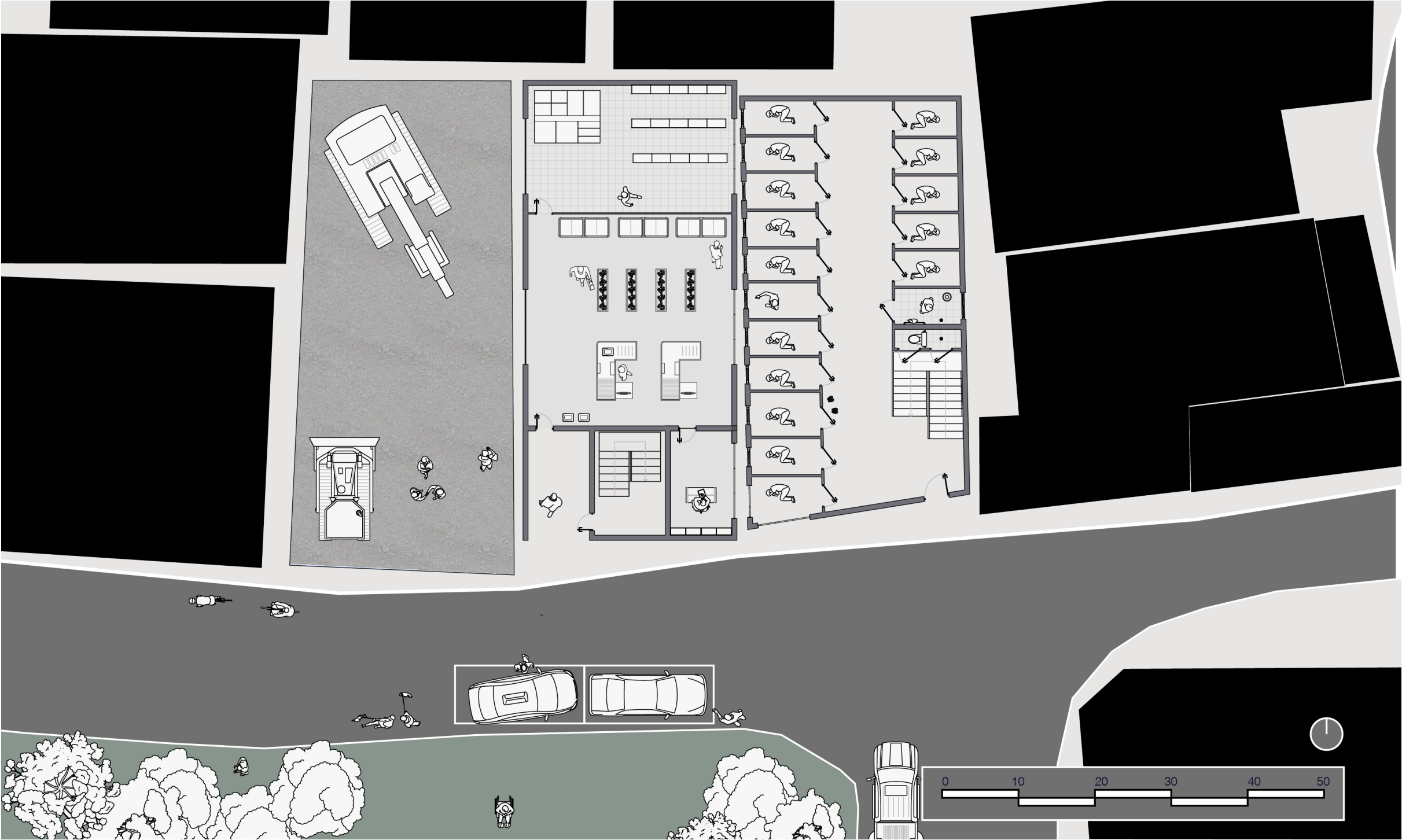


dining render

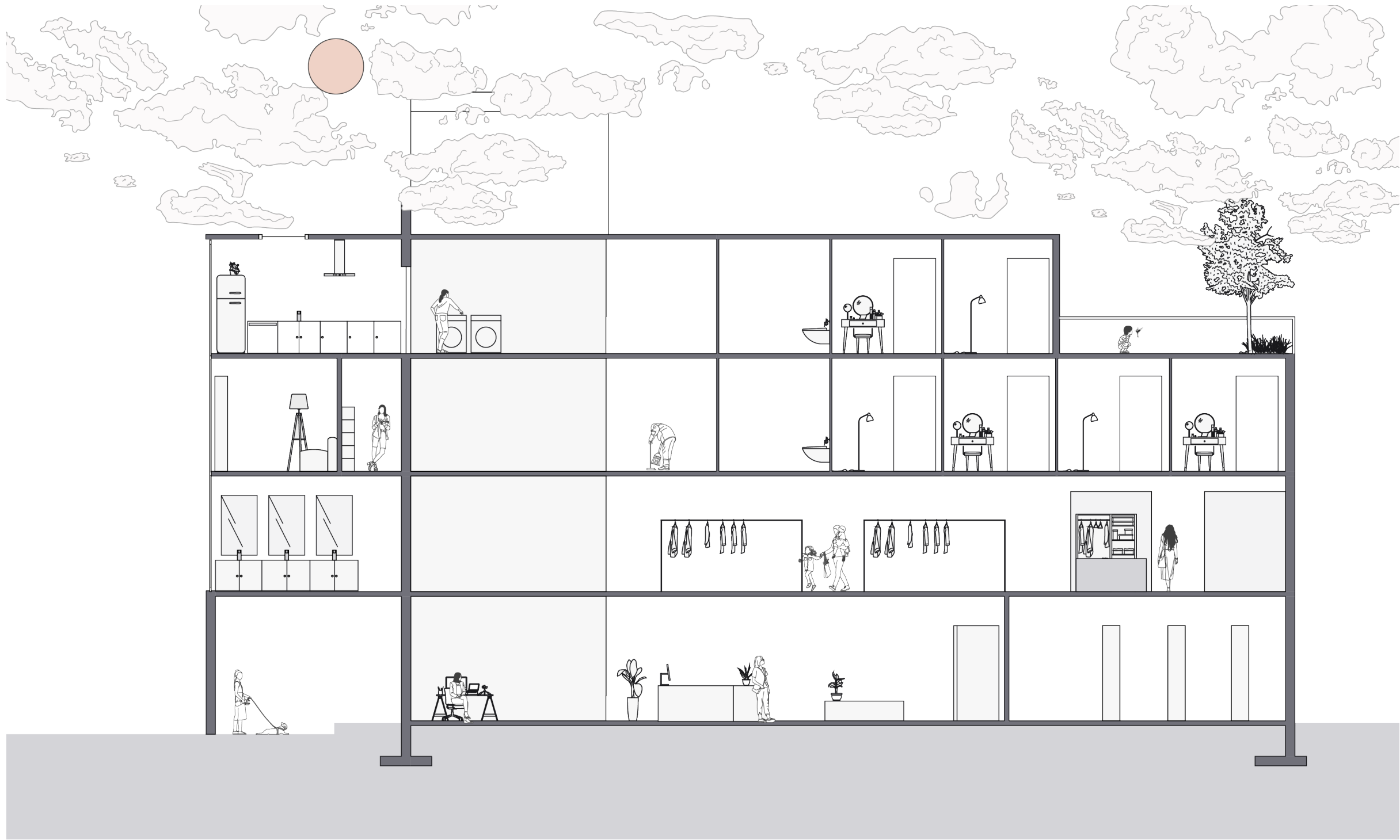


*addition section*





*new development site plan*

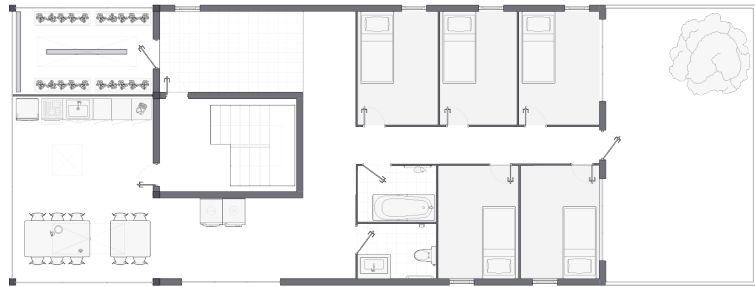


*new section*





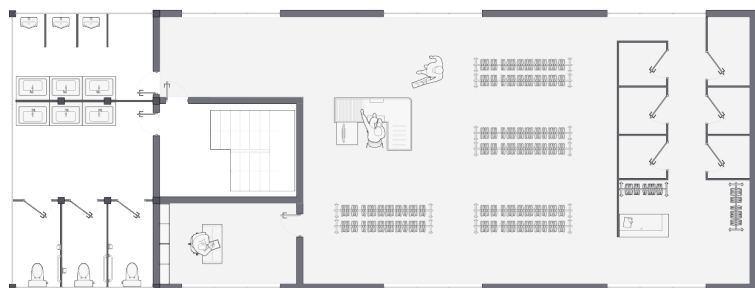
roof



3



2



1

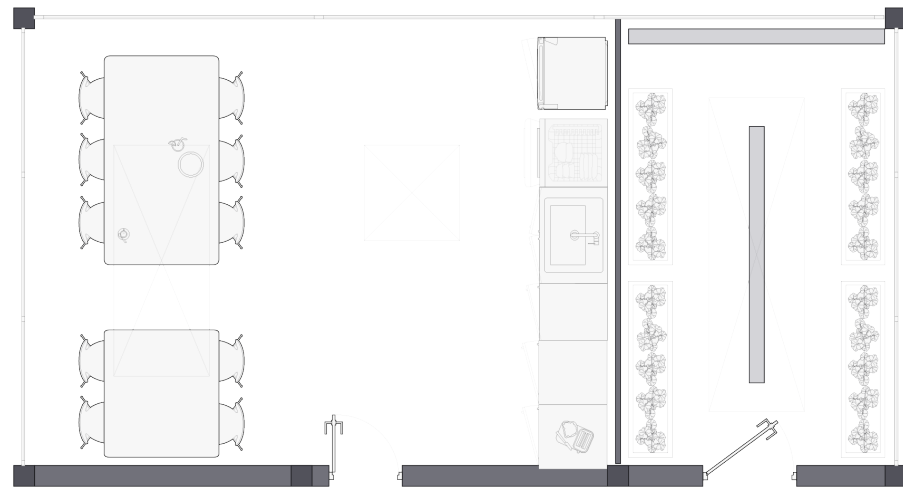


ground

