

Age-Friendly Outdoor Community Space

Feb 2022

 SPENCER HOUSE
SENIORS' CENTRE
5596 Morris Street
Everyone welcome!

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“Our mission is to support the social participation and inclusion of seniors by providing services and programs to enable older adults to live independently, contribute to their community and maintain an active and healthy lifestyle.”

The project is to design and build an age friendly community space in the front and rear yard of Spencer House to provide opportunities for a safe gathering place for seniors, children, and families. We have engaged a local community-based, planning and design firm, the Cities and Environment Unit to assist us with community engagement and design development.

Spencer House has operated a 10am-3pm, drop-in program five days a week for seniors for many years. The inability to offer in-house programming for the majority of the pandemic has highlighted the need for an outdoor community space, where those most vulnerable and isolated in the community can safely gather.

The pandemic has severely affected the senior population, because of the higher risk for seniors should they become infected and the significantly diminished spaces and resources available to seniors during this time. NS in particular has taken a very conservative approach with restrictions to protect our seniors, as the majority of deaths in HRM during the early months were seniors and specifically at Northwood. A number of our participants live there, including the Chair of our Board of Directors.

THE PROJECT'S DESIRED OUTCOMES

Build social cohesion through the continuous engagement and participation of the community through the Community Dream sessions with seniors, daycare children and general public and Community Build Days.

Community Build Days are for community members to participate in the construction, painting, planting, hammering, etc, helping build elements of the final design to build social cohesion and ownership of the space.

The project will revitalize and increase the use of an underused outdoor community space at a time where access to public space is essential for community recovery from Covid.

Improve the accessibility and safety standards of the spaces to allow for All-Ages and Abilities.

Increase opportunities for vulnerable seniors to connect with their community.

Create a safe age-friendly outdoor space that supports Intergenerational gatherings that build community and understanding among the ages.

The design will support and facilitate outdoor programs and activities that serve a variety of people and ages, so that the Daycare children and seniors who attend Spencer House interact and enjoy activities together.

The space also has the potential to create opportunities for small scale entrepreneurship jobs for seniors and youth to host programs out of the space and utilize the commercial kitchen at the centre to develop

The reanimating of the outdoor spaces will re-establish the Centre as a community gathering place and a place that welcomes anyone and everyone.



OUR INSPIRATION

Patricia, a 78 year old single woman, living in a small subsidized apartment in the south end. She has found isolation this year “excruciating”, she feels desperate for “community, connection, and conversation.” A safe, vibrant age-friendly space will ensure that she, and others like her, remain healthy and connected.

During the pandemic, NS took a conservative approach in its restrictions to protect those most vulnerable, mainly seniors. Subsequently, Spencer House was closed for 9 of the last 11 months and while open, seating is limited. Seniors in most need of our services are still unable, or unwilling to assume the risk involved in opening up their small bubbles. Many community members, including children, who normally come to the Centre and volunteer, or participate and lead activities, have not been able to make those connections. The need for a safe, accessible outdoor space where folks can connect with neighbours and community members is essential. This is our inspiration.

We see our community as the foundation for this project and we intend to involve them at every stage; Develop (vision, values, strengths, issues), Design Development, and Building, ensuring they have decision making and creative power throughout.

We have considered unintended outcomes we might face. The process may be overwhelming or disruptive for folks who come regularly. We hope this project will help us expand and reach more people, which could make current participants uncomfortable at first. We will do our best to ease any discomforts, making thoughtful engagement even more important.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATORS

South End Community Day-Care

We offer a uniquely diverse and inclusive full-time program for children aged 6 months to five years, and a school age program for children in Grade Primary to Grade Six. We provide a safe, nurturing and stimulating environment where children can grow to their full potential through:

Quality programming with a focus on each individual child's needs and interests
Whole child development wherein each child is nurtured emotionally, socially, physically, creatively, and intellectually
A "learning-through-play approach" with weekly thematic units

Play is an important medium for learning. It helps to develop a broad range of developmental goals. The Centre provides children with play experiences that enable them to develop and accumulate their own knowledge. Play encourages the children to learn and explore different skills in language, math, science and creative expression.

We are excited to be apart of this project and integrate Play in many forms, for all-ages and abilities into the design.



Cities and Environment Unit

CEU is a community-based planning and design group with 29 years of cumulative experience. Our belief is that real change comes from the empowerment of community members, this is reflected in our unique community-based approach to all projects.

Our approach is about doing more with what you have and seeing every project not just as meeting a specific need within a prescribed budget, but as a significant opportunity to connect community and weave many needs and aspirations together through the project.

Every project and program is developed, designed, built and in an open and inclusive way which allows the community to assume ownership. Adopting a Community-Based approach recognizes the enormous value in harvesting the wisdom, knowledge, experience and passion of the community at every stage of every project.

Every project and program provides an opportunity to use, develop, and expand - local knowledge, skills, materials and human and natural resources. Developing new capacity through a projects build phase is an integral part of what we do. Bringing diverse communities members together to share and learn new skills, while physically building the project leaves a lasting mark on participants and the physical project its self.

