

Park Street Lofts

Saco, Maine

Project Type:
Residential

Case No:
C036008

Year:
2006



SUMMARY

Park Street Lofts consists of 34 live/work loft condominium units housed in a converted five-story, wood-frame, 61,000-square-foot (5,667-square-meter) building that was once a shoe manufacturing plant in Saco, Maine. The developer retained as much of the site's original architecture—most evident in the building's exposed beams—as possible, while providing a creative live/work environment that is unique to the region. This adaptive use of a historic structure has also yielded affordable housing in an area where the median home price has risen steadily for many years.

FEATURES

- Adaptive Use
 - Renovation
 - Market-Rate Housing
 - Loft Housing
 - Open Floor Plan
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LOCATION

Inner Suburban

SITE SIZE

1.6 acres/0.6 hectare

LAND USES

Multifamily For-Sale Housing, Condominiums, Live/Work Space

KEYWORDS/SPECIAL FEATURES

- Adaptive Use
- Renovation
- Market-Rate Housing
- Loft Housing
- Open Floor Plan

PROJECT ADDRESS

18 Park Street
Saco, Maine 04072

OWNER

Park Street Lofts Condominium Association
18 Park Street
Saco, Maine 04072

DEVELOPER

Random Orbit, Inc.
70 Merrill Street
Portland, Maine 04101
207-775-6005
Fax: 207-775-6005
www.randomorbitinc.com

ARCHITECT

Sun House Building & Design
15 Oak Ridge Road
Brunswick, Maine 04011
207-725-2667

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

John Akerman
125 Bowie Hill Road
Durham, Maine 04220
207-926-4880

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Housed in a historic former shoe manufacturing plant, Park Street Lofts stands five stories tall and contains 34 live/work loft condominiums ranging from 1,200 to nearly 2,000 square feet (111 to 186 square meters) in size. The development retains much of the 61,000-square-foot (5,667-square-meter) building's architectural and industrial character, which is most evident in the exposed beams that play an integral role in each unit's interior.

Peter Bass, president of locally based Random Orbit, Inc., which developed the site, has focused on finding value in the reuse of properties in southern Maine for almost 20 years. In 1986, his firm converted a masonry warehouse located in a densely populated residential neighborhood into Merrill Street Studios, the region's first dedicated artist studio building. With the construction of East Bayside Studios in Portland, he introduced the New York-style industrial loft to the region. In 2000, Bass founded Random Orbit, Inc., to further pursue smart growth development, focusing mainly on high-density urban infill projects in both adaptive use and new construction.

While tourism remains the lifeblood of the state economy, Maine has always relied heavily on manufacturing jobs. With many companies shifting their manufacturing operations overseas in recent years, this has resulted in job losses and empty facilities. Because of its location on the Saco River, the Biddeford-Saco area is home to many abandoned mills, some of which have stood empty for quite some time.

In a 2005 report on the growing number of condominiums being built in Saco, Peter Morelli, Saco's economic development director, cited Park Street Lofts as a "great reuse of a building that might have become a white elephant." This adaptive use of a historic building has also provided affordable housing in a region where the median home price has been rising steadily for many years. Through careful zoning changes, the flexible open-space plan, and the live/work concept, artists and other professionals benefit from combining housing and studio/office expenses into one mortgage. Projects like this also help attract more "creative economy" jobs to Maine, which has long been a goal of state government.

Located 15 minutes from Portland, Maine's largest city and its cultural center, Park Street Lofts lies within walking distance to the urban center of Saco, which includes businesses, restaurants, and Amtrak rail service. Buses make regular trips to Portland along the nearby Maine Turnpike, and beaches are just five miles (eight kilometers) to the south.

THE SITE

Park Street Lofts is located on a 1.55-acre (0.63-hectare) quadrangle of land that is defined by Park Street to the east, the Boston and Maine Railroad tracks to the west, a townhouse-style condominium complex to the north, and an undeveloped city-owned surplus lot to the south. The mill building was constructed in 1915–1916 by Saco's Board of Trade to entice Sears, Roebuck and Co. to locate its shoe manufacturing operations in the city. At the time, it was one of the only buildings in the area. Since then, single-family residences and the adjacent condo complex have been built around it, making this large industrial structure somewhat of an anomaly in the neighborhood.

