



TAYLOR PARK

CONCEPT PLAN

ISU Community Design Lab Spring 2023



Iowa State University Community Design Lab

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OVERVIEW

Taylor Park is a large, historical park located in the heart of Traer, Iowa. The focal point of the park is the community building and gazebo perched atop the ridge that runs diagonally through the site. A vast canopy of mature trees spreads out over the sloping landscape, creating a welcoming, naturalistic environment.

As Traer approached its sesquicentennial, the desire to update the park to maintain its charm and provide a vision for its future had become a priority among many residents. The Polish Up Taylor Park initiative formed as a result.

In fall 2022, the Iowa State University College of Design's Community Design Lab began working with Polish Up Taylor Park to complete an inventory and assessment, host a public input session, and create a concept plan for the park that builds on the goals and vision provided by the public and steering committee. The following plan is intended as a guide to direct future maintenance, enhancement, and development of new projects within the park.



photo credit: chad hunter



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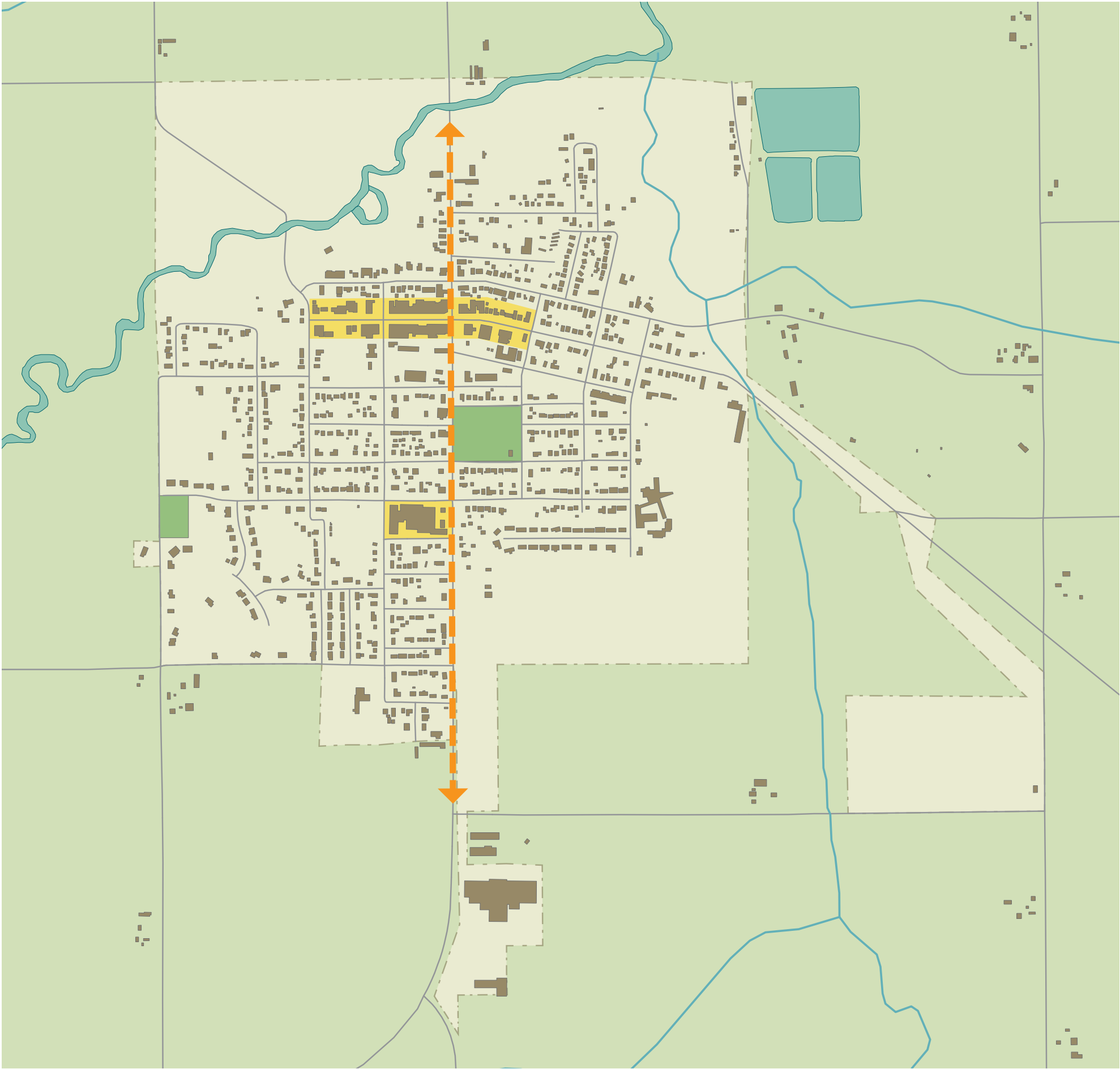


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INVENTORY & ANALYSIS

COMMUNITY CONTEXT



- Taylor Park is in the heart of the community and on the main route through town, making it highly visible
- It is located two blocks or fewer from the school and downtown
- Taylor Park is the only park in the community, making it a vital recreation and social resource
- The park shares a historical and well-established character that is reflected in the downtown and other architecture throughout the community

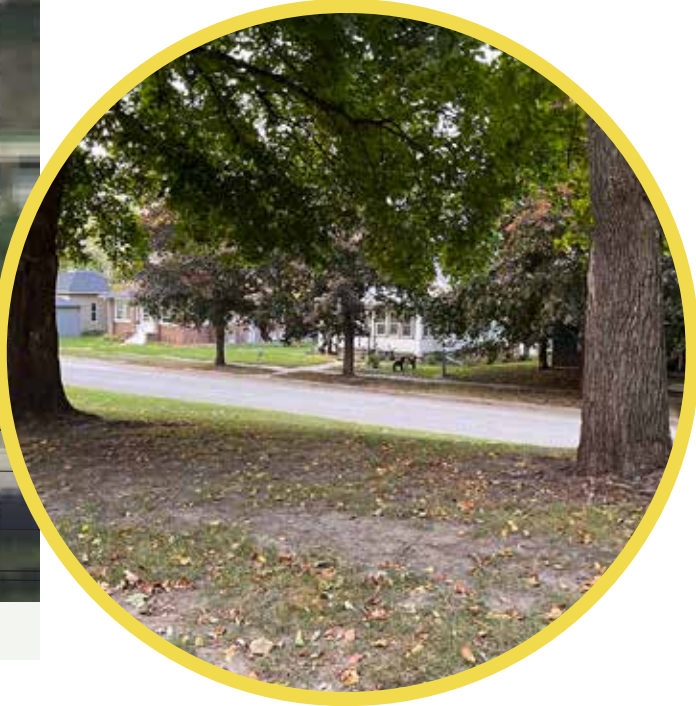
PARK CONTEXT



View of churches on the west side of the park



RESIDENTIAL
CULTURAL

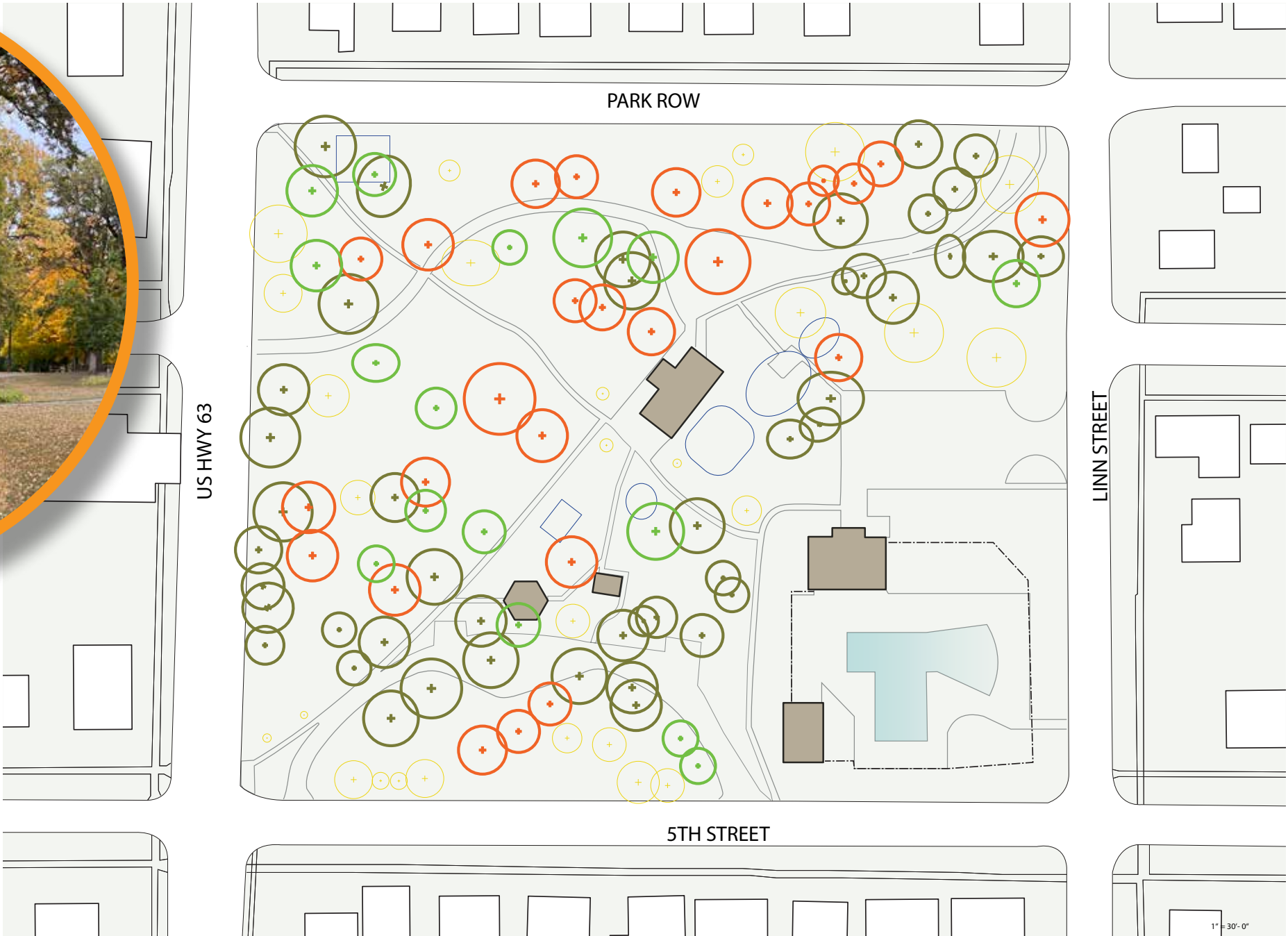


Visual connection to surrounding residences

- The land use surrounding the park is primarily residential, with two churches on the west side
- The park provides recreation opportunities and a beautiful extended front yard for the surrounding properties
- The park is large enough that typical noise coming from it should be minimal
- The surrounding homes look out into the park, which provides safety and security for it
- The park environment is also very visible from cars passing on Hwy 63
- The surrounding residential areas are connected via sidewalks, though the park does not have periphery access

TREE INVENTORY

Summary



PRIMARY TREES

- 45 BUR OAK
- 26 SUGAR MAPLE
- 16 LINDEN

Three dominant species represent 77% of the overall park tree species

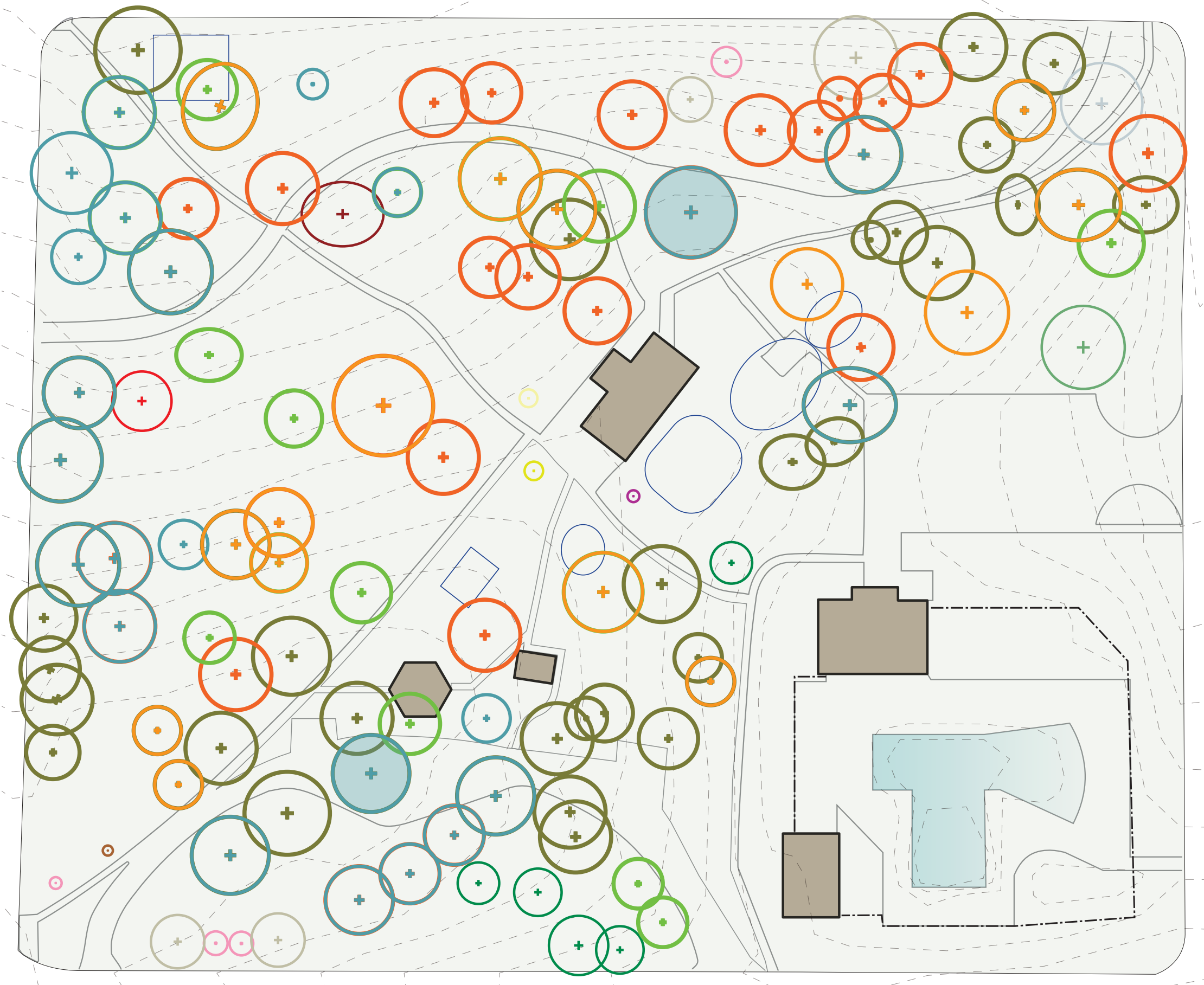
- Bur oaks 40%
- Sugar maples 23%
- Lindens 14%

