

Great Wall of Los Angeles - Art Park

Park Plan & Strategy



CHILD LABOR

GREAT DEPRESSION

LABOR STRIKES

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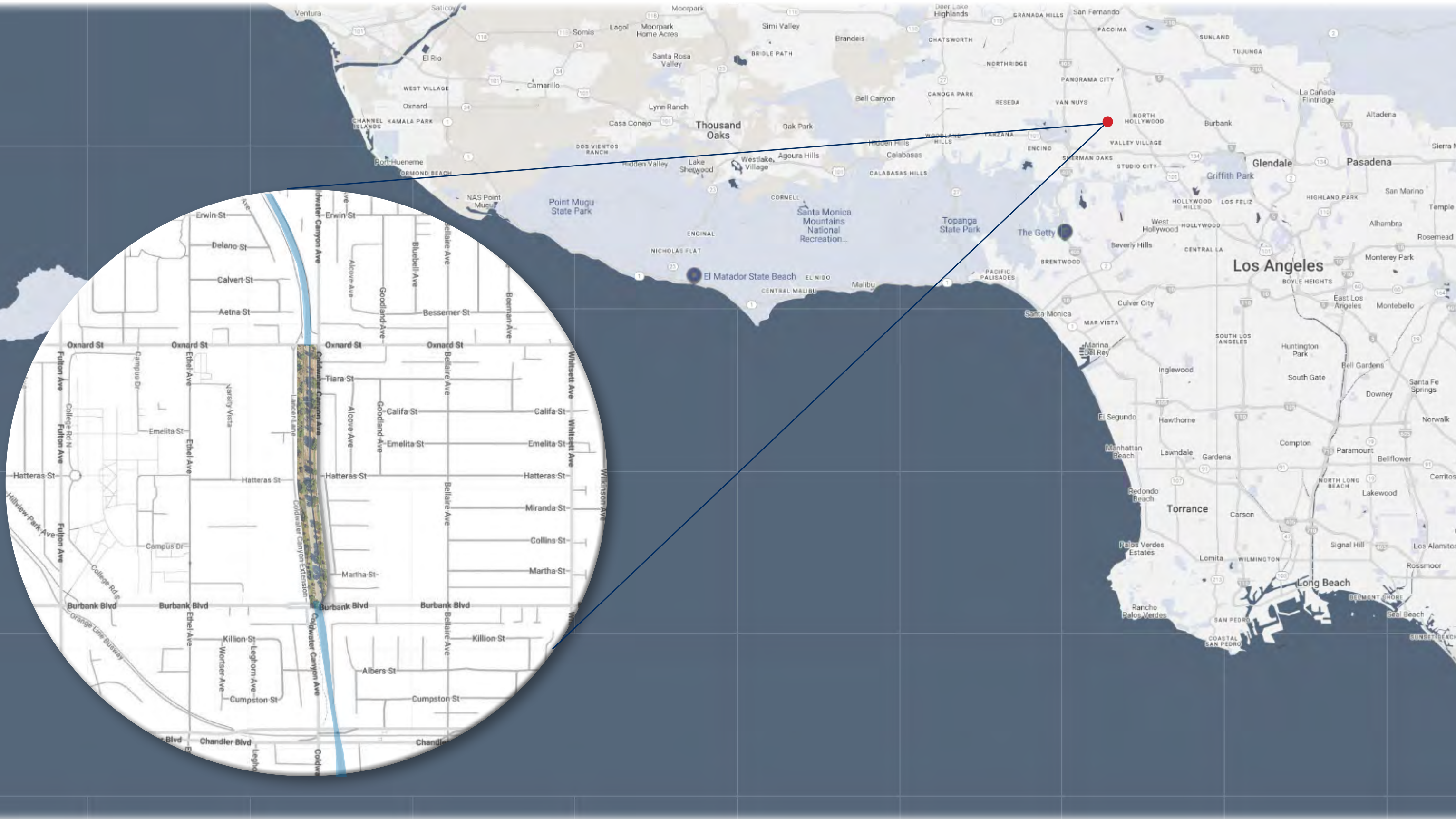
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12920 W Oxnard St, Valley Glen, CA 91401



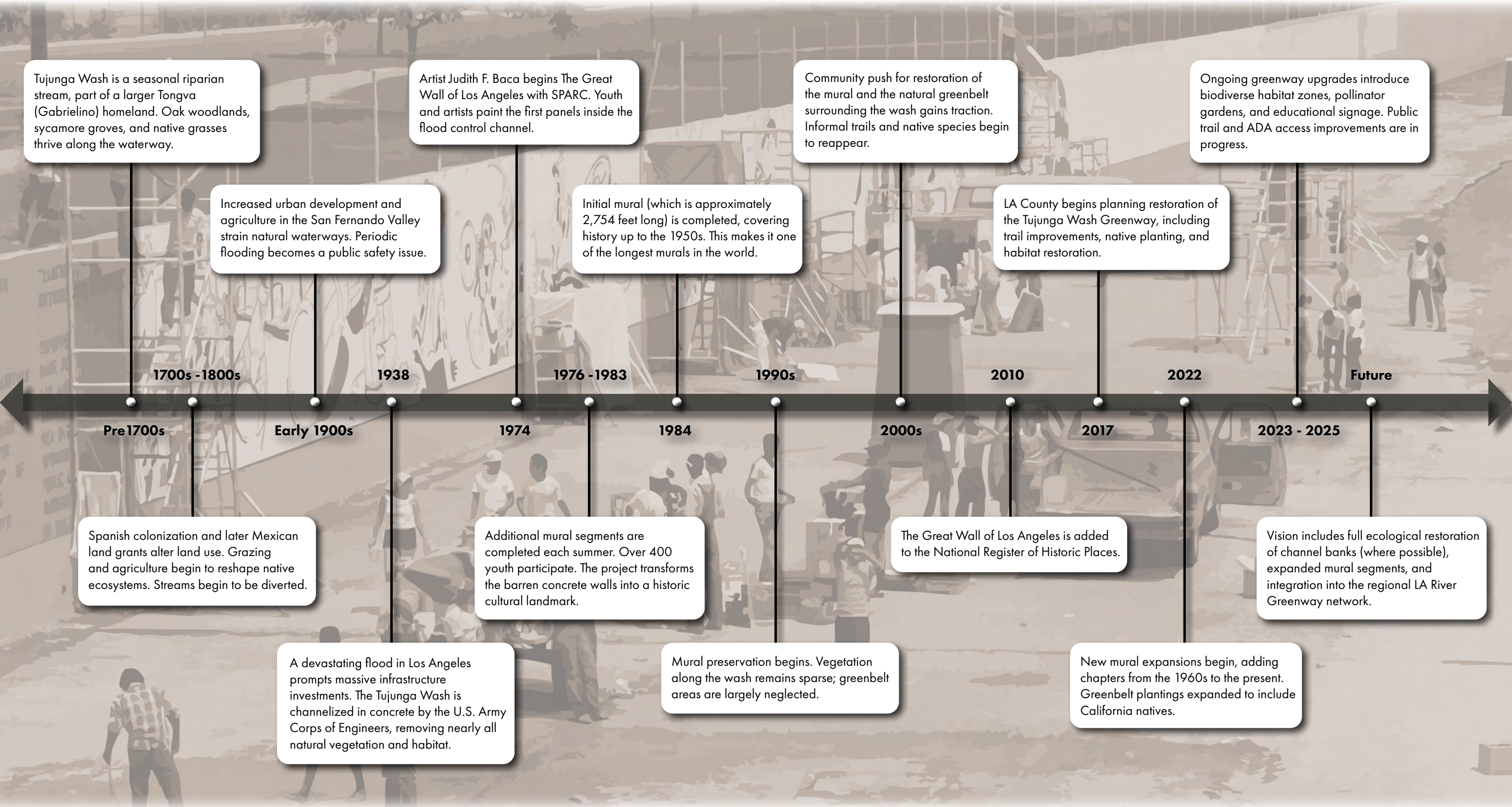
The Great Wall of Los Angeles is a landmark public artwork and a powerful monument to social justice, located within the Tujunga Greenbelt in the San Fernando Valley. Designed by artist and activist Judith F. Baca and produced by the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC) beginning in 1974, the mural stretches over 2,700 feet along the concrete walls of the Tujunga Wash, a flood control channel managed by the Army Corps of Engineers. The site was transformed into a meaningful cultural landscape through a unique blend of art, history, ecology, and community activism.

