



October 26, 2018

Rods “Top Ten” Design Considerations for Permanent Supportive Housing Units

This is a partial list of what should be considered when rehabbing, improving or building PSH units. Much of this is applicable to any type of unit, but more crucial for a PSH unit. This list does not take the place of the most important consideration of all – working with an experienced architectural design team, including asset management, property management, service providers, maintenance staff and if appropriate, tenants. There is much to learn from each of these. Keep in mind that every type of tenant population has unique challenges and needs to address in the design of their housing.

This list does not purport to be complete in terms of all code, accessibility or agency requirements. It is rather a reflection of what LCS has most often seen in producing Physical Needs Assessments for the many Permanent Supporting Housing units that we have inspected over the years.

1. Doors

- **Closers** – Properly working door closers are a very serious Fire safety issue. Fourteen people died in New York because a fire that began in a unit spread out into the hall and up the stairwell. Sometimes, tenants can have difficulty with poorly operating closers and intentionally damage or disable them. A good hydraulic closer should be ADA approved and need no more than 5 pounds of force to open. Proper installation, adjustment, and maintenance is critical. Never use self-closing hinges.
- **Door Hardware** – Interconnected entry door hardware with a lever handle and deadbolt allows for both security, and quick, easy egress in an emergency.
- **Security** – With a solid door and good hardware, tenants can be made to feel safer and more secure with a decent quality peephole, so they can see someone at their door. For those in wheelchairs, a second peephole must be installed at 43” from the floor.
- **Safe emergency egress** - Never install or allow a hotel-type latch that could be difficult and confusing in an emergency.
- **Wheelchair protection** – Wheelchairs tend to damage doors and door frames. Install protection plates as needed. Make sure that the doors are as wide as possible, preferably 36”.

- **Clearly visible numbers and color** – Large clearly visible unit numbers can be helpful, especially for the vision impaired. Additionally, all signs should include Braille. If appropriate, painting doors different colors can help tenants identify their units and provide an additional sense of place.

2. Flooring

- **Carpeting** – Carpeting should be the most durable and cleanable type, preferably carpet tile so that damaged or soiled sections can be replaced easily. Replacement carpeting tiles should be kept on hand.
- **VCT, linoleum, or vinyl sheet goods** – If you are entirely replacing carpet with vinyl, make sure to maintain sound isolation (STC Rating) with an acoustic underlayment like “Acousti-Mat”, which is often required by code, and especially important because tenants can be loud from above, and sensitive to sound below.

3. Window coverings

- Window blinds should be durable, not flimsy, as flimsy materials damage easily, especially as the blinds become more difficult to operate over time.
- Window coverings should be effective in light control and, in some cases, thermal control, as residence may be particularly sensitive to both light and temperature and will resort to covering windows with blankets (or other coverings), resulting in a depressing environment.

4. Paint

- Smaller spaces tend to be more susceptible to paint wear and dirt spots. A higher quality, more wipeable paint product should be used.

5. Cabinets and Countertops

- **Cabinets** - Cabinet materials should be resistant to spills, and durable enough to stand up to the mishandling of doors and drawers. Simple knobs and handles tend to wear better than doors with finger-pull edges.
- **Hardware** - Use quality, durable hinges and drawer slides that are less likely to require adjustment due to misalignment.
- **Countertops** - Countertops should be made of a synthetic or stone material that will resist burns and can be repaired if needed. Make sure that the countertop overhangs the face of the cabinet doors by half an inch, so that spills will not drip onto the cabinet fronts, causing damage.

6. Tubs and Showers

- **Surrounds** - Poor housekeeping will result in caulking and grouted joints to degrade as the result of dirt and mildew. Try to use single piece shower tubs/surrounds.

- **Shower rods** - Should be durable, strong and screwed into secure backing when possible.
- **Grab bars** - There should be grab bars or at least mounting for the future installation of grab bars, as this population is very likely to age in place.
- **Adjacent wall protection** - Make sure that the valve side of the tub has a well-sealed and caulked wall or tile where the shower unit meets the wall.
- **Bathroom floor** - Make sure there is a good seal where the flooring meets the wall. Flooring in bathrooms should be either tile or quality sheet goods, as it will constantly be exposed to water, which tile and quality sheet goods are designed to resist.
- **Roll-in shower** - All roll-in showers should have collapsible water dams and drains both inside the shower, and in the adjacent floor - wheelchairs and walkers will carry water from the shower to the bathroom floor.
- **Anti-scald valves** - All showers should have anti-scald shower valves installed.
- **Exhaust Fans** - All bathrooms should have exhaust fans, and all exhaust fans should have humidistats that turn the fans on as needed, so that moisture is not allowed to accumulate and cause mold. Make sure that there is a one inch undercut on bathroom doors or a vent to provide air supply, or the exhaust fan will be of little effect.

7. HVAC

- **Heating and cooling** - People with physical and psychological medical issues are often hyper sensitive to temperature and usually spend more time in their units.
- **Energy efficiency** - Always purchase the most efficient energy options that budgets allow for. Most often, PSH units do not have separate utility meters. With more time in the unit comes a greater utility cost savings, so this represents a savings to the owner.
- **Thermostats** - Should be sophisticated enough to have a password protected high and low setting to prevent tenants from selecting extremely high or low settings, and they should be simple enough for residents to operate without frustration or confusion.
- **Sound** - Quiet HVAC units are better for those who may be especially sensitive to sound.

8. Air Quality – Ventilation

- **Air quality** - A lack of ventilation, frequently closed windows, poor housekeeping, and poor personal hygiene can cause poor indoor air quality.

- **Fresh air intake** - It is important to have fresh air vents and sufficient ventilation. Small, through-wall vents such as “Airlet” brand fresh air inlets can provide fresh air supply, which is required by current Code.
- **Mechanical exhaust** - A two-speed bath exhaust fan with the required door under-cut or vent into the bathroom can be set to run at a low, constant speed to draw in fresh air and exhaust it through the bathroom. The fans can then switch to a higher speed when needed, for moisture or odors.

9. Appliances

- **Stoves** - Electric stoves should be preferred over gas stoves to avoid the hazard of an open flame.
- **Kitchen exhaust** - A kitchen exhaust hood should be vented to the outside - not recirculated - to reduce moisture and food odors spreading in a small unit.

10. Smoke detectors and fire sprinklers

- **Smoke detectors** – Avoid talking smoke/CO detectors for certain populations. They can be problematic for those who may have issues with suddenly hearing voices. False or real alarms can lead to panic and confusion.
- **Fire sprinklers** - Should be flat or concealed so that residents do not hang hangers or anything else from them, causing unnecessary discharge.

Hope this is helpful. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions or comments.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rod Lane". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rod Lane,
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