



Heritage Preservation Commission

Wednesday, October 8, 2025

6:00 PM

Elk River City Hall

Regular Meeting Agenda

Mill Pond Conference Room

1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER
2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE
3. CONSIDER AGENDA
4. CONSIDER MINUTES
 - 4.1 DRAFT Minutes - September 11, 2025
5. GENERAL BUSINESS

Items in which the information is presented by city staff or consultants, then deliberation and action occur. General Business items are not opportunities to receive or provide public input. However, the presiding officer may, at its sole discretion, solicit public feedback.

 - 5.1 Elk River Water Tower Historic Site
6. MOTION TO ADJOURN



**Meeting of the Heritage Preservation
Commission
Held at the Elk River City Hall
Thursday, September 11, 2025**

Members Present: Commissioner Linda Campbell, Commissioner Gavin Tuckey, Commissioner Zachary Griffiths, Commissioner Lance Lindberg, Councilmember J. Brian Calva

Members Absent: Commissioner Jayne Dietz (attending PreserveMN Conference)

Council Liaison: Councilmember J. Brian Calva

Staff Present: Community Development Director Zack Carlton

Others Present: Sandy Muelners-Comstock and Olivia Halsne, Mend Collaborative

1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER
Pursuant to due call and notice thereof, the meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m.
2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE
The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.
3. CONSIDER AGENDA
Moved by Commissioner Griffiths and seconded by Commissioner Campbell to approve the agenda. Motion carried 5-0.
4. CONSIDER MINUTES
Moved by Commissioner Campbell and seconded by Commissioner Tuckey to approve the following consent items as outlined in their respective staff reports. Motion carried 5-0.
 - 4.1 July 17, 2025, Meeting Minutes
5. GENERAL BUSINESS
 - 5.1 Elk River Water Tower Historic Site
Sandy Meulners-Comstock, Mend Collective, provided an overview of the two versions of the Elk River Water Tower Historic Site plan - Journey and Community. Information for the concepts was gathered from residents during two Farmer's Markets events, hosting a booth at Elk RiverFest, and online community surveys.

Ms. Meulners-Comstock reviewed the Vision Statement and Goals.

Vision Statement

“The water tower historic site is a welcoming community space that celebrates the iconic water tower, local heritage, and everyday gathering. Designed for all ages, it supports connection, play, events, and ecological systems while reflecting the spirit of the community.”

Goals

- The history of Elk River is celebrated through storytelling, art, and interpretive design.
- The site is a symbolic place for the community of Elk River.
- The site is welcoming, inclusive, and accessible for all ages and abilities to experience and enjoy.
- The site is a key stop along a future Elk River historic walk that connects various historic sites throughout the city.

Community feedback revealed that people want to see a water feature, swinging benches, live programs and events, interpretive signage and panels, public art and sculpture, a wide variety of plants, and pathways.

Councilmember Calva stated he thought the stairs gave a sense of importance. The Commission discussed issues of accessibility such as making sure the paths were usable for walkers or strollers and that ramps were available.

Ms. Muelners-Comstock reviewed the plan for including a variety of plants in warm colors to play with the idea of fire and smoke. One of the plans showed a restored prairie planting while the other was more curated.

Olivia Halsne, Mend Collaborative, described the two plans in detail.

Ms. Muelners-Comstock stated the public seemed more receptive to the Journeys concept, citing the fact that people could find their own space within it. However, people liked the boardwalk and sloped lawn in the Community concept. Ms. Meulners-Comstock stated that there was a lot of mixing and matching of the two concepts.

Mr. Carlton stated that feedback mentioned the existing water feature at Woodland Trails park and discussed a pumping feature at the water tower site instead of continuously running water. Resident feedback mentioned concerns about the budget for the project. Once residents heard the goal of the project was to tell the history of Elk River, rather than be a new park, they were more receptive to the idea.

During the latest farmers market event, former Elk River Mayor Jim Tralle asked if there could be a plaque talking about the six mayors of Elk River. Ms. Meulners-Comstock also mentioned she had received feedback about including veteran memorials in the historic site.

Commissioner Campbell stated that, if a historic walk was going to be developed, different historic sites could address different aspects such as a government building including the history of mayors or a veterans memorial located on the corner of Main St and Highway 10. She added that the signage at the

water tower site could include QR codes that gave more information.

Commissioner Lindberg mentioned that people are reluctant to walk across Highway 10. Mr. Carlton stated that there is a possibility of working with MnDOT for a delay in the lights to allow safer pedestrian crossing across Highway 10. The Commission discussed options to improve crossing Highway 10 as a pedestrian.

Councilmember Calva questioned who would decide what history to put on the signage at the site. Mr. Carlton stated the Commission would be part of the process.

Commissioner Campbell added that history of the fire could be incorporated, perhaps including modern fire prevention tips using a QR code. She also added that the history of the water tower should be included. She asked what time frame should be included and if space should be left for future additions.

Ms. Meulners-Comstock reviewed that, once a plan was determined, Mend Collaborative could look at cost estimates and consider funding sources.

Councilmember Calva stated he liked the Journey concept. He was attracted to the sloped lawn in the Community concept but wondered if people would actually go there to lie in the grass. He commented on the green space in the downtown parking lot and that few people use the picnic tables located there. Commissioner Lindberg agreed.

Commissioner Campbell discussed real grass versus artificial turf. She felt the Community concept appeared more restrictive and the stairs seemed unnecessary. There seemed to be more places to sit in the Journey concept plan.

Ms. Meulners-Comstock agreed that the Journey concept had more opportunity to scale if there was a gap or increase in funding. Commissioner Griffiths added that there was ongoing discussion about acquiring a nearby parcel on an adjacent lot and going with the Journey concept may be easier to connect.

Commissioner Griffiths stated he liked the Journey concept with incorporating ideas from the Community concept such as the boardwalk. He liked the official look of stairs, as Councilmember Calva had stated, but agreed that they presented issues with materials and accessibility. He asked if, instead of the water feature going through the map, it could go through the timeline stones along the arc.

Ms. Meulners-Comstock stated the Journey concept could be revised to explore the options of a boardwalk and channeling water to go toward the timeline area.

The Commissioners discussed what is currently located under the water tower. They also discussed locations for stairs and added that a platform could be a good place for a photo opportunity of the water tower.