*new development*

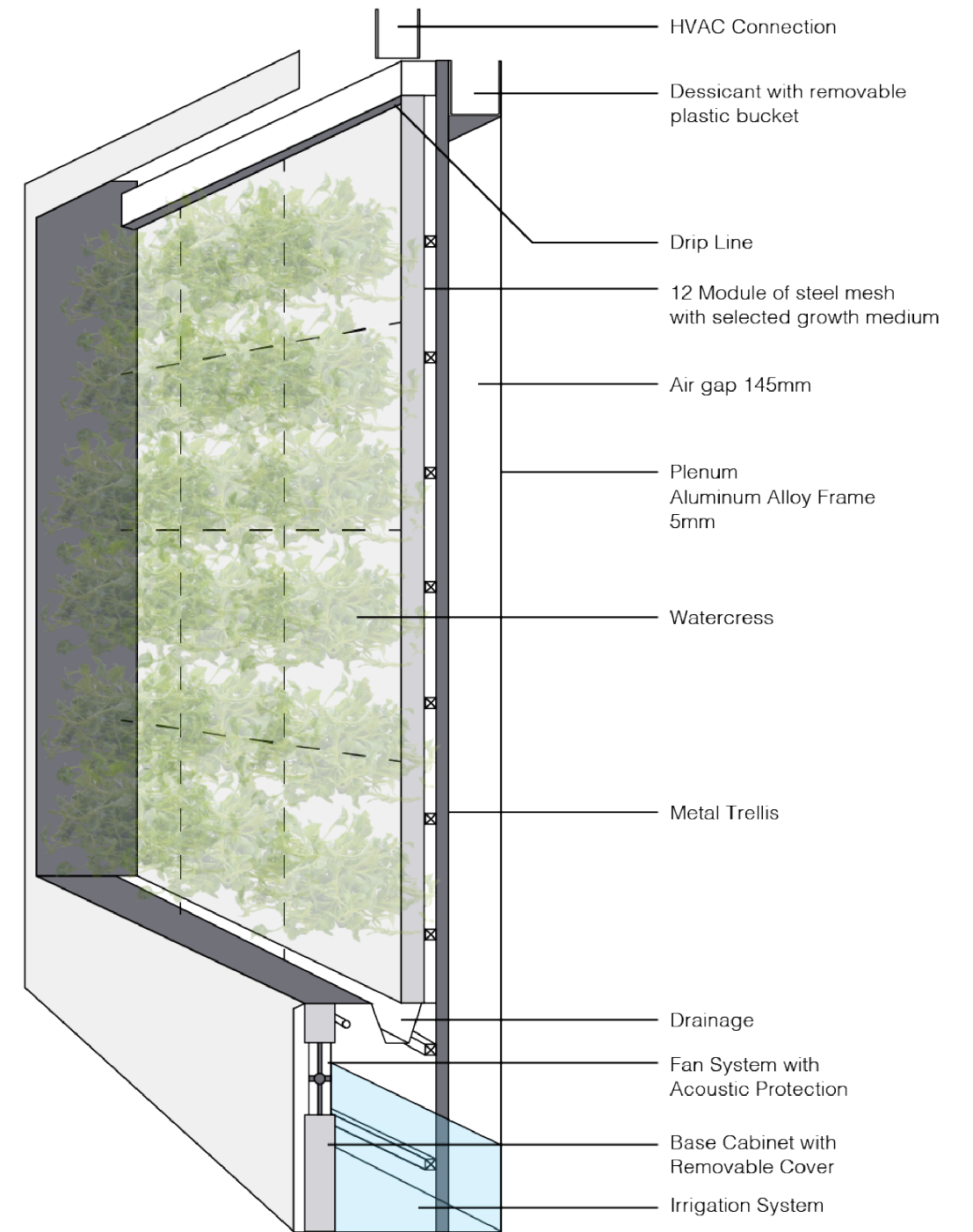


*bed room render*



## Green Wall

A green wall accessory in the standalone section grows watercress, a nutritious and easy-to-grow vegetable, offering tenants potential vendor opportunities.







HUAM RESIDENCE  
17-5 Huam-ro 57-gil, Seoul  
Scale 1"0"=1/8"

*new development model*



*existing bedroom model*

Ultimately, this thesis project aims to foster a symbiotic relationship between property owners and tenants, balancing their needs and aspirations. “Invisible Citizens” seeks to find a reasonable agreement to resolve the ongoing conflict and improve living conditions for all involved.

## VI.

### INSIGHT

During winter of 2023, I had the opportunity to volunteer at Dongja-dong through the non-profit organization, operated by the government.

Day to day tasks included cleaning up the park free of broken glasses and scraping off chipping paints from the walls...There was a bed bug infestation during this time.