These species make great park trees, but the dominance of one species can be troubling when diseases and pests arise, such as the Emerald Ash Borer, and have major effects on the community's tree population

- The site is loaded with mature tree
- Good visibility under the canopy
- Varied fall color
- There is only a single conifer/evergreen which limits winter interest
- Some trees were established too close together which can be problematic as they grow

TREE INVENTORY

Species Diversity



115 TREES

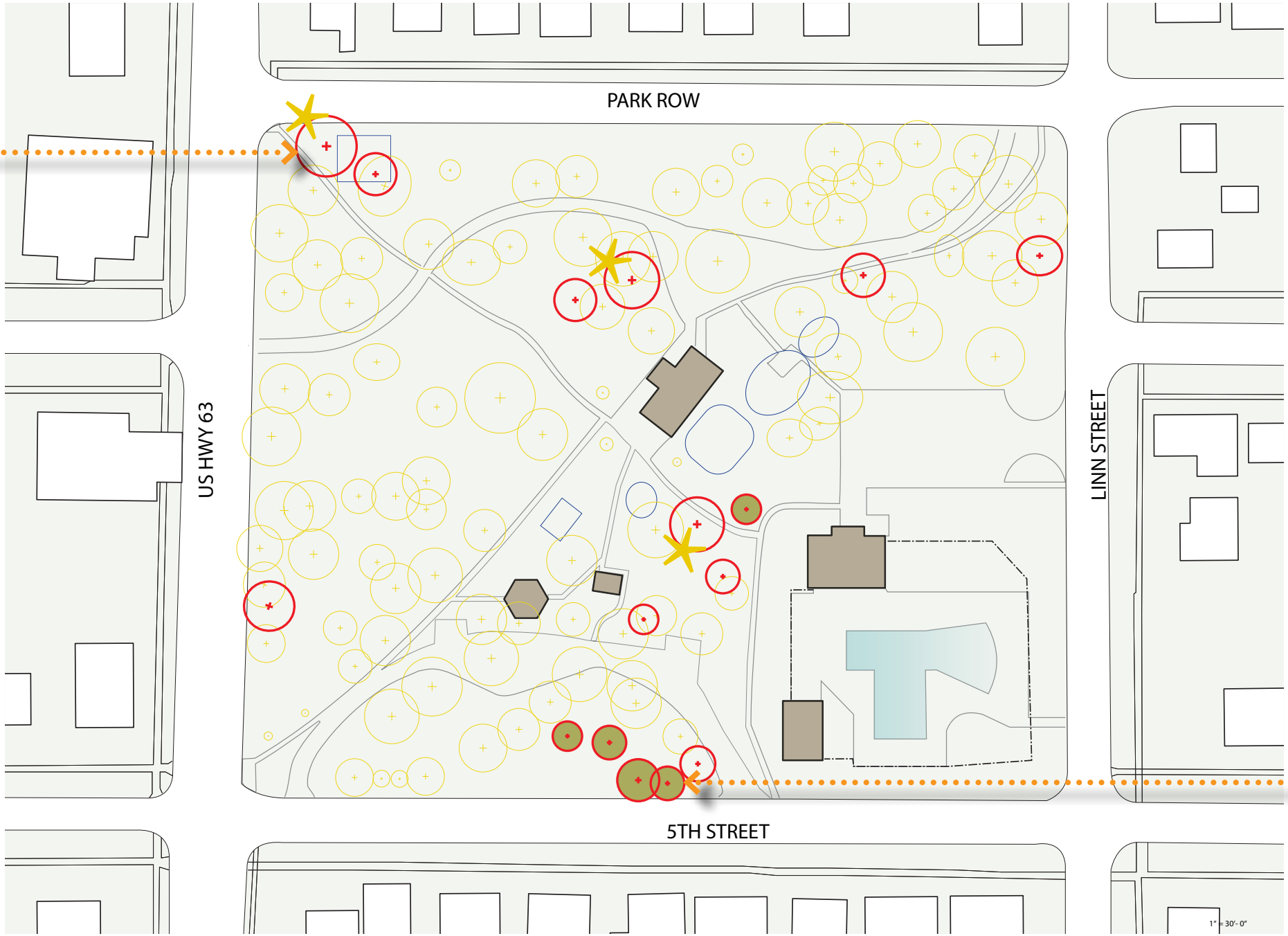
- 45 ○ BUR OAK
- 26 ○ SUGAR MAPLE
- 16 ○ LINDEN
- 5 ○ GREEN ASH
- 4 ○ SILVER MAPLE
- 3 ○ PIN OAK
- RED OAK
- 2 ○ SERVICEBERRY
- CRABAPPLE
- 1 ○ CORKTREE
- HACKBERRY
- WALNUT
- TULIP TREE
- ELM
- BLUE SPRUCE
- SILVER MAPLE
- WHITE OAK
- CATALPA

TREE CONDITION

Trees to Be Removed



The bur oak at the corner of Hwy 63 and Park Row may be suitable for carving if there is enough hardwood remaining



- This map identifies tree species that are damaged and/or are in too close proximity with neighboring trees, which will or is already creating stresses on them
- The starred trees represent bur oaks that could be utilized for trunk carvings

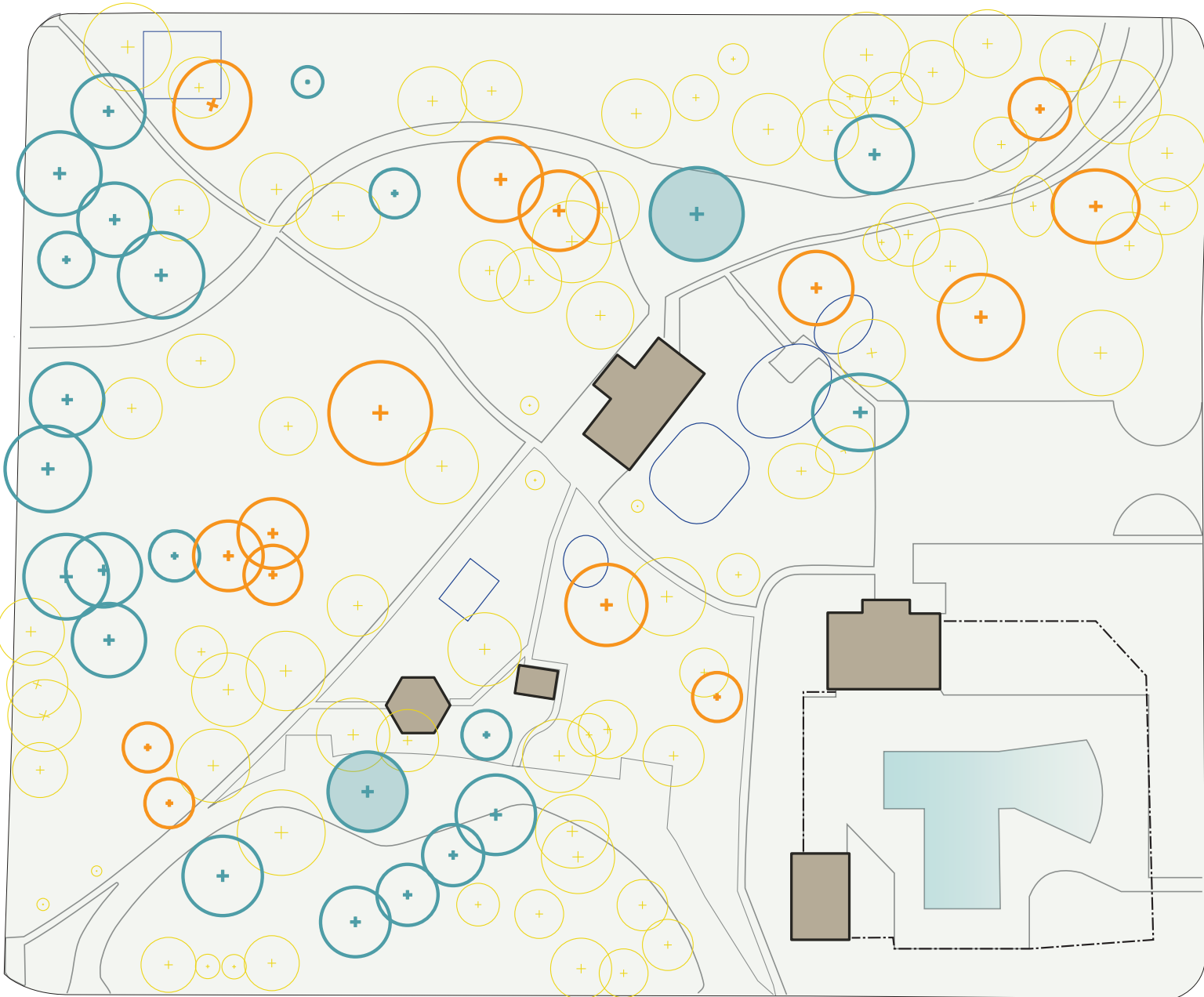
- All the green ash are showing signs of dying off and some have noticeable signs of the Emerald Ash Borer, which will likely spread to other ash trees throughout Traer
- It is a significant number of trees to remove, but it will not greatly affect the canopy because most are located in clusters with other trees



Emerald Ash Borer holes on the green ash along 5th Street

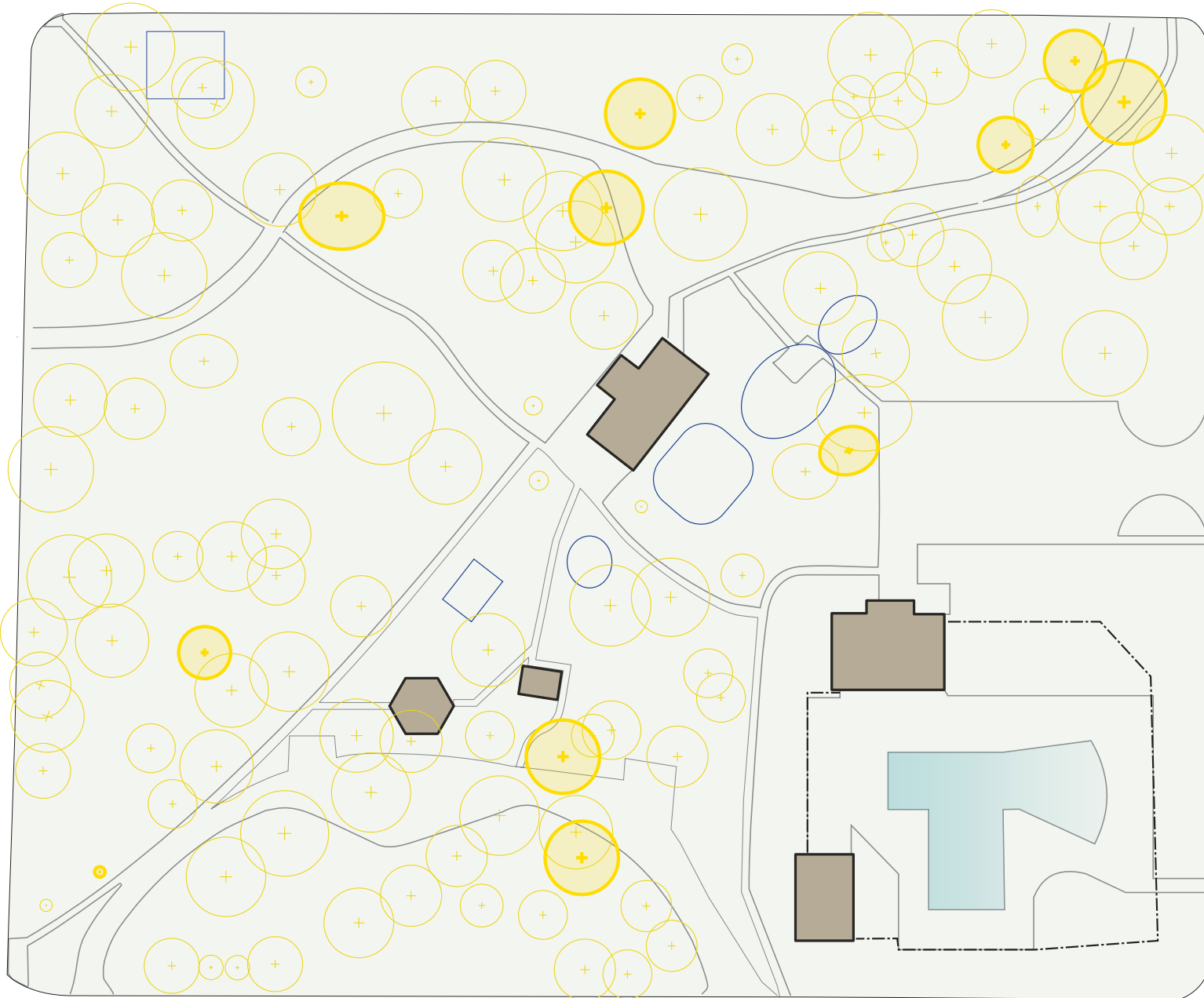
TREE CONDITION

General Maintenance



- Remove dead and broken branches to promote tree health and reduce hazards
- Limb up trees such as lindens and maples to allow more light under them
- Reduce the weight of large, high, or hanging branches to minimize future hazards
- Protect the trees in the parking lots with a buffer to reduce compaction of the roots and add organic material to the base to help promote their future health