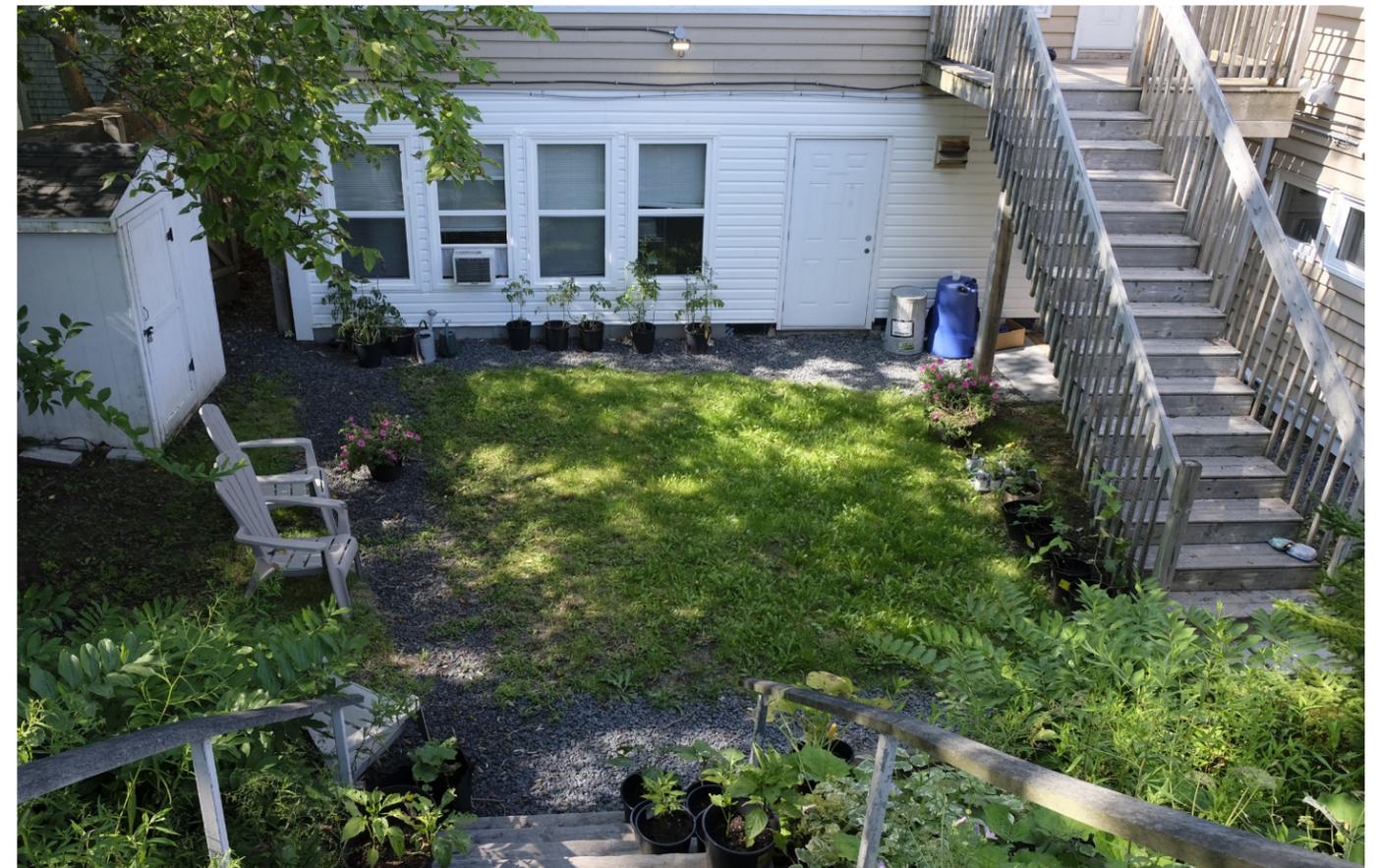
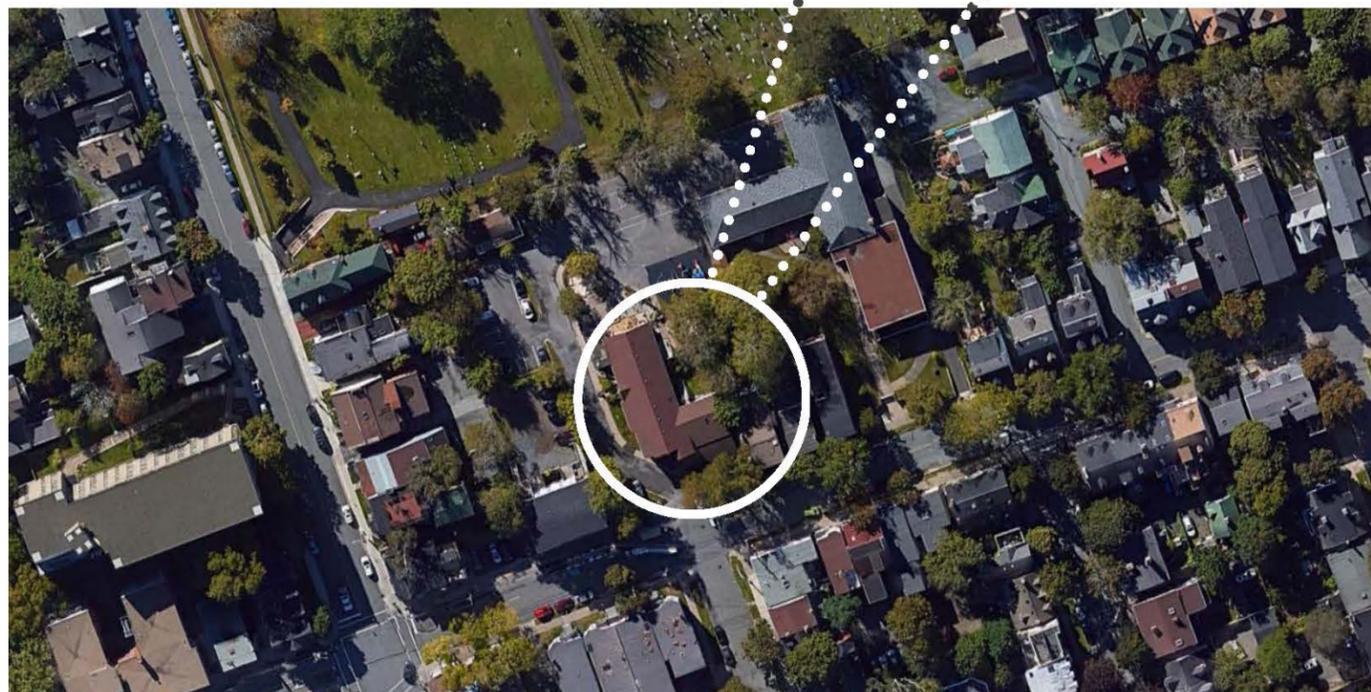
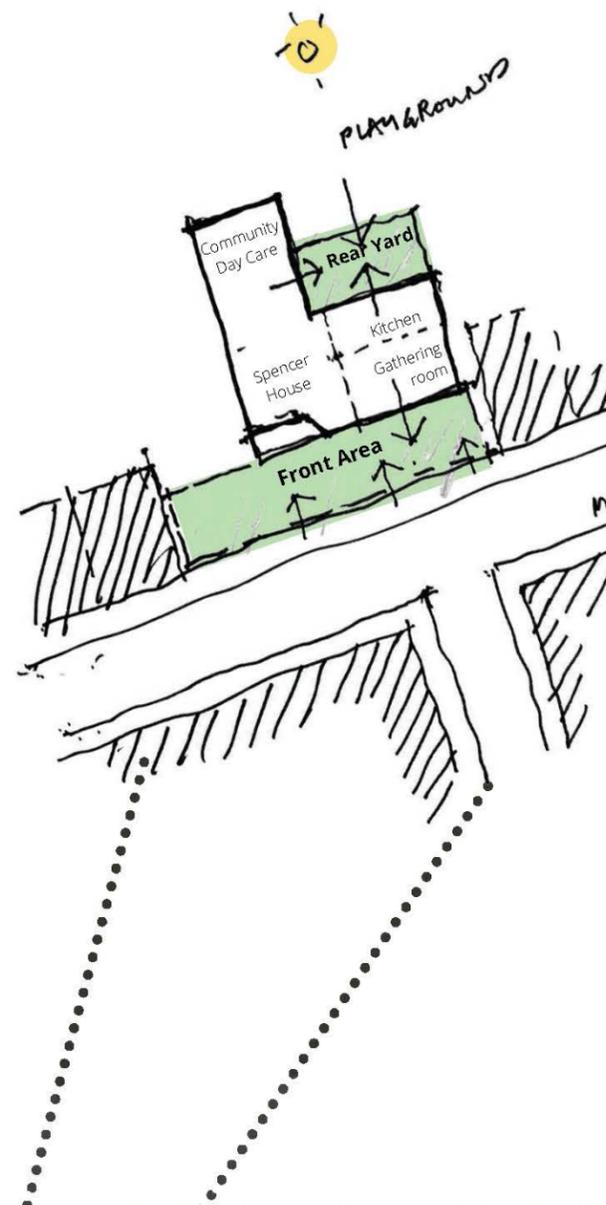
We are beyond honoured and excited to be assisting Spencer House in developing and bringing to life this beautiful and impactful project.