Throughout its 80-year history, the heavy timber-framed building has served mainly as a shoe manufacturing plant for various companies, but from May 1942 to November 1943 it served as a barracks, housing soldiers from the 181st Infantry Division who were on coast patrol in Saco during World War II.

Prior to the conversion, the building's most recent occupant was Lunder Shoe Company, which moved the last of its operations out of the structure in early 2004 during the beginning stages of construction.

The site was already well developed, but because the edifice was built more than 75 years ago, Bass had to improve and modernize the existing drainage system both on and off the property. The former boiler building, a brick structure in front of the building that features a towering brick chimney, was left as a reminder of the plant's industrial past.

DEVELOPMENT PROCESS AND FINANCING

In 2002, Bass learned about the availability of the old Sears Roebuck building in Saco through a real estate agent. The owner at the time, Lunder Shoe Company, had planned to relocate to a new building in the Spring Hill section of the Saco Industrial Park. Being very familiar with the housing situation in the greater Portland area, Bass was optimistic that his vision for the old, essentially derelict structure would fill a definite need.

However, after hearing about the building and checking it out, it took Bass about a year to decide he was going to pursue it. Among the things he researched before undertaking the project were the availability of raw materials and the attitude of the city toward such a project. Bass sought advice from Bob Hamlin, Saco's planning director, and Morelli, both of whom he describes as a "big help."

In the end, it was the receptiveness of the city of Saco, coupled with the demographics of nearby Portland, that led him to pursue the project. And while the idea of loft spaces in old converted buildings is not a new one, it is a very radical concept in the state of Maine. Bass was optimistic that his vision for the old plant would be successful because

"Portland is much more sophisticated than it used to be and there are a lot of people who are looking for a different kind of housing besides the traditional townhouse condominium."

The Saco Planning Board and the city council were both open to this project, mainly because they were happy to see someone turning the old building into housing—something that would be a better fit with the existing neighborhood. They did their due diligence and took some time to understand the concept, particularly the live/work aspect, which would require a contract zone. There was also the matter of maximum density to address. The city ordinance calls for no more than 17 units per acre (42 units per hectare). Park Street Lofts, however, would increase that to almost 22 units per acre (54 units per hectare). Once the planning board and city council were satisfied that this would work and that the building would not be a burden to the city, it was approved.

During the public review process, the community received the project very positively "because they'd been staring at this neglected building for years," Bass says. There were also the usual complaints about increased traffic and parking problems. In addition, the public was concerned that the "artists" who moved into the building would paint a giant mural on its side, but Bass explained that the condo rules and regulations would not allow that without a majority vote, which would be difficult.

Bass financed the Park Street Lofts project through Peoples Bank, a local division of BankNorth NA, at an interest rate that started at around 5.5 percent and ended at around 6.5 percent. Prior to underwriting the loan, the bank required upfront reservations of units. By the time construction began, Bass had secured ten to 12 reservations. "People were looking at floor plans and jumping on," he says. Of those initial reservations, eight ended up going through as sales.

DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

Stephen W. Tibbetts of Sun House Building & Design in Brunswick, Maine, drafted the plans for the interior of Park Street Lofts. Bass and Tibbetts had previously worked together with the Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust to create the 15-lot Larrabee Farms residential subdivision, the first subdivision in Maine to partner with a land trust to protect a significant portion of its land under conservation easement.

Tibbetts's design for Park Street Lofts called for units with large, flexible, wide-open spaces and blank-canvas white walls. "The idea for the design of the building was that it have some resemblance to a factory building, even though the materials we used were not industrial factory-type materials," Bass says.

