

COMMON CONVERSIONS . examples

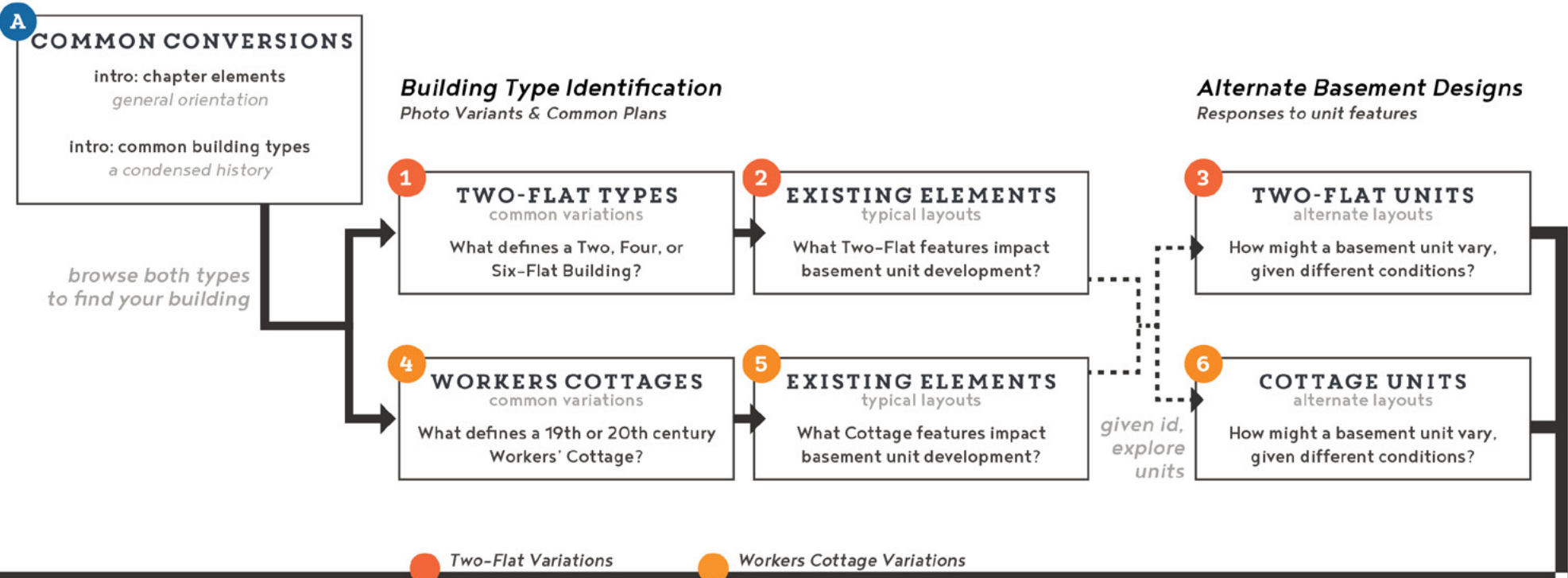
Typical Chicago Workers' Cottages & Two-Flats:
Working Layouts for New Basement Apartments



INTRODUCTION . housing types . layout options

This chapter introduces common Chicago housing—the Two-Flat and the Workers Cottage—and potential basement plans. These designs should help you anticipate the typical issues and opportunities—given age, construction, and common layouts—that you will encounter in a conversion.

NAVIGATING COMMON CONVERSIONS



CHAPTER CONTENTS:

The 'Common Conversions' chapter helps you identify your building's generic type and how its characteristics influence potential basement units. Two-Flats make up 26% of the city's housing (nearly 30% of rentals); Cottage variants are nearly as common. If your home aligns with either type, the unit designs at the chapter's end provide inspiration for adaptation and speak to the issues facing different scales of adaptation.

For each type, the following pages introduce:

- **Building Type and Visual Identification:** This spread elaborates on the variations seen in Chicago, with common unit characteristics.
- **Existing Elements and Design Considerations:** This spread shows common floorplans and outlines the major factors influencing a basement unit's layout.
- **Two Alternate Designs:** this spread shows a small and large unit conversion. Each design incorporates alternate assumptions about building systems and common spaces.

With your type identified and a generic unit in mind, the 'Code Compliant Units' chapter guides you through assessing your property to identify the safety and technical challenges to new units.

CHICAGO HOUSING TYPES:

Chicago's housing stock reflects the city's history as a center of industrial immigration, real estate speculation, and housing kits. The housing types shown here – Two-Flats and Cottages – were built en masse between 1860 and World-War II. Based on simple, repeatable structures and standardized building materials, the regularity of these buildings makes it easy to anticipate renovation and conversion issues.

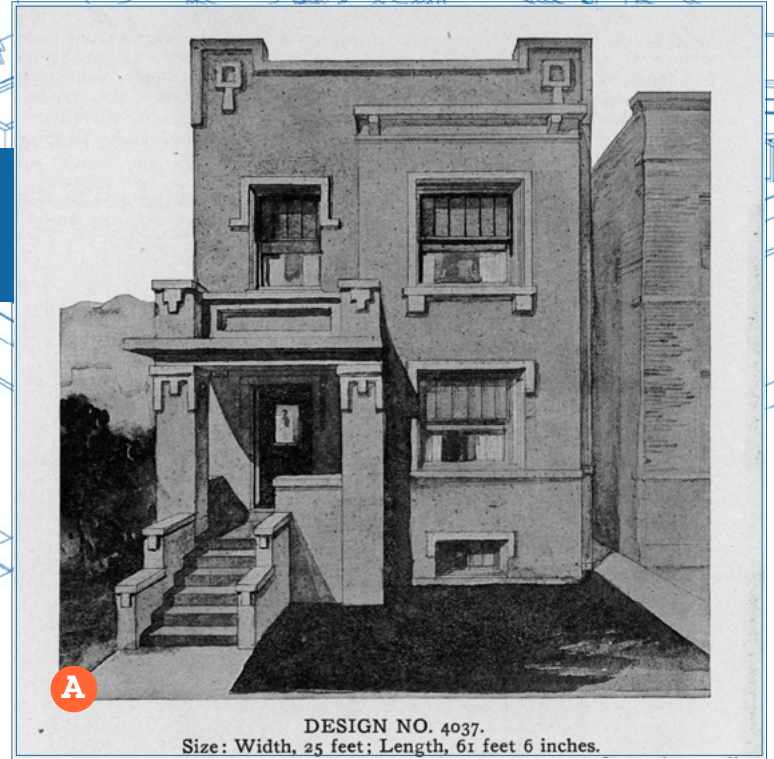
Two to Four-Flats became popular at the turn of the 20th century and are found across nearly all of Chicago (beyond the Loop). At that time, pattern books made it easy for contractors to construct simple brick and graystone buildings. The second unit enabled working-class owners to pay down mortgages and build equity, serving as a tool of upward-mobility.

In some neighborhoods, like Humboldt Park, Logan Square, and Bridgeport, Two to Four-Flats constitute between 55–70% of all housing. Historically, these buildings have the most affordable rents in Chicago when compared with larger multi-family buildings (thanks to less infrastructure and mechanical maintenance).

Workers' Cottages are a slightly earlier type of single-family, working-class architecture, which dominated from the 1860s–1900s. Ranging in exterior decoration, six-room Cottages proliferated in areas like Pilsen, Ukrainian Village, and out to Berwyn. Families finished the Cottage interiors as finances permitted. They could then expand into the attic, build out the rear and basement, or move the light, wood-frame homes as desired.

