



# **THE AMERICAN INDIAN CULTURAL GARDEN**

FINAL REPORT

GARDEN



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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank everyone who participated in the planning and delivery of the stakeholder workshop as well as providing feedback on this report.

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We would like to thank the UNC American Indian Center for their leadership in this project including sharing resources and mobilizing the many stakeholders who participated in the workshop.

We would like to thank the NC Botanical Garden for their generous support of this project including hosting the stakeholder workshop that provided the content for this report.

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**Project team:** Kofi Boone and Angela King



# FINDINGS

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*“The American Indian Cultural Garden is an outdoor community gathering space that affirms Native identity through a healing connection with Mother Earth.”*

A workshop process involving the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill (UNC-CH) American Indian Center, The North Carolina Botanical Garden, campus, Native community, and student stakeholders shaped the priorities, programming, and experiential preferences informing the garden proposal.

The priorities of the American Indian Cultural Garden (AICG) include the designation of a place or places on the UNC-CH campus to support activities that affirm Native identity. Programming elements feature the use



**Stakeholders engaged at the American Indian Cultural Garden Workshop.**

of native plants including “the four sacred medicines”, ceremonial and gathering spaces to enable Native rituals and educational programs, quiet spaces for small group and individual healing, and the inclusion of water for spiritual purposes. Additionally, the AICG would feature elements including art by Native creators, seating throughout the space, a prayer tree, and fire. The preferred aesthetics of the AICG include spaces defined by native vegetation, trees, water, stone, and wood. A minimal structure to enable group activities and gatherings was also preferred.

This report offers a visualization of a space already controlled by the NC Botanical Garden directly across the street from the American Indian Center as an example of how to deploy the recommendations made during the workshop. This proposal wraps the current UNC Campus Community

Garden and could serve as the garden itself, or as a trailhead for a connected system of spaces. In addition to a single site, stakeholders also prefer a network of spaces integrated into the UNC-CH campus. This network could amplify existing spaces communicating Native identity (“The Gift”, etc.) and connect existing campus spaces, as well as contribute to ongoing landscape transformation projects via the ongoing campus race and reconciliation process. This network could include unified wayfinding, paving, planting, seating, and other interpretive elements as well as interpretive materials made available online via mobile apps.

Currently, there is no designated location for the AICG. A site selection study is proposed as a next step for this effort as well as coordination with stakeholders to align the AICG with other campus and community goals.

# CONTEXT

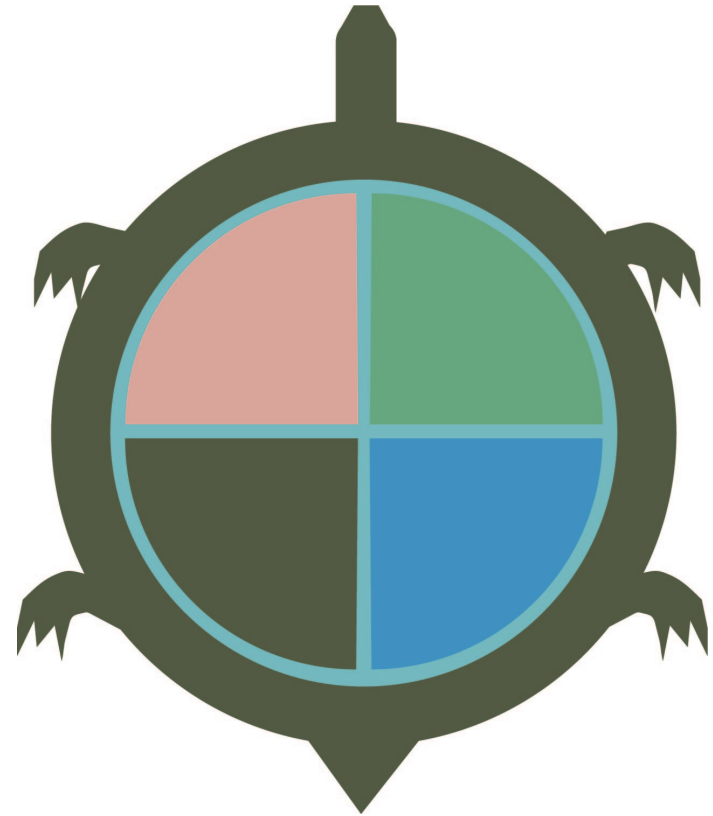
## TURTLE ISLAND

The western and european notions of context was not deemed appropriate to frame this study by workshop stakeholders. Delineating specific and traditionally mapped boundaries was not seen as the best way to express indigenous notions of context. Mother Earth, and more importantly, Turtle Island was offered as a better aligned means of communicating context in native american worldviews.

Many Native groups share the story of Turtle Island to describe the Earth, the North American continent, and creation myths not centered on human beings.

There are regional variations but a common thread is the Creator scooping soil on the back of a turtle to create land in a water and sky filled world.

From there, spiritual beliefs describing the relationships between the earth and its inhabitants flow. Human beings are not at the center of the world's context but a part of a larger network of essential connections.



**A representation of Turtle Island. Many native groups share the story of Turtle Island to describe the Earth, the North American continent, and creation.**



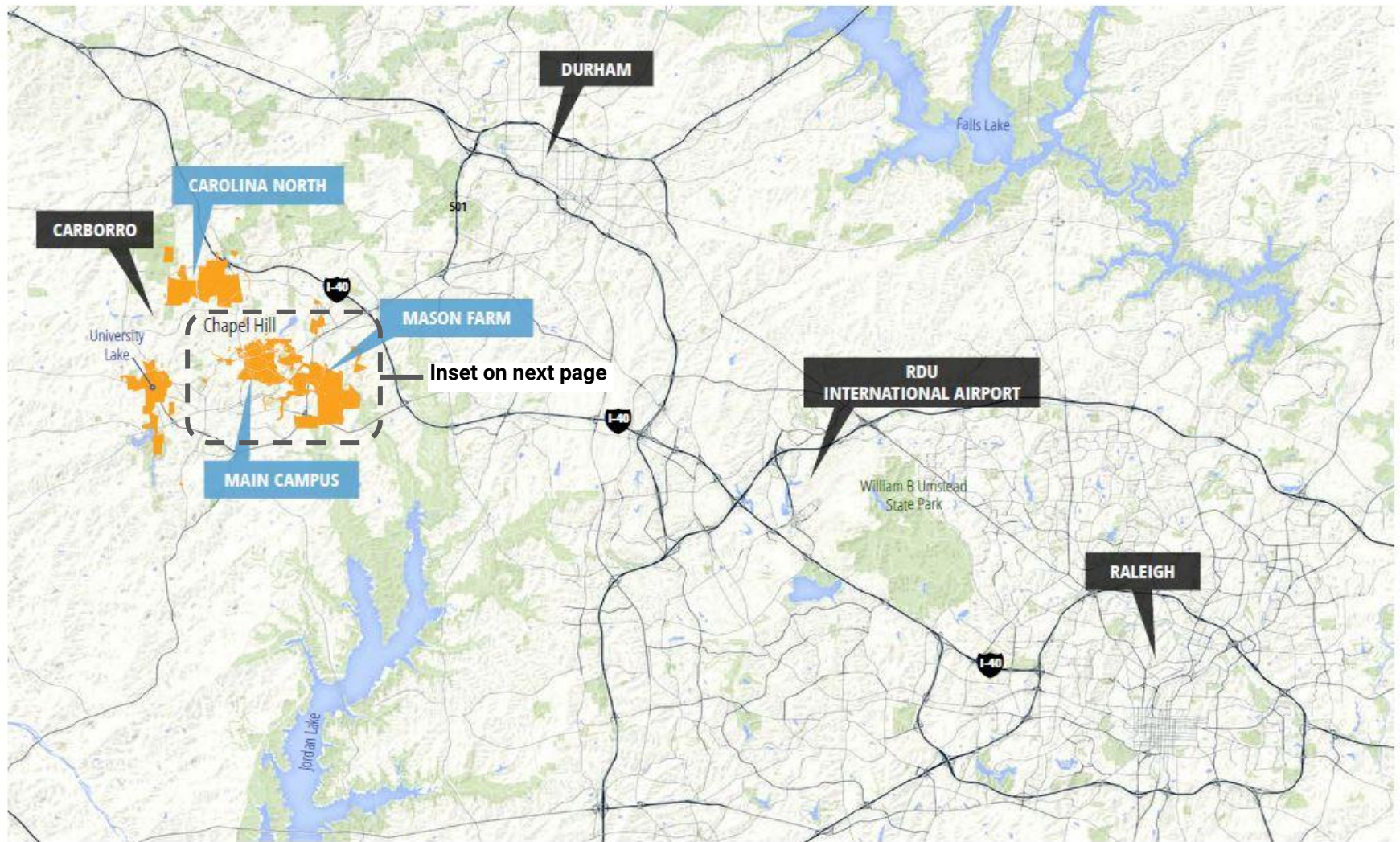
Images of native plants identified by the NC Native Ethnobotany Project as having significance in North Carolina indigenous community traditions.

## NATIVE PLANTS

Native plants are used in all aspects of indigenous life. From the four sacred medicines to culinary and health uses, the stewardship of native plants is critical to understanding and planning spaces representative of Native values.

Through focus groups and interviews with Native communities, the NC Native Ethnobotany Project is building resources to reconnect indigenous communities with their environmental cultural traditions. Stakeholders in the American Indian Cultural Garden planning process also work with the ethnobotany project.



