



Fortson Square ca. 1912. Photo courtesy of the Museum of History and Industry



Fortson Square: Today

FORTSON SQUARE RENOVATION

January 2025



# INTRO | PROJECT SUMMARY

This application seeks approval for the redevelopment of Fortson Square, a roughly 5,000-square-foot public space located at the southeast corner of Yesler Way and 2nd Avenue Extension South, within the Pioneer Square Preservation District. The project is a community-driven initiative that builds upon a concept design developed in partnership with community stakeholders, including the Chief Seattle Club and the Alliance for Pioneer Square. The iterative design process has been shaped by feedback from previous briefings with the Pioneer Square Preservation Board and ongoing community engagement, ensuring the final application reflects a thoughtful and responsive approach to the district's historic and cultural context.

The redesign is inspired by Fortson Square’s historical and cultural significance as a gathering place and its proximity to the Chief Seattle Club’s recently completed ʔálʔal building. The project celebrates the enduring legacy of the Coast Salish peoples, with a design that centers cultural engagement and storytelling. Drawing from the Forest to Shore concept, the design reflects the ecological transect of a Puget Sound shoreline, transitioning from bluff to beach. The space has been thoughtfully designed to complement the planned Grandmother Frog Welcome Figure, which has been previously approved by the Pioneer Square Preservation Board.

The project envisions Fortson Square as a vibrant public space that fosters connection and reflects the community’s values. Improvements aim to enhance accessibility, creating an inviting and inclusive environment for all users. Redesigned pathways and seating areas encourage gathering and social interaction, while native landscaping and lighting improvements contribute to a safe, welcoming atmosphere. The redesigned space aspires to honor Fortson Square’s historical role as a place of gathering while providing a renewed opportunity for cultural exchange and community pride.



Looking South from Smith Tower, 2020

COAST SALISH TERRITORIES

The Coast Salish People are comprised of nearly seventy tribes or bands who speak fourteen languages. The term “Salish” was used by ethnologists to denote their linguistic ties to a root language. Salish People have been occupying contiguous territories along the Salish Sea in present-day British Columbia and western Washington State. The region was rich with varied food sources—including five types of salmon, shellfish, deer, root, bulb, shoots, berries—that were preserved for use in the winter, the prime time for art-making and spiritual ceremonial activities.

Extended families lived in large plank houses in permanent winter villages and married into different villages, thus creating valuable networks of kinship and increasing access to territories and resources. Cooperative work under the guidance of respected leaders solidified the high ranking of certain families. Lush goat wool robes and carved houseposts, rattles, masks, and ritual paraphernalia were expressions of status but also of the power conferred on families and individuals by spirit entities. Despite devastating incursions into Salish lifeways in the modern era, distinctive Salish arts, oral traditions and ceremonies have endured and nurtured a vital sense of Salish identity.



The shed-style longhouses of this central Coast Salish village are similar, though smaller than those usually built further south, around Puget Sound. 1866 {Royal British Columbia Museum}



SITE | HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD

LITTLE CROSSING-OVER PLACE

“The southern portion of Occidental Square was once part of a tidal lagoon and island – very likely an island only at high tide. The Duwamish people built a winter village in this area, which included a longhouse used for shelter, celebration, and trade. A southern -flowing stream, now buried under city streets, provided fresh water and emptied into the lagoon near where 3rd Ave S and S Main St intersect today. When early settlers arrived in the 1850’s the tribes welcomed and helped settlers build their city. Chief Si’ahl, or Chief Seattle, after whom the city was named, was the leader of both the Duwamish and neighboring Suquamish Peoples. Chief Seattle sought alliances for the prosperity of his people, but urbanization and city policies eventually pushed the Duwamish from the Pioneer Square area. Today the Duwamish Longhouse and Cultural Center along the Duwamish Rivers demonstrates their ongoing presence and strong connections to this city.”

From: [Trail to Treasure](#), Pioneer Square Historic Walking Tour - Trail2Treasure.org

