

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We are honoured to participate in this design competition for the Calgary Indian Residential School Memorial at The Confluence, located within Treaty 7, the traditional territories of the Niitsitapi from the Blackfoot Confederacy, including the Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai Nations; the Iyârhe Nakoda and the Chiniki, Bears paw and the Wesley Nations; and the Dene of the Tsuut'ina Nation.

Southern Alberta is also home to the Métis Nation of Alberta, Region 3.

The site within Calgary is located at The Confluence, where the Bow River meets the Elbow River. This place has long been called Mohkínstsis by the Blackfoot, Wichispa by the Nakoda, and Guts'ists'i by Tsuut'ina Dene.

This place is the heart of Treaty 7 territory, we acknowledge our ongoing responsibility to protect and honour all life in the work we do, within our shared reality as treaty people.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

“A memorial to honor our young ones that had no chance in this world. This is something huge. An opportunity”.

- What We Heard Report

Footprints in the Firelight captures a moment suspended between past and present — a quiet, glowing tribute to the lives impacted by the Indian Residential School system. The children’s moccasin footprints, cast in bronze and guiding you through the site, hold space for those who were taken too soon and for those who carry the legacy of trauma and remembrance. Illuminated by firelight — a symbol of ceremony, truth, and transformation — the path becomes sacred: a place where memory meets movement. The name reflects a deeper relationship to the land and spirit, inviting all who enter to witness, remember, reflect, and walk forward together in healing.

At the heart of the project is the Ceremonial Fire, symbolizing healing and transformation. The design emphasizes the restoration of the land, welcoming back native species and creating spaces for the animals that once thrived here. Earth-formed mounds, acting as both cultural markers and flood resilience elements, serve as natural amphitheaters for gathering and ceremony. Modular tensile structures inspired by Indigenous and Métis building traditions provide flexibility while minimizing construction impact. The site integrates native plant ecologies to restore biodiversity, manage stormwater, and sequester carbon, embodying a regenerative approach to land stewardship, aligned with Indigenous worldviews.

This project offers a unified, iconic identity, blending Indigenous knowledge systems and progressive values. It provides transformational spaces for storytelling, contemplation, and community healing. The design elevates Indigenous leadership, ensuring the project reflects the diversity of Inuit, Métis, and First Nations worldviews. The landscape and space becomes a living symbol of reconciliation and an inclusive future.

The memorial design ensures meaningful representation for Métis, Inuit, and Urban Indigenous communities alongside the Treaty 7 Nations. For Métis, it incorporates floral beadwork motifs, Red River cart forms, and flowing patterns to reflect their cultural identity and history of blending worlds. Inuit presence is honored through the inclusion of a sculptural Quilliq, symbolizing light, warmth, and resilience, while the design also prioritizes spaces for Urban Indigenous communities, acknowledging their diversity, connection to land, and cultural plurality, ensuring accessibility and inclusivity for all.

Our team’s analysis of the Indian Residential School Memorial What We Heard Report (January 2023) revealed four themes as Design Drivers for the memorial:

IRSM WHAT WE HEARD REPORT 2023

Knowledge as Relational

- Significance of location at Confluence of the Rivers
- Symbolism and nature

Knowledge from The Land

- Traditional Indigenous design
- Natural setting with some urban features - Seating and Pathways
- Natural grasses and trees
- The elements (wind, light, sound, fire)
- Mix of informal and amphitheatre seating
- Partially covered and open space

The Four Directions & The Medicine Wheel

- Colour: Orange, Medicine Wheel
- Inclusion of four directions

Storytelling, Truth-Telling, & Acknowledgement

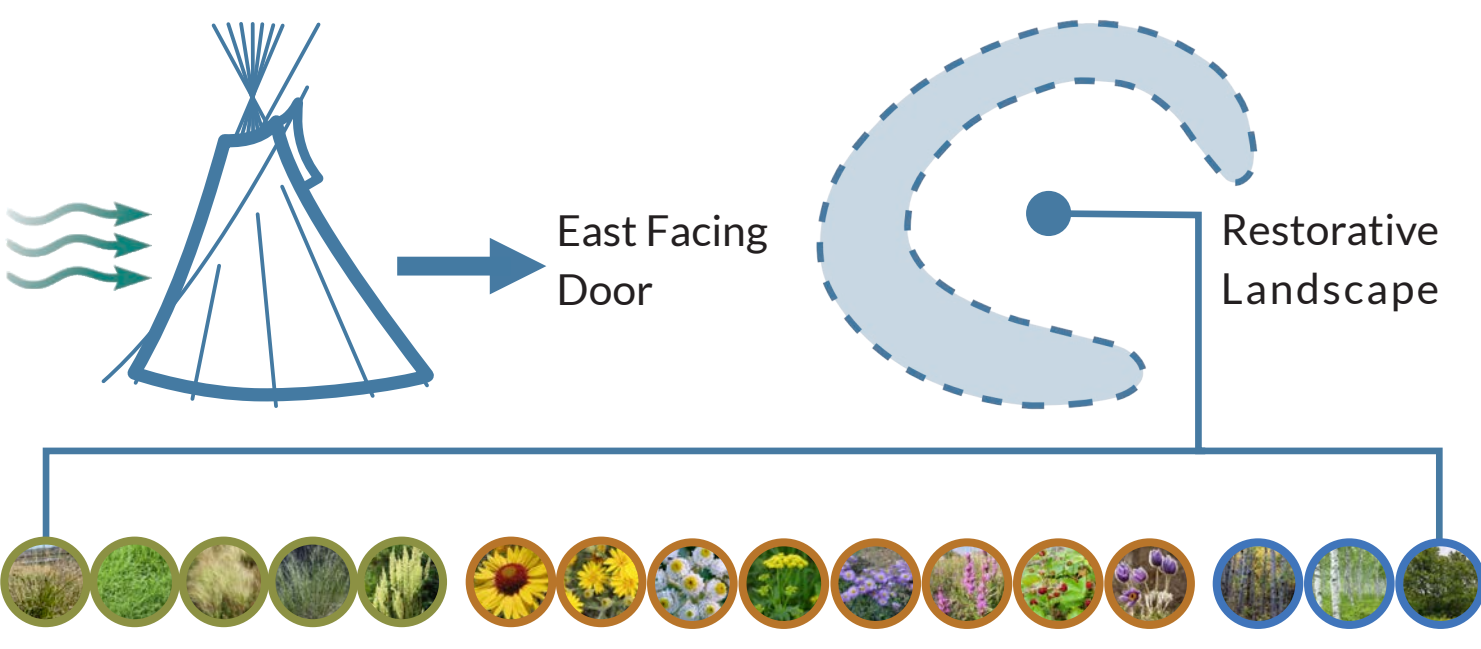
- A space for healing, ceremony, truth, celebration, contemplation, and acknowledgement
- Spirit of temporary memorial must be incorporated
- Accessibility
- Safety

DESIGN DRIVERS



Knowledge As Relational

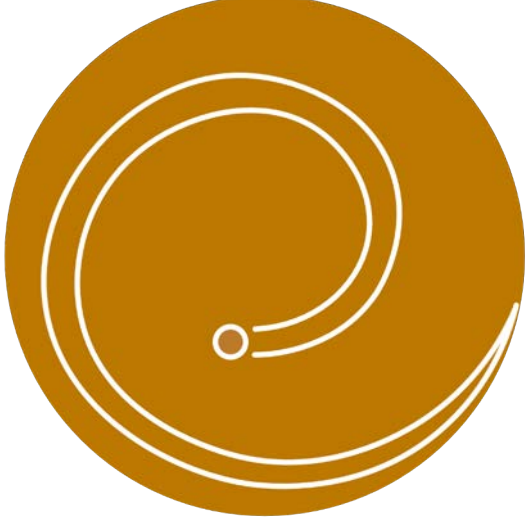
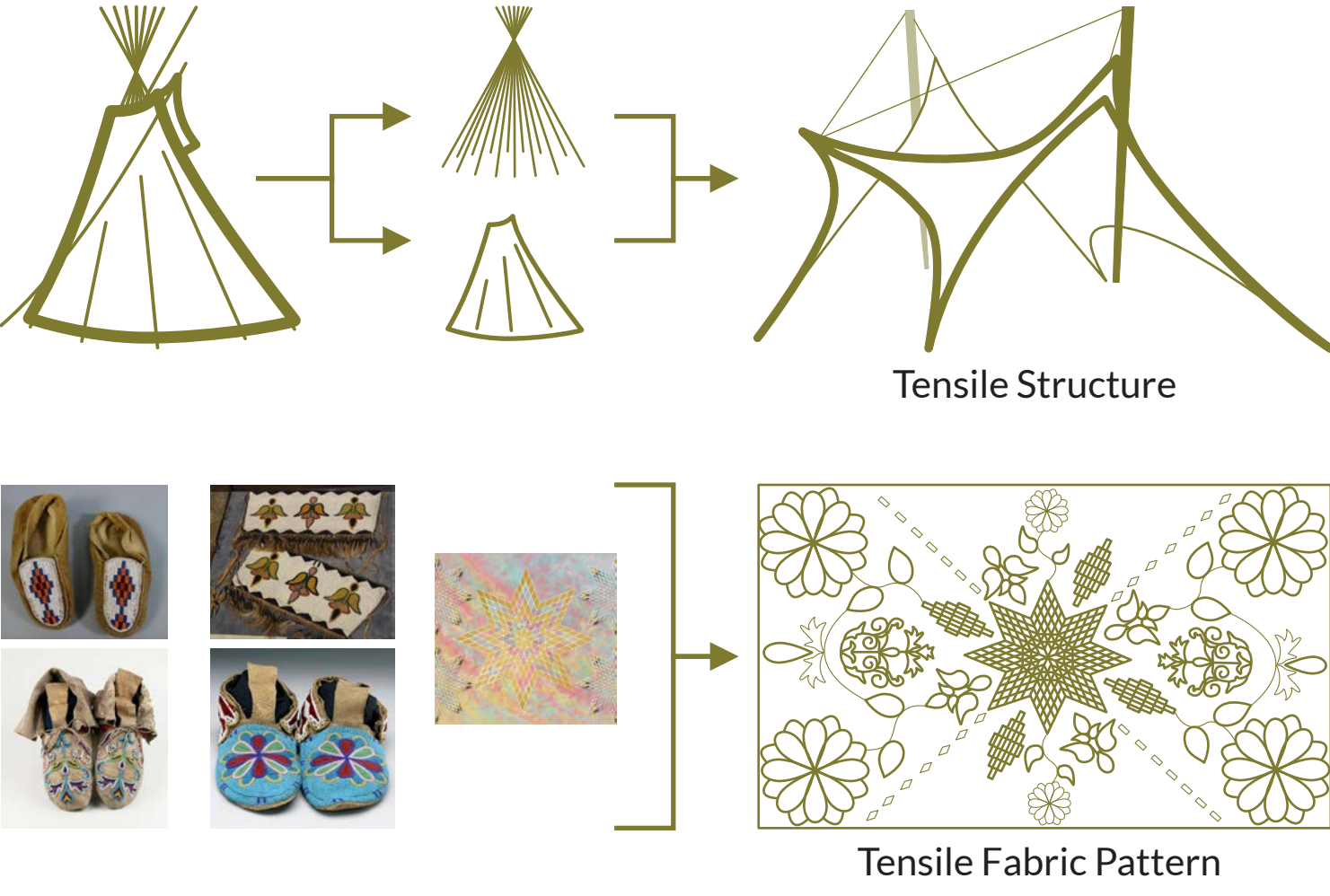
The design is guided by the Blackfoot understanding of knowledge as relational—emerging not from isolation but from the intricate web of relationships with land, animals, ancestors, and the spirit world. This worldview is embodied in every aspect of the site. A native grassland landscape restores and reconnects human and animal habitats, inviting a renewed relationship with the natural world. Quiet spaces for contemplation create space to listen—not just to oneself, but to deeply connect to the land and our ancestors. The ever-present fire becomes a ceremonial link to the spirit world and past generations, grounding sacred practice at the heart of the site, and greater Treaty 7.



