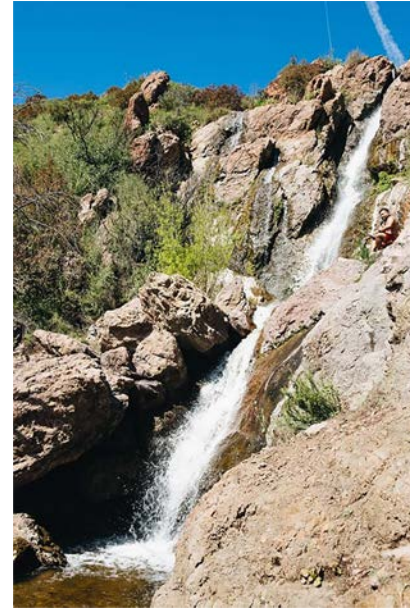


Tongva Park

FINDING PURPOSE THROUGH PROGRAM



Addressing Opportunities and Challenges Through Adaptive Reuse

“The most important scale is the people scale. The city at eye level and at 5km/hour.”

-Jan Gehl



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TONGVA PARK

Location: Santa Monica, CA, USA

Architect: James Corner Field Operations LLC

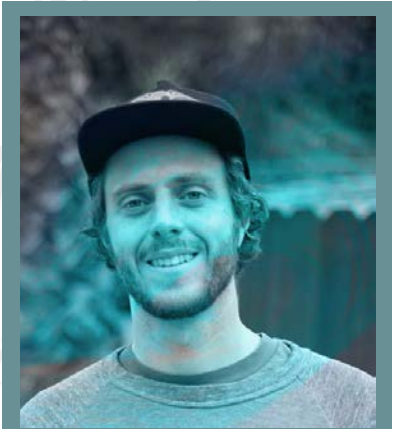
Budget: \$92,300,000

Opened: 2013

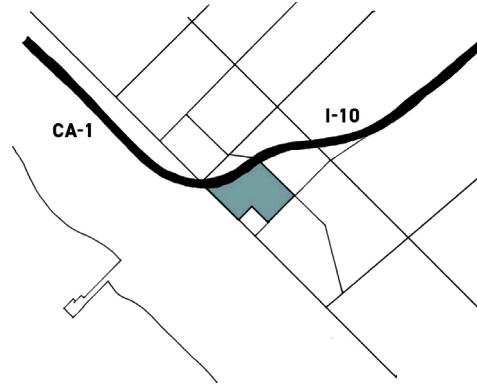
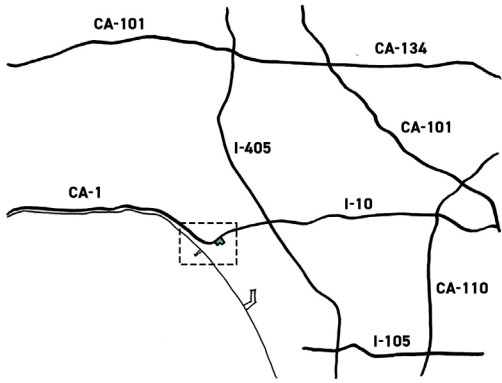
Hours: 6 a.m. to 11 p.m.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

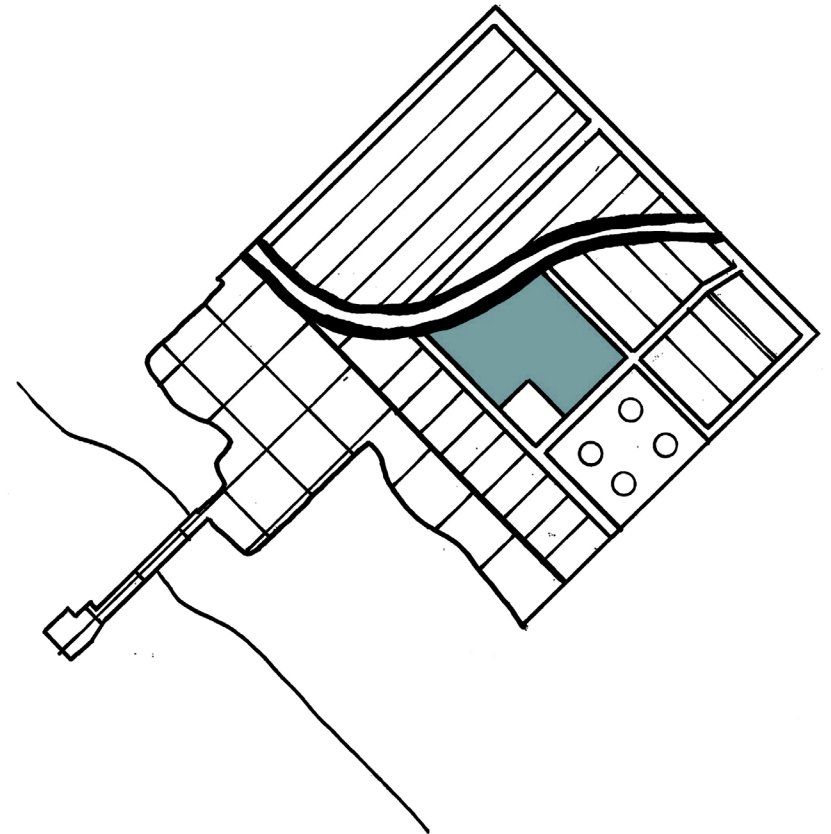
I would like to thank David, Rebecca and Laura for their guidance and wisdom, as well as my classmates for the ongoing inspiration.