THE SITE

Spencer House is located on Morris Street, in the historic neighbourhood of Schmutville, in Halifax. Our specific site is the front and rear yards of Spencer House, as a community centre these are both open to the public, but at the moment they don't feel welcoming nor do they have a true purpose. We are hoping to change that.

The area has a mixed demographic, with student and rental housing adjacent to businesses, offices, condos, and high end real estate. Seniors who live in the area have long resided here, or have relocated here in search of the housing and amenities that the city offers, including subsidized apartments close to the hospital, grocery stores, and other services. Spencer House is particularly important to our seniors as they face low income and poverty and have few social outlets.



FRONT

The front deck, garden and entry to Spencer House is dreary, feels closed off and does not invite you in off the street. Passers by often don't even notice it's there. The deck currently lacks functionality to support current programs like our "Today Cafe", live music, and other activities, let alone any new ones.

The deck railing is too high, when you are sitting in a chair or wheelchair it blocks the view of the street.

This dark alleyway is the only public access to our soon to be great back yard space. It is not accessible for those with mobility challenges. It keeps people OUT, rather than inviting them IN.

The trees and garden space in front is a great asset! We would love to create playful opportunities for young and old to interact more with the 100+ year old trees and have the garden area be an assets for the local community.



BACK

The rear yard is basically empty, but has SO much potential. Both Spencer House and the Daycare have access to this space. Spencer house has already installed an accessible ramp to improve access for our participants.

We see this as a blank slate to imagine an all-ages and abilities space, that's functions in all seasons.

The alleyway connection to the street is blocked partly by an old shed.

At the top of stairs in the middle of crumbling teared "gardens" is one of the Daycare entrances. It currently does not support easy access by tiny humans, who's hands do not reach the hand rails.

We have a beautiful, though run down, stone wall indicative of the Heritage of the area running the length of one side of the yard.



THE PROCESS

Working with Spencer House members, daycare kids and staff, as well as the wider community was key to the success of this project. The design builds on and recognizes the enormous value, wisdom, knowledge, experience and passion this community has.

Dream Session 1 - June 23rd, 2021

With Spencer House members we discussed collective values, determine the strengths, issues and assets of the front and rear spaces.

Dream Session 2 - June 30th, 2021

With Spencer House members we discussed and dreamed up many inspiring ideas for the outdoor spaces.

2 Daycare Session - July 27th, 2021

We had two separate sessions with daycare kids and explored the backyard, told stories and got creative with markers and a big roll of paper.

Public Design Session - Aug 11th, 2021

This session was open to the public and we served free hot dogs and hamburgers. Some folks who had never been to the centre showed up and we had great discussion.

Waterfront Open House 1
July 28th, 2021

Waterfront Open House 2
Aug 25th, 2021

WHAT WE HEARD

From Spencer House Members

Extend the Front Deck

Extended to the trees with seating and lights

Greenery

More flowers, plants, vegetables, herbs, Lilac tree, burning bush, hanging pots and pots to move around, shade garden

Stage

music, bands, plays, singing, swing, ballroom, salsa, dancing area, karaoke, performances

Lots of Seating

Lots of different chairs, something for everyone to sit comfortably. Not too low so easy to get into

Green House

Expanding the use of the back yard into all four seasons

Accessibility

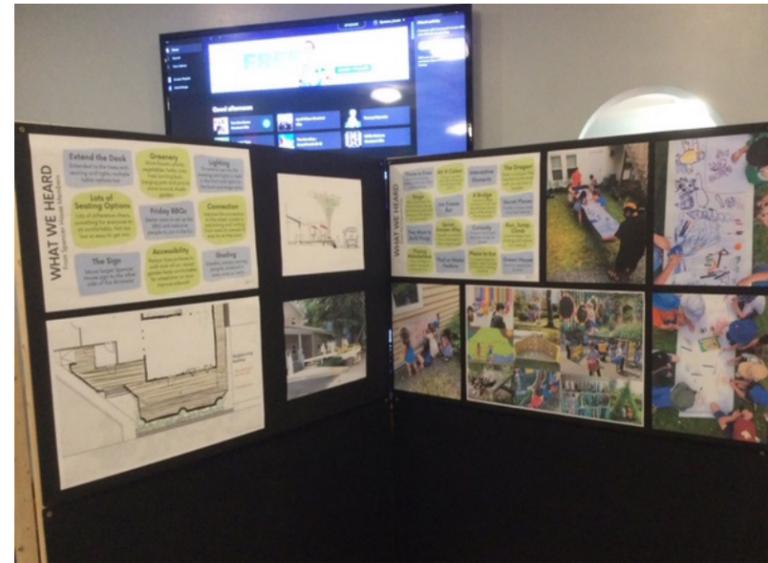
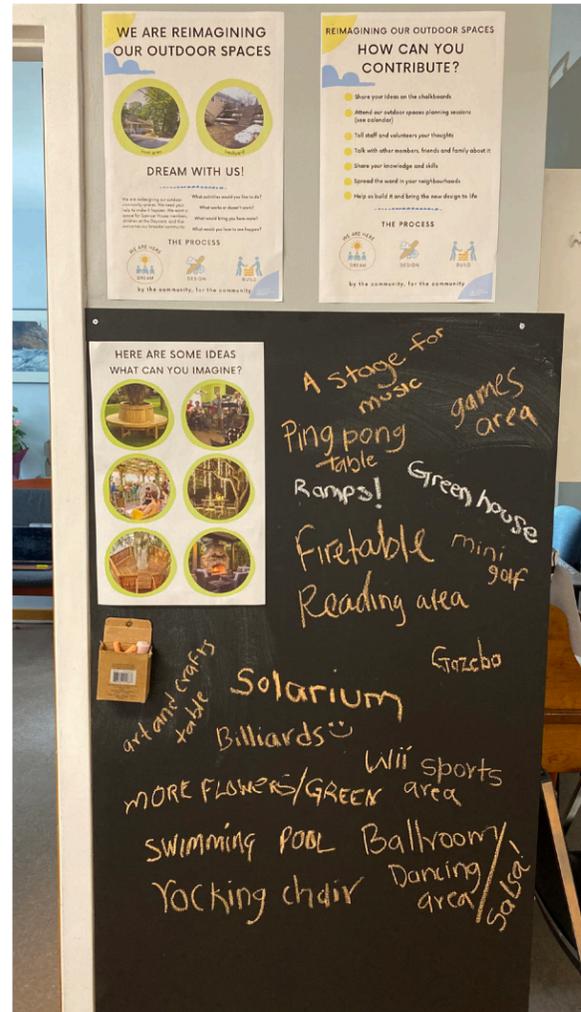
Ramps! Easy surfaces to walk and roll on, raised garden beds comfortable for wheelchair or chair
Improve sidewalk