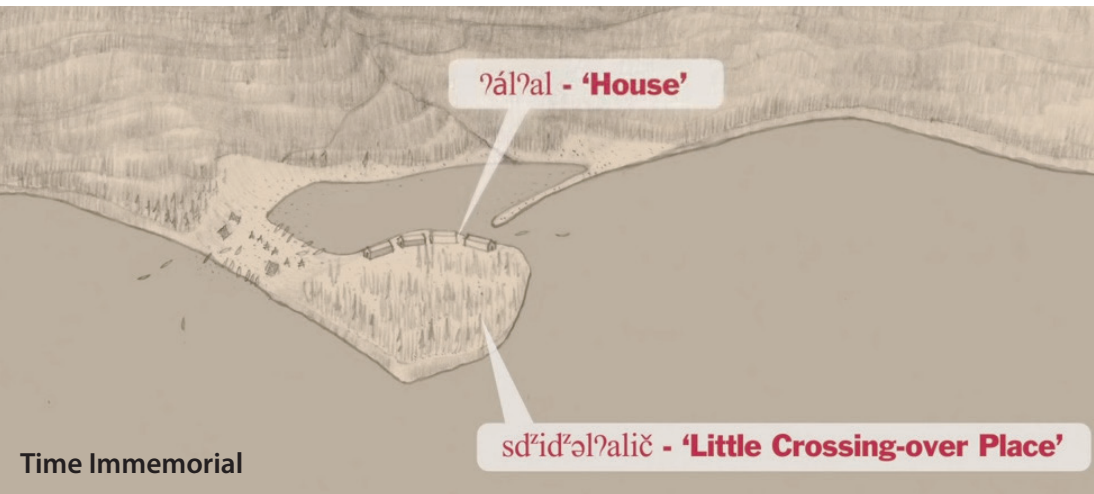
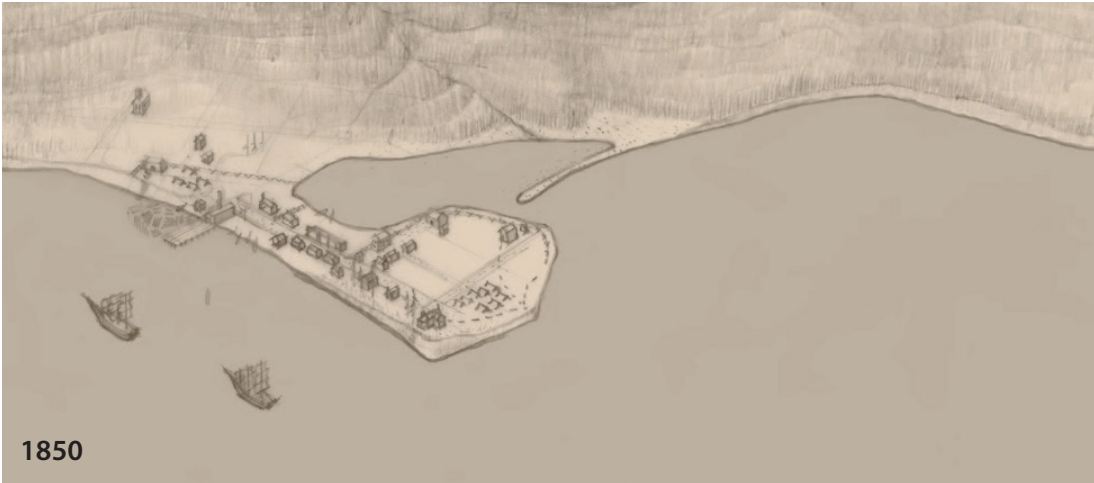
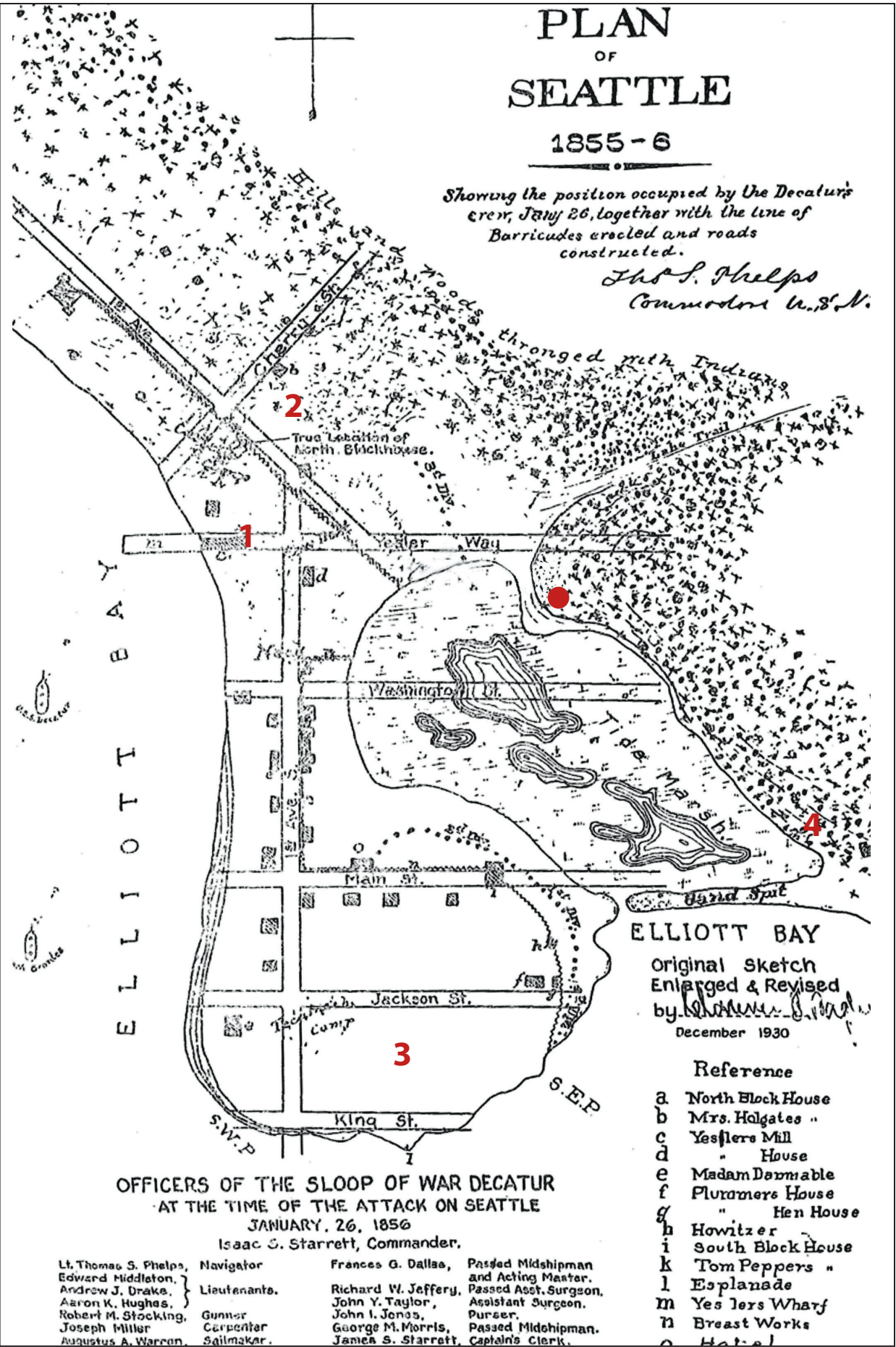