Ms. Meulner-Comstock discussed planting design. The Commission agreed that multi-stemmed trees could be closer to Jackson Ave to provide some privacy. Trees species should not grow too tall to block views of the water tower but include ornamental trees. Commissioner Griffiths commented on trees to provide shade and add autumn interest. Mr. Carlton stated his favorite tree was the Autumn

Brilliance Serviceberry. Councilmember Calva added that evergreens should be part of the plan for winter interest.

Commissioner Campbell pointed out that the current plan included covers over the swinging benches.

Ms. Meulners-Comstock brought up the consideration of maintenance of the plantings. The Commissioner discussed having prairie plantings. Commissioner Campbell asked about a reasonable level of effort the city could provide to maintain appearance. Ms. Meulners-Comstock stated that limiting the varieties of plants would make it easier to identify weeds. Councilmember Calva asked if volunteers could be found to maintain the area.

Ms. Meulners-Comstock reviewed some ideas for funding including adopting a bench or swing or buying pavers with a name on them. Commissioner Calva stated he thought pavers were a great idea and could see people purchasing them for loved ones. Mr. Carlton stated that some of the larger items, such as benches or picnic tables, may be sponsored by local businesses. Ms. Meulners-Comstock added that the information panels could also be sponsored. In addition, grant opportunities may be present.

Commissioner Tuckey asked if the information panels would be similar to the one found near Rivers Edge Commons where the information can be switched out over time. Mr. Carlton stated the information panels would have a similar design theme and would allow for changeable content.

Commissioner Campbell recommended contacting local companies to donate building or landscaping materials and plants. She also wondered if any of the components would qualify for energy-wise grants such as solar lighting.

Ms. Meulners-Comstock reviewed that the Commission was in favor of the Journey theme, incorporating a boardwalk, exploring the inclusion of steps, thinking about water interacting with the timeline, more detailed discussion of tree and plant species, and discussing cost estimations and funding opportunities.

Commissioner Campbell asked if there would be future discussion of items such as art or a drinking fountain. They agreed that the water tower should not be part of the landscape.

Councilmember Calva asked if there could be a way to have the water coming from two different directions and joining to become one to symbolize the Elk River and Mississippi river as well as the unity theme. Ms. Meulners-Comstock suggested pumps on both sides. Commissioner Griffiths commented, if the water is coming from the other side, there would be more reason for a boardwalk crossing it.

Ms. Meulners-Comstock brought up the issue of city Public Works staff maintaining a water feature. The water would need to be pumped in.

Commissioner Campbell asked about drinking fountains and garbage cans. Mr. Carlton stated a drinking fountain would not be an expectation in such a small park but garbage cans would be included.

Ms. Meulners-Comstock brought up the question of lighting and if solar power should be explored. Mr. Carlton felt that electrical lighting should be used, perhaps to include bollards to point the light downward or upward lighting into the trees.

Ms. Meulners-Comstock commented that the interpretive panels should not be of a height to allow someone to hide behind them or could include perforations or legs for increased safety. The old hitching posts could be used as bike racks.

Mr. Carlton asked the Commission about having a Special meeting in October to review a final draft of the plan with a proposed presentation to the City Council at their November 3, 2025 city council meeting.

Commissioner Tuckey asked if there was a list of sites to include in a historic walking tour. Mr. Carlton stated there is currently a walking tour listed on the city website. A more complete list could be a project for the Heritage Preservation Commission in 2026 in addition to fundraising and finding grant opportunities to finance the water tower historic site.

6. MOTION TO ADJOURN

Moved by Commissioner Campbell and seconded by Commissioner Tuckey to adjourn the meeting of City Council. Motion carried 5-0.

The meeting adjourned at 8:05 a.m.

Minutes prepared by Katie Porath.

Lance Lindberg, Chair

Tina Allard, City Clerk



Request for Action

To
Heritage Preservation Commission

Item Number
5.1

Meeting Date
October 8, 2025

Prepared By
Zack Carlton, Community Development Director

Item Description
Elk River Water Tower Historic Site

Reviewed by
Zack Carlton

Action Requested

Recommend approval of the conceptual plans for the Water Tower Historic Site.

Background/Discussion

The Elk River Water Tower Historic Site Committee has been working with Mend Collaborative to finalize the conceptual plan for the Jackson Street Water Tower site. The consultant has incorporated the feedback from the Commission's September 11, 2025, meeting and the public discussions from the farmers' market into one plan, along with cost estimates for the project.

Representatives from Mend Collaborative will present the plans and cost estimates during the meeting. The commission will have the opportunity to provide comments and recommend updates. Staff will be seeking a recommendation from the commission to move the project forward to the City Council for their review and acceptance of the plans.

After the Council's review, these plans will provide staff, the Heritage Preservation Commission, and the City Council with a clear direction to bring this project into reality. This will include fundraising, grant applications, project refinement, and the preparation of construction documents. Additionally, in early 2026, we will continue the conversations around the historic walking trail, and what stories should be told at each stop along the way.

Financial Impact

None

Mission/Policy/Goal

Reflect the culture of citizens and what is important.