- TRIM DAMAGED LIMBS
- GENERAL MAINTENANCE
- PROTECT



- The identified species above exhibit conditions of trees that could be problematic. These should be continually monitored each year to see how they fare and if they start to develop dieback or other problems that may require treatment, trimming or removal

SHADE STUDY



Exposed soil and roots below sugar maples



Pool area and its parking are open and exposed



Parking and popular picnic areas are shaded by high-limbed trees

- Most trees are limbed high enough to allow sunlight to penetrate below them creating opportunities for understory plantings
- Maples and lindens cast deep shade that can make it hard to establish lawn below them; limbing these trees up will establish more groundcover and protect the roots
- Older parking areas are well shaded, while the pool area is fully exposed; This zone could benefit from trees and perennial plantings
- The site has a diverse range of shaded and sunny zones, which could allow for a diverse understory planting as well

CIRCULATION & FLOW

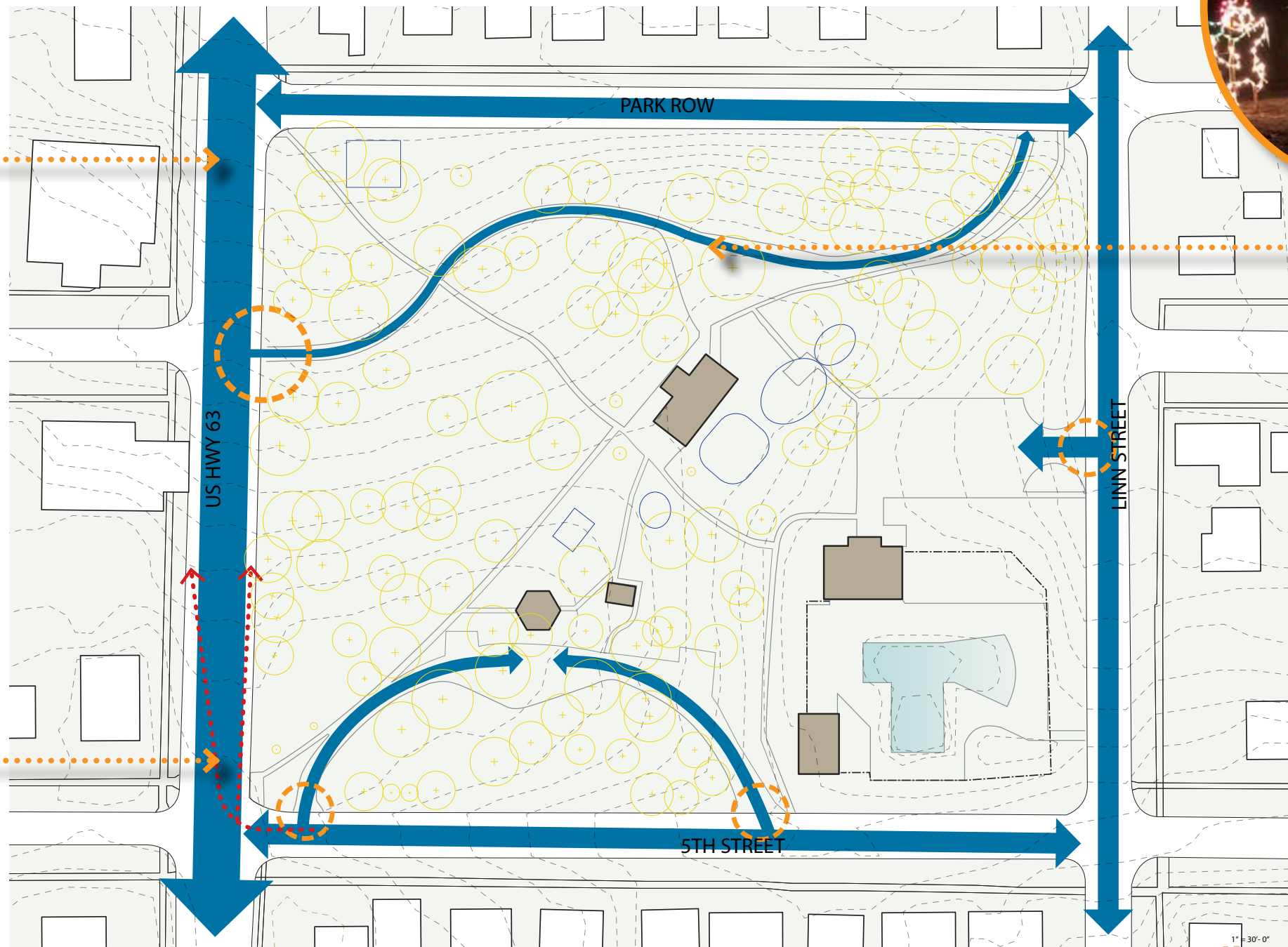
Vehicular



Hwy 63 is a busy road with large vehicles



Views are limited from this intersection because of the hill to the north



Northern path is used for Christmas light display drive-through experience

- Gateway entry could be hard to access because of the speed of highway traffic and the narrow passage through the gate
- The entry on the south is so close to the intersection with the highway that there is little room for vehicles to be out of traffic if they had to wait and another car was coming from behind

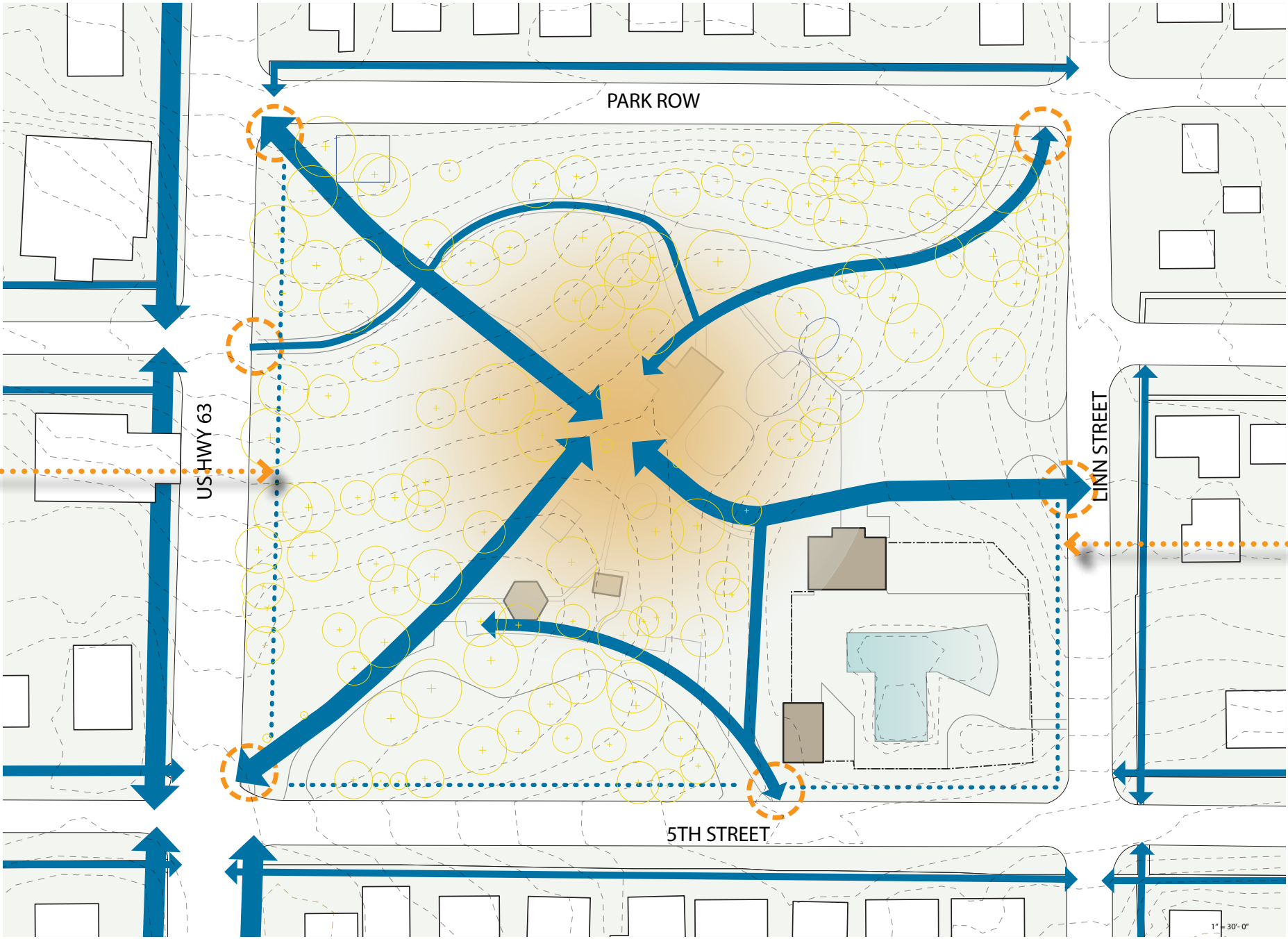
- The entry drive off 5th Street is too narrow for two-way traffic, but there is no designation of a one-way
- The road through the north side of the park provides a scenic drive through the trees

CIRCULATION & FLOW

Pedestrian



Lack of access along the west side, which connects to downtown and the school



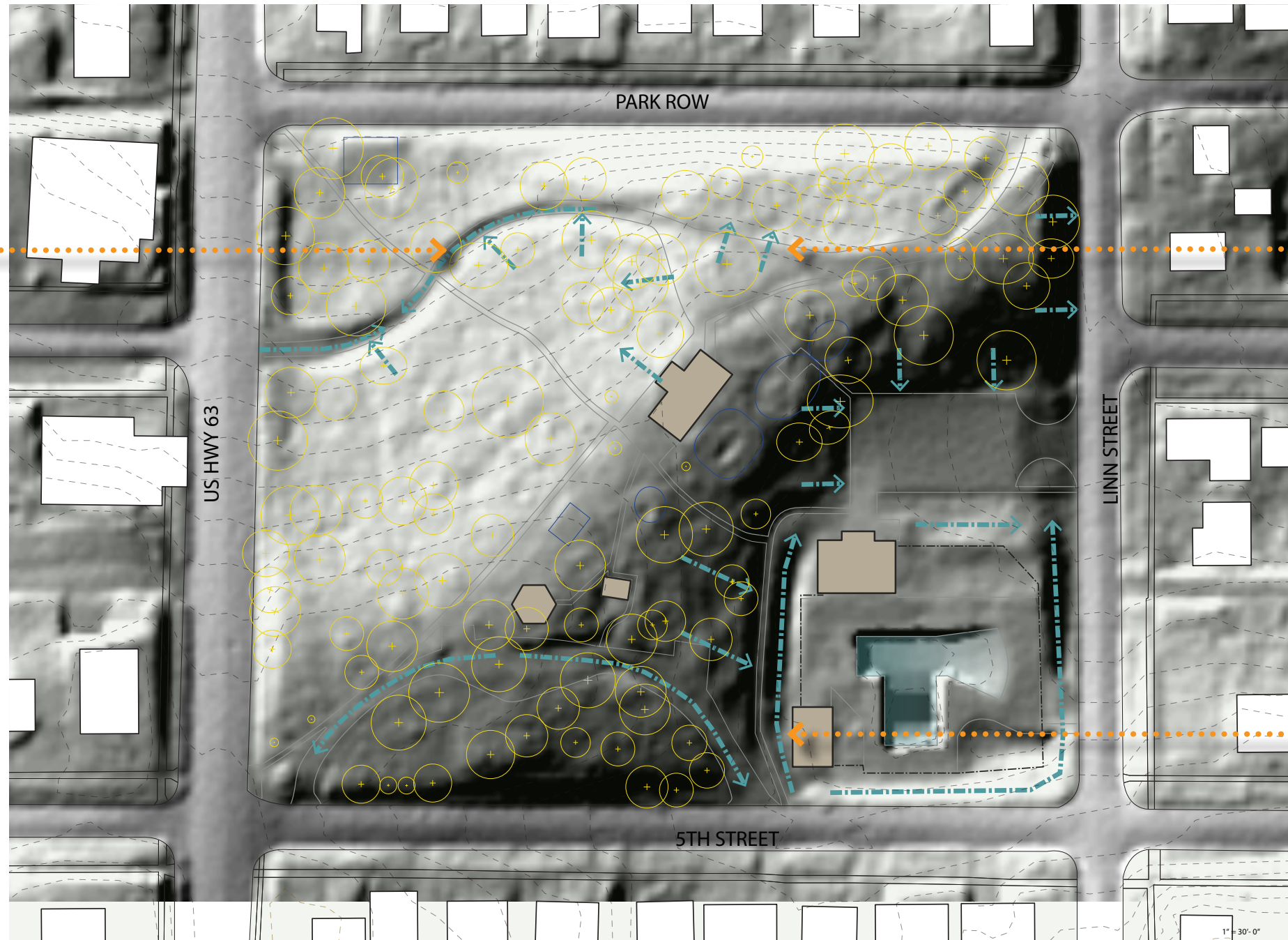
There is no designated access to the pool along the south side of the park or crosswalks leading to pool entrances

