

2026 Urban Land Institute Wavemaker Submission

Patuxent Commons



PROJECT OVERVIEW

Patuxent Commons brings seniors, families, and adults with autism together in one building, rather than the separate, specialized facilities most developments rely on. Tucked into a sloped site in Howard County, Maryland, the four-story building reads as three stories from the street, matching the scale of its surrounding neighborhood. The Autism Society of Maryland proposed the concept, Mission First Housing Group developed it, and Moseley led the design through workshops with future residents.

DATA

COMPLETION DATE
October 20, 2025

ADDRESS
6441 Freetown Road
Columbia, Maryland 21044

SIZE
118,000 square feet

RESIDENTIAL UNITS
76

TEAM

DEVELOPER
Mission First Housing Group in partnership with Howard County Housing Commission

ARCHITECTURE
Moseley

MECHANICAL, ELECTRICAL, AND PLUMBING ENGINEERING
Moseley

INTERIOR DESIGN
Moseley

CIVIL ENGINEERING
Gutschick Little and Weber

STRUCTURAL ENGINEERING
Meyer Consulting Engineers

GENERAL CONTRACTOR
Harkins Builders



COMPLETENESS

Patuxent Commons is finished and fully occupied. The project pairs a mixed-income unit plan with a financing structure that drew on several public and private sources to support residents across different income levels.

Unit Mix and Affordability

The building sets aside 25 percent of its units, or 19 units, the maximum share permitted under HUD and Maryland funding rules, for adults with disabilities at very low income levels. The remaining units serve families and individuals, 27 units at 35 percent, and older adults, 30 units at 40 percent. Of the 76 total units, 43 are one-bedroom at 56.5 percent, 27 are two-bedroom at 35.5 percent, and six are three-bedroom at 8 percent.

Funding Sources

Financing combined four percent Low-Income Housing Tax Credit funding with HUD programs, county allocations, and donations from local organizations tied to the project. The resulting \$44 million capital stack brought public and private funding together behind one mixed-income development, instead of one income band carrying the project alone. Howard County committed more than \$6 million to the project, including gap financing, land acquisition support, and funding for soft costs.

Budget and Delivery

The project team addressed long-lead time items and on-site complexities in advance through early planning and coordination between the architect and general contractor, and the project finished under budget and ahead of schedule. The team reinvested the resulting savings into upgraded flooring and tile, stainless steel appliances, under-cabinet lighting, and USB charging at outlets.

