



DELAWARE **HISTORICAL  
& CULTURAL** AFFAIRS

*Saving Delaware History*

## Timeless History - Area of Reflection

John Dickinson Plantation

340 Kitts Hummock Rd, Dover, DE

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University of Delaware, 2021



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# Overview

For my Senior Design Project at the University of Delaware, I was given the difficult but rewarding task of unpacking the histories and hardships of slavery at the John Dickinson Plantation and ultimately design an area of reflection the commemorates the enslaved peoples who once resided there.

As a Delaware native, I found it important to understand my state's specific history of slavery, as well as learn the legacy of slavery and its lasting impact on American communities to this day. And although the enslaved community played an important role in the function of the plantation, there is a disproportional amount of documentation of their lifestyles compared to the documentation of the Dickinson family. These distinctive concepts compelled me to create a design that would highlight the enslaved community that was intertwined with other free communities on the site, and would incorporate the existing list of enslaved peoples' names.

John Dickinson mansion



Agricultural field on site; proposed location of design



## MISSION

This design will create a contemplative space that commemorates the historical enslaved community that lived on the plantation, and provide an unbounded narrative that cannot be erased through the passage of time.

## GOALS

1. Create remembrance of enslaved peoples and their names, beyond their physical boundary of the plantation
2. Respond to the erasure of the enslaved peoples narratives by making a design that will last through the passage of time.
3. Invoke emotional responses of visitors through awareness of historical events, and allow for visitors and family members to safely mourn and remember the historical community through continuing care
4. Place the design into a space once frequented by the enslaved community, and ensure that it fits into the circulation of the guided tours

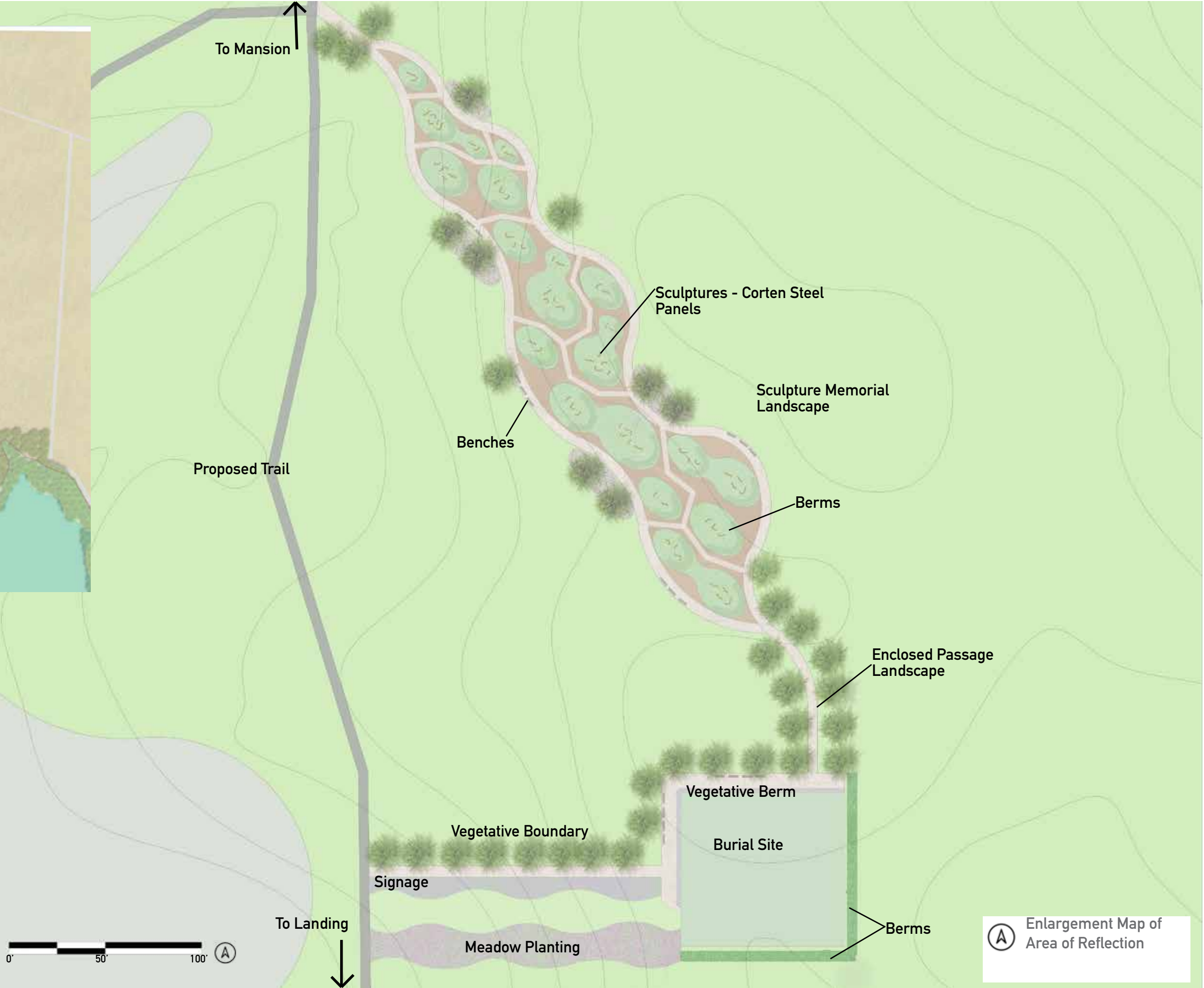
## OBJECTIVES

1. Comfortably hold 15-20 people at a time in gathering space.
2. Design pathways that allow contemplative movement, with larger pathways holding groups of 15-20, and smaller pathways holding groups of 5-10.
3. Incorporate transitional pathways that allow visitors to emotionally prepare for memorial space.
4. Incorporate seating throughout space.
5. Incorporate vegetation that creates sense of place not in relation to agricultural fields
6. Allow for visitors to participate in continuing care.

# Master Plan

Map of John Dickinson  
Plantation

NTS (A)

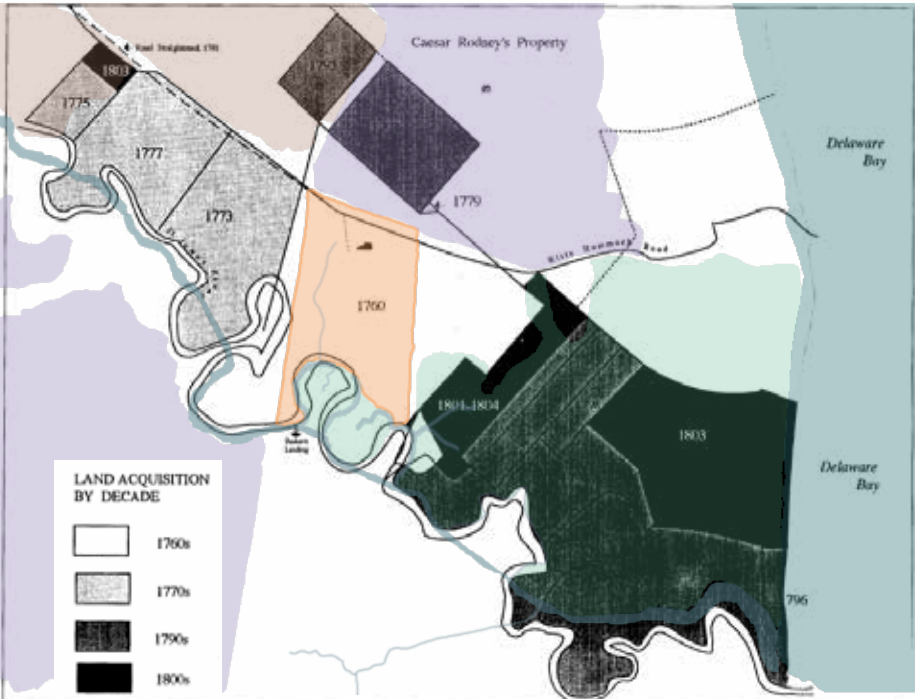
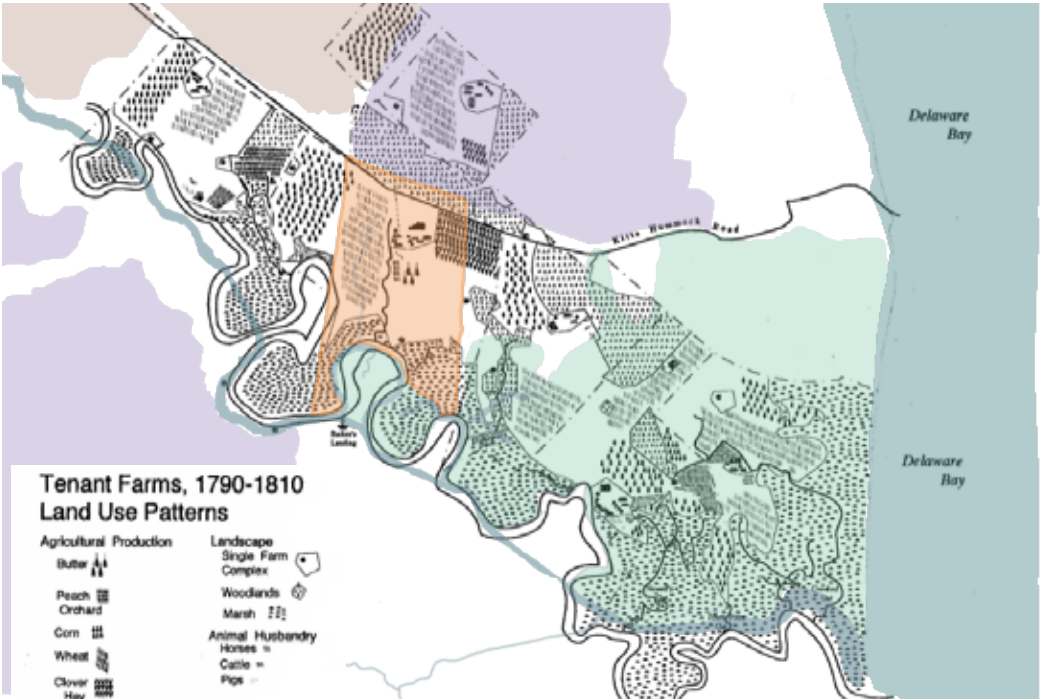
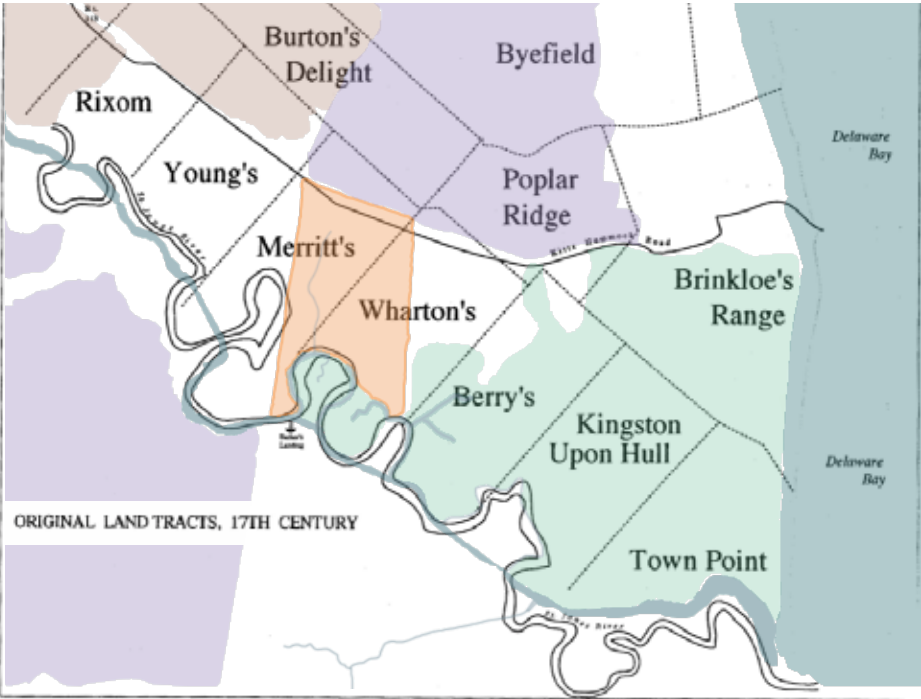
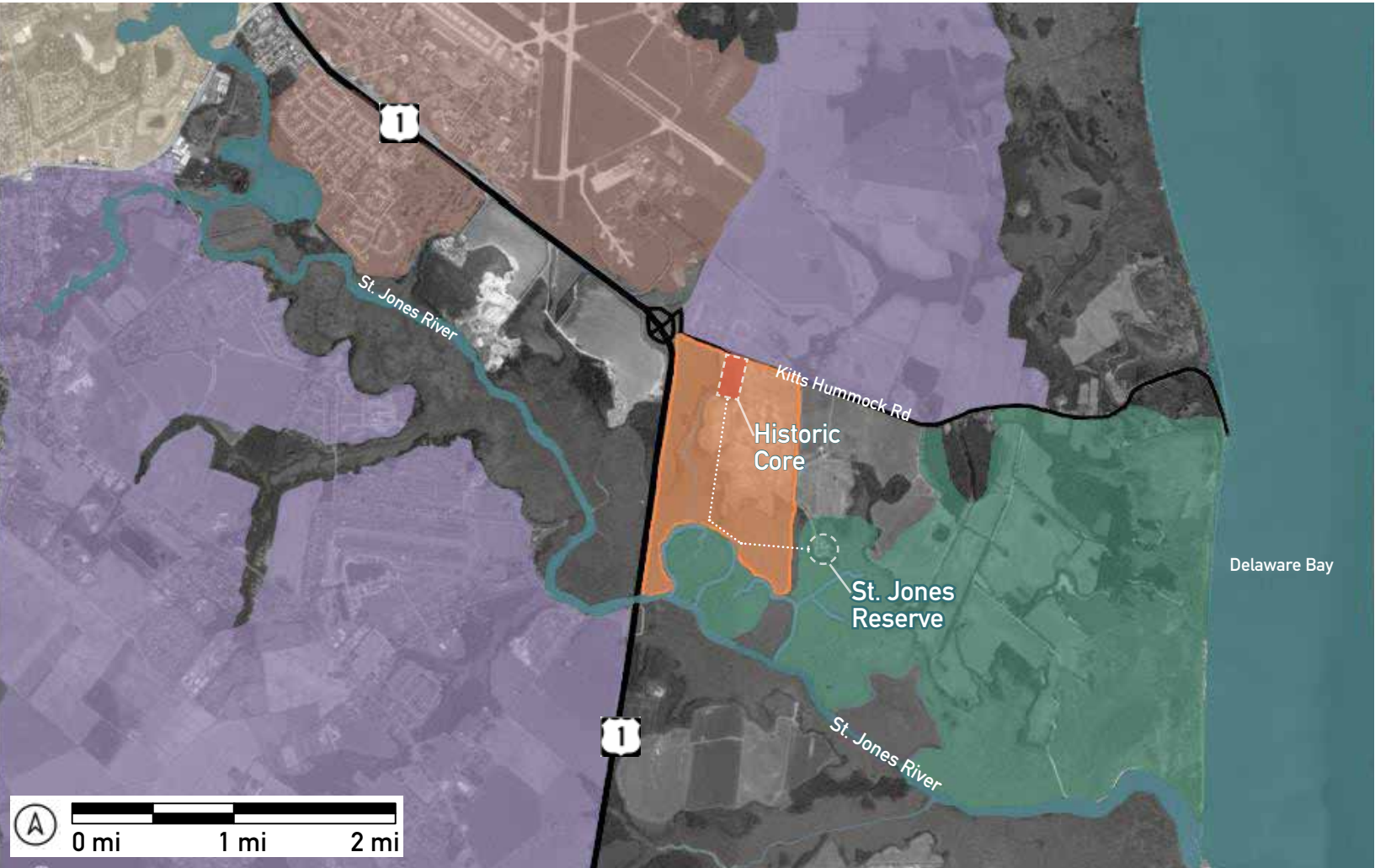
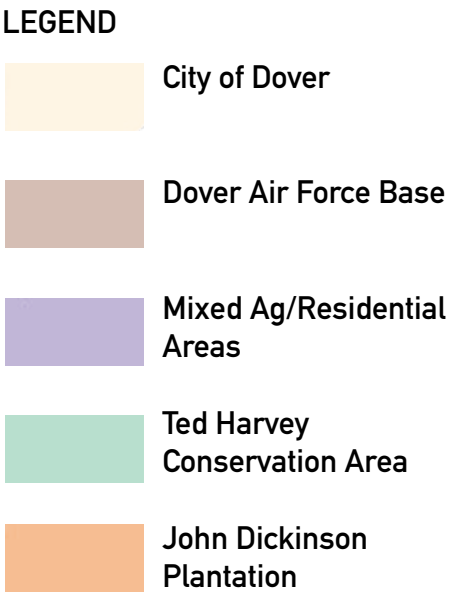


