

# Construct Accessible Walkway at Great Flight Aviary

3001 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Washington DC

Approval of Preliminary Site Development Plans

Smithsonian Institution

# Project Summary

**Commission Meeting Date:** October 9, 2025

**NCPC Review Authority:** 40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1) and (d)

**Applicant Request:** Approval of Preliminary Site Development Plans

**Session:** Consent Calendar

**NCPC Review Officer:** Jamie Herr

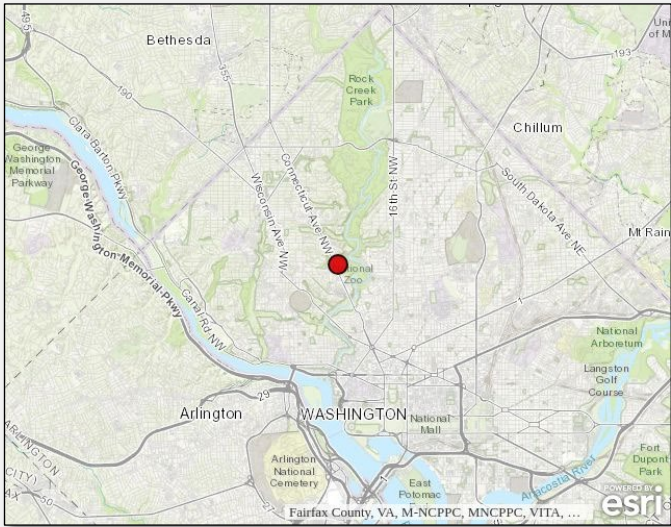
**NCPC File Number:** 8701

## Project Summary:

The Smithsonian Institution has submitted preliminary site development plans for a new accessible walkway to the Great Flight Aviary at the National Zoological Park in Washington, DC. The primary purpose of the project is to provide an accessible connection from the Bird House interior exhibits and the Great Flight Aviary (GFA) to the Bird House Plateau southern exhibit trail. Currently visitors exiting the Bird House from the mezzanine level or returning from the GFA do not have a clear accessible connection to the other exhibits on the Bird Plateau. The only way to enter and exit the GFA accessibly is through the Bird House which is not ideal. As one of the final projects to complete the transformation of the Bird Plateau, this project will provide an accessible route connecting key viewing experiences.



# Site Location



Location Map



# Great Flight Aviary - History

The Bird House, designed by municipal architect Albert Harris, was originally completed in 1928. Beginning in 1935, an addition was constructed on the south side of the building utilizing the same brick material strategy, style, and ornamentation as the original and completed by the Public Works Administration. The building underwent numerous renovations in the 1960's. Significant among them were the removal of the building's entry portico and hipped roof over the elevated central gallery in favor of modern replacements. Also occurring during the 1960's was the construction of the Great Flight Aviary. The form consisted of six parabolic steel arches that formed a circle roughly 130 feet in diameter with a central mast height of nearly 90 feet that was then covered by a vinyl coated steel wire mesh. A concrete bridge in the form of an arc supported by pyramidal piers spans the gap between the original Bird House and the Aviary.

In 2017, the Bird House and Bird Plateau underwent large scale renovation including an extension to the north façade for a new main entry clad in bird friendly glazing and metal panels in hues complementary to the historic brick structure. Other components of this renovation included updates to the north entry sequence from the Bird Plateau, replacement of the 1960's skylight with a pyramidal formed skylight, various bird friendly treatments to historic features, and introduction of handrails to the Great Flight Aviary bridge.



Main entry of 1928 Building (Photo Circa 1940)



Decorative panels at south façade Domenico Mortellito, 1936 (Photo 2014)



Stairs to Great Flight Aviary Bridge (Photo 2014)



Great Flight Aviary and Entrance Bridge (Photo 2014)



2017 North entry sequence renovation



2017 Resurfacing and handrail addition to Great flight Aviary Bridge



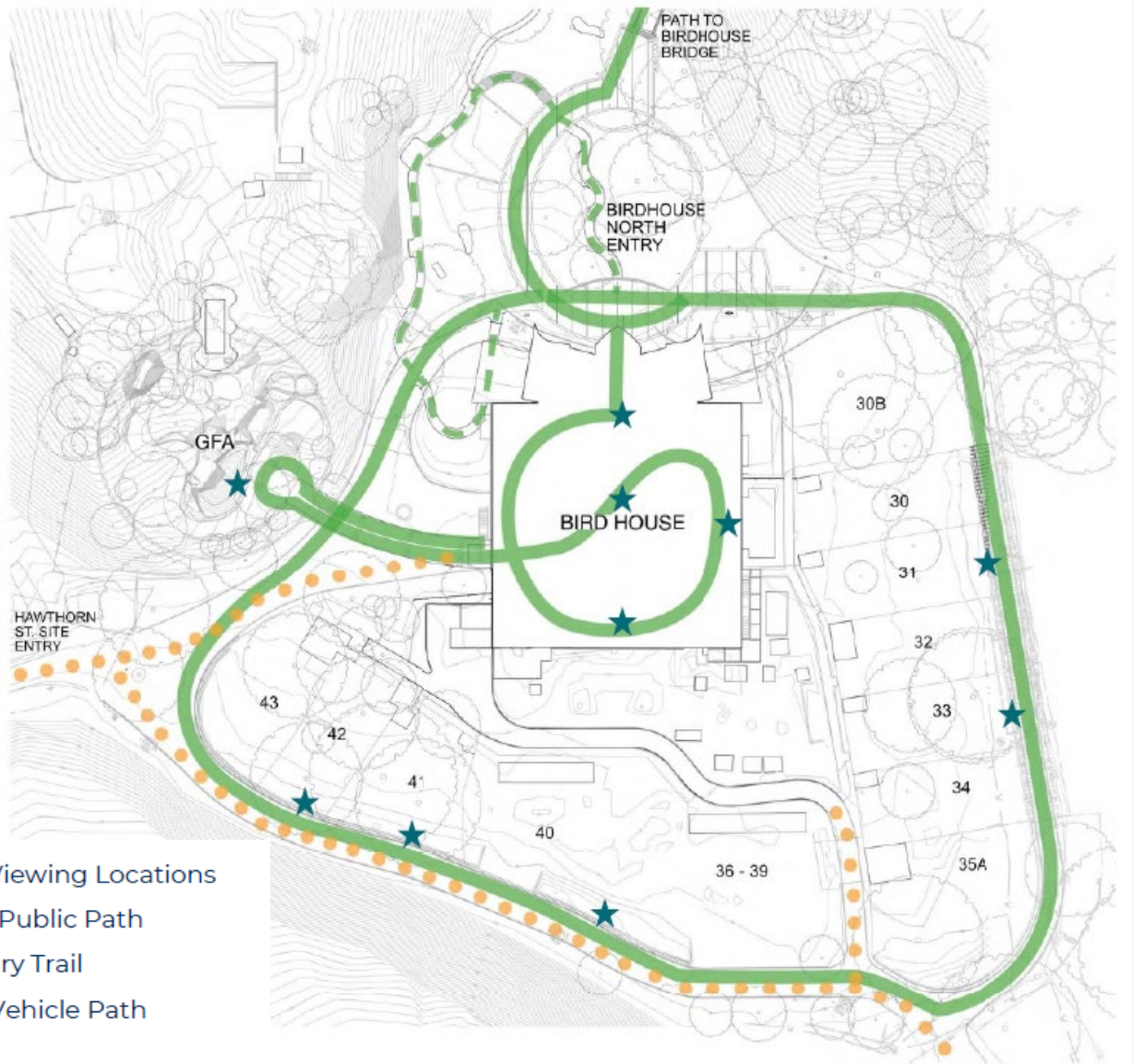
# Great Flight Aviary – Existing Conditions