A forerunner of the interwar bungalow, variations on the Cottage type were built across the city through the early 20th century. With their narrow, rectangular plans and oft raised elevation, Cottages offer the possibility of incorporating basement units in older, denser, transit-rich sections of the city.

TWO-FLATS . common plans & variants



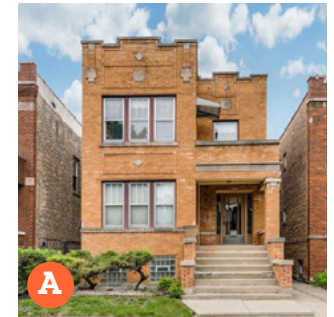
THE CHICAGO 'TWO-FLAT':

There are multiple variations on the 'Two-Flat' building. The design chosen - (a) above, to the left, and in the plans to follow - is taken from Radford's *Stores & Flat Buildings*, a Chicago pattern book from 1913. Design No. 4037 (25 x 61.5 feet) holds two Two-Bedroom units on a common 30x125 foot lot and is a mix of brick walls, wood frame, and stucco finishing. Similar designs - with additional floors - can be seen in Chicago's bay-windowed Three-Flats and Graystones (b). Two units per floor are also common in Four and Six-Flat variants (d) for use on 175 foot deep lots or mirrored on double lots. Post-war variants usually have shorter ceilings and already finished basement units (c).



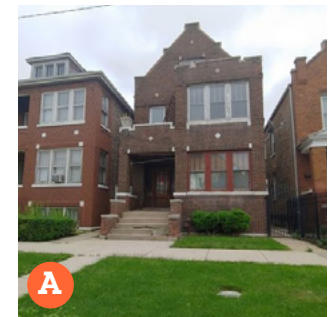
GRAYSTONE TO FOUR-FLAT

Chicago variations:
style, age, & stacking



Range of 'Two-Flat' characteristics:

- **Lots and zoning:** 30 feet or wider in zones RS-3 or greater, double-wide or deep lots common for Four to Six-Flats
- **Unit Types:** typ. two-three bedroom units in Two to Three-Flats, one to two bedroom units in Four to Six-Flats, all originally with one bathroom
- **Unit Sizes, avg.:** 780 sqft (one bedroom), 900 sqft (two bedrooms), 1400 sqft (three bedrooms)
- **Elevation:** Many Chicago designs are raised between 3-6 feet above grade (a half story), with half-sized windows allowing some light for basement units. Keep in mind that it's common to have a windowless (party) wall, along the common stairwell, which enabled building at the lot line, but limits natural light sources and future window wells.
- **Affordable Units:** *For larger buildings (five + units), at least one basement conversion unit must be rented as an affordable unit, for the first 30 years after its conversion, based on the City's ADU ordinance.*





TWO-FLATS . Existing Elements & Opportunities

Two-Flats are typically stacked apartments, each with nearly identical layouts; rooms sit on either side of a central corridor. Building stories are connected by front and back (exterior) staircases. While designs vary, common elements influence potential basement units:

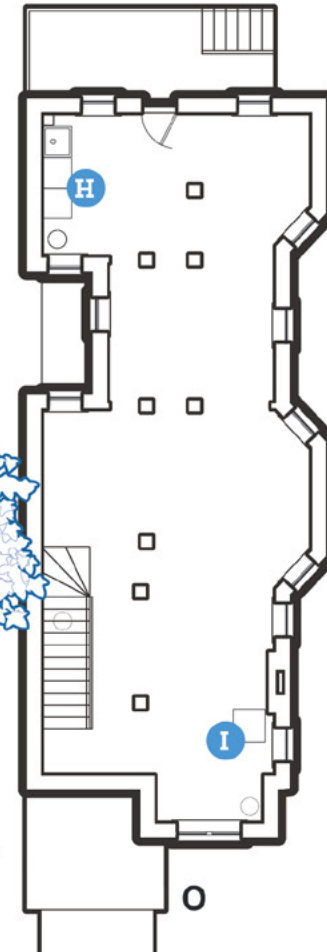
- **Structure** – Prewar units often have heavy brick walls. It's advisable to maintain existing supports, adding basement walls within existing column rows.
- **Multi-unit services** – Two-Flat utilities are already metered and sized for multiple units; corridors and stairs are built for fire safety. Thus it is easy to align/ add connections for another unit's use.
- **Older advantages** – Pre-war Two-Flats were often elevated to avoid street and sewer flooding, with basements tall enough for conversion. Also, old pantries/closets provide space for new plumbing, heating, or laundry in unit.



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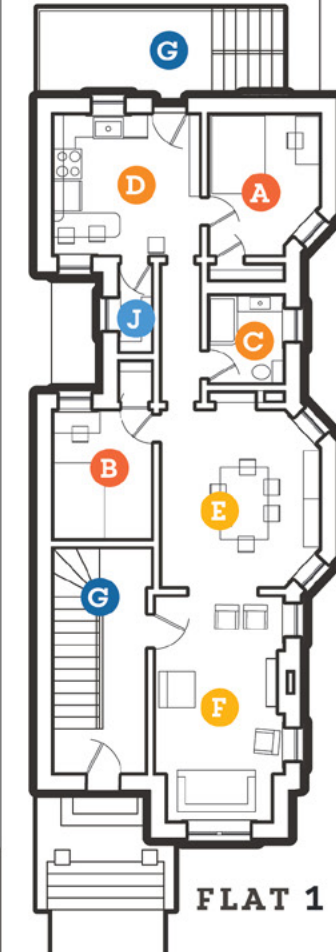
UTILITIES

- H** Laundry & Water Heater
- I** Heating (+ exhaust)
- J** alt. utility closets (in unit)



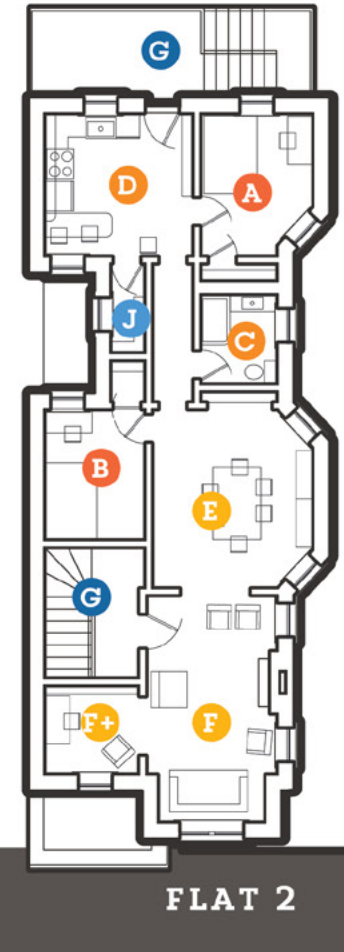
COMMON ENTRY

- G** Stairs & Areaways



EXISTING UNITS

- A** **B** Bedrooms
- C** Bathrooms
- D** Kitchen
- E** Dining Room
- F** **F+** Living Room, Study