Josep Ferrer Miranda was born and bred somewhere between Spain and California. His work with greywater and rainwater irrigation systems at Greywater Corps led him to the field of landscape architecture, where his ultimate goal is to encourage spaces that are a joy to occupy and inhabit. Function first, form will follow, always at human scale and with water top of mind.



NTS 

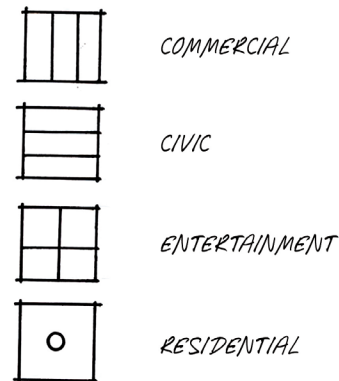


LOCATION & CONTEXT

Tongva Park is located in front of City Hall on the former site of the RAND Corporation headquarters and was reportedly acquired by the city of Santa Monica for \$50 million.

Construction cost an additional \$42.3 million, according to city figures.

Annually, the city spends around \$100,000 on basic maintenance, plus \$20,000 on tree work, \$10,000 on custodial work, and \$330,000 on ambassadors who answer questions and keep an eye on the park (Morley, 2019).



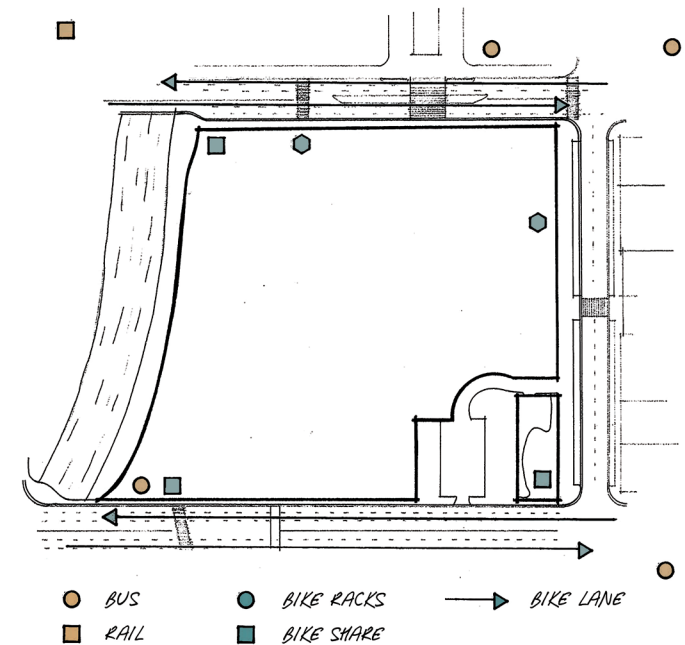
ACCESS & MOBILITY

The park is central and well connected, with several bus providers as well as light rail. Most notably, Santa Monica's extensive **Big Blue Bus** network weaves several lines through the area, and the LA Metro's **Expo Line** terminates nearby at Downtown Santa Monica.

The park offers extensive **bicycle infrastructure**, including plentiful racks and bike lanes. Bike and scooter shares are also available.

Pedestrian and ADA mobility are emphasized throughout the design, with gently sloping, wide pathways connecting access points around the perimeter of the site.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION



PEDESTRIAN CIRCULATION

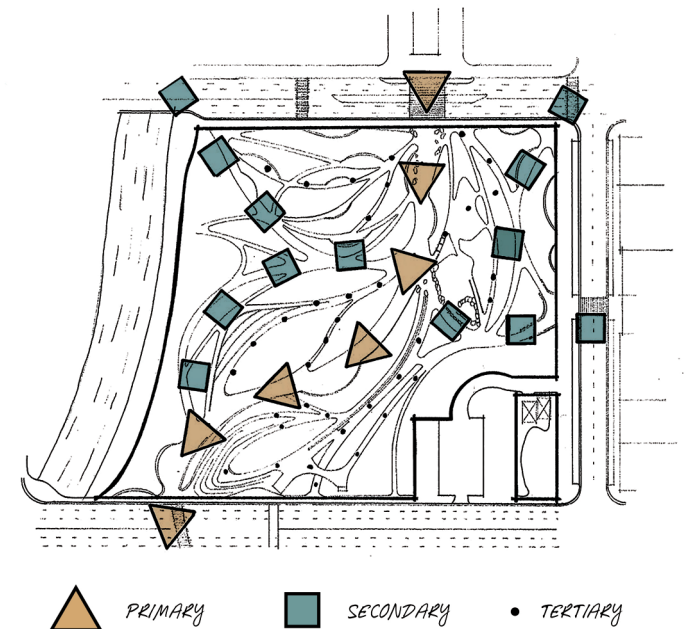


Photo: Hayden AI



Photo: ExperiencingLA.com

Scale 1" = 240'



▲ PRIMARY

■ SECONDARY

• TERTIARY

ACTIVE vs PASSIVE USES

While the park was designed mostly as a passive space, this use mode fails to draw many visitors. Active uses can be observed throughout the site, both sanctioned and not. The **playground** was part of the original design and remains it's most successful feature, often bustling with children and their guardians. **Joggers** frequent the area but mostly stay on the perimeter, ostensibly due to concerns about safety within.



