



Executive Director's Recommendation

Commission Meeting: July 7, 2022

PROJECT Cobb Park 200 H Street, NW Washington, DC	NCPC FILE NUMBER 8379
	NCPC MAP FILE NUMBER 31.20(70.00)45522
SUBMITTED BY District of Columbia Department of General Services	APPLICANT'S REQUEST Approval of preliminary site development plans
REVIEW AUTHORITY District Projects in the Central Area per 40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1) and (e)	PROPOSED ACTION Approve preliminary site development plans with comments
	ACTION ITEM TYPE Consent Calendar

PROJECT SUMMARY

The District of Columbia Department of General Services (DGS), in coordination with the District Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), has submitted preliminary site development plans for a new design for Cobb Park. Cobb Park is a 1.2-acre trapezoid shaped park located on H Street, NW and Massachusetts Avenue, NW between 2nd and 3rd Streets, NW. Cobb Park sits atop the I-395 freeway and was created when the freeway was constructed over 40 years ago. For the past few years, the park has served as a staging area for the Capitol Crossing development including construction trailers, equipment, and materials. Now that the park is no longer needed for construction staging, DPR plans to revitalize the park based on neighborhood feedback.

The District is proposing a new gathering plaza which will feature an art exhibit “star court” that is being donated to the park. Other amenities include a water fountain, perimeter fencing, a lawn area with raised mounds, new lamp posts and lighting, bioretention, ADA accessibility, updated crosswalks, a small play area and a dog park. The park will be enhanced by the addition of perimeter trees to serve as a buffer with a circular walking path with light bollards around the park.

KEY INFORMATION

- The existing park site is 1.2 acres located over I-395 and previously used as a construction staging area for the Capitol Crossing development.
- NCPC has approval authority over the proposed park because it is located inside the central area boundary.
- The proposed design aims to add much needed park amenities such as open space, a gathering plaza, play area and dog park to the Mount Vernon Triangle neighborhood.
- The plan was reviewed by the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) at their June meeting where the design was generally well received, but there were concerns about the amount of

programming on the small site, the lack of design features to address to noisy urban location and safety concerns with the proposed fence.

- The applicant is continuing coordination with the District Historic Preservation Office, the District Department of Transportation, and the District Department of Energy and Environment regarding the park design.

RECOMMENDATION

The Commission:

Approves the preliminary site development plans for the proposed improvements at Cobb Park, located in northwest Washington, DC.

Notes the applicant has held extensive public engagement to inform the park design.

Recommends the applicant explore the incorporation of additional trees or other shade elements to help improve visitor comfort.

Requests the applicant coordinate the necessary stormwater management on the site with the District Department of Energy and Environment and consider approaches that can be integrated with the landscape design.

Requests the applicant coordinate with the District Department of Transportation regarding the use of the public space within the H Street and I-395 rights-of-way.

PROJECT REVIEW TIMELINE

Previous actions	– None
Remaining actions (anticipated)	– Approval of Final Site Development Plans

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Executive Summary

The proposed project is to convert a space previously used as construction staging into a much-needed park with amenities informed by extensive public engagement. The applicant coordinated the design with the Mount Vernon Triangle Business Improvement District (BID) and neighborhood meetings over the last five years. The proposed park design includes a new gathering plaza on the west side of the park that will feature a donated art exhibit ‘Star Court’. The proposed park also includes a water fountain, a central lawn area surrounded by a walking path and raised

mounds and trees, new lighting, stormwater bioretention, a small children's play area with climbing boulders, a dog park, and 42-inch perimeter fence.

The applicant is continuing to refine the design based on feedback received from CFA, DOEE, DDOT and the DC SHPO. Staff believes the proposed design is a good first step toward the goal of adding new park amenities to the area and recommends the **Commission approves the preliminary site development plans for the proposed improvements at Cobb Park, located in northwest Washington, DC.**

Analysis

The 1.2-acre Cobb Park was created originally when I-395 was constructed 40 years ago. In recent years the park was used for contractions staging for the adjacent Capitol Crossing development including contractor trailers, construction materials and equipment. The District Department of Parks and Recreation in coordination with the District Department of General Services and the Mount Vernon Triangle BID began a public design process in 2018 to plan for the future use of the space as a park once the area construction projects were completed. The District and the BID held 5 public meetings with the neighborhood and stakeholders including a neighborhood survey to inform the park design. The neighborhood indicated that they wanted a gathering space, respite from the city, a dog park, a children's play space, and natural elements. Staff recommends the Commission **notes the applicant has held extensive public engagement to inform the park design.**