Image & labels from: *Native Village to Metropolis*, Burke Museum 2012

KEY:

- Fortson Square
- 1 Little Crossing-Over Place  
A small portage where the ruins of up to 8 longhouses were found in 1852
- 2 Grounds of the Leader’s Camp  
Also known as “chief place”, the name of the village where Soowalt (Chief Seattle’s brother) was headman.
- 3 Tecumseh’s Camp
- 4 Fresh water stream

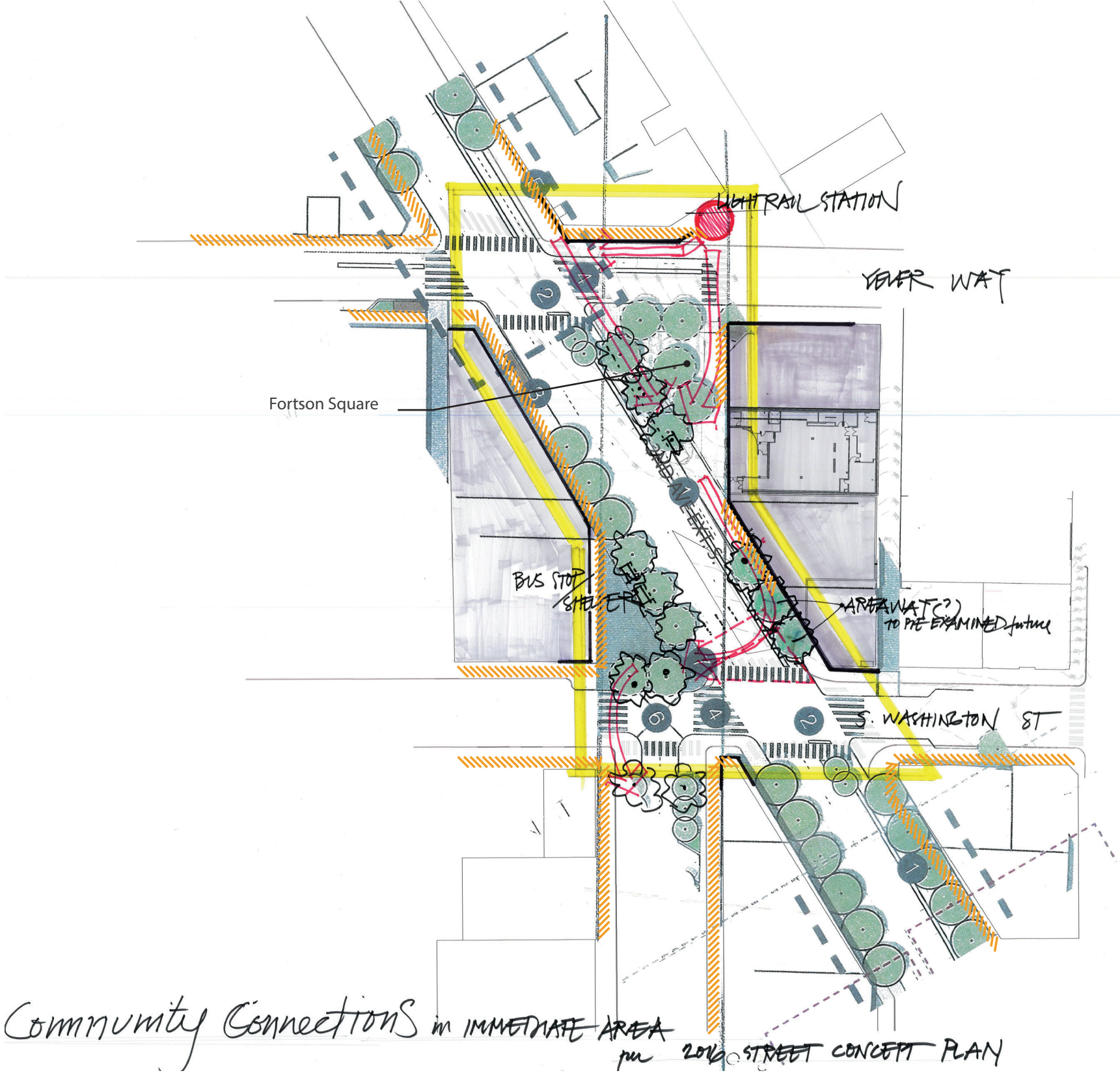




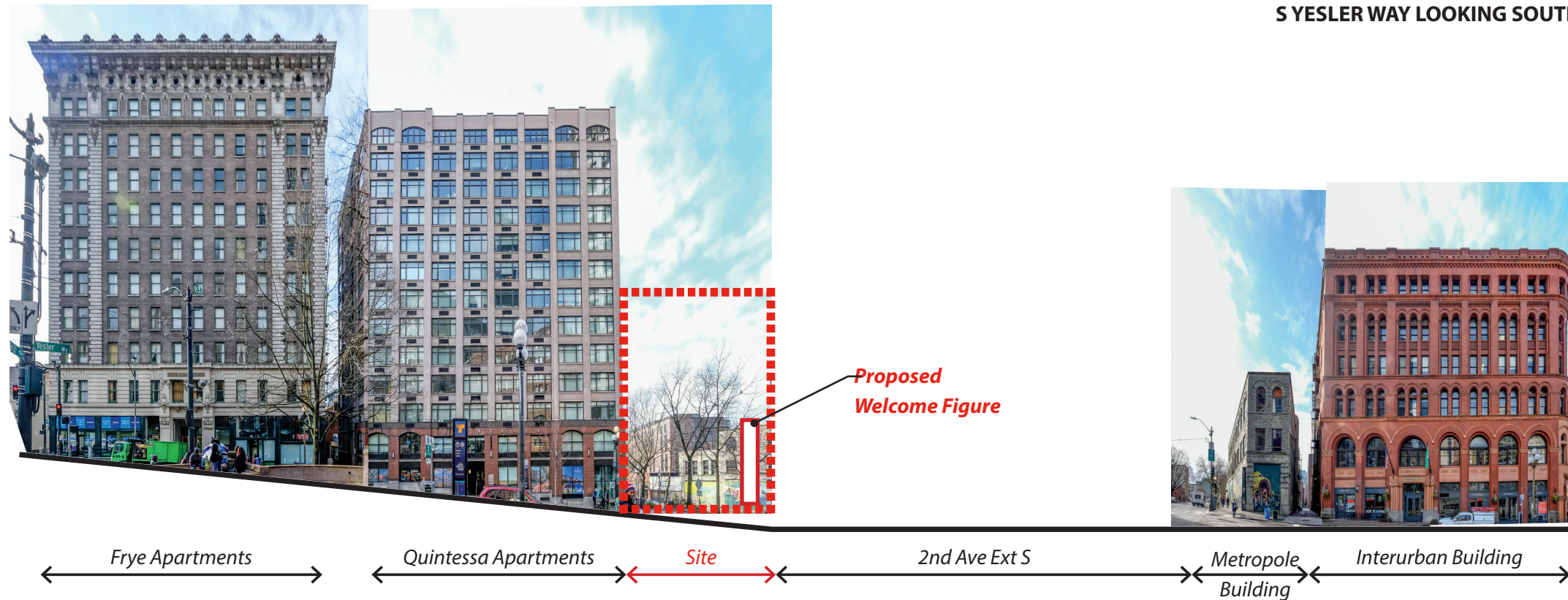
#### Neighborhood Context

1. Fortson Square