Front entry to Bird House

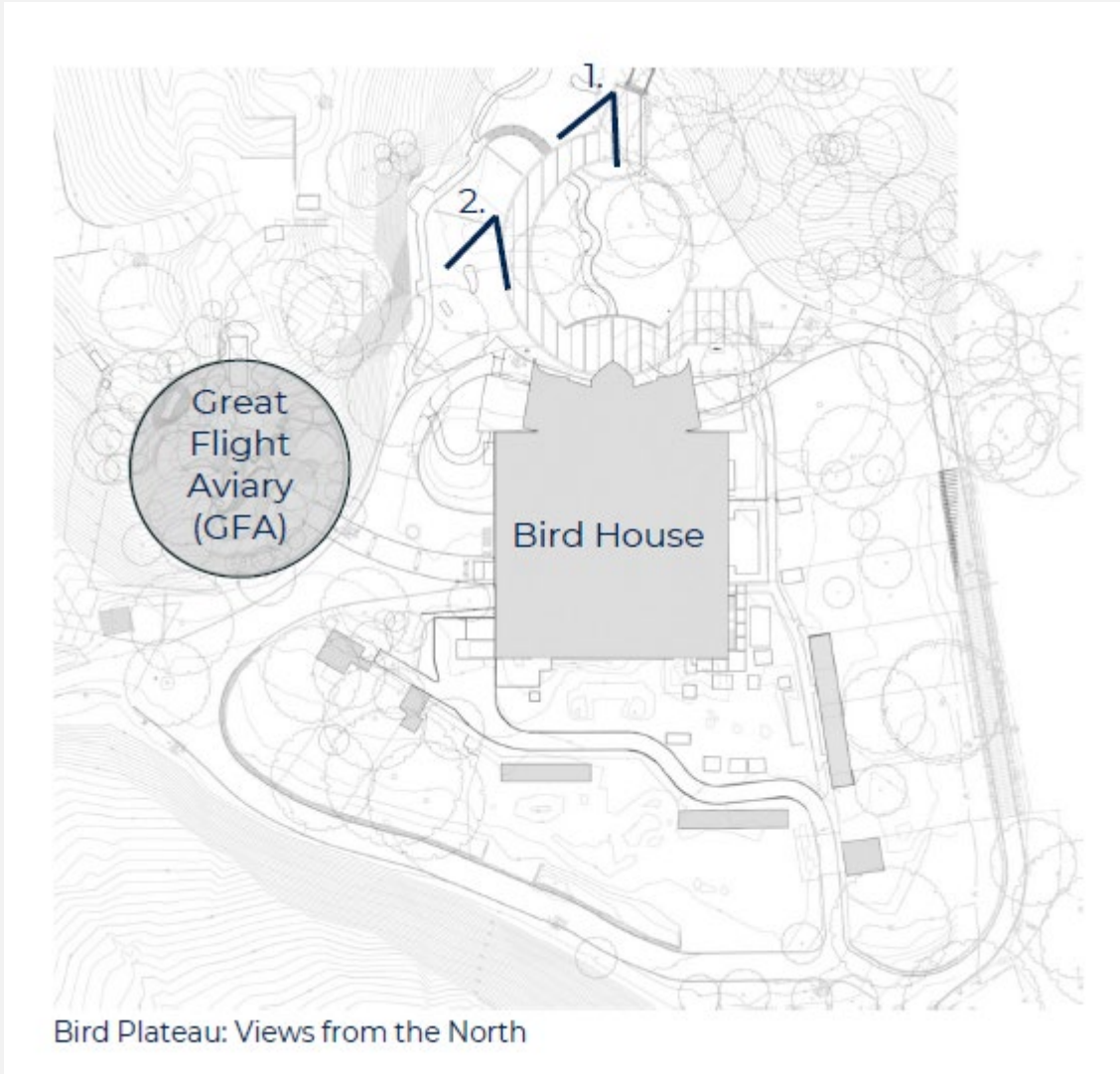


Great Flight Aviary bridge from southeast



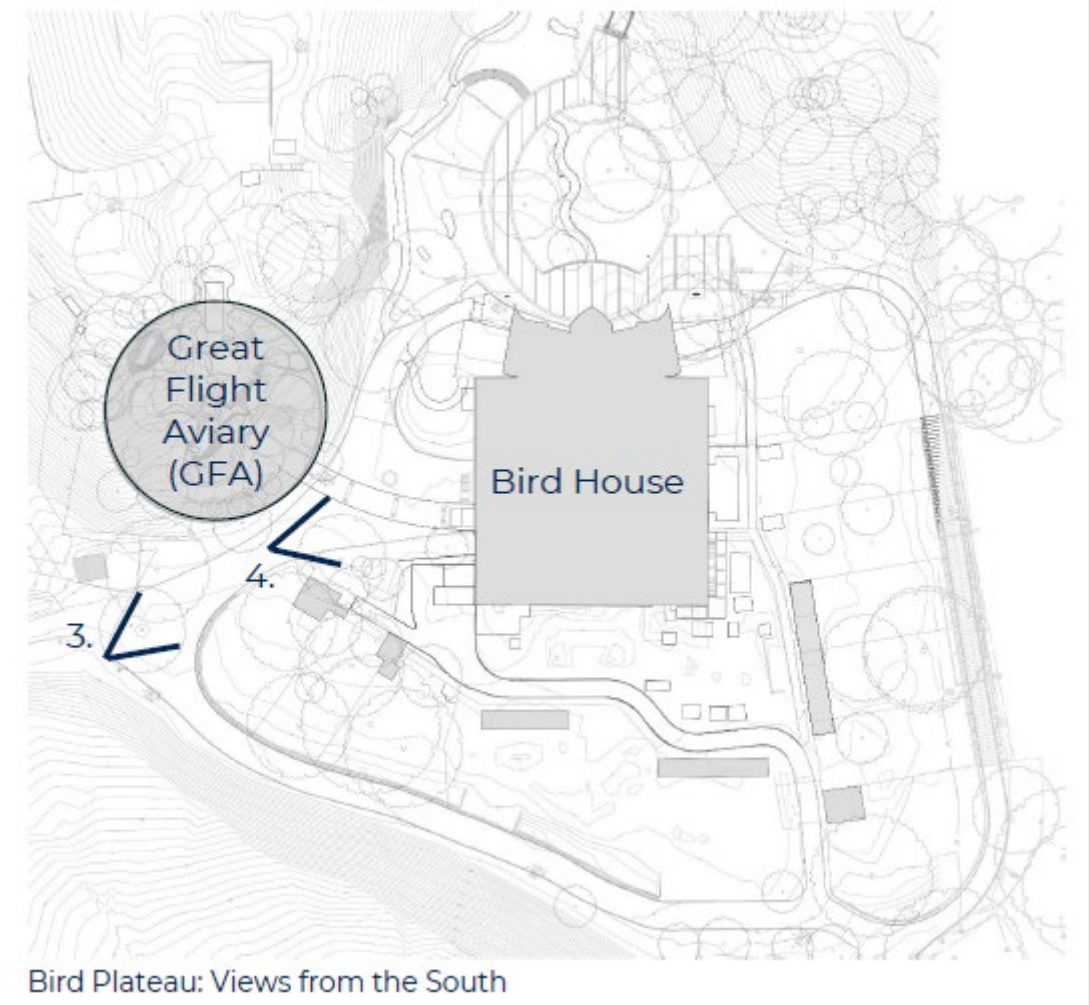


# Great Flight Aviary – Existing Conditions



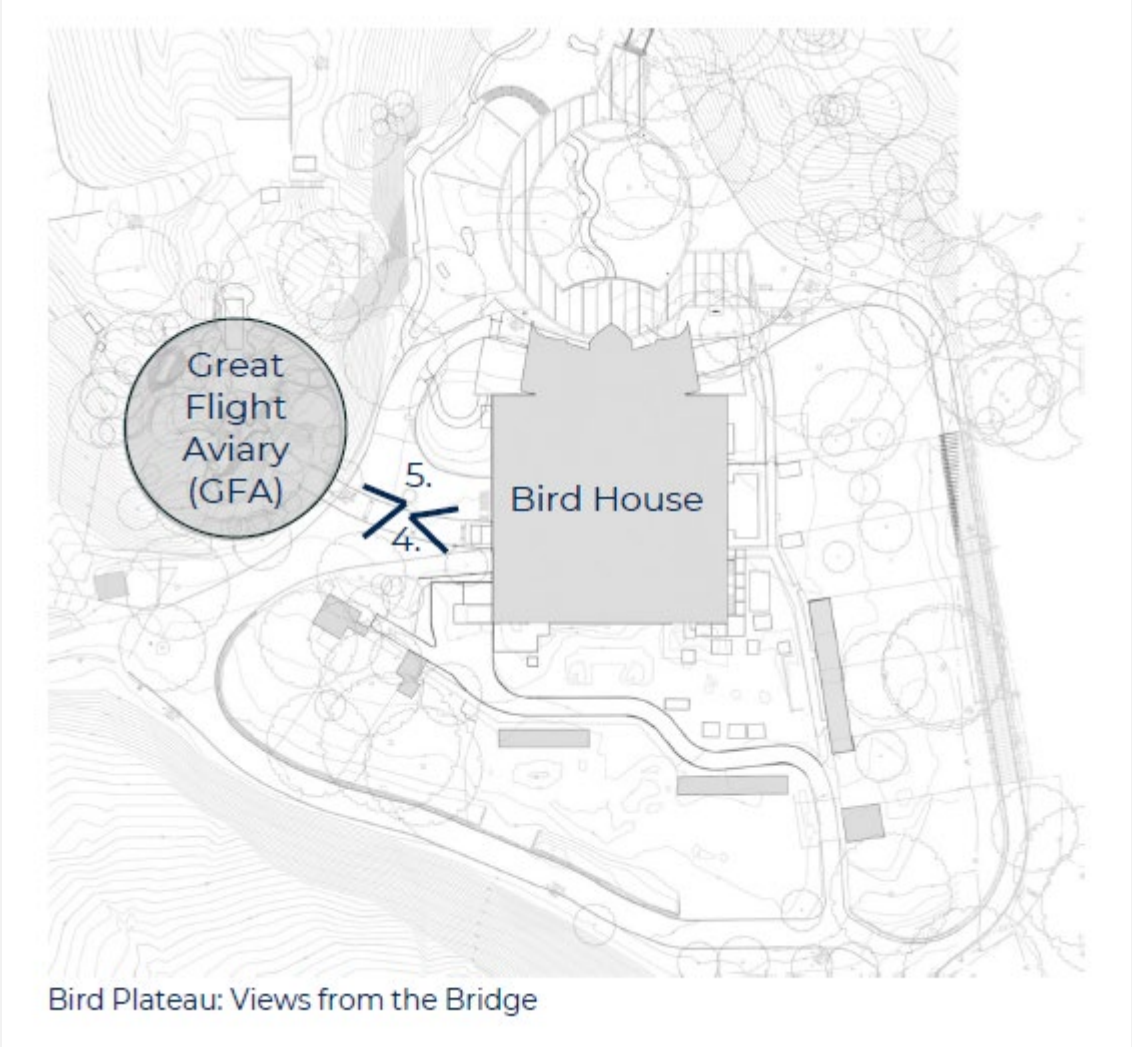