Knowledge From The Land

As understood by the Blackfoot people, knowledge emerges through direct experience—watching, feeling, gathering, being. The site restores native grasslands, creating a dynamic, living landscape where humans, animals, and plants coexist. Every detail—from the subtle rise and fall of mounds echoing the rolling foothills, to the textures underfoot and the evolving soundscape—immerses the visitor in a sensory dialogue with the earth. These mounds form intimate gathering spaces, moments of pause and discovery.

Buffalo, long a source of survival and sacred wisdom, are symbolically woven throughout the site. Their presence is found in the interpretive wall, in the graphic language of the project, and in the rhythm of movement across the land—an homage to their deep teachings and enduring spirit. This is not just a site to walk through, but a place to remember, reconnect, and relearn. A place where stories live, relationships are honored, and the land continues to speak.



The Four Directions & The Medicine Wheel

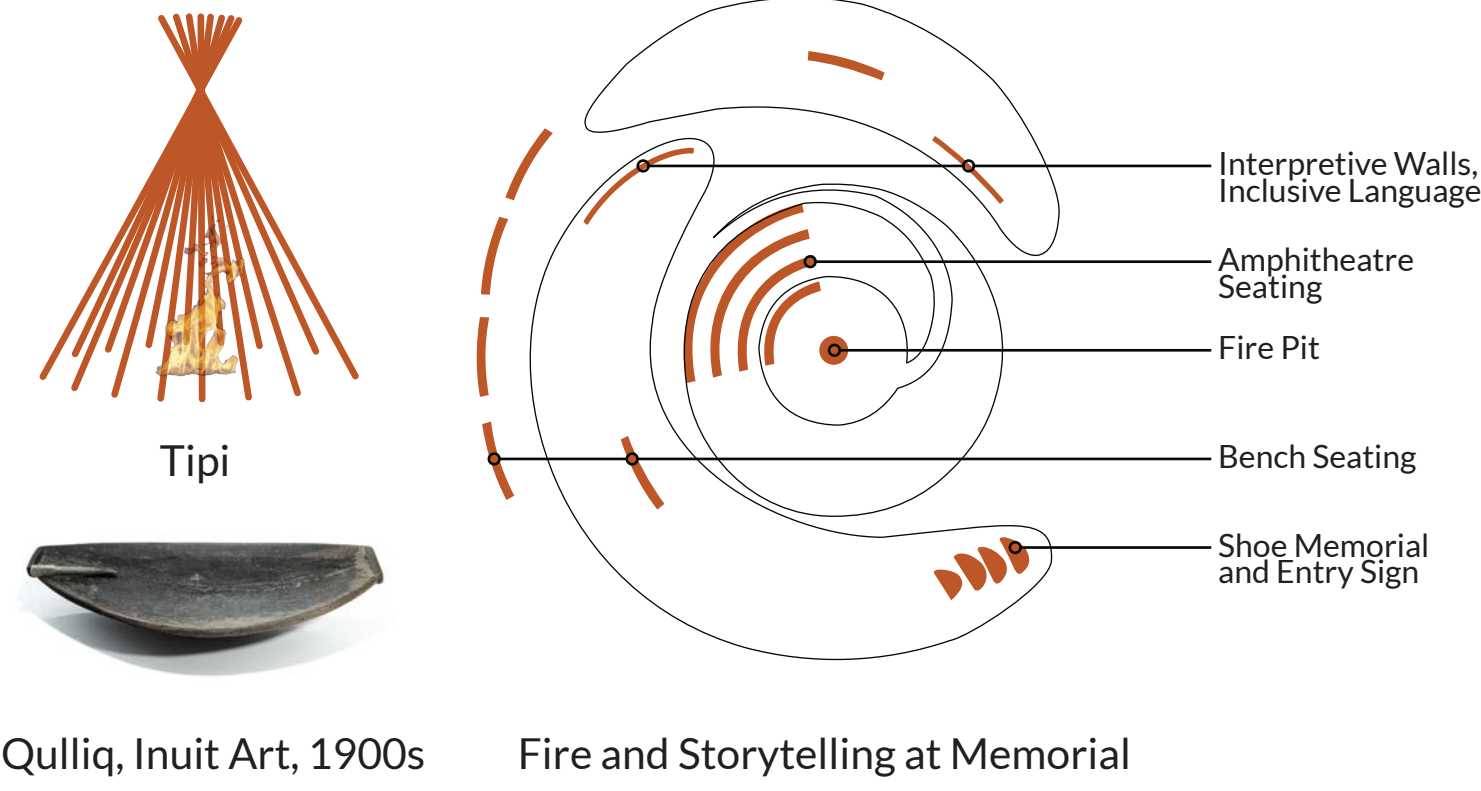
At the ceremonial heart of the site lies a circular, sunken space—created for gathering, for ceremony, and for intergenerational connection. This space is shaped not only by the contours of the earth, native grass mounds but by spirit. It is aligned with the Four Directions and the Medicine Wheel, embodying the balance of physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual life. The land itself becomes a teacher and a holder of memory.

The journey begins in the East, following the path of the sun and moving clockwise in harmony with the cycles of life and seasons. Seasonal plantings mark time and transformation—honoring change, growth, and return. The land is not just observed, but actively engaged with, designed to support healing, presence, and ceremony throughout the year. Bronze moccasin prints are embedded in the earth, grounding the space in memory—echoing the footsteps of children who attended Indian Residential Schools, and those who never made it home. The landscape holds these truths gently. Open views of the sky and across the rivers invite moments of reflection, grief, and quiet visioning. This is a place where the land speaks—of the past, of resilience, and possible futures.

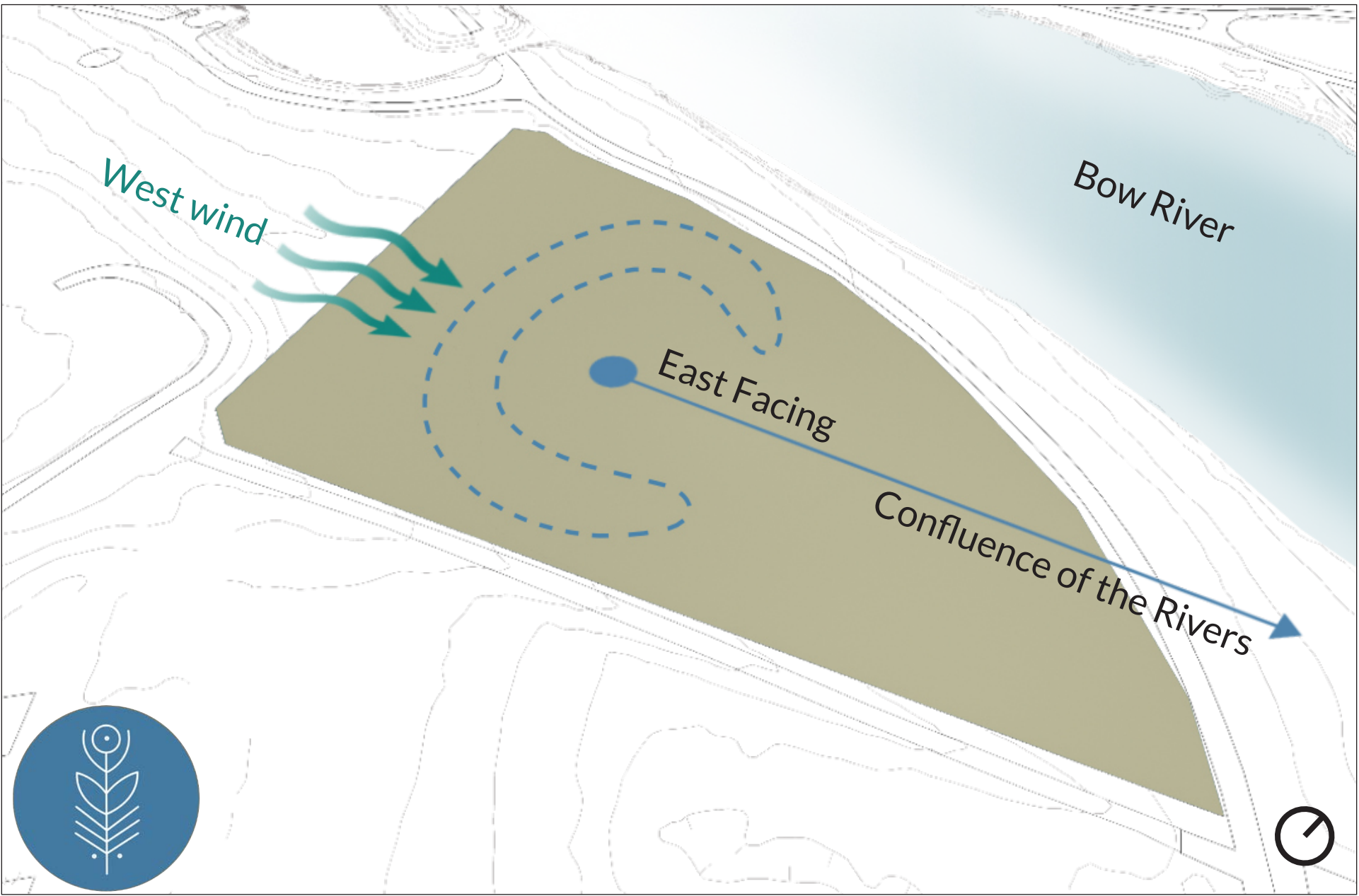


Storytelling, Truth-Telling, & Acknowledgement

As visitors arrive at the site, they are immediately welcomed by a threshold that introduces the journey ahead—one rooted in storytelling, truth-telling, and acknowledgement, the relocated temporary memorial of children’s shoes, neatly placed on sandstone steps. As you continue to the left of the temporary memorial and around the first mound, an Interpretive Wall, with a narrative of the hard truths of Indian Residential School, Acknowledgment of families, history of the local Indian Residential Schools. In addition, guiding you through the site are bronze moccasin footprints that trace a path across the earth, a quiet reminder of those lost and disappeared. Finally, as you move from the first mound to the central bowl and gathering space, amphitheater seating and at the heart of the site, a fire pit offering space for storytelling, ceremony, and continued deep collective healing.