2. Chief Seattle Club - ?ál?al
3. Chief Seattle Club - Monterey Hotel
4. Quintessa Apartments
5. 405 2nd Ave Ext S
6. Frye Apartments
7. Frye Garage
8. Canton Lofts Project
9. Union Gospel Mission
10. Masins Building
11. Weyerhaeuser Building
12. Occidental Square
13. Metropole Building
14. Interurban Building
15. Smith Tower
16. Morrison Hotel
17. Prefontaine Place
18. City Hall Park
19. Tashiro Kaplan Artist Lofts/Arts Building
20. The Loft

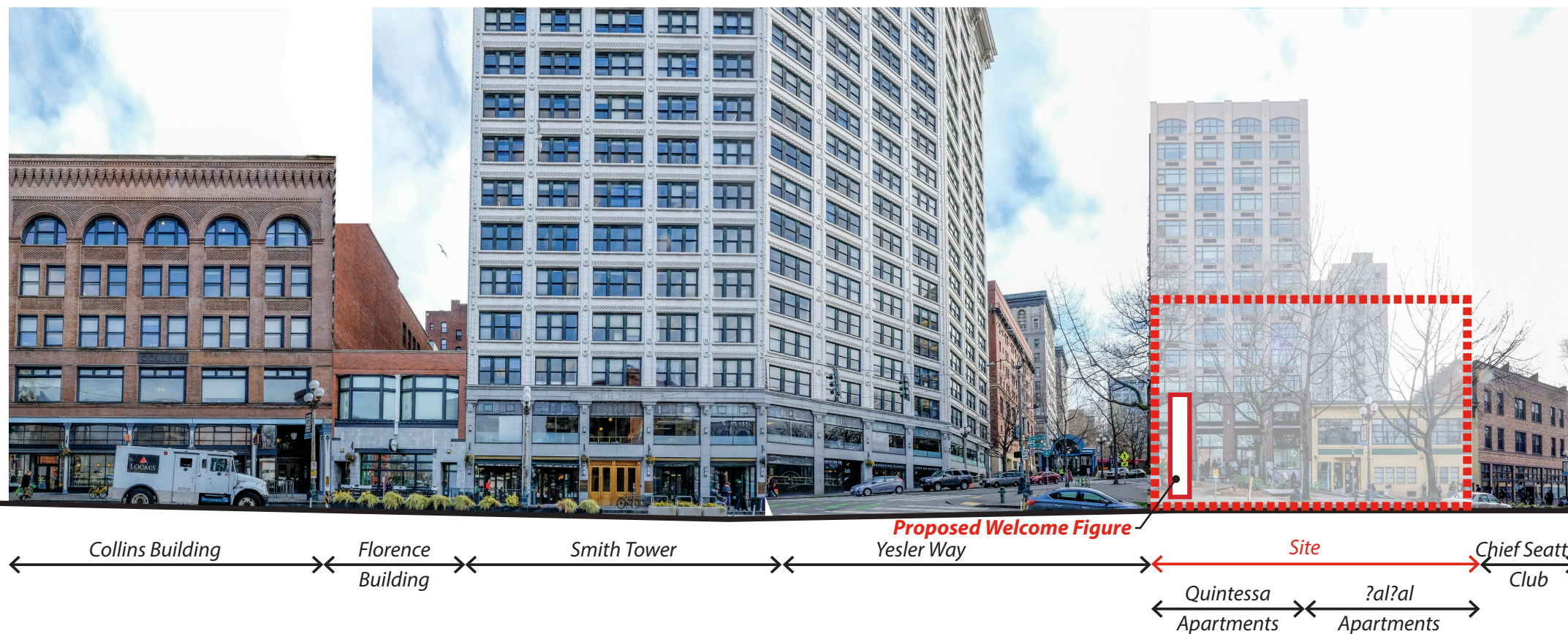
From: Native Village to Metropolis, Burke Museum 2012