- The pedestrian flow on the site leads to the shelter house with no really clear direct flow all the way through the park
- At the point of intersection around the shelter house, paths meet in awkward spaces with no destination or focus
- Because of the slope of the site, it would seem that most visitors stick to the pathways, using the drives and sidewalks
- There are no designated crosswalks to the site
- Circulation is only interior, yet there is a sense that flow should be happening along the periphery

HYDROLOGY



Water flows down the hillside into the driveway, which acts as a swale; erosion is occurring at the edges of the drive



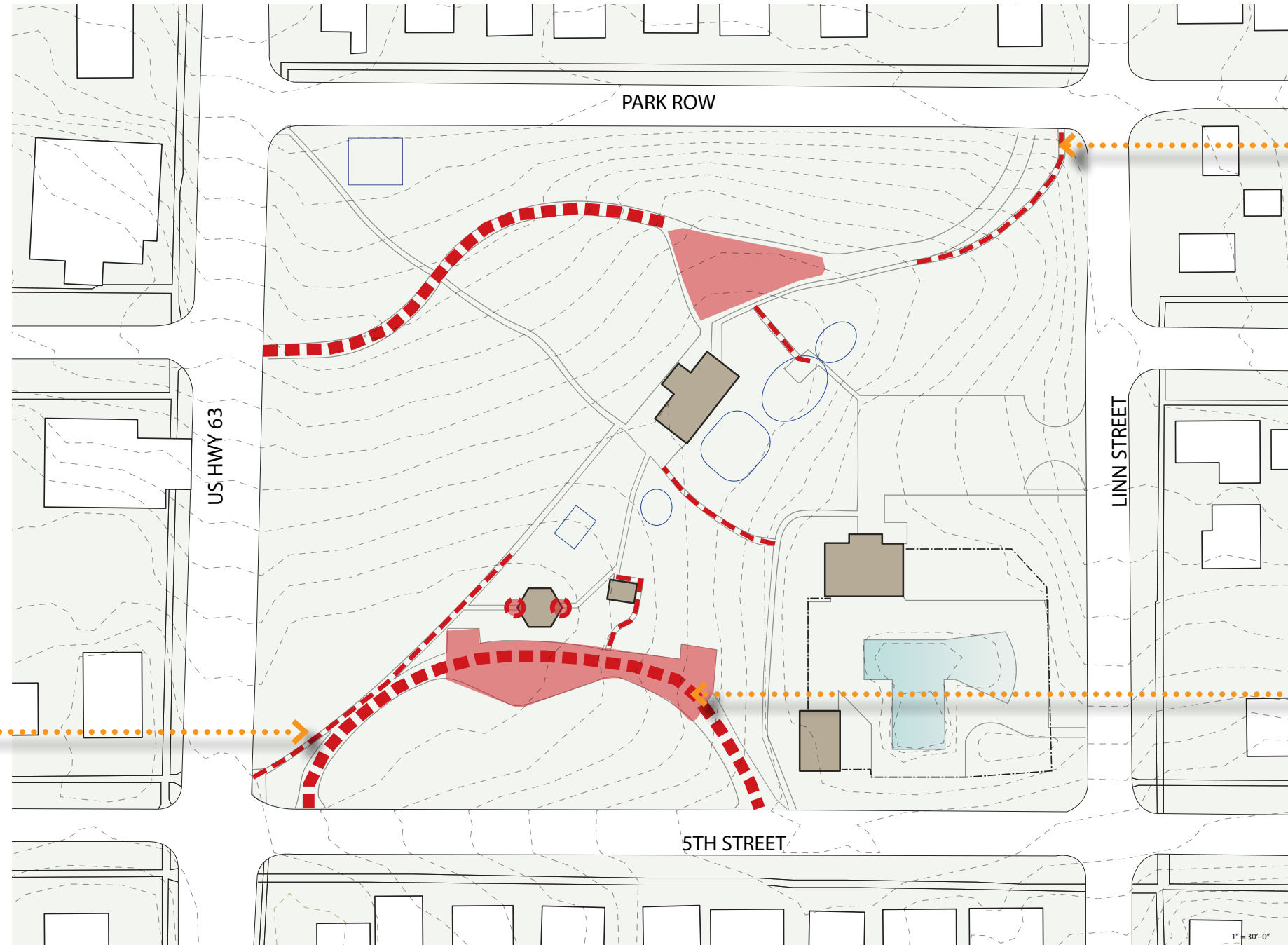
Lack of an edge to the parking lot is allowing the gravel to wash down the hill to the north



Swale on the west side of the pool is capturing water from the hillside and pool area

- A ridge running from the southwest to northeast divides the site in half, directing surface water flow to the northwest and southeast
- The slope across most of the site is shallow enough that there are minimal signs of erosion in the lawn areas
- Stormwater runoff in parking areas and structures is causing ruts in gravel and eroding the landscape around them
- Swales around the pool direct water to end points with no visible drains or vegetation to benefit infiltration

INFRASTRUCTURE CONDITION



Northeast entry has limited accessibility due to aging stairs



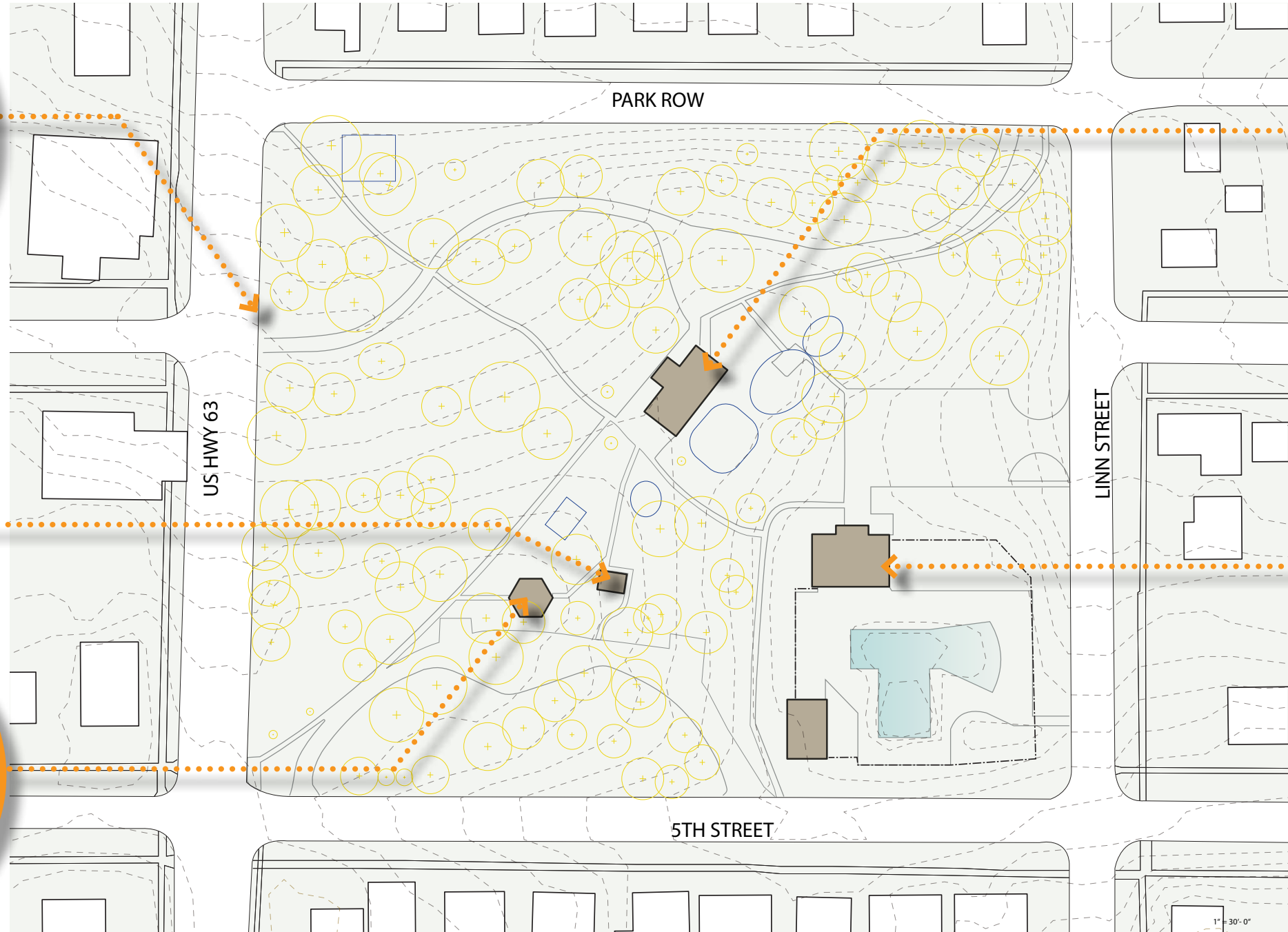
Areas of sidewalk are broken and eroded along primary routes



Ruts have developed in the gravel drive due to stormwater erosion

- Vehicular drives pick up storm water flow, which has created ruts and damage to the surface
- Many of the sidewalks and concrete pads on the west and north sides of the park are aging and broken; near the shelter house and pool conditions are good
- Most sidewalks are narrow, limiting accessibility
- Steeper slopes and stairs to accommodate those slopes impede accessibility into the park along some of the paths
- Parking lots are undefined and the edge has been lost to vegetation and the erosion of the surface material

SITE STRUCTURES



- All the structures in the park vary greatly in their condition, design styles, and materials
- The shelter house and pool are newer structures, but lack a sense of arrival
- The gazebo is in disrepair, but is planned for renovations; the park has only two restrooms, which could be limiting during events

- The entry gate is a beautiful feature and updates are planned for it
- The gateway and the gazebo have a lot of character and could lead the vision for character updates to the park
- Restrooms may be smaller than ADA standards; attached garage could be removed in redesign

PUBLIC INPUT

SUMMARY

A key component of the development of this plan was to engage the public for their input about the park. It was pertinent to understand public perception regarding the current programs and condition of the park, as well as the importance of Taylor Park to the people of Traer. The following pages are a summary of the results of the preference boards, survey, and conversations that were conducted at the event.

Some key goals provided through the feedback include:

- **Build on the natural beauty of the park and the historic charm**
- **Add more and improve the quality of paths for walking and jogging**
- **Enhance and expand the play area**
- **Introduce a variety of designated picnicking spots with permanent tables**
- **Expand and diversify gardens with varying sun/shade conditions**
- **Enhance entry experiences**
- **Improve conditions to create more welcoming social spaces**
- **Increase connections to nature/add pollinator habitat**
- **Define parking with minimal expansion**
- **Be selective in introducing new programming; focus on enhancing those that already exist**