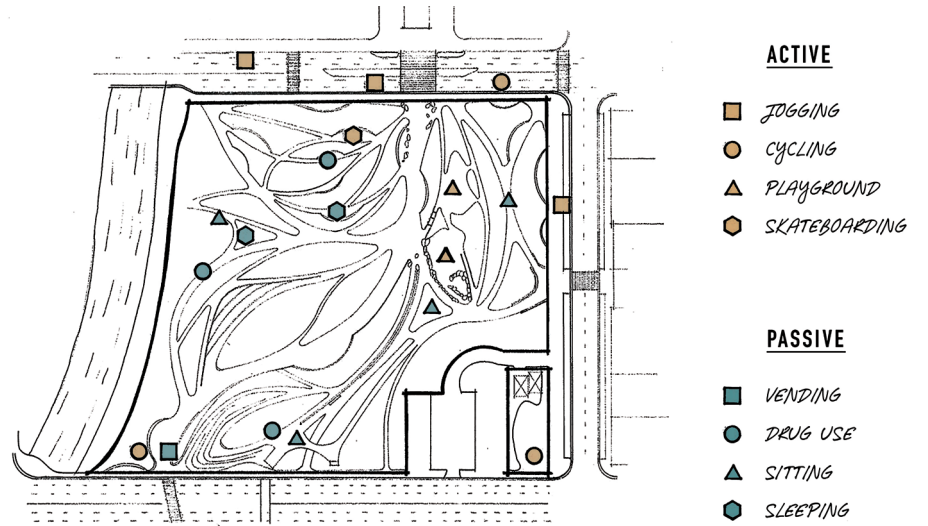
Photo: Santa Monica Observer



Photo: meandmy4boys.wordpress.com



Photo: SiliconBeachHomesinLA.com



“Skateboarding is not a crime”

- Unknown

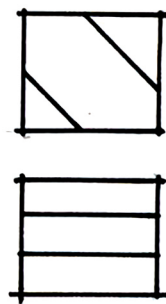
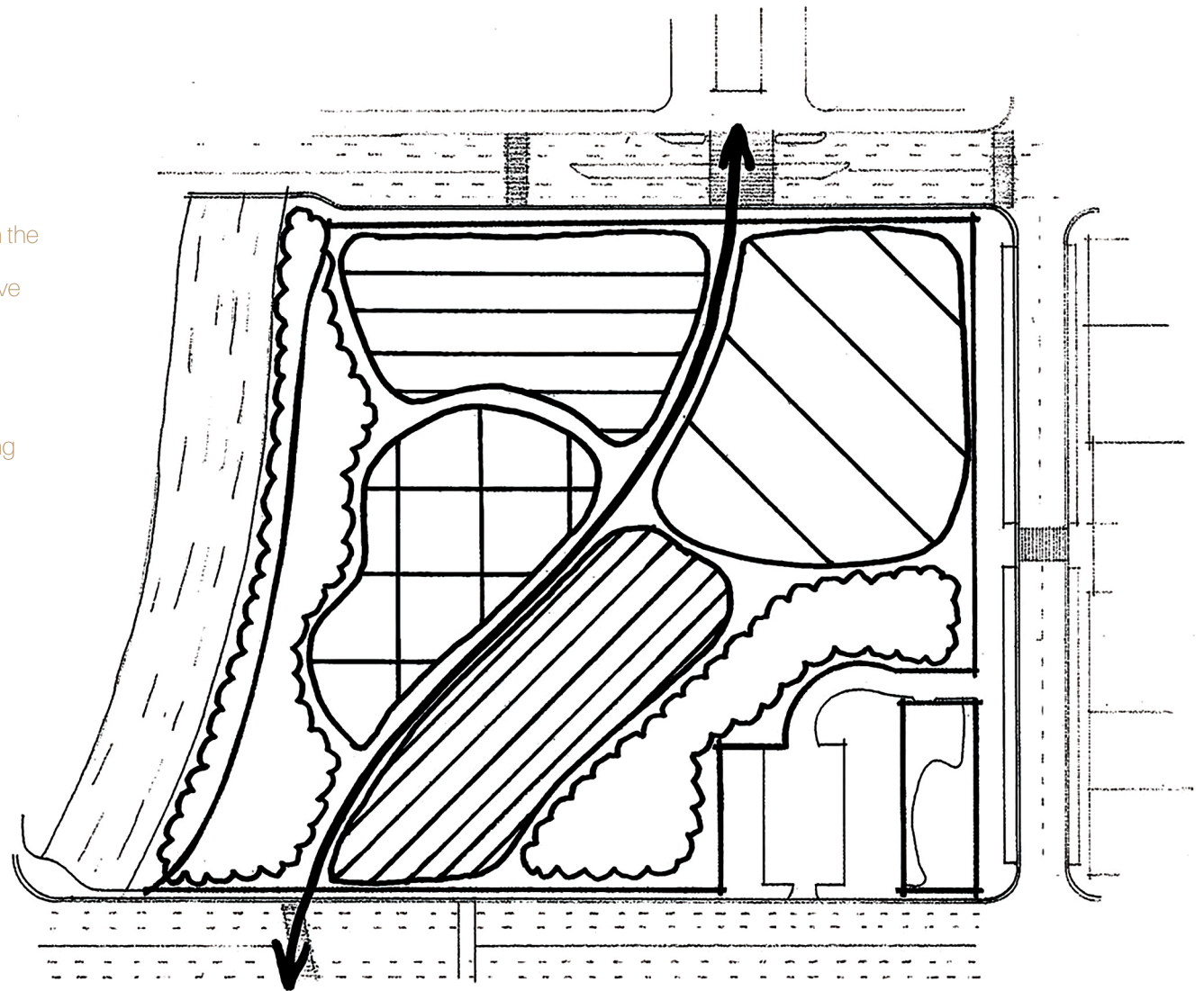
Skateboarders, while not allowed, are almost always seen in the park, drawn by its unique design features and hardscape. Most of the site is covered in skate deterrents, but they still find ways to use the space. **Street vendors** also inhabit a gray area, at times illicit but others encouraged by the city in the form of **food trucks** aimed at bringing visibility and heightened safety to the picnic area (Morley, 2019).