Attachments

1. Water Tower Site Draft Concept Plan

The Elk River Vision

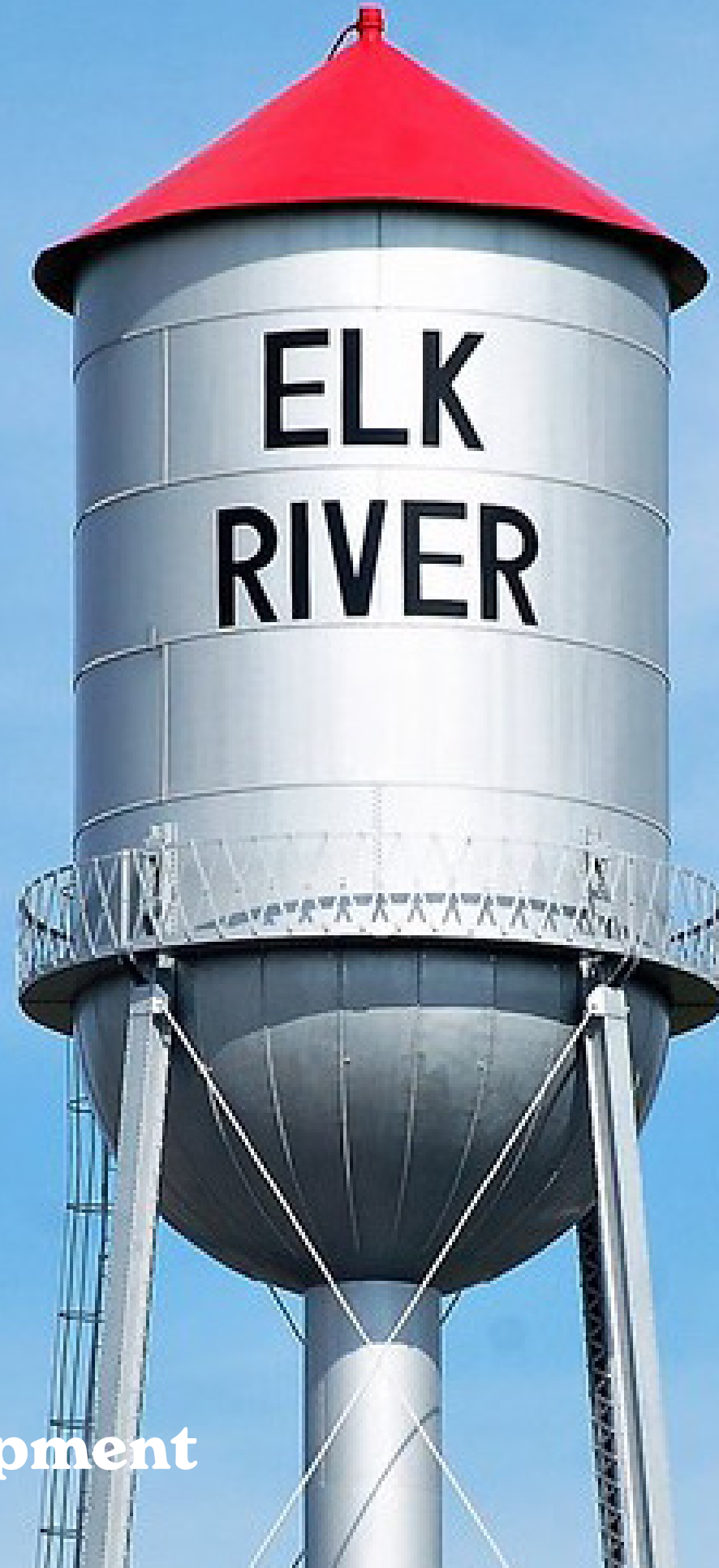
A welcoming community with revolutionary and spirited resourcefulness, exceptional service, and community engagement that encourages and inspires prosperity





Elk River Water Tower
Historic Site

CONCEPT PLAN



09/25/2025 Concept Development



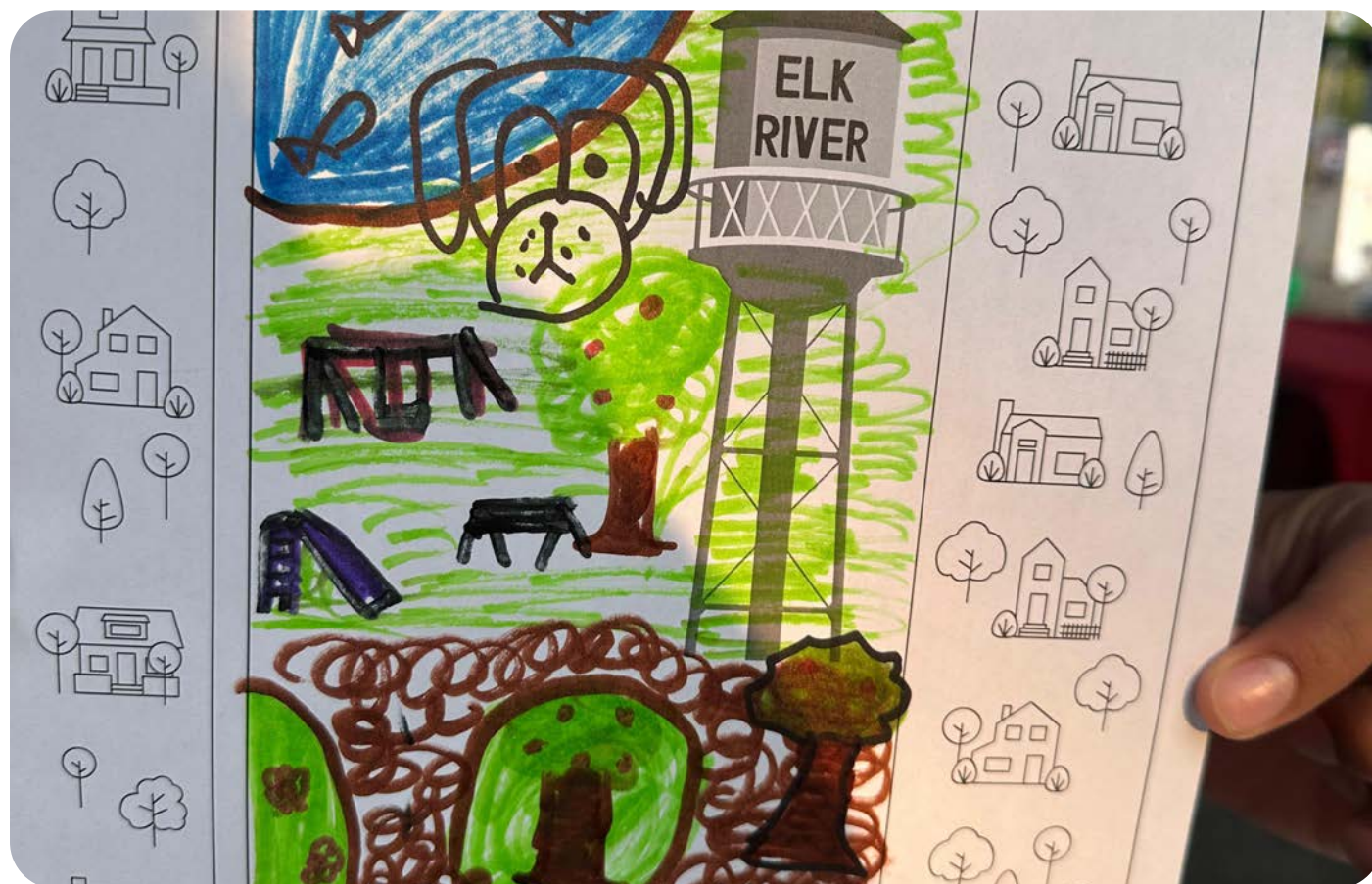
PROJECT GOALS

Vision Statement:

Water Tower Historic Site is a **welcoming community space** that celebrates the iconic water tower, local heritage, and everyday gathering. Designed for all ages, it supports connection, play, events, and ecological systems while **reflecting the spirit of the community**.