The proposed design is intended to respond to the requests of the neighborhood and create an inviting urban park in the Mount Vernon Triangle area. The design includes a gathering plaza on the west side that will feature an art exhibit 'Star Court' that is being donated to the park. In addition, the proposed park design includes a large open lawn in the middle surrounded by a walking path. On the north side of park, a small children's play area is proposed with large boulders for climbing. On the south side of park is a small separately fenced in dog park. The east side of the park has landscape mounding and trees. The entire park is lined with trees however, the proposed trees will be small caliper initially and will take years to provide sufficient shade. Staff requests the Commission **recommends the applicant explore the incorporation of additional trees or other shade elements to help improve visitor comfort.** The entire park is enclosed with a 42-inch decorative fence with four access points; two adjacent to the plaza area and one each at the northeast and southeast corners.

The proposed Star Court art installation is intended to inspire serenity and relaxation in the gathering area. The design of the Star Court is inspired by the neighborhood's namesake, the Mount Vernon Triangle. The geometry of the design is a 6-pointed star made of triangles. The materials for the Star Court include anodized aluminum with a bronze finish, vertical bronze tubes, and a paving pattern that matches the overhead pergola design. The proposal indicates that the seating will be rolled bronze plates over stainless steel armature, but the applicant has indicated that they plan to update these materials to wood to ensure the seats do not overheat in the sun.

In order to comply with the District's Stormwater management requirements, the applicant has indicated that they intend to do bioretention onsite as part of the park design. Staff supports this approach and recommends the Commission **requests the applicant coordinate the necessary stormwater management on the site with the District Department of Energy and Environment and consider approaches that can be integrated with the landscape design.**

The existing property line for the park on the north side does not extend all the way to H Street, NW like the other sides of the park. Because of this, DDOT has indicated that the park will have to coordinate on the elements outside the property line since they are in public space. In addition, coordination is needed on the proposed trees on the eastern half of the park since it sits atop the I-395 tunnel which could limit what is included in the design. Staff recommends the Commission **requests the applicant coordinate with the District Department of Transportation regarding the use of the public space within the H Street and I-395 rights-of-way.**

CONFORMANCE TO EXISTING PLANS, POLICIES AND RELATED GUIDANCE

Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

The project is consistent with the goals and policies set forth in the Comprehensive Plan. In particular, policies related to Urban Design, Parks and Open Space, and Visitors and Commemoration, were found to be considered and addressed.

National Historic Preservation Act

NCPC has an independent responsibility to comply with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). NCPC formally initiated Section 106 consultation with the District of Columbia Historic Preservation Office (DCSHPO) on June 13, 2022 for the proposed park improvements. The applicant has also initiated coordination with the DCSHPO and is continuing to consult on archeological and historic preservation guidance.

National Environmental Policy Act

NCPC has an independent responsibility to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for the improvements located in the central area of Washington, DC; NCPC's responsibility stems from its approval authority over the project. Pursuant to Section 601.12 of NCPC's NEPA Regulations, staff has determined that the project can be categorically excluded from further environmental analysis based on categorical exclusion #2, which pertains to the "approval of the installation or restoration of minor site elements, such as but not limited to identification signs, sidewalks, patios, fences, curbs, retaining walls, landscaping, and trail or stream improvements. Additional features include water distribution lines and sewer lines which involve work that is essentially replacement in kind. Prior to applying this categorical exclusion, NCPC staff determined that no extraordinary circumstances were present as required by the Commission's NEPA Regulations under § 601.11.

CONSULTATION

The applicant has held several community input meetings of the preceding five years with the Mount Vernon Triangle BID and the neighborhood stakeholders to ensure the proposed park elements address community needs.

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the proposal at its June 15, 2022 meeting. Without objection, the Committee forwarded the proposed preliminary site development plans to the Commission with the statement that the proposal has been coordinated with all participating agencies. DOEE noted that the project would require submission for stormwater review and asked that the applicant contact them to initiate review. DDOT noted that the project may require public space review and approvals where the proposal crosses onto DDOT right of way and asked for additional information regarding the location of trees over I-395. The SHPO noted that DGS had not contacted them regarding this project, though the applicant has contacted the SHPO's staff. Based on the plans submitted to NCPC, it appears that the SHPO would not have significant concerns. The SHPO is coordinating provided DGS consult with them in accordance with Section 9b of the DC Historic Landmarks and Historic Districts Protection Act.

U.S. Commission of Fine Arts

The U.S. Commission of Fine Arts reviewed the proposal at their June meeting and approved the concept design with comments. The Commission provided feedback that the proposed design might have too many design elements for the limited space and may need additional thought about security and noise abatement.

