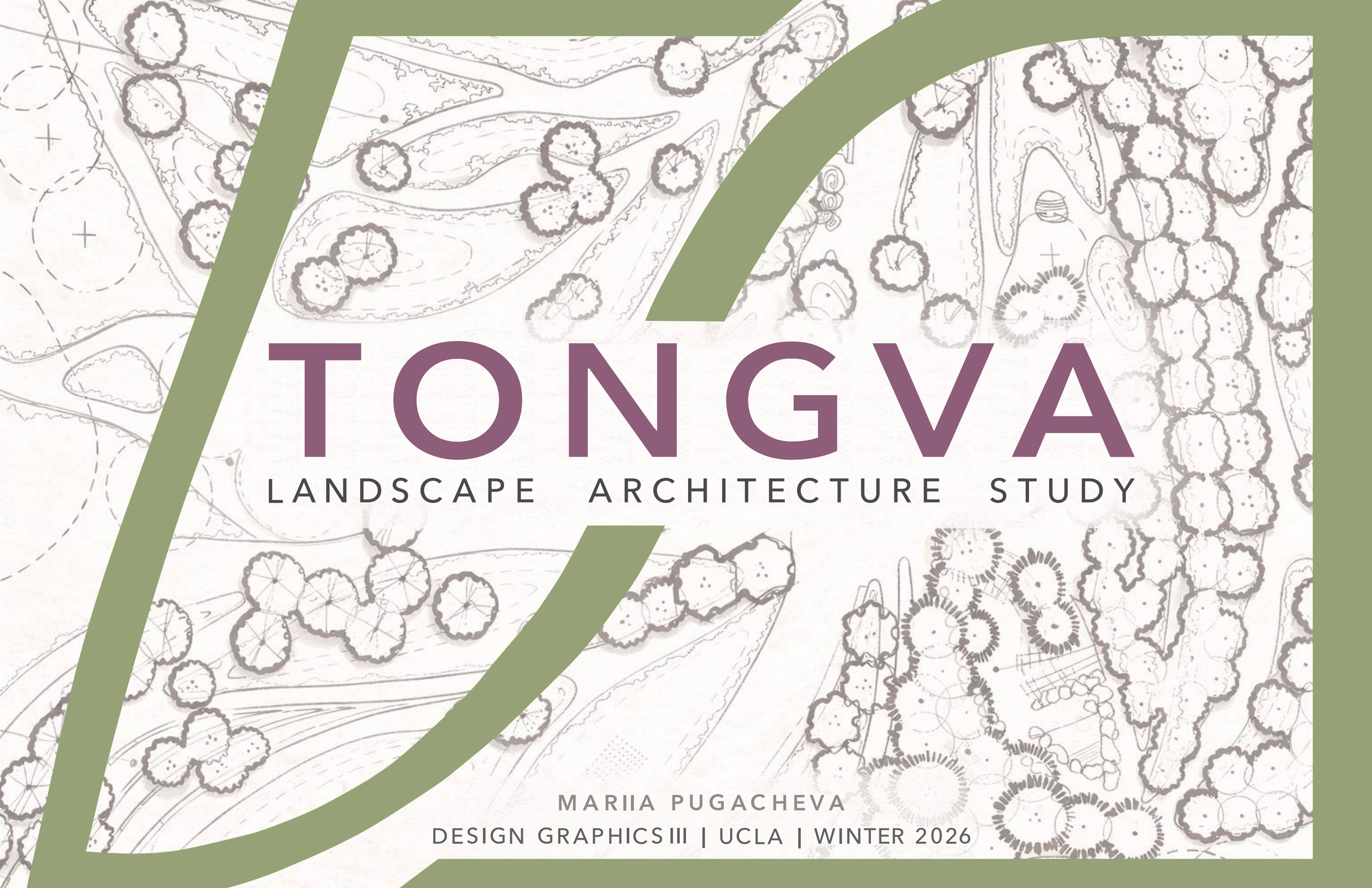




TONGVA

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE STUDY

MARIIA PUGACHEVA
DESIGN GRAPHICS III | UCLA | WINTER 2026

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“Landscape has the power to create spaces that engage the imagination and reconnect people with the processes of nature.” James Corner

HISTORY

The park name celebrates of the rich culture and traditions of the indigenous Tongva people who have lived in this region for thousands of years, and were deeply connected to the original arroyos, native landscape, springs, and the ‘breath of the ocean’ that are symbolically represented in this park.

The Tongva people are the Indigenous inhabitants of the Los Angeles Basin and the Southern California coastal region. They lived in this area for thousands of years before the arrival of European settlers. Tongva communities were located near rivers, coastlines, and natural resources that supported fishing, hunting, and gathering. Their territory included present-day Los Angeles, Santa Monica, the San Gabriel Valley, and the Channel Islands.

The Tongva had a complex society with strong trade networks, spiritual traditions, and deep knowledge of the local environment. Native plants were an essential part of their culture and were used for food, medicine, tools, and construction materials.

Spanish colonization in the late 18th century dramatically disrupted Tongva communities through the mission system. Many Tongva people were forced into missions such as Mission San Gabriel, which led to cultural loss and a decline in population. Despite these challenges, Tongva descendants continue to preserve and revitalize their cultural traditions today. Tongva Park in Santa Monica is named in honor of the Tongva people and recognizes their long historical connection to this land.



NATURAL HISTORY

The natural landscape of the Santa Monica area developed over thousands of years through geological, climatic, and ecological processes. The region is part of the Southern California coastal ecosystem, which includes ocean cliffs, sandy beaches, coastal plains, and nearby mountain ranges. Historically, the landscape was dominated by native plant communities such as coastal sage scrub, grasslands, and oak woodlands.

These ecosystems supported a wide variety of wildlife, including birds, small mammals, reptiles, and pollinators. The Mediterranean climate of Southern California, characterized by dry summers and mild, wet winters, strongly shaped the vegetation and soil conditions. Native plants in the region evolved to survive drought, strong sunlight, and coastal winds. Natural water systems, including seasonal streams and wetlands, once played an important role in supporting local ecosystems. Over time, urban development significantly changed the natural environment of the Los Angeles Basin and Santa Monica area.

Many native habitats were replaced by buildings, roads, and infrastructure. Today, parks such as Tongva Park help restore elements of the natural landscape by incorporating native plants, sustainable design, and ecological principles into urban spaces.



Toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*)



California Buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*)



White Sage (*Salvia apiana*)



Deer Grass (*Muhlenbergia rigens*)



California Sagebrush (*Artemisia californica*)