Concept Plan Goals:

- Elk River's history is celebrated through **storytelling, art, and interpretive design**.
- The site is a **symbolic place** for the community of Elk River.
- The site is **welcoming, inclusive, and accessible for all ages and abilities** to experience and enjoy.
- The site is a **key stop along a future Elk River Heritage Walk**, connecting various historic sites throughout the city.



COMMUNITY VOICE & INPUT

July Engagement Outcomes (pre-design)

What needs to be here?

- . Play
- . Pathways
- . History & Storytelling

How should history be told?

- . Live programs or events
- . Interpretive signage and panels
- . Public art & Sculpture

What do you want this place to be?

A place to celebrate and preserve Elk River's historic water tower as a symbol of community pride—sharing stories of Elk River's history, as well as educational information about the water tower.

Main programmatic elements:

- . Space for small gatherings and learning sessions
- . History interpretation and education
- . Plantings
- . Pathways
- . Public art



COMMUNITY VOICE & INPUT

September Engagement Outcomes (concept design)

Concept Idea 1: Journey

What is missing from this concept?
Use a sticky note to share your idea below:

- LIKE THIS CONCEPT - CAN HAVE MORE SPACE TO SPREAD OUT
- LIKE THIS CONCEPT
- LIKE THIS ONE BEST
- Play doesn't to water feature
- PLAQUE W/ MAP OF THE CITY
- FUND W/ LIQUID SHARE PROFITS
- LIKE THIS CONCEPT - MORE SEATING - MORE PATHS TO WALK
- LIKE MORE NATURAL WATER FEATURE
- ORNAMENTAL LANDSCAPING - THE MORE FLOWERS THE BETTER
- prefer a constant water feature - wants more space to enjoy the existing water feature
- like the water tower
- like no stairs
- incorporate new protection from water educational signage - least by the least like night
- ADD BOARDWALK WHERE FEELER WOULD BE
- Use by having a shadow to see the sundial
- Use by having a shadow to see the sundial
- Use by having a shadow to see the sundial

Concept Idea 2: Community

What is missing from this concept?
Use a sticky note to share your idea below:

- FEENCED IN PARKS
- BIKE RACKS USE OLD HITCHING POSTS
- USE BRIDGE OVER RAIN GARDEN
- Maybe fix movable tables to be concrete and a drinking fountain
- like people being involved in the process and people being happy
- SLATE UMBRELLAS
- SLATE FEATURES
- BUDGET MINDFUL
- ARTIFICIAL TREE
- RAIN GARDEN
- ADD VETERAN'S MEMORIAL
- Really like the sloped lawn
- LIKE THIS W/ OTHER WATER FEATURE
- PLAN IN WATER
- like people being involved in the process and people being happy
- SLATE UMBRELLAS
- SLATE FEATURES
- BUDGET MINDFUL
- USE BRIDGE OVER RAIN GARDEN
- Maybe fix movable tables to be concrete and a drinking fountain
- like people being involved in the process and people being happy
- SLATE UMBRELLAS
- SLATE FEATURES
- BUDGET MINDFUL
- USE BRIDGE OVER RAIN GARDEN
- Maybe fix movable tables to be concrete and a drinking fountain
- like people being involved in the process and people being happy
- SLATE UMBRELLAS
- SLATE FEATURES
- BUDGET MINDFUL

Key Feedback:

Community preference leans toward concept 1


Interest in seeing the boardwalk integrated into concept 1

The more flowers the better



Preference for interactive water feature

COMMUNITY VOICE & INPUT

September Engagement Outcomes (concept design)



Elk River Water Tower Historic Site

Which programs, materials and plantings do you like the most?
Place dots on your favorite elements.

Programs

- Linear timeline signage
- Sloped lawn
- Swing benches
- Elk River map
- Water feature
- Storytelling feature
- Tiered seating
- Water interpretation

Materials

- Red furnishings
- Wood Decking
- Mixed Textures
- Shou Sugi Ban

Plantings

- Striking reds
- Warm colors
- Movement
- Year-round interest

Multiple people preferred for swing benches

Key Feedback:

Programming

- Swinging benches are strongly preferred
- Interactive water feature is strongly preferred