(A) Enlargement Map of  
Area of Reflection

# Site Analysis

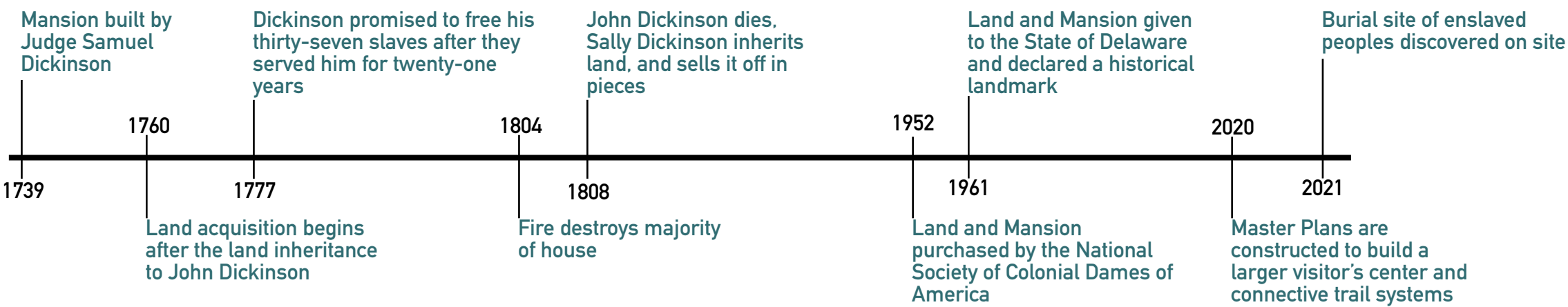
The John Dickinson Plantation is located South East of Dover in Kent County, Delaware. The site is surrounded by areas with various land uses and lies adjacently west of the Route 1 highway. To the north, agricultural areas and the Dover Air Force base are located in the vicinity. The site expands south towards the St Jones River and has potential for connectivity to St Jones Reserve and the Ted Harvey Conservation Area. The combination of these publicly owned areas allows for preservation of historic and natural lands in Kent County.

Map highlighting land uses in the vicinity of John Dickinson Plantation



## HISTORY

By 1760, John Dickinson owned approximately 3,000 acres of land north of the St Jones River, where he operated a plantation divided into various tenant farm parcels. The farms grew crops such as wheat, corn, hay, and peaches. Various kinds of people spent their lives on the site prior to and after this date: tenant farmers, day laborers, indentured servants, and enslaved peoples.



## PROGRAMMING

Today, the John Dickinson Plantation is a historical site and museum operated by the Delaware Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs. The site offers year-round tours, exhibits, field trips, and historically-based demonstrations. Most aspects of the plantation, such as the life of John Dickinson and the lives of those who chose to work on the plantation, have been interpreted. Yet, what is needed next is an area of reflection and commemoration for the enslaved peoples who were forced to live and work on this land, and greatly contributed to its operations all while being out of the limelight of history.

**SPRING**

- “Make A Splash” event
- ARCH Field Trip Day
- Iron Hill Archeology Festival



Field Trip group at the John Dickinson Plantation

**SUMMER**

- Friends of John Dickinson Mansion Annual Meeting



Interior of John Dickinson Mansion

**AUTUMN**

- Public events
- 18th Century Trades Day
- Evening Lantern Tours
- Woodburn Family Fun Fest



Woodburn Family Fun Fest activities

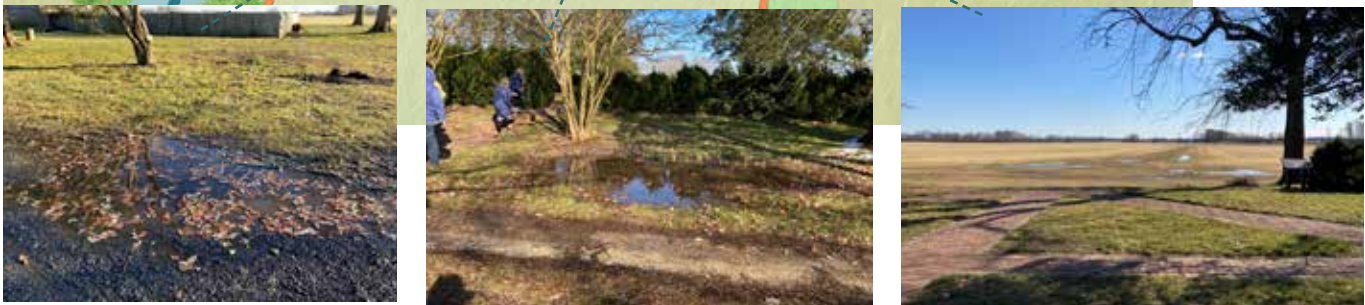
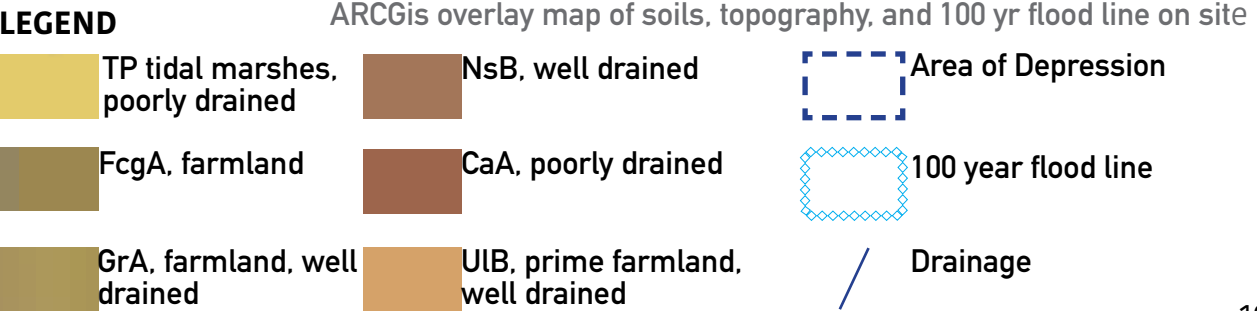
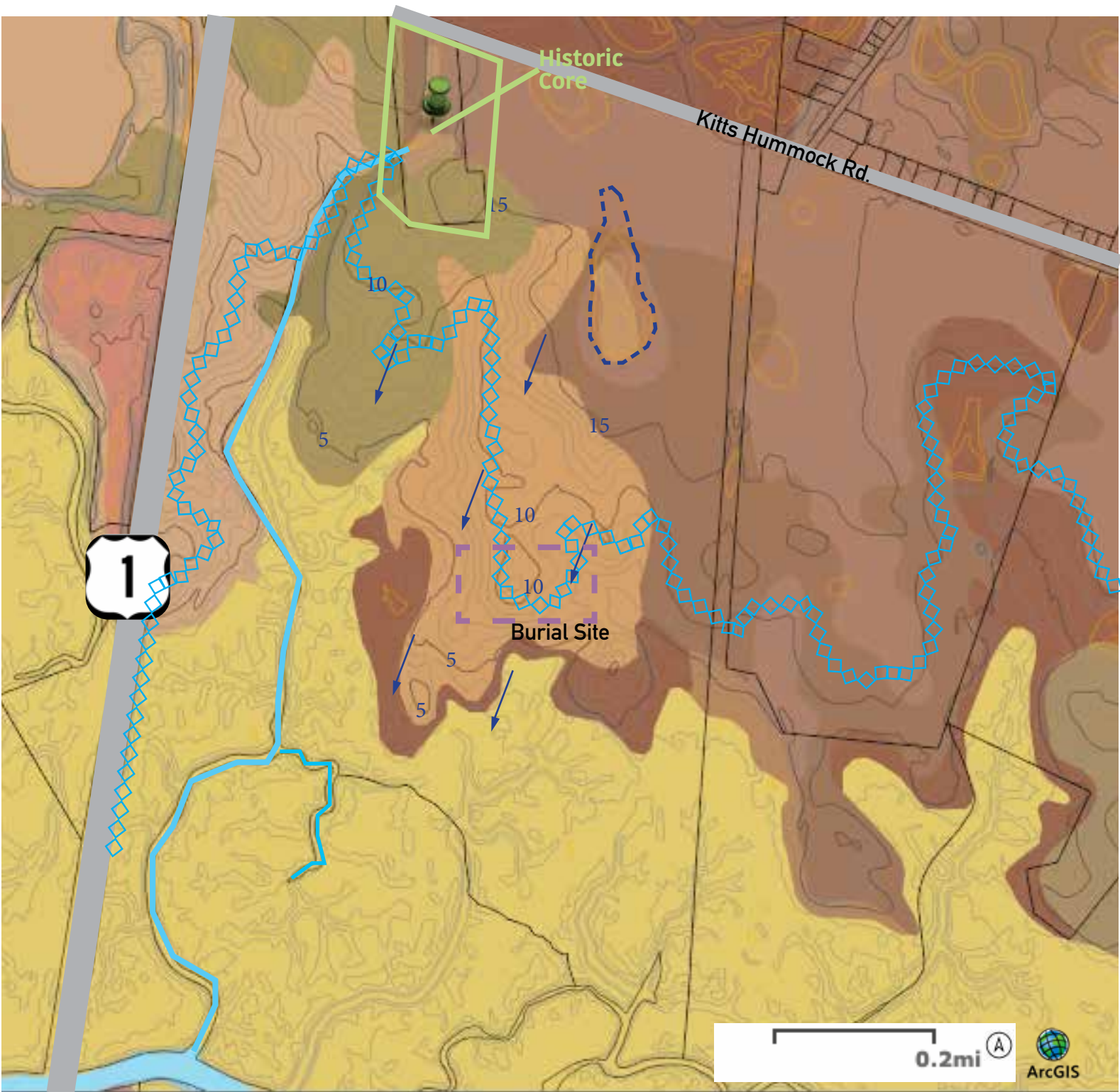
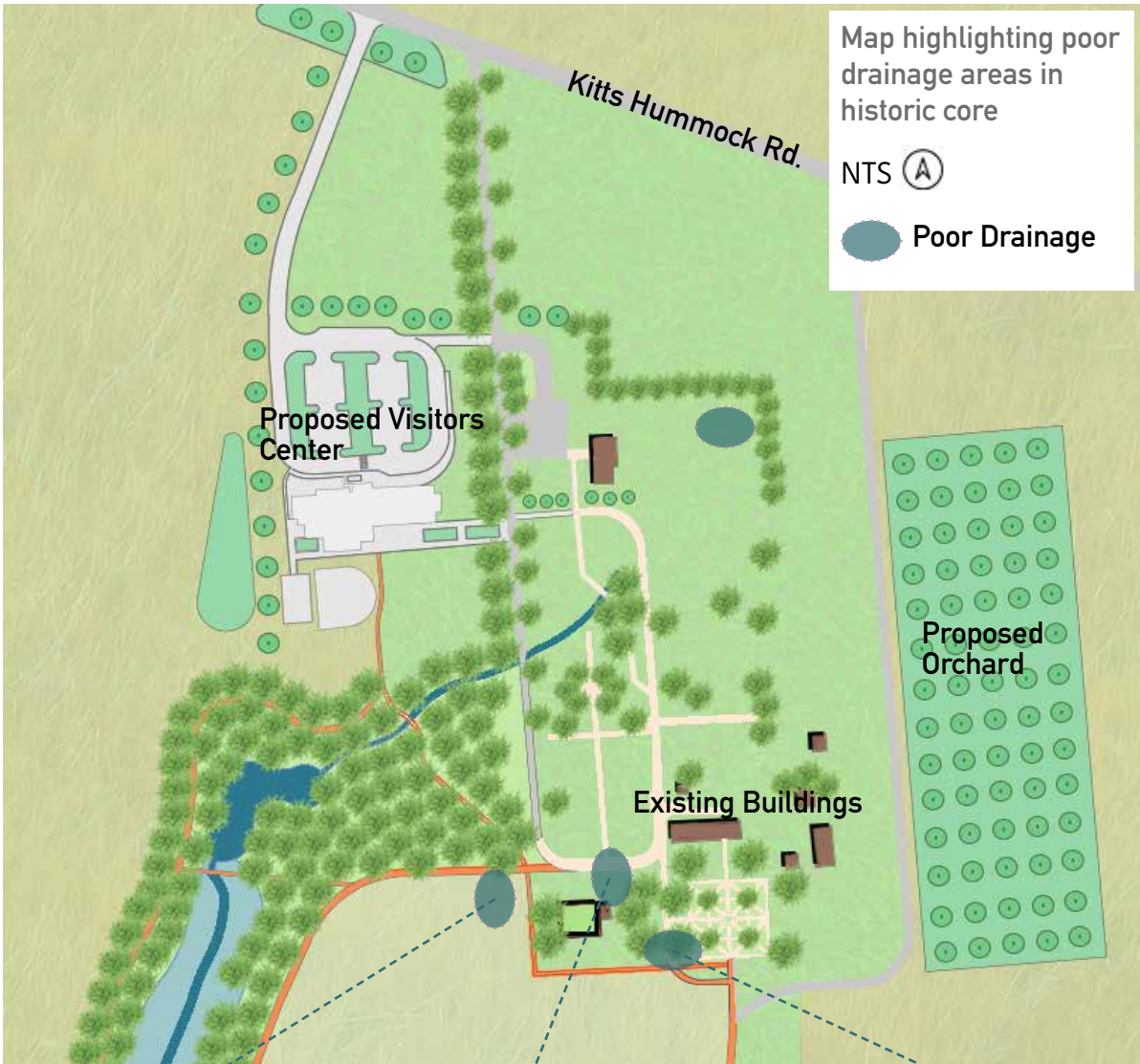
**WINTER**