Eastern fox squirrels



California Gnatcatcher

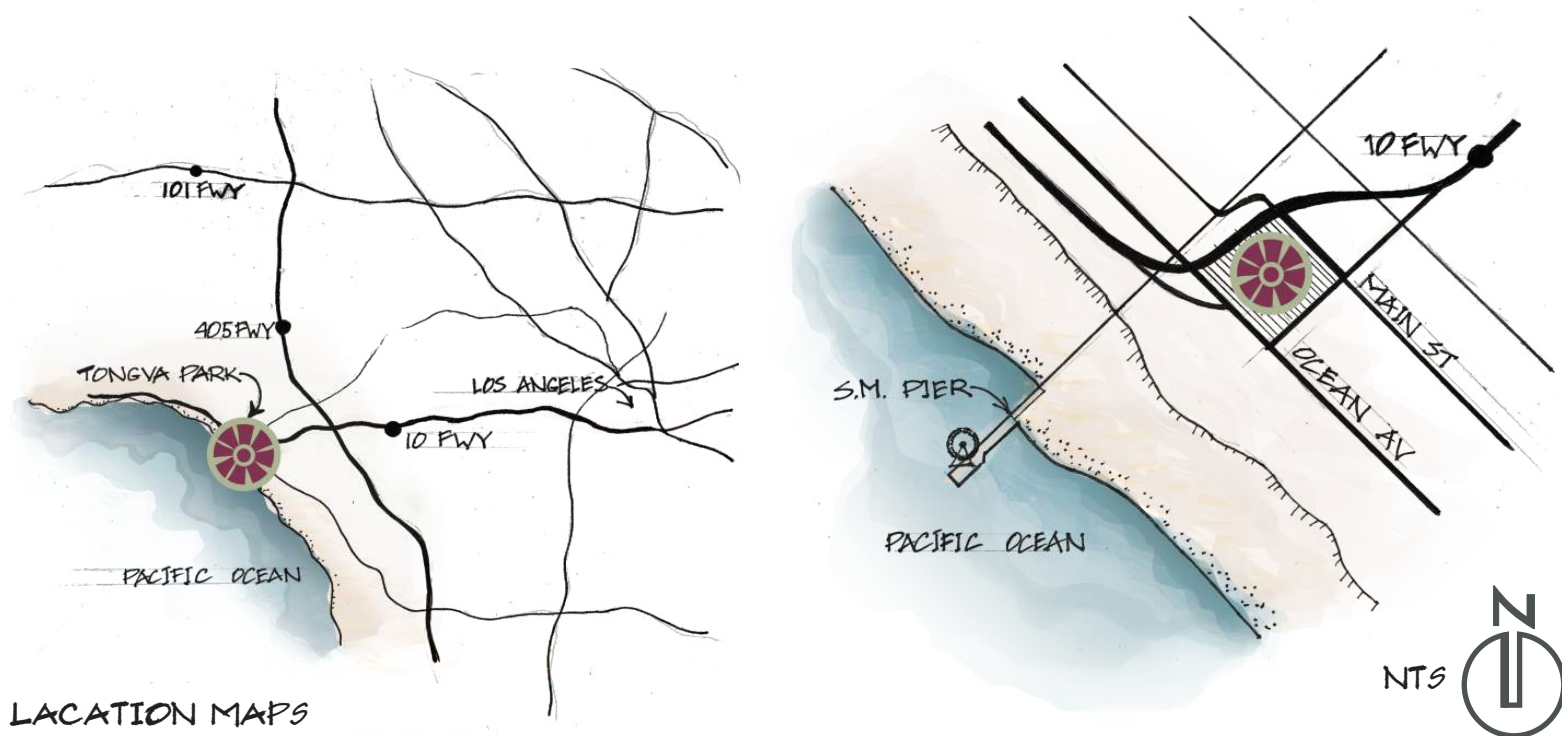


Anna's hummingbirds



Monarch butterfly

LOCATION



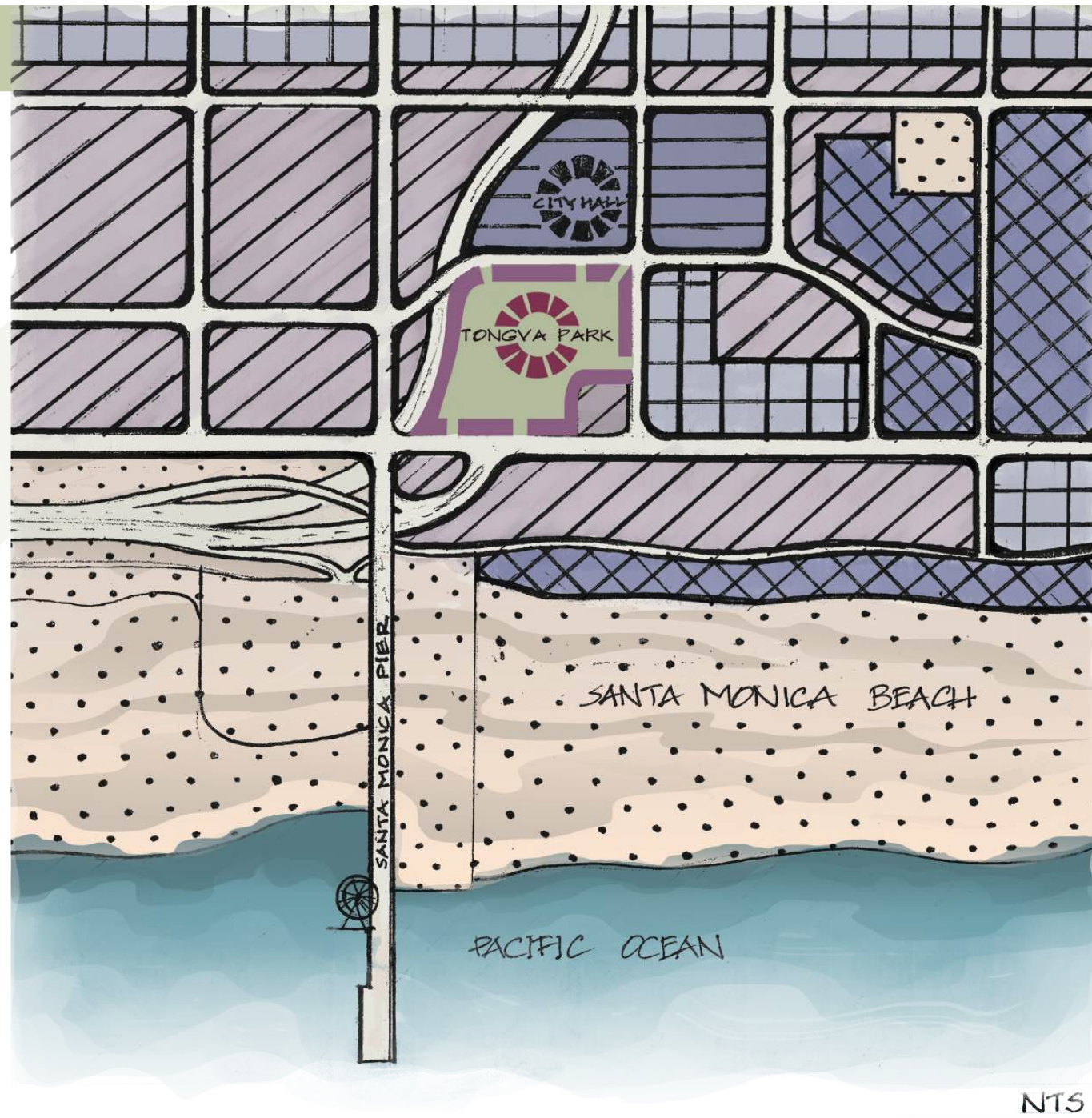
LACATION MAPS

Tongva Park is located in the city of Santa Monica, California, within the Santa Monica Civic Center area, just east of the Pacific Ocean. The park sits between Ocean Avenue and Main Street, and it is positioned south of Colorado Avenue and north of Olympic Drive. This location places the park within walking distance of the Santa Monica Pier, the beach, and the downtown area, making it an important public space for both residents and visitors. The site is part of a larger civic and cultural district that includes public buildings, parking structures, and open spaces. Before the park was built, the area was mostly used as a parking lot and lacked green space and pedestrian connections. The creation of Tongva Park helped transform the Civic Center into a more accessible and environmentally friendly urban environment. Because of its central location, Tongva Park serves as an important link between the city, the beach, and the surrounding community.

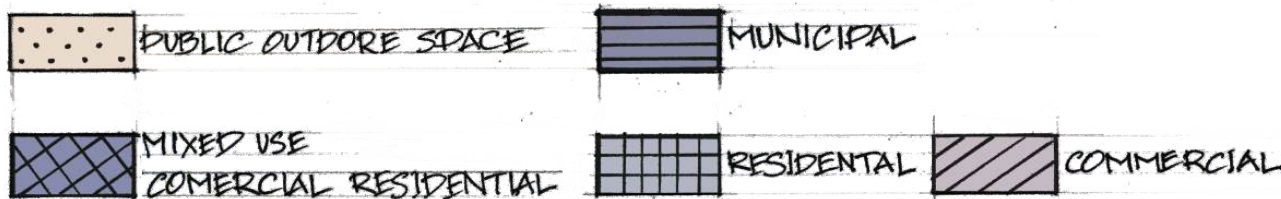


CONTEXT

Tongva Park is located in the Santa Monica Civic Center and is surrounded by Ocean Avenue to the west, Main Street to the east, Colorado Avenue to the north, and Olympic Drive to the south. Nearby are important landmarks including the Santa Monica Pier, the beach, civic buildings, parking structures, and residential and commercial areas. The park connects these urban elements with the natural coastline by creating pedestrian-friendly paths, green spaces, and open views toward the Pacific Ocean.