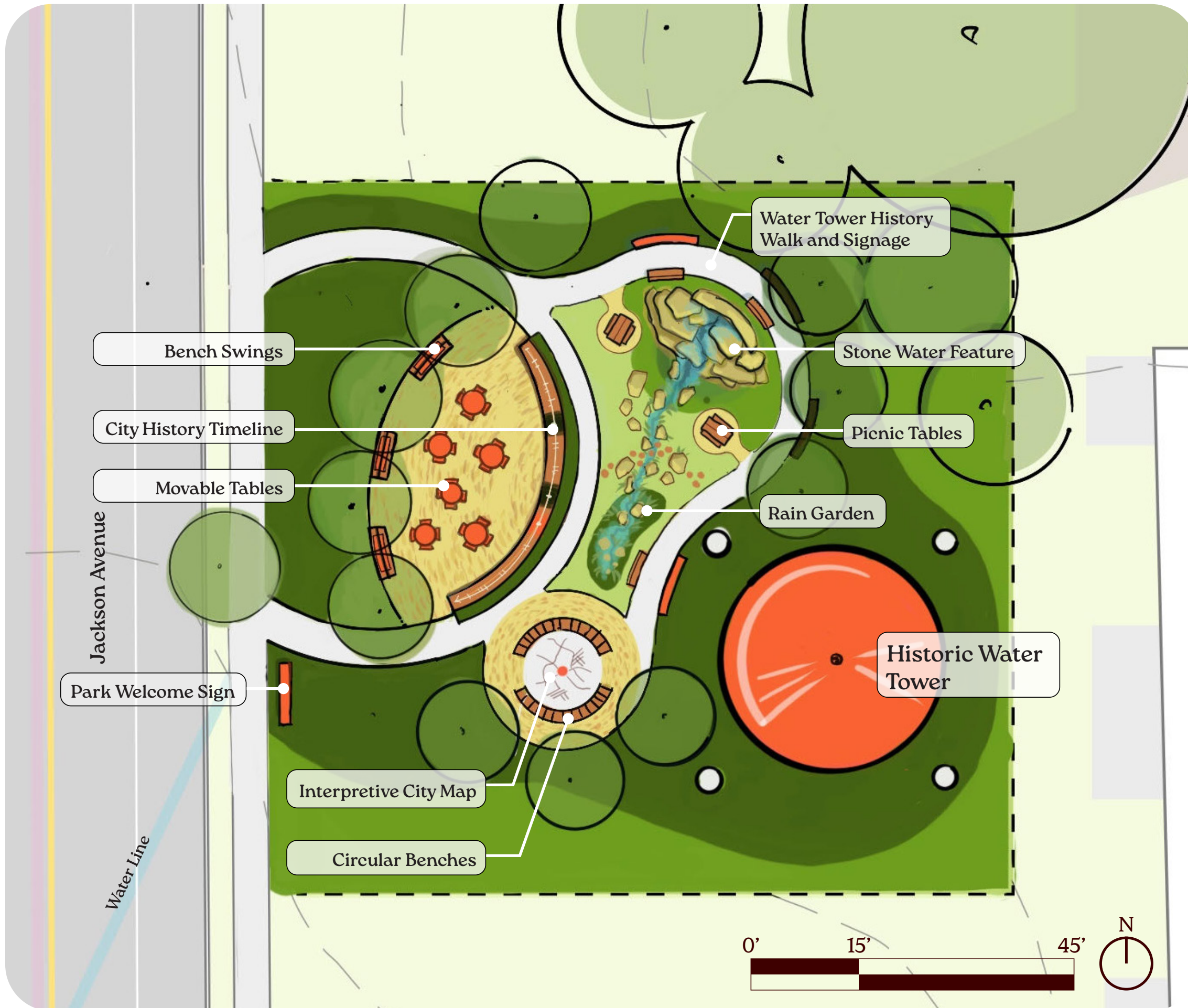
Materials

- Softer surfacing, like wood decking, is preferred
- Furnishings that reflect the character of the water tower is preferred

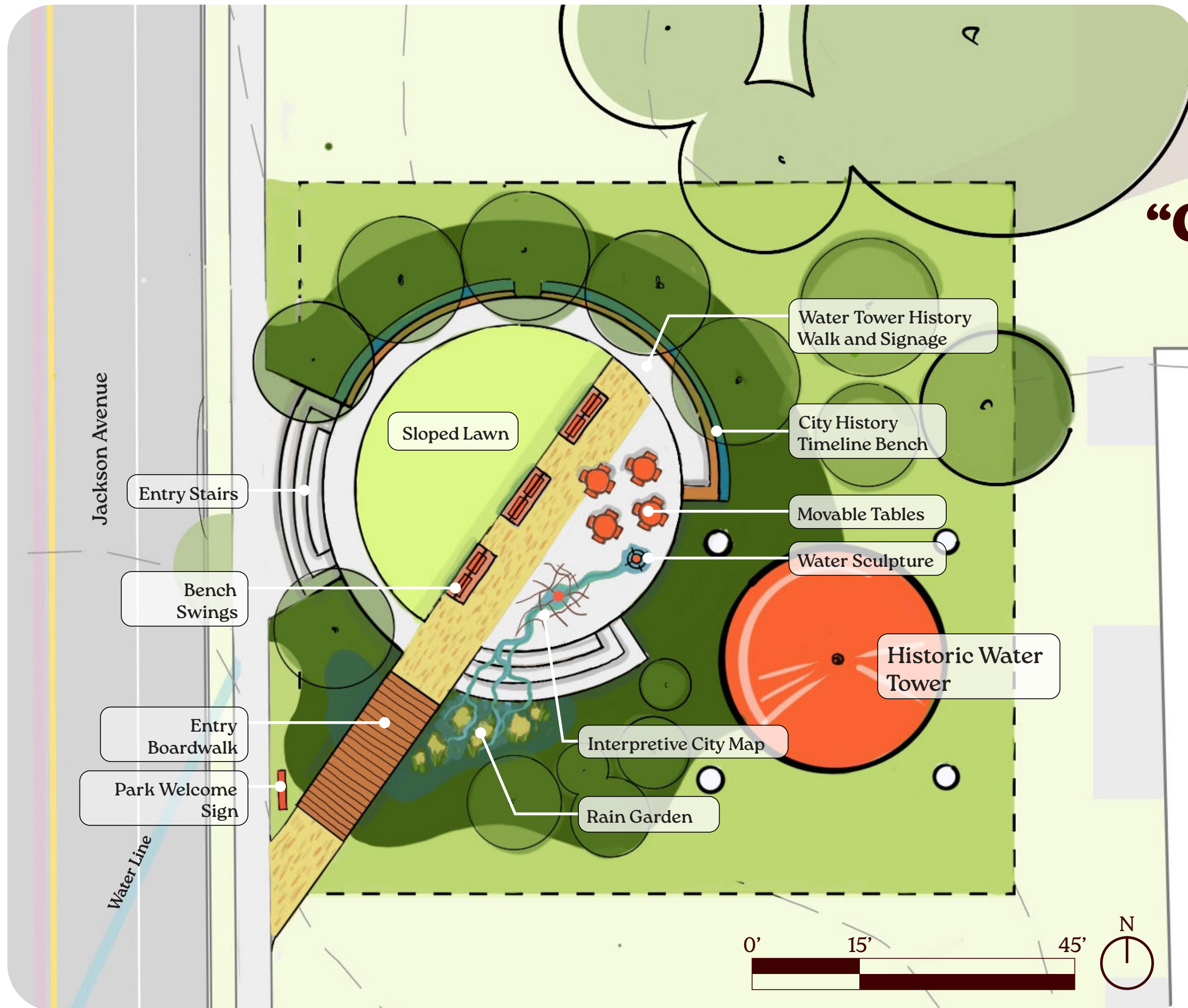
Plantings

- Year-round interest plantings are preferred
- Landscaping that reflects the story of the water tower is strongly preferred