S YESLER WAY LOOKING SOUTH



2ND AVENUE SOUTH/2ND AVE EXT SOUTH LOOKING EAST



# SITE | FORTSON SQUARE EXISTING CONDITIONS

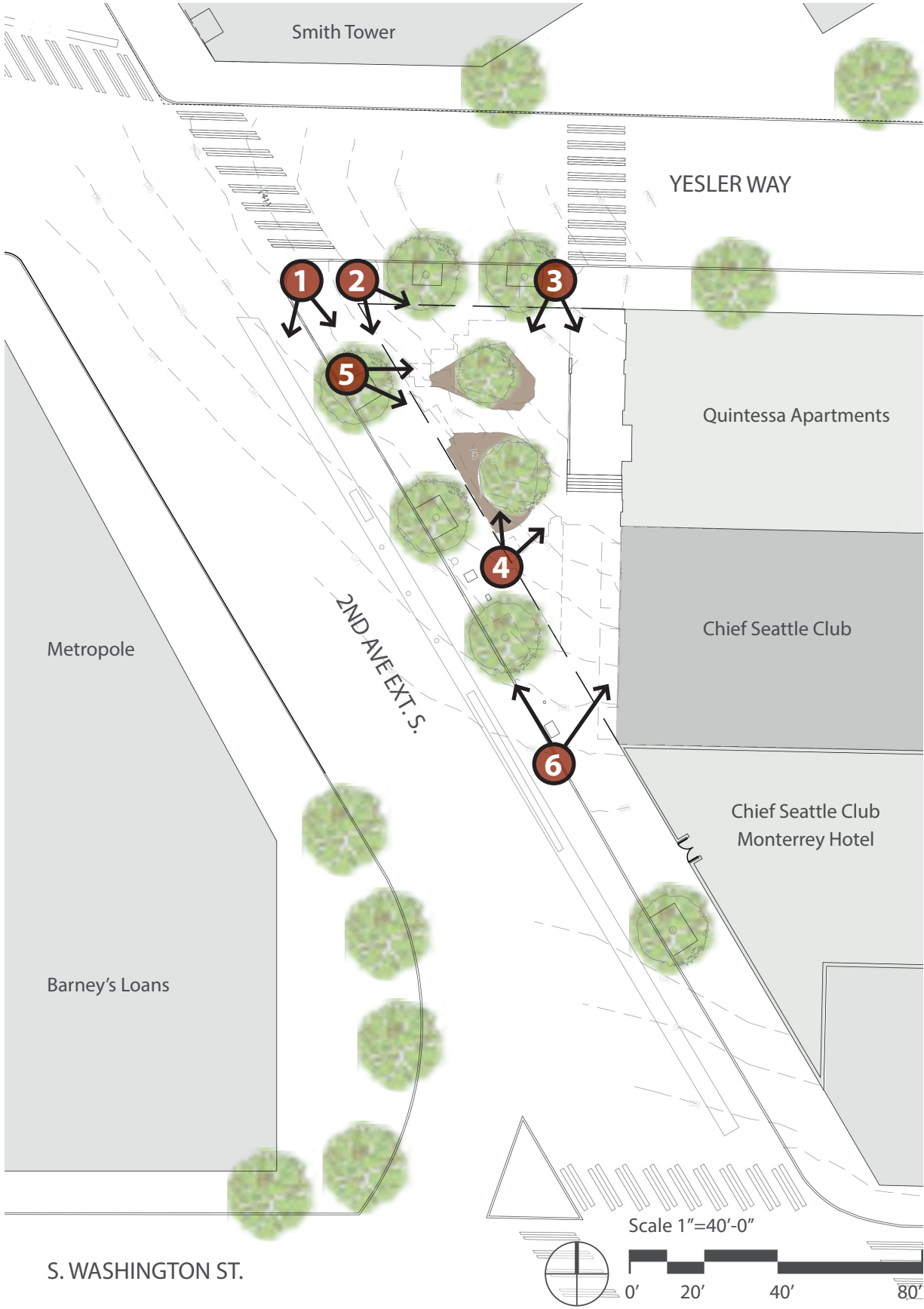
Fortson Square was dedicated in 1901 in honor of Captain George H. Fortson of the United States Navy and other Seattle war dead, who were killed in the Philippines during the Spanish-American War. A plaque in recognition of Captain Fortson is embedded in the pavers toward the northwest corner of the site. The process is underway to rename the Square with an indigenous name, reflecting the important connection the site has to the historic and current connection to the Coast Salish people.