CONTEXT DIAGRAM

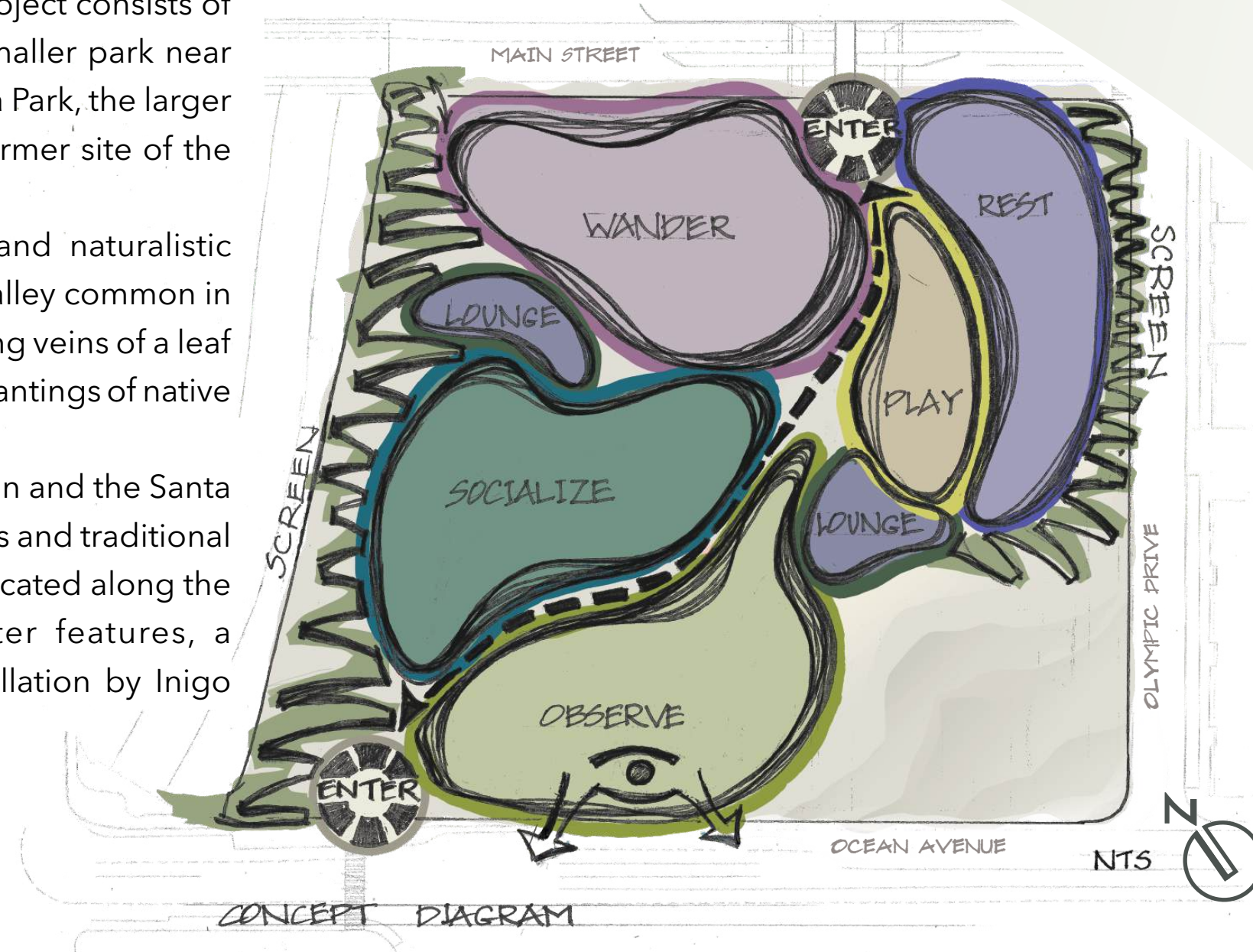


CONCEPT

Tongva Park was designed by landscape architect James Corner, best known for his work on the High Line in New York. The park covers about seven acres and is located just west of Santa Monica City Hall, only two blocks from the Pacific Ocean. The project consists of two connected public spaces: Ken Genser Square, a smaller park near City Hall named after the city's former mayor, and Tongva Park, the larger six-acre landscape located across Main Street on the former site of the RAND Corporation headquarters.

The design of Tongva Park emphasizes an organic and naturalistic landscape inspired by the idea of the *arroyo*, a natural valley common in Southern California. The site plan resembles the branching veins of a leaf and features winding pathways, gentle hills, and dense plantings of native and drought-tolerant vegetation.

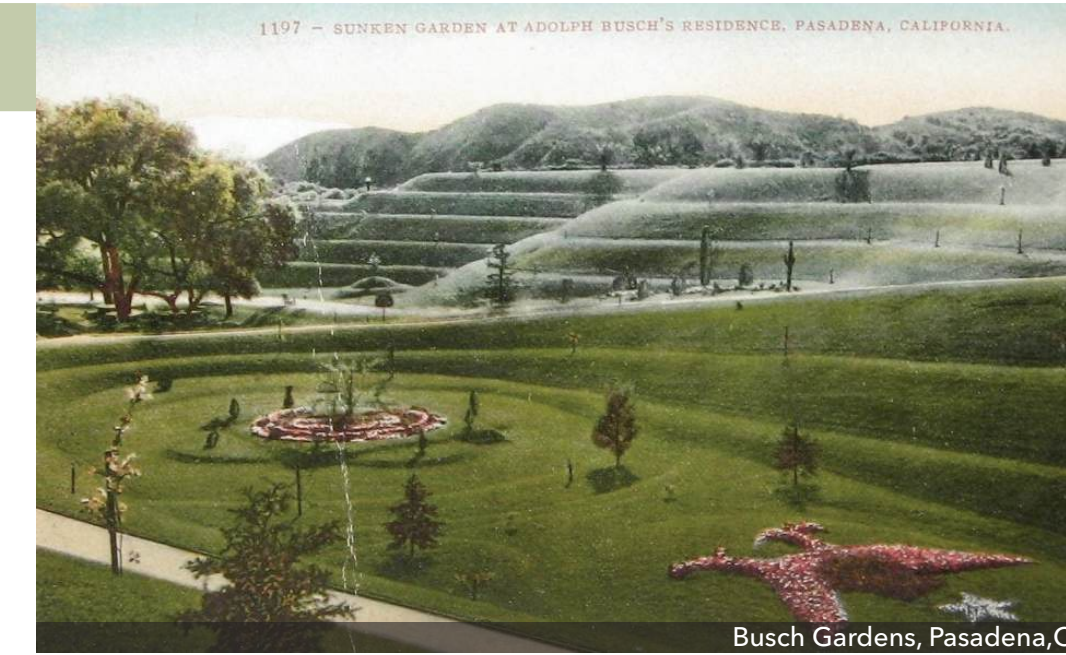
Viewing platforms provide perspectives toward the ocean and the Santa Monica Pier, while their oval forms reference ocean waves and traditional woven baskets. Many of the park's main attractions are located along the central curving pathway, including fountains, water features, a playground, a large event lawn, and a public art installation by Inigo Manglano-Ovalle.