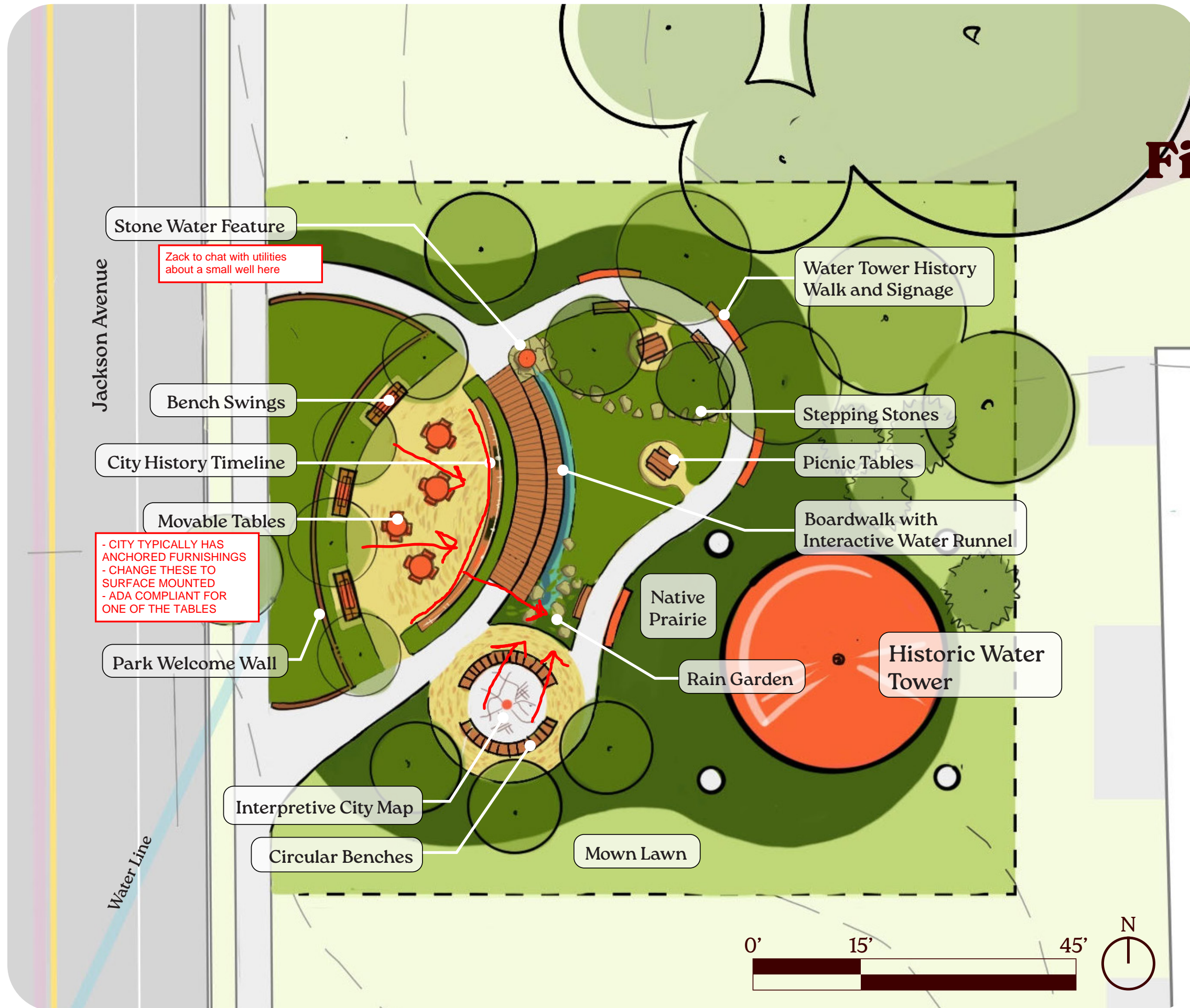
Preliminary Concept 1 “Journey”



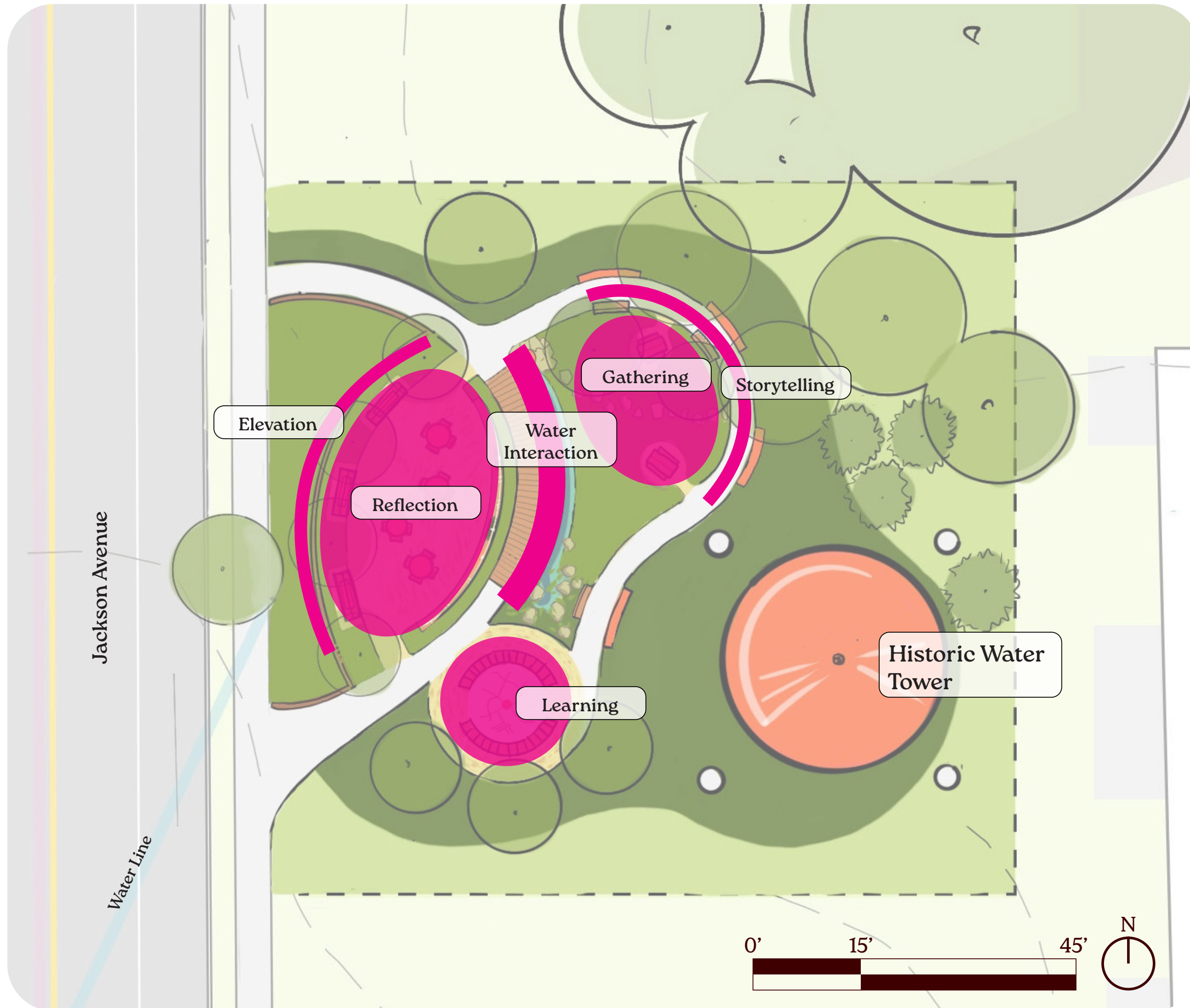
Preliminary Concept 2 "Community"