# Great Flight Aviary – Existing Conditions





# Great Flight Aviary – Existing Conditions



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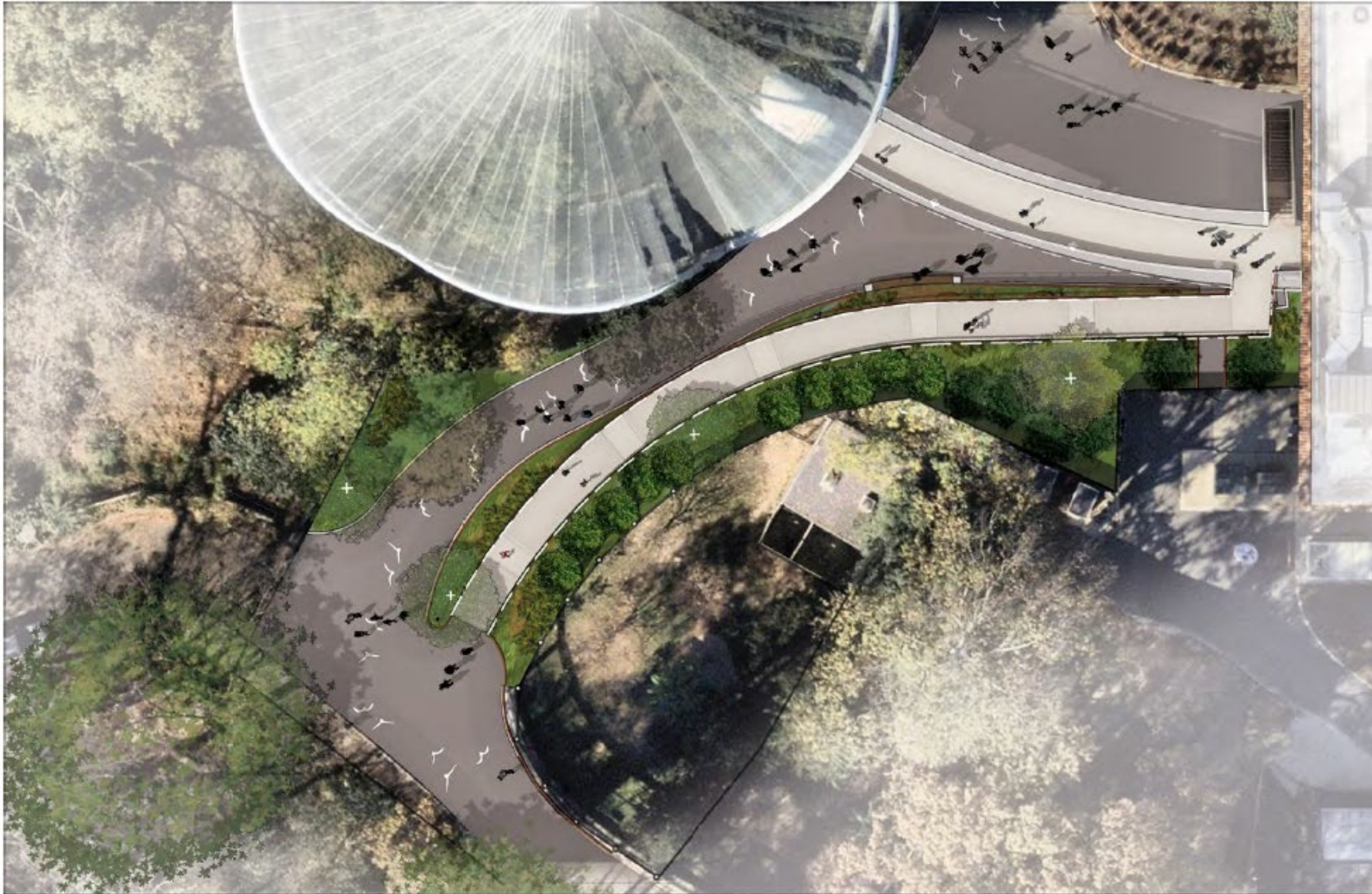