The mural itself tells a “history of California from the perspective of those left out of the textbooks,” depicting the struggles and contributions of Indigenous peoples, immigrants, women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and communities of color. Painted by over 400 youth from diverse backgrounds—many recruited from juvenile justice programs—the Great Wall was both a job-training program and a community healing process. The initial phases were painted between 1976 and 1983, and efforts are now underway to restore and expand the work to reflect more recent decades.

The Tujunga Greenbelt, where the mural is located, is a narrow strip of public land that runs alongside the wash. Once a barren flood control zone, it was reimaged as a linear park and ecological corridor. In addition to the mural, the greenbelt includes walking paths, shade trees, and native planting areas that offer a much-needed green space in a heavily urbanized area. Plans for future revitalization aim to further integrate stormwater management, habitat restoration, and community gathering spaces.

Together, the Great Wall and the Tujunga Greenbelt serve as a model of socially-engaged landscape design, where public art, environmental restoration, and civic memory intersect.





Tujunga Wash is a seasonal riparian stream, part of a larger Tongva (Gabrielino) homeland. Oak woodlands, sycamore groves, and native grasses thrive along the waterway.

Artist Judith F. Baca begins The Great Wall of Los Angeles with SPARC. Youth and artists paint the first panels inside the flood control channel.

Community push for restoration of the mural and the natural greenbelt surrounding the wash gains traction. Informal trails and native species begin to reappear.

Ongoing greenway upgrades introduce biodiverse habitat zones, pollinator gardens, and educational signage. Public trail and ADA access improvements are in progress.

Increased urban development and agriculture in the San Fernando Valley strain natural waterways. Periodic flooding becomes a public safety issue.

Initial mural (which is approximately 2,754 feet long) is completed, covering history up to the 1950s. This makes it one of the longest murals in the world.

LA County begins planning restoration of the Tujunga Wash Greenway, including trail improvements, native planting, and habitat restoration.

← 1700s - 1800s 1938 1976 - 1983 1990s 2010 2022 Future →

Pre 1700s Early 1900s 1974 1984 2000s 2017 2023 - 2025

Spanish colonization and later Mexican land grants alter land use. Grazing and agriculture begin to reshape native ecosystems. Streams begin to be diverted.

Additional mural segments are completed each summer. Over 400 youth participate. The project transforms the barren concrete walls into a historic cultural landmark.

The Great Wall of Los Angeles is added to the National Register of Historic Places.