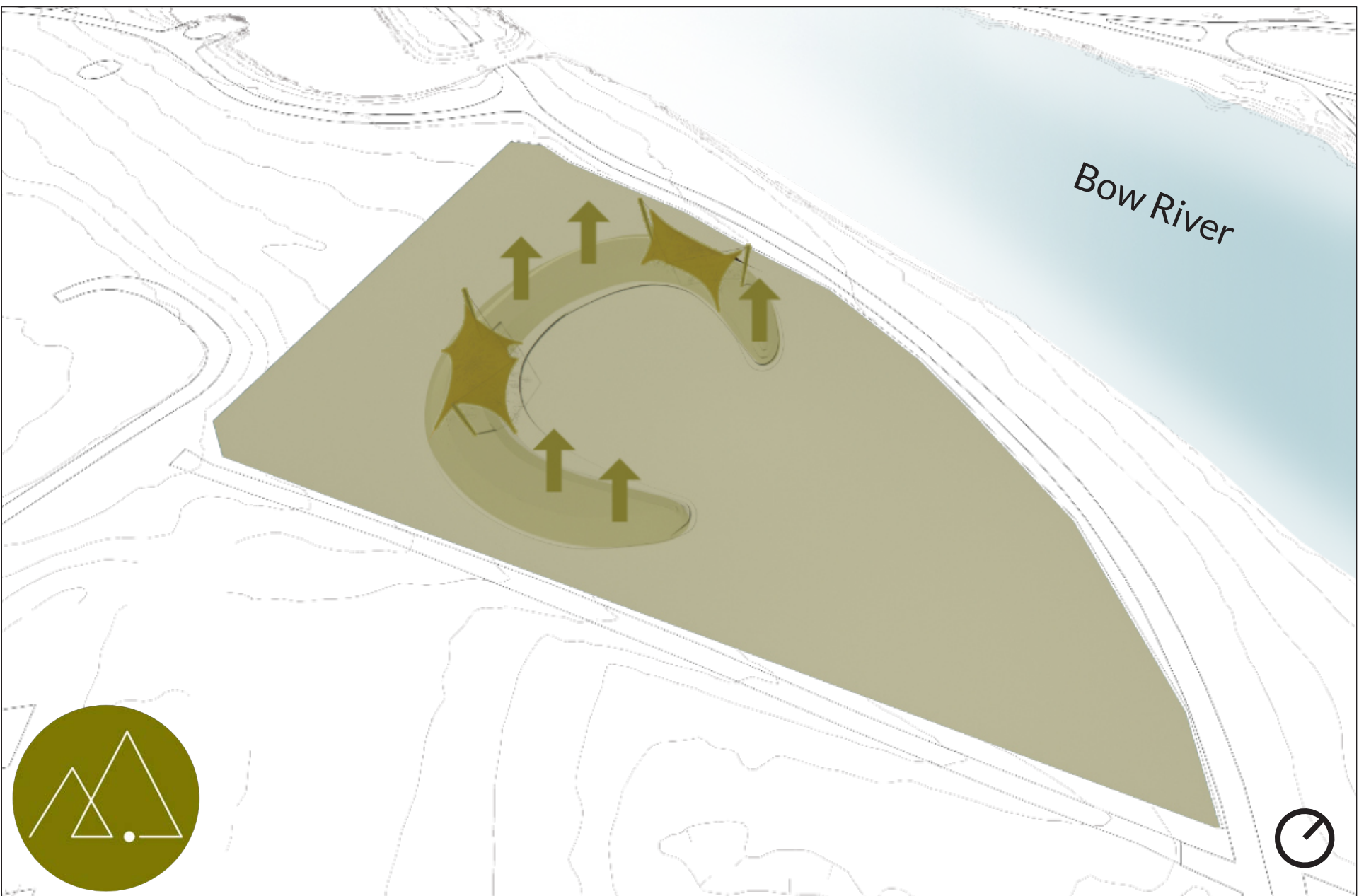


SITE CONCEPT



Site Concept 1 - Connection

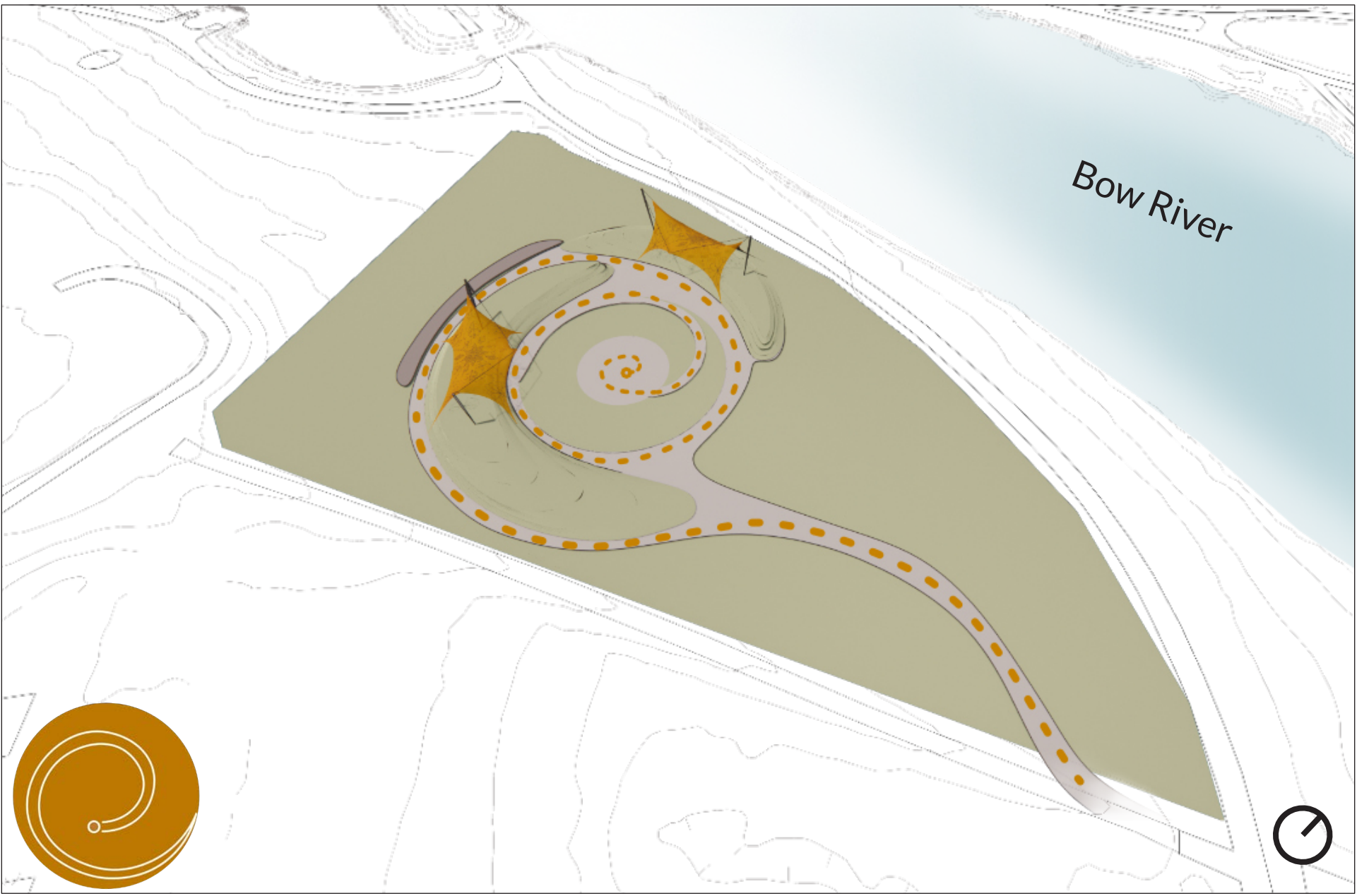
The proposed memorial space is sited as east facing, visually connected to the Confluence of the Bow and Elbow Rivers. The outline of the memorial provides an opportunity to create a windbreak and restorative landscape element.



Site Concept 2 - Protection

The mounds are raised and topped with tensile structure canopies, providing cover from the wind while maintaining open sight lines.

Precedent textile patterns and art (clockwise from far right): Tsuut'ina Nation Design (tsuutina.com), Blackfoot (ROM Collection, ca. 1890), Tsuut'ina Dene (Arthur Erickson Gallery, ca. 1890), Stoney Nakoda (ROM Collection, 1970), and Kainai (Glenbow Museum, 1800s).

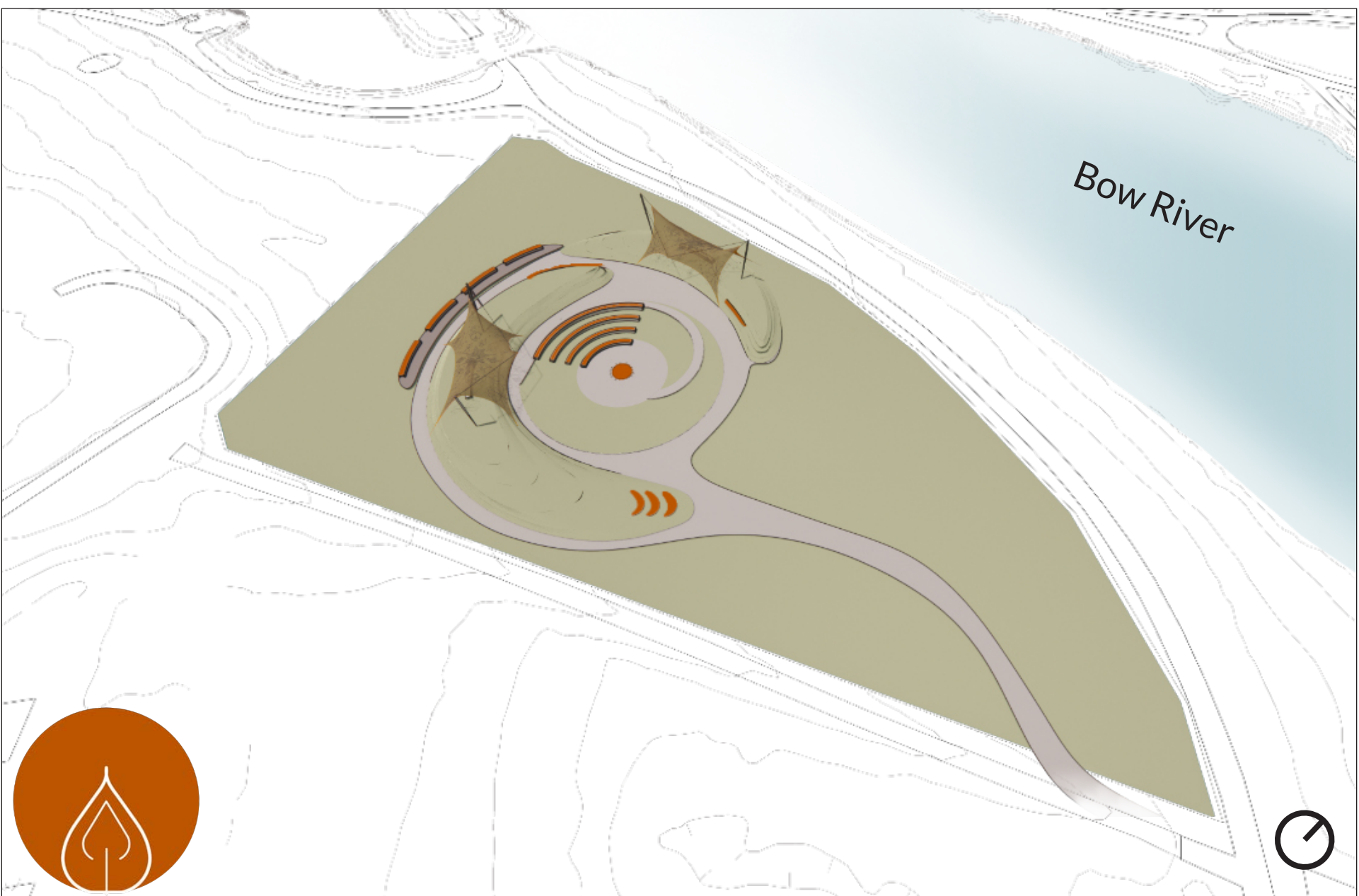


Site Concept 3 - Procession

The mounds are shaped by the clockwise pathway through the site. The spiral procession is defined by bronze and coloured moccasin prints.

“New memorial should be a sister/cousin to the temporary memorial. Take the spirit of it to the new one.”

- What We Heard Report



Site Concept 4 - Memory

The relocated temporary memorial shoes are prominently placed at the entrance. Storytelling features and seating elements echo the curved moccasin prints path, leading to the central fire pit of the memorial space.

PLACE-BASED RESEARCH

With the the IRS WWHR themes in mind, we began researching local, cultural considerations for applying the Design Drivers to Site Concepts.