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# Great Flight Aviary Walkway Design



The project includes:

- An 8'-0" wide ramp at 1:12 max slope with required landings providing accessible access to second floor of the Birdhouse and Great Flight Aviary.
- The ramp is made of six runs of ramp and 6 landings providing an accessible ramp.
- A 10'-0" wide planting zone proposed between the ramp and new fence to provide required predator exclusion separation. This includes:

- 60'-0" of new exhibit yard fence at the bottom of the ramp with integrated visitor viewing.
- 86'-10" of new solid exhibit yard fencing alongside ramp in two sections to maintain privacy in back of house spaces.
- Predator protection atop all fencing on the south side of ramp. Predator protection will consist of steel anti-climb panels and 5 strand hot wires mounted to top of fencing.



# Great Flight Aviary Walkway and Circulation

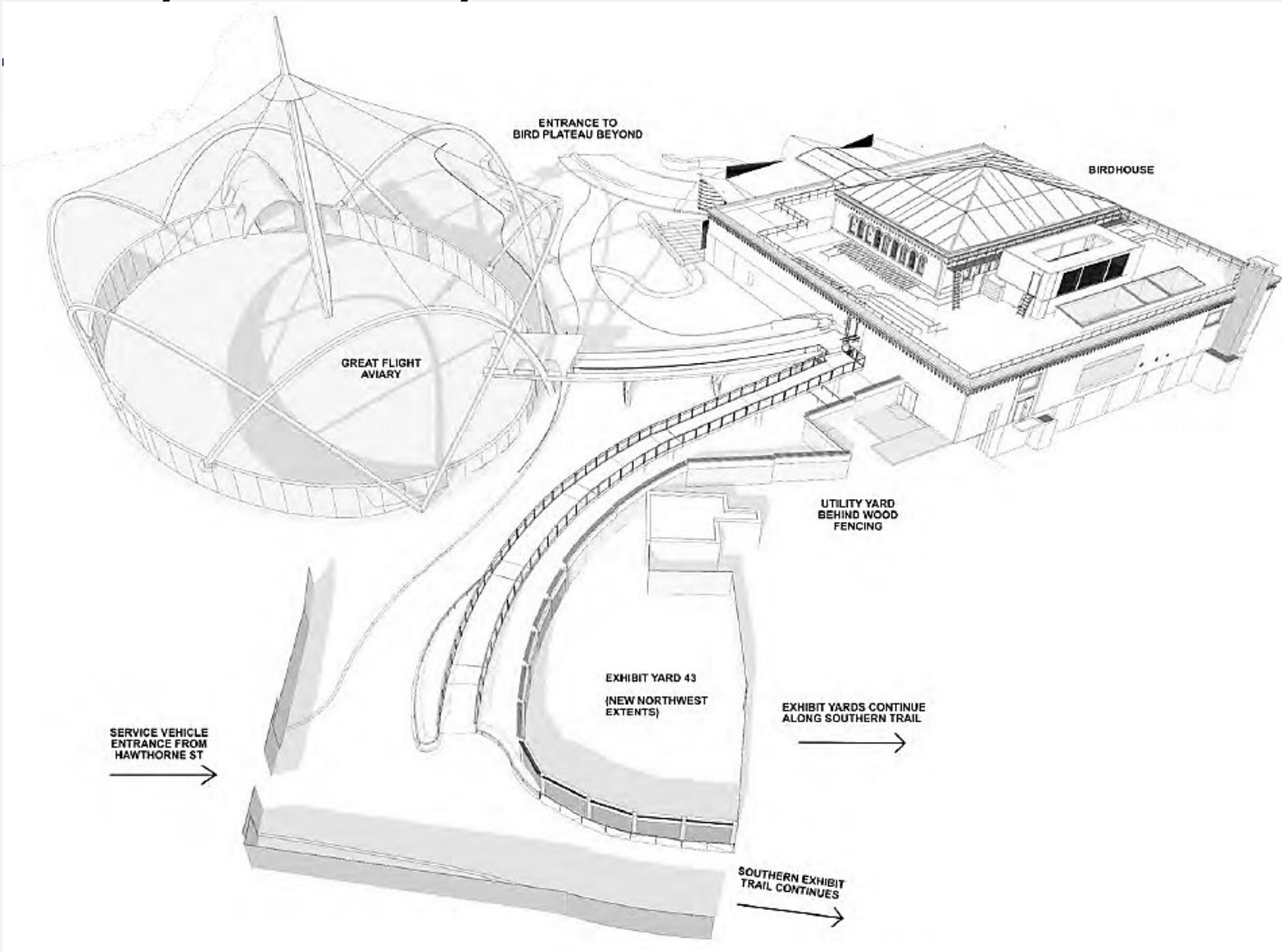
- Proposed Ramp
- ★ Exhibit Viewing Locations
- Primary Public Path
- Secondary Trail
- Service Vehicle Path

The proposed ramp shown in teal encourages the visitor to circum-navigate the entire plateau to view the complete animal collection housed here.