ONLINE REFERENCE

The following supporting documents for this project are available online at www.ncpc.gov:

- Submission Package
- Commission of Fine Arts Letter

Prepared by Jamie Herr
06/16/2022

POWERPOINT (ATTACHED)

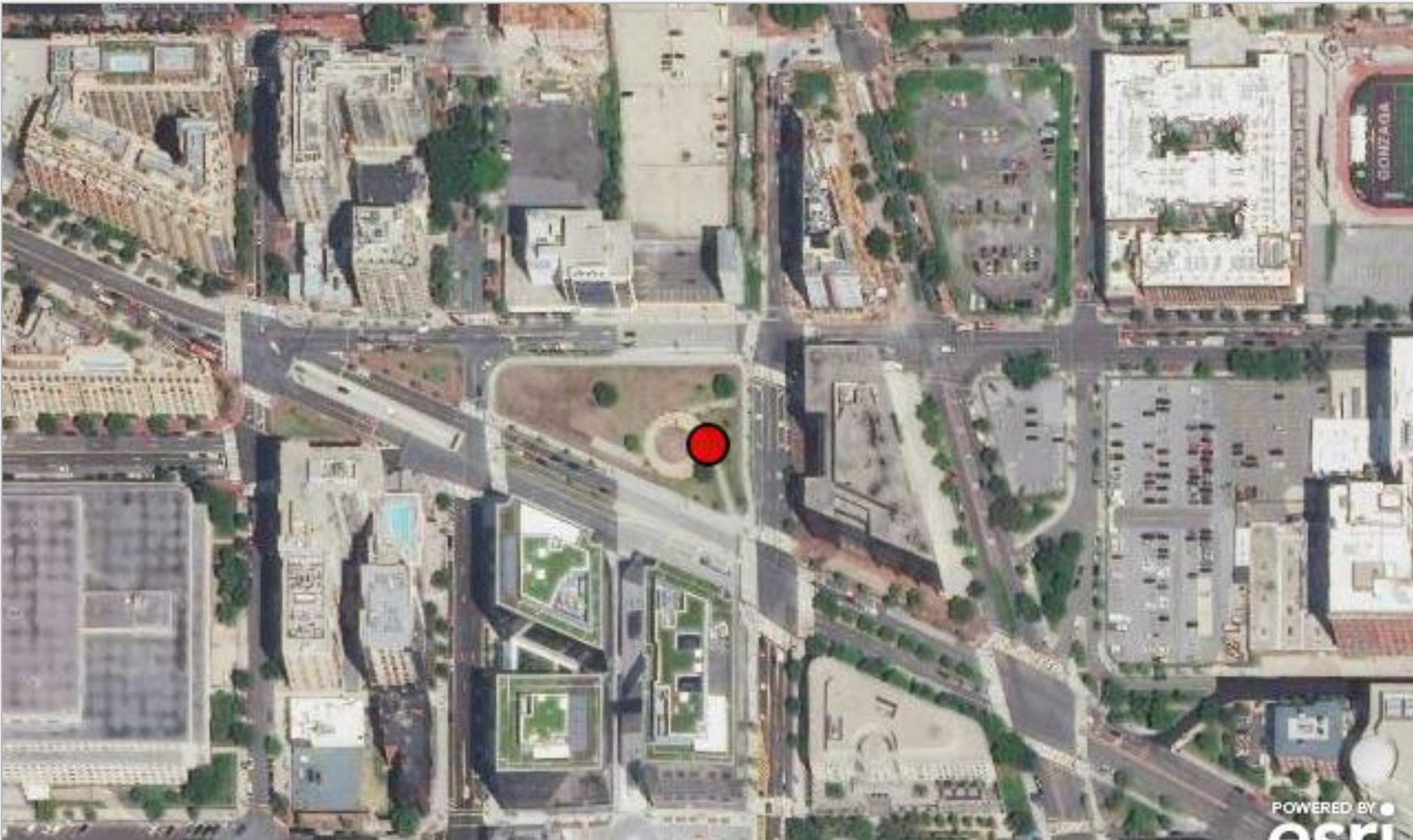
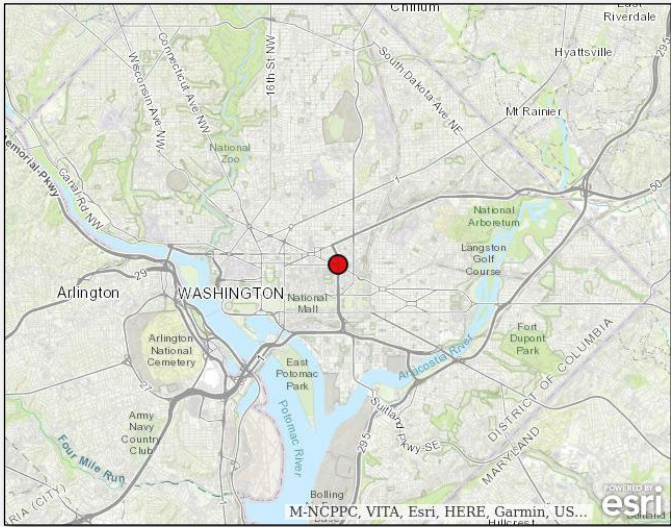
Cobb Park