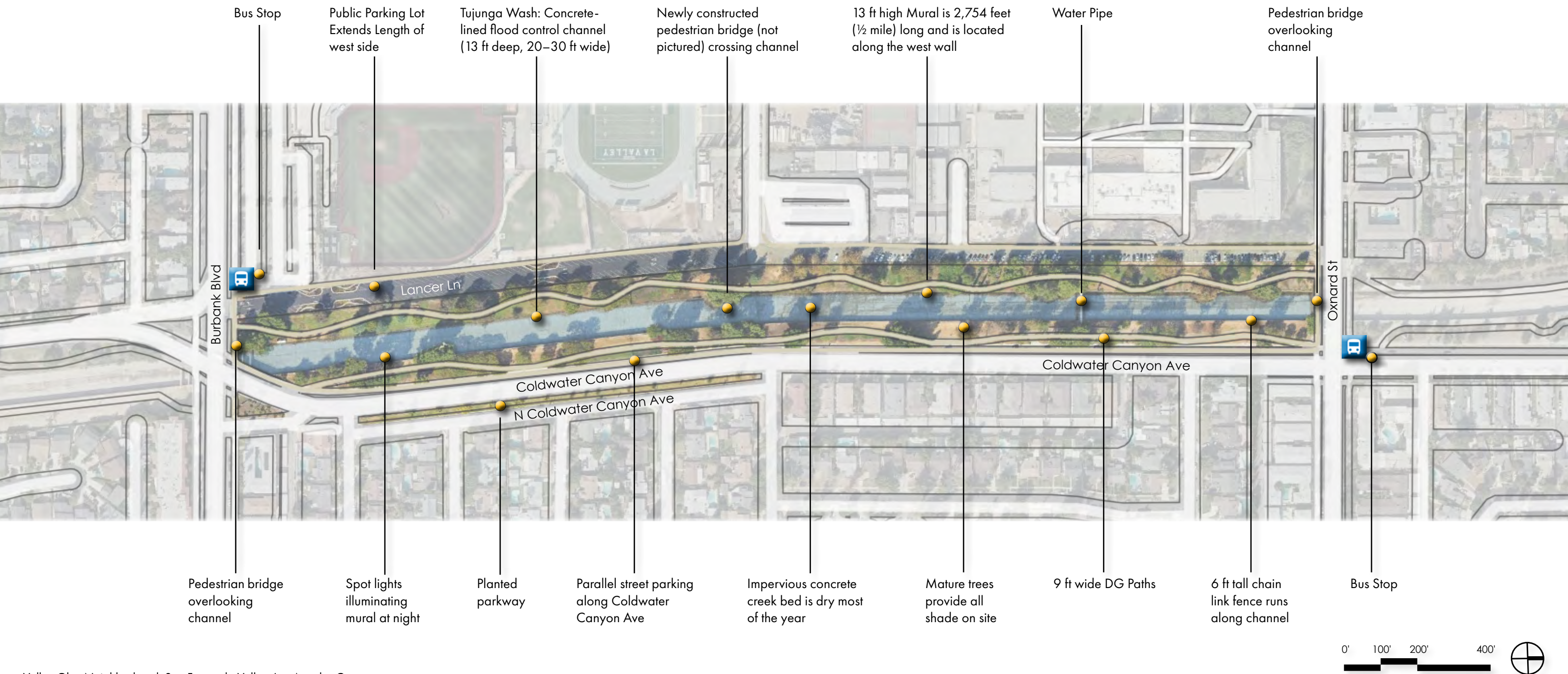
Vision includes full ecological restoration of channel banks (where possible), expanded mural segments, and integration into the regional LA River Greenway network.

A devastating flood in Los Angeles prompts massive infrastructure investments. The Tujunga Wash is channelized in concrete by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, removing nearly all natural vegetation and habitat.

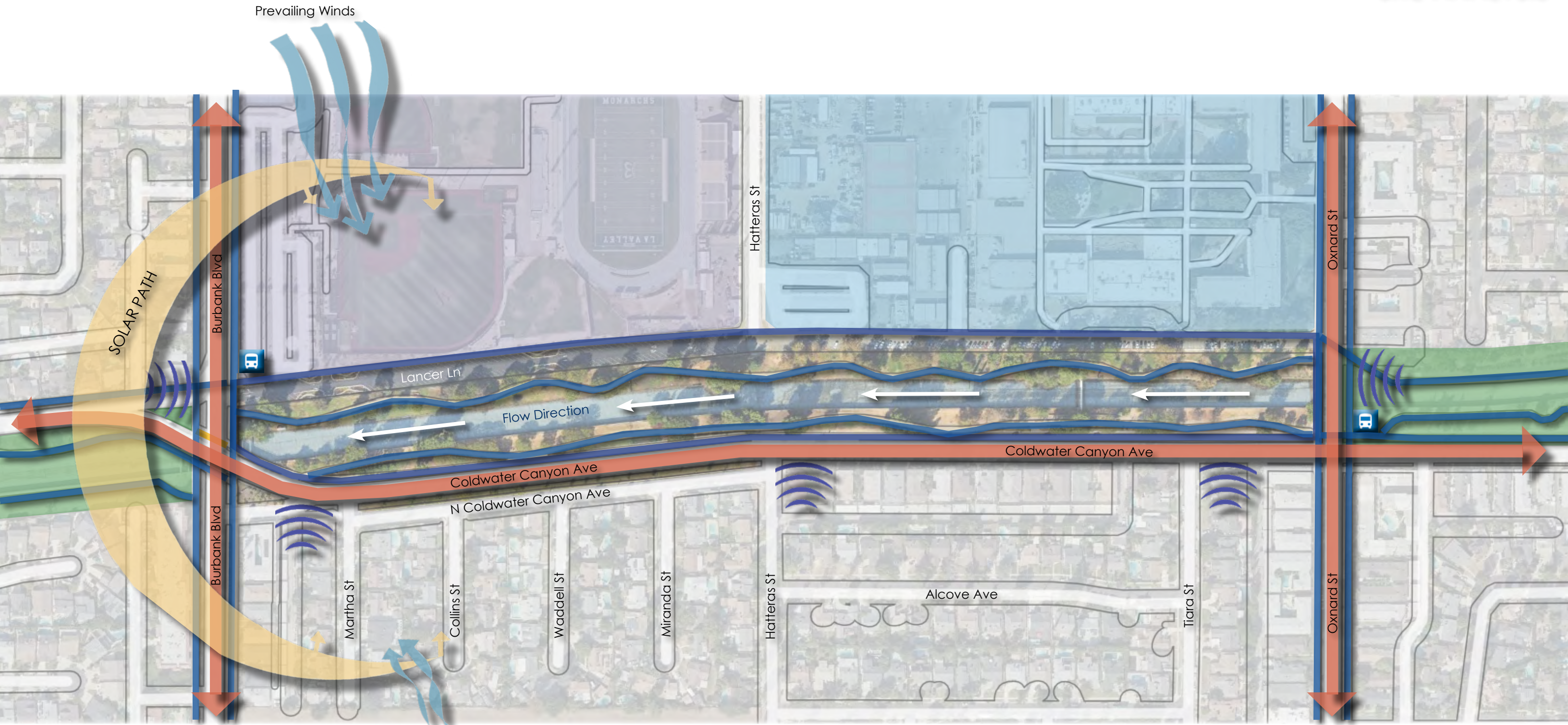
Mural preservation begins. Vegetation along the wash remains sparse; greenbelt areas are largely neglected.

New mural expansions begin, adding chapters from the 1960s to the present. Greenbelt plantings expanded to include California natives.