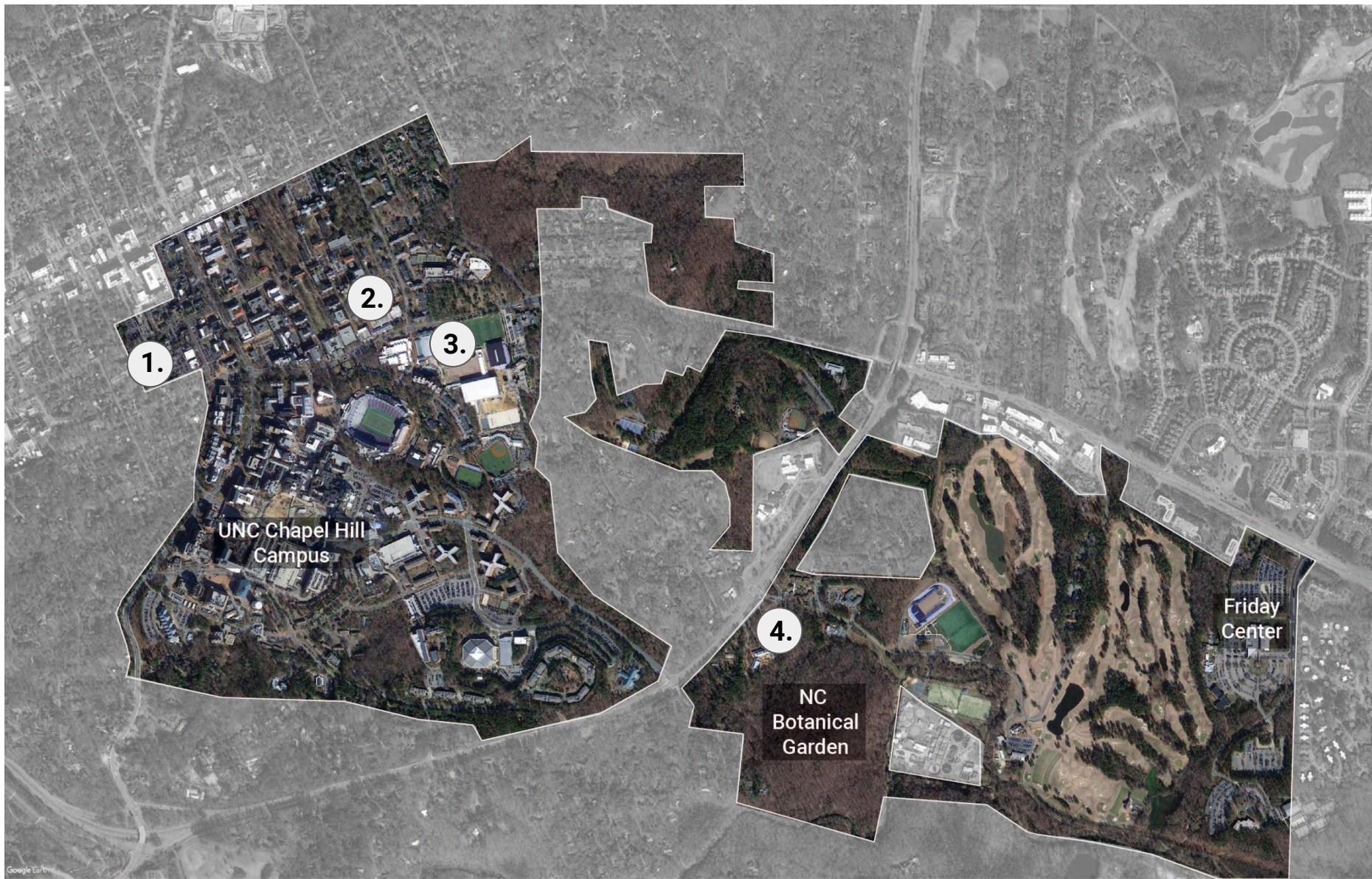


## REGIONAL CONTEXT

University Property

UNC Chapel Hill is located in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. This diagram (from the UNC-CH 2019 Master Plan) shows the extent of university land holdings; 3080 total acres. The main campus (next page) occupies roughly one quarter of UNC-CH land holdings.





UNC Chapel Hill Main Campus has over 34,000 faculty, students, and staff across 729 acres. There are significant places and events that acknowledge Native American heritage including: 1. The American Indian Center 2. The Gift 3. The Annual Carolina Indian Circle Powwow 4. The NC Botanical Garden



# UNC Chapel Hill Campus

UNC Chapel Hill has over 34,000 faculty, students, and staff across 729 acres. The campus is defined by signature public spaces like McCorkle Place and iconic landmarks like the Old Well. However, there are also significant places and events that acknowledge Native American heritage.

## 1. The American Indian Center

Located just west of the main campus, The American Indian Center provides leadership in American Indian scholarship and research, engagement with and service to Native populations, and enrichment of campus diversity dialogue.



American Indian Center



Carolina Indian Circle Powwow



The Gift



NC Botanical Garden

**Existing spaces and activities on UNC CH campus that reflect Native identity.**

## 2. The Gift

Located next to the student center and designed by Senora Lynch, this plaza infuses Haliwa-Saponi cultural themes into the public landscape.

## 3. The Carolina Indian Circle Powwow

The Powwow, held annually (most recently in Fetzer Gym A) brings together Native American artists, vendors, dancers, drummers, and families in a celebration of cultural traditions.

## 4. The North Carolina Botanical Garden

This conservation garden is a statewide resource featuring indoor and outdoor spaces for experiencing and learning about native plants and ecosystems. It contains North Carolina plants significant to Native American cultures and rituals.

Although these are significant campus and community assets, the workshop was born of a desire for more explicitly defined spaces that acknowledging and enabling Native American cultures.



# CASE STUDIES

## BACKGROUND

The American Indian Cultural Garden could be the first of its kind on the UNC-CH campus and in the region. But there are other precedents across North America to learn from. The examples shared are not suggested as solutions for the UNC-CH campus. They are used to illustrate a range of considerations as the garden develops in a collegiate setting. From programming and aesthetics, to the integration of wayfinding and public art, these examples informed the content of the workshop and some images were used with stakeholders to elicit feedback on AICG preferences.



**Programming: Medicine Garden of Indigenous Learning**

The medicinal garden at the University of Manitoba serves many purposes from a space to gather, reflect, learn and research. Intended to bridge cross cultural understandings as an outdoor learning space it incorporates both Indigenous symbolism and traditional plants. The garden space preserves tradition while providing a pathway for contemporary conversations for everyday practices.



**Interpretation/Wayfinding: Bullawah Cultural Trail, Australia**

*Bulla* meaning two and *wah* meaning waters “signifies the two suspension bridges crossing the river as well as the joining of the two rivers and the coming together of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.” This 1.5 mile cultural trail in southeast Australia highlights aboriginal sites and stories. The trail is interactive with signs displaying QR codes for visitors to scan.



**Public Art: Four Spirits sculpture, Kelly Ingram Park, Birmingham**

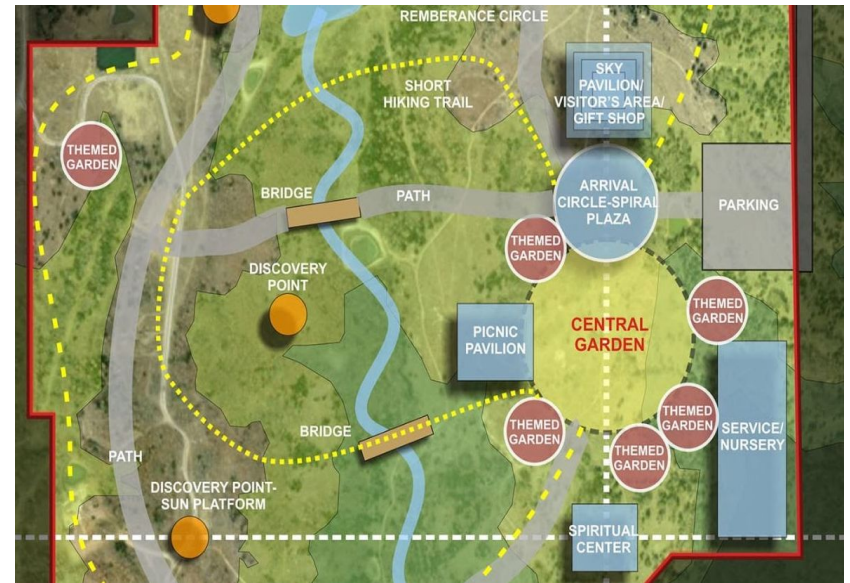
This is one moment along the national Civil Rights Heritage Trail spanning 14 states. The trail is a self guided tour through the city featuring historic landmarks of buildings, parks, and other spaces with informational markers and maps to guide visitors through significant points in history. Prominent sites include the 16th Street Baptist church, the Civil Rights Institute and Kelly Ingram park. Artistic interpretation immerses visitors into the rich historical events making them accessible without diluting the story.





**Structures and Gathering: Indigenous Gathering Place, Ontario**

The Hoop Dance Indigenous Gathering Place celebrates 15,000 years of First Nation, Metis, and Inuit culture through everyday experiences on this Ontario campus. The site comprises five elements: an open air pavilion, a fire circle, water garden, a traditional garden and a seven sisters garden. It is built with traditional building materials and methods and is located in the heart of campus.



