



FRANK J. MANNING
APARTMENTS
CAMBRIDGE, MA

Cambridge Housing Authority Renovation Project Solves Unique Problems for Bathroom Redesign



New building will house some of Cambridge's most at-need communities with clean, updated, affordable housing.

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, national demand for affordable rental housing is at an all-time high but available supply is quickly shrinking. In Cambridge, Mass., the Cambridge Housing Authority (CHA) has met the shortage by conducting a full-scale renovation (including apartment interiors, building systems, and building exterior) of the Frank J. Manning Apartments, a public housing development for elderly and disabled residents. Although renovations were made for low-income residents, the new facilities will offer upscale amenities including expanded common amenities, services, entertainment spaces, and activity rooms making the Frank J. Manning building an attractive living option for seniors and disabled residents.

The renovation was made possible by a \$42 million tax-exempt bond issued by MassDevelopment, the Massachusetts economic development and finance authority. 200+ units are undergoing construction after 8 years of careful planning by CHA, local residents, and architect Bargmann Hendrie + Archetype, Inc.

Because the building's residents are elderly or disabled, it was important that key areas such as bathrooms be as user-friendly as possible and

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meet accessibility codes. CHA had previously worked with Bestbath on construction of the L.B. Johnson Apartment complex and specifically requested its products due to the project's complexity, durability, and low maintenance, establishing Bestbath as a proprietary specification and forgoing the traditional open-bidding process.

Right from the start, construction faced several challenges. The Frank J. Manning Apartments building structure was restrictively designed. Each apartment was a fixed size, requiring that showers be adapted to fit existing dimensions. Tenants live independently within the units and can be rough on the facilities, so showers needed to be durable, low maintenance, and water needed to be easily contained. Finally, each shower unit needed to be safe to use for any person, regardless of age, ability or circumstance.

"We started with a more standard unit and dome design, but as we got further into the project we found plumbing challenges that couldn't be overcome with a cookie-cutter approach," said Ben Wilson, project architect and senior project associate with Bargmann Hendrie + Archteype. "The whole custom fabrication of what Bestbath does was a huge asset. We went through the early design with them in a way that solved many of our problems and gave us a good working solution for the entire project."

Three cases of customization were critical for Frank J. Manning Apartments:

- Each wet wall was part of a fire-rated duct chase. To simplify construction and reduce penetrations through the rated wall, Bestbath created a special mold that resulted in a 60" shower with a 4" inset to accommodate the shower plumbing connections.
- To work with the existing concrete plank floor structure, the new shower unit drains needed to be carefully positioned to avoid reinforcing strands. The team found one custom drain location that would fit all conditions. Bestbath swapped out the older, tub showers for stand-alone units to solve the placement issue.
- The heat and exhaust duct in each apartment ran over the shower and needed to be covered. Bestbath fabricated a fiberglass shower dome and featured a recessed maintenance access panel, both of which flowed with the updated design aesthetics.
- A custom "soffit" was fabricated by Bestbath to conceal the toilet and sink plumbing on the adjacent wall, eliminating any need for a drywall soffit, and simplifying future access and maintenance.

"We really wanted each unit to feel residential instead of commercial," said Wilson. "Our desire was to retain a sense of character that would make any

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resident feel at home, but still update the look to be more contemporary.”

Over the past 10 years, housing authorities nationwide have invested more money in construction to make buildings last. The increasing use of life cycle assessments have helped push this trend. Bestbath is unique amongst manufacturers for providing a 30-year warranty on its products, making them an attractive and secure investment for housing projects looking to conform to life cycle assessment guidelines.

Cambridge's elderly population continues to grow, and CHA hopes to meet the social and physical needs of the community through its Supportive Living Program and through further construction of projects such as the Frank J. Manning Apartments. The first phase of construction has been completed and the project is expected to be finished in Fall 2018.



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