12920 W Oxnard St, Valley Glen, CA 91401



Valley Glen Neighborhood, San Fernando Valley, Los Angeles County
 Coordinates: 34.1798° N, 118.4235° W
 Land Ownership/Management: Los Angeles County Flood Control District, SPARC (Social and Public Art Resource Center), City of LA Recreation and Parks (adjacent parkland)



- Primary Vehicular Circulation
- Pedestrian Circulation
- Bus Stops
- Traffic Noise

- LA Valley College
- Jack London High School
- Park/Public
- Residential

Sunset Western Zone
18
 Growing Season
 7-8 Months

Average Temperatures
 Winter Minimum: 39-45°F
 Summer Maximum: 89-92°F
 Days above 90°F: 80-100
 Days below 32°F: 8-16

Average Rainfall
 Annual: 11-16 in
 Nov-Mar: 9-13 in
 Apr-Oct: 2-3 in
 Snow: 0 in

Reference ETO
 Annual: 48-53 in
 Nov-Mar: 11-13 in
 Apr-Oct: 37-40 in





Dry Conditions



Heat Exposure



Underutilized Open Space



Above Ground Pipe



Signage

Dry Conditions
The site conditions limit the plant varieties.

Heat Exposure
Full sun and heat retention. Tree shade needs to remain.

Underutilized Open Space
The site contains large amounts of open space that are not utilized.

Ecological Degradation
Poor habitat value due to concrete surfaces and invasive species.

Flooding
Site is susceptible to channel overflow flooding.

Above Ground Pipe
There is a large municipal pipe that runs directly across the Tujunga Wash.

Signage
Signage is minimal and not clearly displayed.



Street Sign
Site could benefit from a clearer entry.

Lighting
Outdoor lighting could be increased and upgraded.

Site Entrance
The entrance to the site is not clearly recognizable from the street.

Traffic
Site is located along a busy street and traffic noise is noticeable.

Stormwater Function
Hydrologically active during storms—limits permanent planting or structures in basin.

Existing trees
Existing, mature trees inhibit new design.

ADA Compliance
Noncompliant paths and lack of universal access.

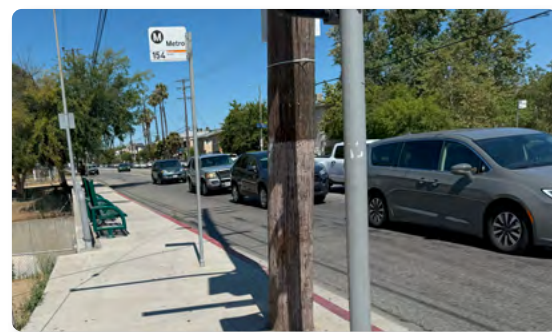
Chain Link Fence
Fence running along the channel is unsightly.



Street Sign



Lighting



Traffic



Existing Trees



Chain Link Fence



Shade & Comfort



Revenue Generation



Educational Signage



Painted Pipe



Cultural Center

Shade & Comfort

Introduce shade structures, trees, benches, water fountains.

Revenue Generation

Farmer's markets, craft fairs, food trucks, cafe, art shows.

Community Engagement

Leverage SPARC's arts legacy for intergenerational design.

Cultural Programming

Educational signage, mural tours, public art integration.

Above Ground Pipe

Create bridge connection covering pipe.

Cultural Center

Art and history exhibitions with restrooms.



Signage

Improve signage to help create a sense of place.

Lighting

Increase and update lighting with green energy sources.

Trail Connectivity

Potential integration into regional bike and pedestrian greenway network.

Traffic Buffer

Create a natural buffer from the busy road to create a sense of enclosure.

Green Infrastructure

Implement LID strategies with bioswales, rain gardens, permeable surfaces, and solar panels in park areas.

Art Installations

Create a sculpture garden to integrate with the mural.

Fence Upgrade

Upgrade fencing material while maintaining visibility.

0' 100' 200' 400'



Improved Lighting



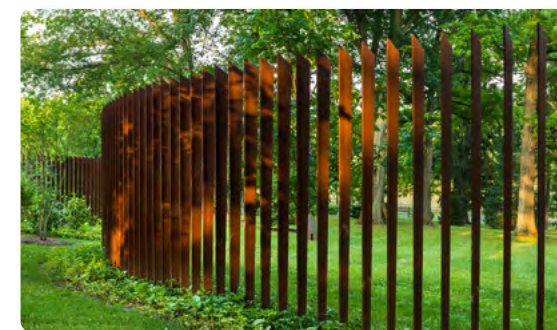
Traffic Buffer



Modern Cafe



Green Infrastructure



Modern Fencing



Location
1801 W. Jefferson Ave,
Detroit, MI 48216

Designers
Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates

Completion
October 2025

Size
22 Acres

Cost
\$80 million

Successful Design Interventions

Environmental

- **Ecological Restoration:** Integrates native plant communities, including meadows, groves, and wetlands, replacing asphalt and compacted soils.
- **Resilient River Edge:** Riverbank is sculpted with riprap, native vegetation, and open access that protects from flooding.
- **Stormwater Infrastructure:** Features bioswales, rain gardens, and permeable paths to manage runoff and ease Detroit's aging sewer system.

Social

- **Equity-Focused Design:** Extensive community input emphasizes equitable access to nature, culture, and recreation.
- **Multiple Activity Zones:** Large lawn for events, water play area, sports pavilion, and nature paths support a variety of user needs and ages.
- **Cultural Integration:** Public art, programming, and signage reflect Detroit's history, culture, and civic identity, strengthening a sense of place.

Economic

- **Regional Destination:** Anchors the riverfront, complements existing redevelopment, boosting tourism and further investment.
- **Job Creation:** Long-term operation of the park will provide jobs and training opportunities through partnerships with community organizations.
- **Catalyst for Connectivity:** Links neighborhoods with the riverfront via greenways, which will enhance property values and livability over time.

Opportunities for Improvement

Environmental

- **Long-Term Maintenance Needs:** Naturalized landscapes and public infrastructure along a riverfront will require ongoing funding with lack of revenue generating activities.
- **Urban Wildlife Conflict:** As habitat returns to the area, managing interactions between people and wildlife will require public education.

Social

- **Transit Access Gaps:** Access from neighborhoods west and north remain limited without expanded public transit or safe bike corridors.
- **Risk of Exclusivity Over Time:** As the park becomes a high-profile destination, there's a risk of it becoming more tourist-oriented rather than continuing to serve everyday needs of Detroit residents.

Economic

- **Revenue Strategy:** The park is primarily publicly funded and philanthropic. Long-term economic sustainability may require more active planning for concessions, events, or partnerships.
- **Gentrification:** Increased desirability of the area could accelerate displacement in surrounding neighborhoods without community intervention.