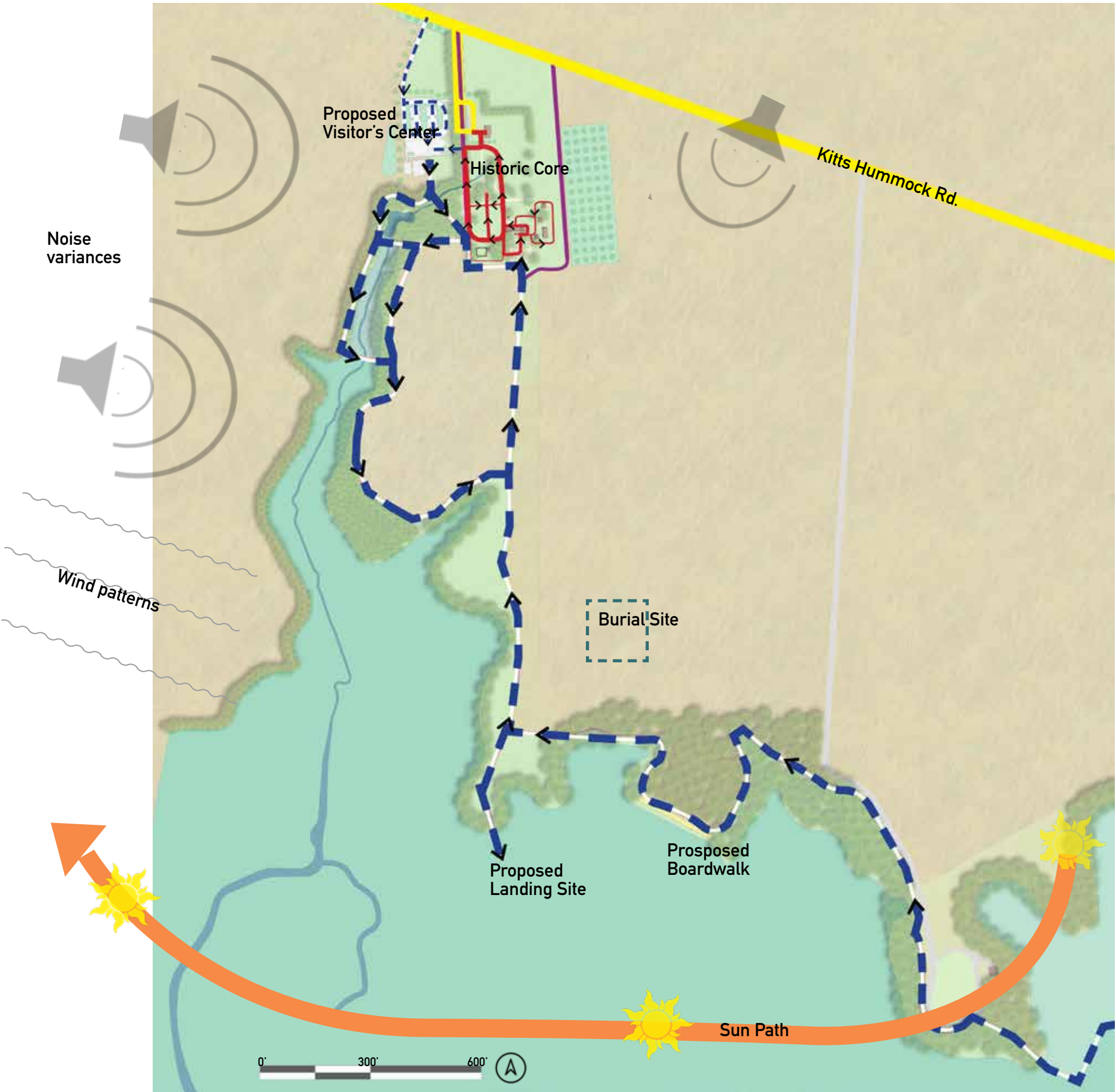
- Friends of John Dickinson Mansion Holiday Gathering
- Bayberry Candle Workshop
- JDP Memorial Event



Wintertime at the John Dickinson Plantation

The soils on site primarily reflect sites with high agricultural use towards the North, and poorly drained soils near the river. The site is mildly flat with decreasing slope facing south towards the St. Jones River. The slope does not support expansive views towards the St Jones River because it is located too far out of site from the historic core. In the historic core, there are several spots that pool water. Grading would be implemented to enhance drainage in these areas if suitable for the area of reflection.





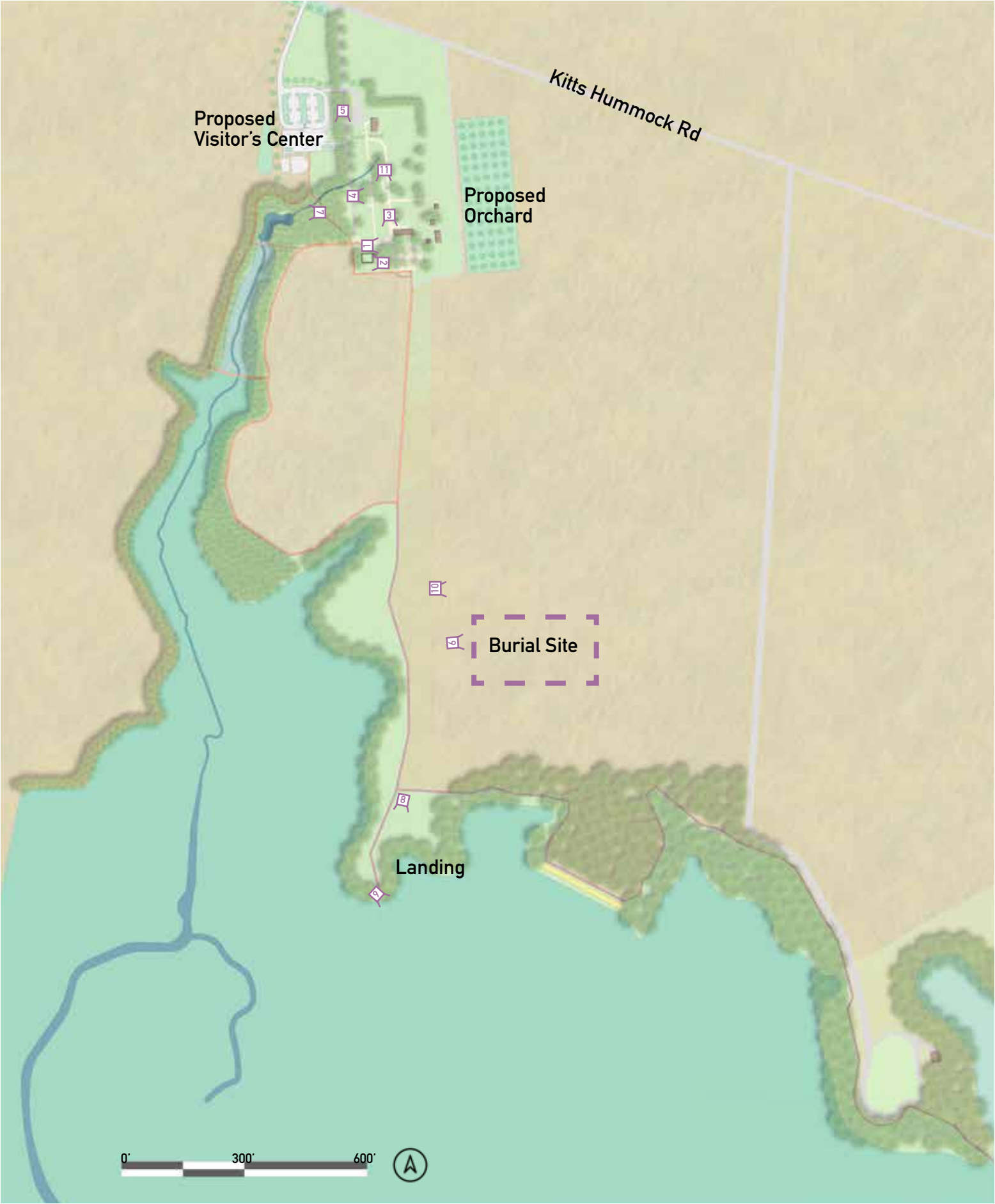
Map of circulation and wind/sun/noise patterns on John Dickinson Plantation

LEGEND

- Proposed Trail System
- Primary Walking Pathways
- Visitor Vehicles
- Maintenance Vehicles
- Farm Field
- Marsh
- Grass
- River
- Burial Site of Enslaved Peoples

The proposed trail systems will expand the circulation of the site, leading to the proposed landing as well as the St. Jones Reserve. These new routes provided me with an opportunity to locate my area of reflection farther away from the historical core and closer to the burial site.

The area around the burial site is flat agricultural land which receives an abundance of sunlight, so I worked to incorporate vegetation that both provides shade and a new sense of place. This location also recieves less noise variances due to its distance from the roadways.



MATERIALS



Historical Brick



Weathered Wood



Concrete



Oyster Shells



Gravel



Tree Archeology



Glen



Exposed Topsoil



Marsh Land



Agricultural Field



Landscaped Beds

## Precedent Study

The Freedom House Museum is a National Historical Landmark located at 1315 Duke Street, Alexandria, Virginia. Once the headquarters of multiple domestic slave trading operations, it is now a “small yet powerful museum” that preserves and interprets both the history of the physical site and the lives of the enslaved people who had passed through.