Archival research notes that the Square was planted and paved around 1907. The shape of the Square was impacted by the 1928-1929 Second Avenue Extension, likely responsible for ensuring the triangular shape of Fortson Square. In 1968, the same area was again planted and five street lamps were installed. The last major improvement was completed in 1999 when artist Elizabeth Conner and landscape architect Cliff Willwerth redesigned Fortson Square, adding a "sculptural ruin" of art that referenced the period between 1890 to 1950. Portions of these sculptural ruins have since been removed for reuse elsewhere. What remains has been deaccessioned and will be removed as part of the demolition of the site.

The site is bound to the west and north with healthy street trees in the oak family. Two oaks also currently stand in the interior of the site. These interior oak trees receive inadequate sunlight due to the shading of the street trees, they limit light to the site during winter and evening hours, and they are sited in planting beds that contribute to challenging grading conditions across the interior of the site. As part of this project, the two interior trees will be removed, and rodent abatement will be performed during this process to address existing pest issues.



Facing South from Yesler Way showing line of replica gas light fixtures



SITE | CONSTRAINTS



- Legend
- Fortson Square Redesign Area
  - Sidewalk Area
  - Building entry
  - Transit node
  - Protected Bicycle Lane

# SITE | GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND DESIGN DIRECTION

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Fortson Square is redesigned to optimize its usability as a public space for neighbors in Pioneer Square, including the Chief Seattle Club. The design provides safe and accessible circulation routes while fostering a compelling environment for cultural engagement and meaningful visitor experiences.

As the first native-focused public space in Pioneer Square, the design centers the Indigenous presence, embracing the diversity of Native cultures, languages, and traditions of American Indians and Alaska Natives. By honoring the original inhabitants of this land, the space becomes a source of pride for both the Native community and the broader public. Inspiration for the redesign draws on Salish cultural elements such as art, music, storytelling, food, plants, and animals, bringing these traditions into the heart of Pioneer Square.

## DESIGN AND LAYOUT

- Redesigned Public Realm
  - The "Forest to Shore" concept shapes distinct zones for gathering and cultural expression, transitioning from bluff to beach. Thoughtfully integrated seating and gathering areas complement the site's natural and cultural elements, creating a space that encourages connection, storytelling, and reflection.
- Programming
  - The space is designed to meet the neighborhood's programming needs, with a dedicated cultural performance area that accommodates significant activities, including prayer ceremonies, drumming, and singing performances.
- Cultural and Artistic Integration
  - The space honors the enduring legacy of the Coast Salish peoples by complementing the planned Grandmother Frog Welcome Figure and incorporating decorative railing panels inspired by Salish art.
- Accessibility Enhancements
  - The design addresses uneven surfaces and slopes, creating a more accessible environment. Grading adjustments ensure level areas that accommodate a variety of community activities and enhance ease of movement throughout the site.
- Public Safety Improvements
  - Lighting upgrades and improved sightlines create a secure and welcoming atmosphere for visitors.
- Native Landscaping
  - Inspired by the ecological transect of the Puget Sound shoreline, the landscape incorporates native plantings, including trees, shrubs, ferns, and groundcovers.
- Infrastructure Upgrades
  - New paving with custom patterns and finishes, along with stairways and railings, enhance circulation and functionality while supporting the usability of the space.

# SITE | FOREST TO SHORE CONCEPT

## FOREST TO SHORE

- Conceptually mimics the transect of a Puget Sound shoreline - from beach to bluff