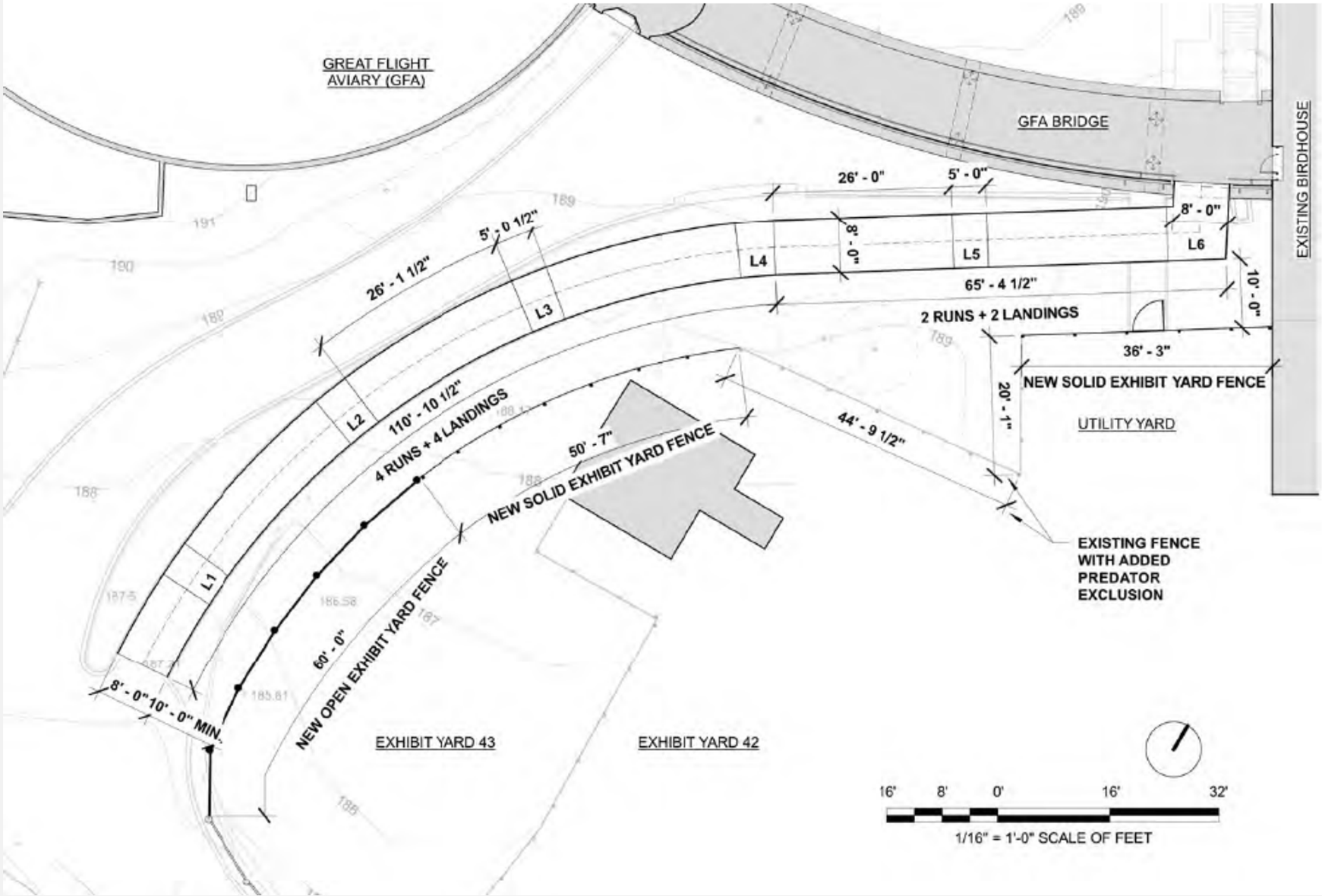




# Great Flight Aviary Walkway – Birdseye View

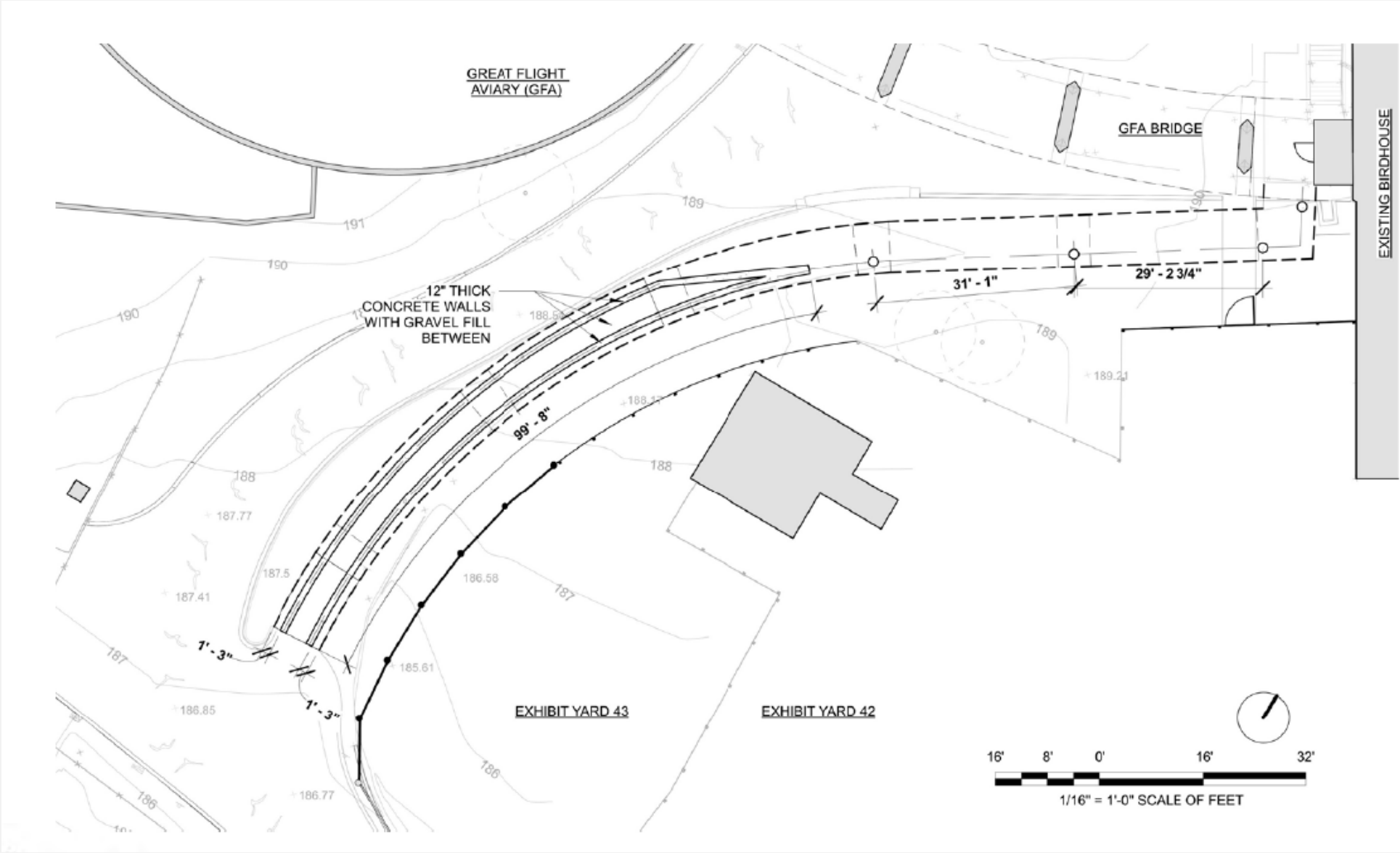


# Great Flight Aviary Walkway Details

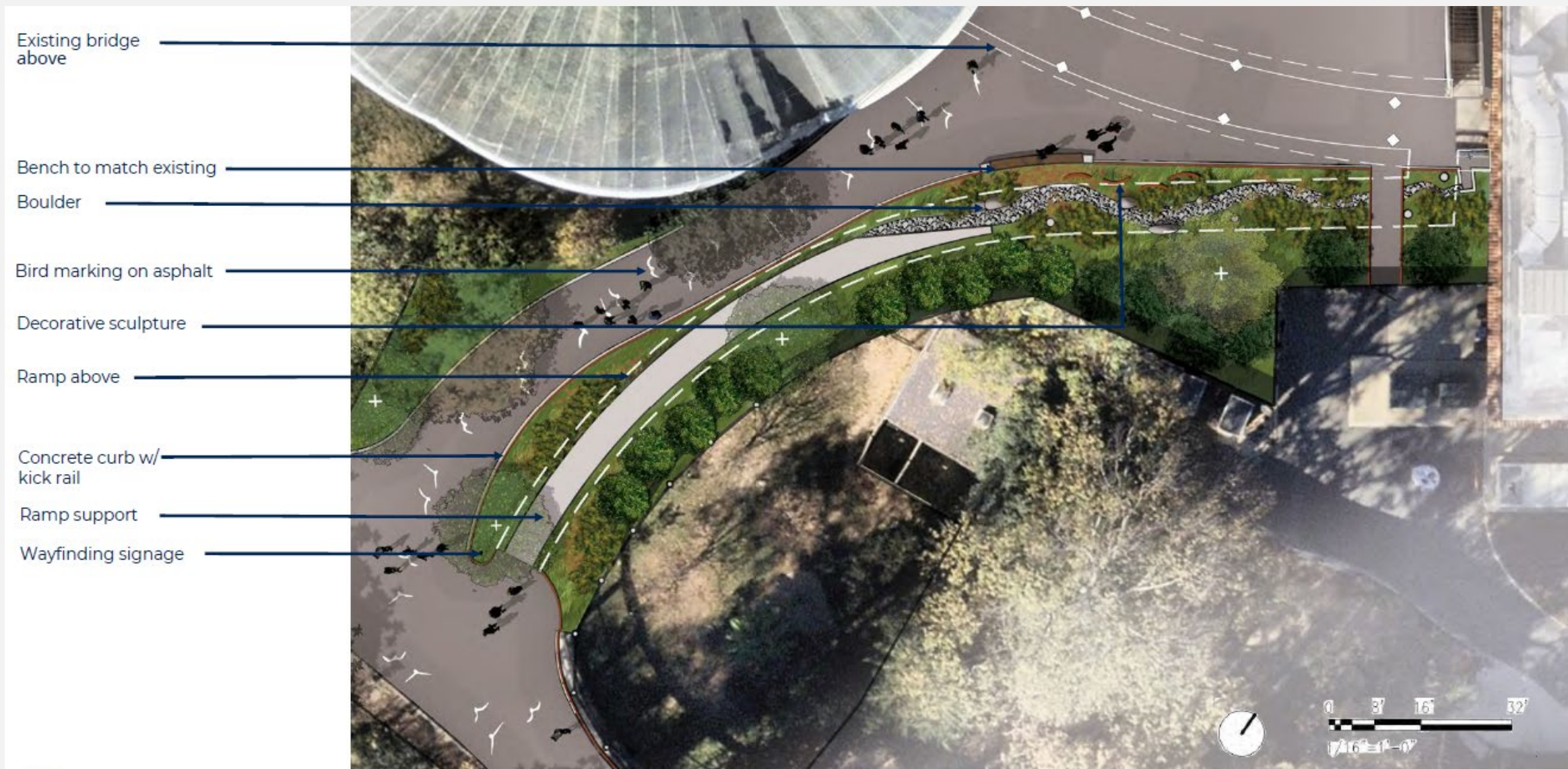




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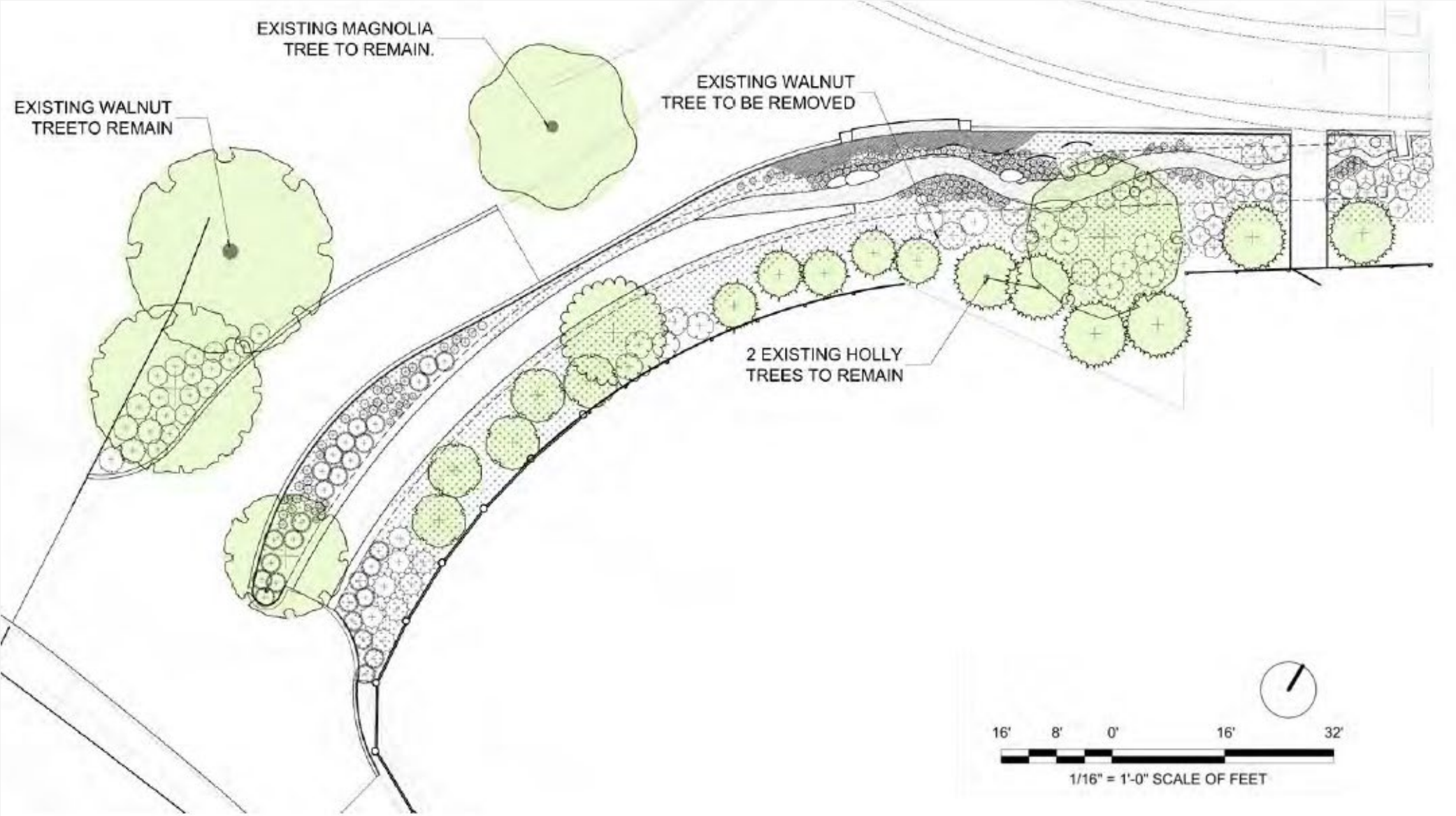


# Great Flight Aviary Walkway Design Details





# Great Flight Aviary Walkway Landscape Plan



# Great Flight Aviary Walkway Landscape Details

The planting palette will be composed of native plants that thrive in shady locations and match plants already present on the Bird Plateau. The plants have multiple seasons of interest and include pollinators



Magnolia virginiana



Juniperus virginiana



Hamamelis virginiana



Nyssa sylvatica



Cercis candensis



Amelanchier arborea



Ilex Opaca



# Great Flight Aviary Walkway Landscape Details



*Rhus aromatica* 'Gro-Low'



*Ilex verticillata*



*Clethra alnifolia*



*Hydrangea quercifolia*



*Panicum virgatum* 'Shenandoah'



*Echinacea purpurea*



*Viburnum trilobum*



*Heuchera americana*



*Cornus sericea* 'Isanti'