Figure 1: Photograph of 1315 Duke St, 1865



Figure 2: 1315 Duke St today

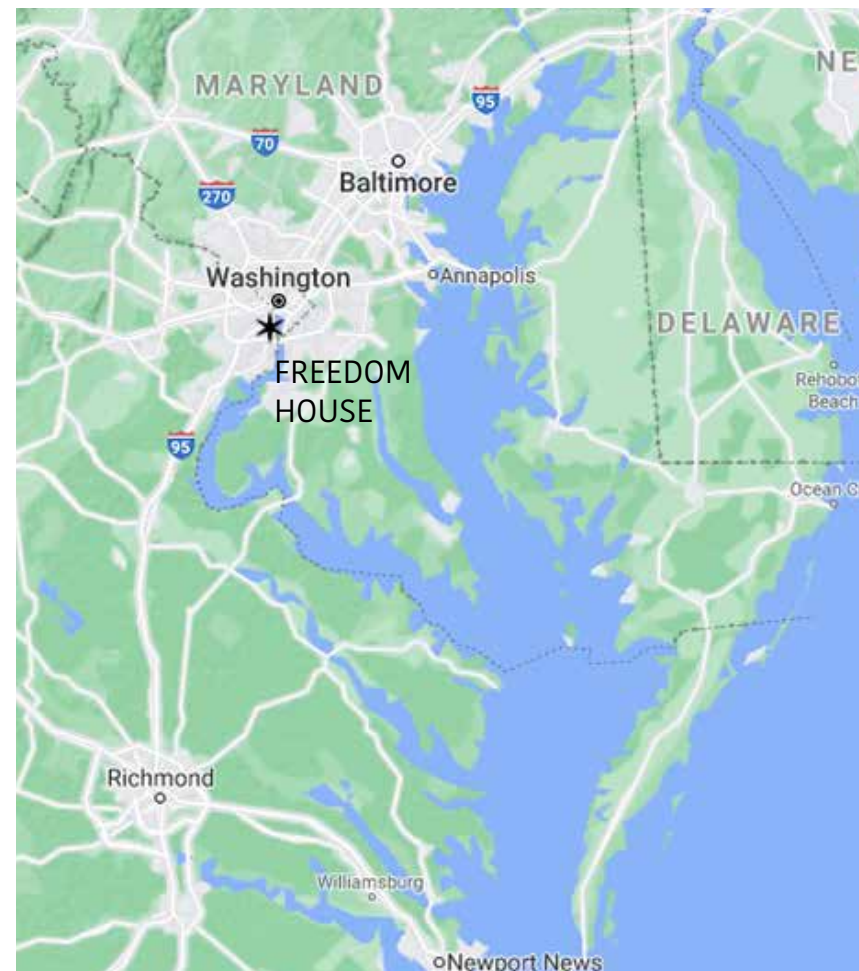


Figure 3: Small scale map image of Freedom House location

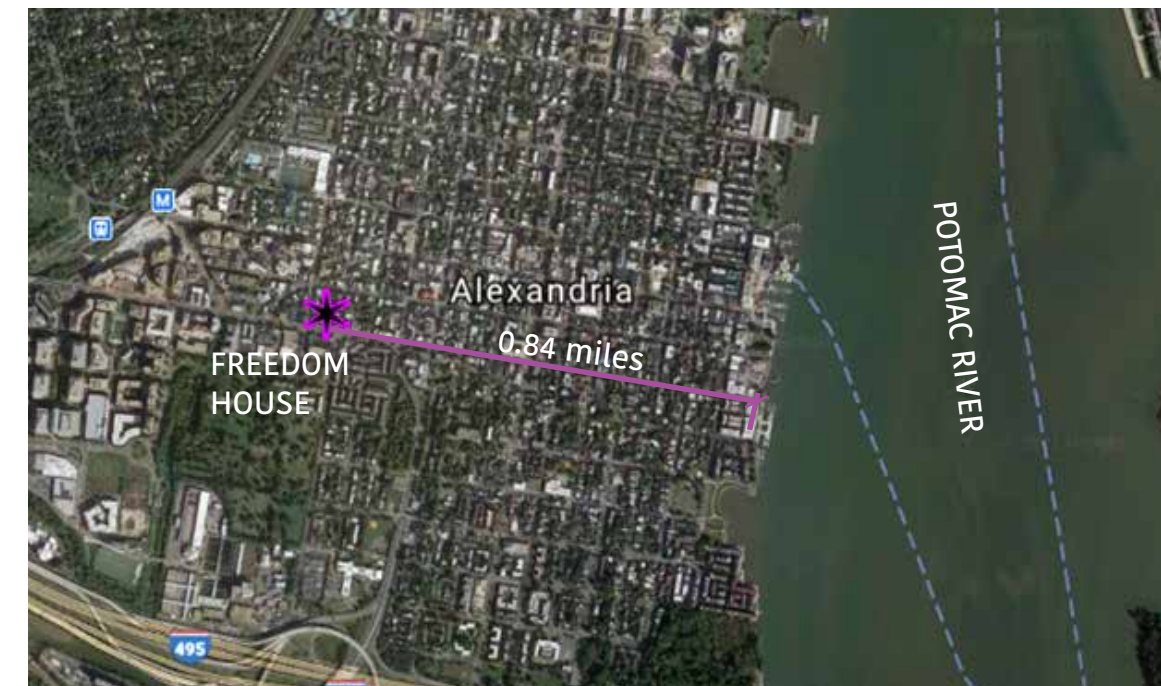


Figure 4: Large scale map image of Freedom House location within Alexandria and in proximity to Potomac River

## Slave Trade Operations History

1315 Duke St is located a mile from the Potomac River, making the it a connective location for the importation and exportation of slaves to Southern states. Franklin & Armfield was the largest operation in the country in the mid 19th century. The company used the building and surrounding land as a holding pen for enslaved people, who were then exported either by foot or ship.

My precedent study of the Alexandria Freedom House shed light on the effectiveness of primary source artifacts and documentation in telling a historical narrative. I was influenced to incorporate existing documentation into my design, in particular the manuscript of enslaved peoples names at the John Dickinson Plantation.



Figure 5: Model of Building and Land when used as a slave pen

Museum Interpretation

The Freedom House Museum focuses its exhibit on both the history of slave trade operators and the lives of the enslaved people who were forced there. It's name, "Freedom House," juxtaposes its history and focuses the narrative survival of African Americans during these times and equal rights in our reshaped nation, present and future.

Materials Used

- Life-sized figures of enslaved people
- First person historical narratives and quotes
- Primary source artifacts
- Informational videos and recordings
- Primary source photographs and documents
- List of enslaved people's names and ages
- Historical materials found on site, e.g shackles

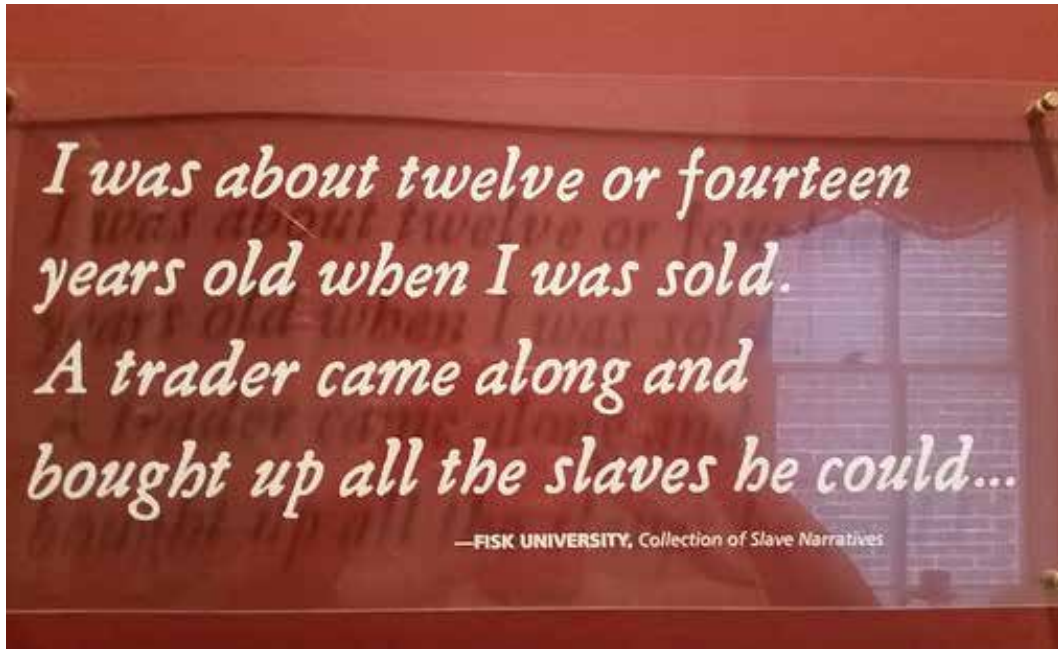


Figure 6: Primary Sourced quote from Collection of Slave Narratives



Figure 7: Museum Exhibit

Public Response

The museum is described as “small yet powerful.” The Northern Virginia Urban League was praised for buying the property in 1996, saving the building from destruction, and implementing the museum. NVUL also provides scholarships and resources to disadvantaged communities, and the museum purchase and upkeep led to a stretch in their resources.

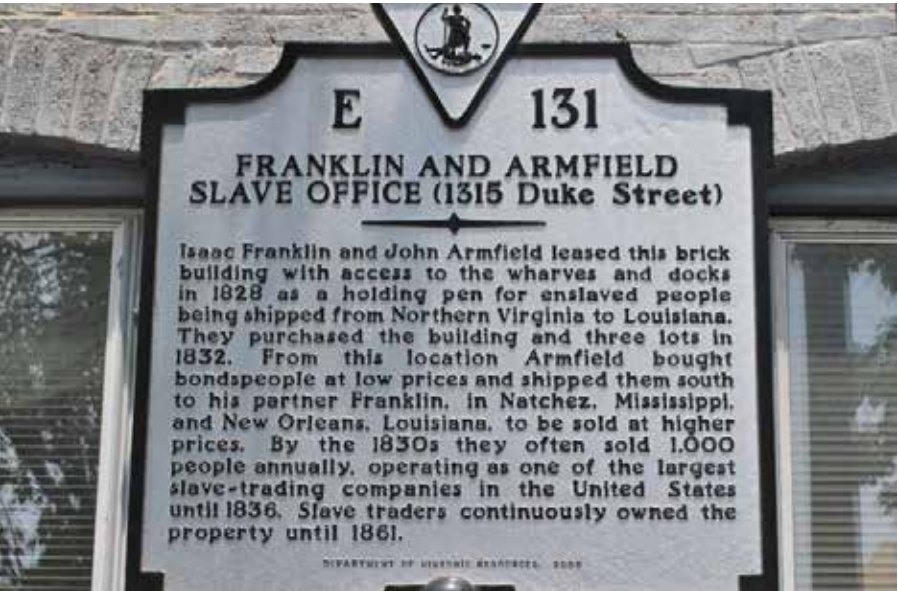
The City of Alexadria buys the Freedom House in 2020 but still grants the museums operations to NVUL. Because Freedom House was brought into the City’s Museum system, the City proposed to instate visitation fees and was met with disput from NVUL, who wished to keep the museum free and accessible to the public.

Betsy Seaton	12
Kitty Robinsn	23
Child Susan	4 months
Sollowman West	23
Ned Freeman	26

Figure 8 & 9:  
List of enslaved people who had been at 1315 Duke St.

NAMES	AGE
William Bates	31
Ned Ake	31
George Wain	31
Washington Pansil	31
William Grant	31
Betty Hain	31
John Lumsden	31
John Dutton	31
Richard Road	31
Michael Brown	31
John Akins	31
Dennis Reynolds	31
Leah Queen	31
Charles Cooper	31
Harriet Myers	31
Elyse Clark	31
Lacinda Williams	31
Mary Grant	31
Rachel Taylor	31
Sally Lee	31
Mahaley Jackson	31
Betsy Seaton	31
Kitty Robinsn	31
Child Susan	31
Sollowman West	31
Ned Freeman	31

Figure 10:  
Signage outside of Freedom House entrance



Sources: (Citations in Works Cited)

<https://alexandrialivingmagazine.com/news/alexandria-vapurchases-freedom-house-property-2020/>

<https://www.alexandriava.gov/historic/info/default.aspx?id=118547>

[https://nvulypn.wildapricot.org/About-Us-\(NOVAUL\)](https://nvulypn.wildapricot.org/About-Us-(NOVAUL))

<https://www.visitalexandriava.com/listings/freedom-house-museum/6053/#:~:text=A%20National%20Historic%20Landmark%2C%201315,tradeing%20operation%20in%20our%20nation.&text=Slave%20trading%20operations%20at%201315,beginning%20of%20the%20Civil%20War>

## Case Studies / Research Briefs

## Article: “Continuing care, passage landscapes and future memories”

Authors: Anna Petersson & Carola Wingren

### Major Topics:

- “Continuing care” involves buying, collecting, and giving items to the deceased by placing them on or near the memorial sites as a **form of care and connection**
- **Materiality** of stone, such as texture and color, is chosen as a direct representation of the deceased
- “Passage landscape” encompasses the **transitional space** between regular and memorial landscape, allowing visitors to emotionally prepare
- “Memory objects” are design elements that help **sculpt the historical narrative** of the memorial and further separate the memorial space from the outside space
- The **sense of touch** can ignite these linkages, such as a mourning person touching a melancholy object or touching the grave marking itself
- Obstacles in designing a public memorial arise when **balancing privacy and public exposure**

### Design Implications:

- The design will utilize the “passage landscape” concept and will allow visitors to prepare for emotional responses that come with a memorial but will not completely remove the memorial from the rest of the site. In this case, the entire plantation has roots in this tragedy, but it is important to distinguish the area of reflection.
- The design will incorporate materials that reinforce the specific narrative of the site; using hard and lasting materials such as stone as a symbol of endurance, and using vegetation as a symbol of inevitable change and the passing of time.
- The design will incorporate affective textures, allowing visitors to use this sense to connect with the past and tragedies.



Public monument for victims of a fire at a dance club; Gothenburg, Sweden

Igualada Cemetery / Enric Miralles  
Barcelona, Spain, 1994

## BACKGROUND

The Igualada Cemetery was conceived as part of a design competition to replace the Old Cemetery in the Catalanian hills. The concept was directly inspired by the rough and hilly terrain,

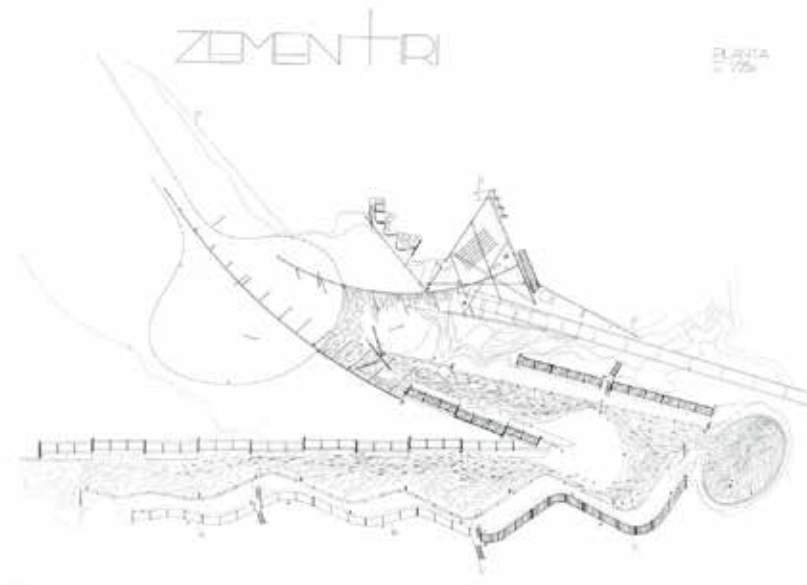


## THE ARCHITECT

Enric Miralles Moya was a Spanish architect who worked on the Igualada Cemetery with his wife, Carmine Pinos. The designers wanted to challenge the traditional design of cemeteries and explore the way the living interact with the memory of the dead, and the larger connection between past, present, and future.



The Igualada Cemetery puts an emphasis on strong materials like stone and corton steel. I was influenced by the symbolizes of timelessness when using long lasting materials.