Grandmother Frog  
Wood Welcome Figure,  
Carved and Painted

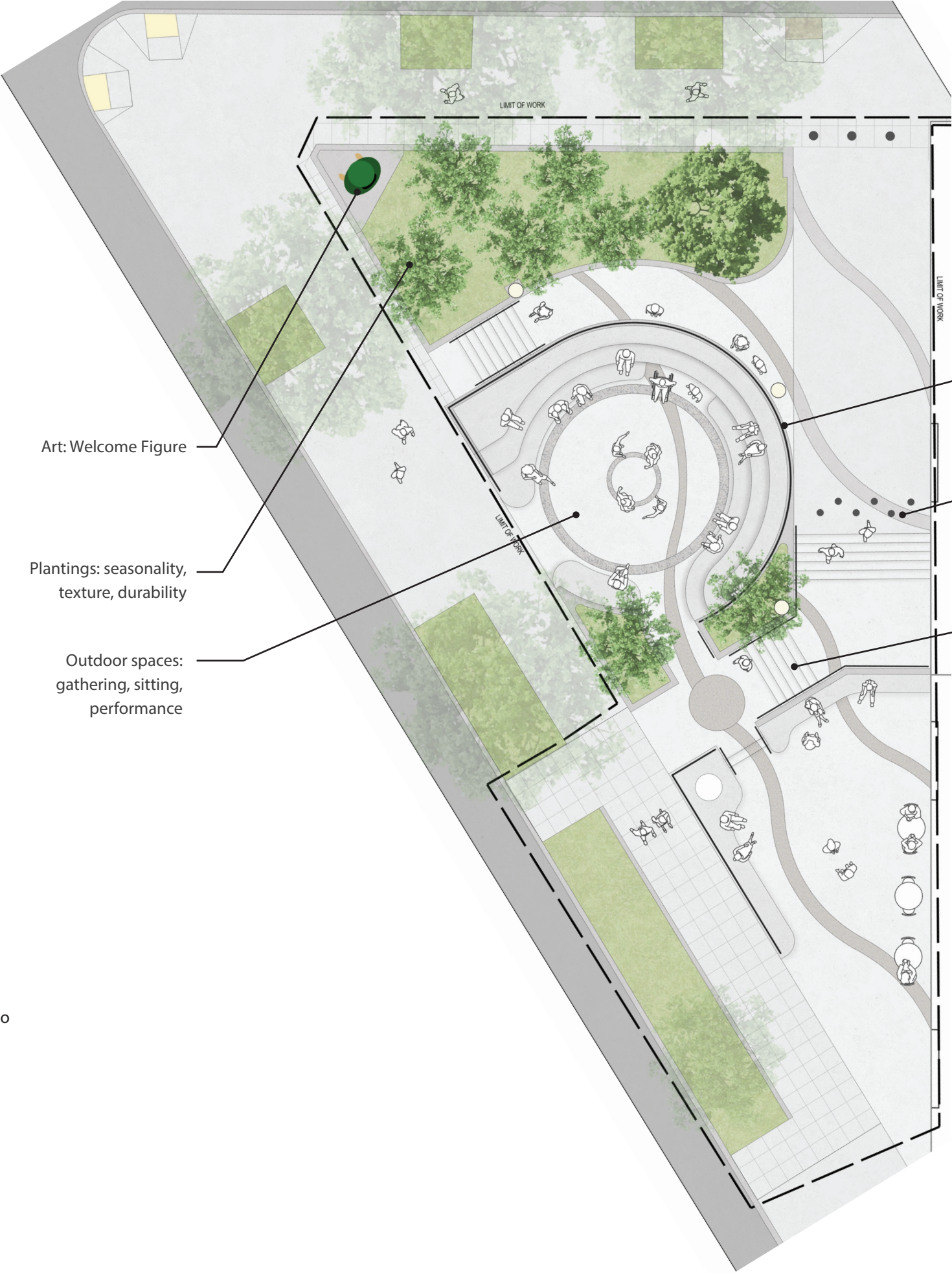
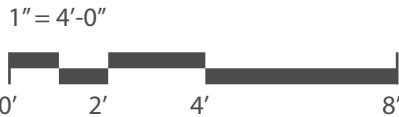


Wood Base,  
Carved and Painted

Metal Basket Shroud  
Over Concrete Base  
and Lighting -  
Proportional to Figure

FRONT ELEVATION

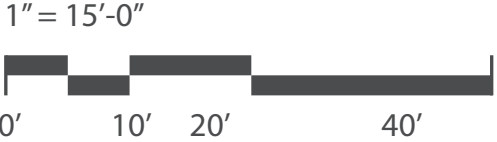
Artist:  
Andrea Wilbur-Sigo  
Squaxin Island



Art: Panel Railing

Paving: patterns, banding,  
color, materials (seashell  
aggregate), finishes

Stairs



SITE | MATERIALITY

PAVING

Shell aggregate and beach gravel bands.  
See 100% CD set for pavement specifications.



LIGHTING

SCL Material Standards: Globe - 5724.15, Pole - 5721.40  
See 100% CD set for additional specifications.



SOURCE: GOOGLE MAPS

ART PANEL RAILING

The artwork shown here is provided as a conceptual reference. The final design and color palette are being developed collaboratively with the Chief Seattle Club and the Office of Arts & Culture to ensure they align with the project’s vision and cultural significance.



SOURCE: NOEL BROWN AND AMANDA HALL, CORE GRAVEL

# SITE | PLANTING PALETTE

## FOREST TO SHORE

The plant palette for Fortson Square draws inspiration from the ecological transect of the Puget Sound shoreline, transitioning from bluff to beach. Native trees, shrubs, ferns, and groundcovers are chosen for their seasonality, texture, and durability, creating a landscape that reflects the site’s natural and cultural identity.