200 H Street, NW, Washington DC

Approval of Preliminary Building Plans

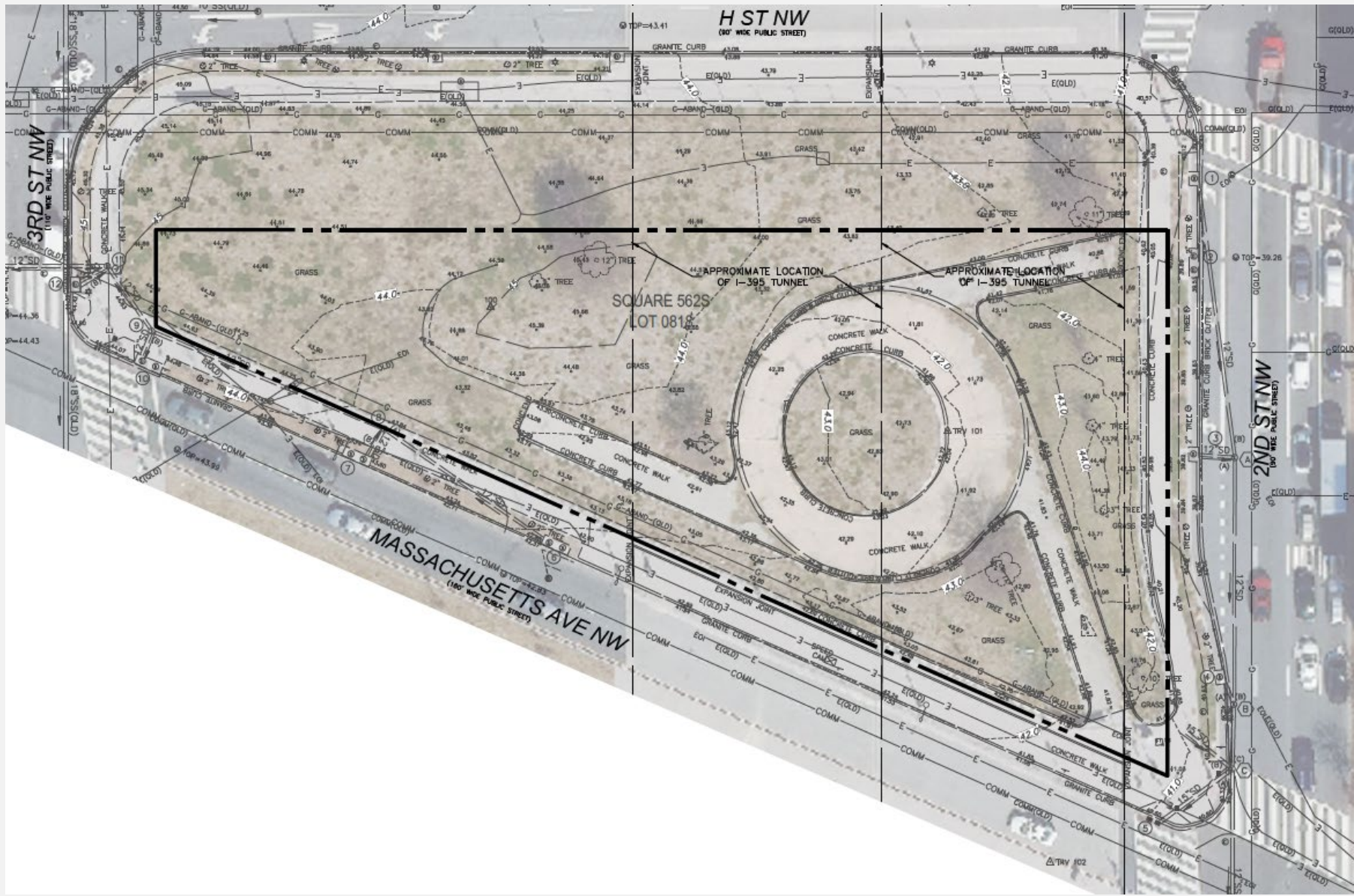
District of Columbia Department of General Services