Activities & Games

Reading area, ping pong table, Wii sport area, darts, mini golf, billiards, horseshoe pit

Fireplace

Have more use in the winter months and create a cozy outdoor space



WHAT WE HEARD

From the Daycare Kids

Places to Draw

Love art and being creative, draw with chalk or on a surface

Art & Colour

Colourful art on the side of the building and the kids what to help paint it

Interactive Elements

The Dragon!

There is a dragon that lives behind the stone wall, you can hear it breathe

Stage

With a disco ball, for band, karaoke, dance performances, play and seating for the seniors to come watch!

Ice Cream Bar

A Bridge

Have a bridge connection from the second level across and a slide down or fire mans pole

Secret Places

Tunnels, a maze, cave, cozy/cool seating

They Want to Build Things

Secret Garden Alley

The path connection from to the back is like a magical path

Curiosity

Things to touch and discover. Using the senses

Run, Jump, Climb

Love to chase, rock climbing wall, zipline, turf, orbie pit

Playing Makebelieve

A box of things to add to the space to transform it.

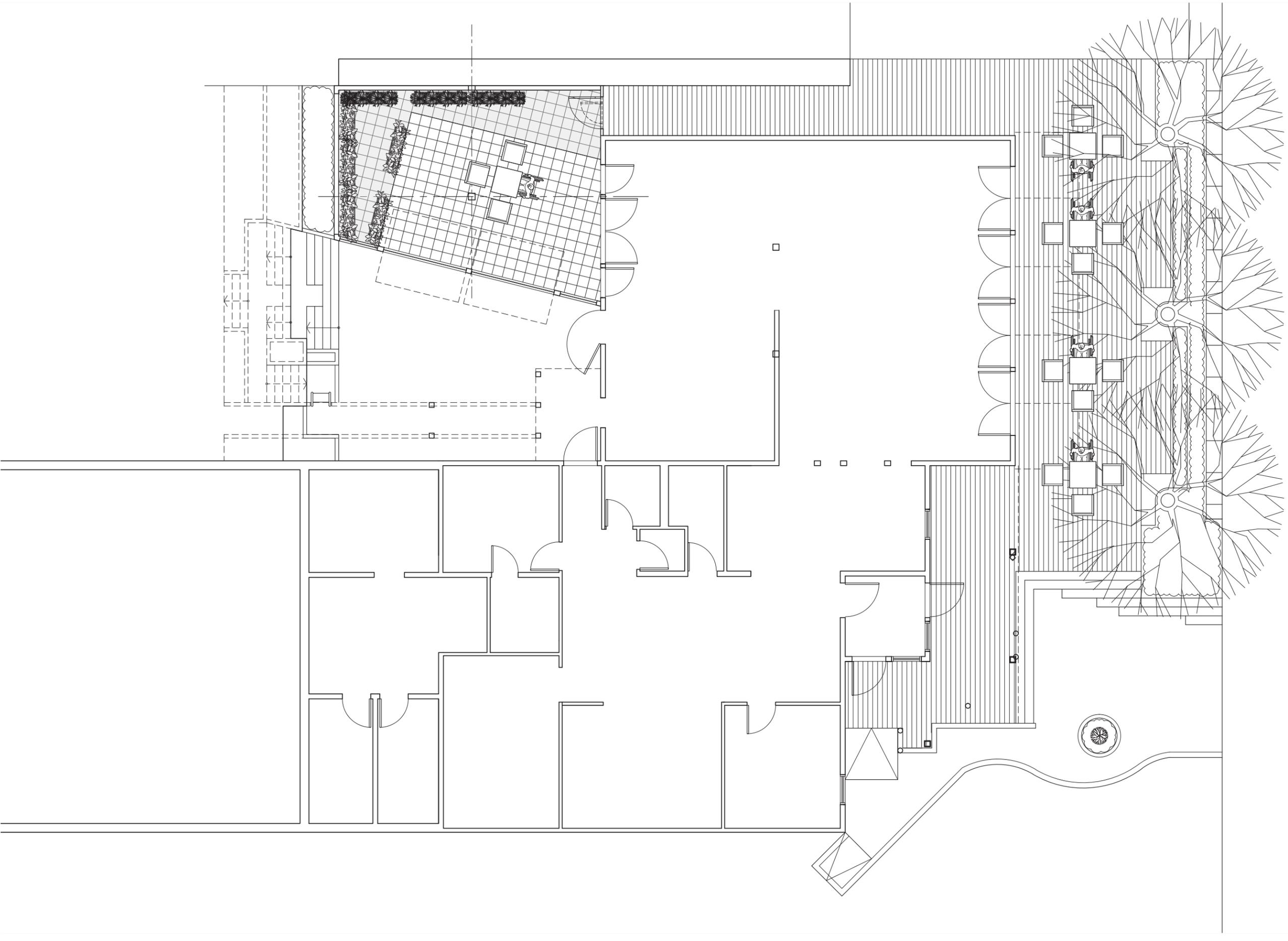
Pool or Water Feature

Place to Eat

It's nice to have an outdoor area to have lunch and a vending machine

Green House

Starting seeds from scratch



THE DESIGN

Greenhouse - the side path and door opens up into the back yard greenhouse, which occupies half of the back area.

The green house is equipped with accessible planters, additional seating and a small fire place.

A mix of garden beds, stairs and seating connects the daycare down into the space and provide audience seating for performances and events.

Paved Activity Area - this occupies the second half of the back area and is a stage area for music, dance and events.

A bridge leads from the second floor daycare to the daycares play area and connects with the garden stairs down into the back yard. It also becomes a great place to watch performances below.

Improved Flow - four double French style doors in the front and 2 leading to the back creating an open air feeling and flow in and out of the centre.

The door to the back has the look and feel of entering a magical castle. It is arched and has a secondary smaller door for small children and magical creatures.

Back Access - the deck wraps around the centre creating a seamless and accessible connection to the back yard area.