*THE INVISIBLE CITIZENS*

Jennifer Kim

the winters are cold but they are earthbound  
the summers are warm but they are heatbound

but in spring  
their food nurture the flies so they can fly higher  
then their flying foes chirp about their chipping walls

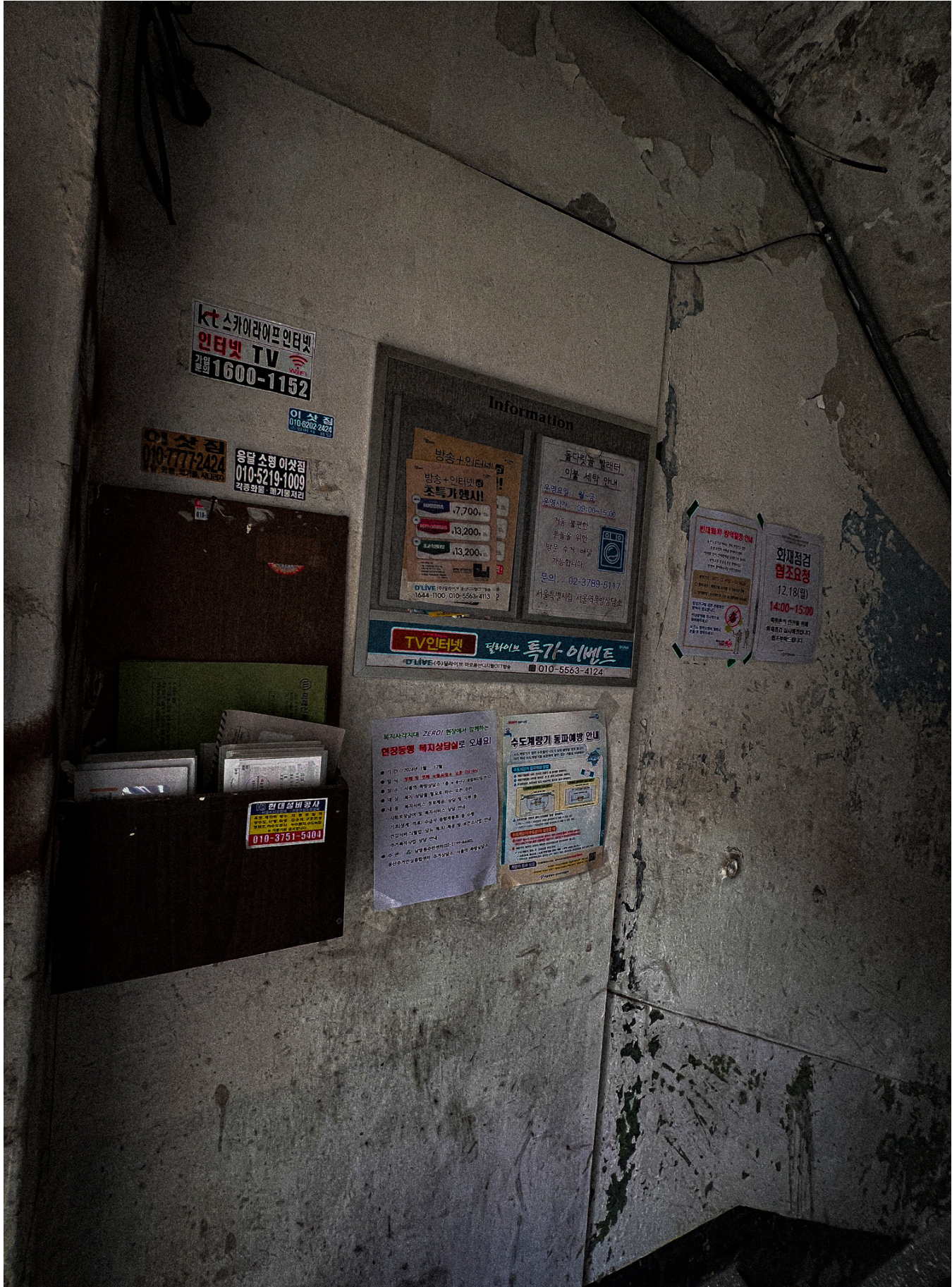
lives of the living lived discreetly as if the state of  
non-living makes more sense

it's is painful to desire hope.

*step towards PROGRESSIONS- a photo essay*

The following pages were photos taken during winter of 2023 at the site of research.