*Ilex glabra*



*Dryopteris intermedia*



# Great Flight Aviary Walkway Rendering





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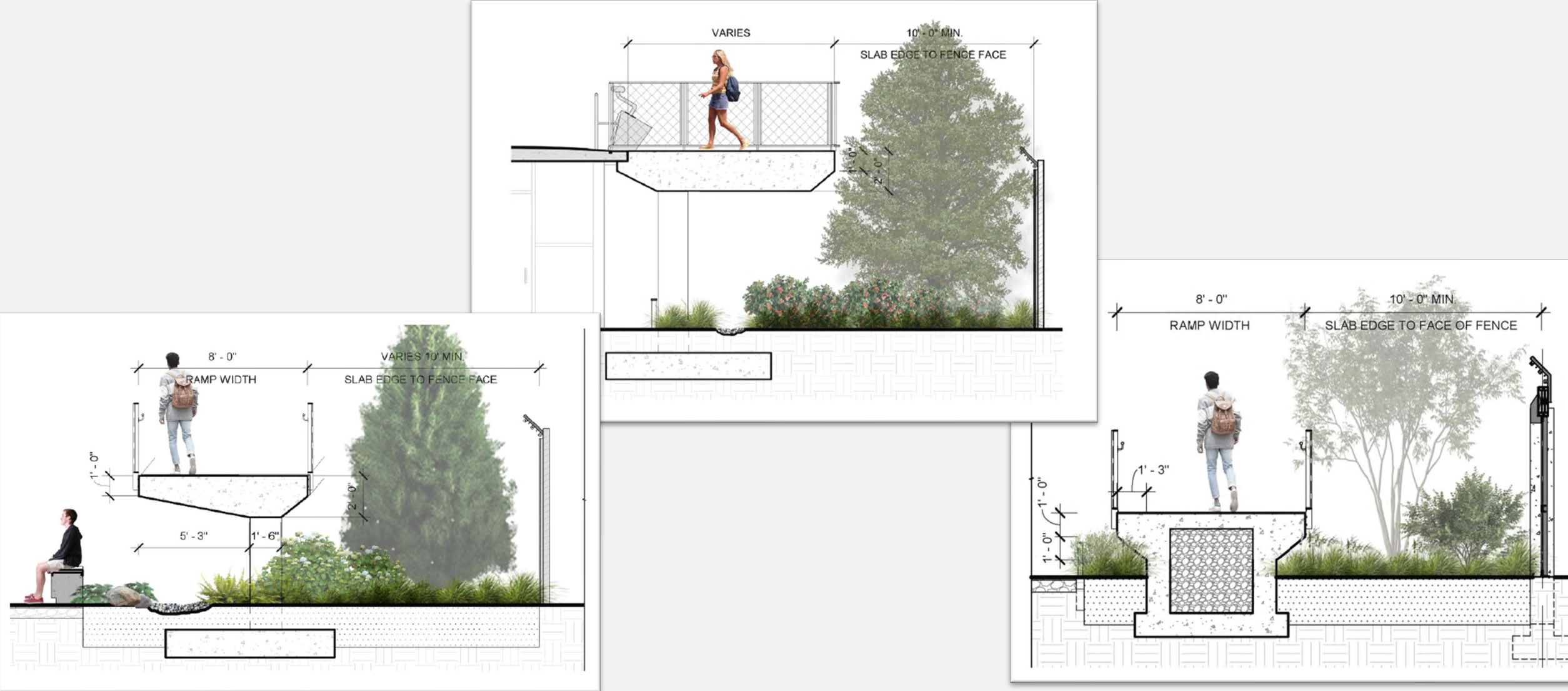




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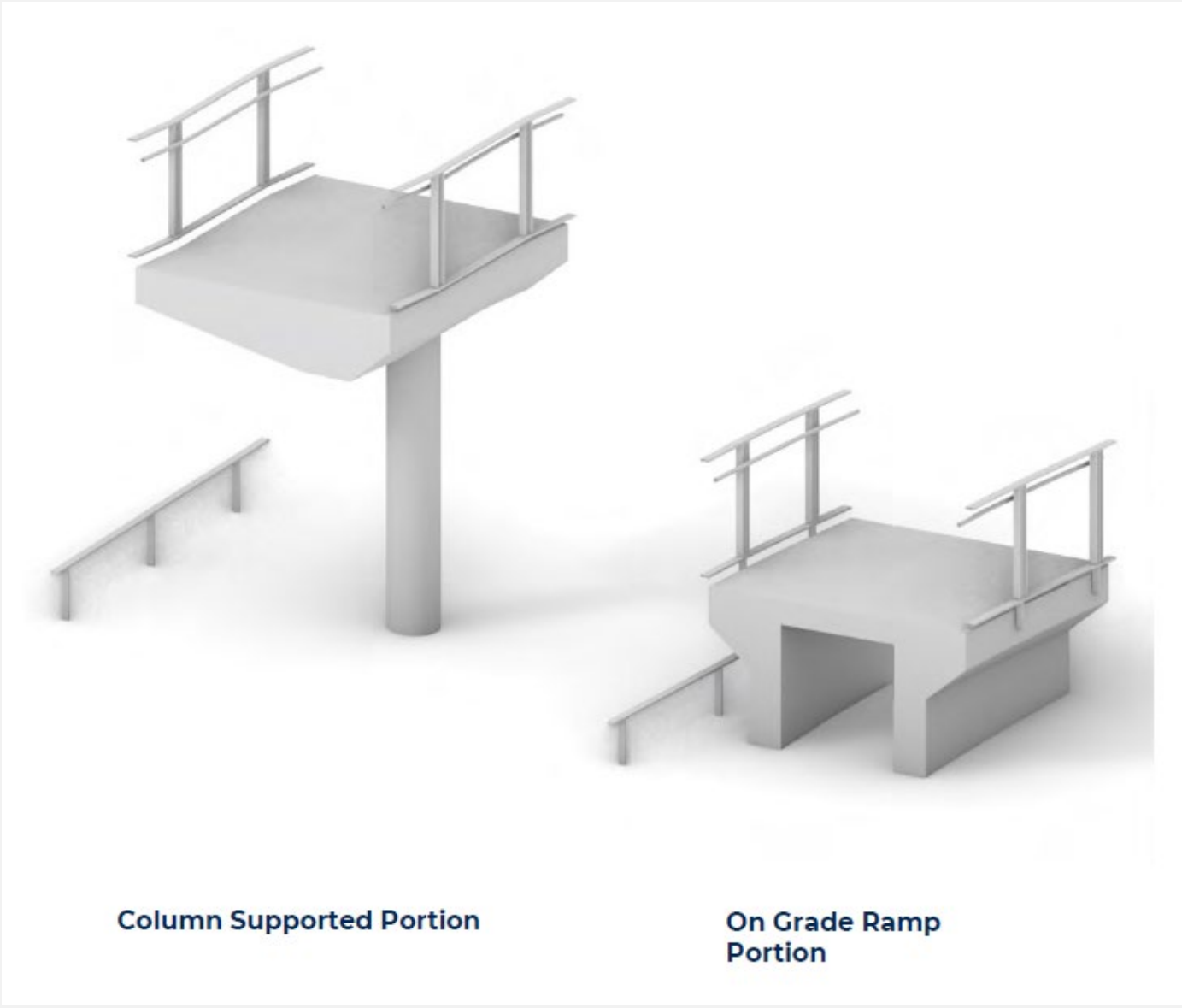
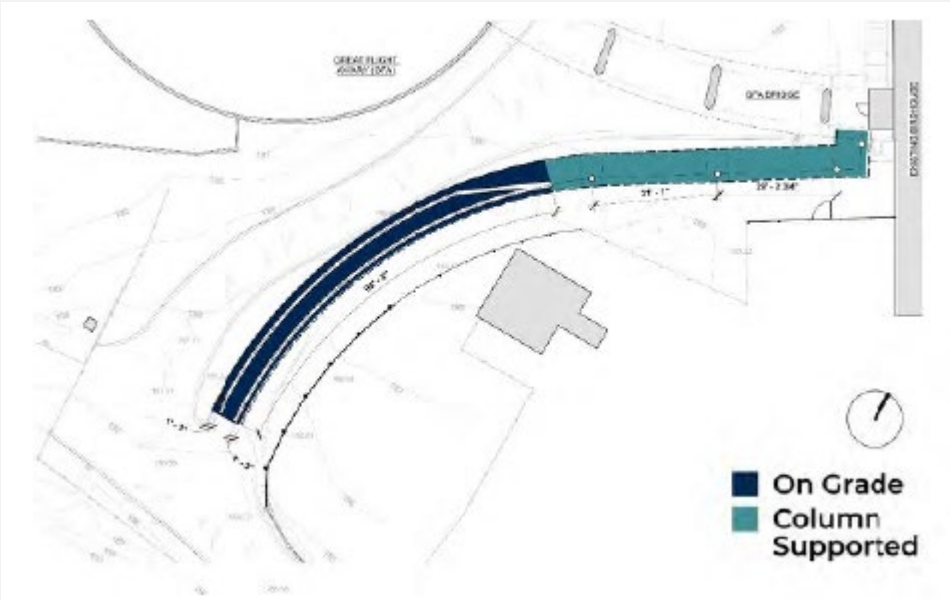