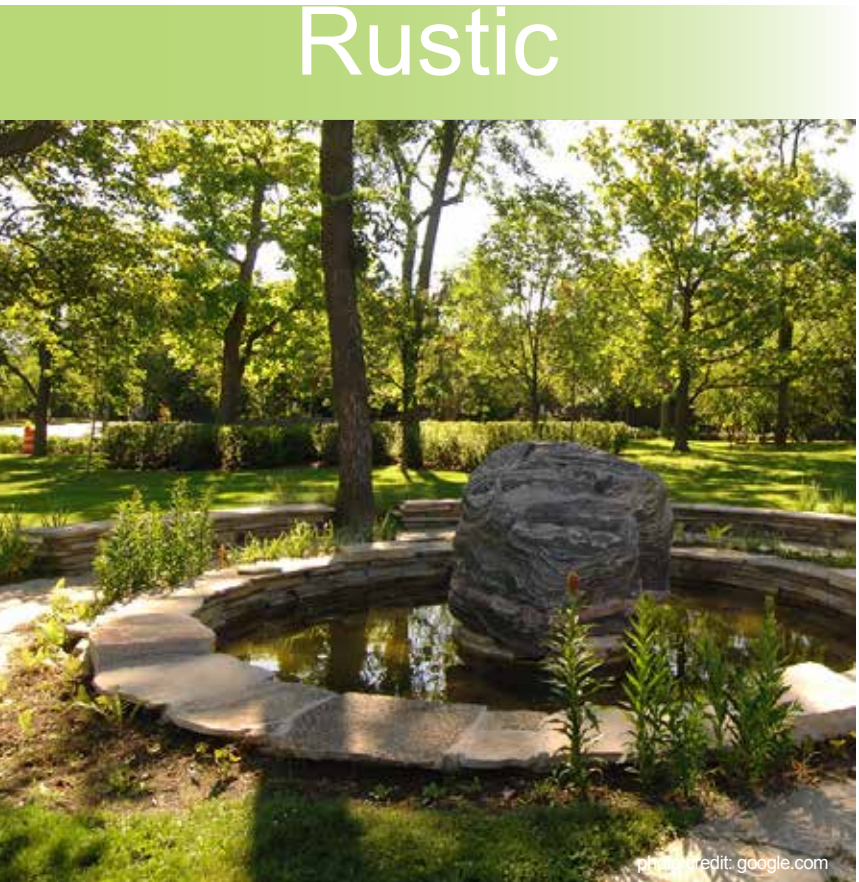
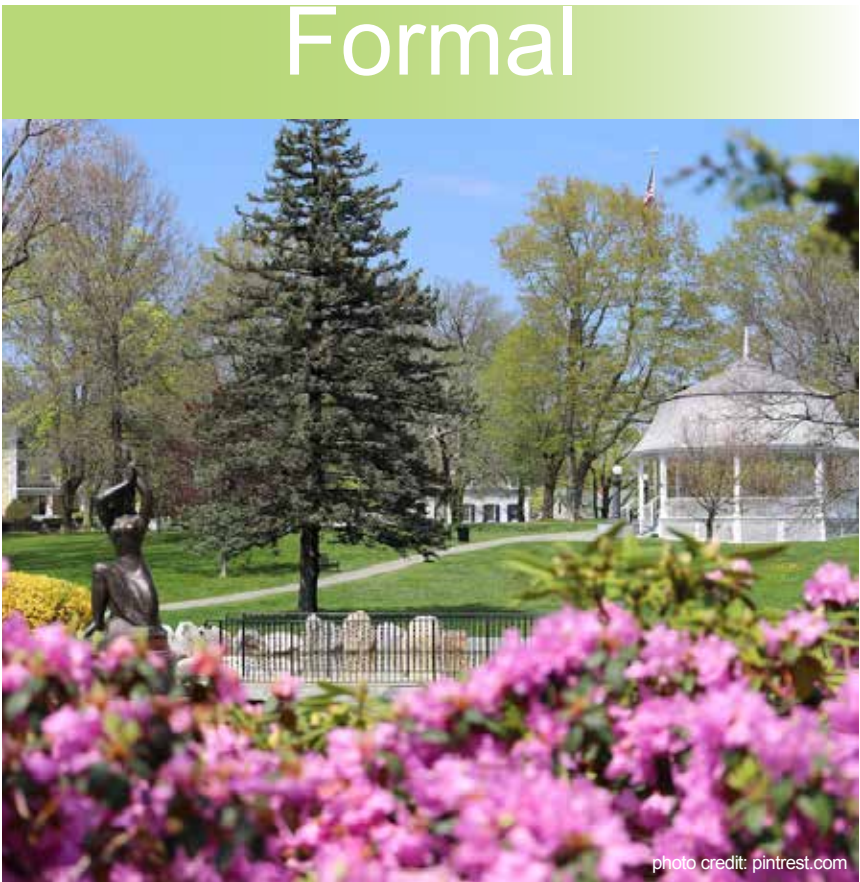


THEME & LANDSCAPE CONCEPTS

Participants were asked to select a theme and style that they feel fit their vision for Taylor Park. A range of “Contemporary,” “Formal,” and “Rustic” options were provided. Twenty-four people provided their feedback. Rustic scored the highest with 13 votes, with formal trailing slightly at 10 votes. These results are reflective of the current park style, which is more rustic in character with its woodland-like tree canopy and a few historical elements that have continued to be the identity for the park. Residents also provided feedback on styles of site furnishings, playscape features, and options for picnic facilities that they preferred.

Goals:

- Enhance natural beauty of the park
- Improve health of existing trees
- Add diversity as new trees are introduced
- Celebrate the historical elements by maintaining the structures and defining them with garden spaces
- Increase and enhance gardens with both natural style and more formal beds near structures and gathering spaces



PROGRAM / ACTIVITY SURVEY

Seventeen residents participated in the survey that asked about the importance of existing and potential programming in Taylor Park. Respondents had the option of providing additional ideas. Many concepts were considered; however, only a couple items were brought up more than once. Those items are included in the list to the right. Many of the other items were addressed in the preference boards or the mapping exercise.

The majority of existing programs were determined to be highly important to preserve and enhance. In terms of potential projects, improved parking, adding pickleball, and creating pollinator habitats were considered important. Splash pad and biking were a toss up between important and unimportant, and skateboarding is considered unimportant for the park. These results seem to show that the current park is already meeting community needs, but that a couple of new programs with more attention directed to enhancements of the existing opportunities would be desired.

Current Programs

	Unimportant	Important	Very Important	
Walking/Jogging	1	6	10	Improve conditions and increase connections
Play/Playground		8	9	Improve and enhance with a blend of built and natural features
Basketball	2	8	6	Update and buffer to keep ball from rolling downhill
Picnicking		5	12	Rethink organization and permanence
Gardens/Gardening		8	9	Expand and create zones based on sun/shade
Pool		5	11	Enhance entry experience
Horseshoes	3	9	3	Better establish
Events/Shelter		4	13	Enhance sense of destination and social capacity
Events/Gazebo		5	12	Enhance character and potential for events
Enjoying Nature/Bird Watching		12	4	Maintain with some upgrades

Potential Programs

	Unimportant	Important	Very Important	
Splash Pad	7	7		Minimal interventions
Biking	5	5		Incorporate potential for bikes along perimeter paths
Parking		10	4	Enhance and reinforce existing
Pickleball	4	7	2	Define an option for a future location
Skateboarding	8	4	1	Create conducive paths, but do not prioritize it as a feature
Pollinator Habitat/ Conservation	2	10	4	For use in key drainage areas and enhance gardens with native plants
Other 1... <u>disc golf</u>			2	Not enough space for a course but a couple of goals could be included
Other 2... <u>sand volleyball</u>			2	A potential future location could be shown
Other 3... <u>relocate/hide trash</u>			2	Determine new options for locations and buffers

MAPPING ASSETS, BARRIERS, & OPPORTUNITIES

The third component of the engagement event involved participants gathering around site plan, sharing stories, and mapping concerns, goals, and opportunities they see for Taylor Park. The mapping process brought up a few other desires and concerns that will be addressed in the design concepts moving forward.

- Enhance circulation around the perimeter of the park
- Utilize curving paths to increase interest
- Light the perimeter paths along Hwy 63 (potentially utilizing the historical lighting from downtown)
- Widen and level sidewalks
- Highlight memorials
- Introduce conifers (larch)
- Introduce shrub-level plantings and more low-maintenance gardens
- Explore using permeable paving options where appropriate
- Provide seating within gardens
- Create a design for the bathroom that makes it work with the gazebo and/or relocate it
- Encourage physical activity through the design
- Provide places for parents to relax around the play areas
- Create more social opportunities
- Develop a seating area around the gazebo for events
- Increase the experience of the park from the highway
- Tie the veterans memorial into the design
- Alternative options to stairs on the northeast corner





DESIGN CONCEPTS

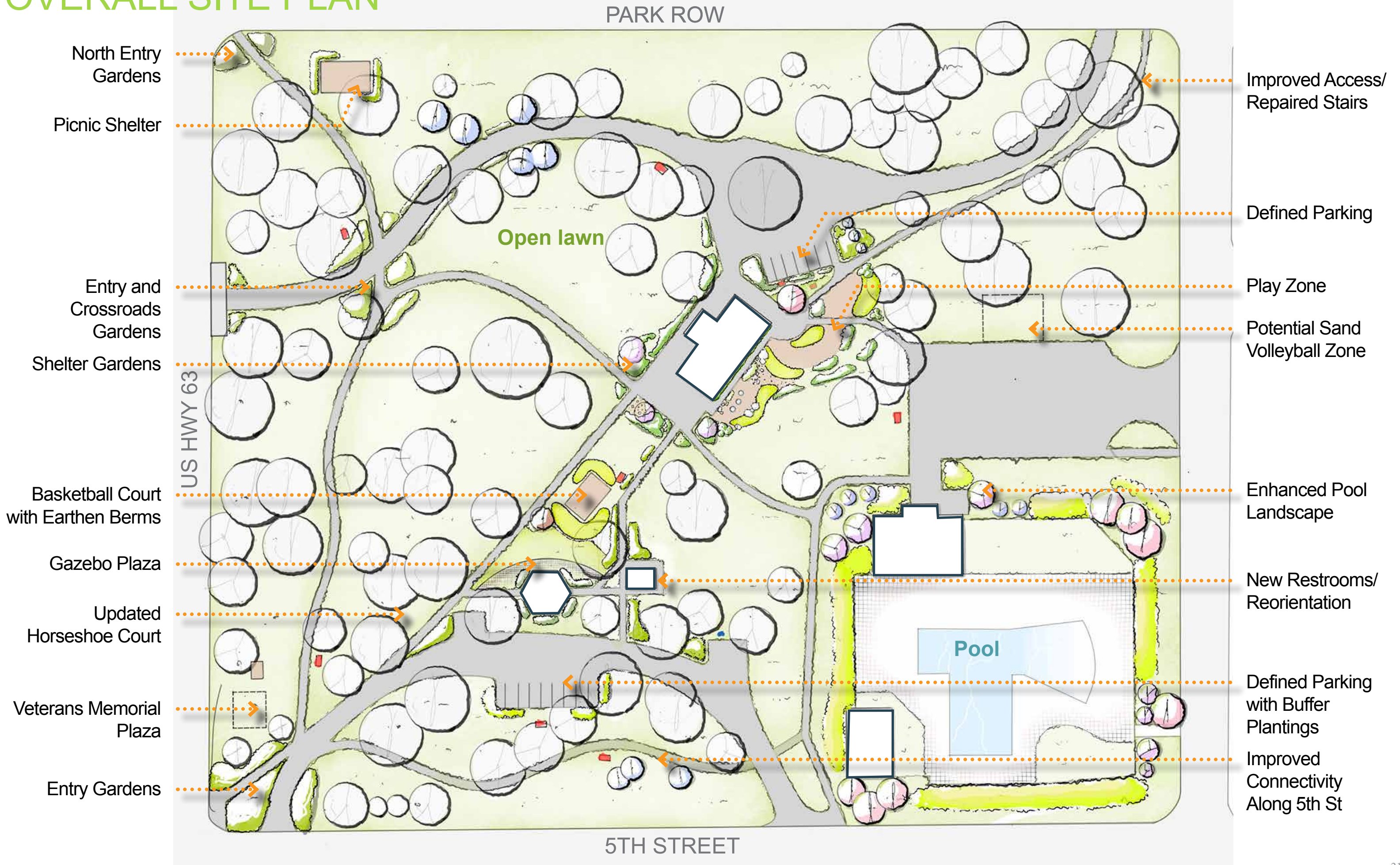
GUIDING PRINCIPLES

A series of guiding principles, goals and desires garnered through public engagement and input received through the Polish Up Taylor Park committee directed the development of the following design concepts for Taylor Park.

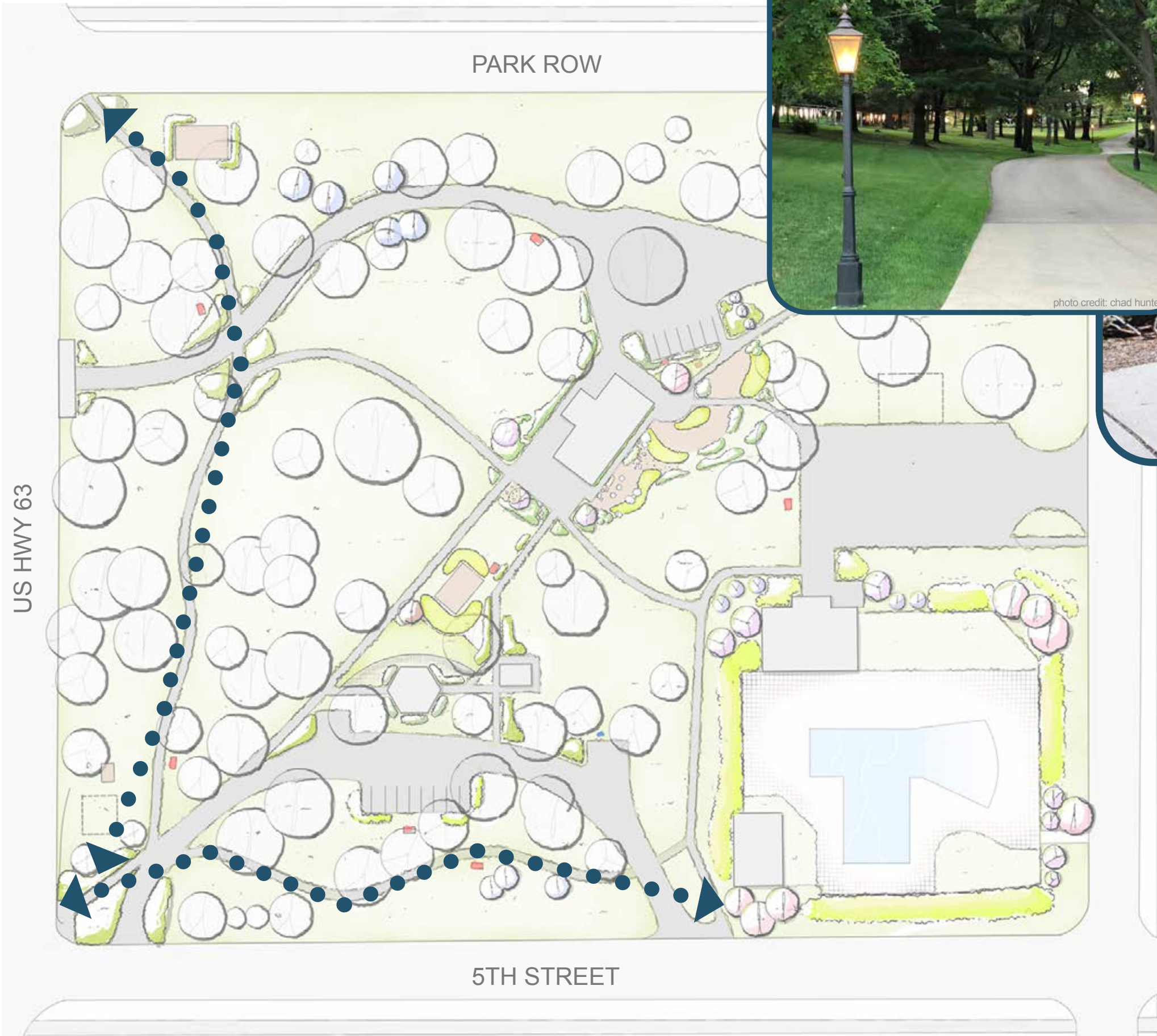
- Maintain existing park organization and infrastructure framework
- Enrich the programmatic elements with design updates that will encourage greater use of and appreciation for the park, as well as provide more opportunities to increase social gatherings
- Utilize vegetation and other landscape feature to define spaces and places within the park, and enhance the experience along its pathways
- Improve connectivity and accessibility along the perimeter of the park and to key amenities