Site Location

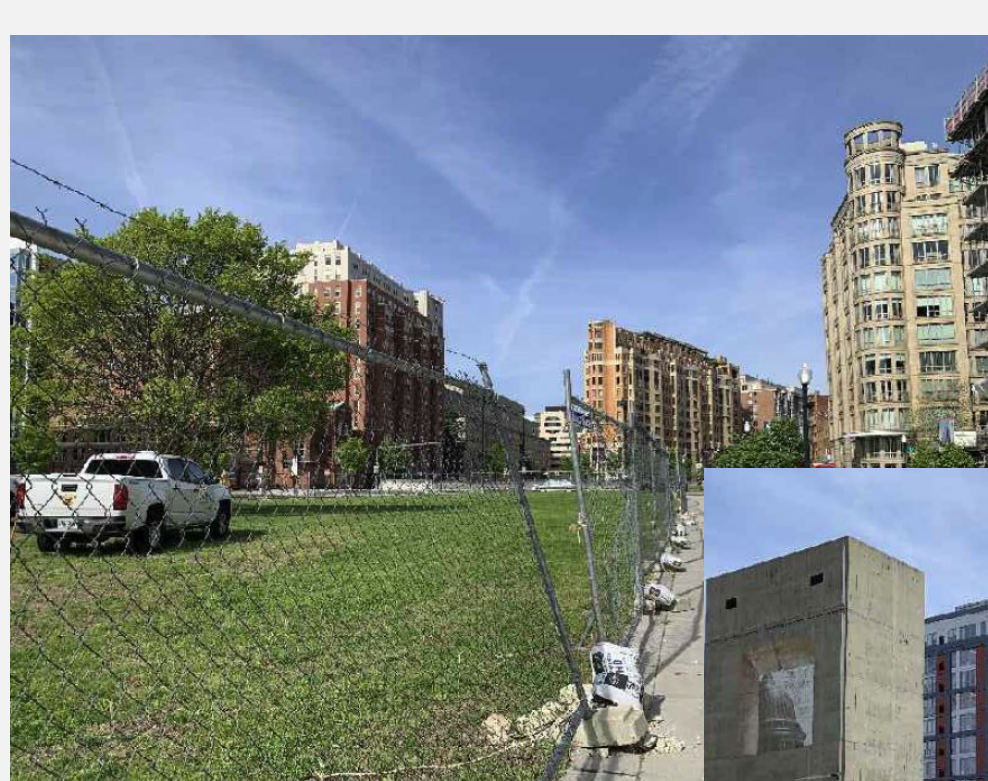


Location Map

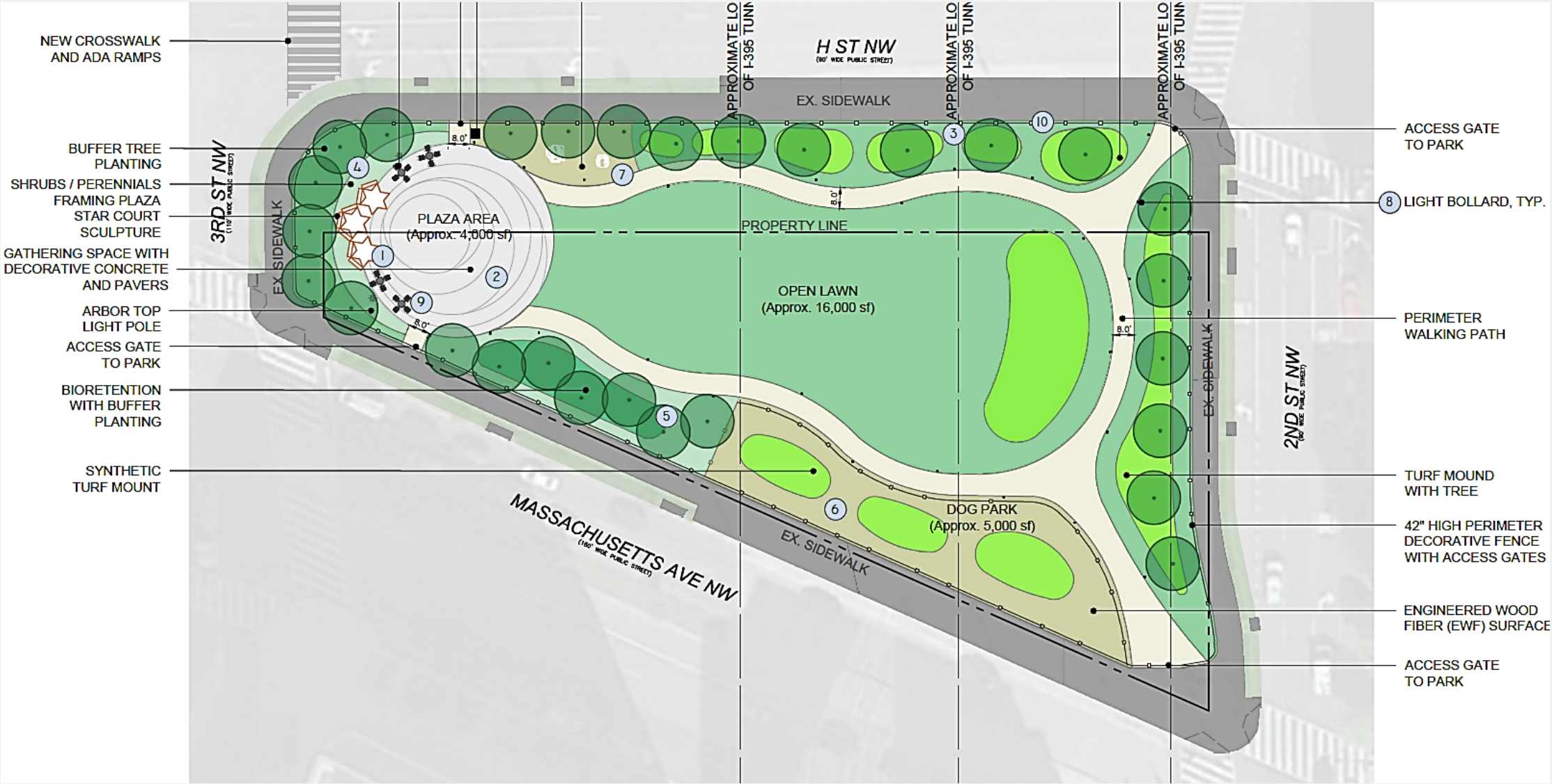
Existing Conditions