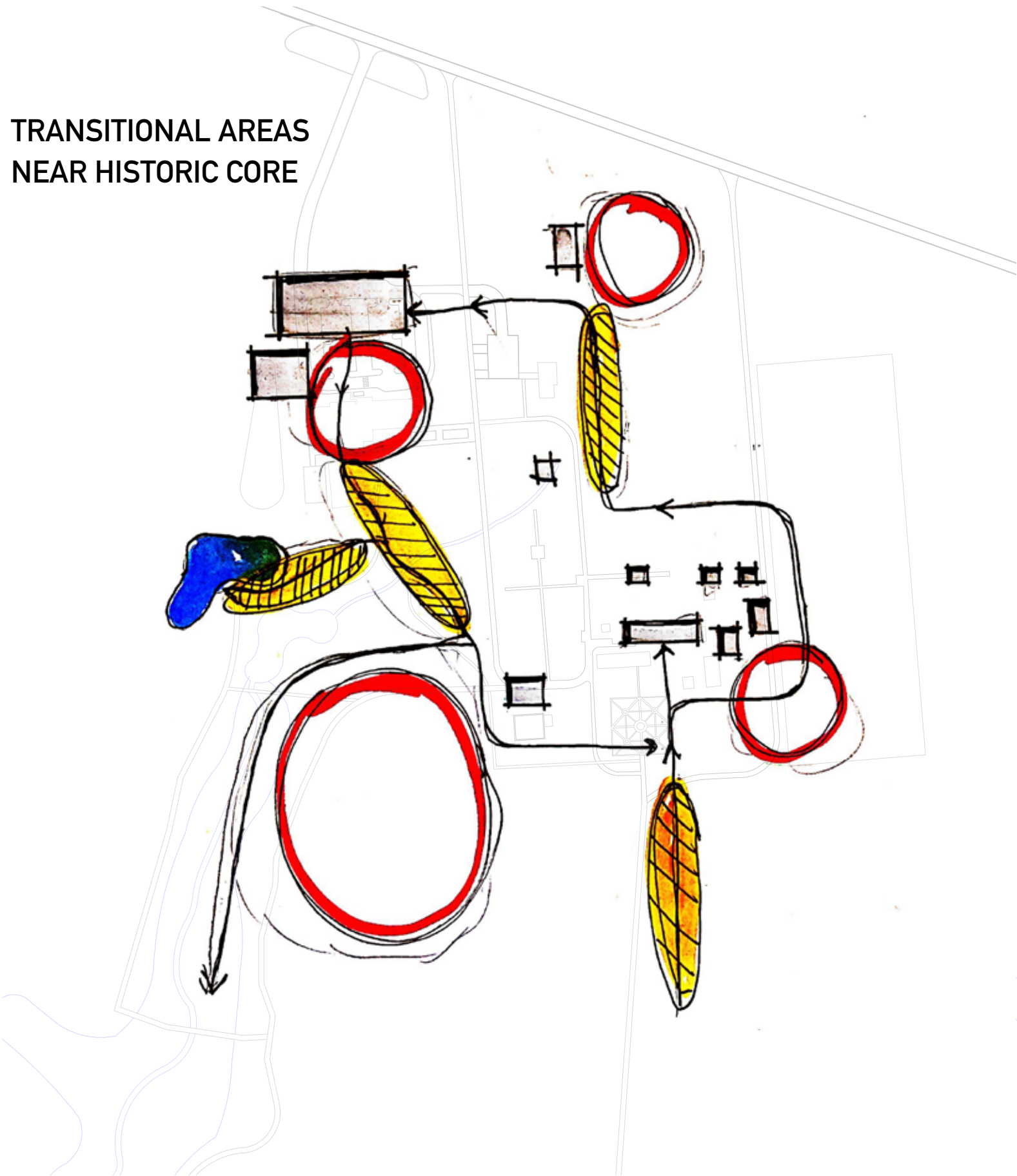
## IMPACT

The site is renowned for seamlessly embeddning into the unique rugged landscape. It is remarked that the topography and physical characteristics of the land hold the story of the dead. It is a juxtaposition to traditional Spanish architecture. The legacy of the landscape depicts that the materials will decay and weather over time, in comparison to human life.