CONSTRAINTS IN FORMING NEW UNITS

ALIGN WALLS WITH EXISTING STRUCTURE

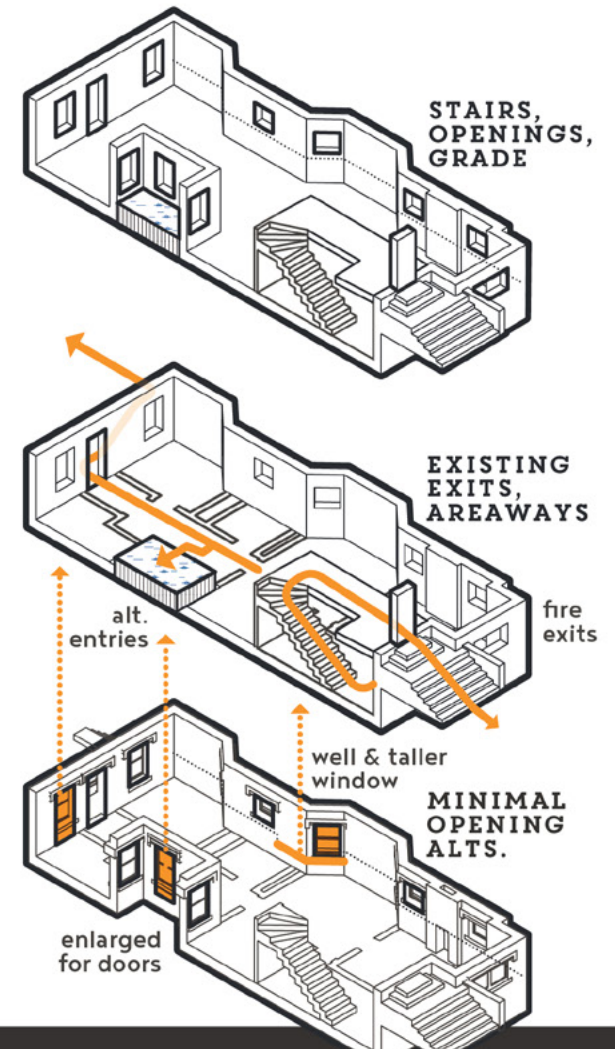
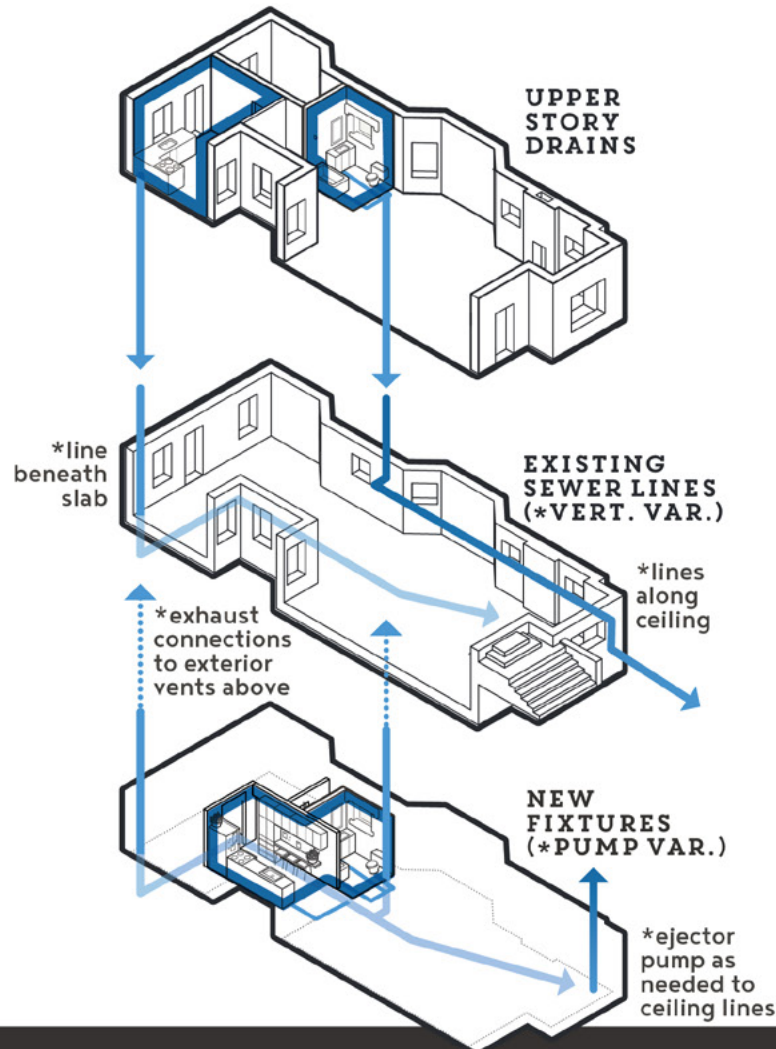
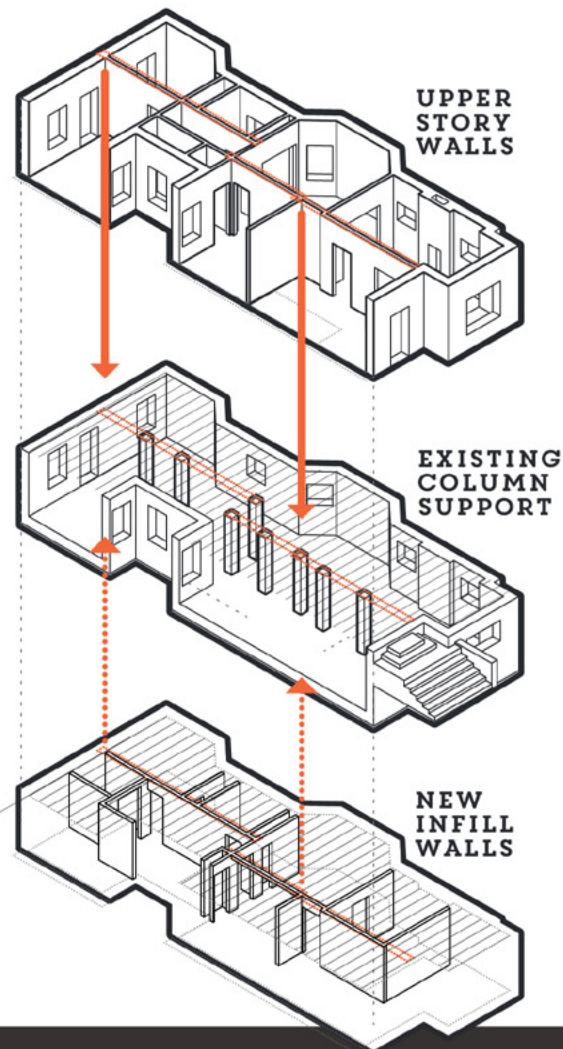
Minimize Re-Engineering of Building Loading