The building's 12,230 square feet (1,143 square meters) of space per floor are divided among five floors. With the exception of the first floor, the layouts of each floor are identical. The difference on the first floor is the 910-square-foot (85-square-meter) centrally located community room, which occupies much of the space where unit 106 would have been. As a result, and because much of its view is obstructed by the old boiler building in front of the structure, unit 105 is slightly larger than similar units on upper floors.

The floors are poured concrete, which has been waxed in the hallways. In individual units, the concrete was left untouched to give owners the choice of how to finish them. Access to upper floors is through one of two stairwells, each of which leads to a separate exit (one in front, one in back) or to the elevator, which is located in the main lobby, next to the community room entrance. Access to the stairwell that leads to the basement is also located in the main lobby, as are mailboxes. Throughout the building, exposed beams are visible—in hallways, in units, and in the community room—contributing to the industrial feel.

Also contributing to the industrial feel is the large wraparound porch at the front entrance, which Bass says was intended to suggest a loading dock "without being too industrial about it."

The building is heated with natural gas, and each unit is fitted with an efficient wall-hung boiler that provides hot water "on demand," reducing the costs and space associated with hot water tanks. Even though it was no longer needed, the 1,690-square-foot (157-square-meter) brick former boiler building and large brick chimney located in front of the building were left, but because of the amount of asbestos contained inside the structure, access has been limited. Each unit has a storage room in the relatively unfinished basement, which is also home to the large water tank that feeds the building's sprinkler system.

The original entrances to and parking lot for the site were modified to provide two parking spots for each unit, as well as six visitor spots. The parking lot spans the east-facing front of the building and wraps around the south side, stretching almost to the railroad tracks in the west-facing rear of the building. These tracks are rarely used, serving only one company that is located in the nearby industrial park.

Because the building was constructed before single-family homes sprouted up around it, it really didn't fit into the overall feel of the neighborhood. Now that it has been converted to condominiums, it blends in better, but the large factory building is still somewhat of an anomaly.

Landscape architect John Akerman was charged with making the grounds blend with the surrounding neighborhood. His plan called for grassy open spaces, combined with mulch beds in front of the building, flanking the walkway to the secondary front door, and along the sidewalk on Park Street. Along the sidewalk, these beds are filled with deciduous trees and other shrubbery. Perennials fill the beds along the walkways. A pipe drains the site into a rocky area near Park Street, which feeds into the city sewer system.

Construction on Park Street Lofts commenced in April 2004. Wright-Ryan Construction, Inc., based in Portland, served as the general contractor, and worked closely with Bass to solve any unforeseen problems that arose during construction.

The first buyers closed on their units and began moving into the building in February 2005.

MARKETING

When it came to marketing the Park Street Lofts project, Bass worked closely with state and local arts organizations to generate buzz for it. The Maine Arts Commission was especially willing to post information about the project in its early stages.

As construction progressed, a number of local arts organizations took an interest in the project for two reasons. First of all, it was a creative reuse of an abandoned mill, which appeals to many people in the region. Secondly, they were intrigued by the live/work aspect of the project, which, as stated previously, was a novel concept for the state of Maine.

The second phase of marketing for Park Street Lofts involved placing ads in the real estate section of the larger newspapers that serve the area.

TENANTS, MANAGEMENT, AND PERFORMANCE

Each of the 34 condominium units in Park Street Lofts is individually owned, with residents also owning 1/34 of the common elements and grounds. All owners also have one vote in all association matters. The owners of the 32 occupied units represent a diverse background and include artists, lawyers, retired people, and other professionals ranging in age from their mid-20s to their 70s. For many, Park Street Lofts is their first homeownership opportunity.

Toward the completion of construction, Random Orbit hired Coastal Management (now Foreside Management) of Falmouth, Maine, to manage the property. Having reached the established sales benchmark of three-fourths of the units in August 2005, Random Orbit turned management of the building over to the owners' association.

As is common with condominiums, Park Street Lofts is governed by a very specific set of rules and regulations that are taken almost verbatim from the Maine Condominium Act and from the Saco municipal ordinances that govern home-based occupations. The five-member board of directors is drawn from the pool of unit owners. Each board member serves a two-year term.