Renaissance Park

Location

100 Manufacturers Road,
Chattanooga, TN 37405

Designers

Hargreaves Associates

Completion

2006

Size

23 Acres

Cost

\$8 million



Site Plan



Before



After

Successful Design Interventions

Environmental

- **Brownfield Remediation:** Transformed a contaminated brownfield into a functioning green space, improving soil and water quality.
- **Stormwater Management:** Swales, wetlands, and a central basin filter stormwater naturally, mitigating flooding and pollution.
- **Habitat Restoration:** Native plantings and constructed wetlands promote biodiversity and support migratory birds, amphibians, and aquatic life.

Social

- **Public Riverfront Access:** Park provides open access to the river, trails, and lawns, fostering public interaction with the landscape.
- **Educational Opportunities:** Signage and design elements educate visitors on ecological restoration and water systems.
- **Flexible Use:** Open lawn and pathways accommodate various community uses including: yoga, concerts, walks and community gatherings.

Economic

- **Catalyst for Revitalization:** Sparked reinvestment in the surrounding neighborhoods, increasing property values and supporting local businesses.
- **Cost-effective Infrastructure:** The use of passive stormwater systems and native landscaping reduces maintenance costs over time.
- **Revenue Generating Opportunities:** Open spaces and paths allow for revenue generating opportunities such as markets and events.

Opportunities for Improvement

Environmental

- **Limited Shade Structures:** Some areas lack sufficient tree cover, which could provide additional habitat, shade, and cooling in summer months. Trees had to be limited due to brownfield remediation. Alternative shade structures could be integrated.
- **Wetland Maintenance:** Wetland areas have occasionally suffered from neglect or invasive species pressure.

Social

- **Connectivity & Access:** Pedestrian connections between Renaissance Park, Coolidge Park, and the riverwalk system could be improved.
- **Underutilization in Off-Peak Hours:** Without structured programming, the park can feel underused during weekdays or in colder months, potentially limiting its social vibrancy.

Economic

- **Lack of Permanent Revenue Generation:** Lacks cafes, vendors, or amenities that could generate ongoing income and jobs.
- **Gentrification Pressures:** While the park boosted local property values, it may have contributed to housing cost increases without corresponding affordable housing measures nearby.



Citygarden

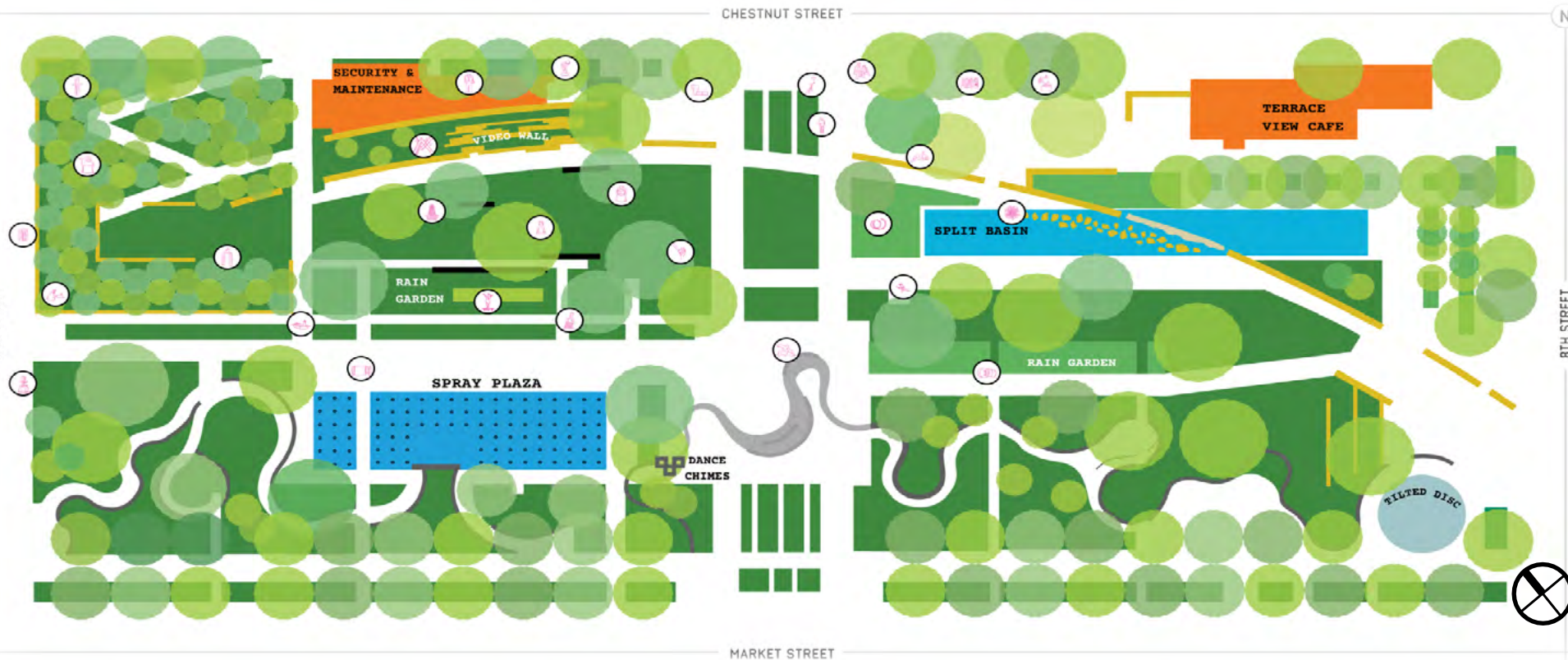
Location
801 Market Street,
St. Louis, MO 63101

Designers
Nelson Byrd Woltz Landscape Architects

Completion
2009

Size
2.9 Acres

Cost
\$42 million (including \$12 million in art)



Successful Design Interventions

Environmental

- **Green Infrastructure:** Integrates sustainable stormwater management through permeable paving, rain gardens, and planting beds.
- **Native and Adaptive Planting:** Plant palette includes many native and drought-tolerant species and create a four-season experience.
- **Cooling Urban Microclimate:** Water features, shade trees, and dense vegetation help mitigate the urban heat island effect.

Social

- **Free and Open Access:** Unfenced and always open, fosters inclusivity and casual use—families, office workers, and tourists all feel welcome.
- **Art + Play Integration:** Sculptures by internationally recognized artists are placed without barriers, allowing tactile, playful interaction.
- **Human-Scaled Design:** The garden feels intimate and inviting, thanks to varied topography, winding paths, seating nooks, and a small café.