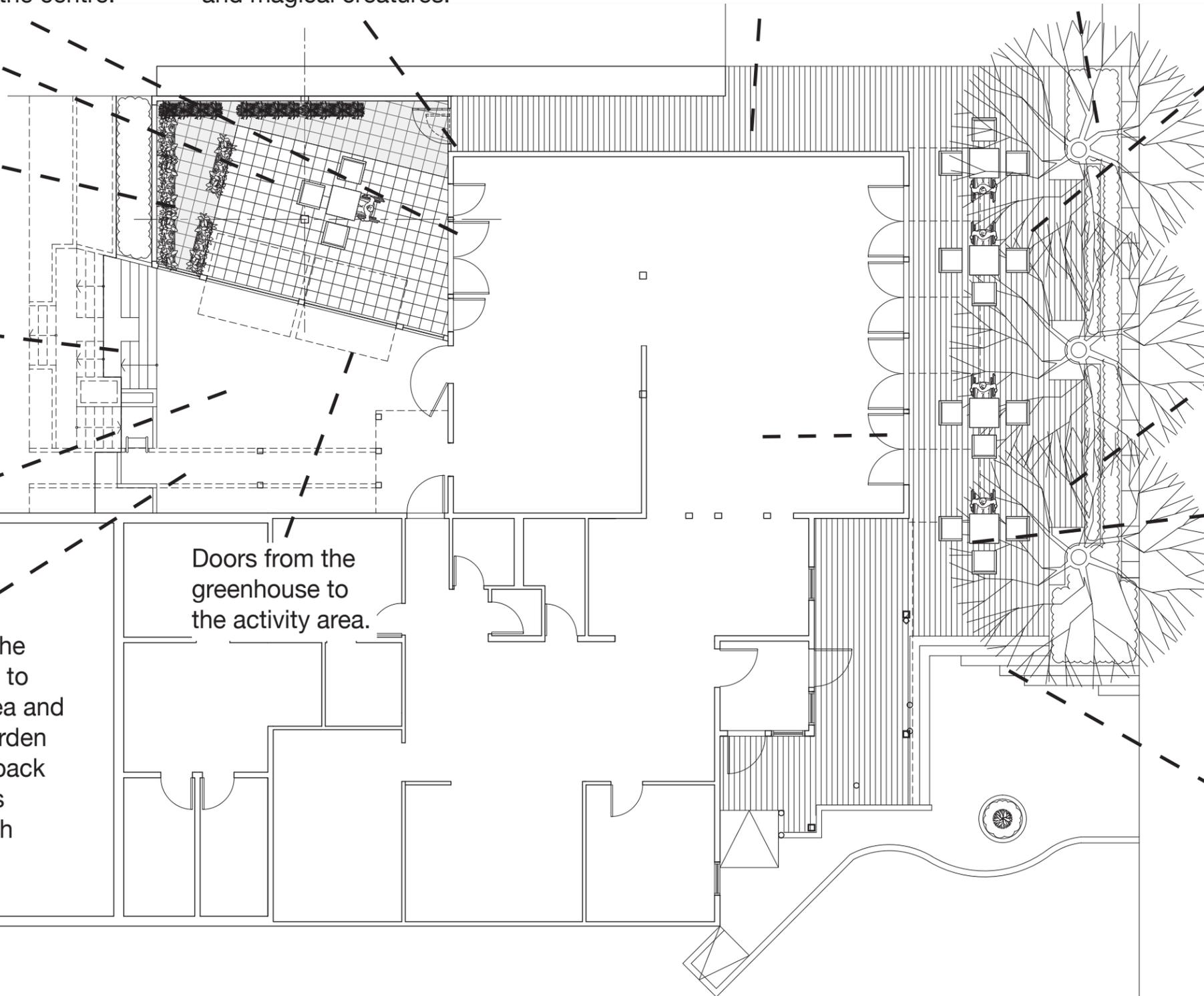
A narrow garden lines the edge of the deck and meets the large granite blocks.

Extended Deck - the deck extends slightly beyond the trees wrapping around them giving a feeling of being in a tree house.

Benches line the street edge of the deck between the trees.

Accessible cafe tables fill the space and are easy to move around for different functions and events.