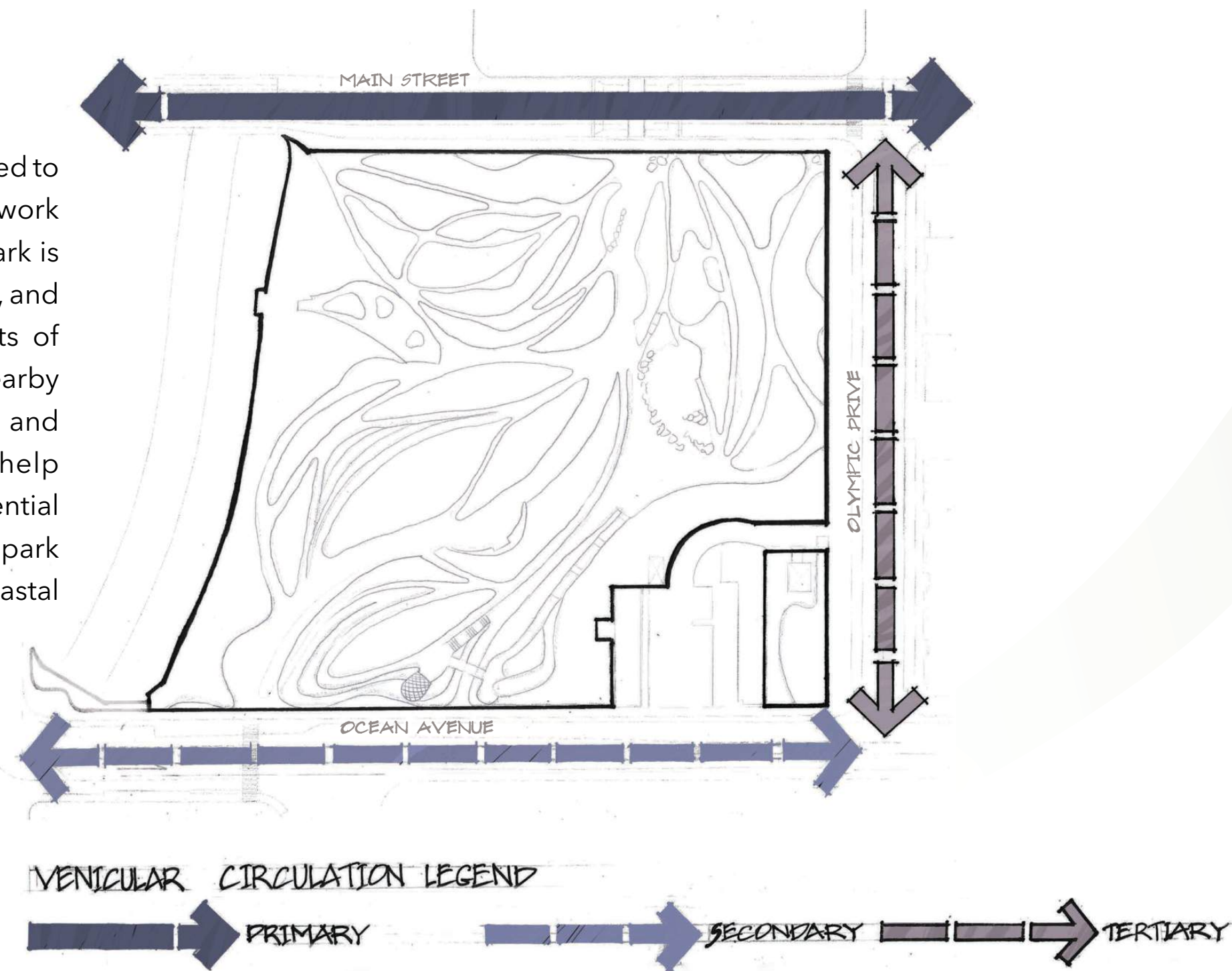
HISTORICAL PRECEDENT

Busch Gardens in Pasadena, created in 1906 by Adolphus Busch, is an important historical landscape precedent in Southern California. The garden was famous for its terraced landscapes, winding pathways, bridges, and water features built along the natural slopes of the Arroyo Seco. Visitors experienced the garden through a sequence of scenic viewpoints and changing spatial environments. These design ideas influenced later landscape architecture projects that emphasize movement, topography, and exploration. Similar principles can be seen in Tongva Park, where curving paths, hills, and layered planting create a dynamic and immersive landscape experience.

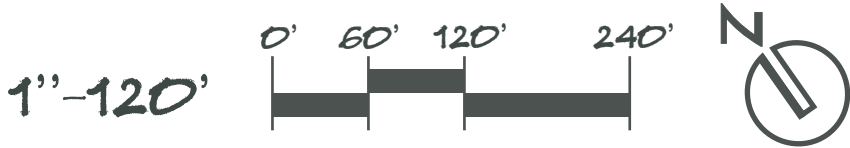
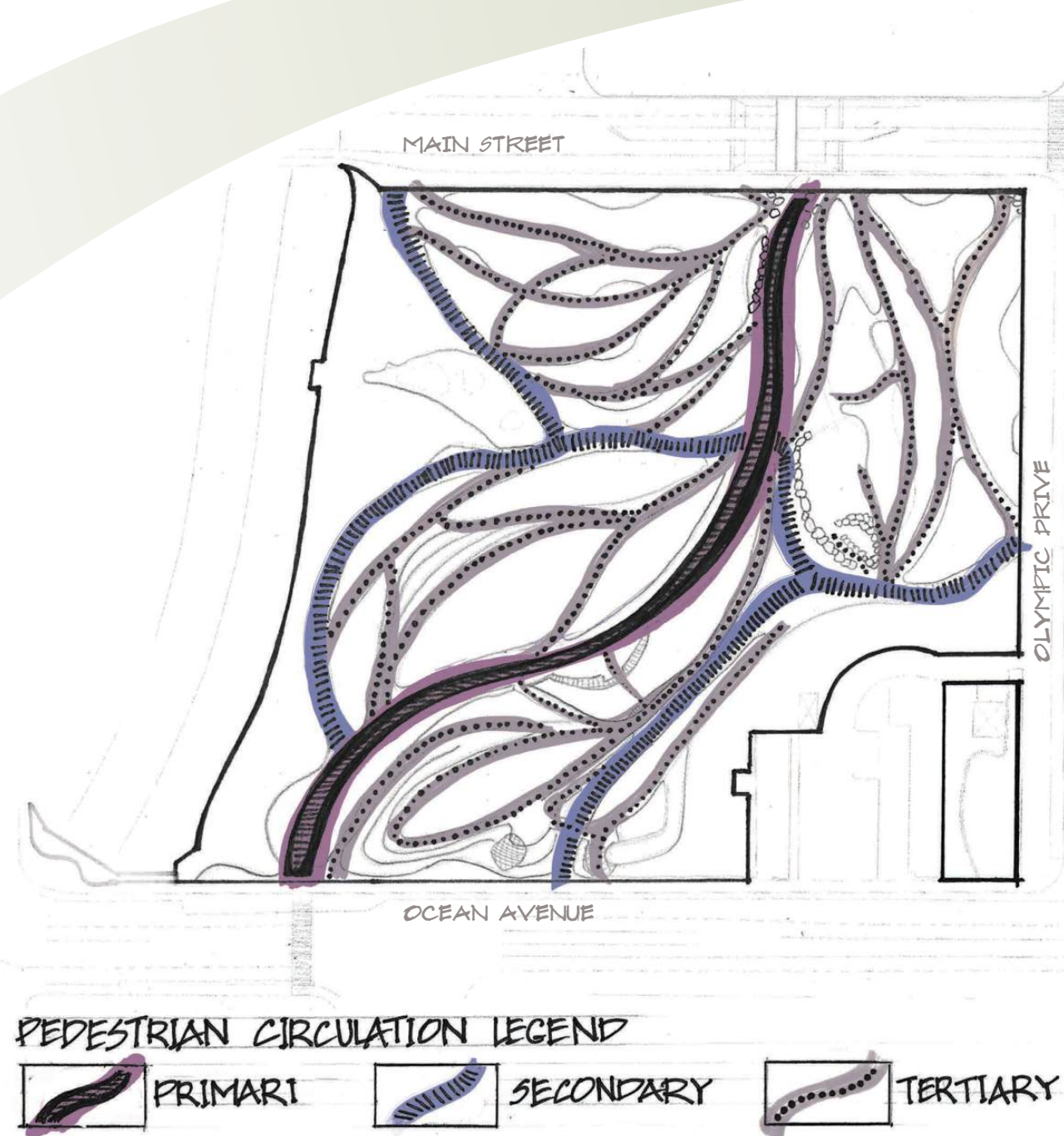
An **Arroyo** is a Spanish term for a dry creek or water-carved gully/wash, common in arid regions of the Southwestern United States, which remains dry most of the year but fills with water during heavy rain or flash floods. It acts as a natural drainage channel for runoff.