Economic

- **Catalyst for Downtown Revitalization:** Shifted perceptions of downtown, spurring investment in adjacent properties and energizing commerce.
- **Increased Foot Traffic:** The park attracts locals and tourists, supporting nearby restaurants, hotels, and small businesses.
- **Terrace View Cafe:** Dedicated cafe provides revenue generation year round.

Opportunities for Improvement

Environmental

- **Limited Habitat Function:** While beautifully planted, the site's scale and design focus on aesthetics over habitat—pollinator support, bird habitat, and biodiversity value could be expanded.
- **Water Use in Fountains:** The water usage raises sustainability concerns (especially in hot summers).

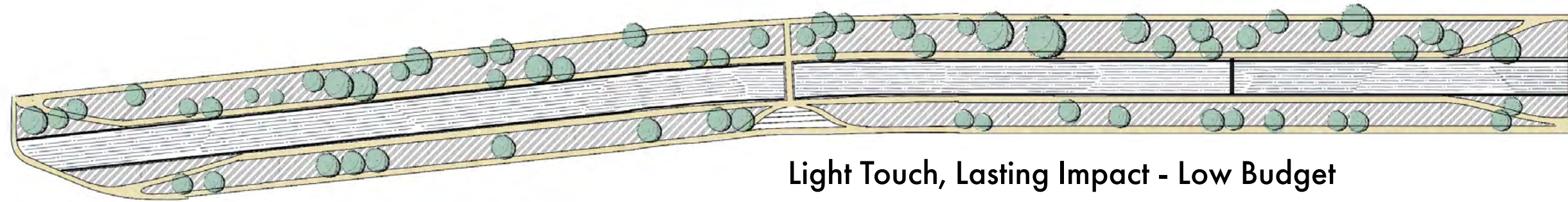
Social

- **Equity of Access:** Though welcoming, the park is located in downtown and may be less accessible to residents from underserved neighborhoods due to transportation gaps.
- **No Formal Community Programming:** Lacks regular events or programs that directly engage local communities or youth in stewardship.

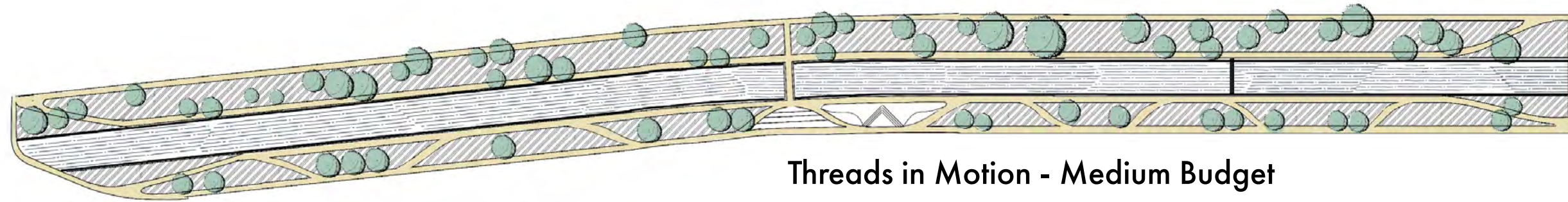
Economic

- **Dependency on Philanthropy:** Citygarden is almost entirely maintained by private funds; there's no clear plan for long-term resilience if funding shifts or declines.
- **Additional On-Site Revenue:** Could benefit from additional on-site revenue generating activities.