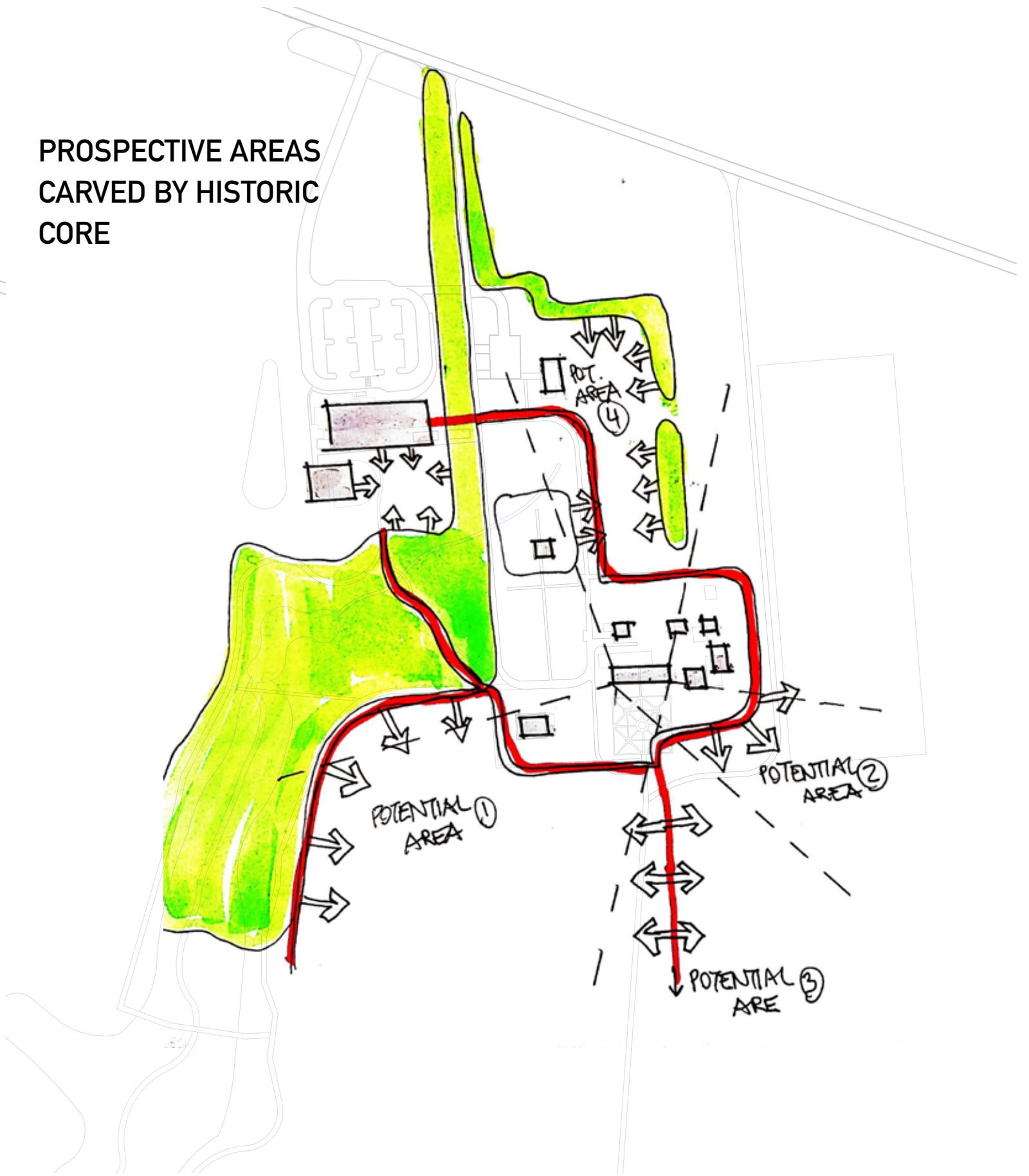


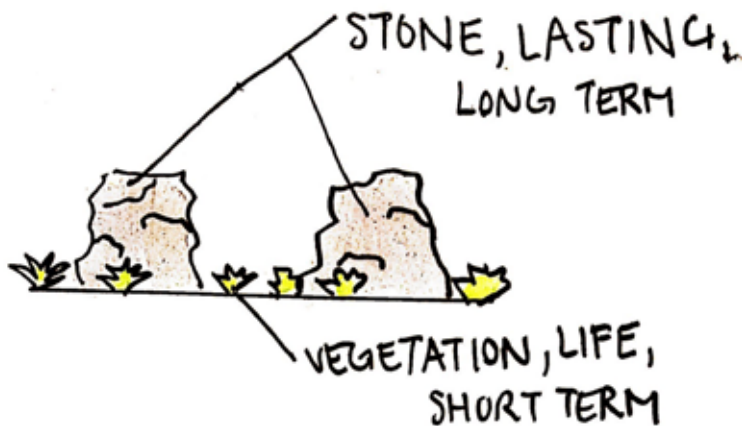
# Conceptual Design

TRANSITIONAL AREAS  
NEAR HISTORIC CORE



PROSPECTIVE AREAS  
CARVED BY HISTORIC  
CORE

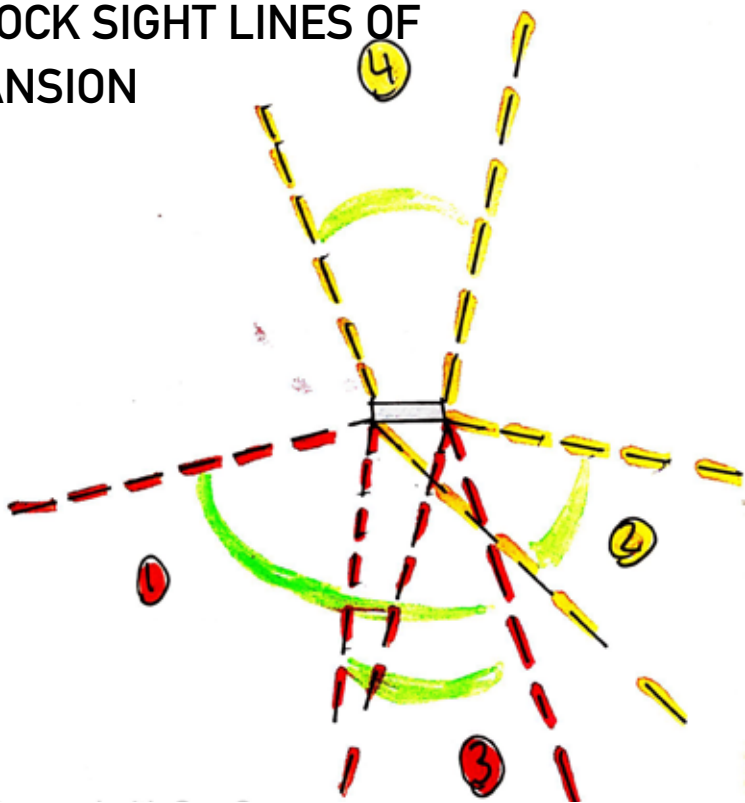




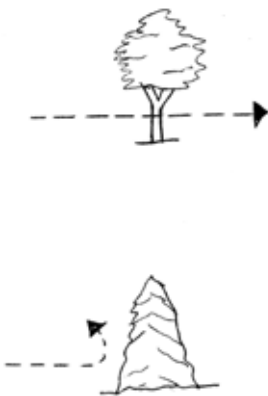
MATERIALITY & TOUCH



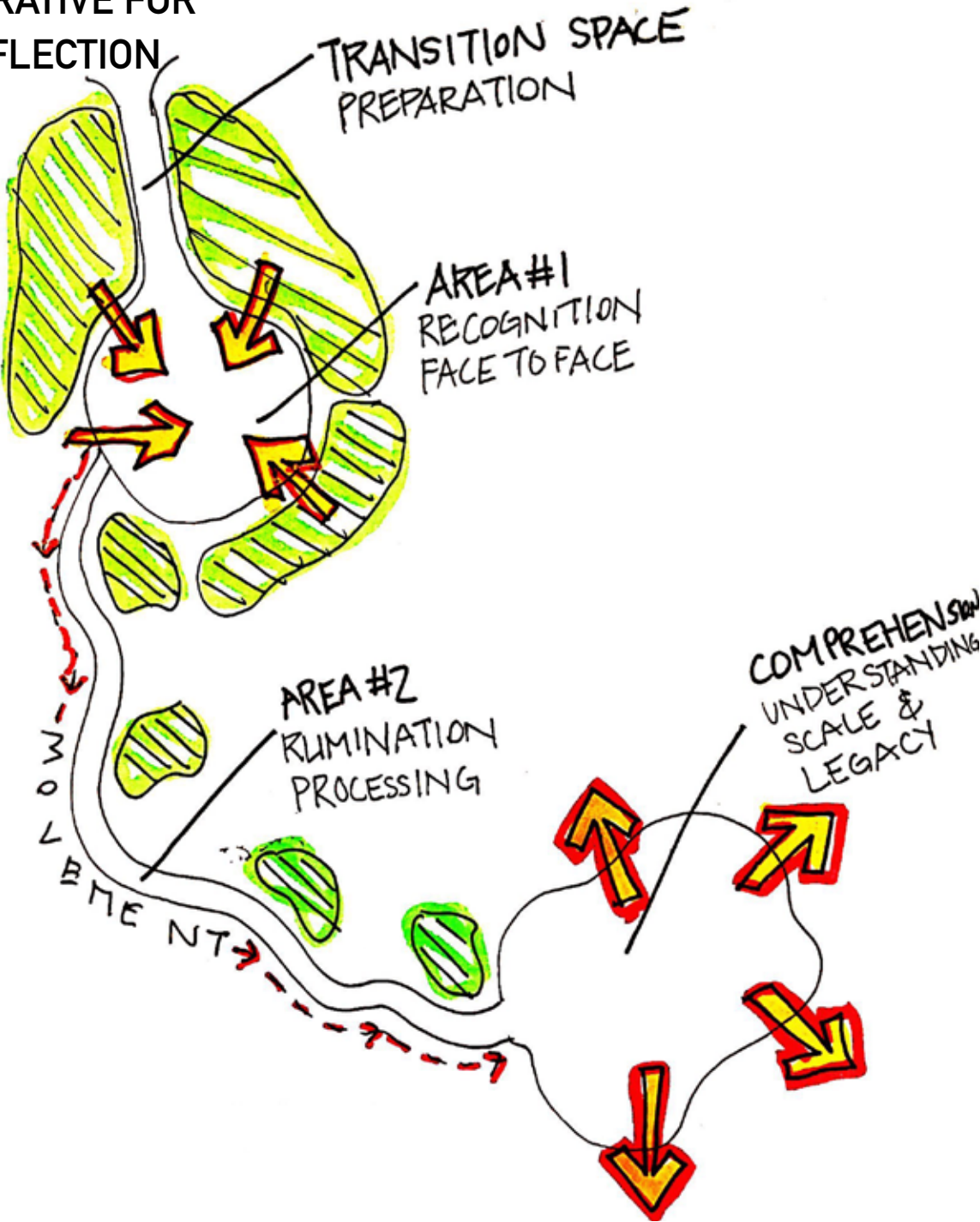
BLOCK SIGHT LINES OF MANSION



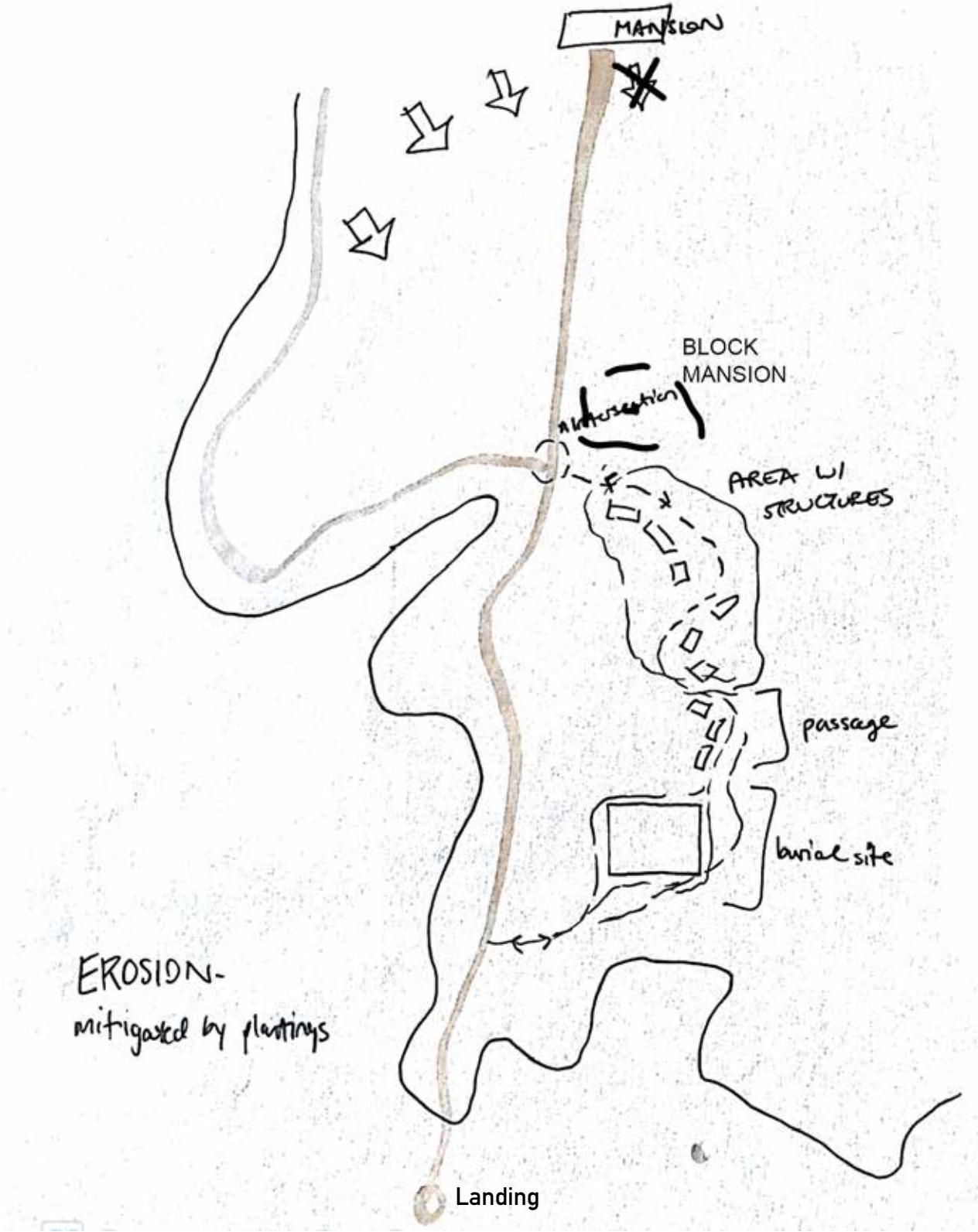
VEGETATION AS WIND BARRIER AND EROSION CONTROL



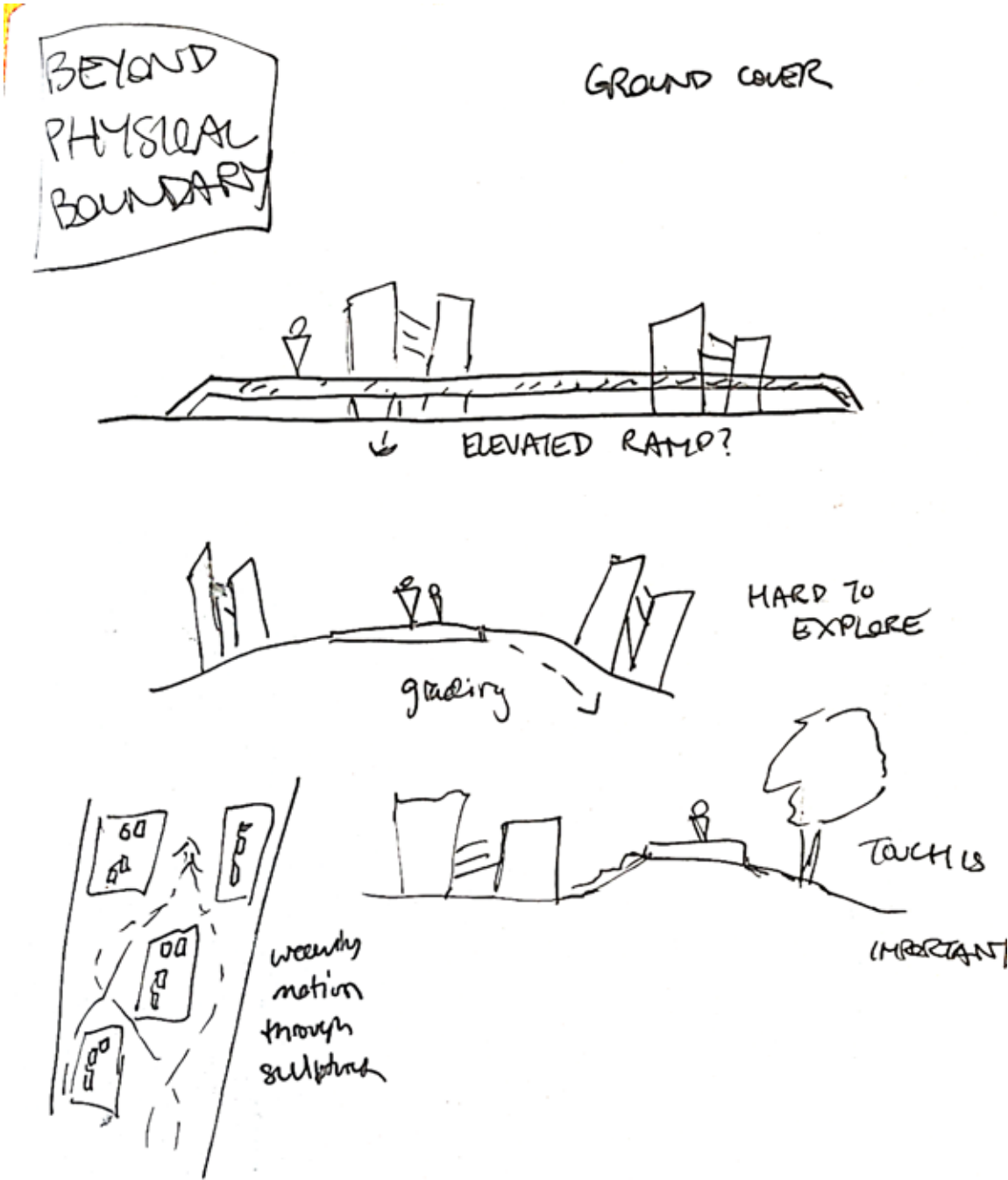
INITIAL NARRATIVE FOR AREA OF REFLECTION