**Conceptual design: Chickasaw Nation Cultural Center site diagram**

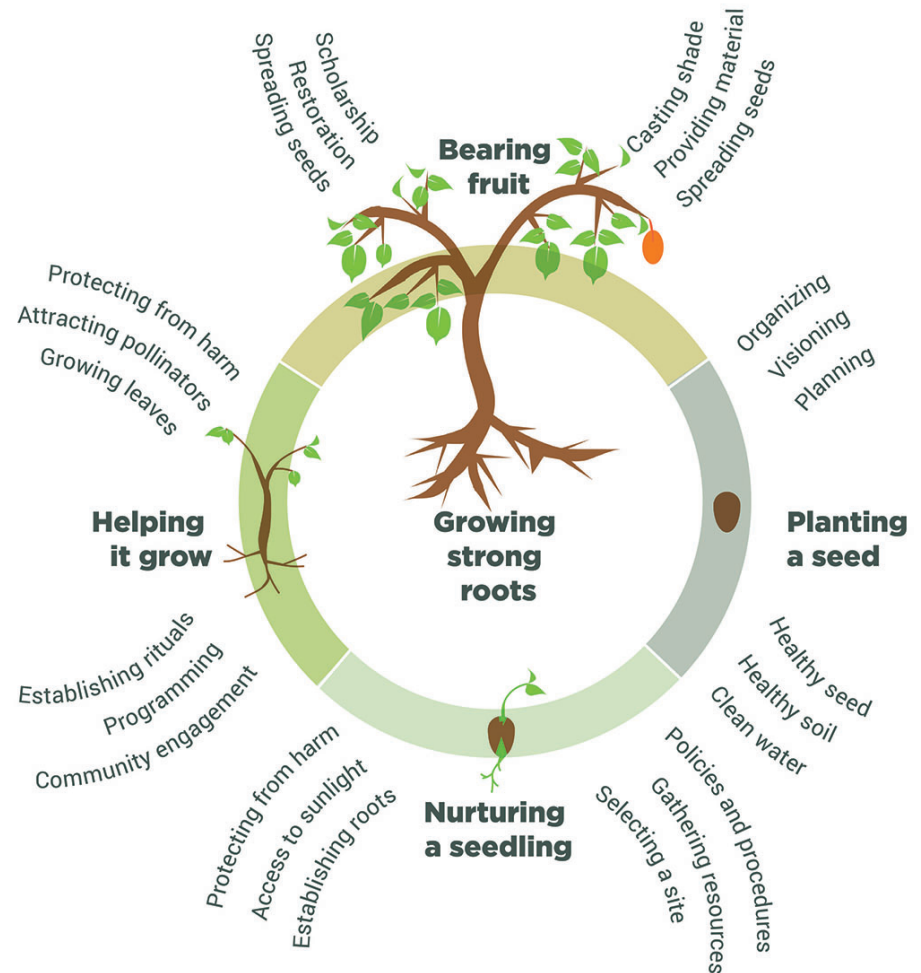
The Chickasaw National Cultural Center site diagram offers an example of how a place can be transformed to accommodate a range of programs. It shows an order and structured layout organized around a central garden and radiating into the surrounding landscape. This site concept informed this study's approach to translating workshop findings into visual tools communicating the spatial implications of the AICG.

# WORKSHOP

## BACKGROUND

The UNC American Indian Center in partnership with the North Carolina Botanical Garden (NCBG) and other stakeholders, sought to establish a program for a conservation-oriented garden which will create a gathering place to celebrate American Indian cultures, Indigenous ecological knowledge, support American Indian students in adjusting to life on campus, and serve as a botanical and cultural teaching tool for the greater community.

Designing, implementing, and documenting a workshop with many stakeholders was determined as the path towards translating the needs of the future garden into a vision for future organizing and fundraising. The workshop was held on February 19, 2020.



A diagram translating the phases of activities needed to create and sustain the American Indian Cultural Garden.





## MISSION STATEMENT

The initial mission statement for the American Indian Cultural Garden was:

*"The American Indian Cultural Garden is an outdoor community space that welcomes connection with nature and affirms native identity."*



After introductions, the workshop began with a review of the existing mission statement. Participants worked in small groups reviewing and amending the statements through critical discussion. Each group presented a revised statement with justifications for changes.

The group was welcomed by Randi Byrd (above) and Larry Chavis from the UNC American Indian Center, as well as Damon Waitt from the NC Botanical Garden. Stakeholders quickly got to work in small groups.

Some common themes emerged including:

- *Outdoor Community Space*. There was consensus across groups that this was the correct phrasing.
- *Welcomes or Affirms?* Although the initial statement used “welcomes”, the majority of revised statements used the term “affirms” in relation to Native identity.
- *Nature? Natural World? Mother Earth?* A range of terms was used to describe nature. However, one participant suggested to the group that using “Mother Earth” reinforces Native concepts of nature through language and clarifies the intent of the garden.

The following is a proposed revision to the American Indian Cultural Garden. It was compiled from the individual statements created by participants.

*“The American Indian Cultural Garden is an outdoor community gathering space that affirms Native identity through a healing connection with Mother Earth.”*

## PRIORITIES ANALYSIS

Stakeholders were asked to express their priorities for the garden individually and in groups. Using sticky notes, stakeholders listed one priority per note on a sheet. The exercise confirmed that having a physical “place” programmed with “activities” on the UNC campus were the top priorities. They were the most often referenced terms. “Conservation”, “history”, identity”, and “recognition” followed the two leading priorities. References to these terms were almost equally represented in the stakeholder notes. “Unity” was also referenced in the notes.



**Top priorities were the need for a physical “place” and programmed “activities” in the American Indian Cultural Garden.**



## PERSONAL STORIES

Stakeholders participated in an interactive exercise that asked each of them to tell a personal story about a favorite place in a natural setting. Using a series of symbolic objects, each participant constructed a remembered experience and shared their experiences with the group.

This exercise helped everyone to get better acquainted with the perceptions, values, and experiential preferences of one another.

Below is a sampling of some of the most memorable experiences shared.



**Stakeholders gathering symbolic objects used in constructing their favorite environmental experiences.**



## PERSONAL STORIES

*"The most peaceful space I remember was secluded and undisturbed. We were greeted by eagles who lived there. It's secluded but there is a place for everyone. There was a place with signage describing who the (native people) were that were on the land. You could see the water at a distance. There was an area for people but then there were foothills and two fallen trees that were natural benches. It wasn't as noisy, it was really quiet. For the ( American Indian Cultural) garden I would like to see spaces where you could be alone but also spaces for people, spaces for healing. I could see our (native) fraternities and sororities using this space. It could also be an extension of "The Gift" with the paving and the seating."*

*"I made a model of my experiences camping with friends in the mountains, an area we like in the foothills, a place to be by yourself, and a place to be together. Blueberries, trees, shrubs, paths created by wildlife. A place I go to a lot over the years."*

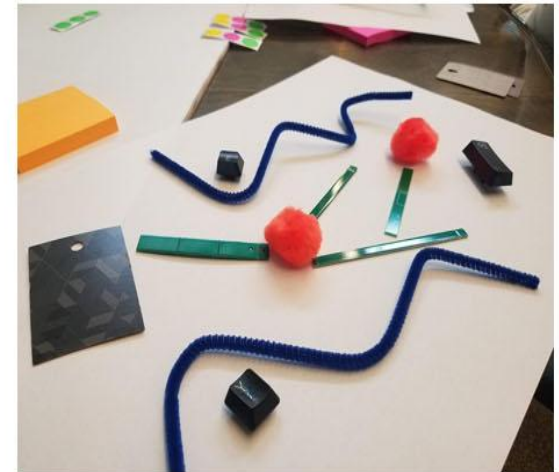
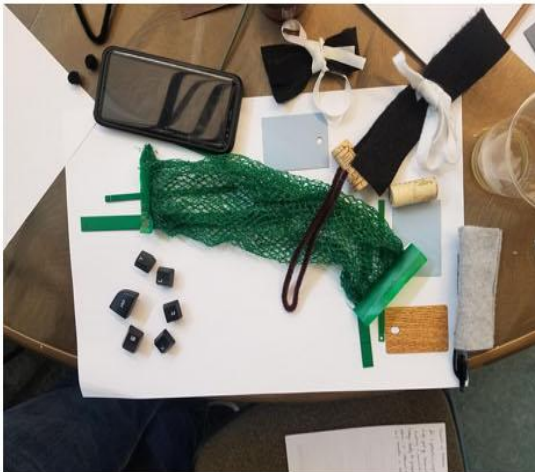
*"My memories include having a walking path through the woods was my personal refuge amongst all of the plants. Big granite rocks as natural gathering spaces, invite you to climb on them and have a space of sanctuary. Benches at the natural pausing points, thoughtful remembering places. Wild grape vines, part of our natural relationships. My special spot was a grove of cedars with boughs hanging down to the ground. Reflection pools and the importance of water on our gathering space as places to literally reflect with seating. Something representative of the medicine wheel in the middle that could be a walk or a sculpture."*

*"I'm bringing together multiple places that were sacred to me. This is heaven on earth in (my) style. There are rivers where you can have a ritual and ceremony and speak with the rivers. We have a spiritual connection to water. Between the rivers is a pumpkin patch to remind us that there is a whole ecosystem and to be reminded that you are a part of something bigger than yourself. I have this to represent soot. Water, earth, fire; sacred. Thank you."*

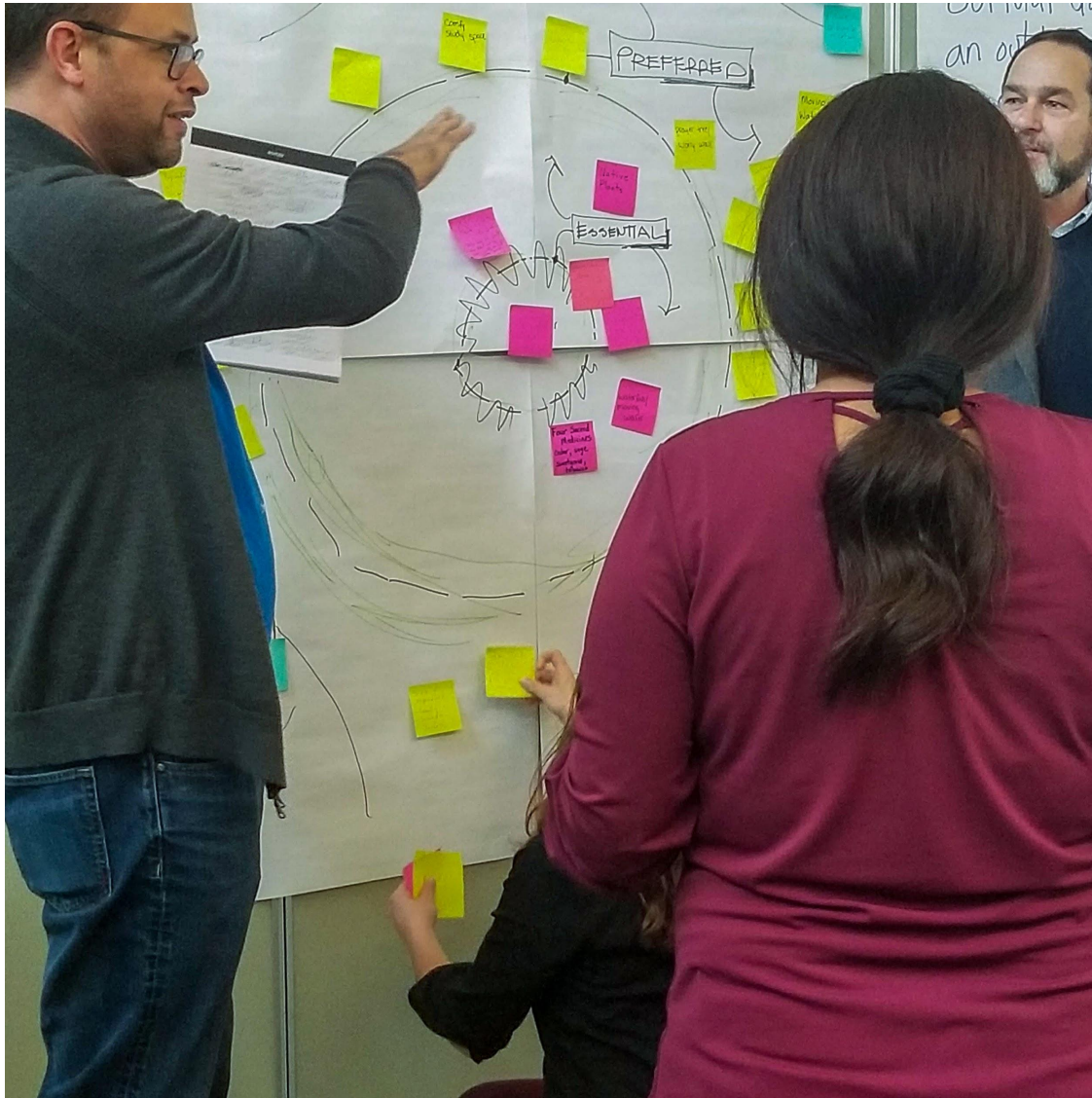
**Excerpts from stakeholder personal stories describing their memorable outdoor experiences.**

