



Stone Mill Lofts

Stone Mill Lofts exemplifies the intersection of historic preservation and community development. Housed in the 178-year-old Essex Machine Shop, a structure listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the project not only preserves a significant piece of Lawrence, Massachusetts' industrial history, but makes history in its own right as the first all-electric, combustion-free multifamily development of its kind.

The Essex Company, founded in 1845, transformed the area into a bustling industrial hub, with the machine shop playing a pivotal role in manufacturing tools and machinery for the textile mills. However, as the textile industry declined in the 20th century, the building fell into disrepair, remaining largely vacant for over two decades.

The development team restored the ochre-colored fieldstone facade, revealing its original hues, and replaced the roofing with locally sourced materials to maintain historical integrity. Inside, original structural elements were preserved, and modern amenities were integrated in a way that showcases the building's industrial heritage. The design features large windows, open-concept layouts, and historic touches, including original doors and structural supports.

Stone Mill Lofts addresses the critical shortage of affordable housing in Lawrence, with 58 of the 86 units designated for households earning up to 60% of the area median income. The project also includes units for those with special needs supported by the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health Rental Subsidy Program.

The impact of Stone Mill Lofts extends beyond housing, thanks to a partnership with the Connected Communities Foundation, which links low-income residents to essential supportive services, including job training and financial literacy classes. A senior community coordinator works to build connections among residents, shaping programming based on survey results.

The preservation story of Stone Mill Lofts is beautifully intertwined with the journey of one disabled veteran who found refuge in the abandoned structure prior to its transformation and

now calls it home as a resident, supported by rent and utility subsidies. While sheltering in the abandoned building, he documented drawings and carvings by mill workers over the years, the oldest dating back to 1867. Some of his photographs are now on display in common areas. The Stone Mill Lofts redevelopment serves as a model for how historic preservation can be leveraged as a community good, by revitalizing a historic structure, addressing housing needs, fostering community connections, and stimulating the local economy. Its success sets a benchmark for future developments, showcasing innovative preservation techniques that respect the past while embracing the future.