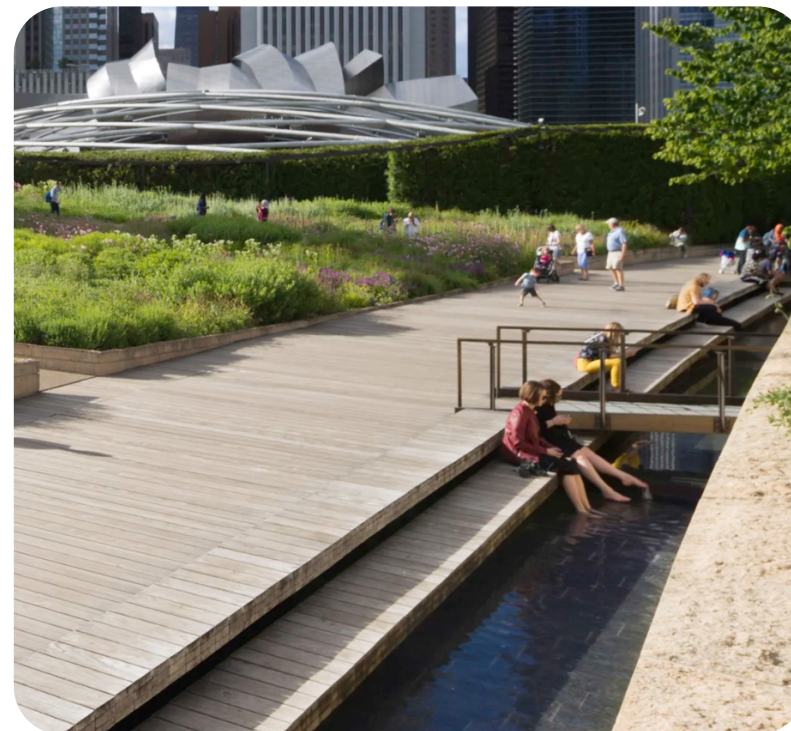
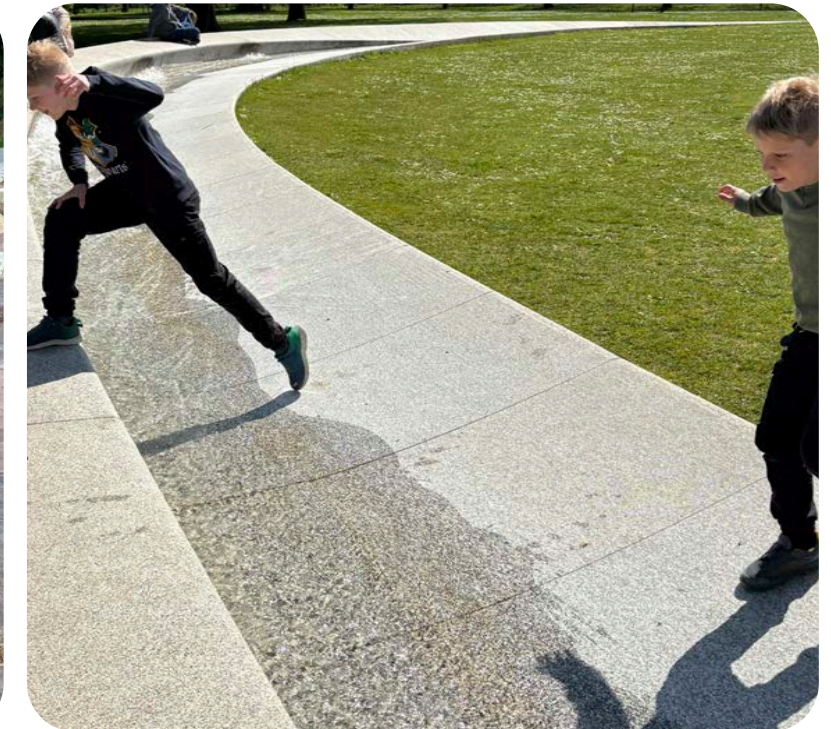
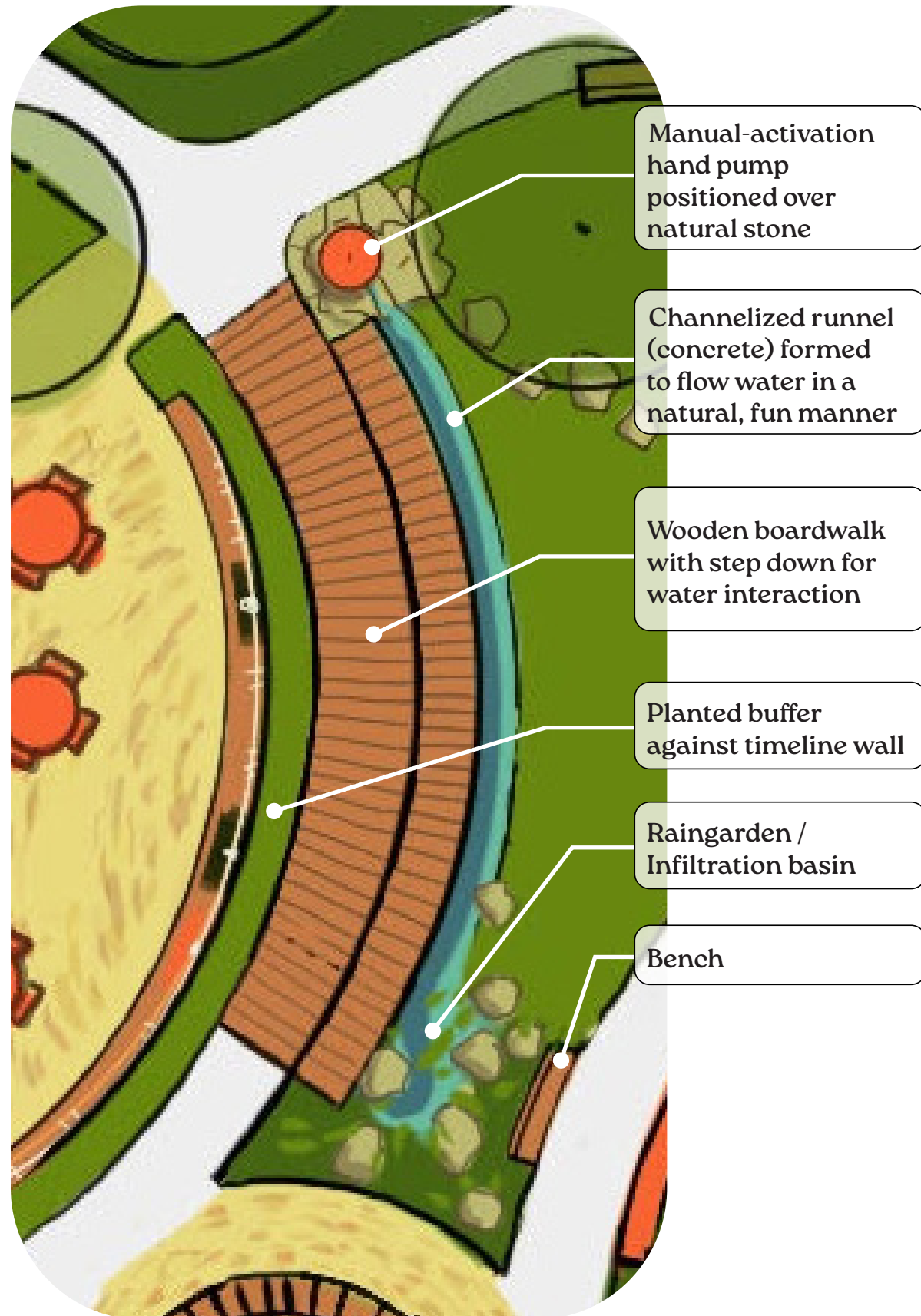
Draft Final Concept