Vehicular circulation around Tongva Park is connected to the surrounding urban environment through a network of streets, sidewalks, and pedestrian routes. The park is bordered by Ocean Avenue, Main Street, Colorado Avenue, and Olympic Drive, which provide access from different parts of Santa Monica. Pedestrians can easily reach the park from nearby destinations such as the Santa Monica Pier, the beach, and downtown Santa Monica. Crosswalks and sidewalks help connect the park with surrounding civic buildings, residential areas, and public spaces. This circulation network allows the park to function as an important link between the city and the coastal landscape.

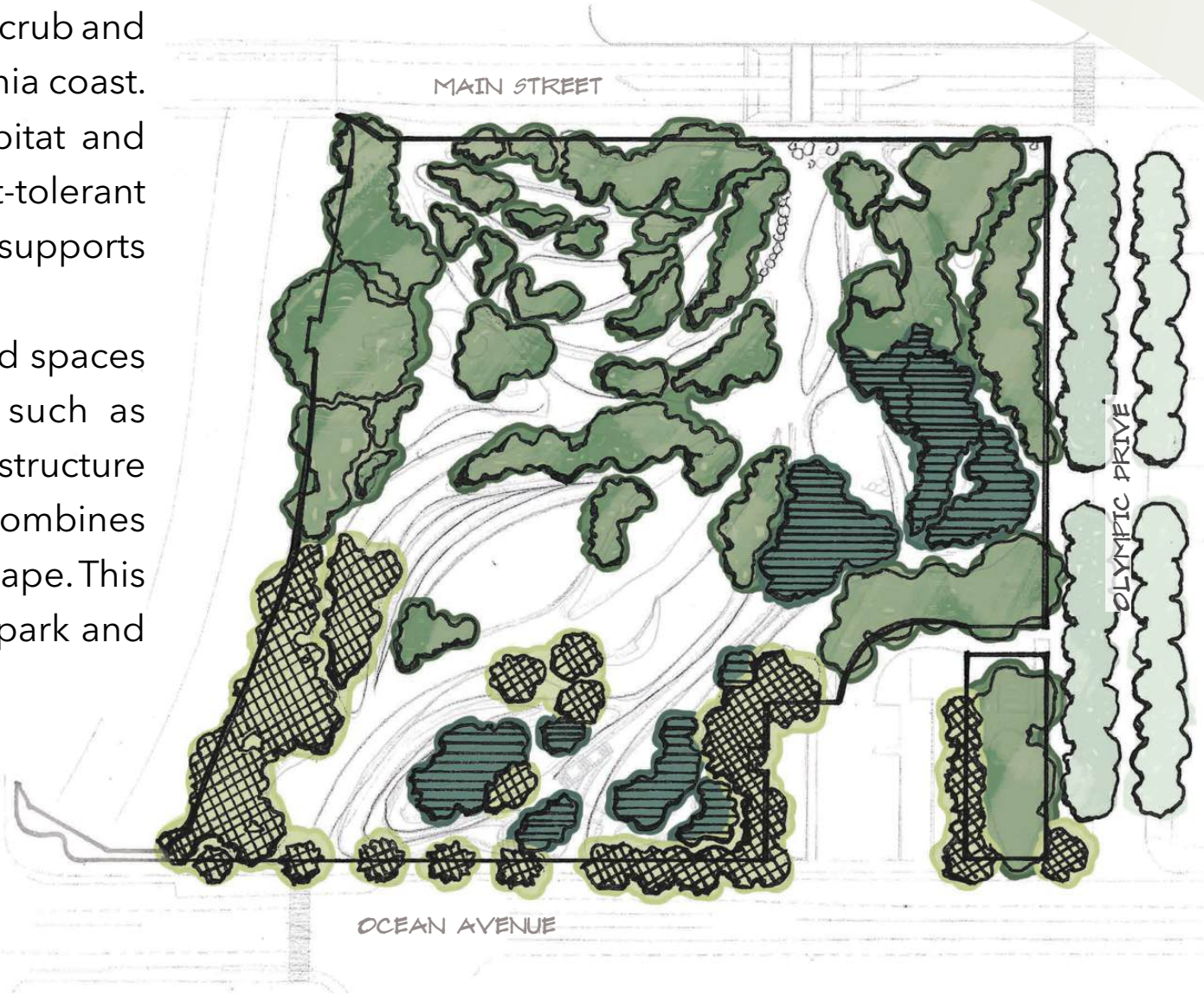


Pedestrian circulation in Tongva Park is organized through a network of curved pathways that guide visitors through the landscape. These paths follow the park's hills and valleys, allowing people to move naturally between different spaces. The circulation system connects important areas such as gardens, lawns, playgrounds, viewing platforms, and seating areas. Multiple routes encourage exploration and create different walking experiences throughout the park. This organic circulation pattern contrasts with the rigid street grid of the surrounding city and enhances the park's natural character.



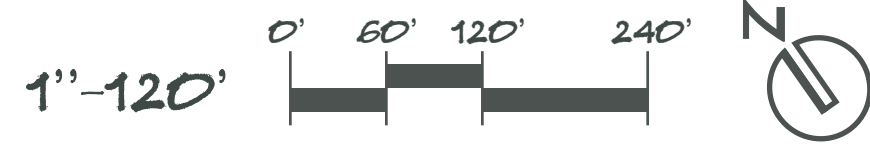
PLANT MATERIALS

The planting design of Tongva Park includes a diverse selection of native and drought-tolerant plants suited to the Southern California climate. These plants reflect the natural ecosystems of the coastal region and help create a sustainable urban landscape. Many species are characteristic of coastal sage scrub and Mediterranean-type environments found along the California coast. Native shrubs, grasses, and flowering plants provide habitat and food for birds, insects, and pollinators. The use of drought-tolerant vegetation also helps reduce water consumption and supports sustainable landscape management. Trees play an important role in the park by creating shaded spaces and improving the microclimate for visitors. Species such as sycamore, olive, pine, ficus, and strawberry trees provide structure and visual interest throughout the park. Layered planting combines trees, shrubs, and grasses to create a rich and diverse landscape. This planting strategy helps define different spaces within the park and enhances the overall ecological character of the site.