## PERSONAL STORIES

*"Mine's is about the role of ceremony in our community. There are old ceremonies and new ceremonies. Old ceremonies were created to make a shared memory. Old ceremonies used to be new ceremonies. A celebration of major life events. And healing ceremonies. We're at the point where we need new ceremonies to reconnect with our people. All people must be asked to come (to this space). The key point is you have to ask the people to come and participate. It's all about healing. There are many things going through our tribal communities. In my vision, I have four corners for the four directions (north, east, south, and west). There are (actually) seven directions including the sky above, the earth below, and us in the middle. If the people come and you could have a talking circle to share a memory or a prayer for healing. Everyone would have their time to speak a prayer. I have a tree in the middle. It doesn't have to be a living tree, it could be a sculpture. After speaking, each person would tie a loose feather to the tree. Then they can return to the circle. The idea is you would leave the feathers on the branches."*



**Stakeholders used symbolic materials to assemble models of representing great memories of outdoor places. They presented their models and stories to the full group enabling connections and conversations that informed the rest of the process.**



## PROGRAMMING

Stakeholders worked individually and in groups to share their preferences for programs (uses) of the garden. Using color coded sticky notes they were asked to share their essential, preferred, and optional programs.

Affinity groups made up of community, university partners, and students provided further review and added input to the programs shared.

The group work helped to define the scope and type of activities used to identify the spatial and scale requirements of the proposed garden.

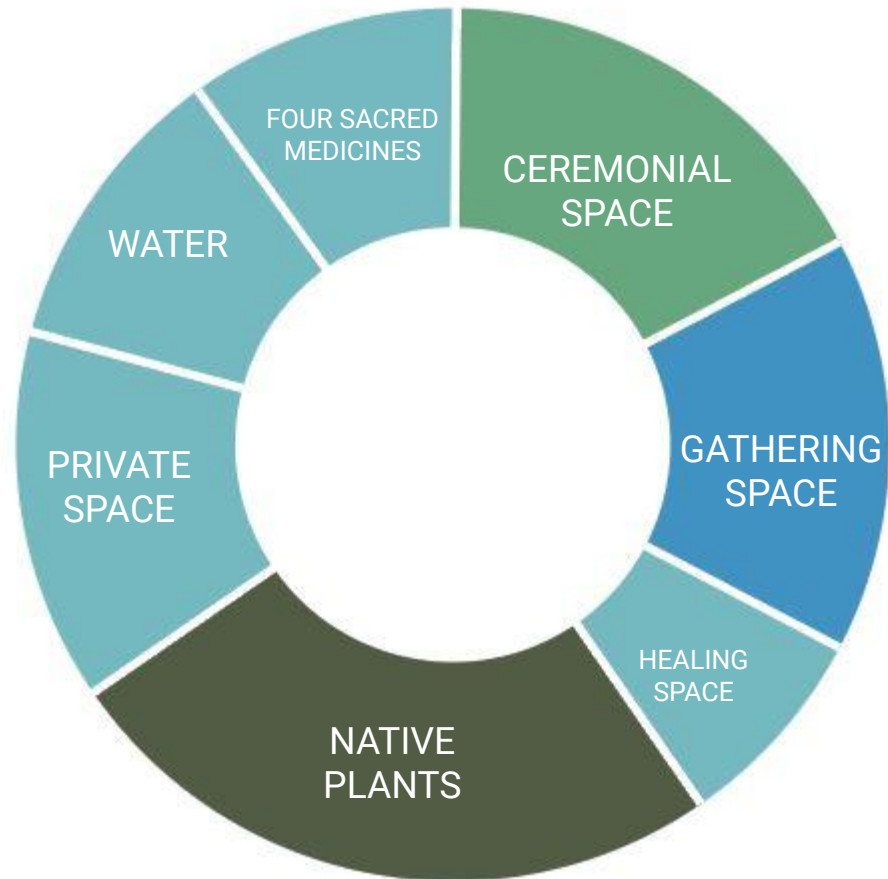
Stakeholders participated in a programming exercise where they were asked to locate notes containing their preferences in a diagram indicating priorities



## PROGRAMMING ANALYSIS

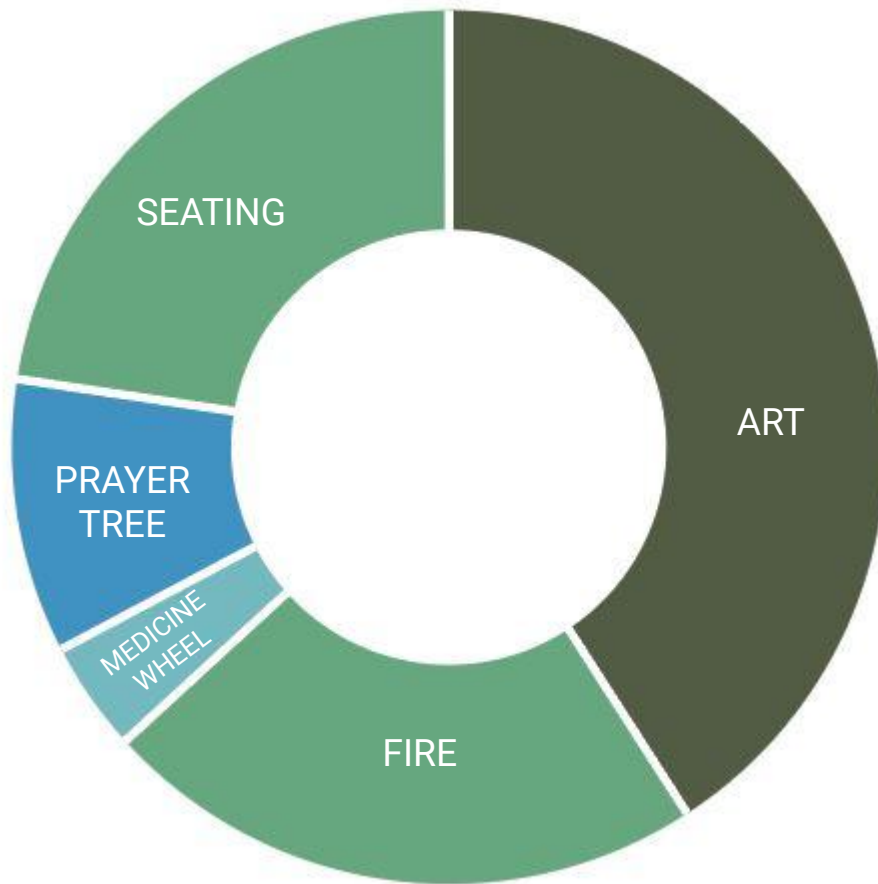
Space for native plants was the most reported programmatic element reported in this exercise. The four sacred medicines are significant components to native plant selections. The need for ceremonial space to engage in native rituals, and gathering space for larger events and festivals were the next most preferred programs.

Private space and healing space were the next most preferred components. Access to water was shared as being important for spiritual connections.



**Top priorities for programming included the need to provide spaces for large ceremonies, gatherings for community and campus groups, as well as quiet spaces. The need for native plants was reinforced as a programming need.**

## ELEMENTS ANALYSIS



The programming exercise included a request for stakeholders to be more specific about their preferred garden elements. Art created by Native artists was the overwhelmingly most preferred garden element. Specific references were made to incorporating art throughout, especially at the garden entry. There were many mentions of seating for group and individual activity.

Fire was referenced as essential to enabling Native rituals like smudging. Mention was made to the challenges with allowing fire on the UNC campus.

**The top priority for the future garden was art (specifically referenced as an entry or gateway feature). Seating throughout was important, as was access to fire to enable rituals like smudging.**

## VISUAL PREFERENCE

Stakeholders worked in groups to share their aesthetic preferences by using color coded dots on sets of garden images. The images were sorted into groups including: Gathering spaces, quiet spaces, ceremonial spaces, and educational spaces. Groups were asked to identify their most and least preferred images in each category.

Affinity groups made up of community, university partners, and students provided further review and added input to the preferences shared.



**Stakeholder groups identified their most and least preferred aesthetics by sorting reference images.**



## Gathering Spaces



A



B



C



D



E



F

## Quiet Spaces



G



H



I



J



K



L

## Ceremonial Spaces



M



N



O



P



Q



R

## Educational Spaces



S



T



U



V



W



X

Images used with stakeholders to document their program and aesthetic preferences

# PREFERENCE ANALYSIS

The most preferred images were predominantly from the quiet spaces category. Notes associated with the images suggested that stakeholders preferred low impact and nature dominant images. By contrast, the least preferred images were the most structural and lacked planting and other elements of natural context.