# Great Flight Aviary Walkway Sections





# Great Flight Aviary Walkway Details



# Great Flight Aviary Walkway Railing Details



As part of the effort to integrate the new walkway within its current surroundings on the Bird Plateau, the material language of both concrete surfaces and the railings reference precedents from the plateau.

The guardrail panels feature weathering steel frames with a wire mesh infill matching the material strategy utilized to line multiple paths on the plateau.

The concrete surfaces are tinted to match the coloration of pavers found at the entry plaza of the Bird House. The slab and supports are the same color for uniformity. But the concrete coloration will intentionally not match the painted concrete of the GFA bridge to reinforce that this walkway is a new addition to the historic structure.

The handrails mounted to the guardrail stanchions are aluminum rails with integrated downward facing light fixtures to match the language used in the interior of the Bird House.





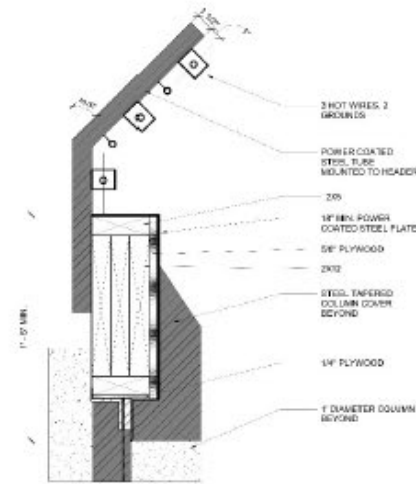
# Great Flight Aviary Walkway Fencing



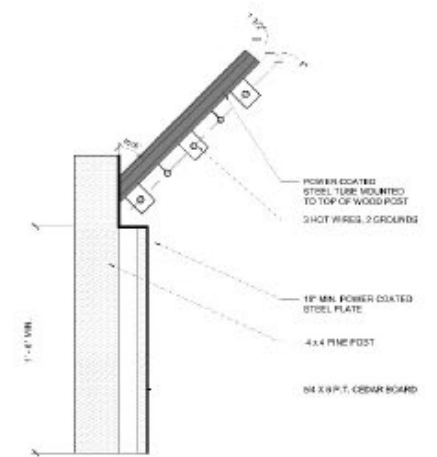
Exhibit fencing to match language currently installed at Bird Plateau Southern Exhibit Trail with added predator proofing.



### Predator Exclusion at Open Exhibit Yard Fencing



### Predator Exclusion at Solid Exhibit Yard Fencing



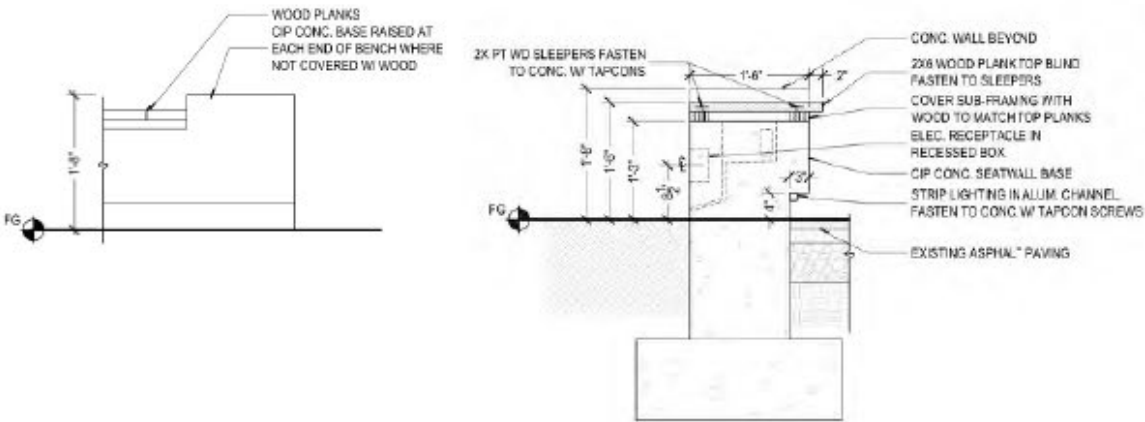
Predator proofing design components:

- 5 Strand Hot Wire
- 1 - 6" Anti Climb Panel
- 2' - 0" Dig Barrier
- 8' - 0" Vertical Cedar Plank Fence (Solid) or Metal Frame with Mesh Infill Panel between Concrete Columns (Open)

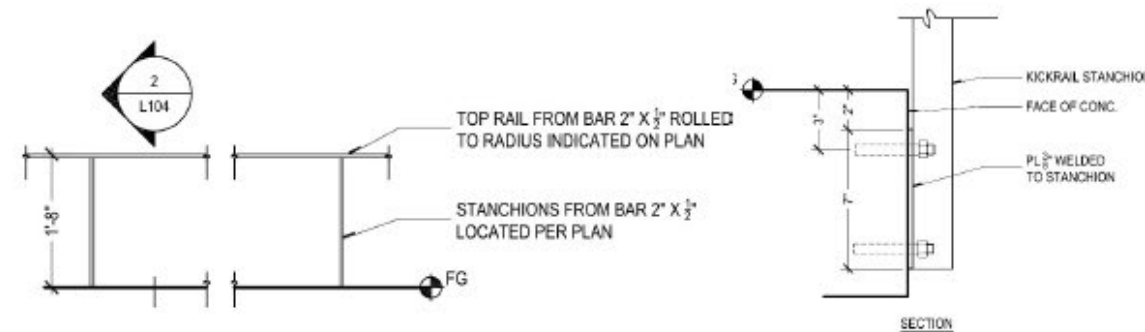
# Great Flight Aviary Walkway Materials



Dark grey linear pavers, stained concrete paving and bench, and kickrails to match language found in north plaza of Bird House



Elevation and section of bench



Elevation and section of weathering steel kickrails