Existing Conditions



Proposed Plan



Plan Details



1 STAR COURT



2 PAVING



3 TURF MOUNDS



4 SHADE TREES



5 BIORETENTION



6 DOG PARK



7 PLAY ELEMENT



8 LIGHT BOLLARDS

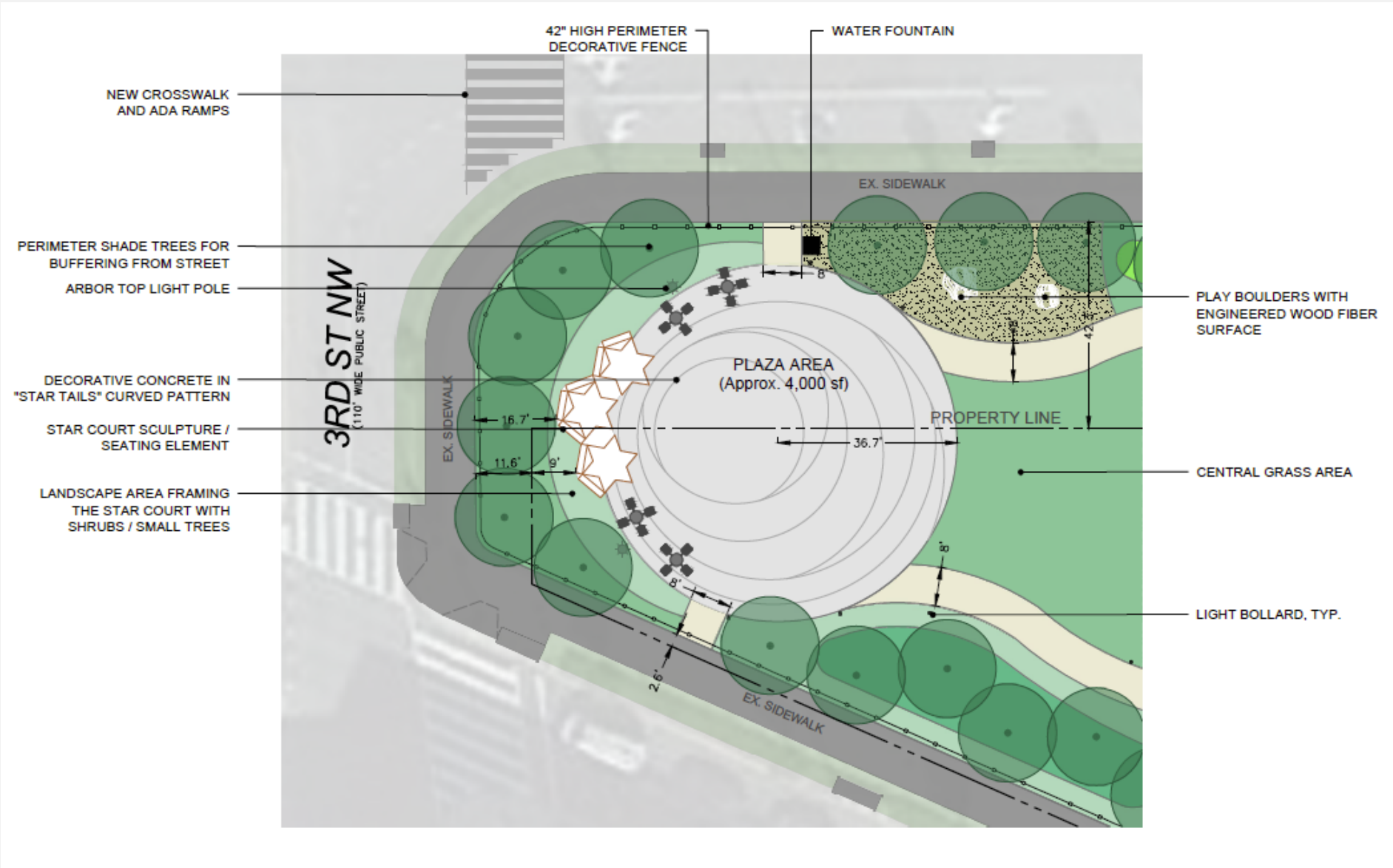


9 SITE FURNISHING OPTIONS

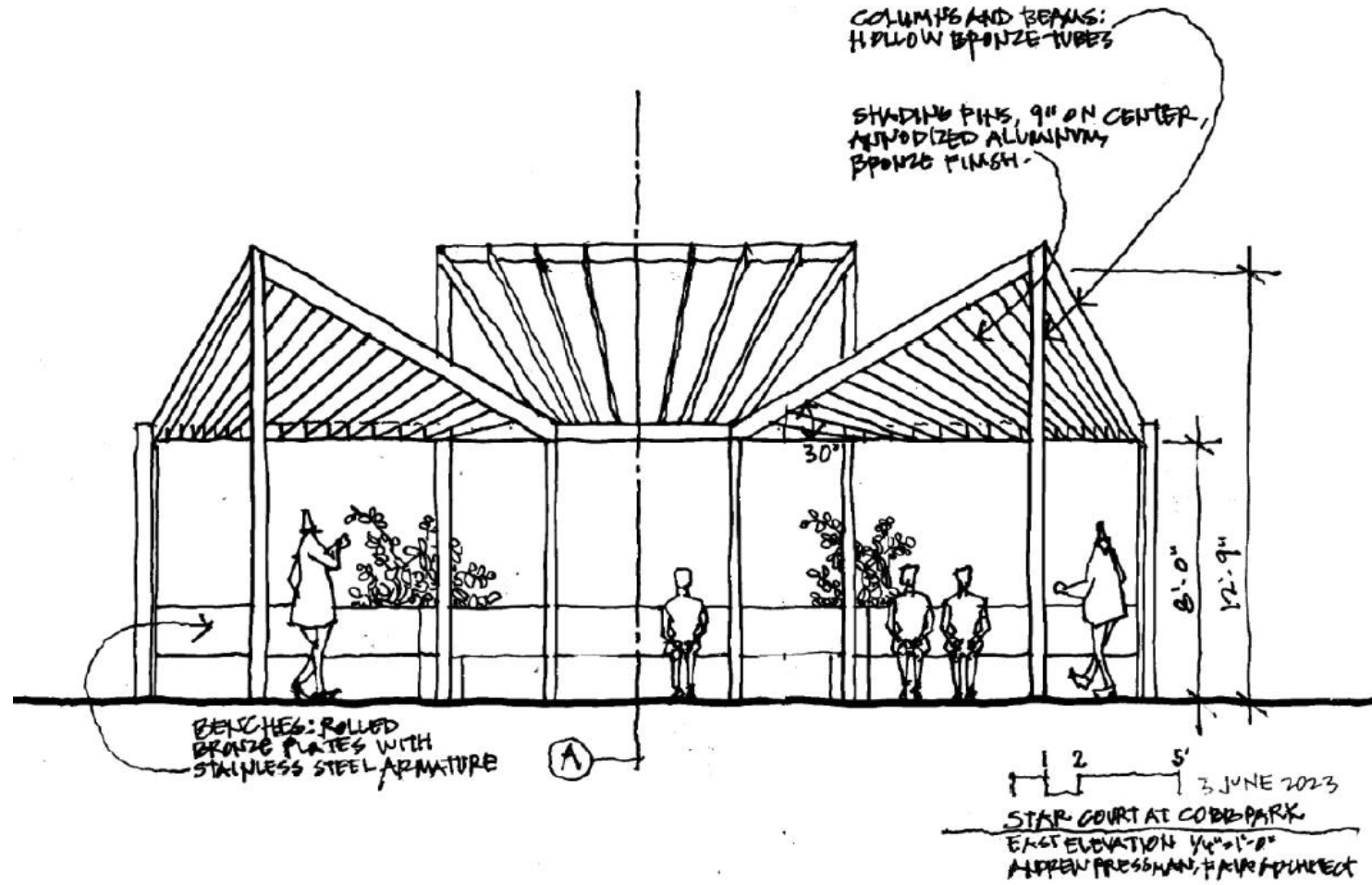