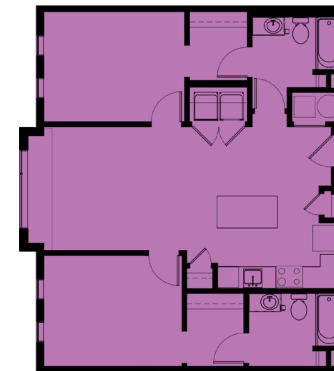
43

one-bedroom units



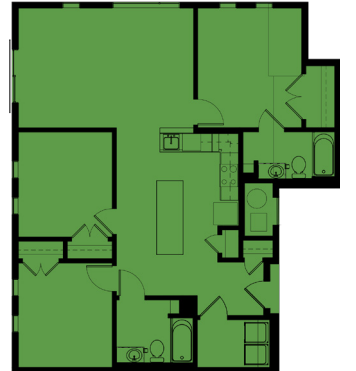
27

two-bedroom units

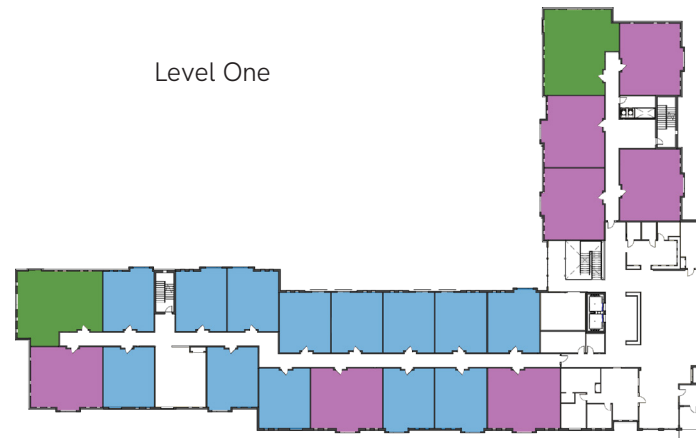


6

three-bedroom units



Level One



Levels Two and Three

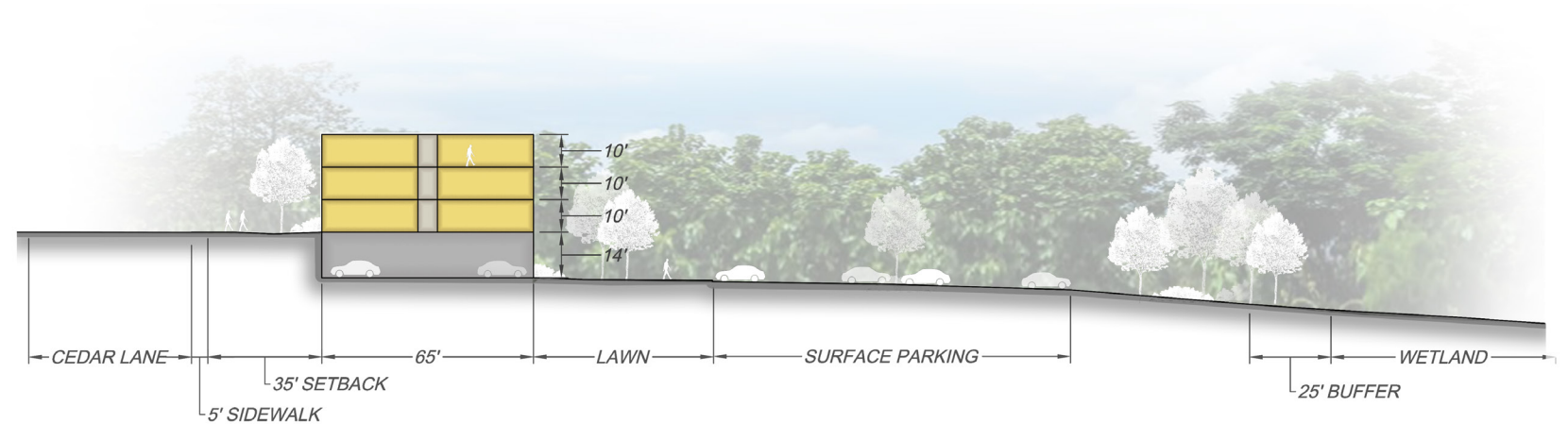


A SENSE OF PLACE AND QUALITY

The design addresses two distinct challenges: a steep, constrained site on the exterior, and the risk of an institutional feel on the interior.

Exterior

The site sits on a steep hillside. The design tucks a 123-space structured parking garage into the grade, hiding it from the street and allowing three levels of residential space to rise above a concealed lower level. The four-story building reads as three stories from the surrounding street, matching the scale of its context. The result keeps a human-scale street presence even as it meets required density. Shifts in materials and rooflines divide the building's massing into the character of several smaller structures, an effect reinforced by upgraded signage and landscaping at the pedestrian level.



Interior

Offset circulation paths and dispersed amenity spaces break long corridors into smaller, distinct areas. The smaller areas support wayfinding and ease the institutional scale common to large residential buildings. A central lounge provides direct access to residential wings, elevators, and management suites. Seating niches and open areas along the corridors give neurodiverse residents a place to decompress and give seniors and families a place to gather, all within the same hallway.

SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability at Patuxent Commons extends past the building's physical systems to the services housed inside it, keeping residents close to what they need without leaving the building or the neighborhood.

Site and Systems

Site design reduces the building's footprint, preserves existing tree cover and wetland areas, and increases stormwater capacity through pervious paving. Hickory Ridge Village Center sits across from the site, and a public bus route runs past the property, putting shopping, employment, and recreation within easy reach for residents who may not drive.

This siting follows a recommendation from prior housing research produced with the Urban Land Institute, which has urged developers of autism-focused housing to prioritize sites near transit, employment, shopping, and recreation. Electric vehicle charging stations on site support residents as adoption grows in the surrounding community.



On-Site Services

After-school programs, senior support, and specialized services for adults with autism each have dedicated space on site, so residents and their families never need to leave the building to reach them.

VISIONARY AND EMULATION

Most developments separate housing types by population. Patuxent Commons treats population mixing, income mixing, and accessibility as one integrated design standard rather than separate special cases. This combination gives other developers a working example most projects never attempt.