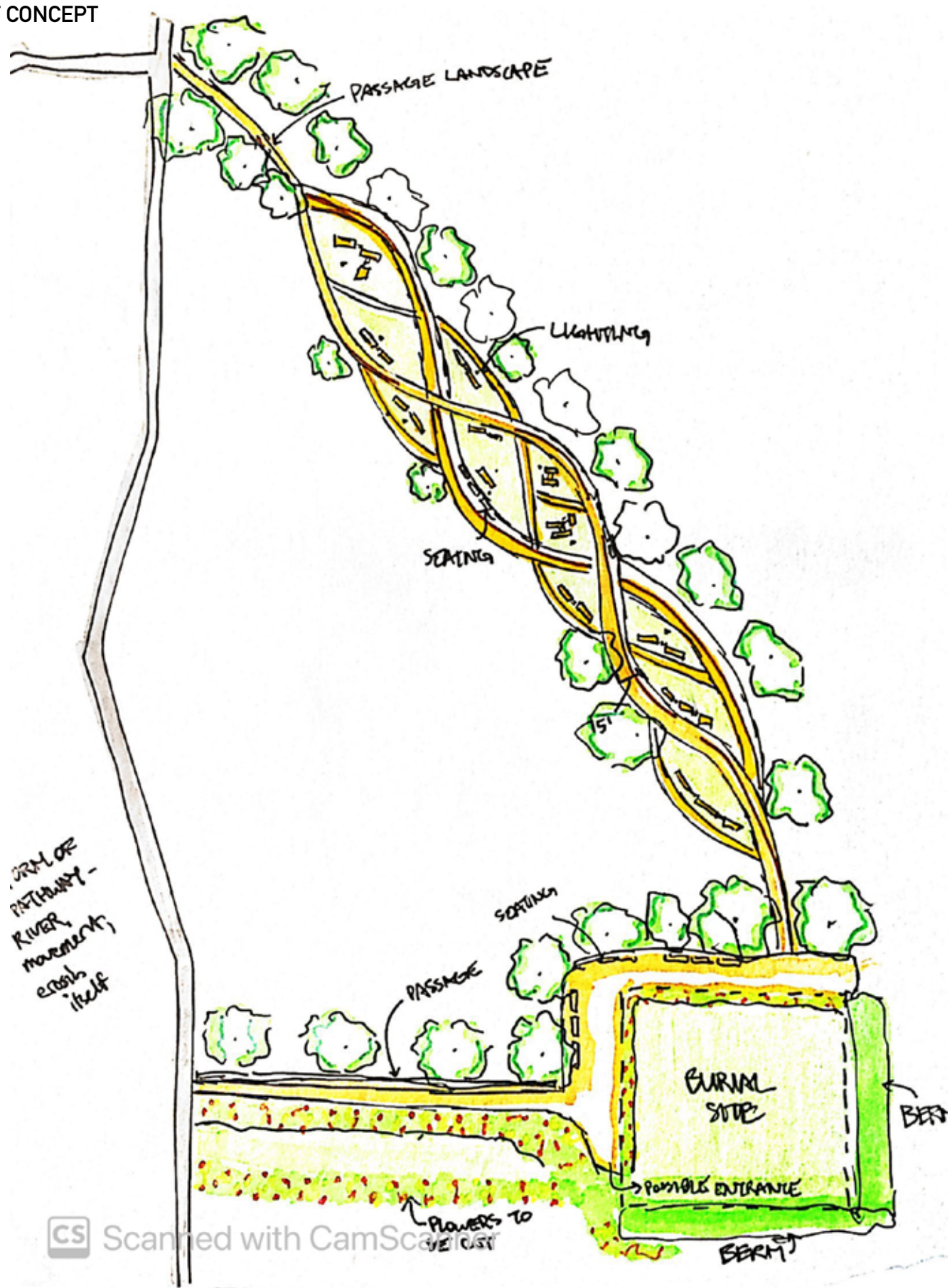
SITE VIEWS



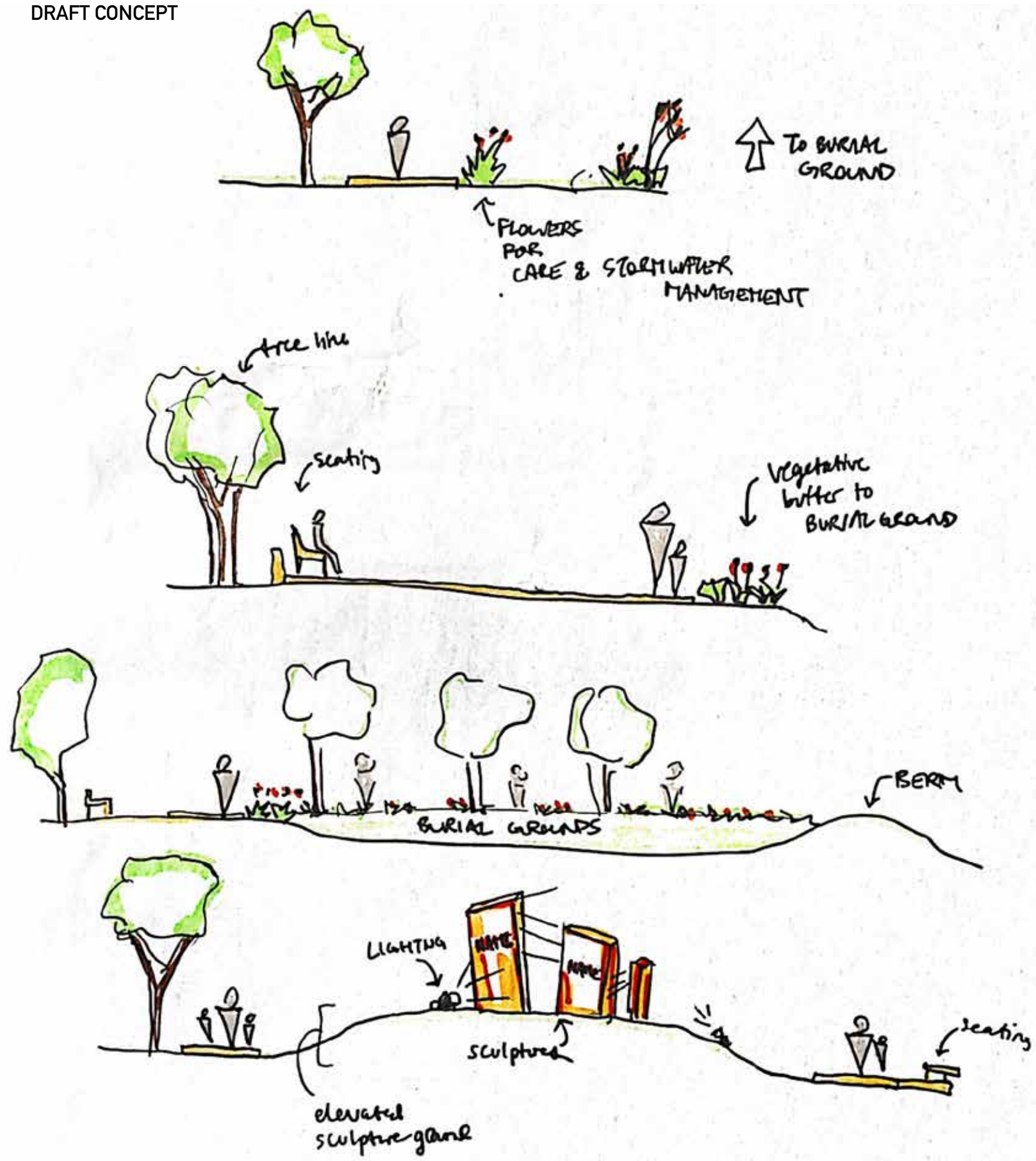
ROUGH ITERATIONS



DRAFT CONCEPT



DRAFT CONCEPT



# Master Plan Design

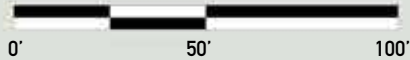
Map of John Dickinson  
Plantation

NTS (A)



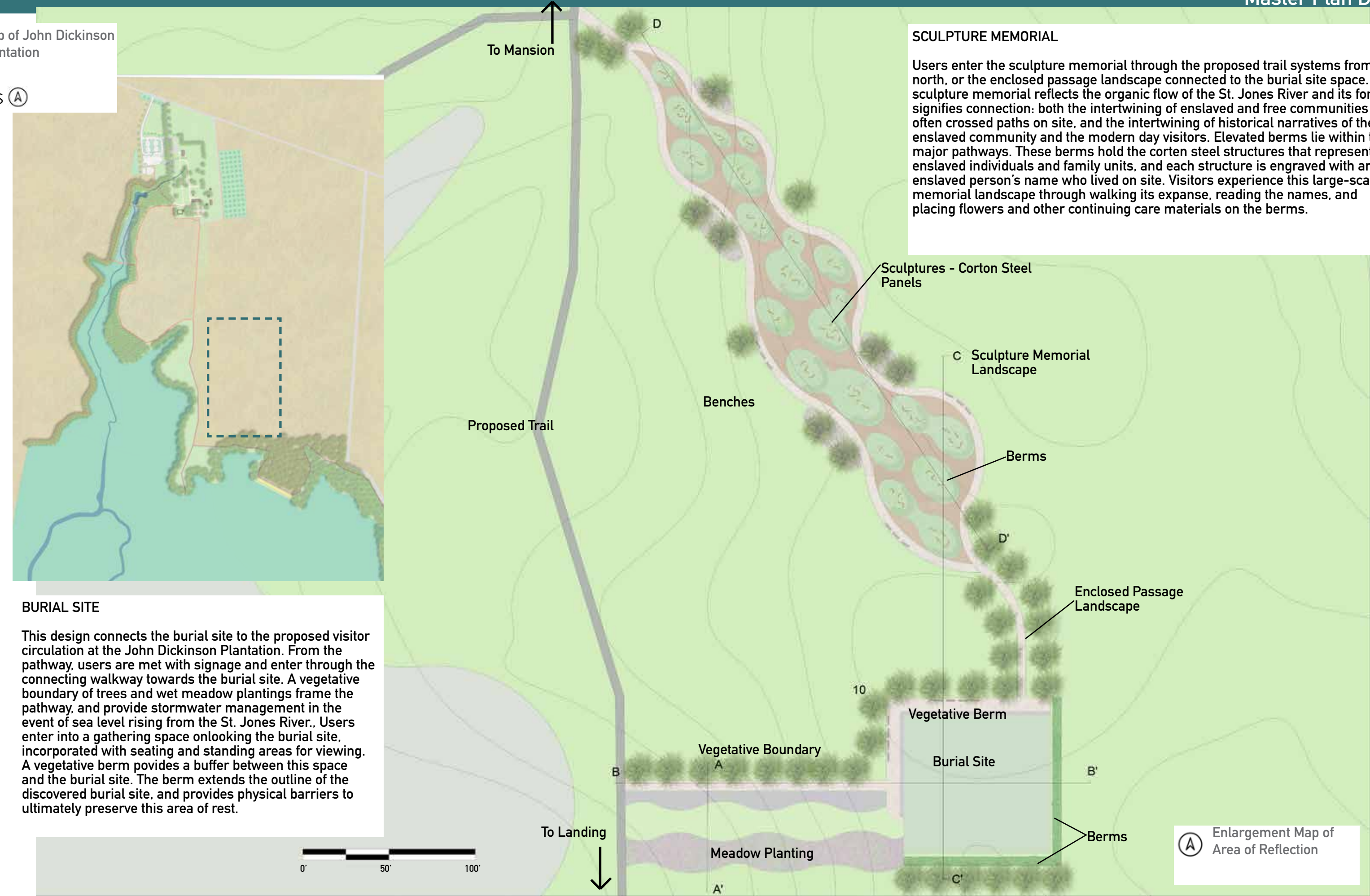
BURIAL SITE

This design connects the burial site to the proposed visitor circulation at the John Dickinson Plantation. From the pathway, users are met with signage and enter through the connecting walkway towards the burial site. A vegetative boundary of trees and wet meadow plantings frame the pathway, and provide stormwater management in the event of sea level rising from the St. Jones River., Users enter into a gathering space onlooking the burial site, incorporated with seating and standing areas for viewing. A vegetative berm provides a buffer between this space and the burial site. The berm extends the outline of the discovered burial site, and provides physical barriers to ultimately preserve this area of rest.

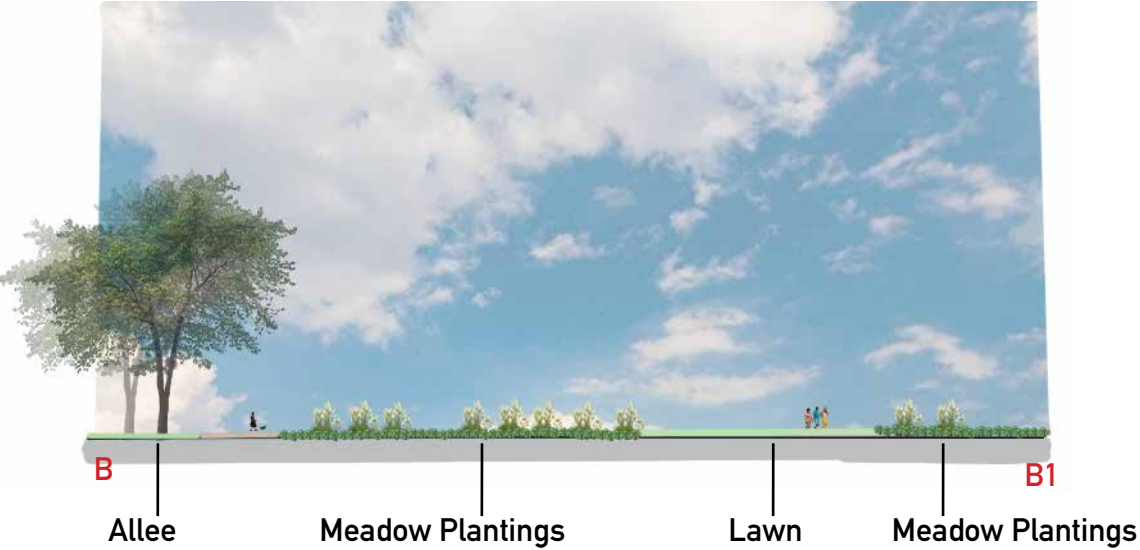
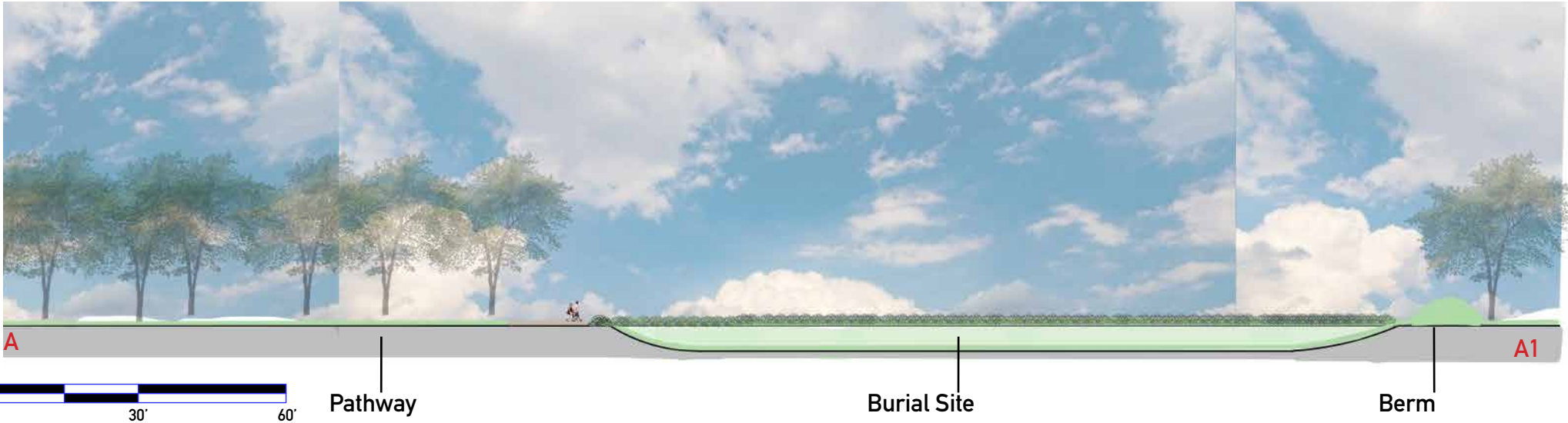
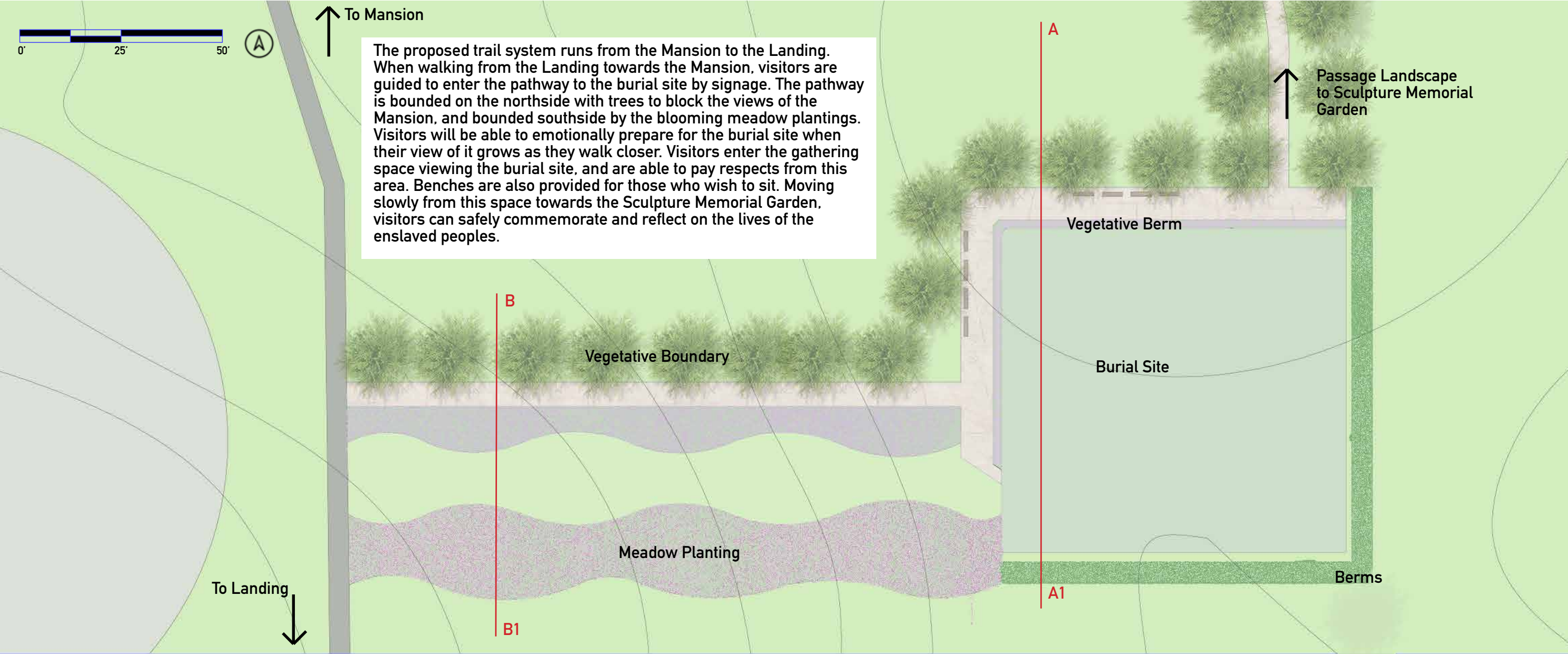


SCULPTURE MEMORIAL

Users enter the sculpture memorial through the proposed trail systems from the north, or the enclosed passage landscape connected to the burial site space. The sculpture memorial reflects the organic flow of the St. Jones River and its form signifies connection: both the intertwining of enslaved and free communities that often crossed paths on site, and the intertwining of historical narratives of the enslaved community and the modern day visitors. Elevated berms lie within the major pathways. These berms hold the corten steel structures that represent enslaved individuals and family units, and each structure is engraved with an enslaved person's name who lived on site. Visitors experience this large-scale memorial landscape through walking its expanse, reading the names, and placing flowers and other continuing care materials on the berms.