TRIBE NAME	DWELLINGS	MATERIALITY & ARCHETYPES	
Stoney Nakoda Nation	Tipis (teepees) were the primary dwelling: Made from lodgepole pine poles Covered with stitched buffalo hides Designed for mobility – essential for their seasonal, nomadic lifestyle tied to hunting and gathering.	Interior features: Central fire pit for heating and ceremonies Buffalo hides and willow bedding used inside for warmth and comfort Decorated with painted symbols tied to family, spiritual visions, or clan affiliations	
Blackfoot Confederacy	Tipi: Blackfoot tipi designs acknowledge the sacred kinship with all things. The top part acknowledges the creator's world, the universe. The middle part displays life, and the bottom is an acknowledgement to the land.	Materials: the materials made to create the tipi were tanned bison hide and lodgepole tree poles. Large wooden stakes were used to keep the tipi grounded, some locations used rocks instead as a substitute. Leatherwork: Blackfeet leatherwork involves tanning and decorating animal hides to create items such as moccasins, bags, and clothing. The designs often incorporate beadwork and quillwork.	
Tsuut'ina Sacree	-Dome shaped & regular tipis, using covered with skins and insulate with earth and sot. -Dugout pit houses / lodge. Made from wooden poles and earth for insulation.	-Usage of porcupine quills within the craft of their baskets -Bows made of sweet grass and root. -Necklaces made of altered shells, bones, stone, and leather.	
Métis	Traditional Dwellings: Métis traditionally lived in log cabins/wood frame homes/teat or temporary structures made from local materials, reflecting a blend of European and Indigenous building techniques.	Art and Craftsmanship: The Métis are known for intricate beadwork and weaving, particularly exemplified in the Métis sash and Octopus bags. These woven, brightly colored garments symbolize their historical role in the fur trade and serve both functional and decorative purposes.	
TRIBE NAME	HOMELAND	LANDMARKS	BELIEF SYSTEMS
Stoney Nakoda Nation	-Eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains in present-day Alberta -Main community hub: Morley (Mîni Hîral), located west of Calgary -Traditional lands known as Kîtaowashimoon, within Banff and Jasper National Parks and Kananaskis Country.	-Morley (Mîni Hîral) – central community and ceremonial gathering site. -Cascade Mountain (Mînihrpa - "The Waterfalls") – sacred peak recognized by Stoney names. -Mount Yamuska (Iyâmuthaka) - "flat-faced mountain," culturally important and linguistically rooted. -Bow River (Mîni Hîral) – spiritually and ecologically vital -Kananaskis Country – traditional territory with sacred sites and ancestral trails	-Identity as Iyârhe Nakoda - "People of the Mountains" -All living things have spirit; deep respect for land, water, animals, and ancestors -Spiritual responsibility to care for the land as gifted by the Creator.
Blackfoot Confederacy	Traditional territories included parts of Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Montana. The traditional name of this territory is Kîtaowashimoon.	-Blackfoot Mountain (Mistakî): Is found in the south of Glacier National Park. -Mountain Chief (Nîstasakî): Located on the eastern border of Glacier National Park and Blackfeet Indian Reservation. -Porcupine Hills (Kâ'iskah pîlîs): Found in Manitoba, Canada are northwest of Swan River. North Saskatchewan River: Flows through the Canadian Rockies to Lake Winnipeg.	Blackfoot followed the Collective Way, which was to be unselfish, with the land and with their neighbors to come and hunt on Blackfoot land, giving opportunities to them to challenge for leadership. Along with that is to share resources, knowledge, and kindness.
Tsuut'ina Sacree	Traditional homelands: Dane-zaa, upper Saskatchewan and near the Athabasca river in the present provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan, moved south to escape enemy attacks and search of food.		Abside by Natural Law: Respecting all spirits of the land and how the elements of: water, air and fire. To be followed & practiced every day.
Métis	The traditional homeland of the Métis spans west-central North America, including areas in Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, and parts of the Northwest Territories.	Landmarks: The Red River and areas around South Ste. Marie and the Great Lakes are historically significant as trading hubs and settlements.	Self-determination: The Métis value their right to self-government, captured by the term "Ojipensîwak" ("those who rule themselves"). Respect for Land and Nature: Deep respect for the environment, including animals and plants, as integral to their worldview.

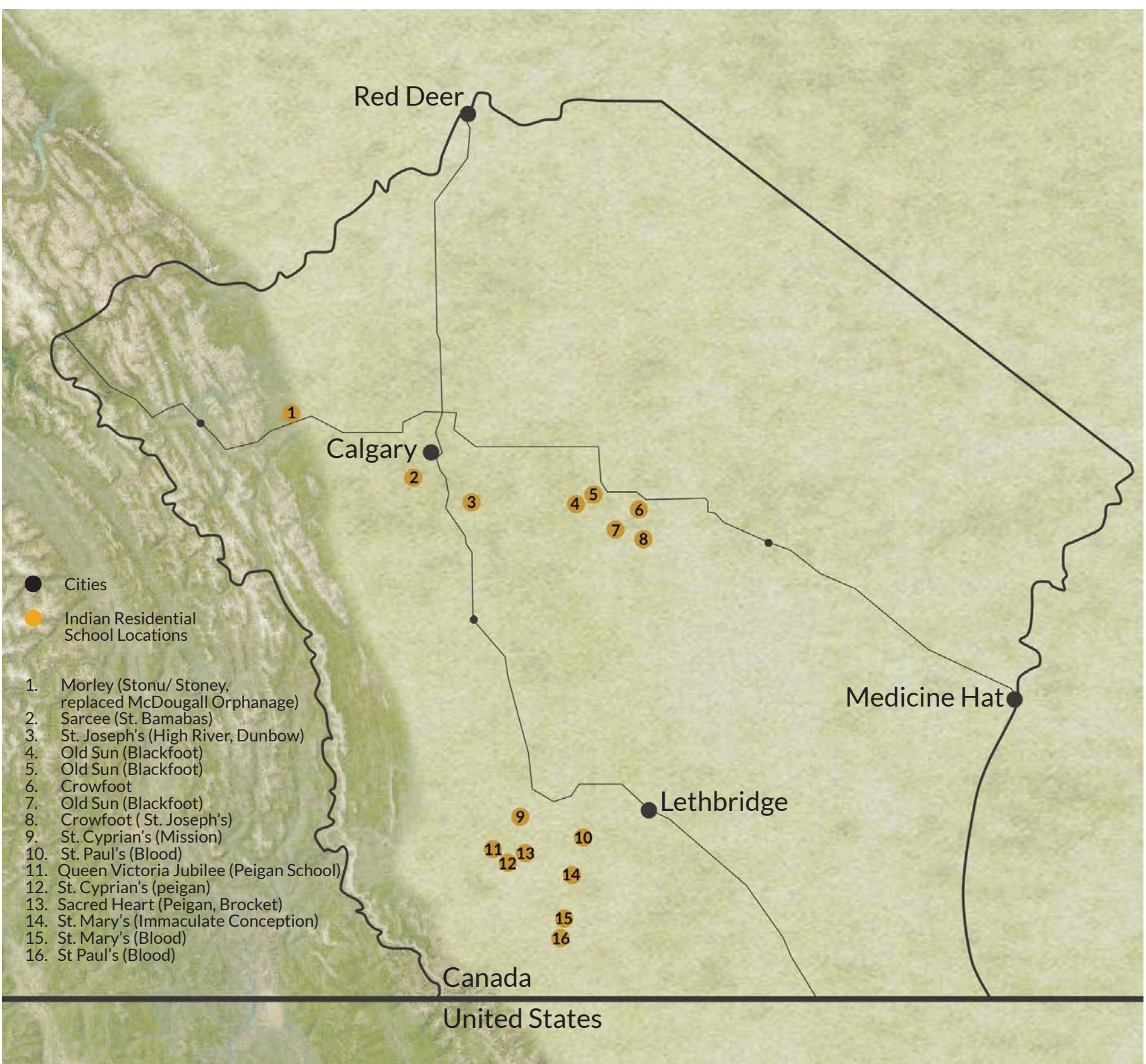
In designing a memorial that honors Survivors and the legacy of Indian Residential Schools in Calgary, it is essential to meaningfully reflect the distinct cultures, worldviews, and material traditions of Métis, Inuit, and Urban Indigenous communities in addition to the Treaty 7 Nations.

For Métis representation, the design may incorporate elements such as floral beadwork motifs, Red River cart forms, and curved, flowing patterns reflective of movement and blending cultures—symbolizing their identity as “the people who walk between worlds.”

Inuit cultural elements may be reflected in the inclusion of sculptural forms like the quilliq (oil lamp) or inuksuk, built from stone and honoring connections to Arctic land, light, and ancestral guidance. Material choices may echo the use of soapstone, hide, and bone, and spatial qualities may reflect shelter, survival, and quiet resilience.

Urban Indigenous considerations acknowledge the diversity of Nations living in the city today, many of whom are disconnected from their homelands often due to displacement and intergenerational trauma. The design must create inclusive, welcoming spaces for reflection and ceremony, with attention to accessibility, visibility and cultural plurality. Across all land-based knowledge, ceremony, and relationality to nature will guide design strategies that weave together symbolic plantings, sculptural forms, and gathering spaces into a unified and respectful whole.

TREATY 7 RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS



FOOTPRINTS IN THE FIRELIGHT
INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL MEMORIAL
AT THE CONFLUENCE OF THE RIVERS

SITE PLAN 1:1000



ENLARGED SITE PLAN 1: 500



SOUTHWEST - NORTHEAST SECTION 1:500



“I imagine a playground and seeing children happy there”.
- What We Heard Report

MOMENTS



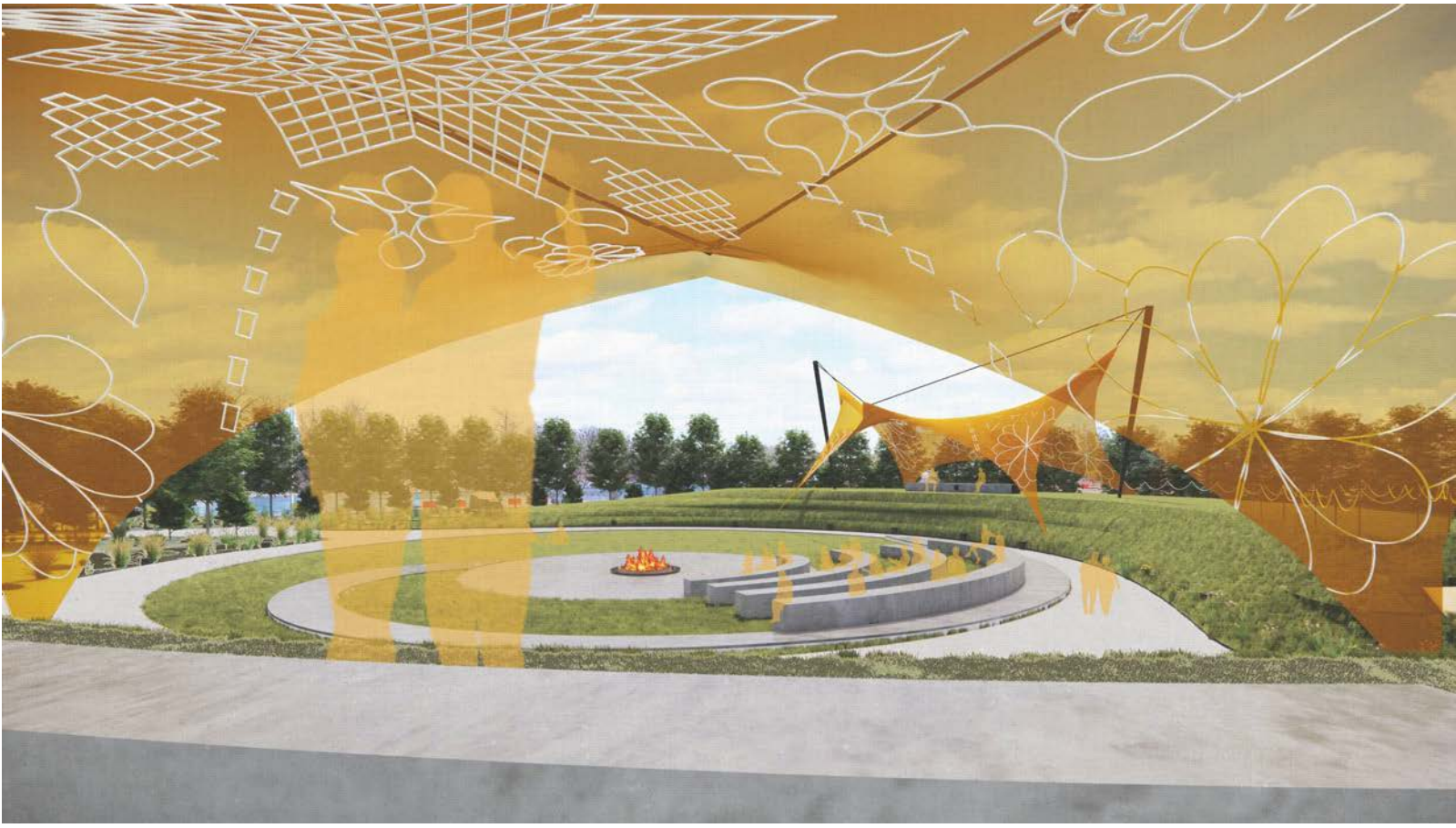
1 Entry Way, Signage, and Temporary Memorial