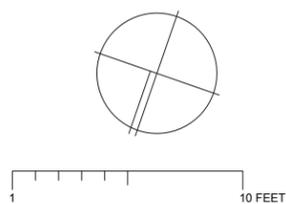
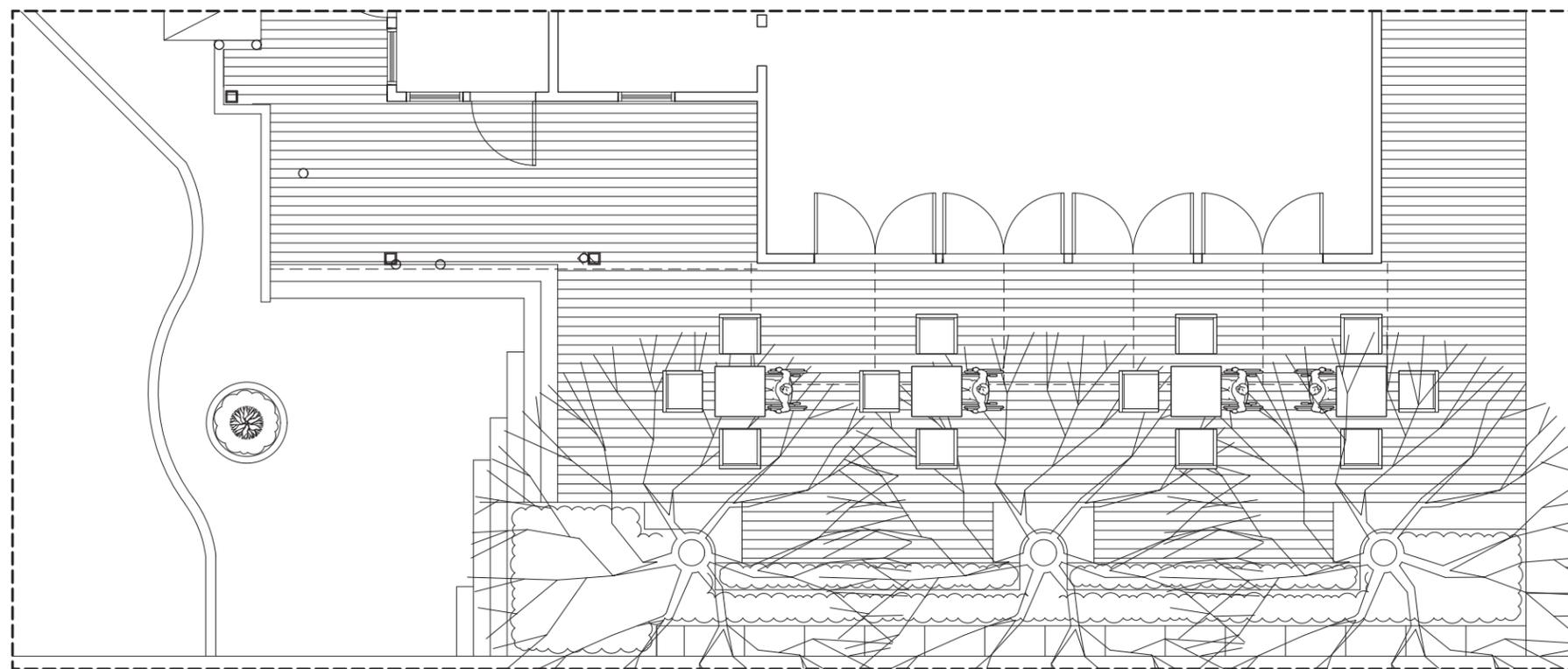
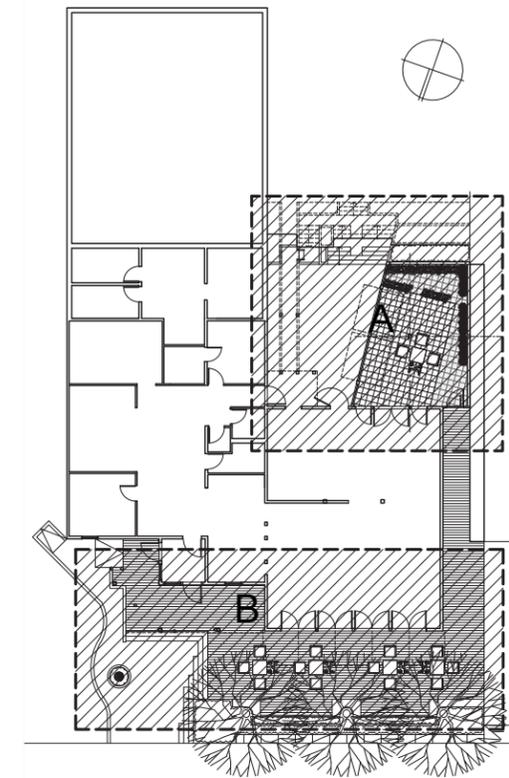
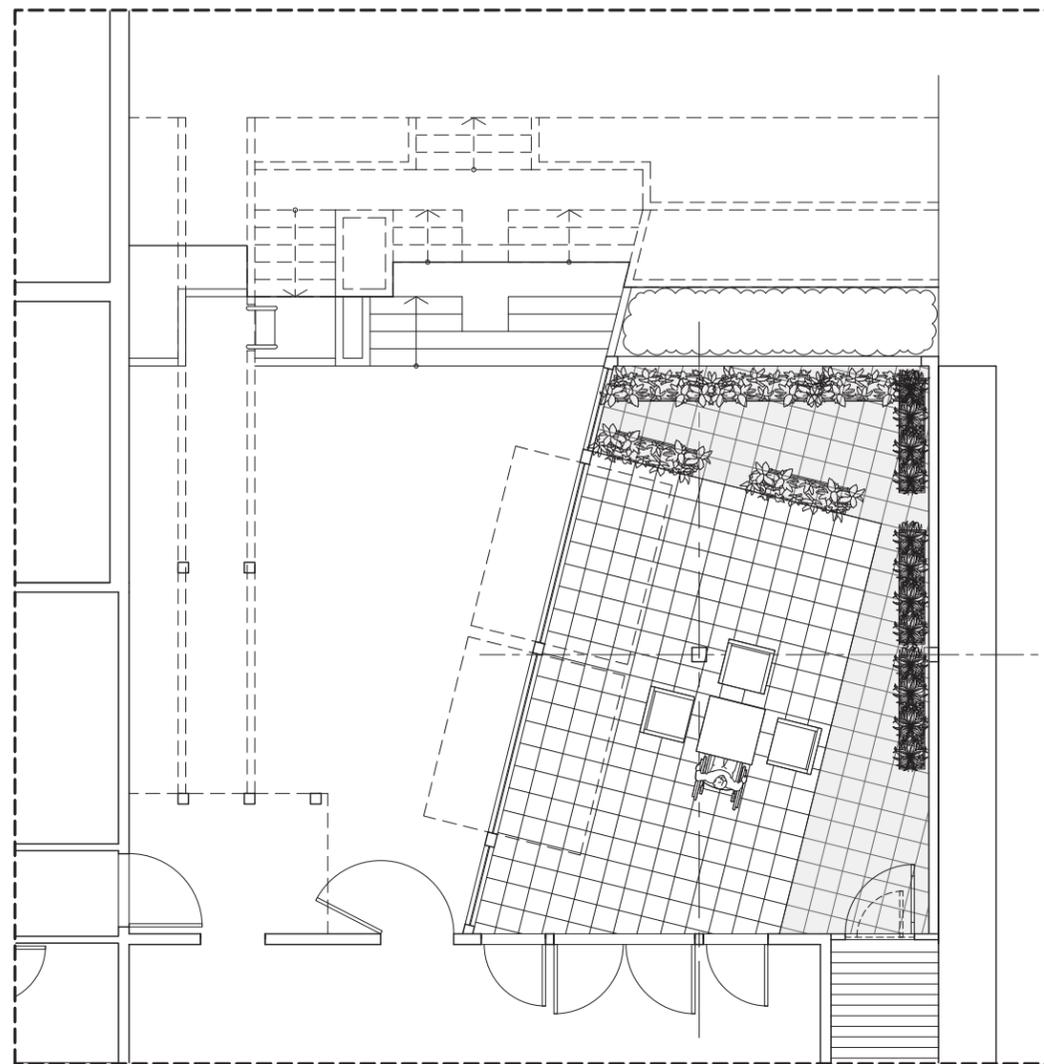
Stairs wrap around the side of the deck and meet the sidewalk and pathway, inviting you in.



Doors from the greenhouse to the activity area.