The only preferred structure (below) was noted as being minimal, adaptable, and seemed to “fit” into its context.



**A low-impact shelter in a flexible mixed use field was the most preferred site feature by stakeholders.**



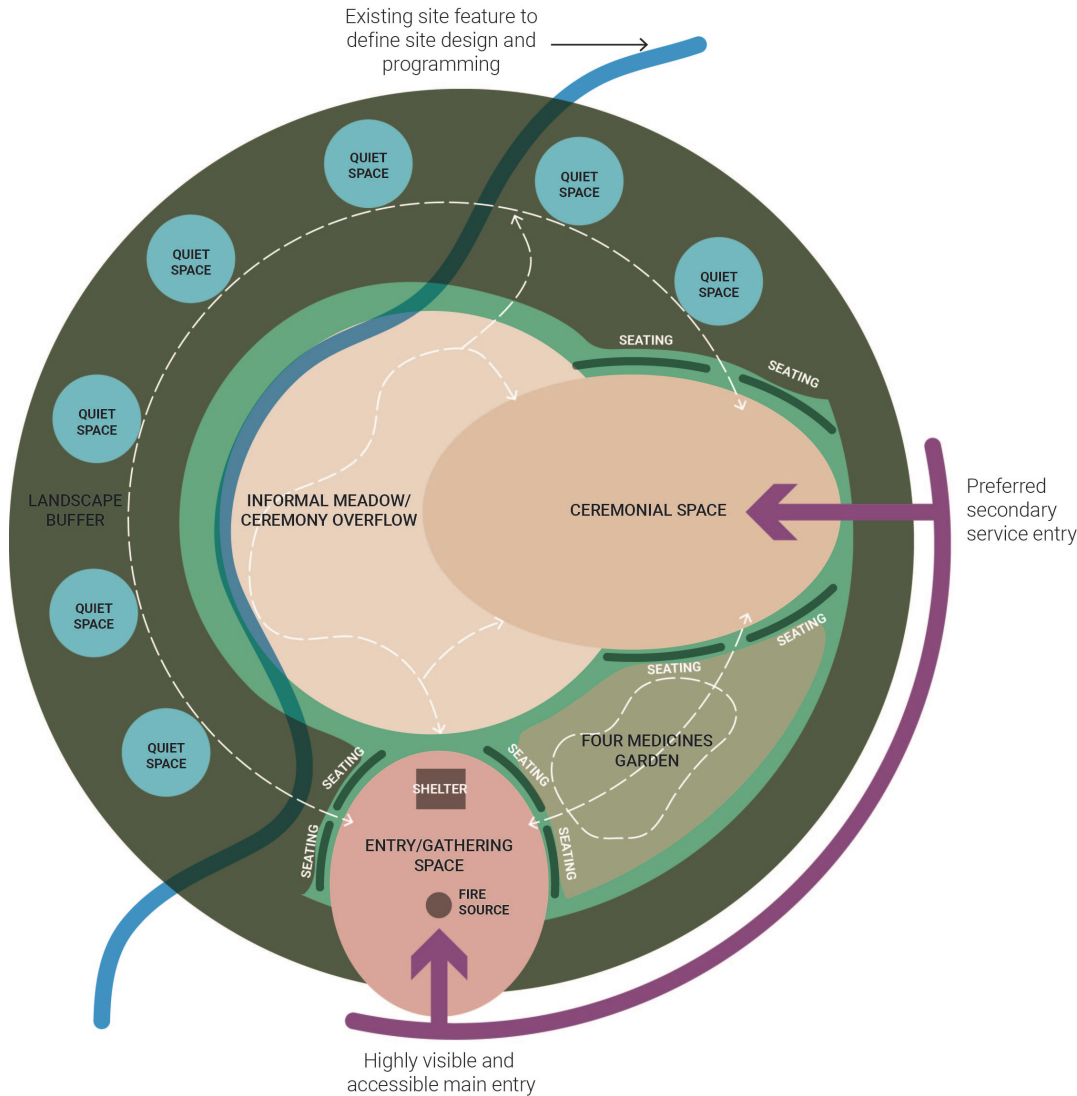
**Six of the top seven most preferred program elements by the stakeholders. Many feature low impact environmental experiences that can be translated to the UNC Campus landscape.**



# CONCEPT

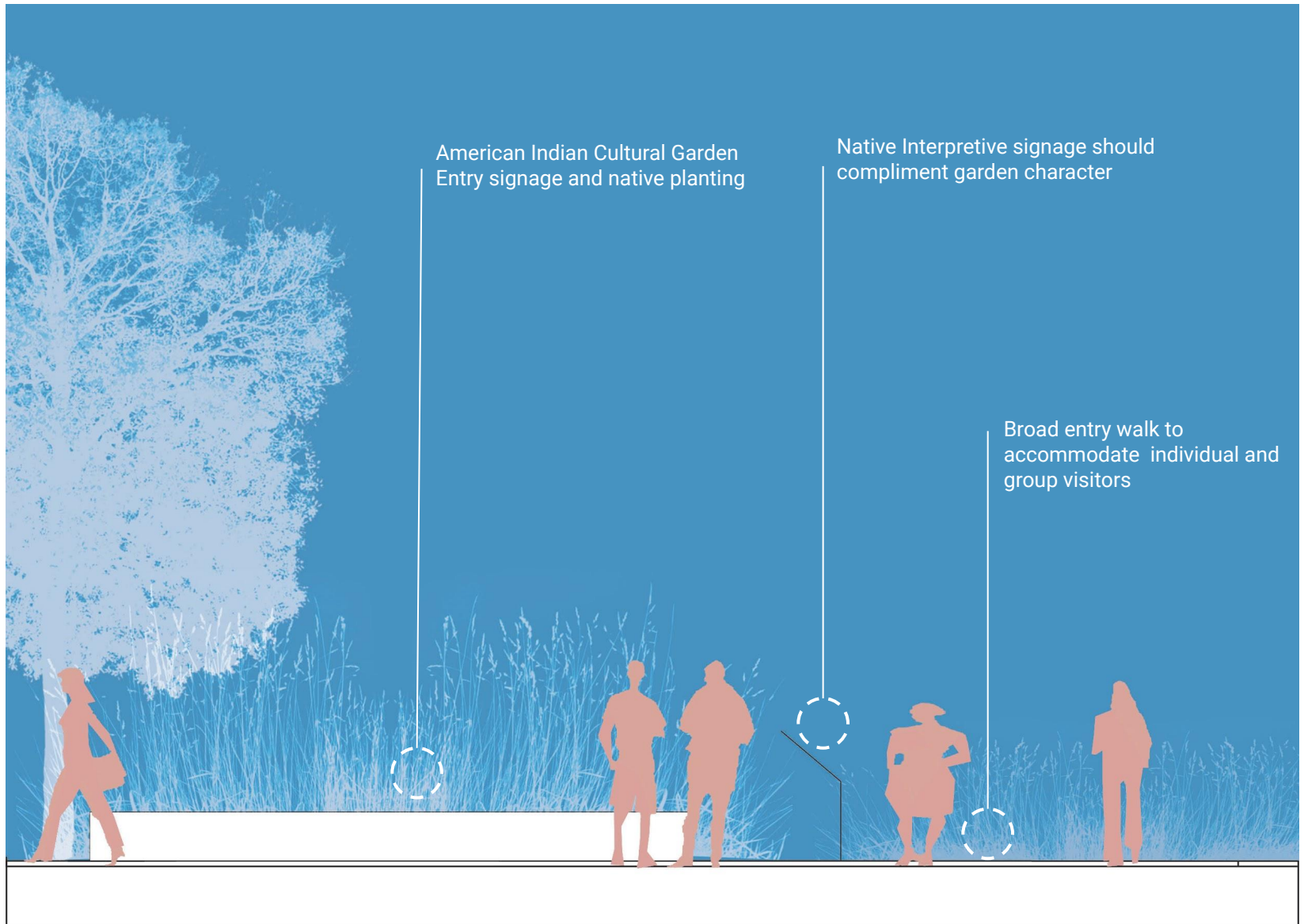
## GARDEN CONCEPT

This concept visualizes how the different components preferred by stakeholders could fit together in a space. A gathering space features prominently at the garden entry. A ceremonial space for large events can be accessed separately, or via walking paths through native gardens. Quiet and private spaces are situated to be buffered from the more active areas. Should the site have existing features (like mature trees and/or water), those elements could help to organize the locations of key features.