SITUATE UTILITIES NEAR EXISTING LINES & DRAINS

Minimize Re-Engineering of Plumbing & Heating

PLACE ROOMS TO ACCOUNT FOR EXISTING OPENINGS

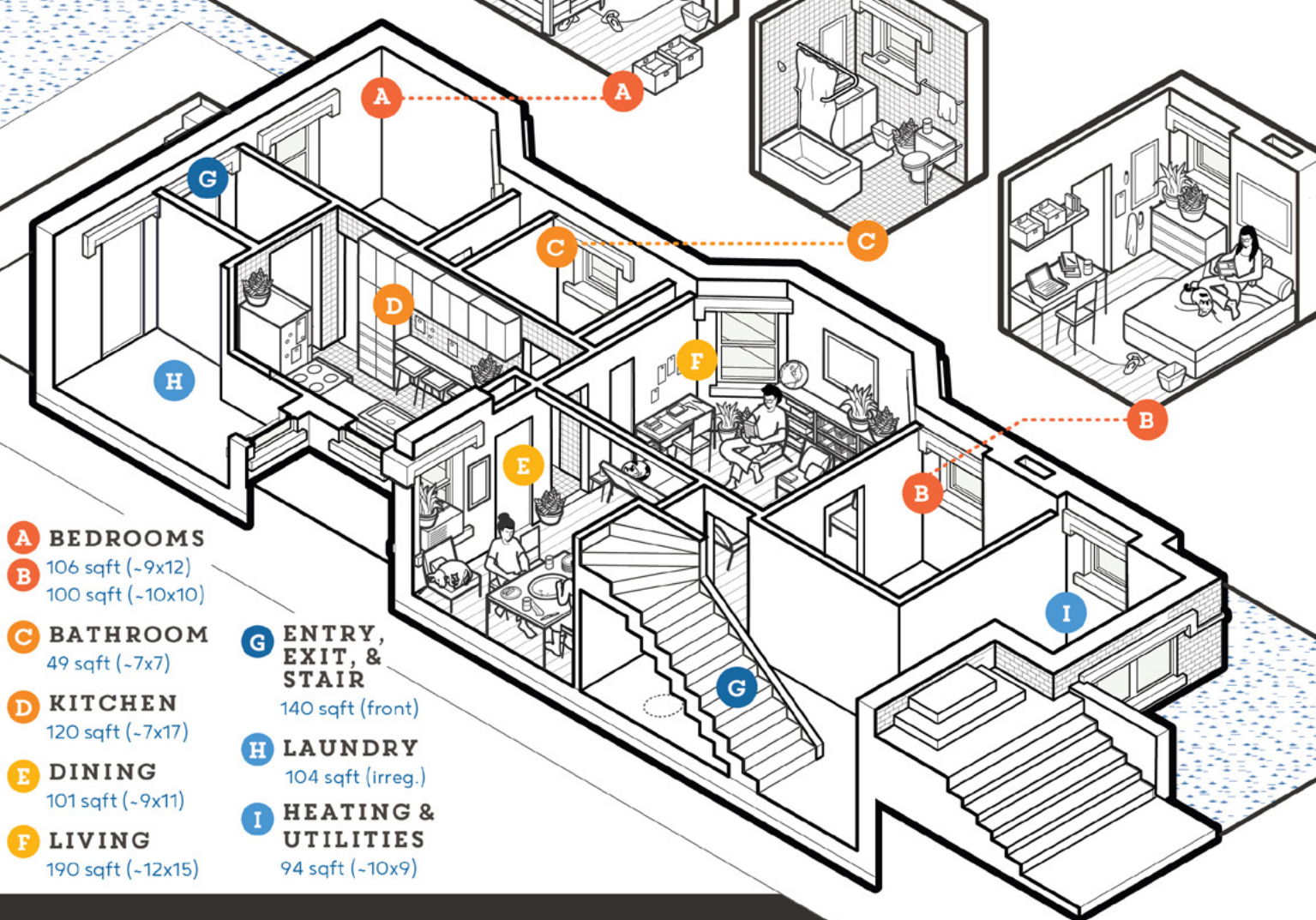
Minimize Alterations to Foundation, Add Exit Routes



SMALLER UNIT, TWO BEDROOMS

TWO-FLATS

- **Size:** Two Bedroom, 720 sqft unit
- **Utilities:** Furnace room has space for ejector pumps/ meters, sump under stairs, new drain line from bath to ejector pump
- **Openings:** new laundry door



A BEDROOMS

- B 106 sqft (~9x12)
- C 100 sqft (~10x10)

C BATHROOM

- D 49 sqft (~7x7)

D KITCHEN

- E 120 sqft (~7x17)

E DINING

- F 101 sqft (~9x11)

F LIVING

- G 190 sqft (~12x15)

G ENTRY, EXIT, & STAIR

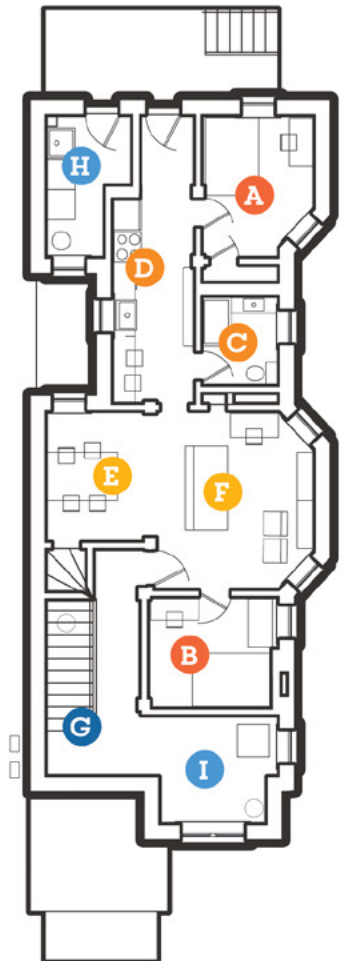
- H 140 sqft (front)

H LAUNDRY

- I 104 sqft (irreg.)

I HEATING & UTILITIES

- J 94 sqft (~10x9)



LARGER UNIT, TWO BEDROOMS

TWO-FLATS

- **Size:** Two Bedroom, 900 sqft unit
- **Utilities:** larger unit = limited maintenance access; ejector pump and water meter in closets, sump under stairs (via closet), new plumbing on laundry line
- **Openings:** exit/side stair from unit kitchen

common conversions

A BEDROOMS

B 106 sqft (~9x12)
93 sqft (~9x10)

C BATHROOM

35 sqft (7x5)

D KITCHEN

140 sqft (14x10)

E DINING

190 sqft (~12x15)

F LIVING

215 sqft (~14x15)

G ENTRY & STAIR

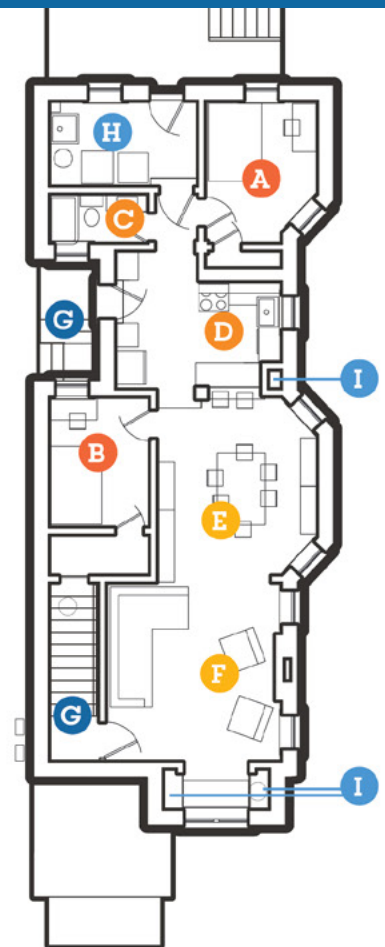
Exterior & Interior

H LAUNDRY & HEATING

90 sqft (~12x7)