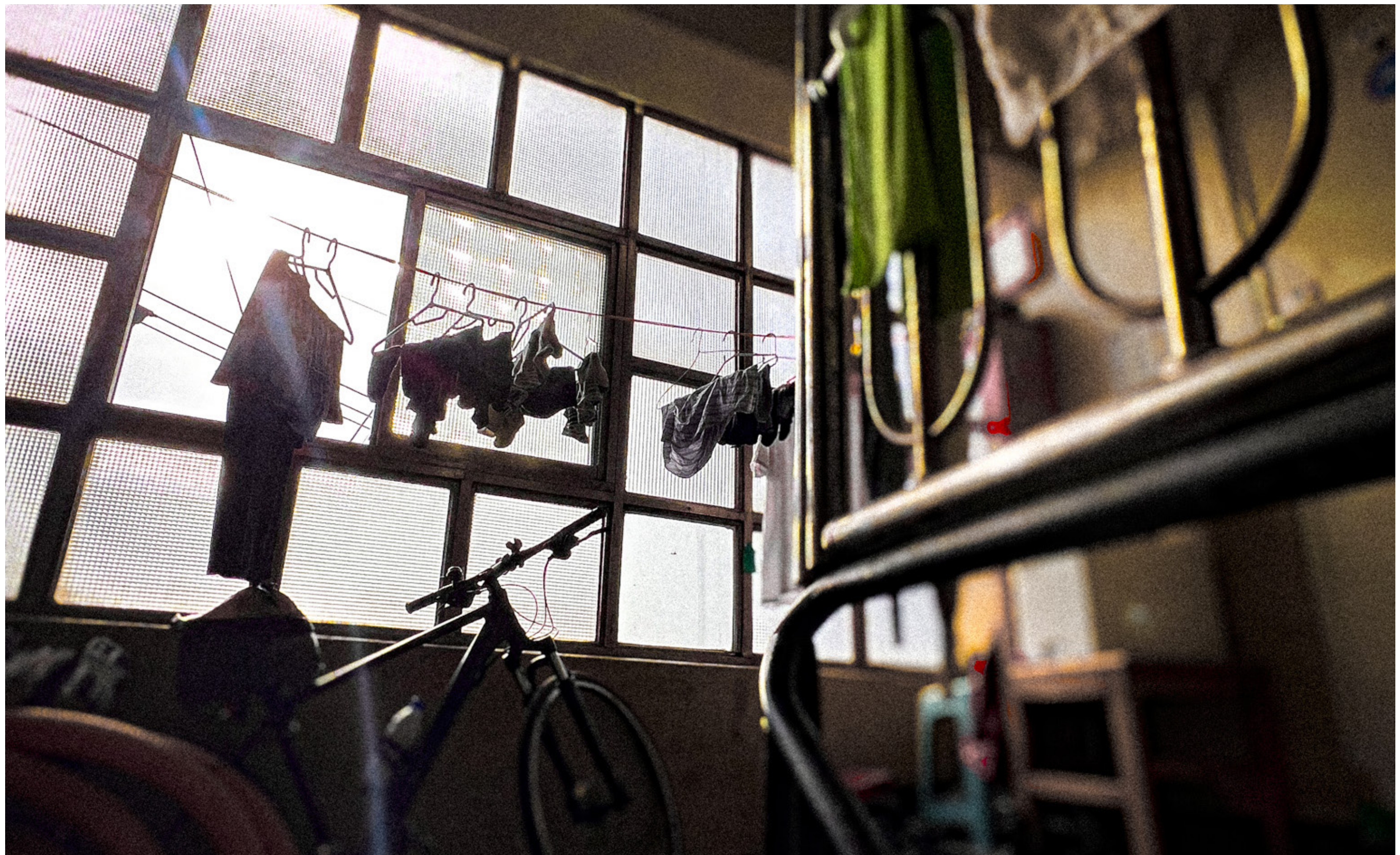














*hojungk.kcargo.site*