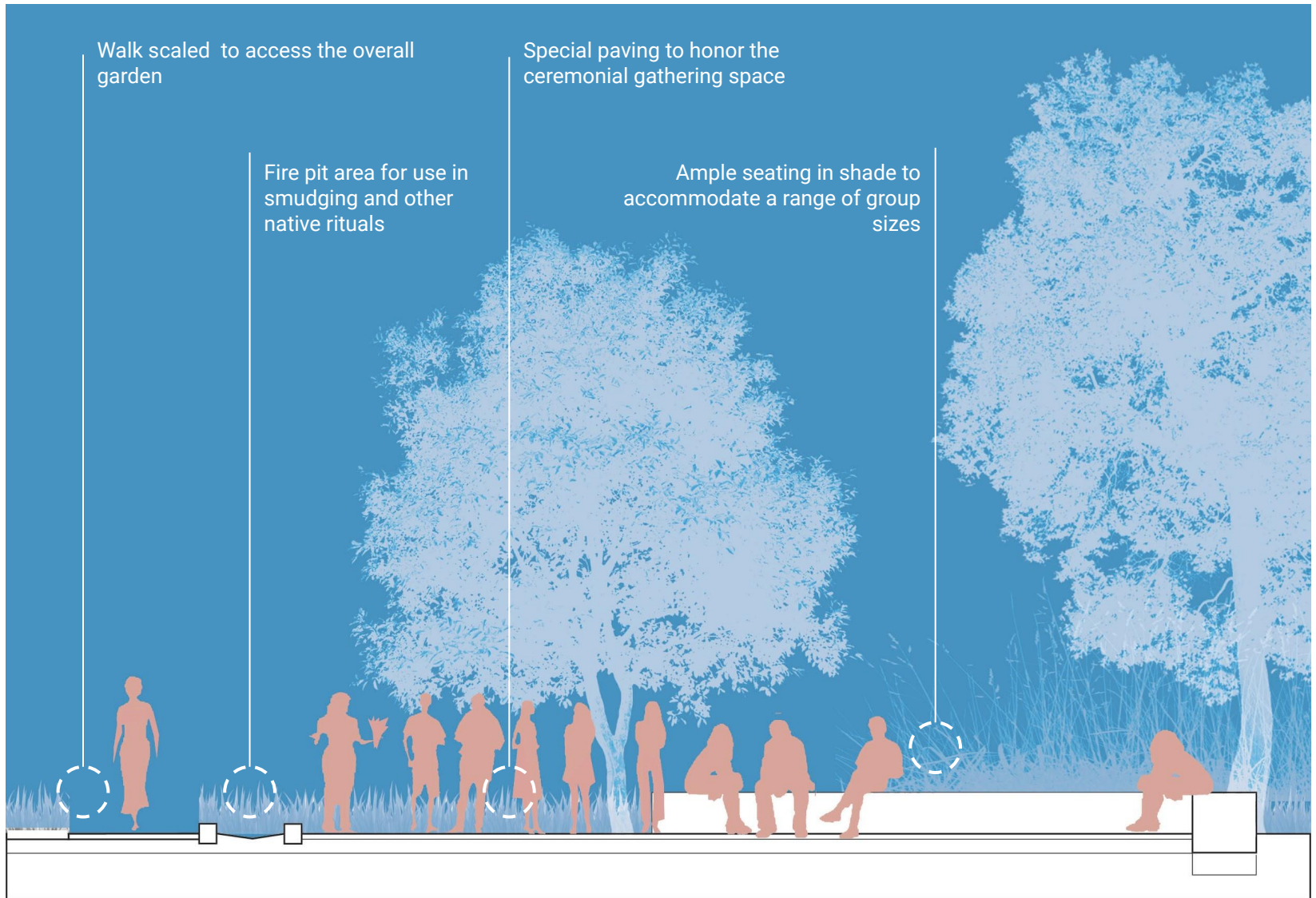


**The American Indian Cultural Garden Concept Plan (not to scale). This concept Represents the preferred relationships between the many uses and programs desired by stakeholders.**

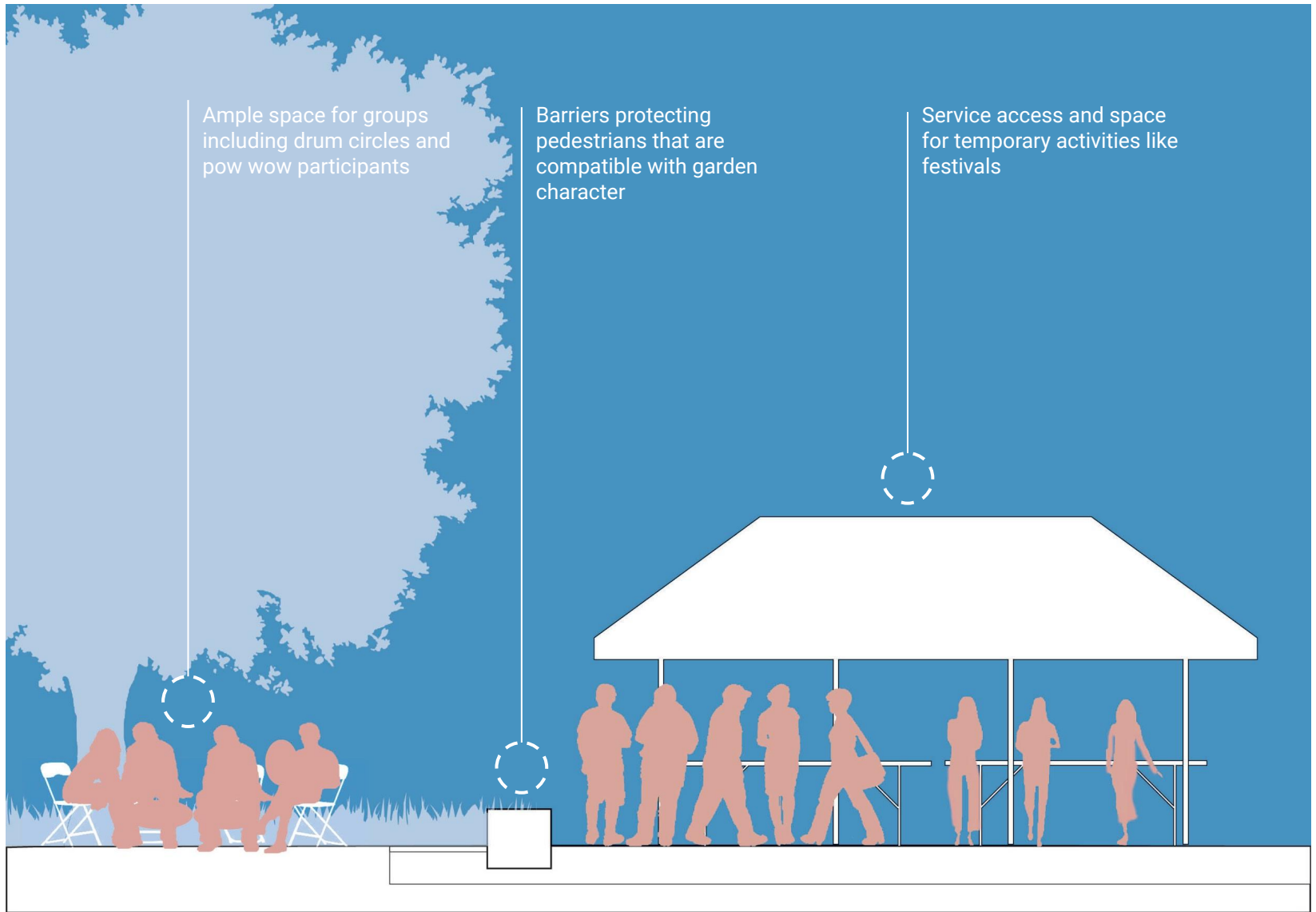




The entry for the American Indian Cultural Garden should be visible, connected and welcome visitors. Entry and interpretive signage should fit into the overall character of the place. Native plants, especially planting associated with the four sacred medicines, should be available and accessible for native rituals.

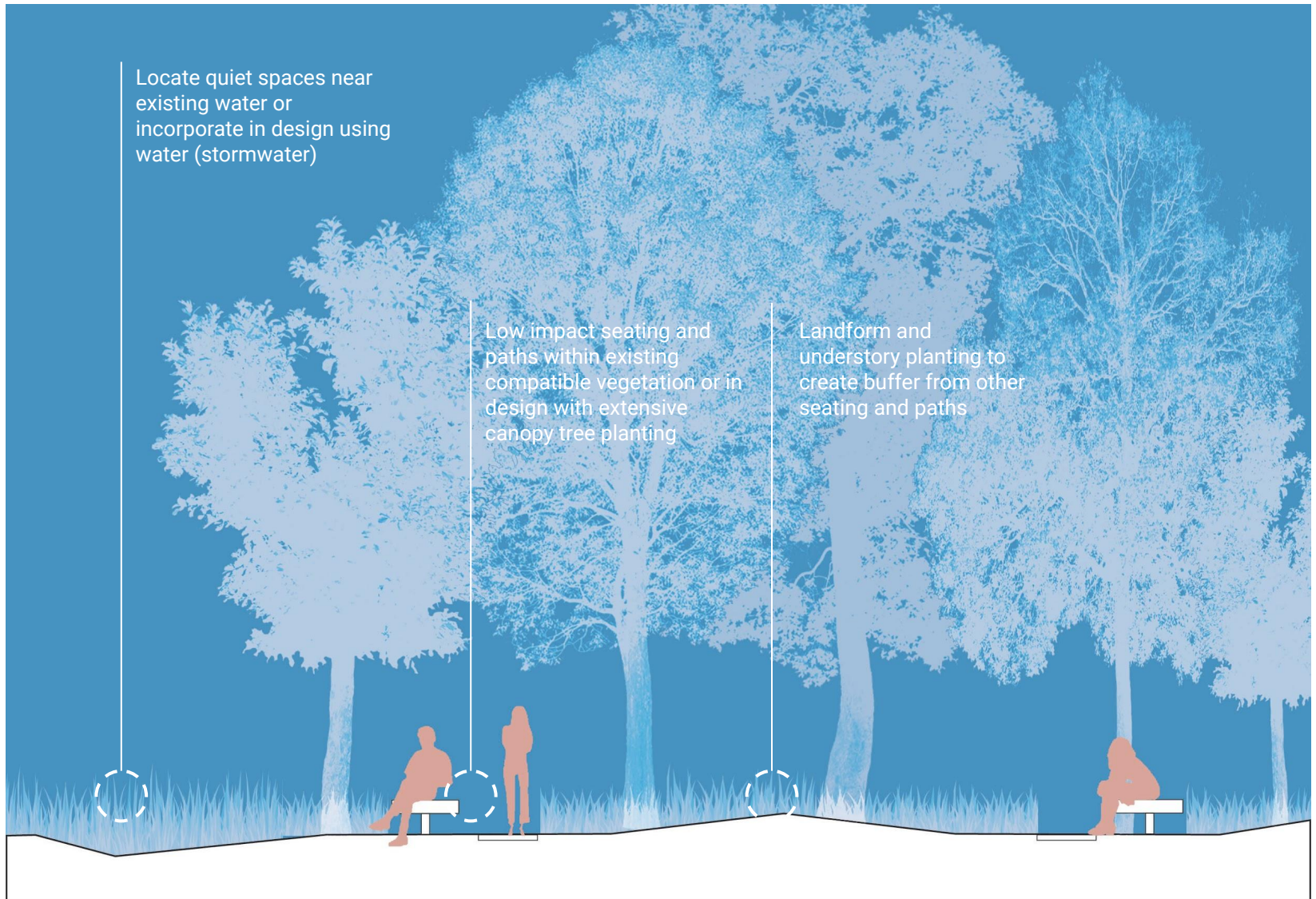


**The gathering space for the American Indian Cultural Garden should include ample seating, shade, and access to fire for smudging and other native rituals. Special paving should enhance the character of the space. Native plants, especially planting associated with the four sacred medicines, should be available.**



The ceremonial space for the American Indian Cultural Garden should be scaled and detailed to accommodate large groups and events. Space for temporary activities, like festivals and pow wows, should be allocated. The space should be accessible for service vehicles. However, Vehicular access should be restricted to protect pedestrians.