One Building, Every Population

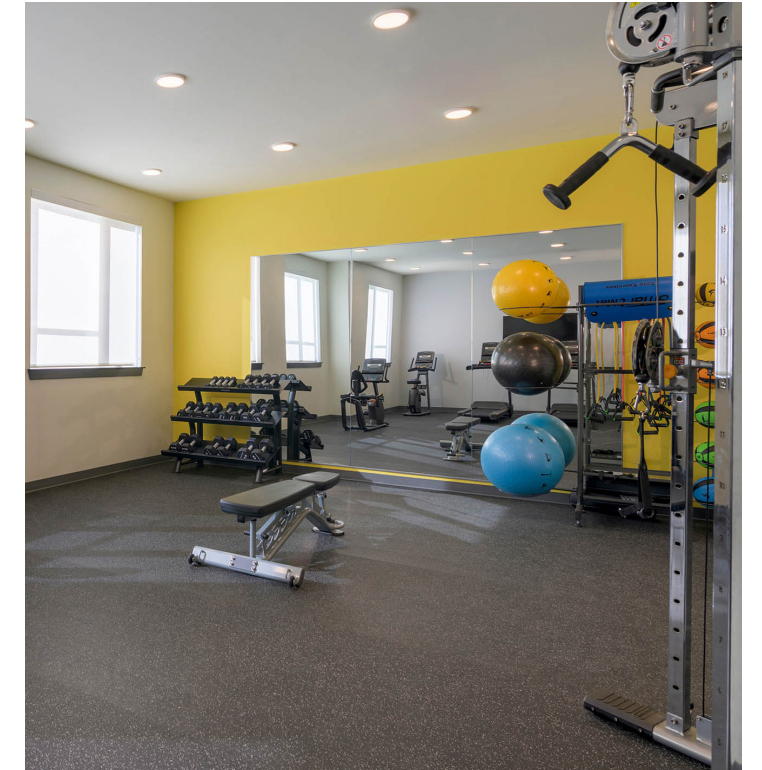
The population mix established above extends to income as well: the very low income disability units sit alongside units for families, individuals, and seniors within the same mixed-income structure. The same social and sensory design principles run through the whole building, not just one specialized wing. The fitness center, business center, and multipurpose rooms sit apart from one another rather than grouped in a single amenity zone, positioning them to encourage spontaneous interaction between residents of different ages and abilities.

Accessibility as a Standard Feature

Removable base cabinets appear in every kitchen, not just the accessible units, and units for residents with hearing and visual impairments include enhanced life-safety and notification devices as standard features throughout the building.

“Everyone deserves a chance to live in housing that’s affordable and inclusive and in communities where they feel like they belong. That’s true for people with disabilities, but it’s also true for seniors and for families who are seeking affordable housing. We believe everyone, no matter their age or ability, has something to offer to the community. That’s the vision for Patuxent Commons.”

—Melissa Rosenberg
Executive Director
The Autism Society of Maryland



A NEED

The need behind Patuxent Commons came directly from the people it would serve.

The Community and Its Residents

The Autism Society of Maryland and its 12-member Housing Task Force created the original concept to address housing instability among low-income adults with disabilities. Following a competitive selection process, the Task Force chose Mission First Housing Group as developer in 2019, and the organization remains involved with the building and its residents today. The shortage they responded to is not unique to Howard County: a ULI Arizona-led study of autism housing found that most existing models remain isolated, one-off developments rather than a repeatable housing type.

Demand for the finished units was strong enough that the development team held a lottery to select residents from the pool of applicants, which confirmed the need the organization identified years earlier. The project also meets the ongoing need for senior and family housing in Howard County, placing it within reach of daily services rather than apart from them. National surveys, including those conducted by AARP, find that more than 90 percent of older adults prefer to remain in their own homes or communities, a preference Howard County residents consistently express as well.

Design Shaped by Resident Input

Workshops with the organization and future residents shaped specific features of the building, including the corridor seating niches and decompression areas built for sensory needs. The team also moved the parking area and main entrance to the rear of the site to address neighbor concerns and give residents a quieter approach to the building.

“We are taking another step towards a more inclusive, compassionate, and connected community. Years in the making, Patuxent Commons took a village to bring it to life. This intergenerational community represents the best of who we are. It represents the power of collaboration. It represents the possibilities that we can unlock when we dream boldly. And, most of all, it represents our compassion as a community.”

—Calvin Ball
Howard County Executive



The design team held conversations, large and small, with community members to seek their advice and input regarding the development of this concept. A series of “user design” sessions with prospective residents and stakeholders solicited additional input that informed the planning and development of Patuxent Commons.



APPLICANT

DESIGN FIRM

Moseley
1414 Key Highway
Baltimore, Maryland

POINT OF CONTACT

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“Patuxent Commons may be one project, but it embodies a vision that we are determined to see replicated. Together with Mission First and our many partners and supporters, we’re demonstrating what’s possible when affordable housing truly includes people of all abilities.”

—Melissa Rosenberg
Executive Director
The Autism Society of Maryland