CONCEPT

Tongva Park is a statement piece with mixed practical results. Of the designated use areas in the original design, perhaps only Explore and Observe live up to their intent.

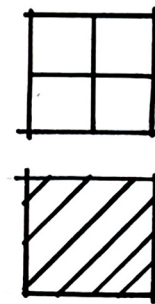
The space remains underutilized, while existing uses are a mixed bag of positive and negative activities. Nefarious uses are a driver of behavior, often leading to an unsafe atmosphere.

Active uses dissuade negative activities with the presence of others and the sense that the space has a purpose and is not "empty". The passive areas are not successful, leading to a vacuum that is often filled with illicit and threatening behavior.



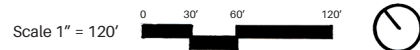
EXPLORE

IDLE



GATHER

OBSERVE



SITE PLAN

Mostly a parking lot, the formerly flat landscape was **shaped to mimic the curves and colors of the Santa Monica Mountains and the Pacific Ocean**. Flora and fauna, as well as water features, were inspired by Arroyos lined with **boulders** and **sycamore** trees, as well as the ocean-facing landscapes where they terminate.

The many nooks and crannies formed by the beautiful **grading, concrete structures and plantings** form a striking ensemble, but also come with issues.

The **lack of visibility** into the park was intended to give an intimate atmosphere to the space. Unfortunately, it has created a myriad of **hiding spots** that have been observed as places for dealing and using hard drugs.



Scale 1" = 160'

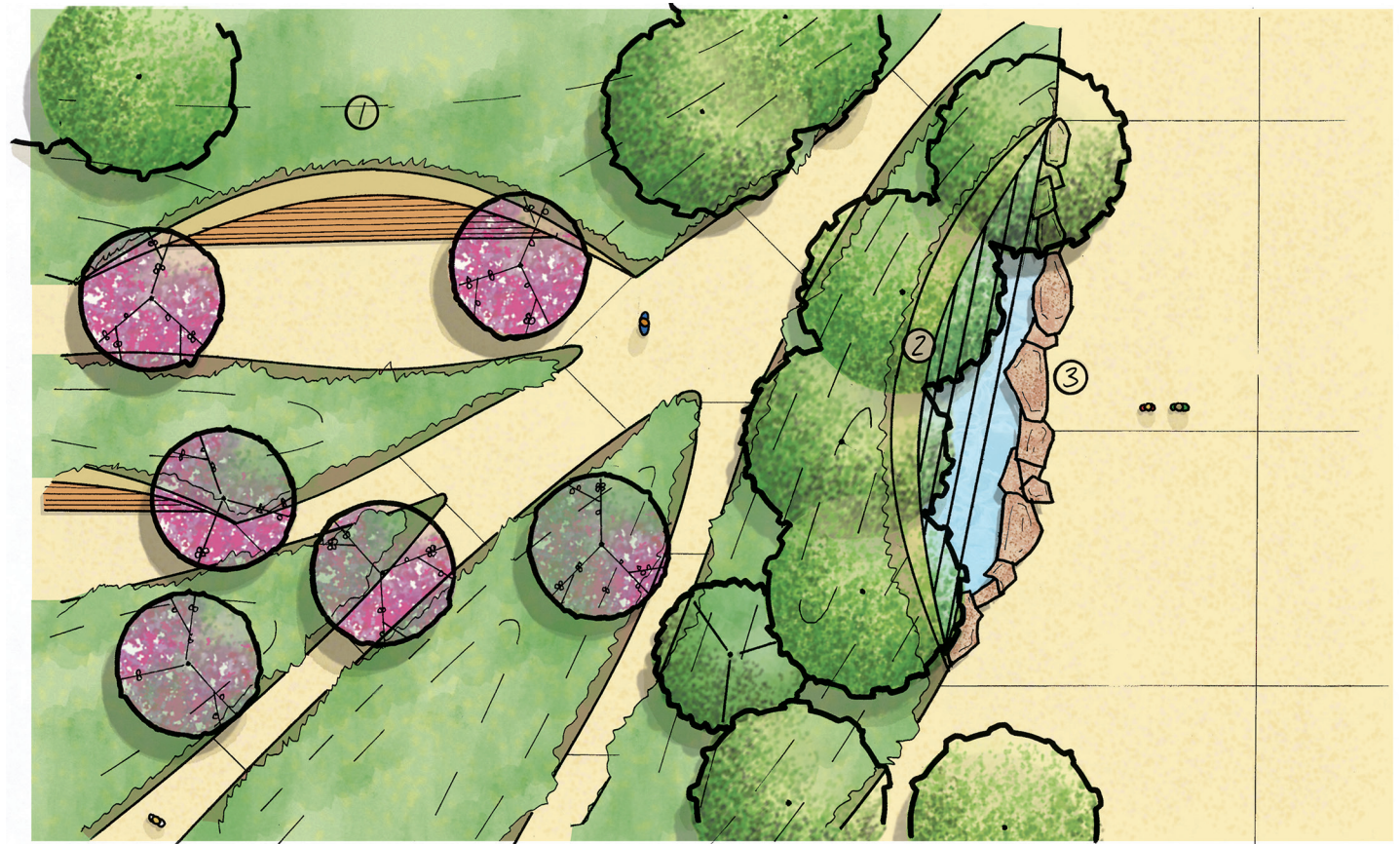


GARDEN HILL

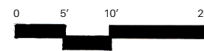
The mound area, known as Garden Hill, is one of the highlights of the design - at least on paper. It's unique network of mounds and abundant flora creates a whimsical atmosphere, but also raises security concerns.