Bass says he is very happy with the performance of the Park Street Lofts project. Because of the low initial acquisition price of the building, it was a very successful project for him financially. "Even with all the extra structural work that we did, it really exceeded my expectations," he says.

EXPERIENCE GAINED

- With an old, essentially derelict building, there is a seemingly never-ending number of unforeseen problems to solve.
- Finding a contractor who was willing to work through unforeseen problems jointly was a major plus.
- Working closely with city officials from the beginning ensured a positive experience with zoning and permitting.
- In future projects, Bass says he might build some smaller units with lower price points. The two remaining units that have gone unsold as of May 2006 are large (1,820 square feet/169 square meters) and because they are on the top two floors, they afford views to the east, west, and south. Therefore, they carry a higher price tag.
- The contract zone that allows for live/work space is truly unique in the region and opens up the potential for bringing more creative economy jobs to an area of the country that has been hit hard by the loss of manufacturing jobs in recent years.
- The building sits within the growing urban district of Saco and is within either walking distance or a short drive of just about any amenity imaginable; these factors were key to the success of the project.

PROJECT DATA				
LAND USE INFORMATION				
Site area (acres/hectares): 1.55/0.63 Gross density (units per acre/hectare): 21.94/53.97 Number of off-street parking spaces: 74				
LAND USE PLAN				
Use	Area (Square Feet/Square Meters)			
Buildings	13,921/1,293			
Streets/surface parking	23,320/2,166			
Landscaping/open space	30,521/2,835			
RESIDENTIAL INFORMATION				
Unit Type	Number of Units	Area (Square Feet/Square Meters)	Number of Units Sold	Average Sale Price
Loft	10	1,250/116	10	\$150,000
Loft	5	1,275/118	5	\$145,000
Loft	10	1,485/138	10	\$180,000
Loft	5	1,720/160	5	\$235,000
Loft	5	1,820/169	3	\$235,000
DEVELOPMENT COST INFORMATION				
Site Acquisition Cost: \$300,000 Site Improvement Costs: \$362,500 Construction Costs: \$3,750,000 Soft Costs: \$400,000 Total Development Cost: \$4,812,500				
DEVELOPMENT SCHEDULE				
Site purchased: June 2003 Planning started: June 2003 Construction begun: April 2004 Sales commenced: April 2004 Project completed: February 2005				

DRIVING DIRECTIONS

From Portland International Jetport: Follow signs to Maine Turnpike South. Travel approximately nine miles (14.5 kilometers) and take Exit 36–Saco. Beyond the toll plaza, take Exit 1–Industrial Park Road. At the light at the bottom of the ramp, take a left. Go one-half mile (0.8 kilometer) to the next light at the end of Industrial Park Road. Take a left onto Route 112 (North Street). Travel one mile (1.6 kilometers) on Route 112. Upon crossing the railroad tracks, take the immediate right onto Park Street. The building is less than a quarter mile (0.4 kilometer) down the street on the right.

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This Development Case Study is intended as a resource for subscribers in improving the quality of future projects. Data contained herein were made available by the project's development team and constitute a report on, not an endorsement of, the project by ULI—the Urban Land Institute.

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Photo by author.

Retaining much of its former industrial feel, including the now-unused brick boiler building and chimney, park Street Lofts is a 34-unit live/work condominium development located in a former shoe assembly plant situated amid a residential neighborhood in Saco, Maine.



Photo courtesy of Peter Baas, Random Orbit, Inc.

At the time construction on park Street Lofts began, employees of Lunder Shoe Company, the building's previous tenant, were still working on the first floor.



The proximity to the Boston and Maine Railroad line played a key role in the building's construction by the Saco Board of Trade, as well as its subsequent occupation by the shoe manufacturing arm of Sears, Roebuck and Co. in 1916.



During construction, a painting of the Native American face that served as the logo for the Saco Shoe Company found on the structure's facade was cut out and now hangs in the lobby of park Street Lofts as a reminder of the building's shoe-assembly heritage.