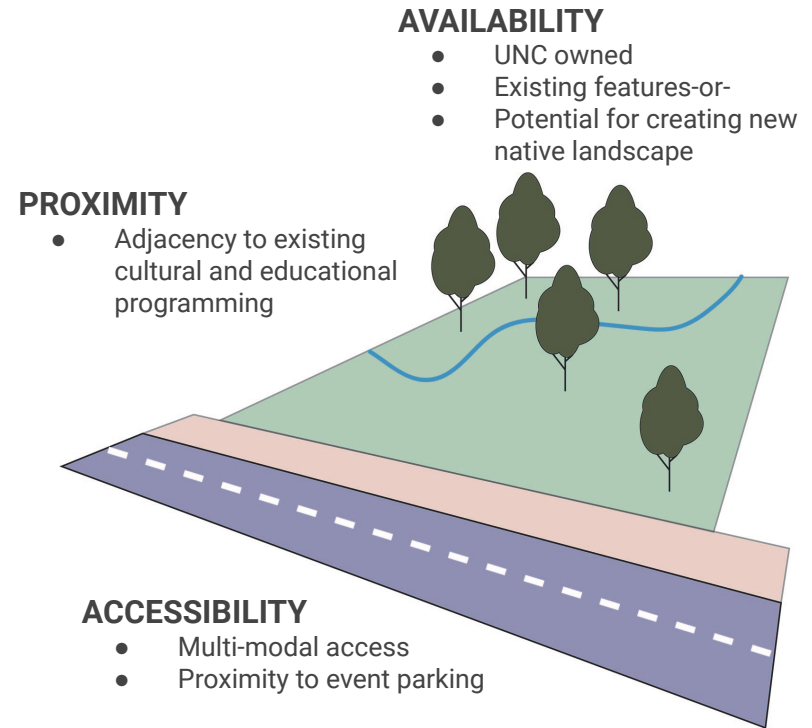
The quiet spaces for the American Indian Cultural Garden should be visible but buffered and removed from active spaces. Paths and seating should be low impact and minimal. Location of these spaces could be associated with existing water on the site, or could be incorporated in a design that produces water (stormwater, etc.). Mature trees and vegetation on site provide ideal settings for quiet spaces per stakeholder workshop comments.

# SITE SELECTION CRITERIA

The American Indian Cultural Garden concept was developed without a site in mind. However, the concept did inform potential criteria for selecting a garden location. The number one criteria is the *availability* of land on the UNC campus. A UNC owned site is essential to ensure long term garden sustainability. If the site has existing natural features, they can become key components of the garden's detailed design.

*Proximity* to nearby cultural and educational programming associated with Native cultures is another criteria. Being proximate to these resources can enhance the capacity of the garden to serve a variety of native and campus needs.

Lastly, *accessibility* is an essential component. Ease of pedestrian and transit (campus and city bus) access are important factors. Additionally, proximity to nearby event parking resources is



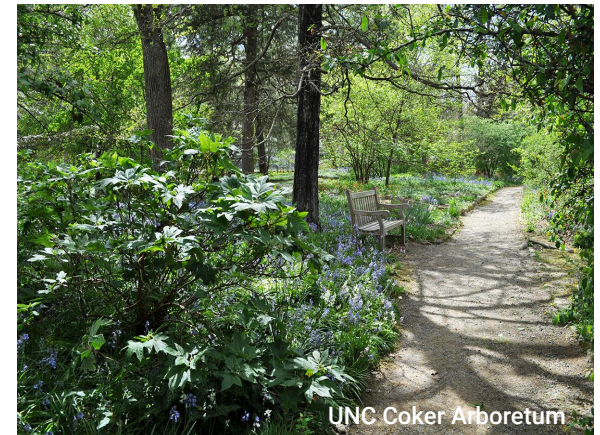
**Site selection criteria includes key factors necessary for the success of the American Indian Cultural Garden.**

important for various Native community events bringing stakeholders from beyond the campus to the garden.



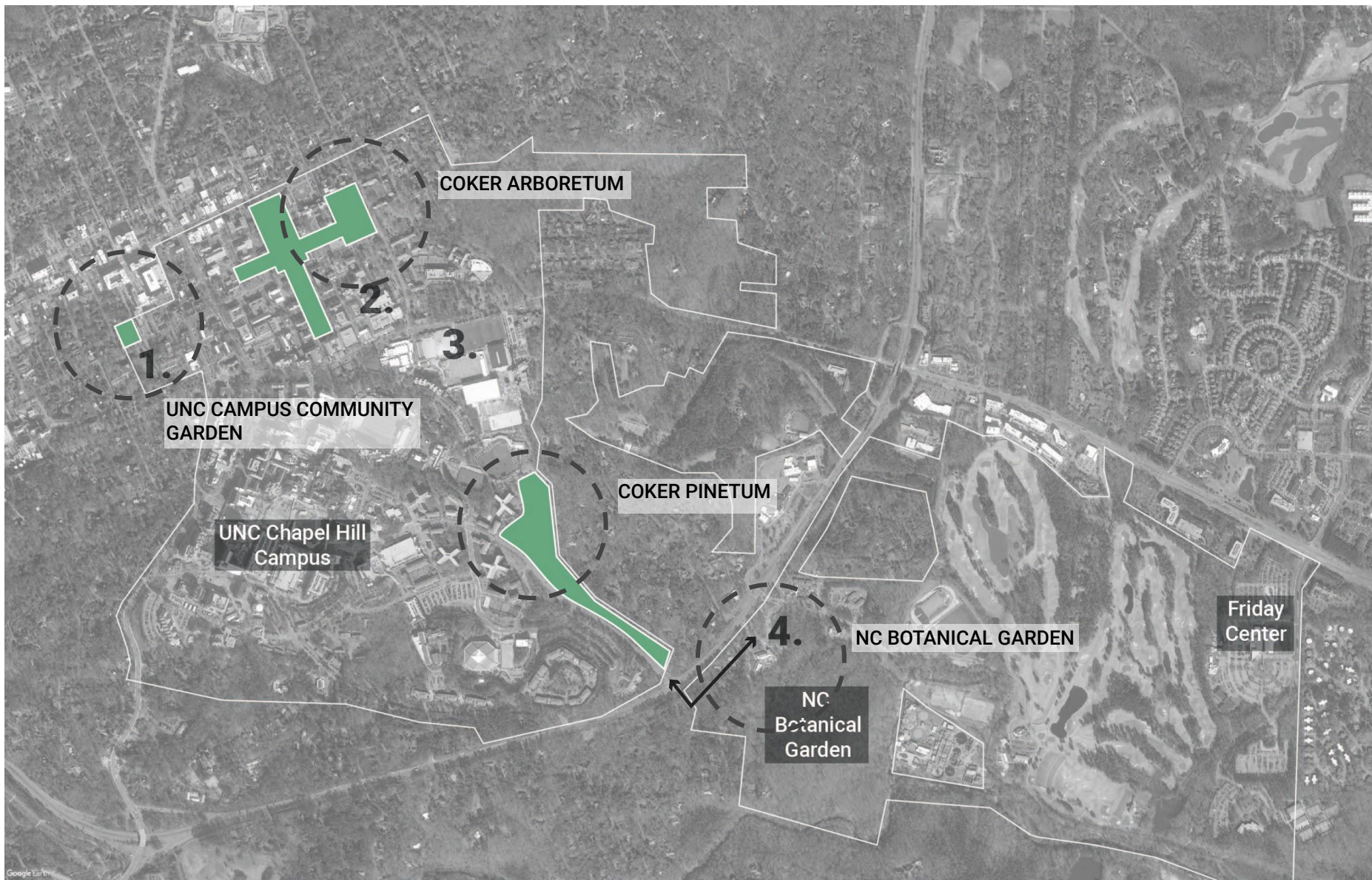
## POTENTIAL SITES

Based on the site selection criteria, several existing sites on the UNC campus were identified as potential locations for the American Indian Cultural Garden. All meet the Availability and Accessibility factors. The UNC Coker Pinetum site does not fully meet the Proximity criteria but was included due to its strengths in other categories. If any of the sites, or others, are selected, they will require a thorough site analysis and site design process. This will present another opportunity for stakeholder engagement.