The rolling concrete forms and aesthetic **cantilevered benches** attract skateboarders, seen as a nuisance but in reality a positive force in contrast to the hard drug use that is the norm here.

The area's features are clearly an **invitation to play**, both on wheels and off, and offer a myriad of opportunities for adaptation to **new and exciting active uses**.



Scale 1" = 20'



- ① BENCH
- ② FOUNTAIN
- ③ BOULDERS



GARDEN HILL
NATURALISTIC BEAUTY

Garden Hill boasts a variety of plantings, including trees, shrubs, succulents and grasses. Of note are the coral trees that bring a splash of color to the earth tones of the landscape with their bright blossoms (below).

The areas around the fountain and the east side of the park feature Tongva's ubiquitous native sycamores (opposite), towering stalwarts of the Arroyo ecosystem as well as this downtown Santa Monica green space.



Photo: krispgarden.blogspot.com

- ① BENCH
- ② FOUNTAIN
- ③ BOULDERS

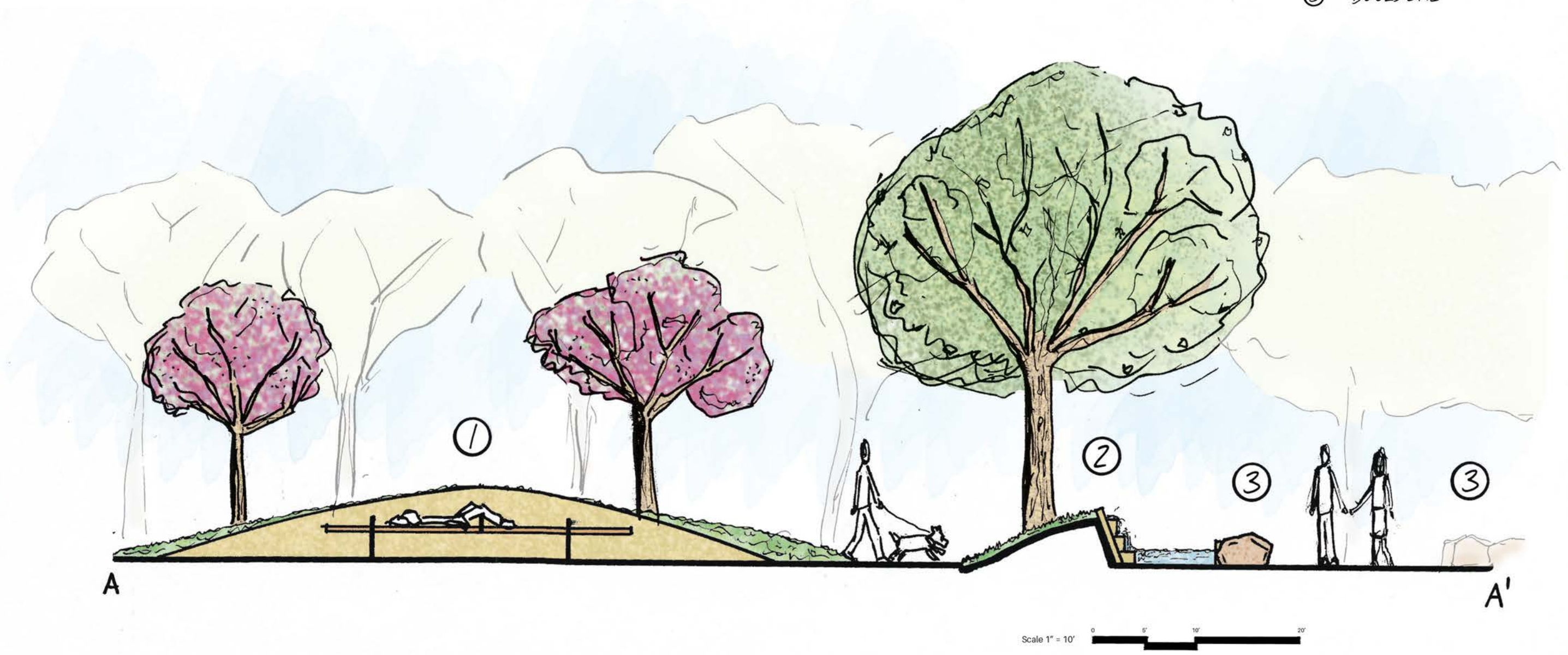


Photo: University of Redlands (not from Tongva Park)