2 Footprints, Ampitheatre, and Ceremonial Fire Pit
a Inuit Artist — To design and fabricate a large sculptural qulliq, serving as a symbolic welcome at the entrance to the lower bowl. This piece may also function as a smudge stone, marking a natural threshold into the ceremonial space.
b Métis Artist — To create a mural along the concrete face of the amphitheater seating, bringing stories, patterns, and Métis visual language into the heart of the gathering area.
c Treaty 7 First Nations Artist — To design the ground plane pattern of the central circle surrounding the ceremonial fire, embedding meaning and cultural resonance directly into the landscape.



3 Interpretive Wall and Quiet Seating

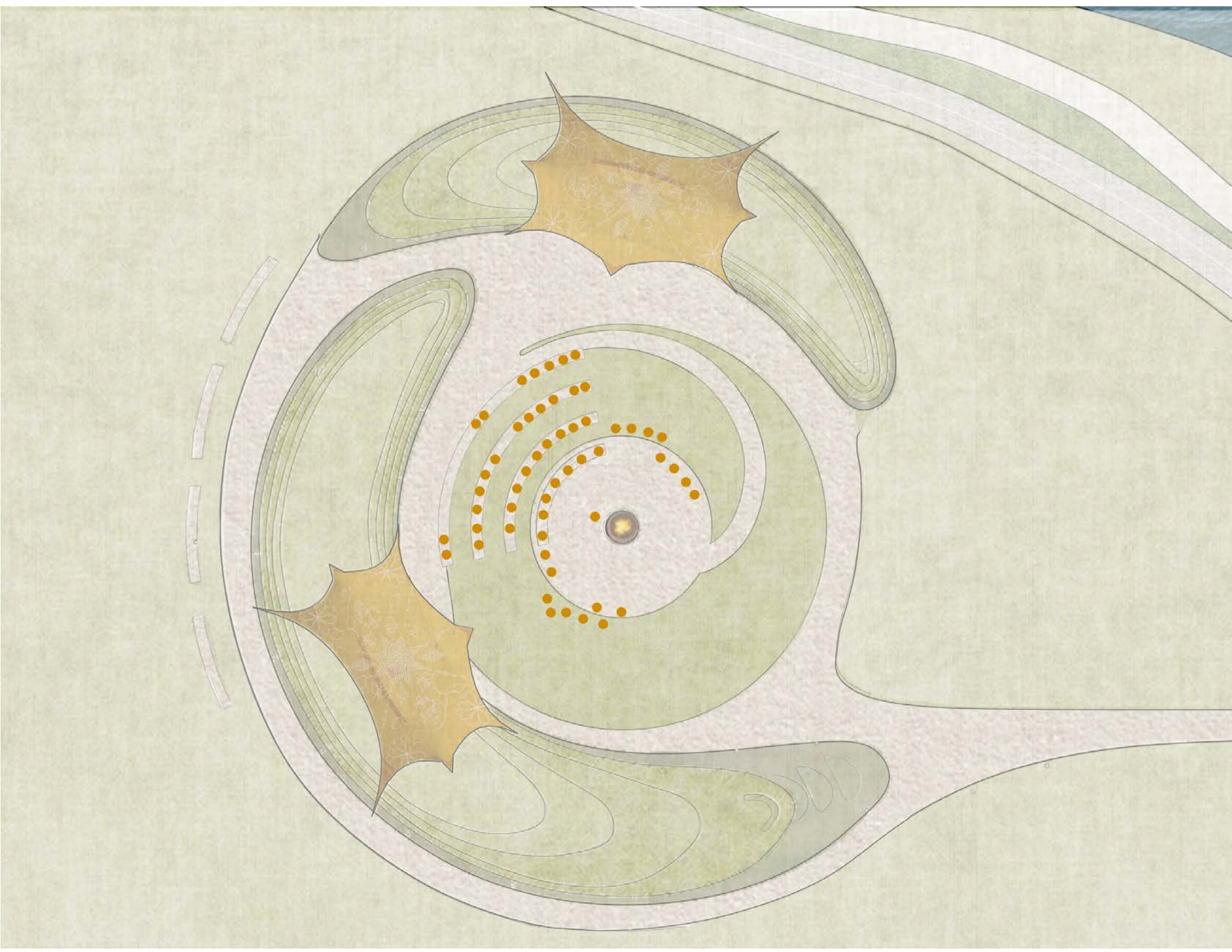


4 Tensile Structure Experience

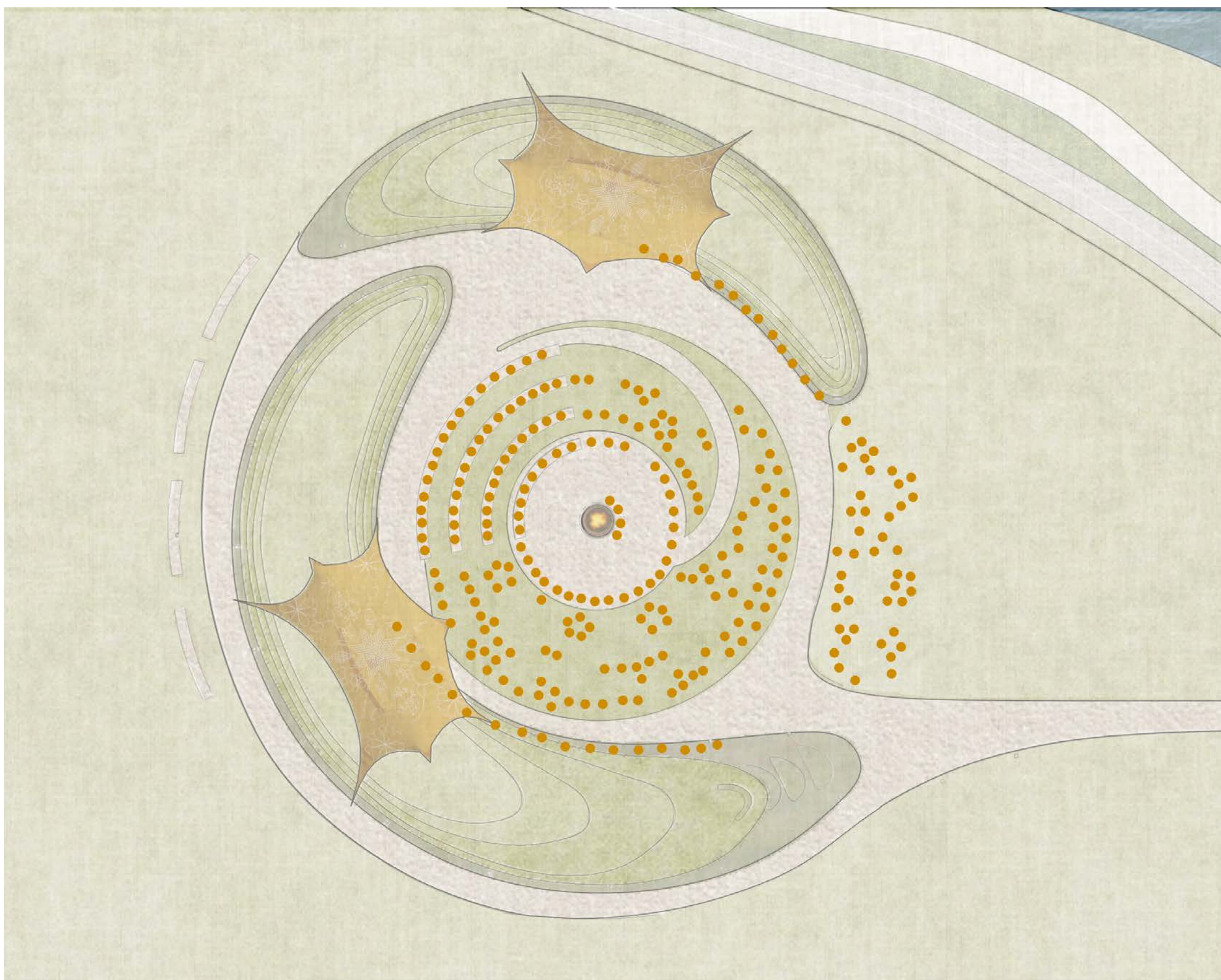
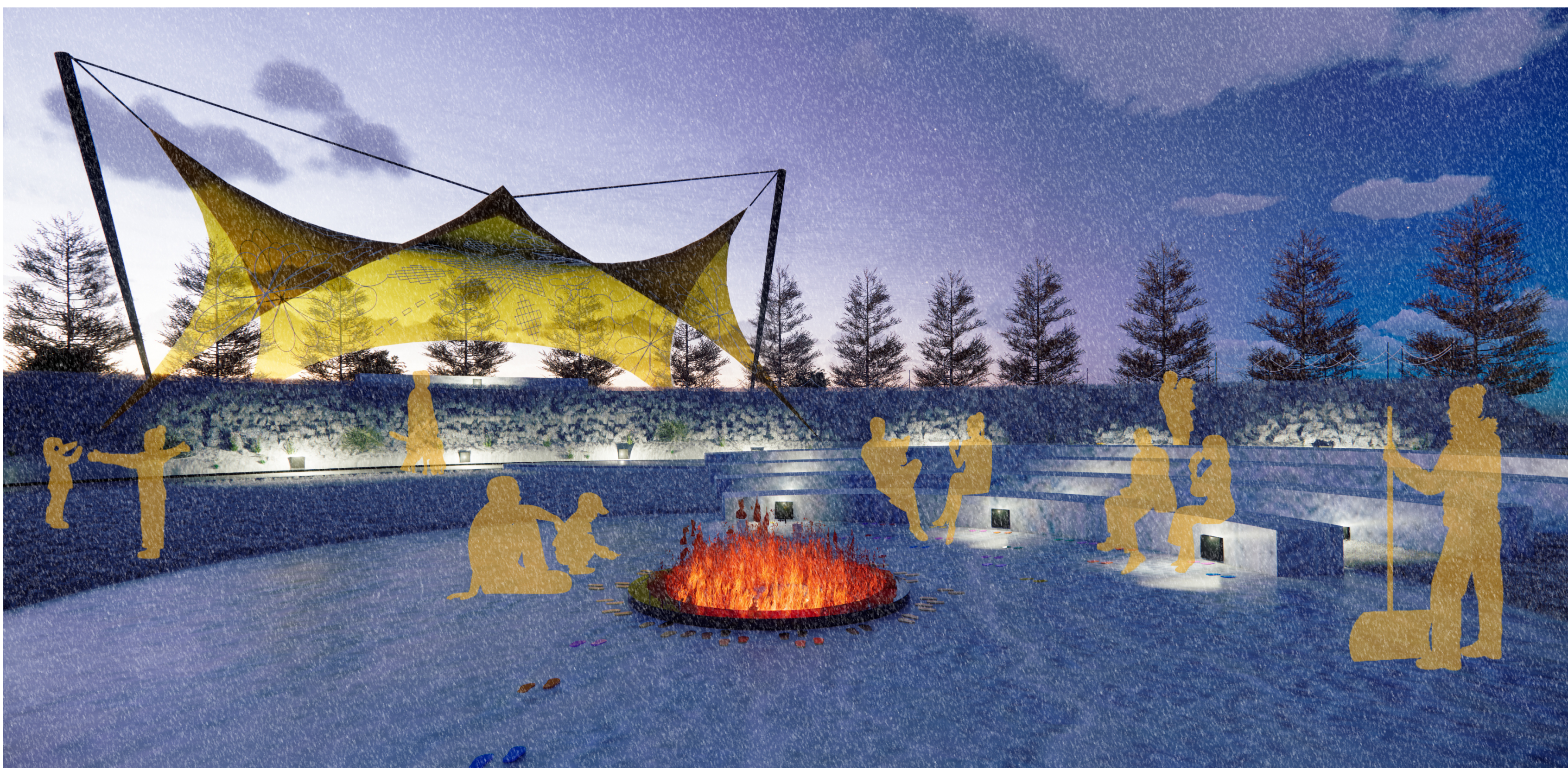
RESTORATIVE LANDSCAPE