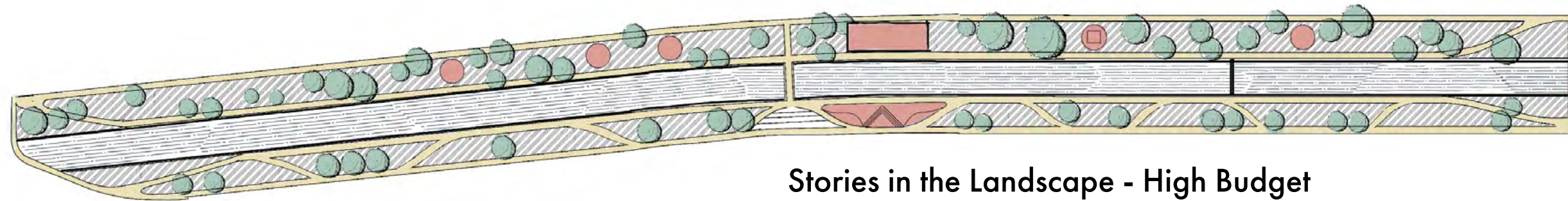




Light Touch, Lasting Impact - Low Budget



Threads in Motion - Medium Budget

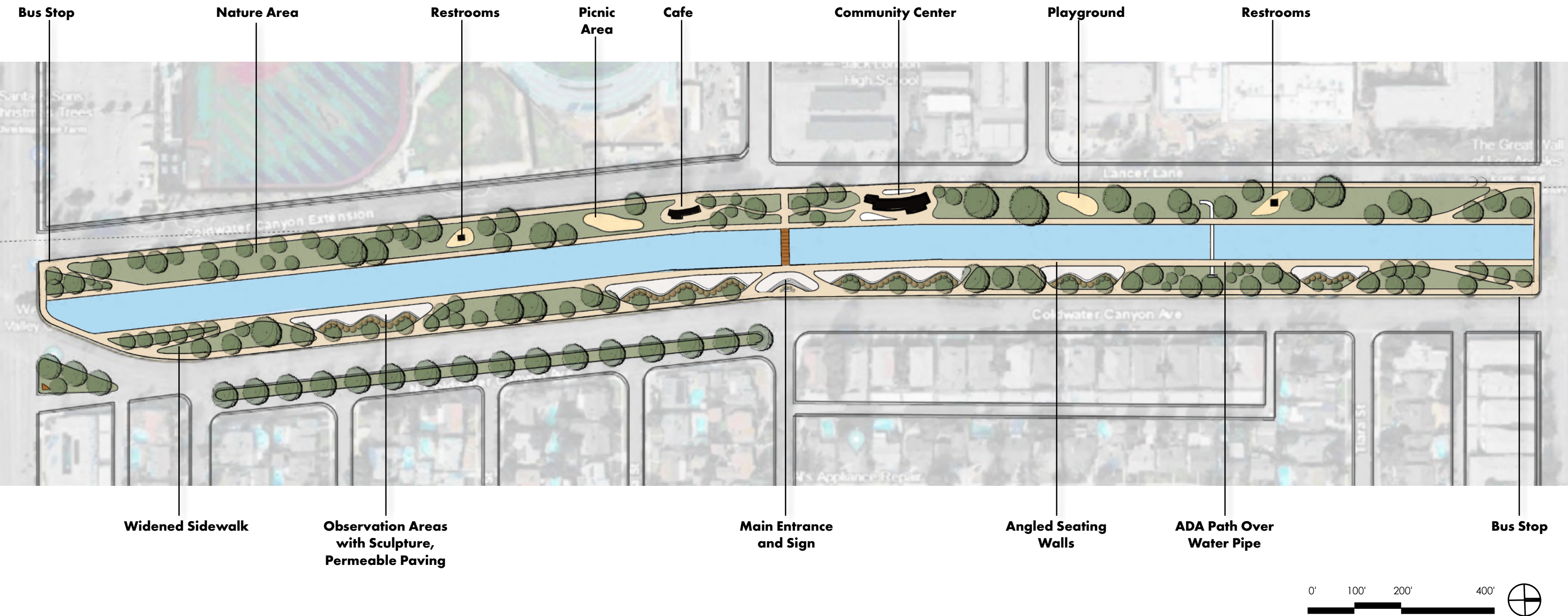


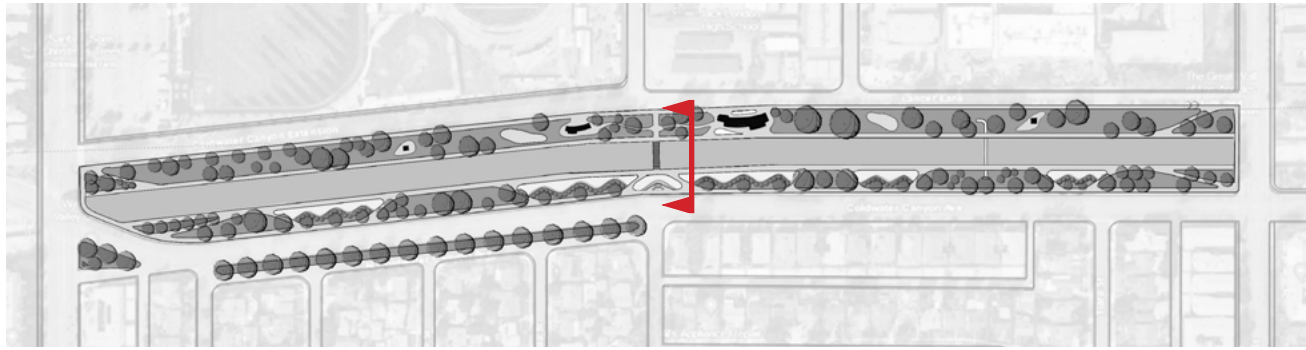
Stories in the Landscape - High Budget

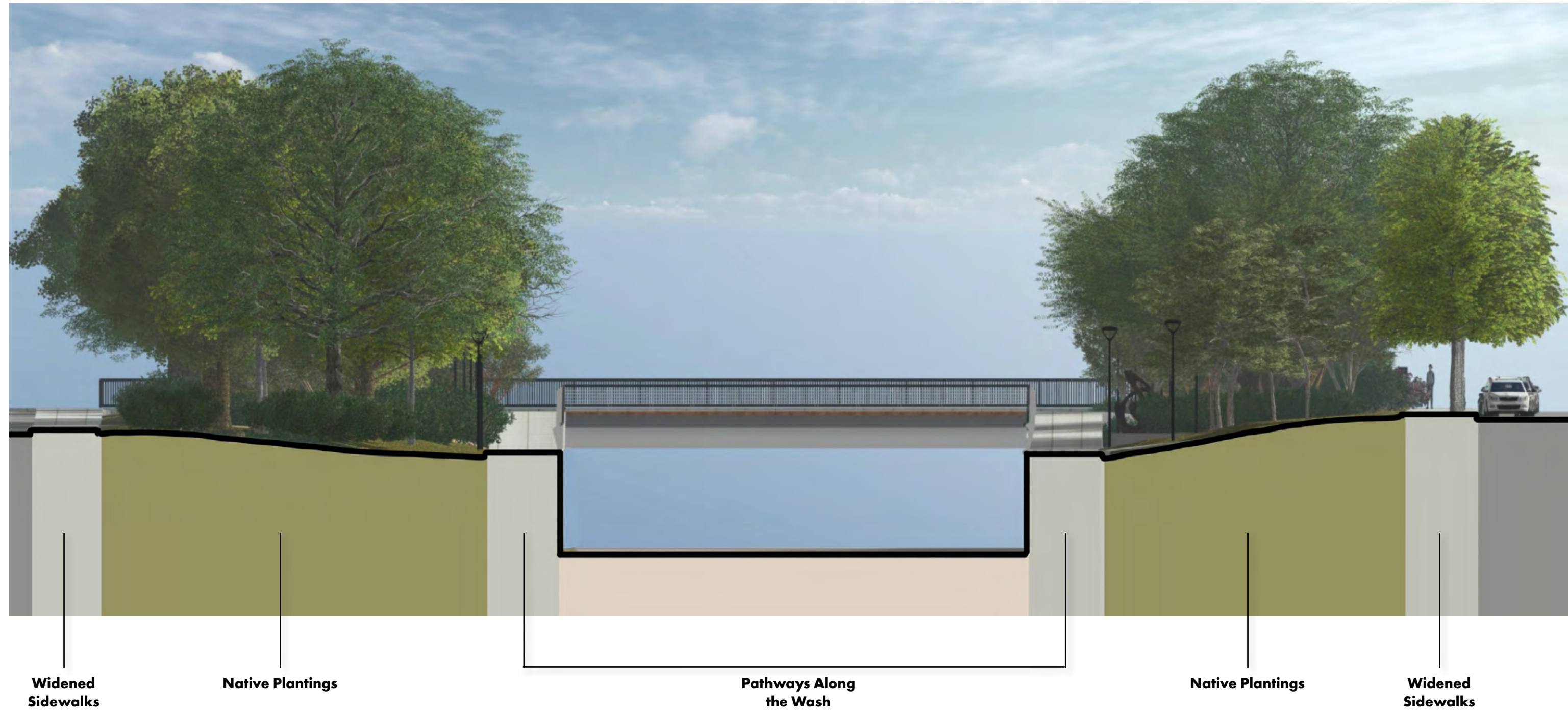
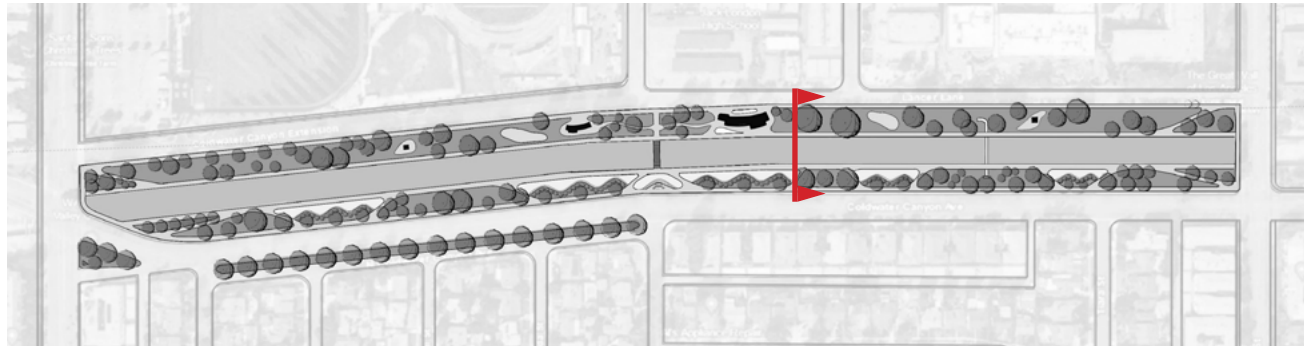