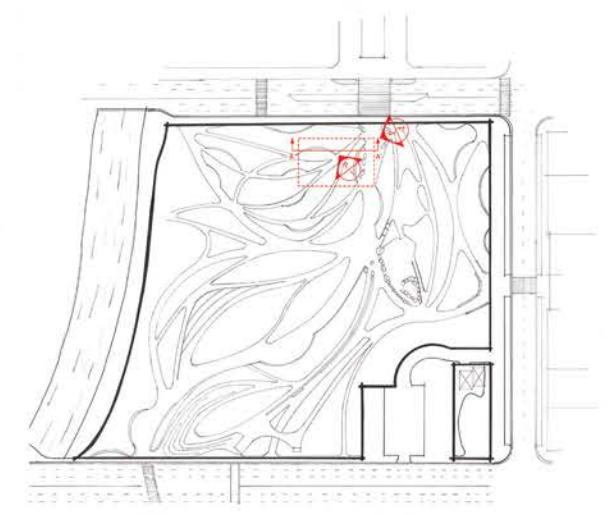




Photo: Sheryl Kaskowitz/KALX

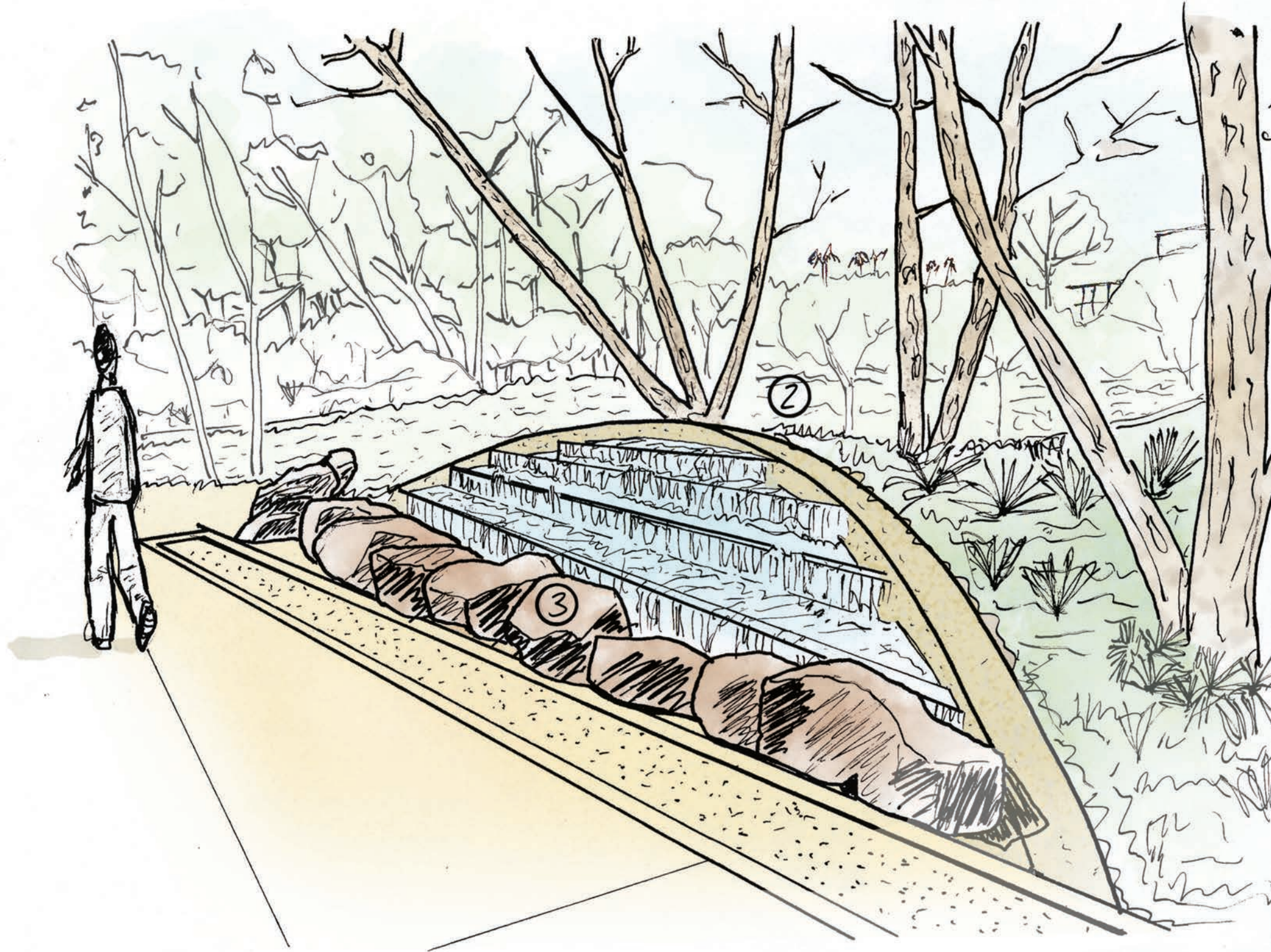


GARDEN HILL ADAPTIVE REUSE

Already an attraction to skaters, the mounds can be easily **retrofitted to accommodate roller sports**, creating exciting new possibilities with ramps and ribbons of concrete criss-crossing the area while **dissuading harmful activities**.

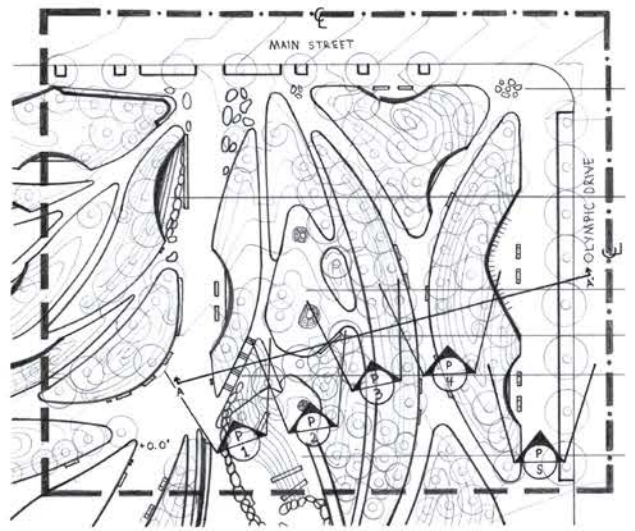
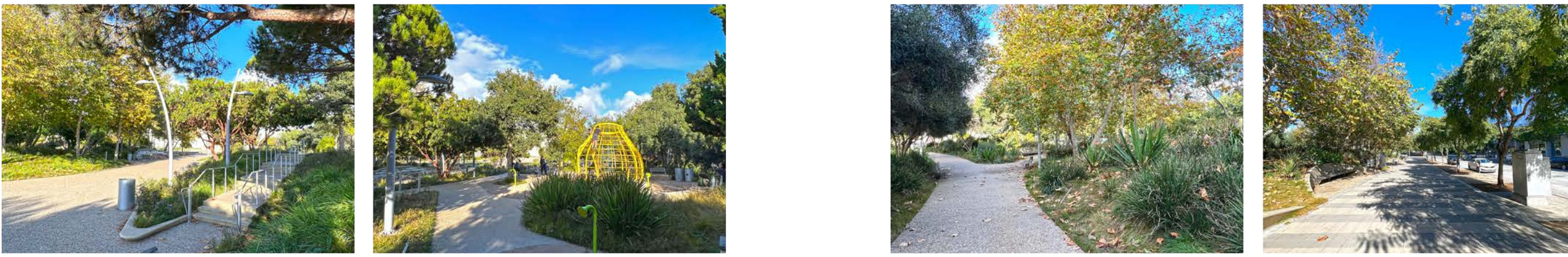
Enhancing this area would also focus skating activity here, reducing it in other parts of the park where it can be strategically blocked.. A similar concept was implemented at the U.N. Plaza in San Francisco (left).