Developer peter Bass of Random Orbit, Inc., in portland, Maine, wanted the building's large wraparound porch to evoke the loading dock that had been located where the porch now sits.



Photo by author

Because the developer wanted the condo association and unit owners to have input into how to decorate building's interior, white walls, bare concrete floors, and galvanized steel doors are the norm at park Street Lofts.



Photo courtesy of Peter Bass, Random Orbit, Inc.

The developer turned each 12,300-square-foot (1,143-square-meter) floor of open space into five condominium units of varying sizes while retaining the building's original architectural feel.

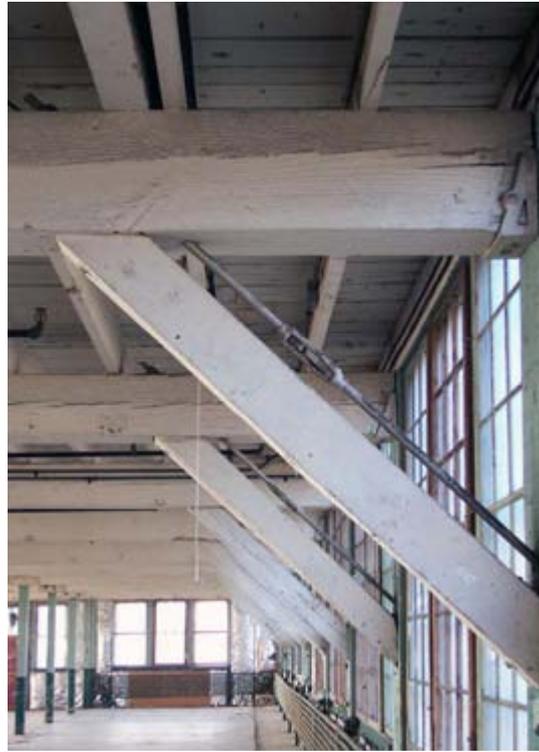


Photo courtesy of Peter Bass, Random Orbit, Inc.

All of the building's original timber supports remained in place for the conversion, receiving a coat of paint to make them fit with the "blank canvas" concept of the finished product.



Photo courtesy of Peter Bass, Random Orbit, Inc.

The open-concept plan of each live/work condominium space allowed owners to personalize their unit's layout to suit their personal styles.



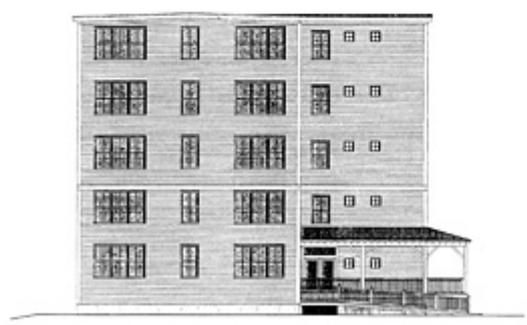
Client: Random Orbit, LLC
Architect: Stephen W. Tibbatts, P.E.

Project: Park Street Lofts
Date: 10/17/17
Scale: 1/8" = 1'-0"