(A) Enlargement Map of  
Area of Reflection



MEADOW PLANT PALETTE



Peltandra virginica



Lobelia cardinalis



Asclepias incarnata



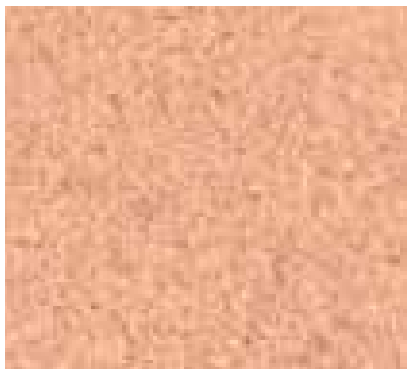
Bidens laevis



Hypericum punctatum

The meadow plan palette consists of perennials that tolerate wet soils. Blooms can be cut from these plants and placed near burial site or sculpture garden as a form of continuing care.

MATERIALS

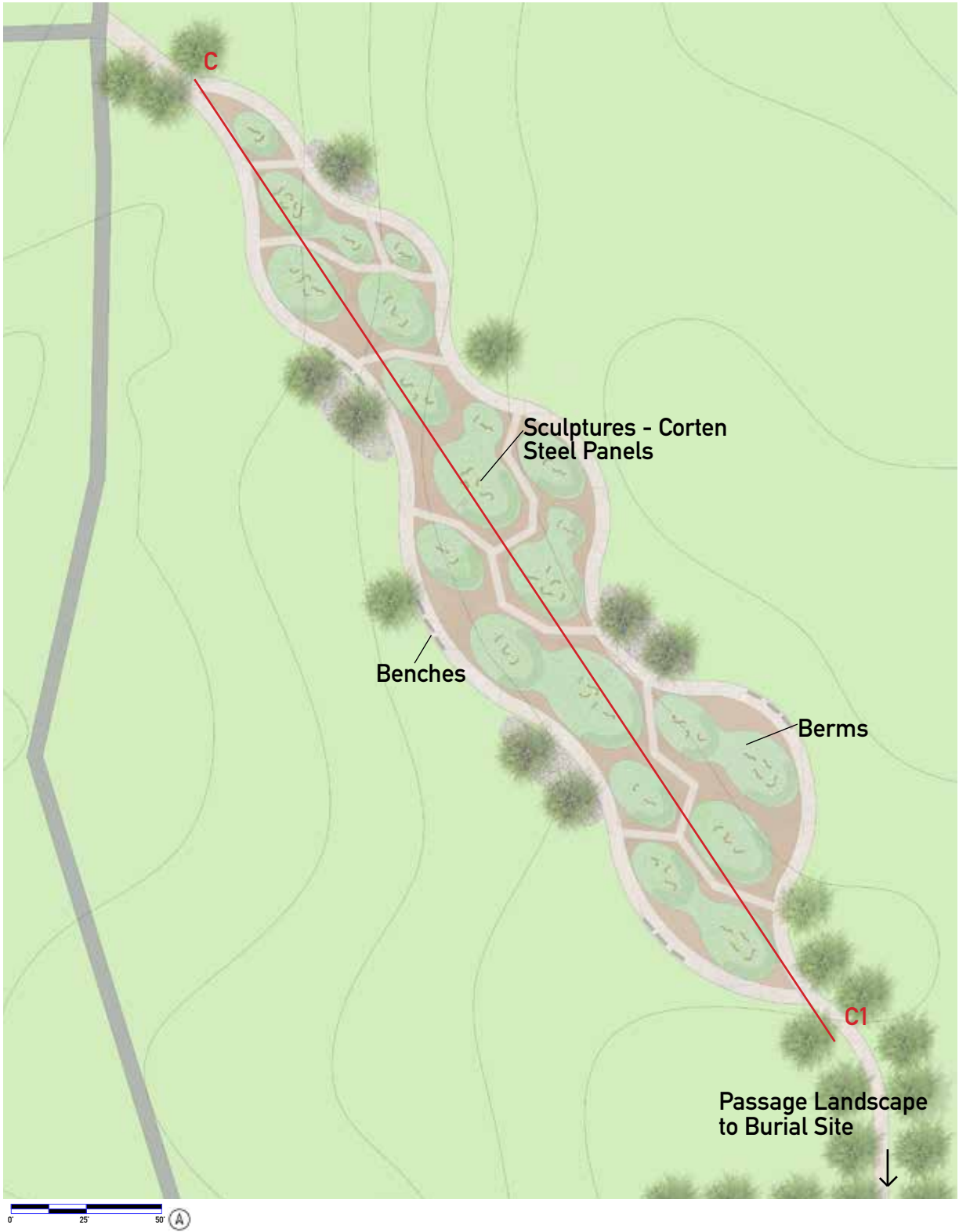


Colored Asphalt



Benches

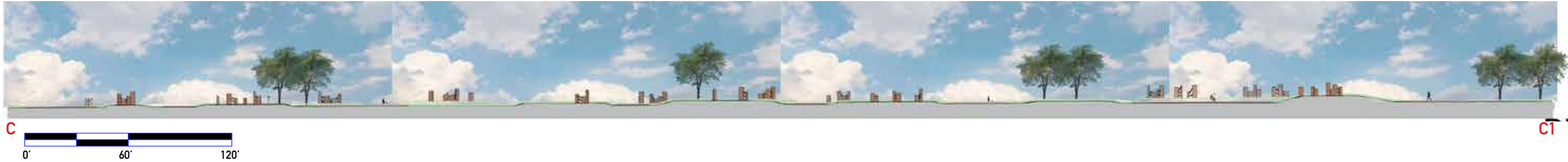
The asphalt pathway and gathering space will provide an accessible route to the burial site and sculpture memorial garden. Stone benches will also be incorporated into the design, allowing for visitors to sit with the burial site as the view point.



The expansive sculpture memorial garden symbolizes the intertwinement of the enslaved community and other free communities who lived on the plantation. Its placement within the agricultural field creates a new sense of place to an area that the enslaved people once labored on. The organic shape of the outer pathways mimic the flowing pattern of the St. Jones River, yet visitors can opt to use this pathway or walk freely within the memorial space as notion of free choice.

Throughout the site are sculptural structures placed on top of raised berms. These sculptures stand erect above the eyeline of visitors and symbolize the enslaved community, recognizing that this community takes precedence and have ownership of the space. Structures range between a height of 3 to 6 feet and are individually marked with a name from the enslaved people's manuscript. Users experience entering the memorial garden with the feeling of being a visitor and onlooker into the narratives of the enslaved people's community, and are encouraged to comprehend the large scale of both the community and the impact of slavery.

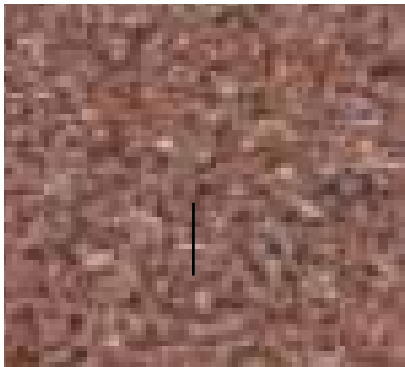
Berms are elevated at 2 to 4 feet above the pathways, and ramps are incorporated into them that allow visitors to walk up to and interact with the sculptures. On top of this, the elevation functions in the case that sea level rise occurs, where the pathways may become flooded but the sculptures will remain above. Corten steel is used as the material as it rusts with age and reinforces the lasting of the sculptures through time.



MATERIALS



Steel Wires



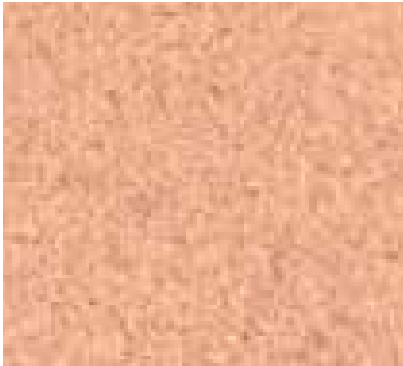
Compacted Synthetic Mulch



Lighting



Corten Steel Panels



Colored Asphalt



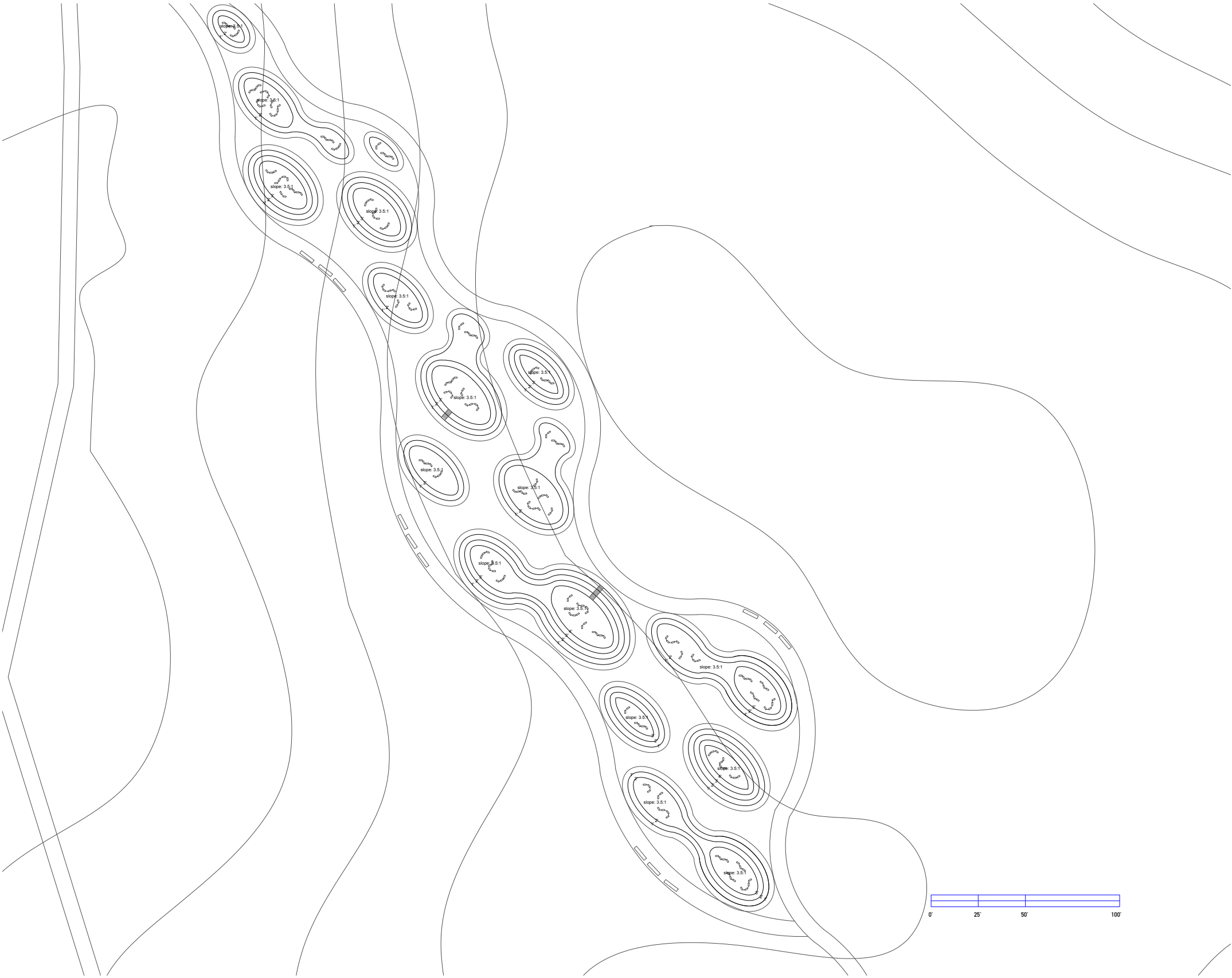
Benches



PERSPECTIVES



A grading plan is provided to illustrate the construction of berms. With a range of elevations, the sculptures remain accessible to approach. Ramps are also incorporated for accessibility.



My design ultimately functions as an area dedicated to the enslaved peoples of the John Dickinson Plantation as they did not have ownership of their space in history. Visitors experience entering a landscape that reinforces this narrative and allows them to commemorate and reflect on the lives and legacies the enslaved peoples. The emotional responses of placing yourself into the historical hardship of slavery be complex and difficult to understand. Therefore, my design allows visitors to process these emotions, but still come to realize the scale of the community who endured slavery on this specific site. The burial site works to provide everlasting rest to the enslaved peoples, and the sculptural memorial garden emphasizes everlasting life, community, and legacy.

I would like to thank our stakeholders, including the Delaware Historical and Cultural Affairs and The Friends of John Dickinson Plantation. I would also like to acknowledge and thank my Capstone professor Anna Wik and the other professors in the Landscape Architecture Department here at University of Delaware.