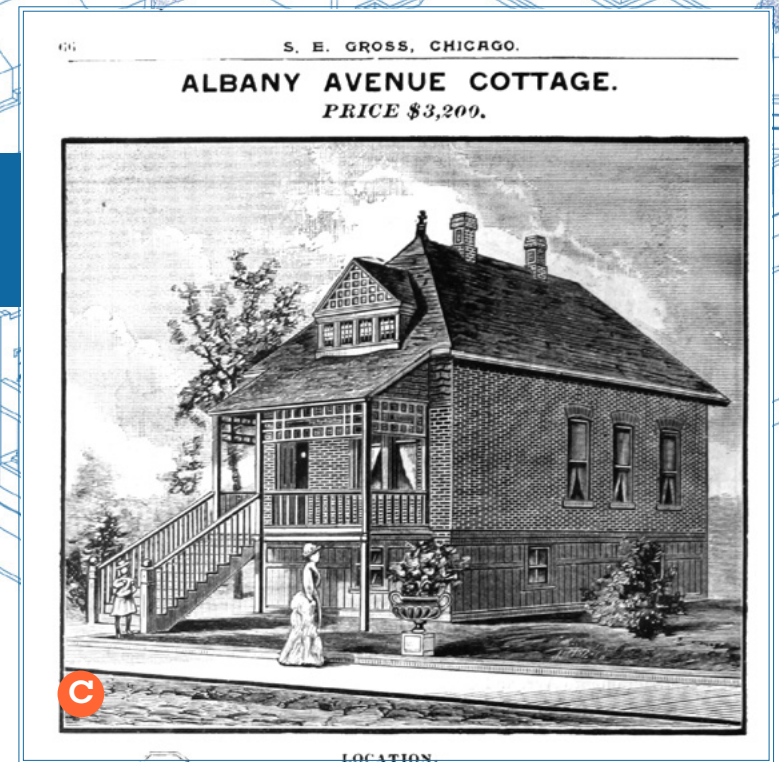
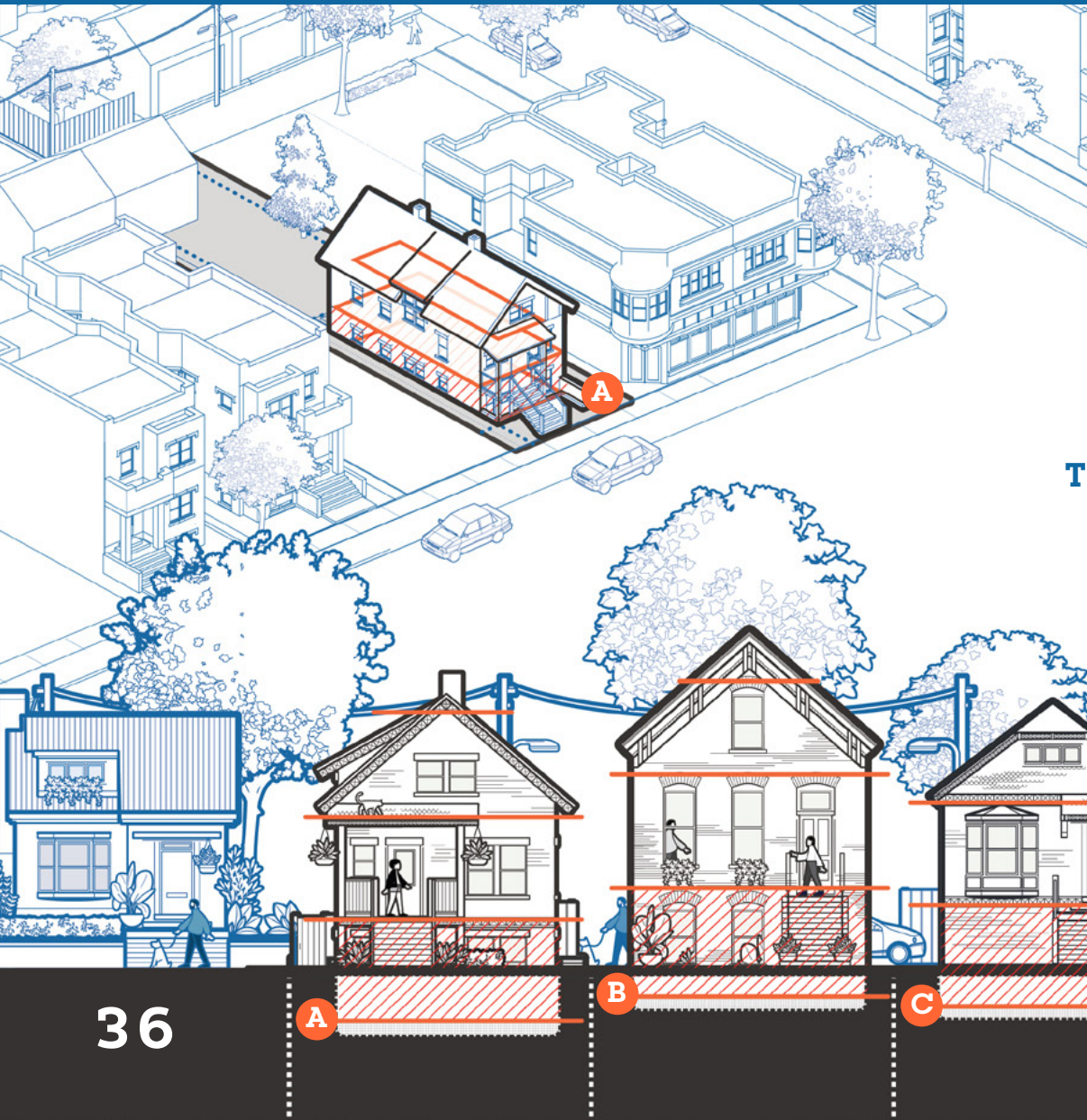
I UTILITIES & CLEAN-OUTS

32 sqft (irreg.)



COMMON CONVERSIONS

WORKERS' COTTAGES . variants

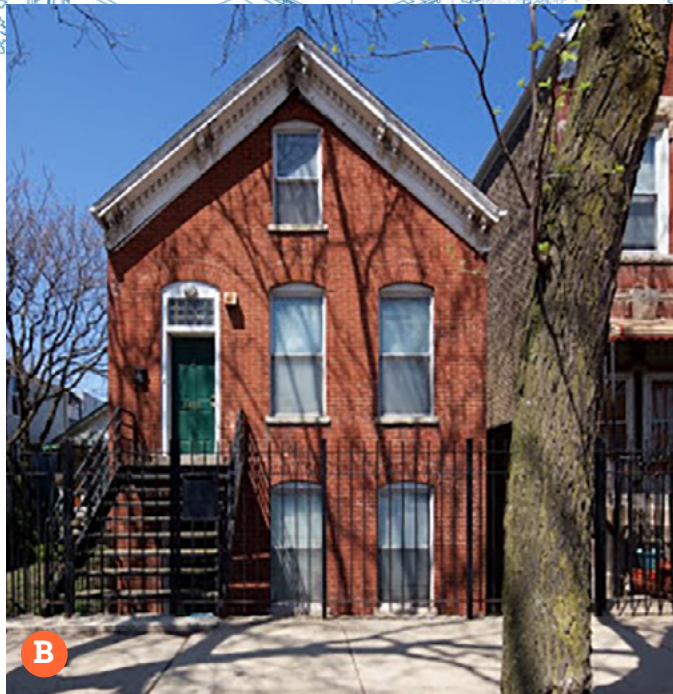


THE WORKERS' COTTAGE:

Workers' Cottages are generally 20–22 feet wide, two to three rooms deep, and have optional access for attic occupation. The design chosen – (a) to the left and in following plans – is taken from Hodgeson's *Low-Cost American Homes*, a Chicago pattern book from 1904. 'The Vixen' (20 x 42 feet) is a three to four bedroom single family home, meant for a 25x100 foot lot with varying construction materials. Diagrams include likely updates: a second bath and dashed in a second floor fire-escape, to satisfy egress requirements for multi-unit conversion. Common materials include Italianate brick Cottages (post-1872) with large windows and high ceilings (b), as well as brick and wood interwar Cottages in the city's North and South edges (d). Less common are early, wooden Cottages (above, c), which have been lost to decay and demo.