Stories in the Landscape

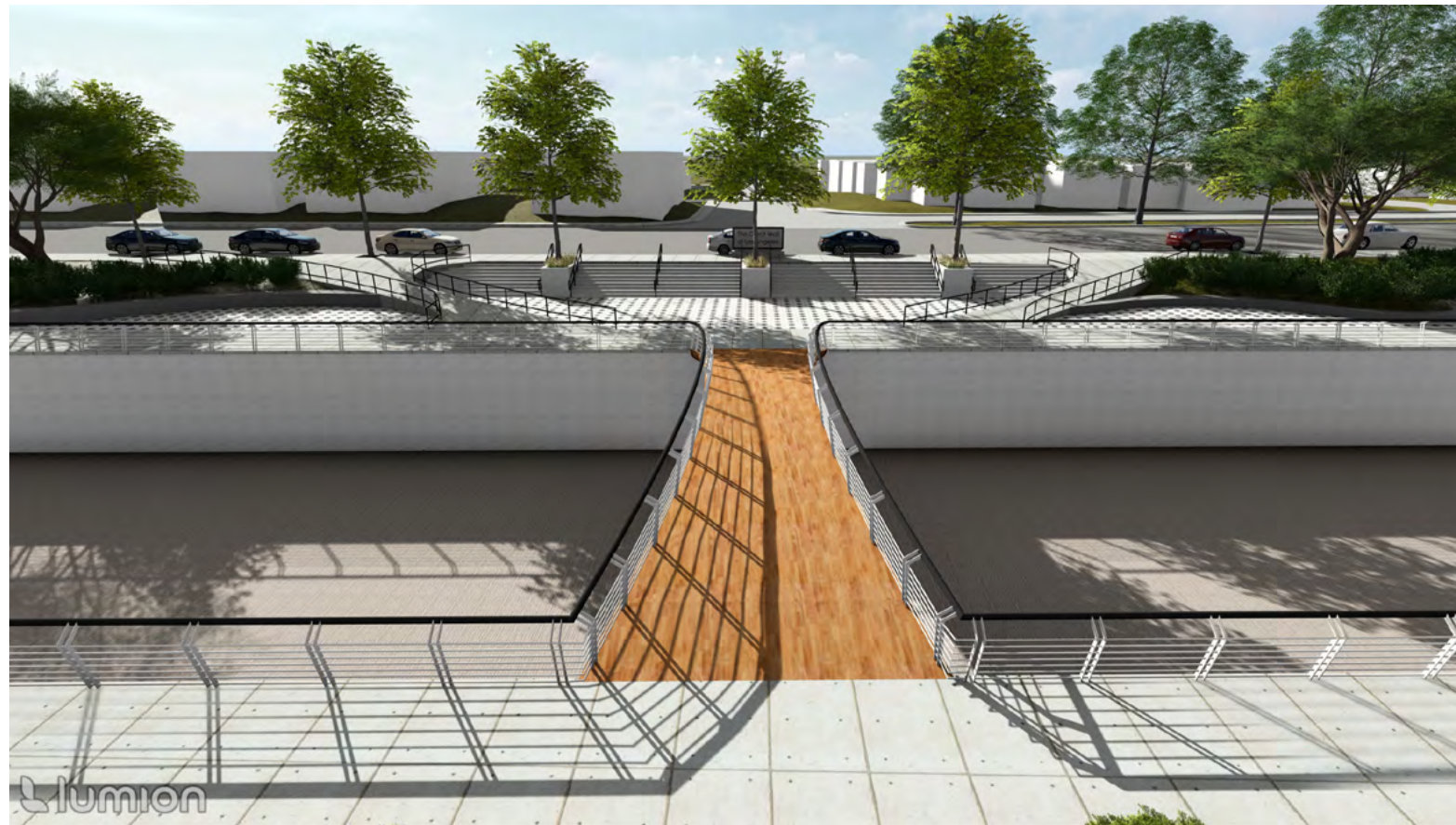
The design frames the Great Wall of Los Angeles as both a cultural monument and a landscape experience. Inspired by the surrounding river channel and native ecology of the Tujunga Wash, the plan creates a sequence of varying views—sometimes wide and expansive, other times intimate and framed by vegetation. Movement along the path mirrors the flow of the wash itself, guiding visitors through shifting perspectives of the mural while grounding the artwork within its living landscape.













3D Walkthrough: [Video Link](#)



References

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citygardenstl.org/design-details/

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