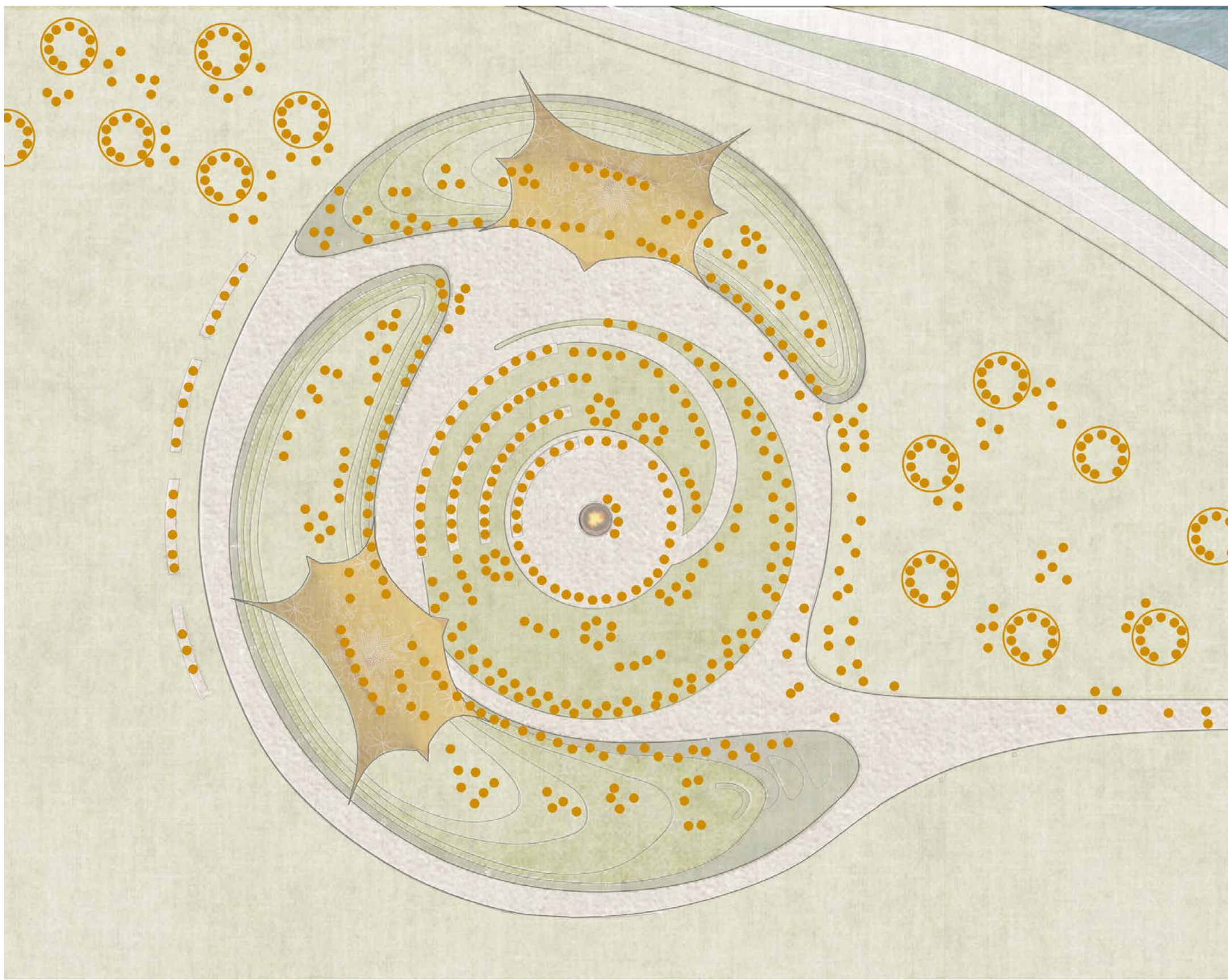
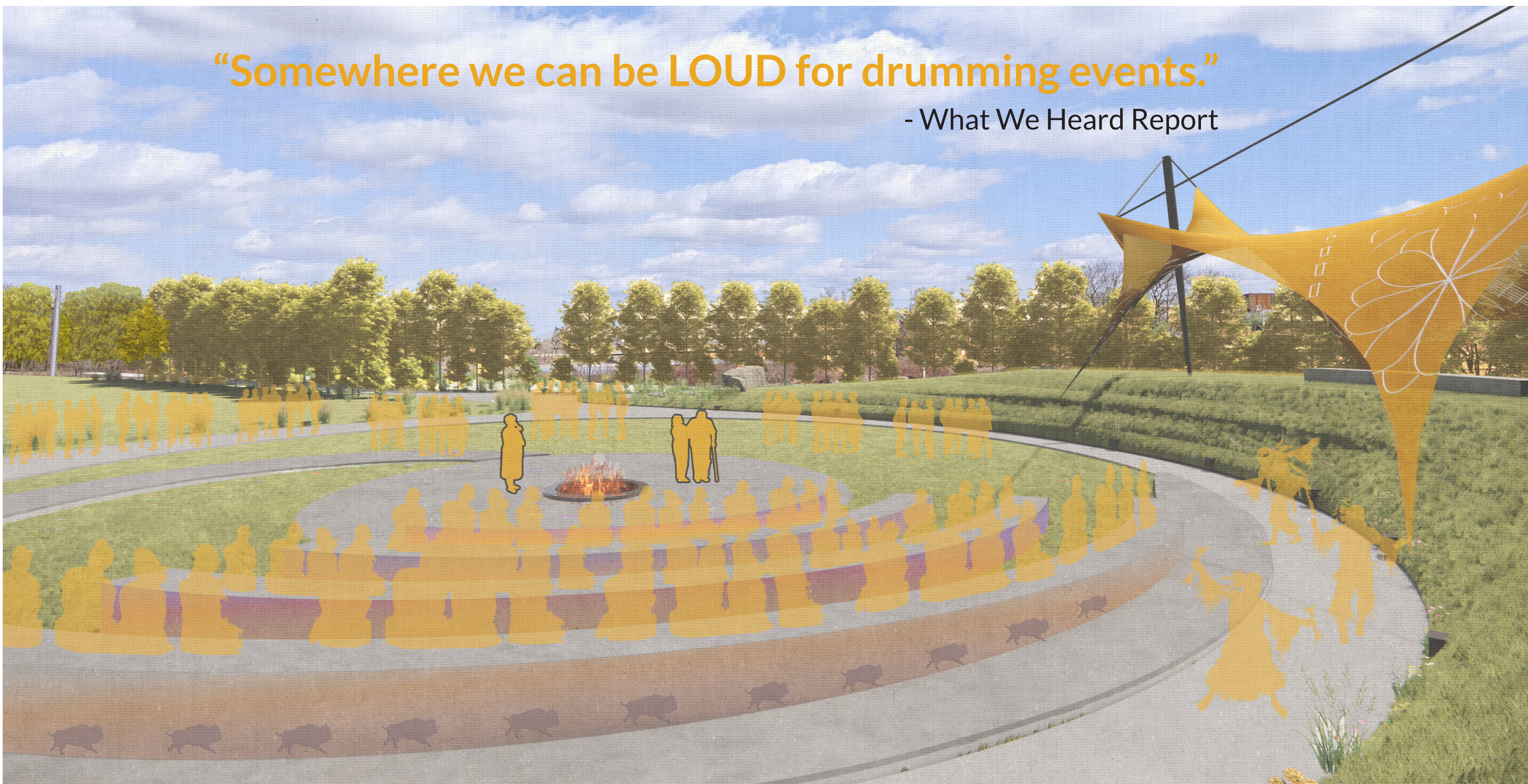
SEASONAL ACTIVITIES