TREE CANOPY LEGEND

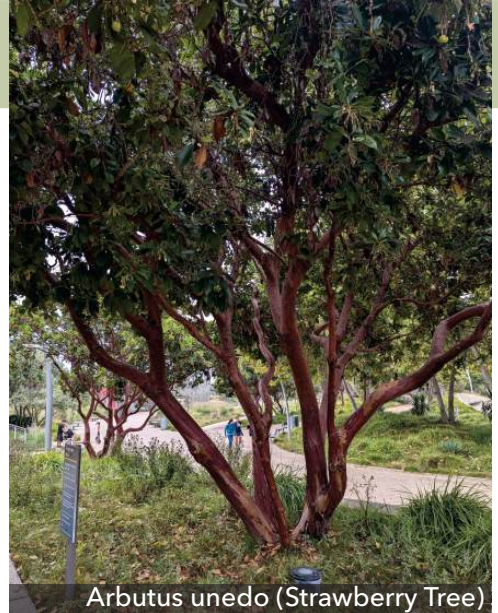
- PALM TREES
- PINE TREES
- ALL OTHER TREES



Pinus pinea (Italian Stone Pine)



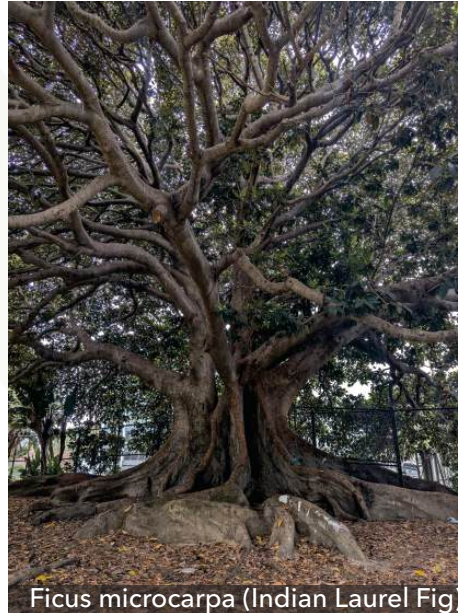
Platanus racemosa (California Sycamore)



Arbutus unedo (Strawberry Tree)



Palms (California Fan Palm, Mexican Fan Palm, Mexican Blue Palm)



Ficus microcarpa (Indian Laurel Fig)



Olea europaea (Olive Tree)



Aloe arborescens (Tree Aloe)



Bougainvillea Spectabilis (Beautiful Bougainvillea)



Juniperus chinensis (Hollywood Juniper)



Ficus pumila (Creeping Fig)



Amaryllis belladonna (Amaryllis)



Agave attenuata (Foxtail Agave)



Heptapleurum arboricola (Dwarf Umbrella Tree)



Muhlenbergia rigens (Deer Grass)

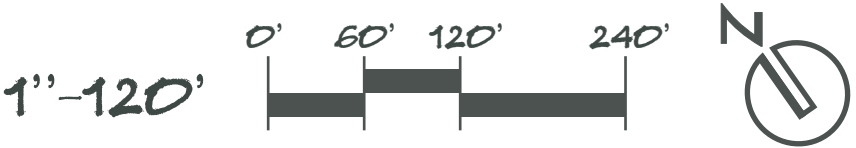
WATER FEATURES



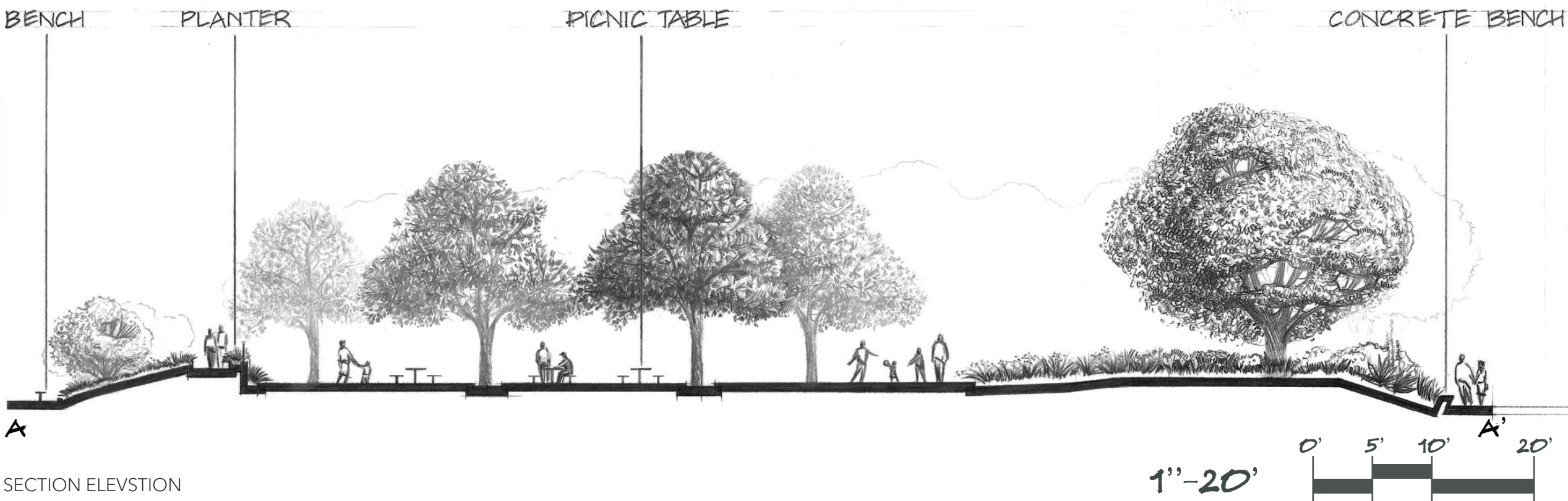
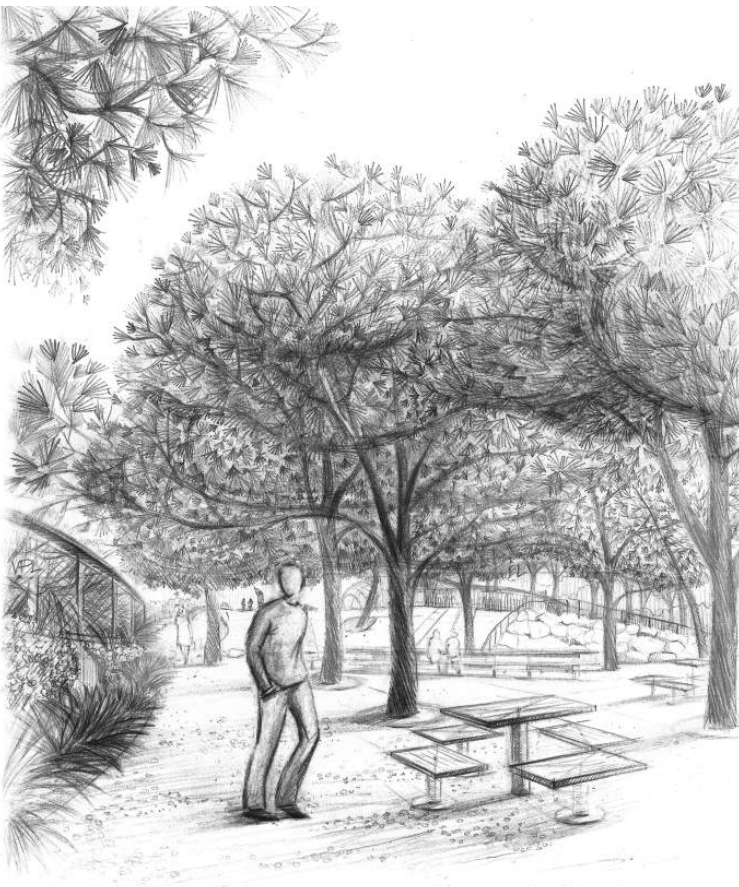
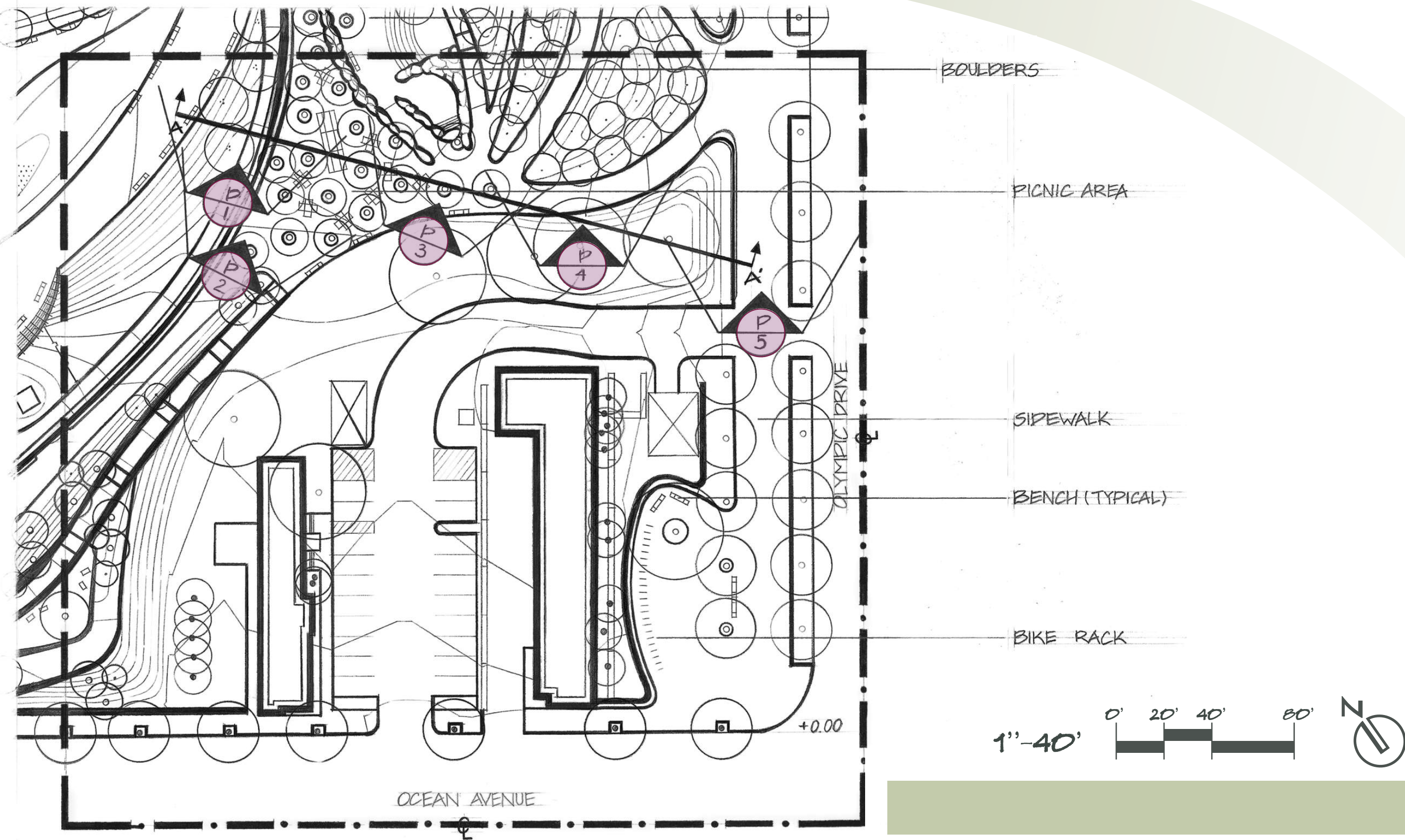
WATER FEATURES