FROM BRICK TO FRAME COTTAGES

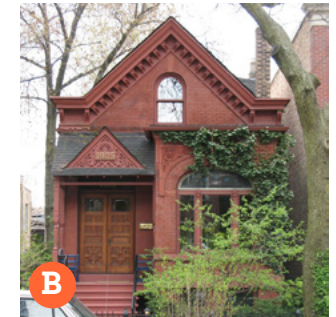
Chicago variations:
style, age, & adaptation



B



D



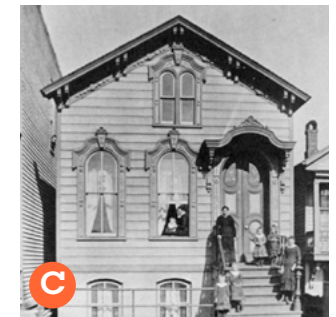
B

Range of 'Workers' Cottage' characteristics:

- **Lots and zoning:** 25 feet or wider lots in all residential zones, common on the smallest urban lots
- **Unit Types:** typ. two bedroom units in oldest, single level Cottages, two to four bedrooms in 1.5 stories, after 1870s
- **Unit Sizes, avg.:** 800 sqft (1860s two bedroom), 1380 sqft (two to four bedrooms, 1.5 story brick and frame designs, post-1872)
- **Elevation:** In older neighborhoods, raised Cottages can be 6-12 feet above grade, making basement entries and windows easy to accommodate. That said, if your building has existing basement terraces (common in Pilsen) these often mark the original height of the street, before sewers were added and streets raised (6-12 feet). This indicates your unit will need an ejector pump, to raise basement drainage up to existing sewer connections.
- **Affordable Units:** *Single family homes, under the accessory dwelling units legislation, have no affordability requirements for new conversion units, as they can only add a single unit.*



D



C



B



WORKERS' COTTAGE . Existing Elements & Opportunities

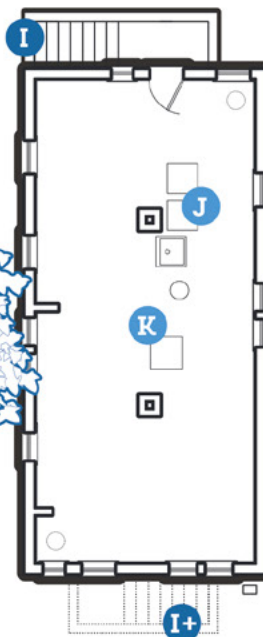
Workers' Cottages are typically 1.5 story, single family homes, with a front-facing gable. First floor rooms sit aside a central wall and attic rooms are centered under the eaves. Some have interior basement stairs while older models have exterior access only. While layouts vary, common elements will influence unit designs:

- **Structure** - With light wood construction and small spans, there's more flexibility in wall placement. It's still advisable to integrate/reinforce current column lines.
- **Services** - Cottage utilities are likely to be sized for a single unit, so conversion will require new connections, enlarged sewer lines and pumps (added \$), but this allows for flexible placement.
- **Older advantages** - Raised Workers Cottages were elevated to avoid flooding and enable expansion, with basement height, areaways, and tall windows anticipating inhabitation. Your building likely has old renovations that will impact unit development.



UTILITIES

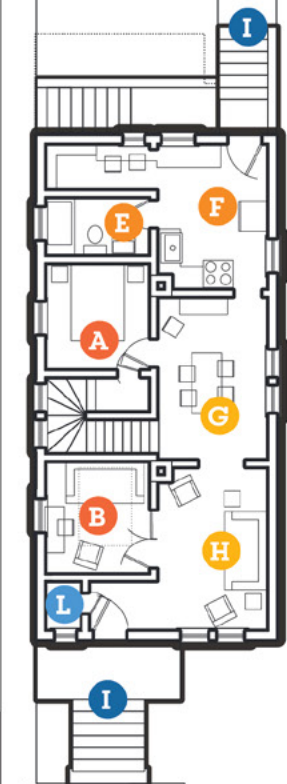
- J** Laundry
- K** Heating & Water Heater
- L** alt. utility closets (in unit services)



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COMMON ENTRY

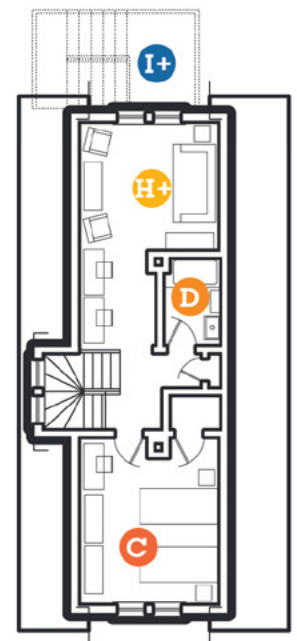
- I** Exterior Stairs, Areaways, Porches
- I+** Exit Routes Req. If Expanding



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EXISTING UNIT

- A B C** Bedrooms
- D E** Bathrooms
- F** Kitchen, Pantry
- G** Dining Room
- H H+** Living, Study

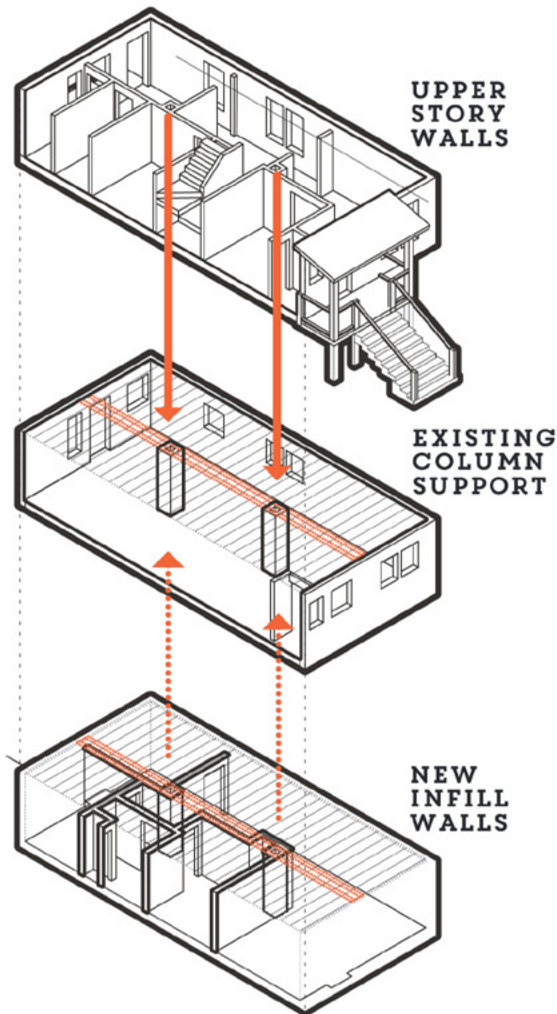


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CONSTRAINTS IN FORMING NEW UNITS