FRONT DECK





No.	REVISION/ISSUE	DATE

PROJECT NAME

SPENCER HOUSE

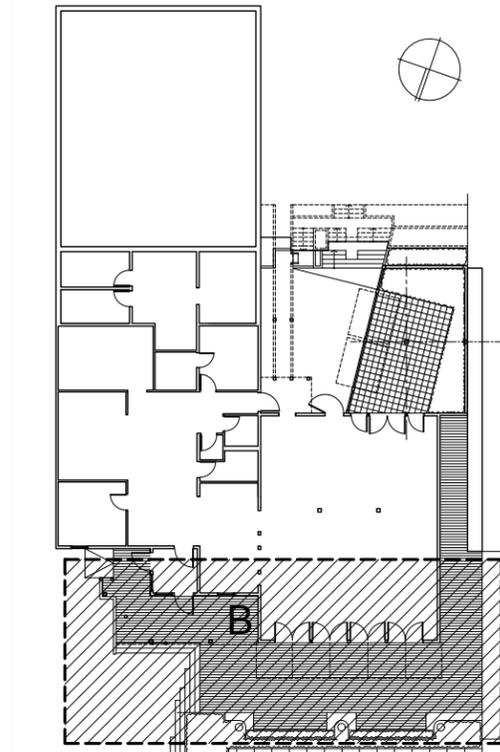
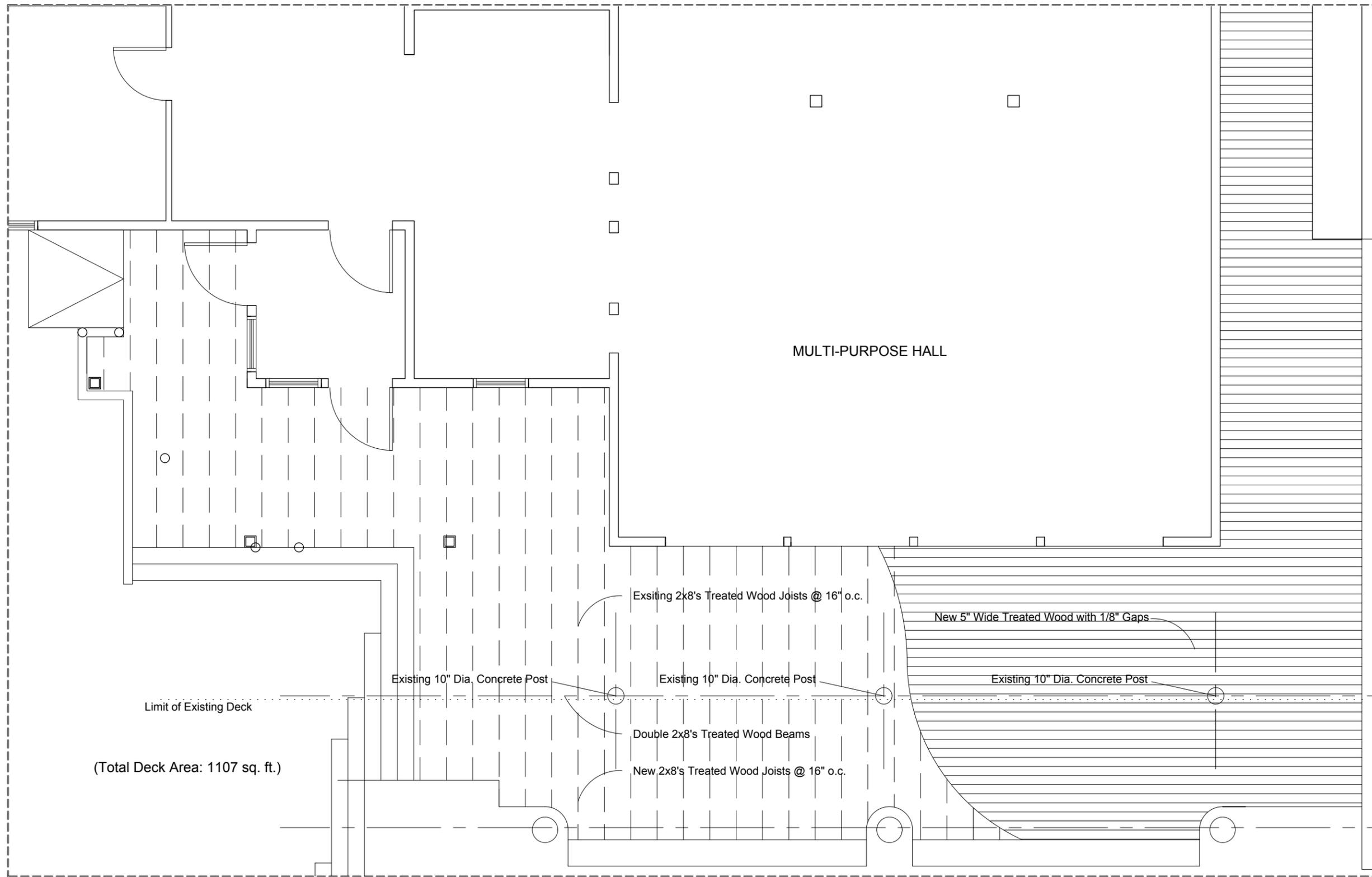
DRAWING TITLE

**FLOOR PLAN -
PROPOSED**

DATE
15.10.2021

DRAWING No.