OVERALL SITE PLAN



CIRCULATION

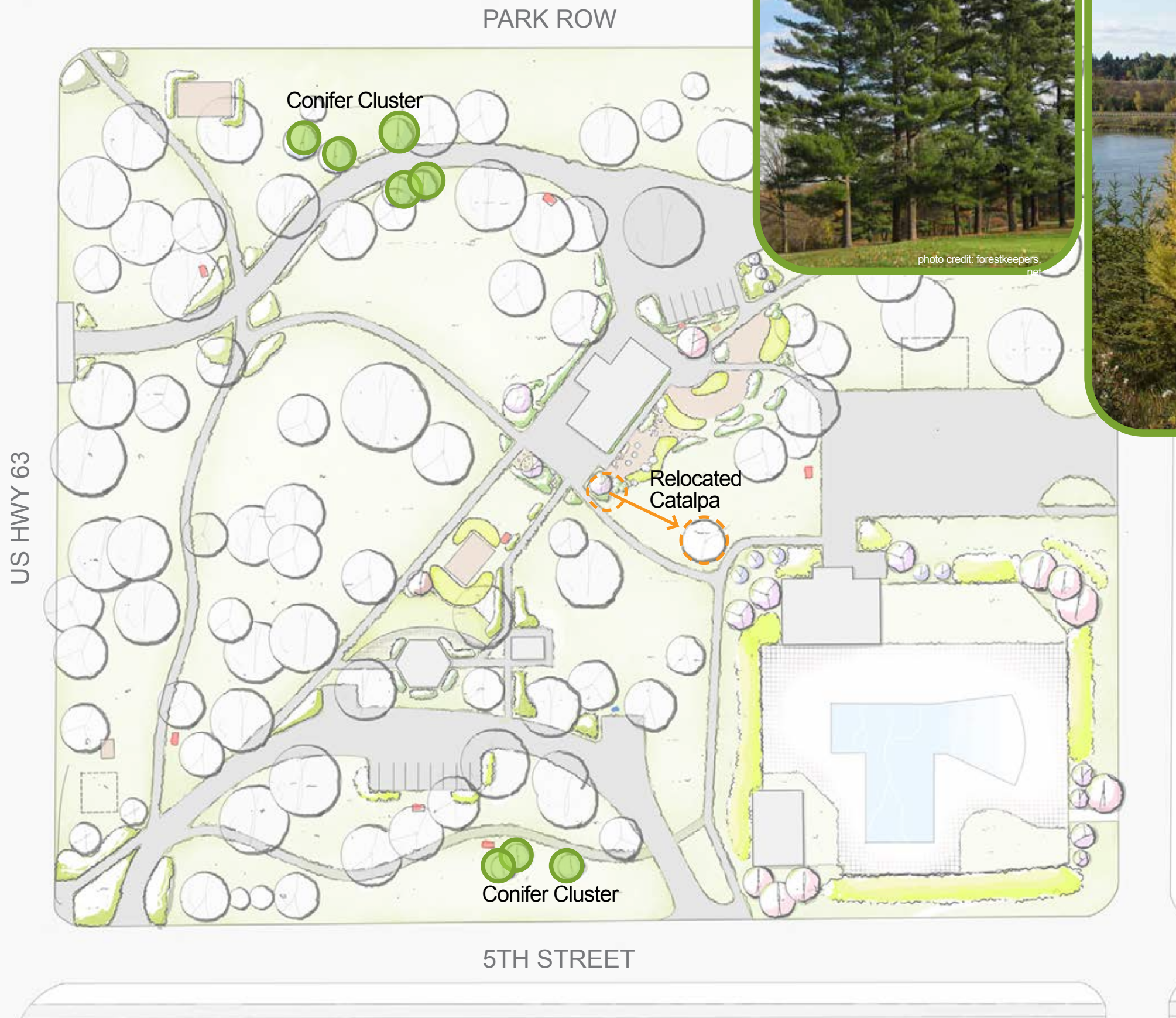


Extend connections

- New paths adjacent to the highway and 5th Street
- Paths meander through the trees
- Additional understory plantings will enhance the route along the highway
- Lighting along path, select fixtures that build on the downtown historical aesthetic

PLANTING STRATEGIES

Conifers & Overstory Trees



Diversifying the tree canopy

- Conifers are proposed along the north drive entry and the new path on the south edge of the park. Potential species are: White Fir, Black Hills Spruce, Eastern White Pine, and American Larch
- If additional deciduous shade trees are added to the park, select species where one or two are already present in the park (e.g., elm, catalpa)
- Understory plantings identified in the plans may include ornamental trees and large shrubs (i.e. serviceberry, crabapple, viburnum)

PLANTING STRATEGIES

Sun Exposure



- Full Shade
- Part Shade
- Part Sun to Full Sun
- Full Sun

Selecting plants

The well developed tree canopy creates a diversity of sun exposure throughout the park. Vegetation should be selected for its ability to thrive under various light conditions. Each planting bed has been highlighted to show the anticipated sun exposure for each location. Further on-the-ground observations should be made before making final plant selections. Many flowering plants will tolerate some shade, but will produce fewer flowers and may have less dense foliage as a result.

PLANTING STRATEGIES

Plant Palette Suggestions

Full to Part Shade

PERENNIALS

- Allium
- Astilbe
- Bleeding Hearts
- Canadian Wild Ginger
- Columbine
- Coral Bells
- Creeping Phlox
- Ferns
- Hostas
- Japanese Pachysandra
- Ligularia
- Lily of the Valley
- Lilyturf
- Pennsylvania Sedge
- Wild Geranium
- Wood Sedge

Part or Full Sun

FLOWERING NATIVE PERENNIALS

- Aster
- Blue False Indigo
- Blue Flag Iris
- Culvers Root
- Gentian
- Golden Alexanders
- Purple Coneflower
- Sweet Joe Pye Weed

NATIVE GRASSES

- Blue Grama
- Little Bluestem
- Northern Sea Oats
- Pennsylvania Sedge
- Prairie Dropseed
- Side-oats Grama
- Switchgrass

SHRUBS (Part Shade)

- Annabelle Hydrangea
- Bottlebrush Buckeye
- Pagoda Dogwood
- Oakleaf Hydrangea
- Witchhazel

Full Sun

FLOWERING NATIVE PERENNIALS

- Beebalm
- Butterfly Milkweed
- Gayfeather
- Mountain Mint
- Showy Goldenrod
- Whorled Milkweed
- Wild Indigo
- Yellow Coneflower

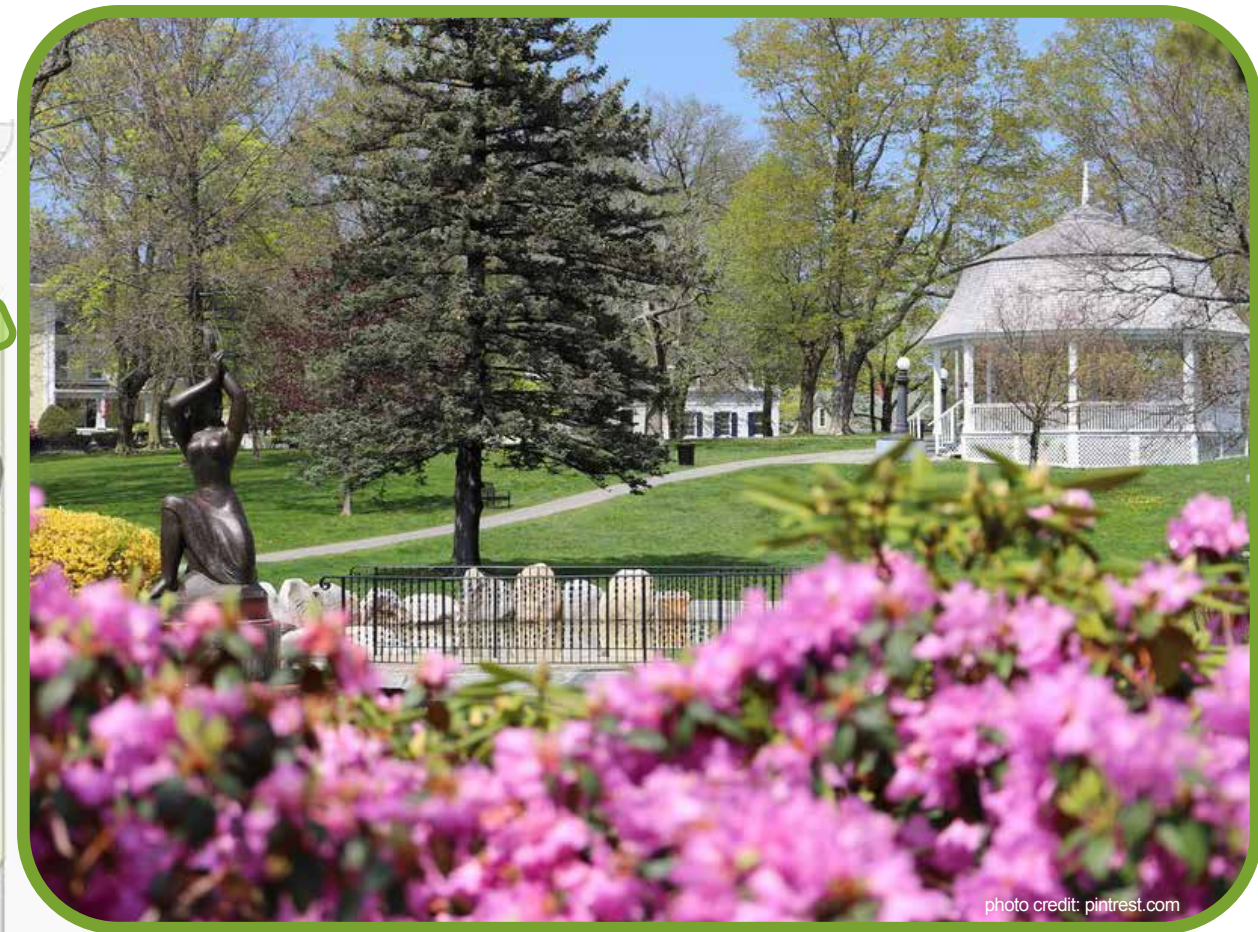
ORNAMENTAL GRASSES

- Karl Forester Grass
- Maiden Hair Grass

SHRUBS/ORNAMENTAL TREES

- Beautyberry
- Eastern Redbud
- Grey Owl Juniper
- Miss Kim Lilac
- Northern Bayberry
- Redtwig Dogwood
- Rugosa Rose
- Serviceberry
- Taylor Juniper

ENTRY LANDSCAPES



Establish gateways

- Formal garden beds will mark entry points into the park on the northwest and southwest corners
- Plantings around the historical gate and extending along the drive will enhance the entry experience for vehicular traffic as well
- Native plants will be encouraged in the bed mixes
- The northwest corner is also a prime location for a stump carving, which would be incorporated into the planting bed
- Beds on the southwest corner would extend to tie in the war memorial site
- The northeast corner should receive updates to the stairs and minimal planting enhancements

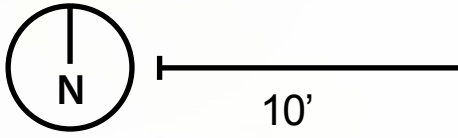
ENTRY LANDSCAPES

Southwest Entry Concept A

The following entry planting-bed design scenarios are intended as inspiration for what could be in these spaces. The goal is to create a lush, welcoming entry landscape full of textures and colors. Gardeners from Traer can use these as a jumping-off point for their designs. Both scenarios envision turfgrass filling the remainder of this vegetated island between the driveway and sidewalk. A minimum of a two-foot mow strip should be maintained around the bed to protect the plants from vehicles and salt-spray.