- ① BENCH
- ② FOUNTAIN
- ③ BOULDERS



DISCOVERY HILL

This quadrant of Tongva is arguably the most successful, seeing **consistent use** throughout the day. While visibility remains a problem, the **playground** area generates constant activity which dissuades antisocial behavior. Skaters can be seen taking advantage of the playground as well as seat walls and benches in the dense sycamore grove. The **picnic area** is another highlight, well used and considerably safer-feeling than the one on the opposite side of the park.



Scale 1" = 20'

DISCOVERY HILL THE PLAYGROUND

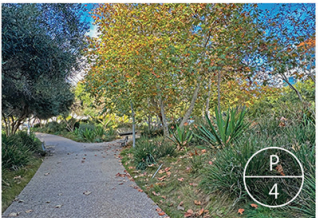
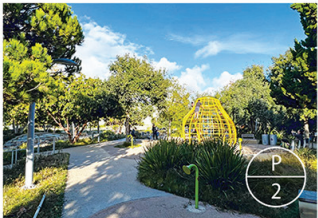
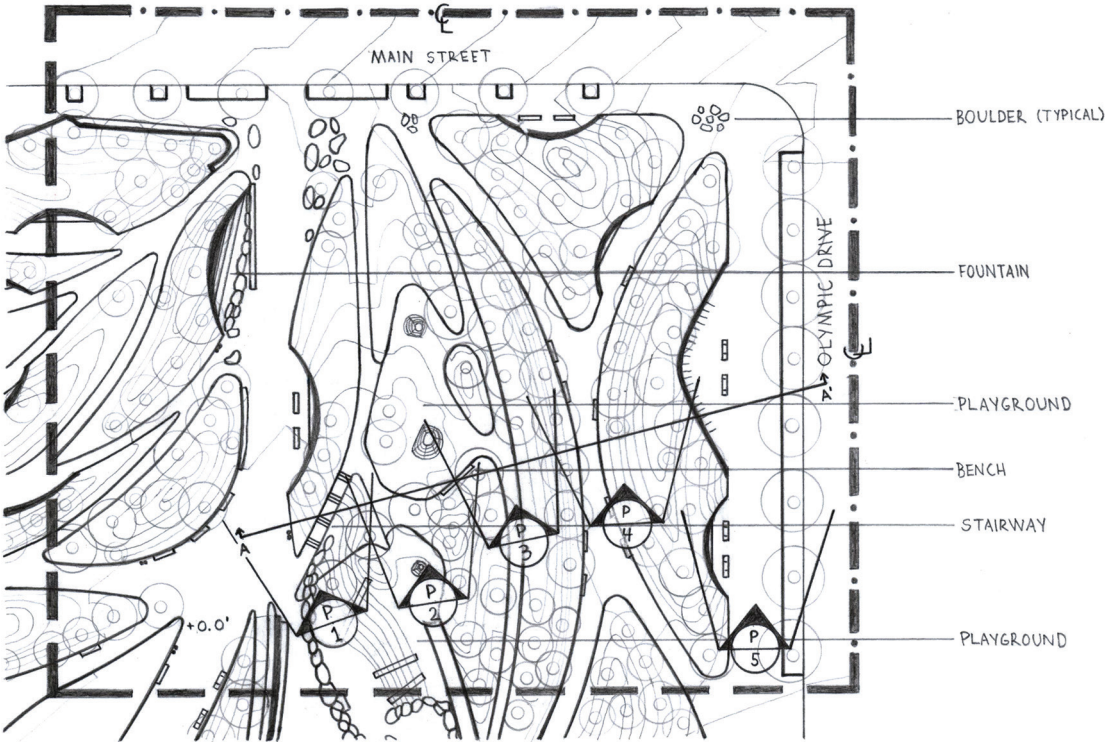
Located on top of the shade-dappled Discovery Hill, the playground remains Tongva Park's **most popular destination**. A collection of fun and exhilarating features make use of the terrain in ways reminiscent of rock climbing, with ample seating throughout. The activation of the space and the presence of children create a tacit agreement to keep illegal activities out of this area. The use of **padded surfacing** is very successful, favoring safety and suggesting the use of padded surfaces for other purposes such as jogging and skate deterrence.



DISCOVERY HILL

SYCAMORE GROVE

Featuring undulating mounds covered in the quintessential Arroyo sycamore tree, the sycamore grove in the east corner of the park offers beautiful foliage and shade cover, but also plenty of opportunities to hide out of sight. Beyond view from the street and playground, the alcoves and benches of the grove become a flash point for hidden activity.