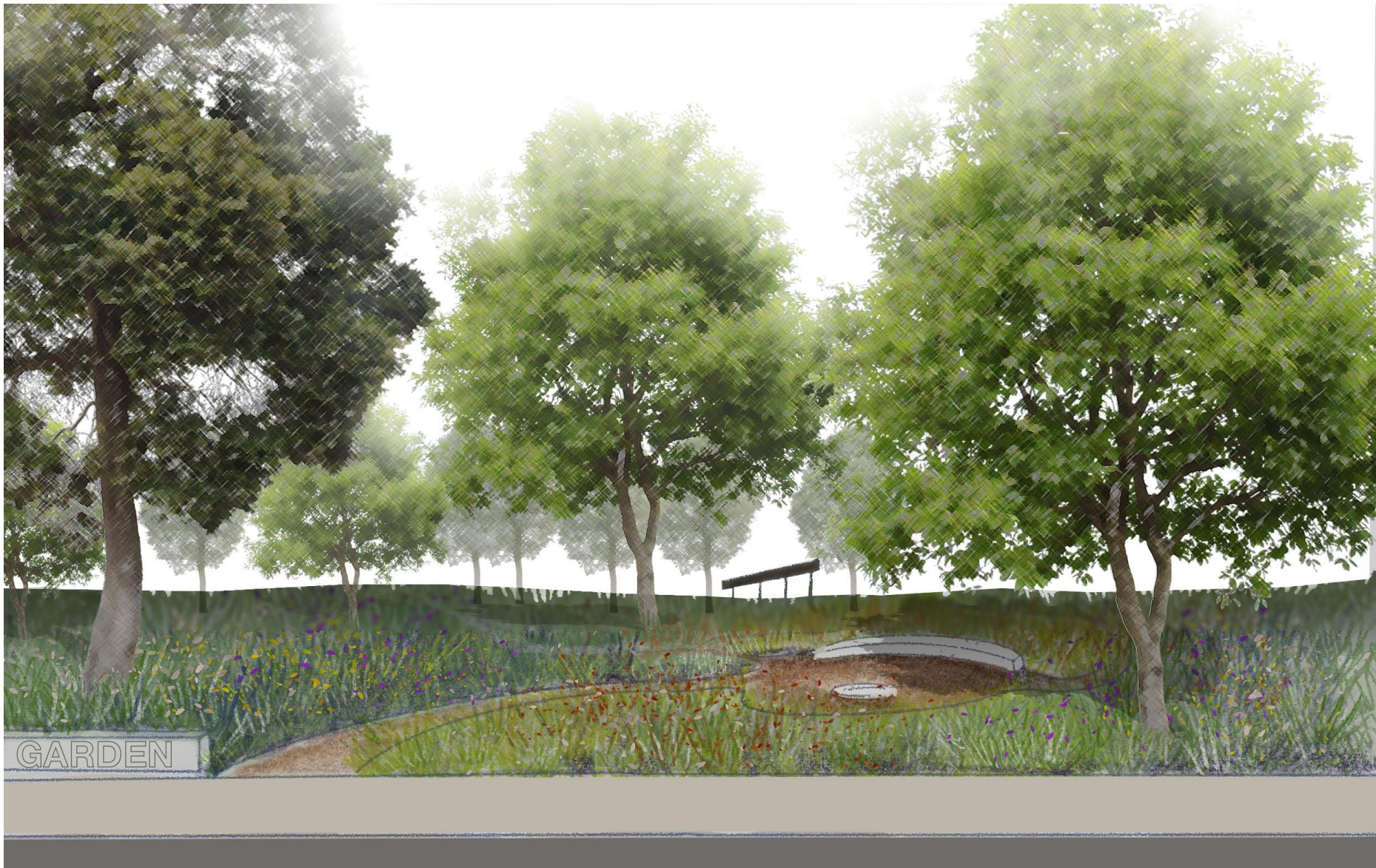
**Images from some of the current sites on the UNC Campus that could support the American Indian Cultural Garden. All are accessible, have available space for low impact adaptations, are proximate to important supporting resources, and have the potential to communicate strong cultural and environmental values held by indigenous people.**





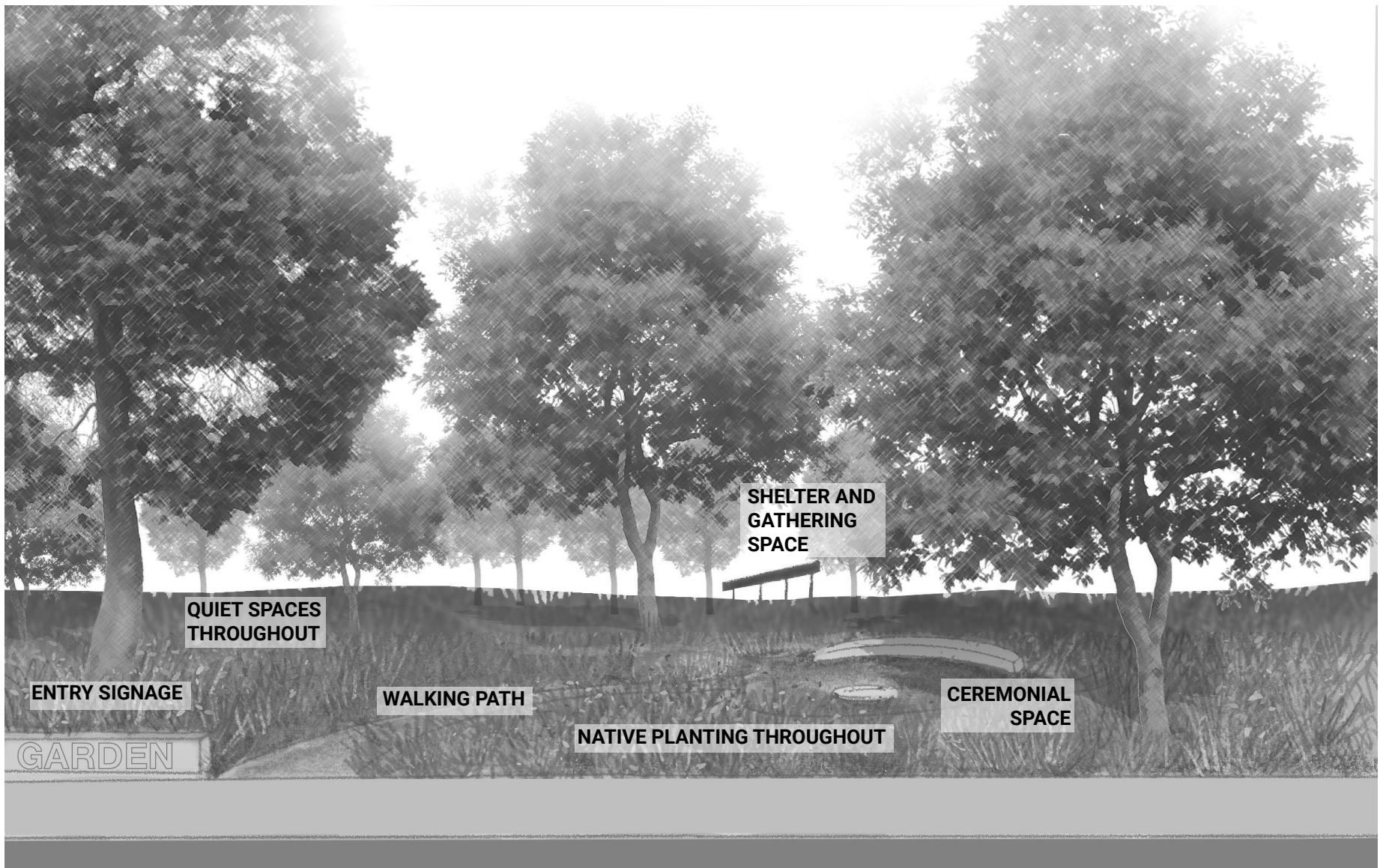
The workshop results informed site selection criteria for the American Indian Cultural Garden location. Areas (map above) were selected based on the following criteria: *availability* (UNC owned land that has or could have native planting and natural features), *proximity* (key adjacencies including existing cultural and educational programming), and *accessibility* (potential for multimodal access and parking for larger events).





This image represents how the American Indian Cultural Garden concept could fit on the land (this is not a specific site). It is accessible to walkers and passersby and marked with an entry image. A gathering space with access to fire and ritual materials that greets visitors. A path through native gardens connects to a multipurpose open air structure which anchors a large gathering space. Around the garden are intimate quiet spaces for personal reflection.





This image represents how the American Indian Cultural Garden concept could fit on the land (this is not a specific site). It is accessible to walkers and passersby and marked with an entry image. A gathering space with access to fire and ritual materials that greets visitors. A path through native gardens connects to a multipurpose open air structure which anchors a large gathering space. Around the garden are intimate quiet spaces for personal reflection.



## INTERPRETIVE TRAIL AND MOBILE APPLICATION DEVELOPMENT

A single location for the American Indian Cultural Garden is the preferred stakeholder vision. However, an interpretive trail connecting multiple locations important to Native identity and culture was proposed as well. This trail, a self-guided walk, could be unified through common signage, landscape elements, paving, and other features. In this alternative vision, the garden's components would be distributed across campus.

The trail and a single garden could work together. Extending from/to the garden, the trail could also be a way to expand the garden and catalyze other landscape elements expanding the exposure and use of the garden concept.

Stakeholders recommended the development of a mobile application to leverage

The extensive use of mobile devices on campus. Stakeholders are interested in apps that can be used to locate important places, interpret culturally significant elements, and coordinate events serving Native communities. Stakeholders expressed the their own capacity to begin work on these apps in the near term.

Navigation



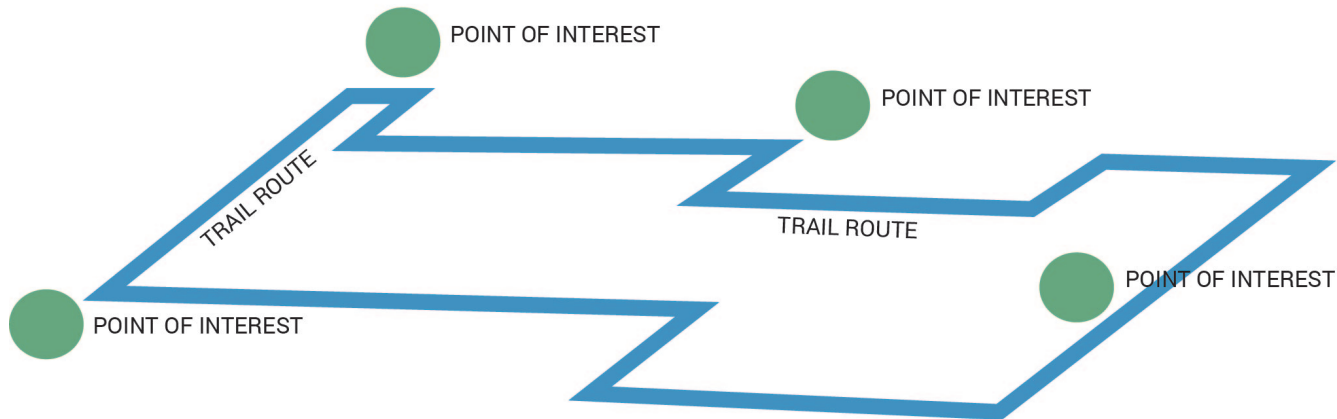
Interpretation



Coordination



Mobile App Development



Self-Guided Trail Route

Stakeholders support the development of a mobile app that could help people find places, learn history, and engage in events associated with Native people and culture on the UNC campus. Stakeholders support the the development of a trail helping people find cultural and educational opportunities on the UNC campus.

**NC STATE**

Department of Landscape Architecture  
and Environmental Planning  
College of Design  
November 2020