### SMALL TREES/LARGE SHRUBS

‘Pacific Fire’ Vine Maple, *Acer circinatum*



Flowering Dogwood, *Cornus kousa x nuttallii*



### MEDIUM SHRUBS

Oregon Grape *Mahonia aquifolium*



Salal, *Gaultheria shallon*



Nootka Rose, *Rosa nutkana*



### GROUNDCOVER

Creeping Oregon Grape, *Mahonia repens*



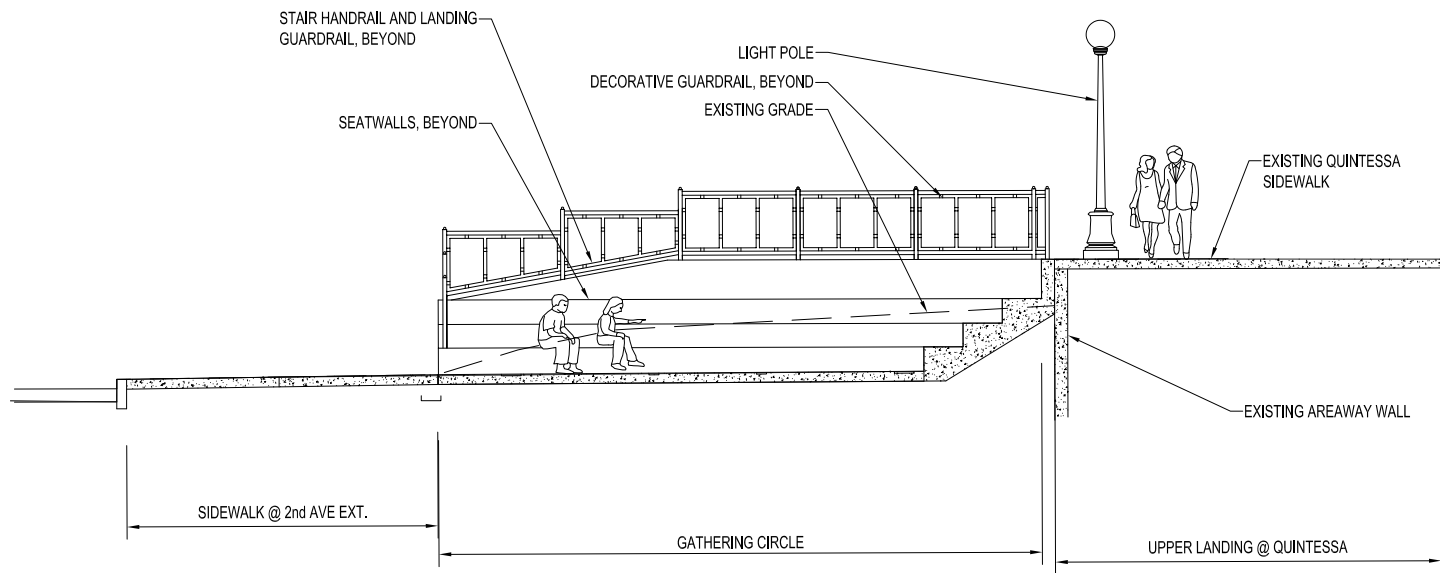
Creeping Dogwood, *Cornus canadensis*



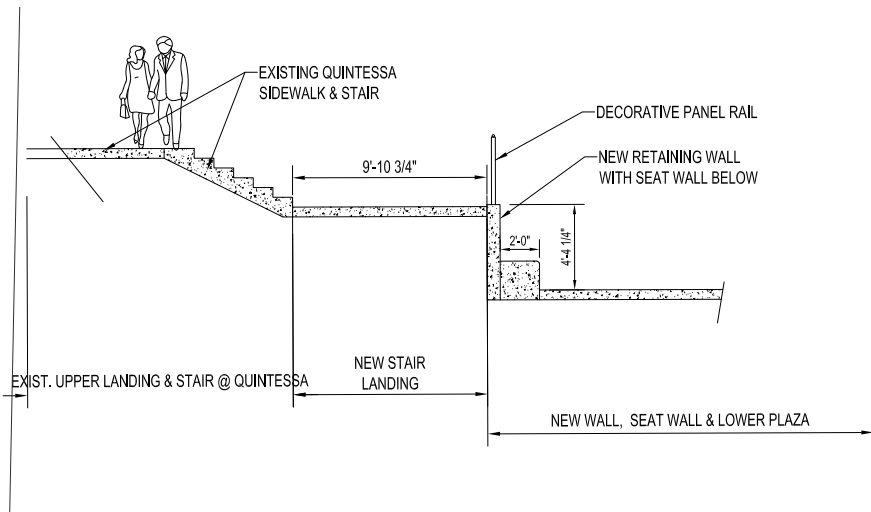
Sword fern, *Polystichum munitum*



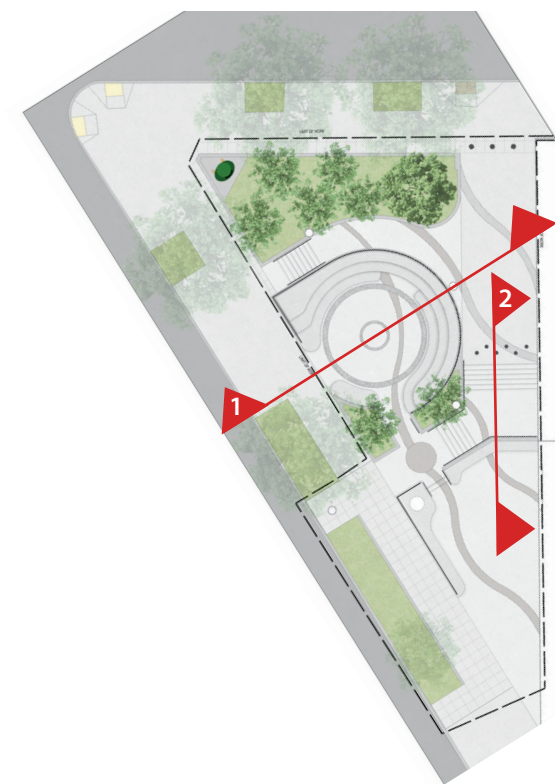
SITE | CONCEPTUAL SITE SECTIONS



1 SITE SECTION THROUGH THE GATHERING CIRCLE  
SCALE: 1" = 5'-0"



2 SITE SECTION FROM QUINTESSA STAIRS TO LOWER PLAZA  
SCALE: 1" = 5'-0"





1 SITE ELEVATION - 2ND AVENUE EXTENSION - NORTH TO SOUTH  
SCALE: 1" = 10'-0"