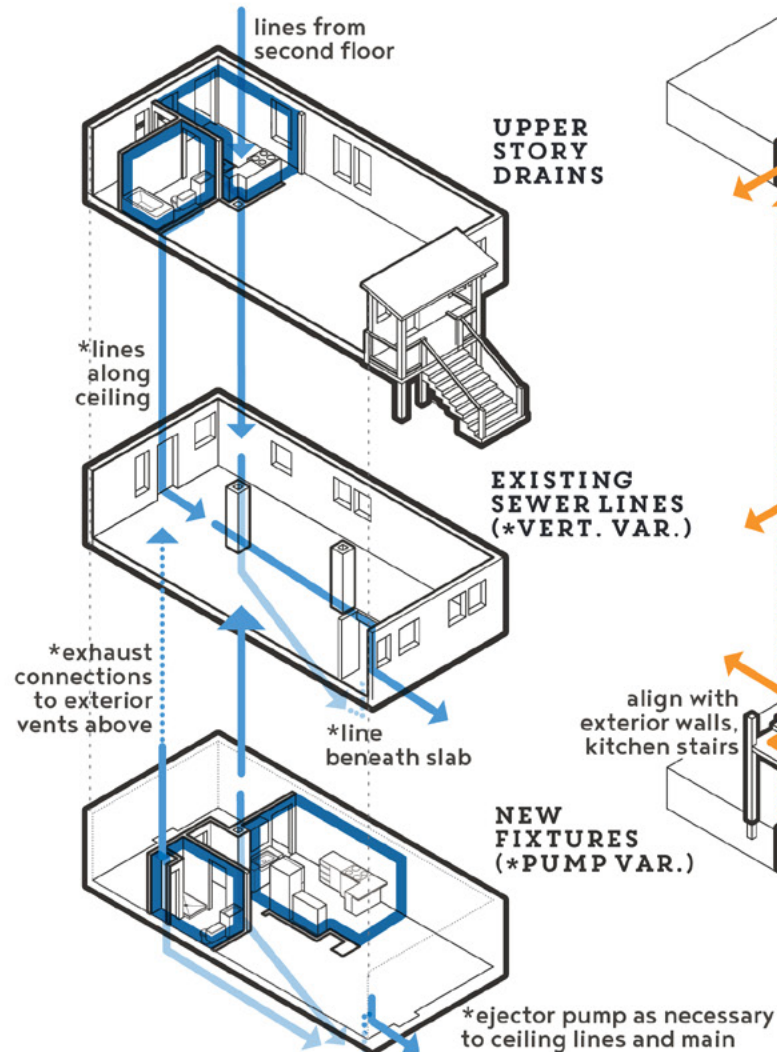
ALIGN WALLS WITH EXISTING STRUCTURE

Minimize Re-Engineering of Building Loading



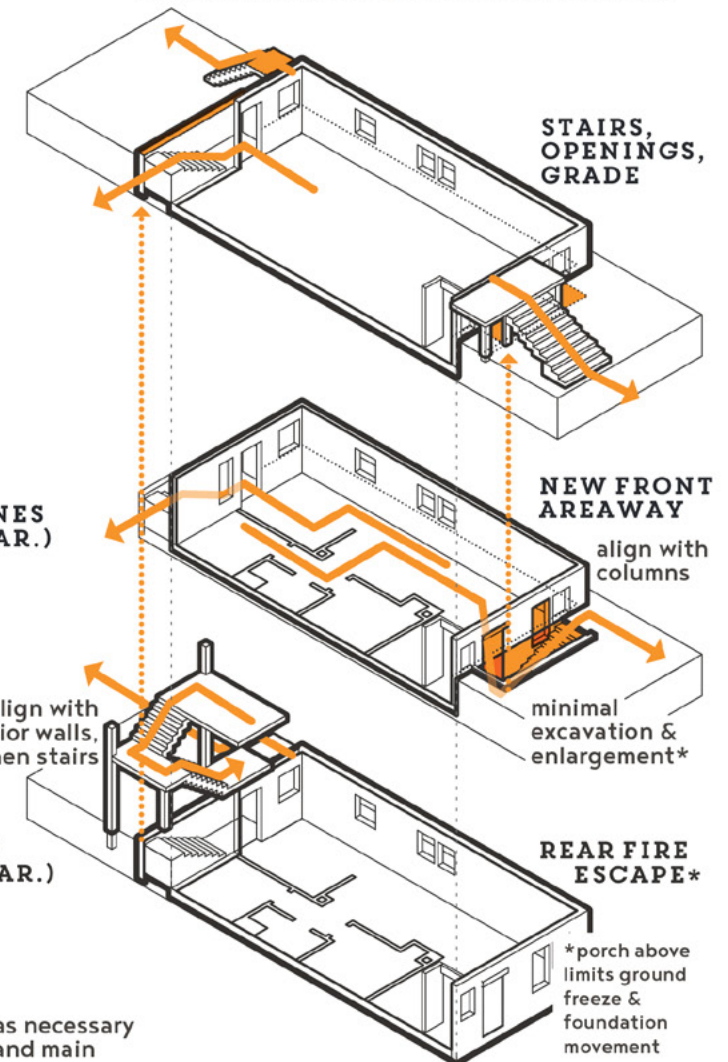
SITUATE UTILITIES NEAR EXISTING LINES & DRAINS

Minimize Re-Engineering of Plumbing & Heating



PLACE EXITS TO ACCOUNT FOR EXISTING STRUCTURE

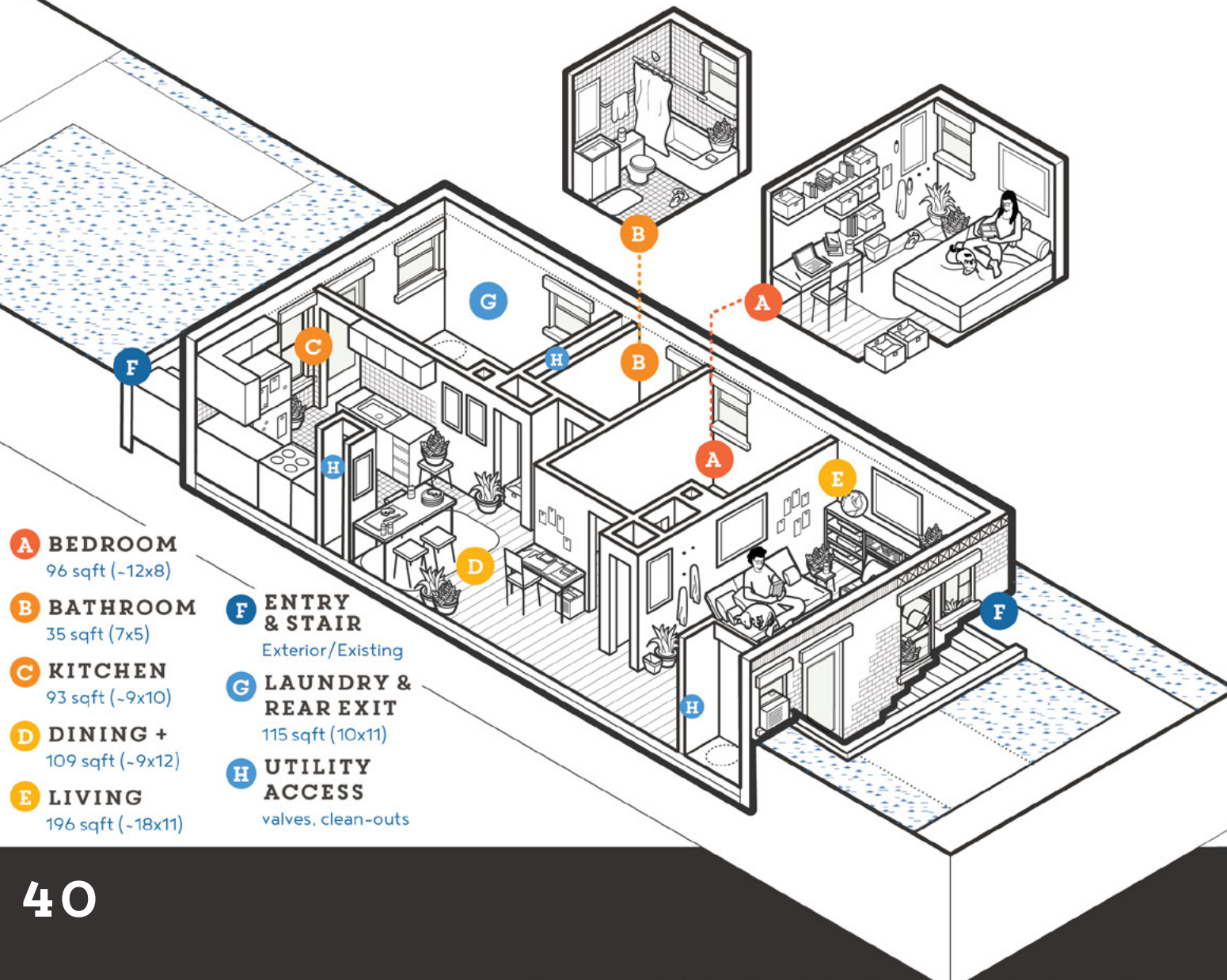
Minimize Alterations to Foundation, Add Exit Routes