Water features are an important element of the landscape design in Tongva Park. Several fountains and interactive water installations provide visual interest and create a refreshing environment for visitors. These water elements are especially popular with children and families, encouraging play and social interaction. The fountains are located along the main pathways and gathering areas, helping to activate different parts of the park. In addition to recreation, the water features contribute to the sensory experience of the park through sound, movement, and cooling effects.



TOPOGRAPHY

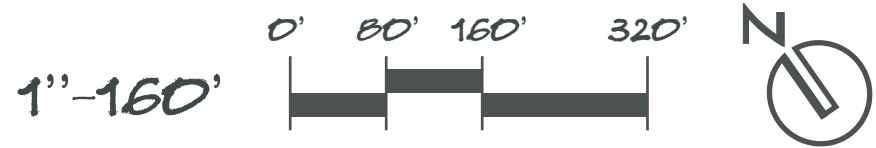




HAND RENDERED, BLACK & WHITE



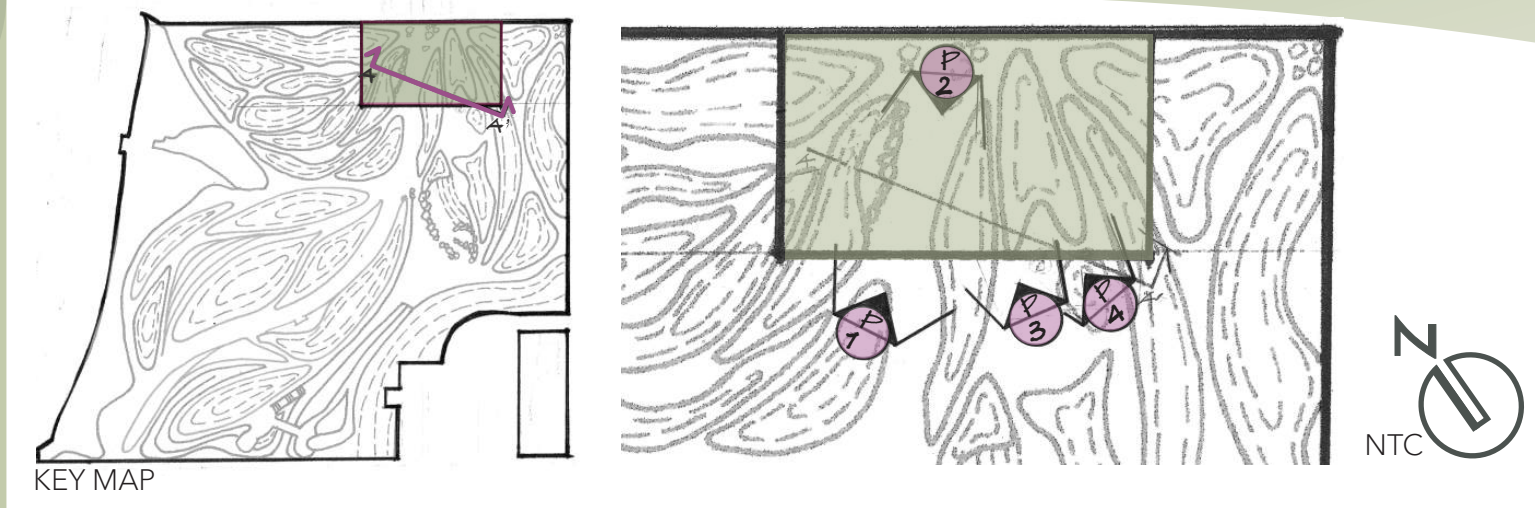
HAND RENDERED, COLOR



DIGITALLY RENDERED, COLOR



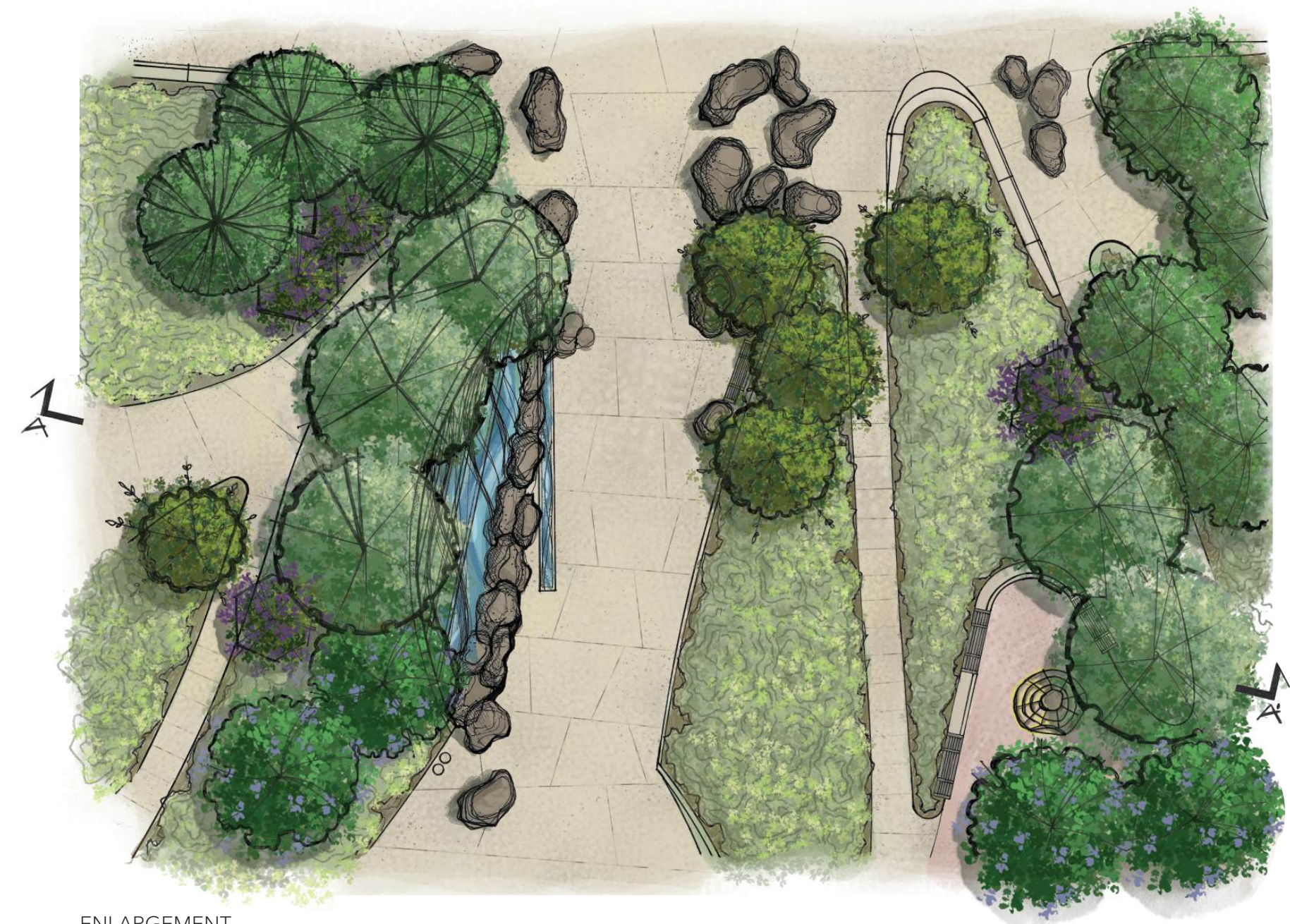
SECTION ELEVATION



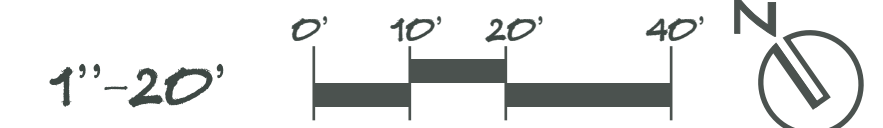
SECTION ELEVATION



ENLARGEMENT



ENLARGEMENT





PERSPECTIVE VIEW P1



PERSPECTIVE VIEW P2



PERSPECTIVE VIEW P3



PERSPECTIVE VIEW P4



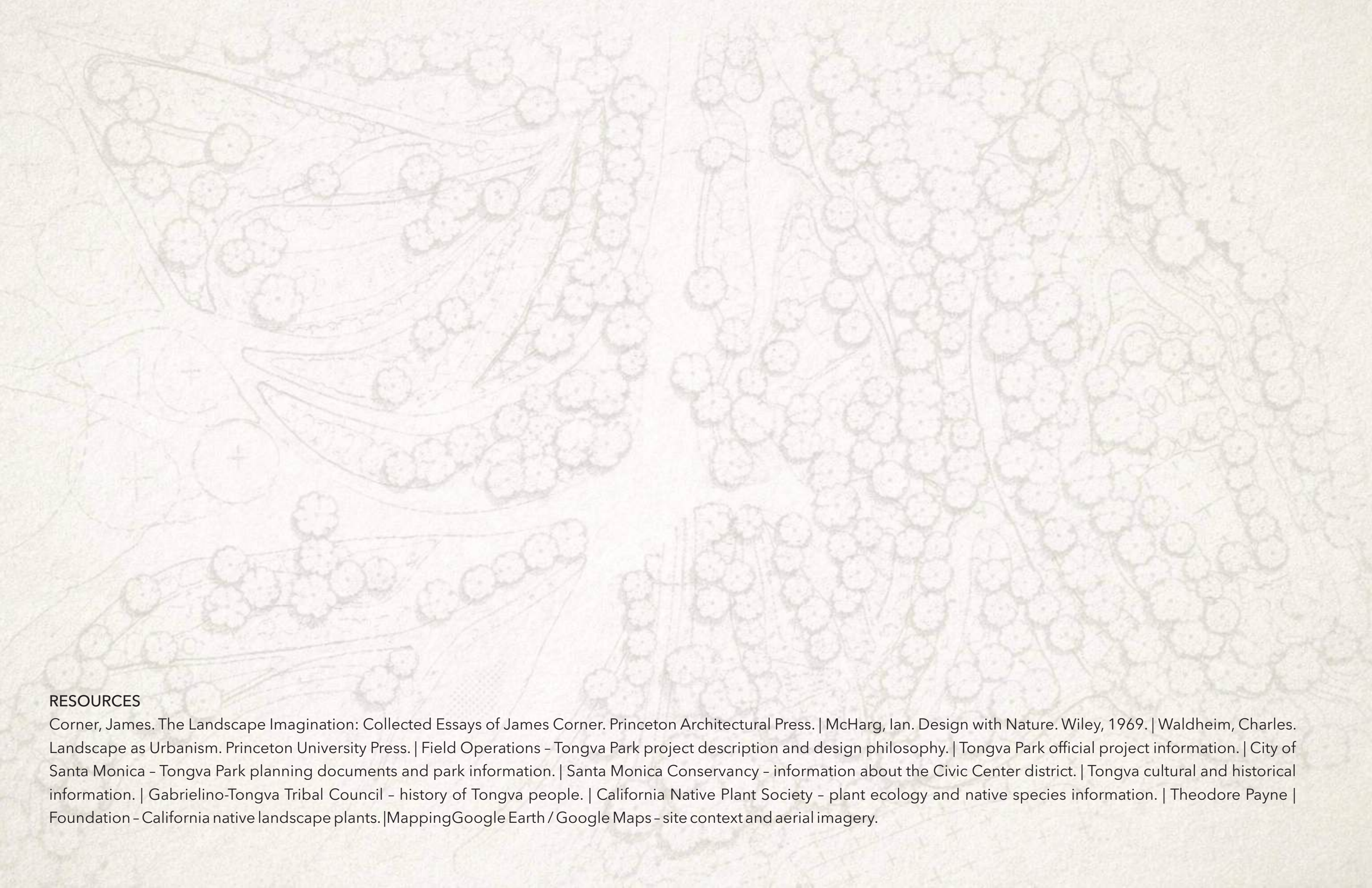
As my study of Tongva Park comes to a close, I can see how much this project expanded my understanding of landscape architecture and strengthened my confidence as a designer.

During the process, I researched the site's history, the heritage of the Tongva people, and the design strategies that shape the park today. I analyzed circulation, planting, topography, and spatial organization and translated these ideas into plans, perspectives, and graphic studies. An important part of my work was developing hand-drawn graphics, where I practiced using different line weights to create hierarchy, depth, and clarity in my drawings, while also improving my skills in graphic design software.

I am very grateful to my instructors, Laura Razo, David Squires, Rebecca Schwaner, for their guidance and support. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to Nicole Volpe for the course History of the Designed Landscape, which helped open my understanding of landscape features from a historical perspective and deepened my appreciation of how landscapes evolve through time.

And also thank my classmates for their collaboration and shared ideas throughout this learning experience.





RESOURCES

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