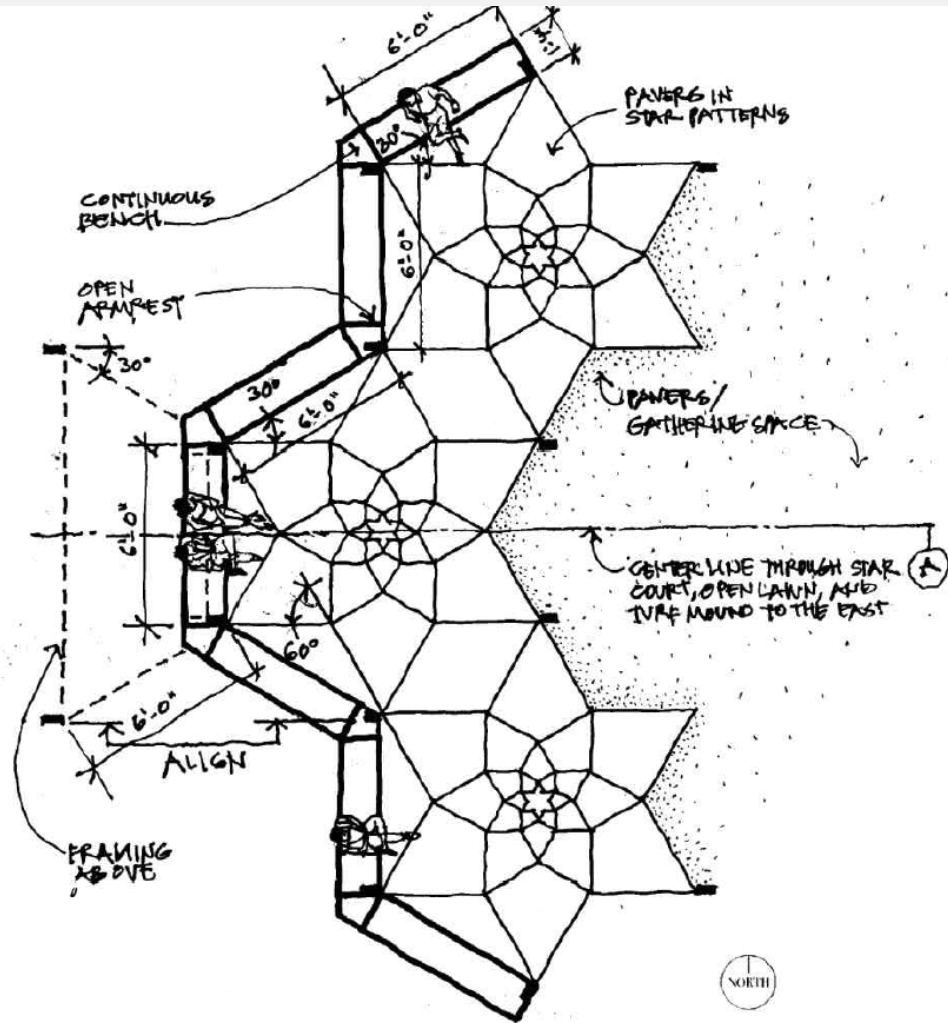


10 DECORATIVE FENCE

Plaza Detail



Star Court Detail



Star Court Model