PAVING

High quality concrete finishes are a point of pride for Tongva Park. The characteristic aggregate paving is painstakingly textured at **two levels of granularity** to highlight the hierarchy of the paths. Tongva's **extensive paving** can be a point of criticism ecologically, but an opportunity for roller sports and other activities. The north east edge of the site features an attractive striped paver design (right), and the use of **padded surfacing** in the play area is highly effective. Padded surfacing could be used for other applications, such as a jogging path that would invite runners into the space while preventing skaters from rolling in those areas. Concrete by Shaw & Sons.

“Padded surfacing could be used for a jogging path and skate deterrent.”



LARGE AGGREGATE

MEDIUM AGGREGATE



Photo: Shaw & Sons





FURNISHINGS

LIFE OF A LIGHT FIXTURE

The **light fixtures** of Tongva Park are a prime example of design features that work in a controlled setting such as the High Line, but are not appropriate for this site in downtown Santa Monica. Today, they find themselves in various states of **decomposition** (above). Many **wooden benches** in the park have met the same fate, while simpler and more durable concrete structures have withstood the chaos. The design choices surrounding the park appear **overly optimistic** and even naive in retrospect, apparently motivated by a search for high-end aesthetics over practicality while underestimating the importance of durability.

IN CONCLUSION

Not without its short-comings, it is safe to say that **Tongva Park is a work of art**, and in many ways a triumph. Perhaps many of the perceived problems in the park are symptomatic of its environment and not its design. However, I do believe Tongva Park's relationship with this environment could be improved. By embracing existing active uses such as jogging and roller sports, the park could reach new heights of functionality and service to the community.

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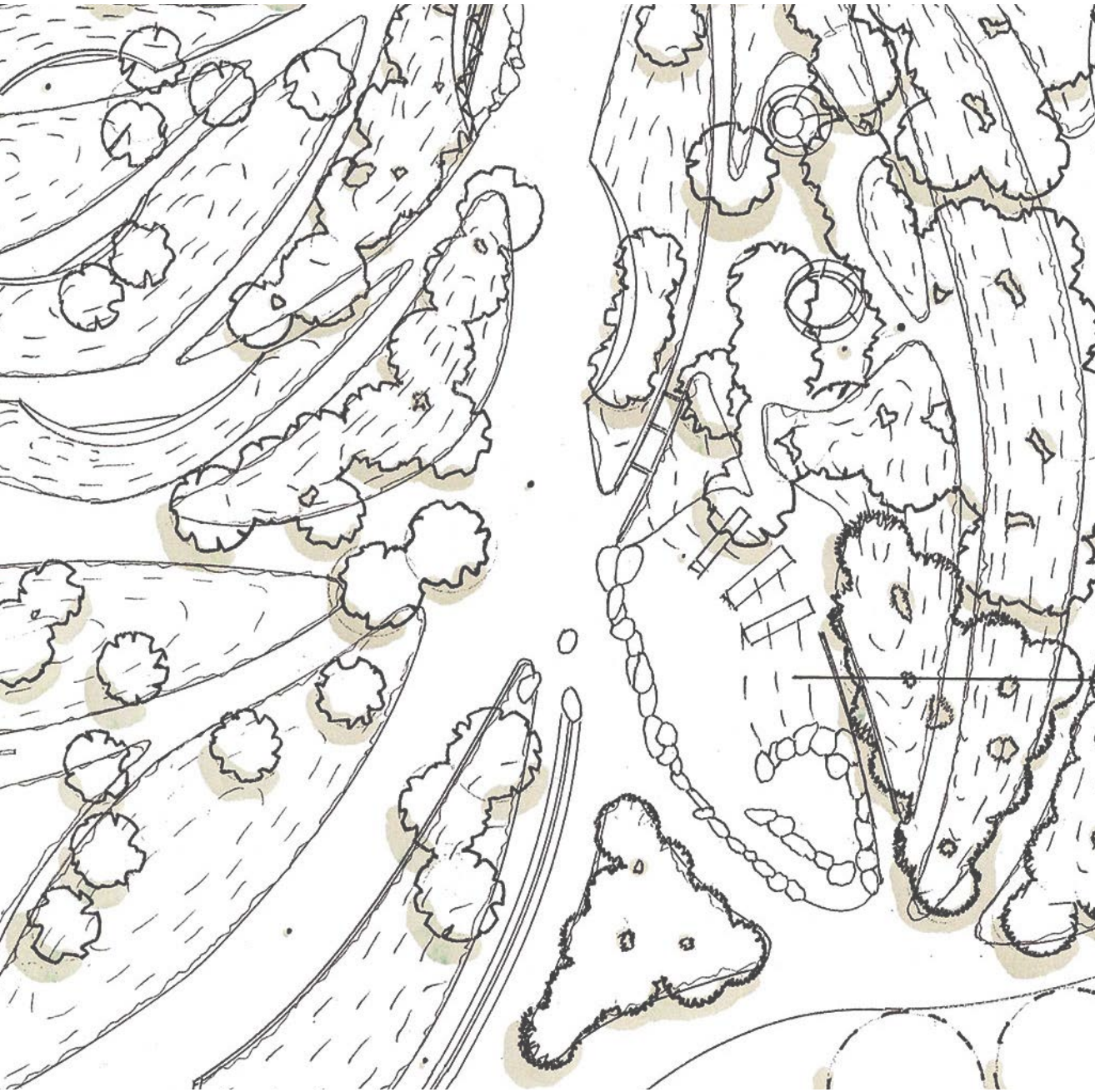
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Tongva Park
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UCLA Extension
Spring 2024
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