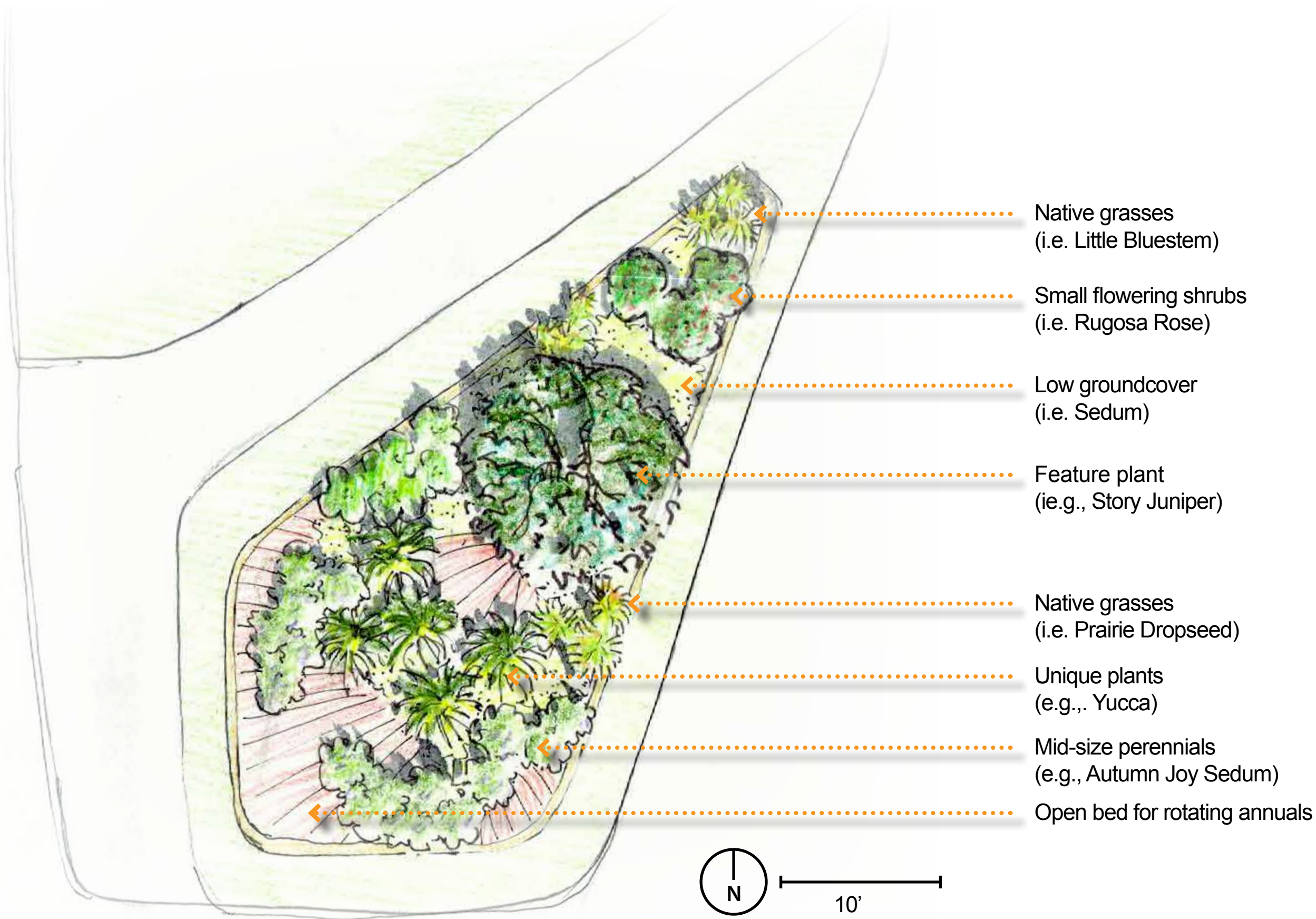


- Low groundcover (i.e. Sedum)
- Mid-size perennials (e.g., Autumn Joy Sedum)
- Conifer shrubs (e.g., Grey Owl Juniper)
- Ornamental Flowering Tree (e.g., Serviceberry)
- Mid-size flowering shrub (e.g., Rugosa Rose)
- Native grasses (e.g., Prairie Dropseed or Little Bluestem)
- Open bed for rotating annuals
- Mid-size perennials (e.g., Autumn Joy Sedum)



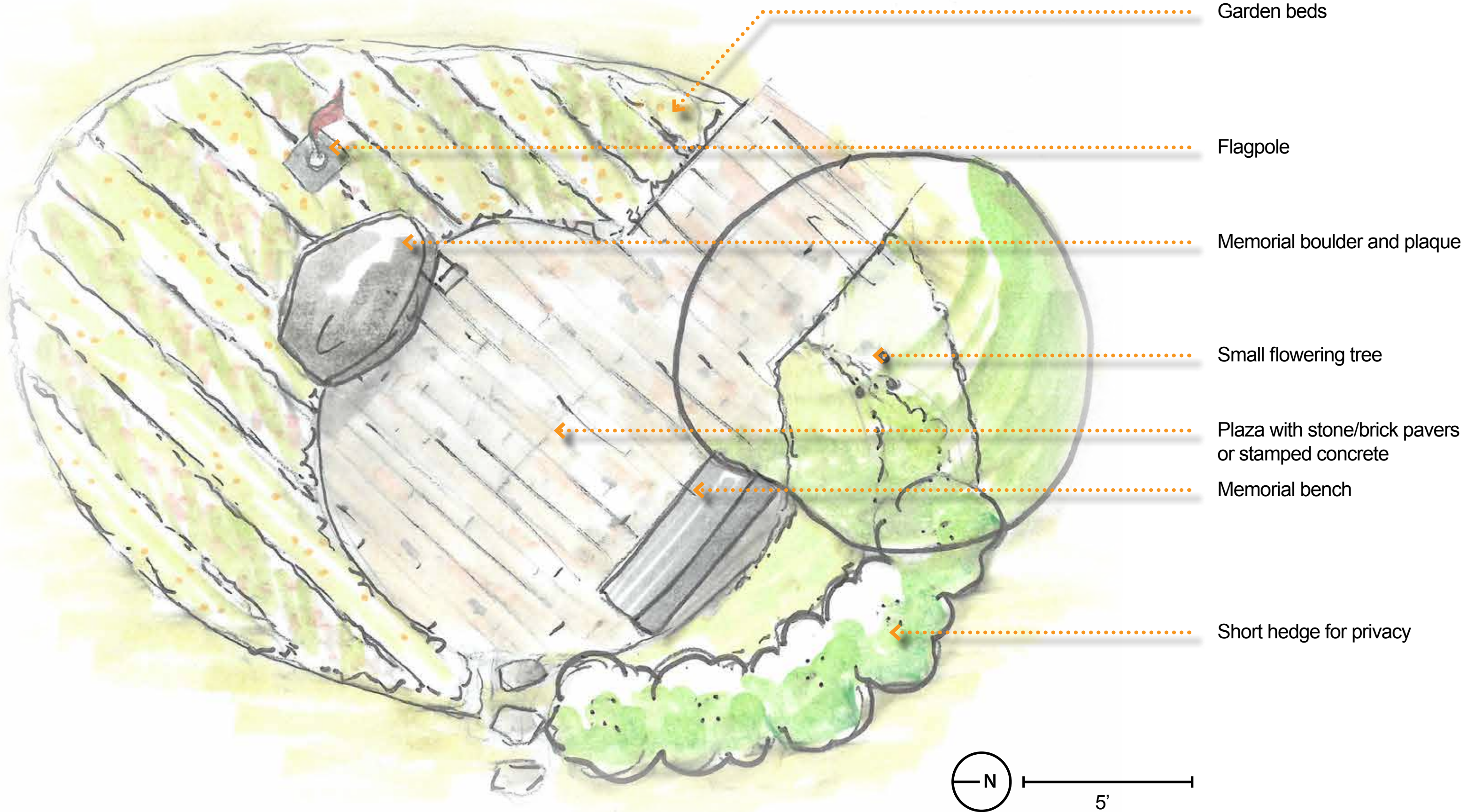
ENTRY LANDSCAPES

Southwest Entry Concept B



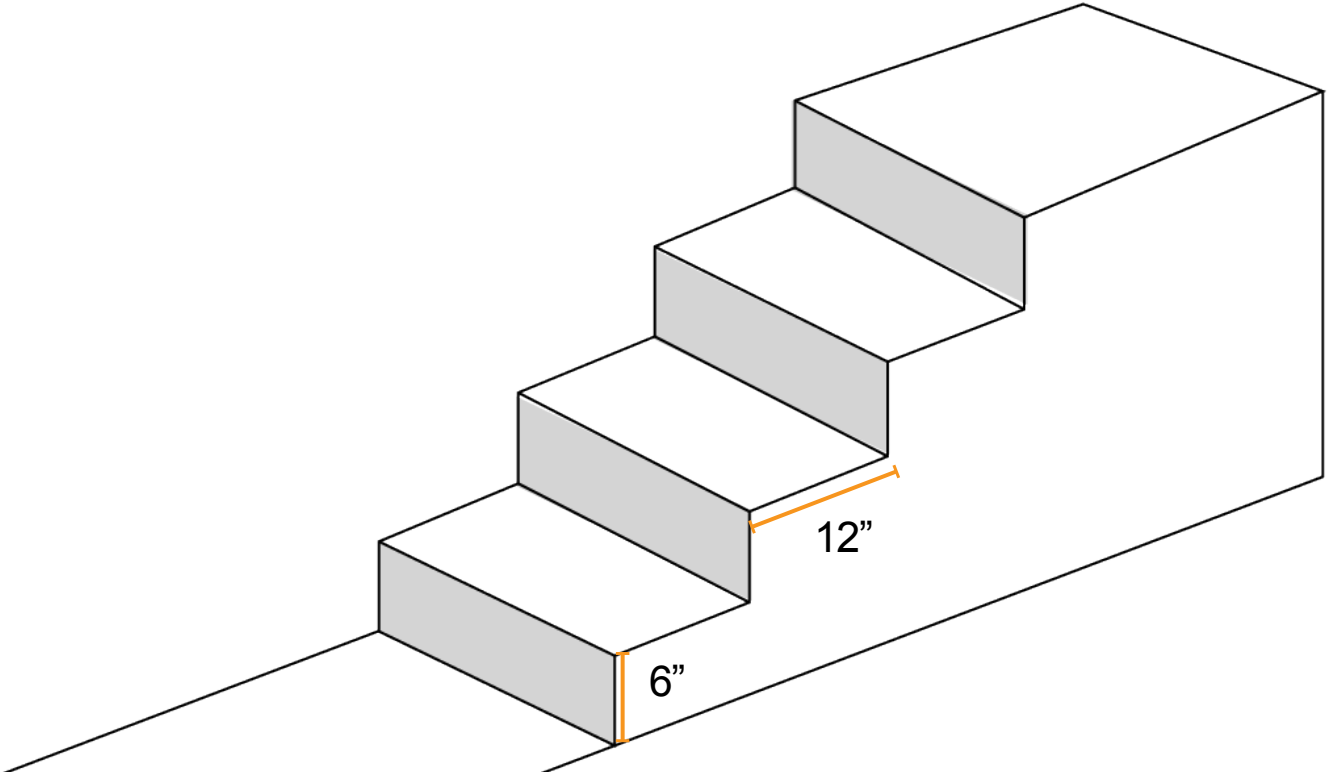
ENTRY LANDSCAPES

Veterans Memorial Plaza Concept

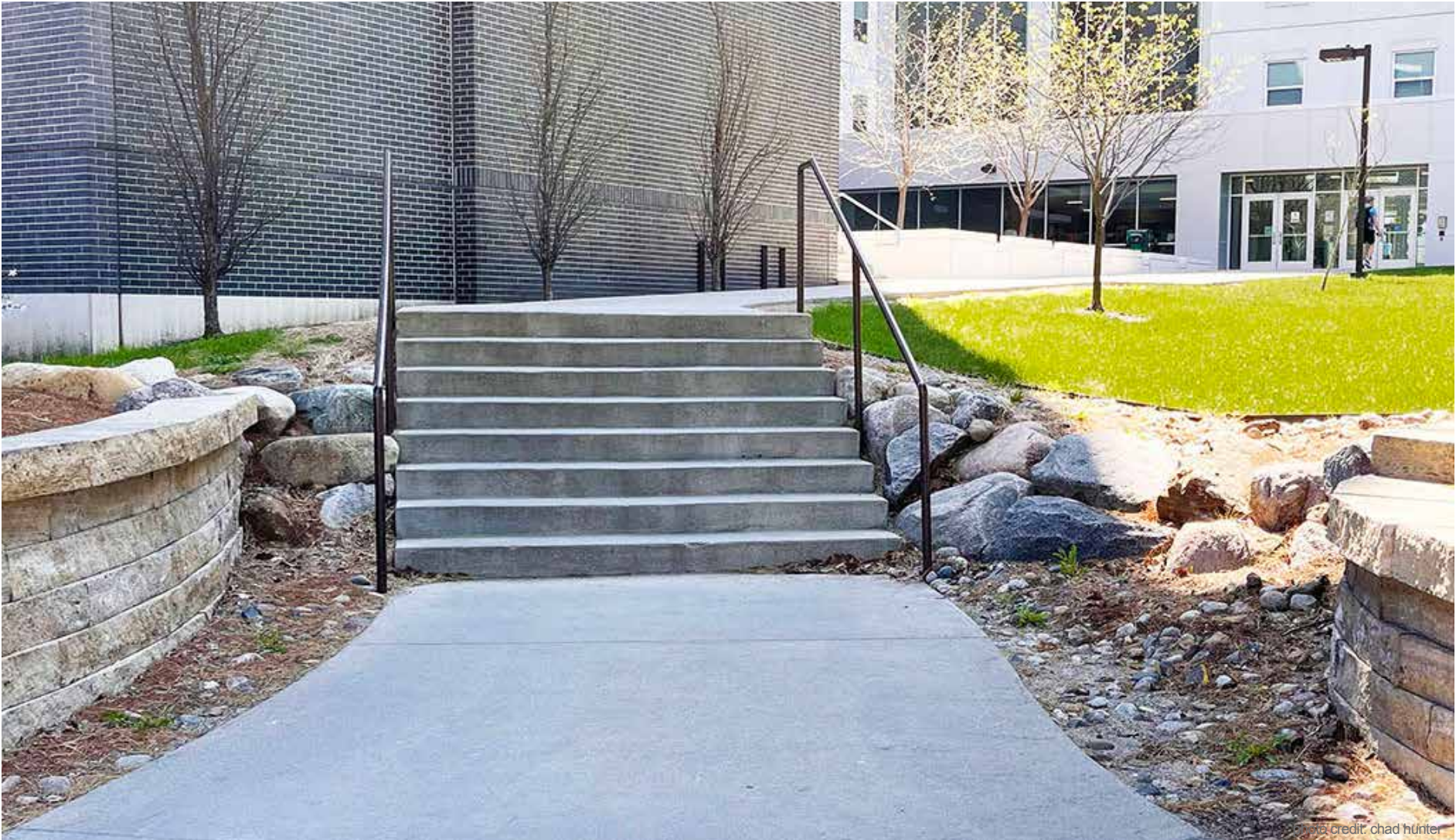


ENTRY LANDSCAPES

Northeast Entry Stairs



- The current pedestrian entry point from the northeast is limited in accessibility due to broken, uneven paths and a deteriorating set of stairs
- The risers and treads of the stairs are disproportionate based on current universal access standards
- New stairs should have a riser height of 6" and tread of 12"
- Stonework and plantings could be utilized to enhance the stairs to create a more prominent point of entry