SCALE
AS SHOWN



No.	REVISION/ISSUE	DATE

PROJECT NAME
SPENCER HOUSE

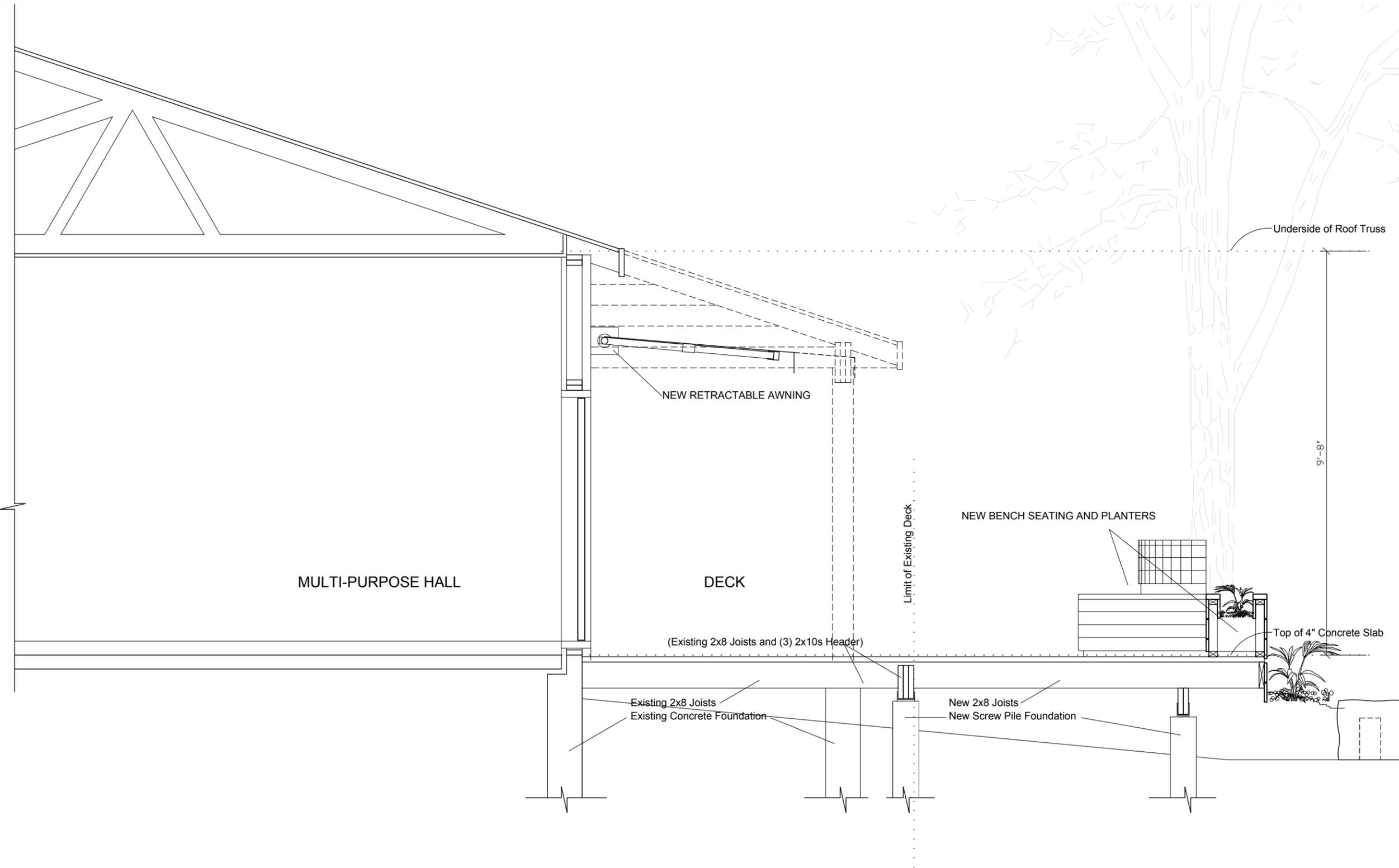
DRAWING TITLE
FLOOR PLAN - PROPOSED

DATE
 15.10.2021

SCALE
 AS SHOWN

DRAWING No.

PART PLAN- DECKING
 1/8"=1' (if printed 11x17)



SECTION THROUGH DECK- PROPOSED
1/30 (if printed 11x17)

No.	REVISION/ISSUE	DATE

PROJECT NAME
SPENCER HOUSE

DRAWING TITLE
SECTION THROUGH FRONT DECK- PROPOSED

DATE
15.10.2021

SCALE
AS SHOWN

DRAWING No.



NORTH ELEVATION- EXISTING

3/16"=1' (if printed on 11x17)



NORTH ELEVATION- PROPOSED

3/16"=1' (if printed on 11x17)

No.	REVISION/ISSUE	DATE

PROJECT NAME
SPENCER HOUSE

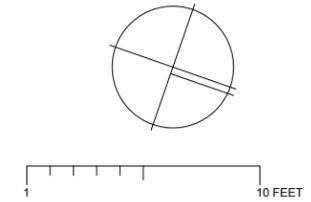
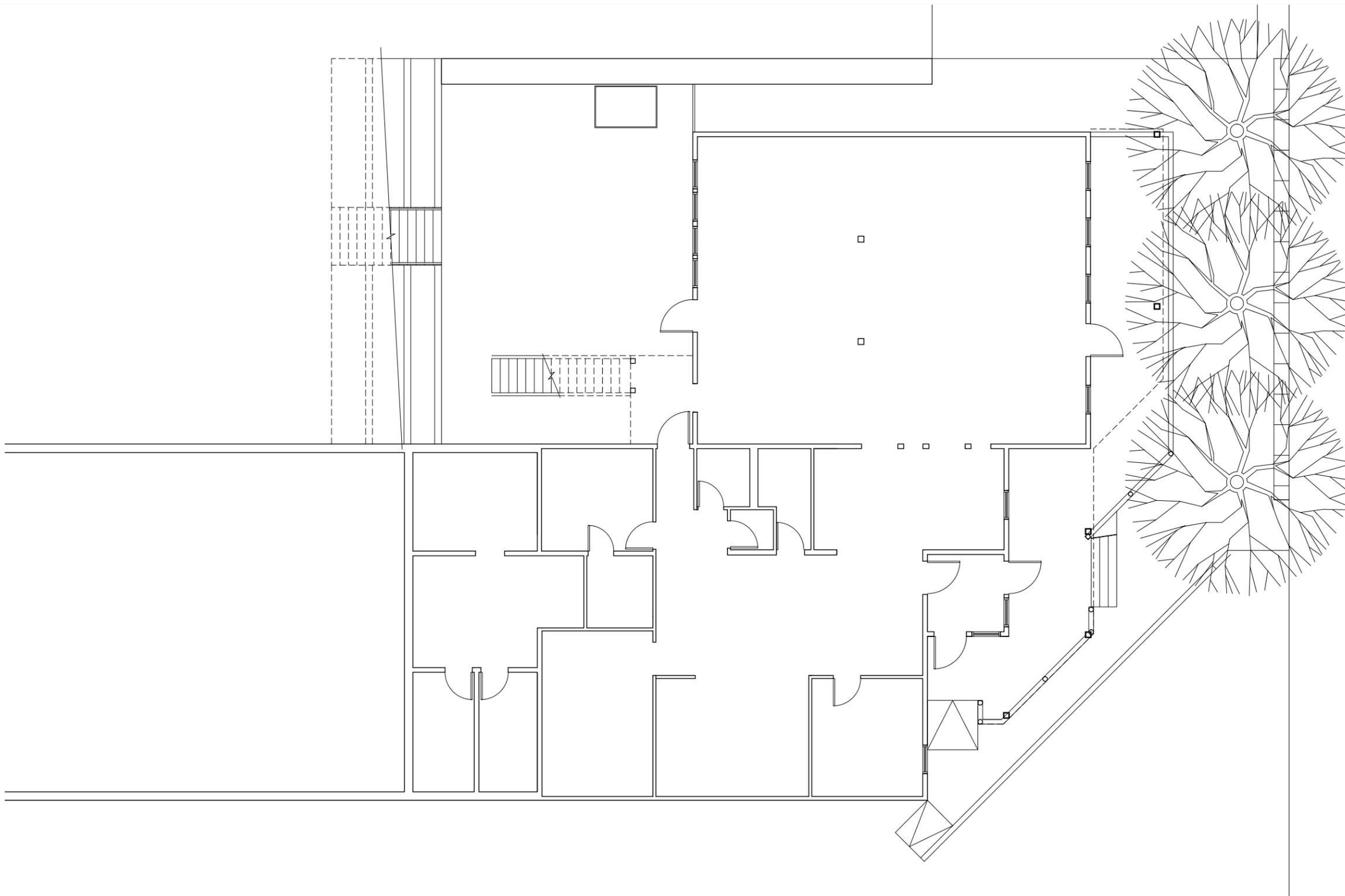
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**SECTION THROUGH
FRONT DECK-
PROPOSED**

DATE
15.10.2021

SCALE
AS SHOWN

DRAWING No.

EXISTING FLOORPLAN



No.	REVISION/ISSUE	DATE

PROJECT NAME
SPENCER HOUSE

DRAWING TITLE
FLOOR PLAN- EXISTING

DATE
15.10.2021

SCALE
1:150 (on 11x17)

DRAWING No.