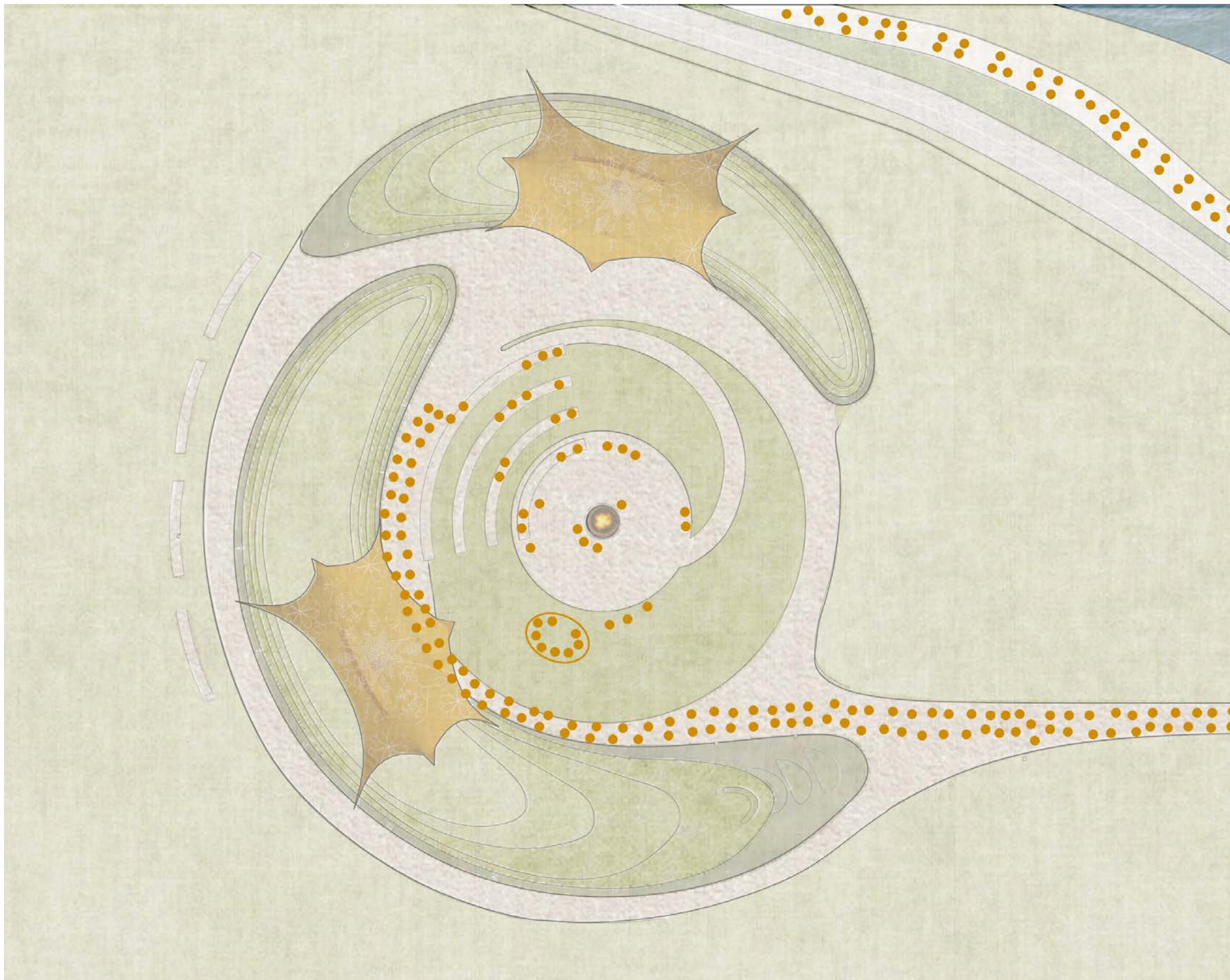
Storytelling in the Winter



National Day of Truth and Reconciliation - Ceremony



Powwow in the Summer



Sweat Lodge in the Spring - Walk for Reconciliation



Heart - Leaved Alexander



Showy Fleabane



Dotted Blazingstar



Wild Strawberry



Prairie Crocus



Aspen



Clumping Paper Birch



Manitoba Maple

Footprints in the Firelight

Indian Residential School Memorial at The Confluence of the Rivers

Footprints in the Firelight captures a moment suspended between past and present — a quiet, glowing tribute to the lives impacted by the Indian Residential School system. The children's moccasin footprints, cast in bronze and guiding you through the site, hold space for those who were taken too soon and for those who carry the legacy of trauma and remembrance. Illuminated by firelight — a symbol of ceremony, truth, and transformation — the path becomes sacred: a place where memory meets movement. The name reflects a deeper relationship to the land and spirit, inviting all who enter to witness, remember, reflect, and walk forward together in healing.

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Footprints in the Firelight

Indian Residential School Memorial at The Confluence of the Rivers

April 22, 2025

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Land Acknowledgement

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The site within Calgary is located at The Confluence, where the Bow River meets the Elbow River. This place has long been called Mohkinsstsis by the Blackfoot, Wîchîspa by the Nakoda, and Guts'ists'i by Tsuut'ina Dene.

This place is the heart of Treaty 7 territory, we acknowledge our ongoing responsibility to protect and honour all life in the work we do, within our shared reality as treaty people.

Call to Action 82

We call upon provincial and territorial governments, in collaboration with Survivors and their organizations, and other parties to the Settlement Agreement, to commission and install a publicly accessible, highly visible, Residential Schools Monument in each capital city to honour Survivors and all the children who were lost to their families and communities.

We recognize the Calgary Indian Residential School as a response to the Call to Action 82 from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action.

Detailed Design Narrative

Introduction

We came to this design with a deep sense of responsibility—aware of the pain, the history, and the need to approach it with humility. It was important to create a space that could carry the weight of truth, acknowledge the lasting impact of Indian Residential Schools, and still hold room for many uses. Most of all, we wanted it to feel honest—able to express sorrow, honor resilience, and offer quiet hope for the future.

Some members of our team have family who attended Indian Residential Schools, loved ones who lived through the experience, and others who never made it home. We have had the honour of listening to Survivors, learning from their stories and lived experience of the pain that still echoes through generations. With deep humility, we have created a design that invites a range of emotions and moments to unfold as you move through and experience the site. At its heart is the Ceremonial Fire—gently cradled by the land and discovered through a quiet journey across the site. Healing the land is a central theme of the project. Great care was taken to research native species, and in an act of reclamation, these plants—and hopefully the animals that once thrived here—are being welcomed back home.

The project offers innovative solutions rooted in Indigenous knowledge systems, regenerative design practices, and deep community engagement to respond to the site's physical, cultural, and emotional challenges. Earth-formed mounds serve as both cultural expression and climate infrastructure — acting as natural amphitheaters, spaces of protection, and flood resilience elements. Modular tensile structures, inspired by traditional Métis and Indigenous building typologies, allow for flexible programming while minimizing construction impact. The careful integration of native plant ecologies not only restores biodiversity but also contributes to carbon sequestration, stormwater management, and the creation of healing spaces.

These innovations result in a unified, iconic identity that honours the past while envisioning a more inclusive and just future. By elevating Indigenous design leadership and potential to incorporate Inuit, Métis, and First Nations worldviews, the project becomes a living reflection of reconciliation and progressive values. The design invites transformational experiences — spaces for ceremony, storytelling, contemplation, and gathering — offering a powerful model for what future cities can be: inclusive, resilient, and grounded in truth.

The design also prioritizes climate resilience through the thoughtful use of native, drought-tolerant plantings that reduce water demand, restore biodiversity, and adapt to shifting climate conditions. The deep-rooted prairie grasses and groves of native trees enhance soil stability, support carbon sequestration, and help regulate microclimates across the site. In addition, the sculpted earthen mounds provide natural flood protection and buffer the gathering spaces from extreme weather, embodying a land-based response to climate challenges grounded in Indigenous knowledge and ecological sensitivity.

The concept has been developed with a strong understanding of constructability and project budget parameters. Our cost consultant has confirmed that the current estimate is within budget, with generous allowances included for key components such as artist collaborations, specialty materials, and ceremonial infrastructure. Material choices—such as locally sourced sandstone, native plantings, and low-carbon concrete—have been selected not only for cultural and environmental value, but also for durability, ease of procurement, and cost-effectiveness.

Modular elements, such as pre-fabricated tensile structures, allow for efficient off-site construction and streamlined on-site installation, enhancing feasibility and minimizing disruption. Long-term operational and maintenance efficiencies are built into the planting strategy, which prioritizes native, drought-tolerant species that require minimal irrigation or intervention. The overall approach demonstrates a clear alignment with the project's technical and operational requirements, including lifespan durability, low-maintenance materials, and scalable, resilient design features that support sustainable stewardship of the space over time.

Design Drivers

Through our research of the local Nations, key themes were revealed and help guide the overall design and approach.

Storytelling, Truth-telling, and Acknowledgement

As visitors arrive at the site, they are immediately welcomed by a threshold that introduces the journey ahead—one rooted in **storytelling, truth-telling, and acknowledgement**, the relocated temporary memorial of children's shoes, neatly placed on sandstone steps. As you continue to the left of the temporary memorial and around the first mound, an **Interpretive Wall**, with a narrative of the hard truths of Indian Residential School, Acknowledgment of families, history of the local Indian Residential Schools. In addition, guiding you through the site are bronze moccasin footprints that trace a path across the earth, a quiet reminder of those lost and disappeared. Finally, as you move from the first mound to the central bowl and gathering space, amphitheater seating and at the heart of the site, a **fire pit** offering space for storytelling, ceremony, and continued deep collective healing.

Knowledge as Relational

The design is guided by the Blackfoot understanding of **knowledge as relational**—emerging not from isolation but from the intricate web of relationships with land, animals, ancestors, and the spirit world. This worldview is embodied in every aspect of the site. A native grassland landscape restores and reconnects human and animal habitats, inviting a renewed relationship with the natural world. Quiet spaces for contemplation create space to listen—not just to oneself, but to deeply connect to the land and our ancestors. The ever-present fire becomes a ceremonial link to the spirit world and past generations, grounding sacred practice at the heart of the site, and greater Treaty 7.

Four Directions and the Medicine Wheel

At the ceremonial heart of the site lies a circular, sunken space—created for gathering, for ceremony, and for intergenerational connection. This space is shaped not only by the contours of the earth, native grass mounds but by spirit. It is aligned with the Four Directions and the Medicine Wheel, embodying the balance of physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual life. The land itself becomes a teacher and a holder of memory.

The journey begins in the East, following the path of the sun and moving clockwise in harmony with the cycles of life and seasons. Seasonal plantings mark time and transformation—honoring change, growth, and return. The land is not just observed, but actively engaged with, designed to support healing, presence, and ceremony throughout the year.

Bronze moccasin prints are embedded in the earth, grounding the space in memory—echoing the footsteps of children who attended Indian Residential Schools, and those who never made it home. The landscape holds these truths gently. Open views of the sky and across the rivers invite moments of reflection, grief, and quiet visioning. This is a place where the land speaks—of the past, of resilience, and possible futures.

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As understood by the Blackfoot people, knowledge emerges through direct experience—watching, feeling, gathering, being. The site restores **native grasslands**, creating a dynamic, living landscape where humans, animals, and plants coexist. Every detail—from the subtle rise and fall of mounds echoing the rolling foothills, to the textures underfoot and the evolving soundscape—immerses the visitor in a sensory dialogue with the earth. These mounds form intimate gathering spaces, moments of pause and discovery.

Buffalo, long a source of survival and sacred wisdom, are symbolically woven throughout the site. Their presence is found in the **interpretive wall**, in the **graphic language of the project**, and in the rhythm of movement across the land—an homage to their deep teachings and enduring spirit.

This is not just a site to walk through, but a place to remember, reconnect, and relearn. A place where stories live, relationships are honored, and the land continues to speak.

Plantings

Through our Two-Eyed Seeing approach, from the lens of an Indigenous World View combined with a lens of Biodiversity, we created a place for animals, plants, and humans.

From an Indigenous worldview, biodiversity is not just a measure of ecological health but a reflection of the deep, interwoven relationships between all living beings—humans, animals, plants, and the land itself. Indigenous cultures view the natural world as a vast, interconnected web where each species has a role to play in maintaining balance and harmony. Increasing biodiversity strengthens these connections, fostering resilience in ecosystems that support food sovereignty, medicinal plant availability, and sustainable hunting and fishing practices essential to Indigenous ways of life. A richer biodiversity also enhances climate adaptability, ensuring that both human and non-human communities can thrive despite environmental changes. By protecting and restoring biodiversity, we honor traditional ecological knowledge, preserve cultural identity, and uphold the reciprocal responsibility to care for the Earth, a principle central to local Indigenous belief systems of interconnectedness and recognizing all.

For the planting material we looked to local protected examples of native grasslands species, including: rough fescue, porcupine grass, spear grass, june grass, northern wheatgrass, blue grama grass, green needlegrass and western wheatgrass, sagebrush, salt sage, long-leaved sage, broomweed, wild rose, buckbrush, Bebb willow, Saskatoon, red osier dogwood, chokecherry and silverberry. Potential rare species include crowfoot violet, few-flowered rush, yellow evening primrose, mountain shooting star and yellow paintbrush. Perennial species may include prairie crocus, northern bedstraw, three-flowered avens, wild blue flax, and prairie sageworts. Potential tree species may be aspen, paper birch or Manitoba maple.

Animals

By restoring native plant communities and local species, the landscape becomes a refuge for wildlife—welcoming birds, pollinators, and small mammals back to the site. This ecological care honors Indigenous ways of knowing, where land is seen not as a resource but as a living relative to be nurtured and protected.

Bird species the landscape may support include piping plover, ferruginous hawk, burrowing owl, loggerhead Shrike, long-billed curlew, Baird's sparrow, sprague's pipit, upland sandpiper, sharp-tailed grouse, horned lark, chestnut collared longspur, savannah sparrow, and cooper's hawk. Mammals native to this area include coyote, Richardson's ground squirrel, thirteen-lined ground squirrel, white tailed jack rabbit and American badger.