CENTRAL HUB



Create destinations

- A mix of swaths of native plants and formal beds will enhance the landscape surrounding the shelter house
- The plantings will create a more diverse and engaging focal point at the crossroads of the major paths through the park
- These beds tie together surrounding programmed spaces as they cross multiple pathways and define a large open lawn extending out from the building

CENTRAL HUB

Shelter Updates

- Addition of arch detail from gazebo introduced in between posts
- Native planting mass as foundation planting on the west side to ground the shelter in the site and help manage erosion from storm water runoff



Concept for community shelter and surrounding landscape updates



photo credit: chad hunter

PLAYSCAPE ENHANCEMENTS



Update & grow play zone

- Mix off-the-shelf play structures with nature play elements
- Utilize plantings, stone, and earthwork to merge the various play areas and styles
- Native plantings along the building to manage erosion from water coming off the building and paving
- Picnic area and seating to accommodate for parents/guardians

PLAYSCAPE ENHANCEMENTS

Shelter Gardens & Playscape & Plan

Buffer around existing maple in parking area

Defined parking

Picnic area

Native border planting

Open Lawn

Shelter House

Existing shade tree replaced with ornamental

Small seating area under flowering tree

Small playground in mulched zone

Earthen berm

Sand play

Entry plaza with donor pavers

Discovery trail

Large playground zone

Adventure play zone

Earthen berm



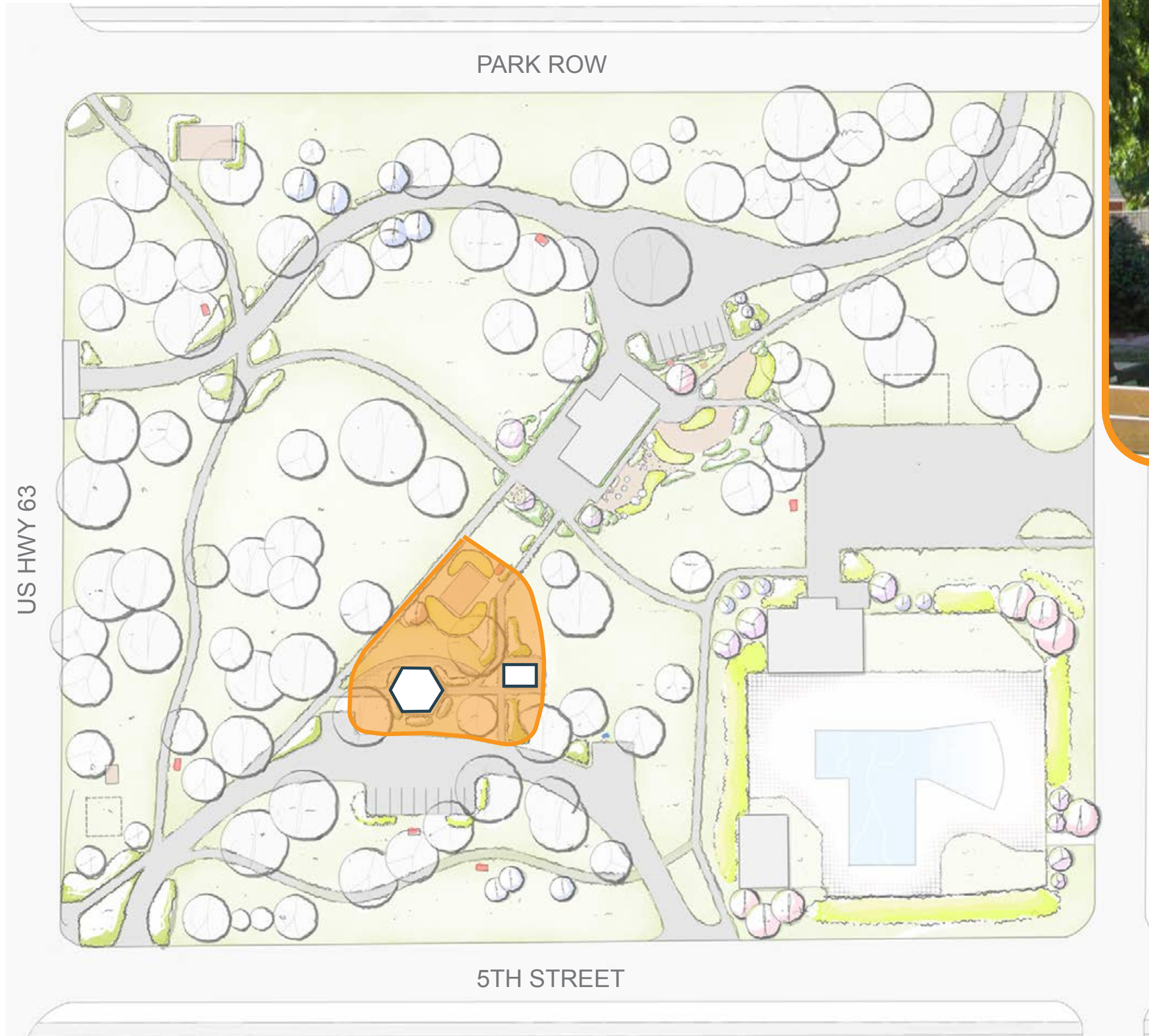
PLAYSCAPE ENHANCEMENTS

Playscape Concepts



- The new play area will blend the off-the-shelf play equipment with natural play elements creating one larger play zone
- Plantings, earth mounds, and natural stone features will create the borders of this space and integrate it with the park landscape

GAZEBO PLAZA



Increase social capacity

- Create plaza area to the north of the gazebo for gathering
- Berm around the basketball court will help prevent balls from rolling downhill and provide a seating option for the court and plaza
- Understory plantings and formal garden beds will help create a more cohesive identity between the gazebo and restroom structure
- A new restroom structure is suggested

GAZEBO PLAZA

Site Plan



Picnic area

Earthen berm to contain basketball and act as amphitheater seating for gazebo plaza

Buffer plantings

New restroom with paths surrounding it

Donor plaza with engraved pavers

Updated gazebo and surrounding plantings

Shrub plantings to buffer dumpster location

Defined pull-in parking for 7-8 cars with buffer plantings

Picnic area

GAZEBO PLAZA

Restroom Updates

- New restroom with white siding, brick veneer, and architectural details to match gazebo and potential shelter updates
- Intersecting gable roof with metal panels to play off the form and materials of the shelter
- Reoriented to align with other site structures and updated circulation
- Foundation plantings and buffer plantings to embed it in the landscape



Accessible restroom concept with drinking fountain



photo credit: chad hunter

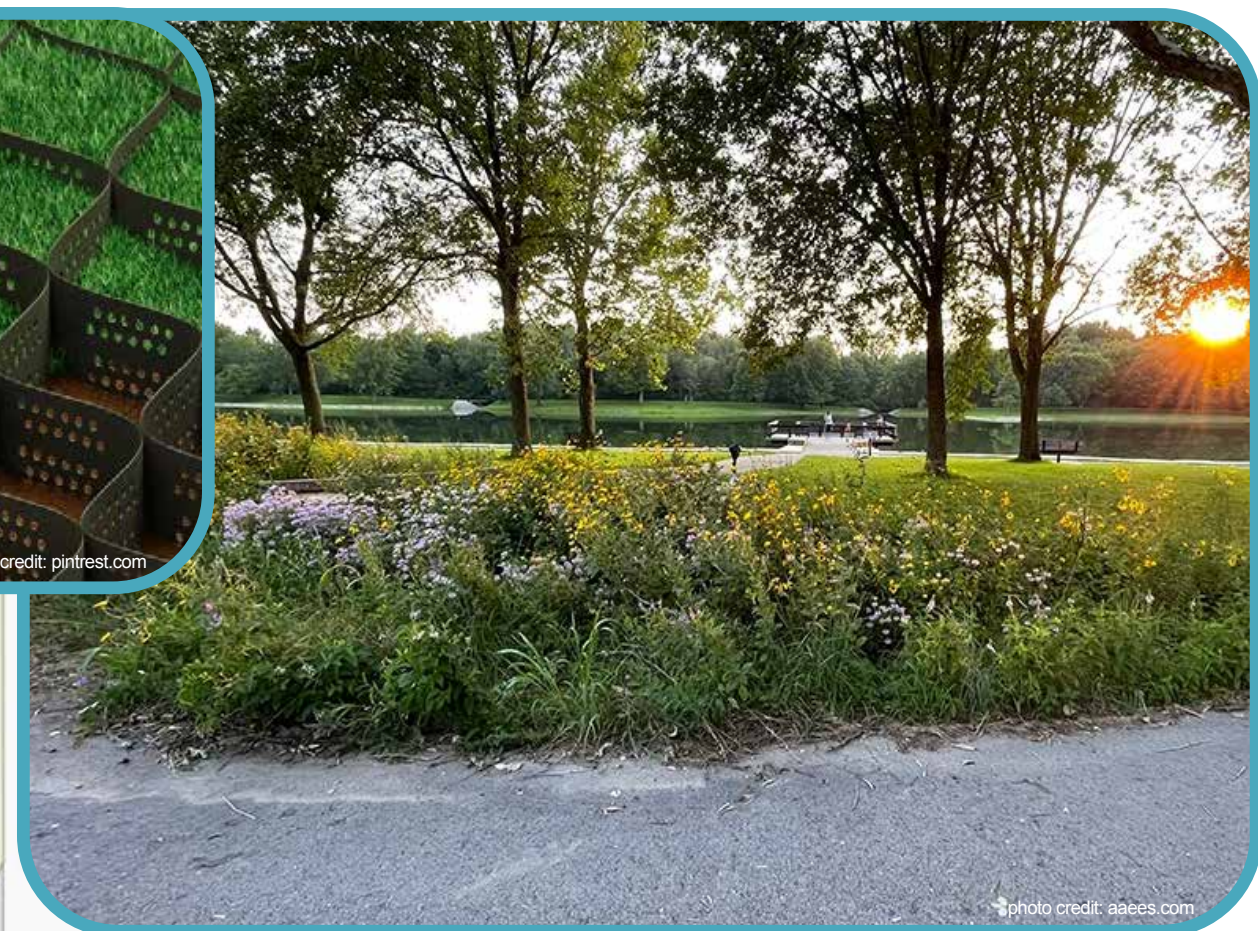
POOL ZONE



Enhance pool landscape

- New plantings at the entry into the pool
- Some foundation plantings around the fence to extend the entry experience
- Incorporate natives into the drainage areas to help with infiltration and reduce erosion from storm water runoff

PARKING



Define & expand parking

- South and north parking zones expanded with clearly designated standard parking bays
- Tree removed from south parking zone/drive
- Tree in north parking lot protected with planting bed/barrier
- Buffer plantings along the edge of parking zone and the north entry drive to reduce erosion and filter runoff
- In the south lot the parking bay on the west end would house the trash receptacle with plantings to buffer it from entry views and from the gazebo area
- Utilize structural grid for to reinforce parking surfaces

LANDSCAPE FURNISHINGS

Picnic Amenities



Picnic shelter concept for the northwest corner of the site

- Participants in the public input session recommended a mix of individual, paired, and sheltered picnic zones
- This plan envisions mounted picnic tables to keep them in designated spots
- The picnic areas will be set among the trees and gardens with good visibility and easy access
- The picnic shelter is designed to be reflective of the style and materials utilized in the update concepts for the community shelter, restrooms and gazebo



photo credit: pinterest.com



photo credit: friendsofpattersonpark.org

LANDSCAPE FURNISHINGS

Seating

- For site furnishings an overwhelming number of participants (17 of 23) voted for the classic style
- This style will inform the selection of items such as benches, picnic tables, trash receptacles, and potential lighting enhancements
- The classic style will work well with the formal/ rustic theme intended for the park as a whole
- Some of the rustic elements, which received 4 of the 23 votes, will be utilized within the landscape where appropriate