SMALLER UNIT, ONE BEDROOM

WORKERS' COTTAGES

- **Size:** One Bedroom, 610 sqft unit
- **Utilities:** Furnace/Laundry room requires stacked washer/dryer to conserve space; water meter and ejector pump in utility closets at front, kitchen/bath on existing sewer vertical
- **Openings:** added front entry and stairs, enlarged windows



A BEDROOM

96 sqft (~12x8)

B BATHROOM

35 sqft (7x5)

C KITCHEN

93 sqft (~9x10)

D DINING +

109 sqft (~9x12)

E LIVING

196 sqft (~18x11)

F ENTRY & STAIR

Exterior/Existing

G LAUNDRY & REAR EXIT

115 sqft (10x11)

H UTILITY ACCESS

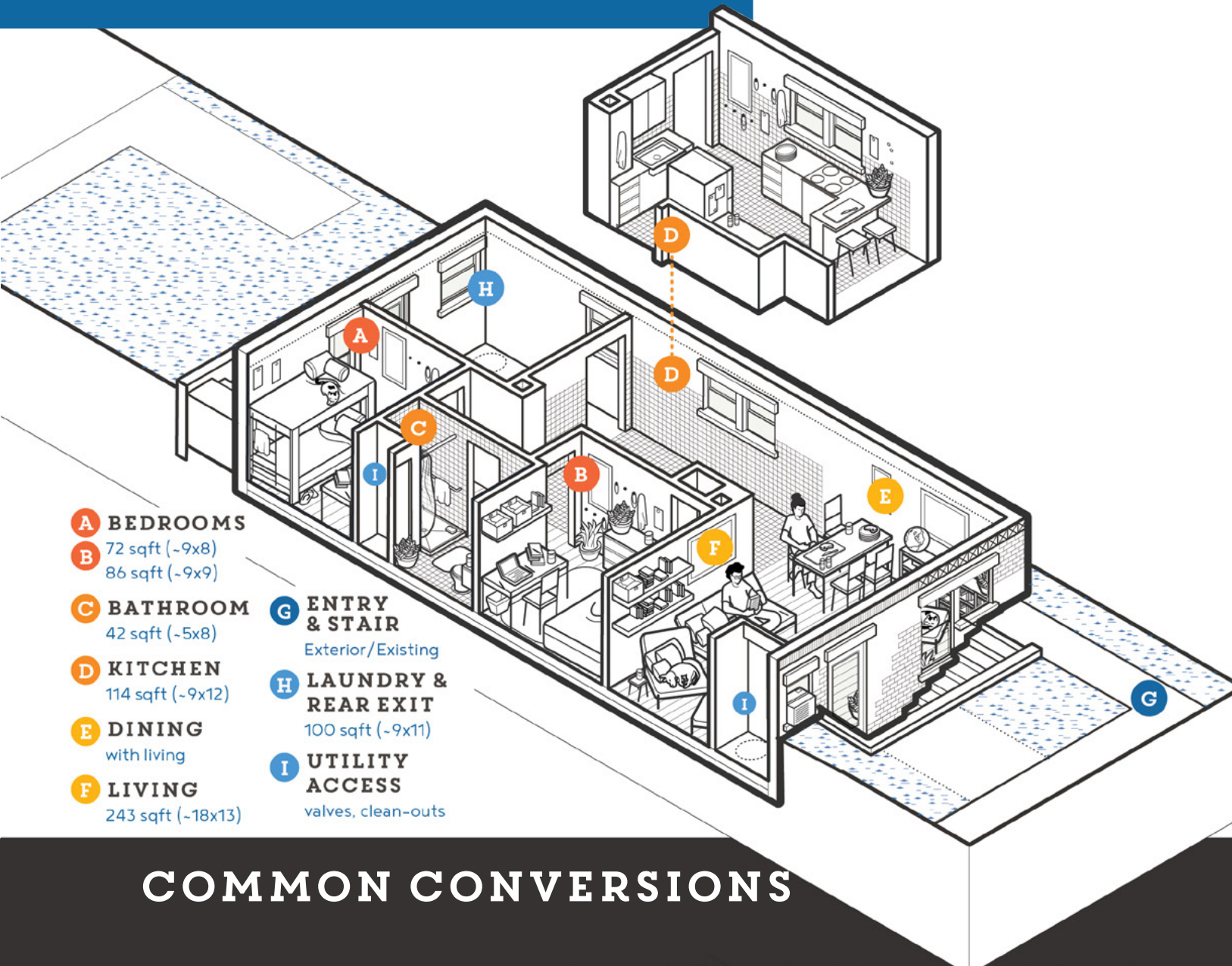
valves, clean-outs



LARGER UNIT, TWO BEDROOMS

WORKERS' COTTAGES

- **Size:** Two Bedroom, 633 sqft unit
- **Utilities:** Furnace/Laundry room requires stacked washer/dryer to conserve space; water meter and ejector pump in utility closets at front, new plumbing from bath to pump
- **Openings:** added front entry and stairs, enlarged windows

**A BEDROOMS****B** 72 sqft (~9x8)**B** 86 sqft (~9x9)**C BATHROOM****C** 42 sqft (~5x8)**D KITCHEN****D** 114 sqft (~9x12)**E DINING****E** with living**F LIVING****F** 243 sqft (~18x13)**G ENTRY & STAIR****G** Exterior/Existing**H LAUNDRY & REAR EXIT****H** 100 sqft (~9x11)**I UTILITY ACCESS****I** valves, clean-outs

COMMON CONVERSIONS