Water as a Teacher: Stormwater Management Strategy

The landscape design integrates respectful, low-impact stormwater management strategies that reflect Indigenous values of stewardship and relationality with water. Techniques such as permeable surfaces and vegetated swales allow stormwater to move naturally through the site – filtered, slowed, and absorbed into the land are possible with this landscape design, and can be further developed in detailed design. These systems not only reduce runoff and support local ecology, but also align with “sponge city” principles, where the landscape is designed to hold and release water gradually, like a living sponge. Water is treated as a sacred element – not a problem to be controlled, but a teacher and relative to be respected. These systems are woven seamlessly into the memorial's form, supporting ceremony, reflection, and healing while building long-term resilience against future flood events.

Reduced Carbon Footprint + Carbon Neutral Strategy

The design prioritizes a reduced carbon footprint through the careful selection of materials with low embodied carbon and minimized transportation impacts. Locally sourced, durable, and natural materials are used wherever possible (sandstone, aggregate for concrete, local native plantings, locally sourced timbers for tensile poles) to reduce resource consumption and support regional economies. Light-coloured concrete paving was selected as a “cool” material to help reflect sunlight and reduce the urban heat island effect, contributing to improved thermal comfort, climate resilience, and accessibility on site.

Construction methods are chosen to limit waste and energy use, while plantings are selected not only for ecological benefit but also to sequester carbon over time. By embedding sustainability into every design decision – from material palettes to long-term maintenance strategies – the project reflects a commitment to climate responsibility and environmental stewardship rooted in Indigenous values of living in balance with the land.

The design embraces a low-carbon, land-honouring approach by integrating locally sourced sandstone, regional timbers, and low-carbon concrete, minimizing the environmental footprint while supporting local economies and material traditions. Construction methods prioritize low-waste practices and include modular tensile structures fabricated off-site, allowing for efficient on-site assembly with minimal disruption to the land. The planting strategy is rooted in Indigenous worldviews of reciprocity and respect for the natural world – featuring native and drought-tolerant species that sequester carbon, restore biodiversity, and thrive with minimal intervention. Groves of native trees and deep-rooted prairie grasses are thoughtfully placed to support soil health, foster wildlife habitats, and create restorative, living spaces that reflect the spirit of healing and renewal. Every aspect of the site speaks to a deeper relationship with the land – one that sustains, remembers, and honours the wisdom of those who have walked it since time immemorial.

The design meets GHG emission reduction goals through the use of locally sourced sandstone, regional timbers, and low-carbon concrete, significantly lowering emissions related to material transport and production. Native trees, deep-rooted grasses, and drought-tolerant plantings are strategically used throughout the site to naturally absorb carbon dioxide, restore biodiversity, and create a living landscape that sequesters carbon over time — reflecting Indigenous values of reciprocity and care for the Earth.

Conservation Approach

Archeology and Pre-Contact Significance

Indigenous nations have been potentially meeting at or close to the Confluence since Time Immemorial. Special care will be taken to not remove earth from the site unless it is deemed contaminated and required for remediation.

Our project team recognizes the lands adjacent to the proposed site hold historic and archaeological significance for their association with Fort Calgary, one of the first Northwest Mounted Police outposts in western Canada. The site is listed on the Canadian Register of Historic Places and designated as a Provincial Historic Resource as well as a City-Wide Historic Resource in Calgary. The Heritage Values and Character-Defining Elements of the site stem from its location at the Confluence of the Bow and Elbow Rivers, the sequence of uses on the site, and the presence of artifacts from those uses. Although no surface elements of the original palisaded and log forts remain, there are in situ subsurface structures and artifacts of daily life yet to be unearthed.

The proposed design elements for the Indian Residential School Memorial focus on the development of at-grade and above grade spaces and structures, limiting subsurface disturbance. The design will prioritize maintaining the natural site, in keeping with the parkland and replanted prairie state of the land. The proposed at-grade pathways and seating elements will blend into the landscape, and sheltered areas will be designed to reduce excavation. Prior to initiating site investigation and construction activities for the Memorial, the project team will develop a conservation plan in collaboration with Heritage authorities, the Elders Advisory Committee, and the City of Calgary. This plan will provide a guide for site activity and outline a conservation decision making process to ensure proper procedure and care are observed in the event subsurface structures or artifacts are unearthed. If modification of subsurface elements is required, the project team will coordinate an Intervention Request with Heritage authorities.

Architectural Elements

Lightweight Tensile Structures

Drawing inspiration from traditional tipi construction, we designed a lightweight, modular, and movable tensile structure that rests lightly on the land. The patterned fabric canopy features beadwork motifs, thoughtfully adapted from 1890s-era designs unique to each local Nation, honoring cultural heritage with care and ecological mindfulness.

Ceremonial Fire Pit

Anchoring the site is a ceremonial fire pit designed as a place of gathering, storytelling, and shared ritual. Inspired by Indigenous traditions, the fire becomes a living symbol of renewal, connection to land, and the continuity of community memory. The ceremonial fire is inset into the ground and can be covered for powwows and accessed during gatherings and ceremonies. The fire will follow local protocols around maintenance of a sacred fire, and we will look to local Knowledge Keepers for guidance. The concrete surround of the ceremonial fire pit is oriented to acknowledge the Four Directions, offering both spatial significance and cultural meaning. This element also presents an opportunity for collaboration with a Métis or Treaty 7 artist to integrate artwork directly into the concrete, enriching the space with visual storytelling and cultural expression.

Qulliq

A Qulliq (also spelled *kudlik*) is a traditional oil lamp that holds profound cultural, spiritual, and practical significance in Inuit culture. At the entrance to the lower bowl of the gathering circle will be a large soapstone Qulliq on a soapstone pedestal. As a central feature of the gathering space, a sculptural qulliq installation evokes the warmth, resilience, and ancestral wisdom of Inuit culture, offering a place for reflection and community connection. The lamp's presence serves as both a symbolic hearth and a timeless tribute to the life-giving role of women and fire in Inuit tradition. This feature will be designed in collaboration with an Inuit artist.

Landscape Features

Mounds

Large earth mounds are sculpted into the landscape to create a sense of intimacy and enclosure, forming a natural amphitheater that invites gathering and reflection. Their gentle contours echo the rolling foothills of southern Alberta, grounding the space with the natural contours of the landscape. Each mound is planted with drought tolerant, hearty native grasses that will help to mitigate erosion and enhance the overall natural beauty of the site.

The mounds gently enclose and protect the gathering space, while thoughtfully framing views toward the sacred confluence of the Bow and Elbow Rivers — a place of deep significance to Indigenous people since time immemorial.

Beyond their cultural and spatial significance, the mounds are strategically shaped to function as a natural dyke, offering added protection to nearby structures in the event of a 100-year flood. Their gentle, organic form blends seamlessly with the landscape while providing a subtle yet resilient barrier that supports both ecological function and climate resilience.

Moccasin Footprints

Set into the concrete along a contemplative walkway, bronze moccasin footprints offer a poignant landscape gesture—marking absence through presence. Evoking the memory of the children taken from their families, the installation weaves historical acknowledgment into the land, grounding the site in healing and remembrance.

Interpretive Wall

The bronze interpretive wall anchors the site, standing in quiet testimony to the painful history of Indian Residential Schools, etched with the hard truths and the local histories it scarred. Honoring Survivors, families, Elders, and intergenerational Survivors, the wall offers space for truth-telling and acknowledgment. The wall will feature national history in addition to Treaty 7 and Métis Otipimisiwak Districts 5 & 6 Indian Residential School Survivors, and honours and will be inclusive of urban Indigenous peoples impacted by the Indian Residential School system from across Canada: First-Nations, Metis, and Inuit peoples living in Calgary.

Lighting

Landscape lighting is thoughtfully integrated to preserve the natural rhythms of the environment, using low intensity, shielded fixtures that minimize glare and disruption. Warm-toned, downward-facing lights ensure visibility while remaining sensitive to local wildlife, protecting nocturnal animals and pollinators. The lighting strategy follows Dark Sky principles, reducing light pollution to maintain the integrity of the night sky and support ecological balance across the site.

Amphitheatre Seating

A gently curving concrete bench is integrated into the natural contours of the amphitheater, offering accessible, durable seating for gatherings, storytelling, drumming, and powwows. Designed with care for Elders, children, and individuals with mobility needs, the bench provides comfortable, inclusive seating that supports both intimate and large-scale cultural events. The concrete face of the seating provides an additional opportunity for a potential Métis artist collaboration.

Quiet Seating

Opposite the interpretive wall, a quiet seating area offers a more private, contemplative space for reflection. Surrounded by flowering perennials and shaded by tree canopies, the seating is fully accessible and thoughtfully integrated to provide comfort, calm, immersive landscape for quiet contemplation and remembrance.

Temporary Memorial

The inclusion of the former temporary memorial from the steps of City Hall marks a powerful entrance to the site, honoring the grassroots community efforts that sparked this journey of remembrance. It stands as a lasting reminder of collective mourning, resilience, and the voices that called for truth, acknowledgment, and actions of reconciliation.

Further Considerations

Artist Collaborations

The project envisions three meaningful artist collaborations that center Indigenous voices and deepen the cultural presence on site:

1. **Inuit Artist** — To design and fabricate a large sculptural *qulliq*, serving as a symbolic welcome at the entrance to the lower bowl. This piece may also function as a smudge stone, marking a natural threshold into the ceremonial space.
2. **Métis Artist** — To create a mural along the concrete face of the amphitheater seating, bringing stories, patterns, and Métis visual language into the heart of the gathering area.
3. **Treaty 7 First Nations Artist** — To design the ground plane pattern of the central circle surrounding the ceremonial fire, embedding meaning and cultural resonance directly into the landscape.

These collaborations ensure the meaningful inclusion of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit artists, creating a site that is representative, welcoming, and rooted in cultural respect and diversity.

Key Considerations for Métis, Inuit, and Urban Indigenous

In designing a memorial that honors Survivors and the legacy of Indian Residential Schools in Calgary, it is essential to meaningfully reflect the distinct cultures, worldviews, and material traditions of Métis, Inuit, and Urban Indigenous communities in addition to the Treaty 7 Nations.

For Métis representation, the design incorporates elements such as floral beadwork motifs, Red River cart forms, and curved, flowing patterns reflective of movement and blending cultures—symbolizing their identity as "the people who walk between worlds." A lightweight tensile structure inspired by the shape and construction of the Red River cart tarp and tipi allows for gathering spaces that are gently placed on the land, embodying a respect for transience and care. Beadwork-inspired patterns on the fabric honour Métis visual language, tying past to present. Native plantings along the pathways recall traditional foraging routes, while the opportunity to include Métis artist collaborations ensures cultural representation through art and story. This landscape becomes a place where Métis memory is honored, and where traditional lifeways are re-rooted in the soil — a gesture of reconnection, healing, and affirmation.

While geographically distant from southern Alberta, the Inuit are intimately connected to this memorial through shared history and collective trauma. The inclusion of a large sculptural Qulliq — the traditional Inuit oil lamp — at the entrance to the ceremonial lower bowl is both symbolic and practical. As a source of light, warmth, and life in Inuit culture, the Qulliq becomes a threshold marker: a place to pause, warm up by the light or smudge, and cross into sacred space. Designed in collaboration with an Inuit artist, it will carry with it the quiet power of intergenerational care and resilience. Though the southern landscape is unfamiliar to Inuit traditions, the project makes space for Inuit stories and ceremonial presence — allowing them to be seen, held, and honored in a shared space of remembrance and healing.

Urban Indigenous considerations acknowledge the diversity of Nations living in the city today, many of whom are disconnected from their homelands often due to displacement and intergenerational trauma. The design will create inclusive, welcoming spaces for reflection and ceremony, with attention to accessibility, visibility, and cultural plurality. Across all, land-based knowledge, ceremony, and relationality to nature will guide design strategies that weave together symbolic plantings, sculptural forms, and gathering spaces into a unified and respectful whole.



Summer powwow at Footprints in the Firelight