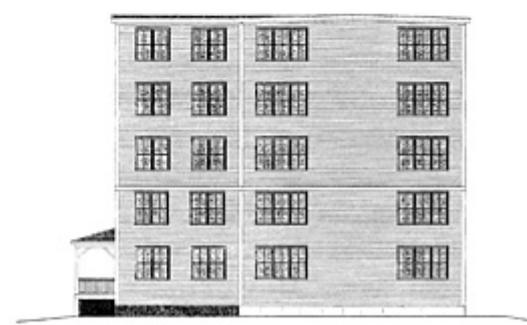
Sheet: A



Park Street Elevation

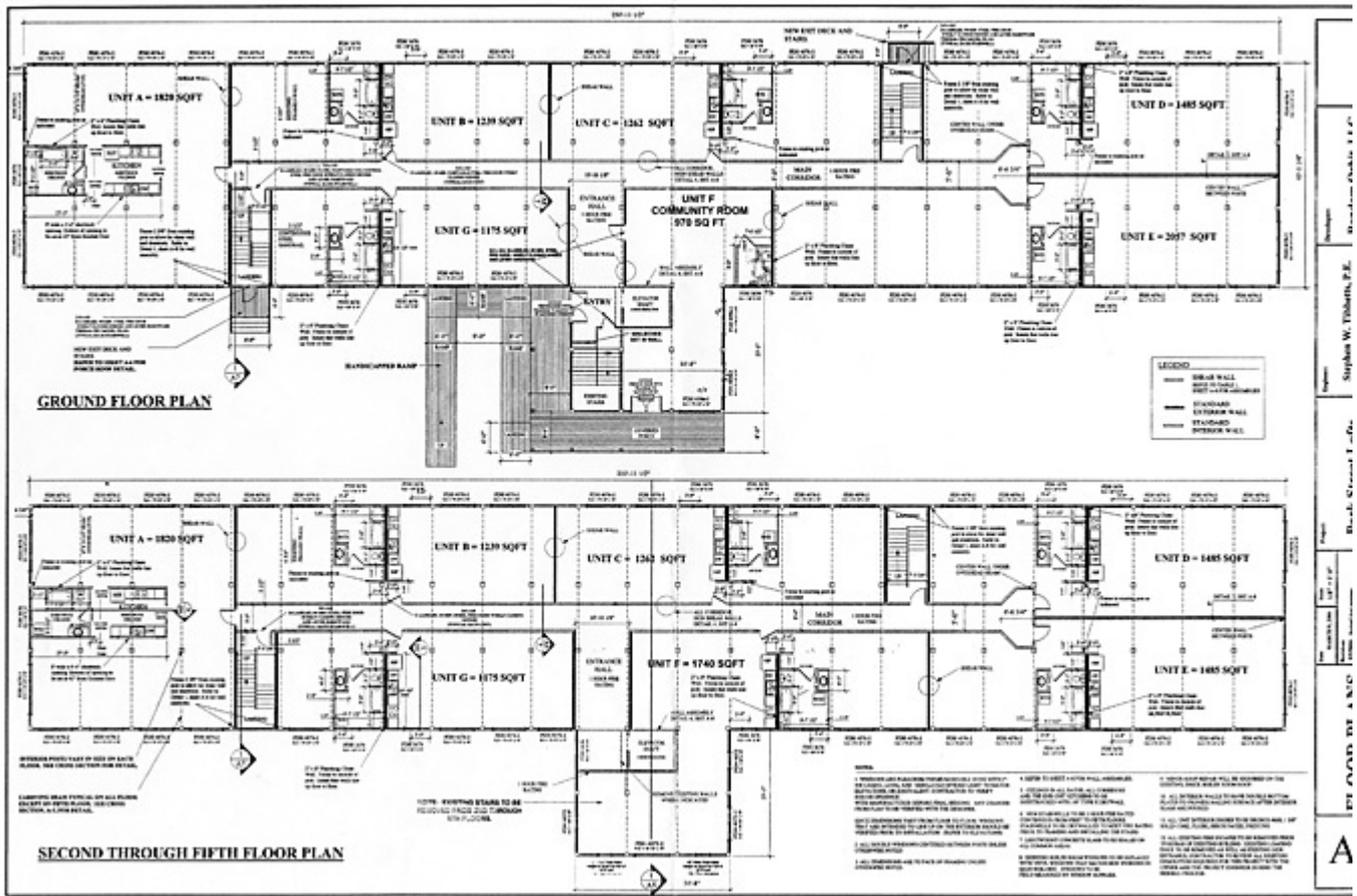


West Elevation



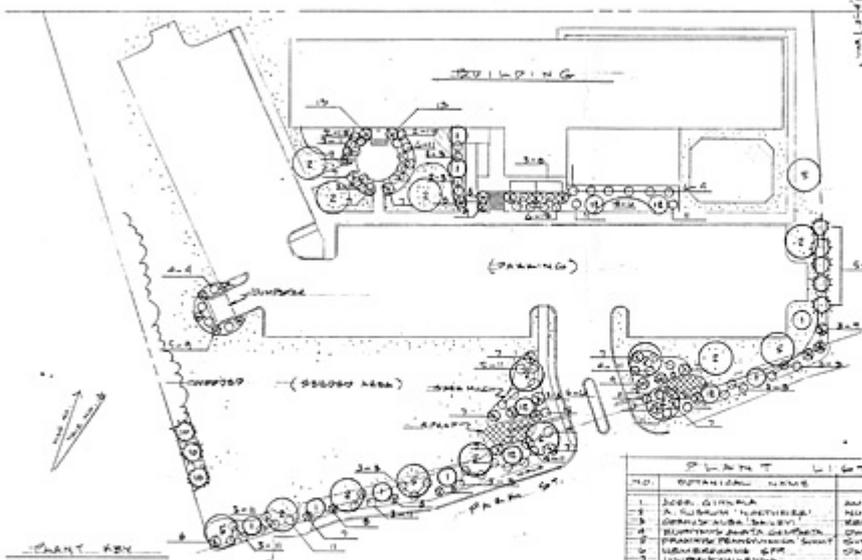
East Elevation

park Street Lofts elevations.

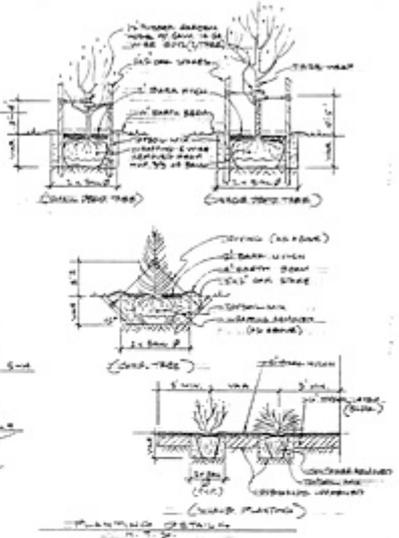


park Street Lofts floor plan.

PLANTING NOTES:
 1. PLANTING SHALL BE ACCORDING TO THE PLANT SPECIFICATIONS AND QUANTITIES LISTED IN THE SCHEDULE.
 2. ALL PLANTING SHALL BE INSTALLED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CITY OF CHICAGO PLANTING SPECIFICATIONS.
 3. THE CONTRACTOR SHALL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR OBTAINING ALL NECESSARY PERMITS AND APPROVALS FROM THE CITY OF CHICAGO.



PLANTING PLAN
 SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"



NO.	SYMBOLICAL NAME	COMMON NAME	QUANTITY	SIZE	REMARKS
1	Q1001	Red Maple	8	12" x 12"	See Schedule
2	Q1002	Red Maple	12	12" x 12"	See Schedule
3	Q1003	Red Maple	12	12" x 12"	See Schedule
4	Q1004	Red Maple	12	12" x 12"	See Schedule
5	Q1005	Red Maple	12	12" x 12"	See Schedule
6	Q1006	Red Maple	12	12" x 12"	See Schedule
7	Q1007	Red Maple	12	12" x 12"	See Schedule
8	Q1008	Red Maple	12	12" x 12"	See Schedule
9	Q1009	Red Maple	12	12" x 12"	See Schedule
10	Q1010	Red Maple	12	12" x 12"	See Schedule
11	Q1011	Red Maple	12	12" x 12"	See Schedule
12	Q1012	Red Maple	12	12" x 12"	See Schedule
13	Q1013	Red Maple	12	12" x 12"	See Schedule
14	Q1014	Red Maple	12	12" x 12"	See Schedule
15	Q1015	Red Maple	12	12" x 12"	See Schedule
16	Q1016	Red Maple	12	12" x 12"	See Schedule

PRELIMINARY PLAN
 NOT FOR CONSTRUCTION

park Street Lofts landscape plan.