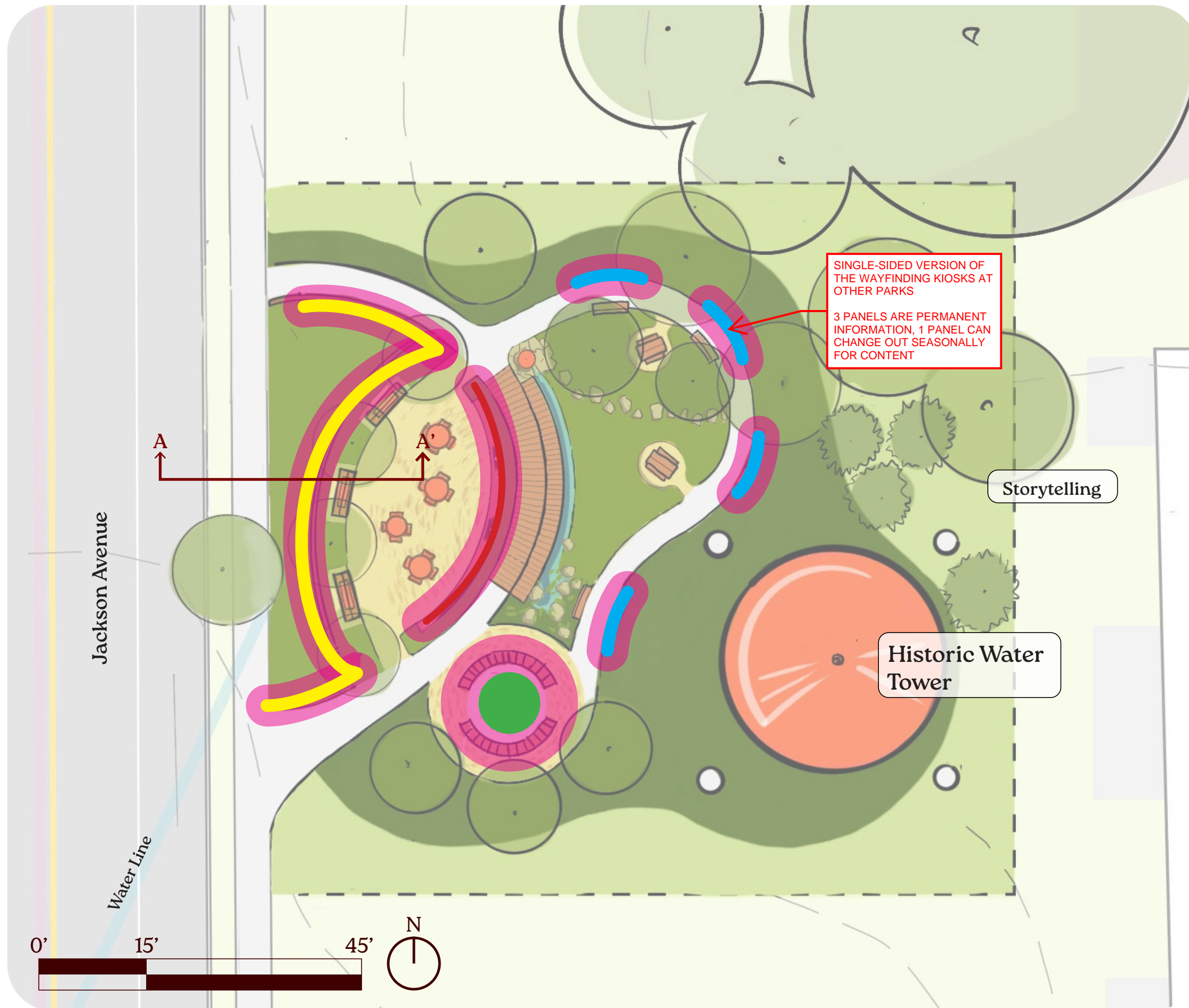
Overall Program



Water Interaction



Storytelling Program



 Park / Heritage Welcome Wall



 City Timeline



 City Heritage Map








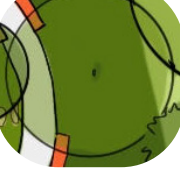


 Story Panels



Materials & Plantings



-  Concrete
-  **P** Pavers
-  **W** Wood Decking
-  **S** Stepping Stones
-  **N** Native Prairie
-  **M** Mown Lawn
-  Evergreen Tree
-  New Ornamental, Columnar, or Shade Tree



Plant Palette



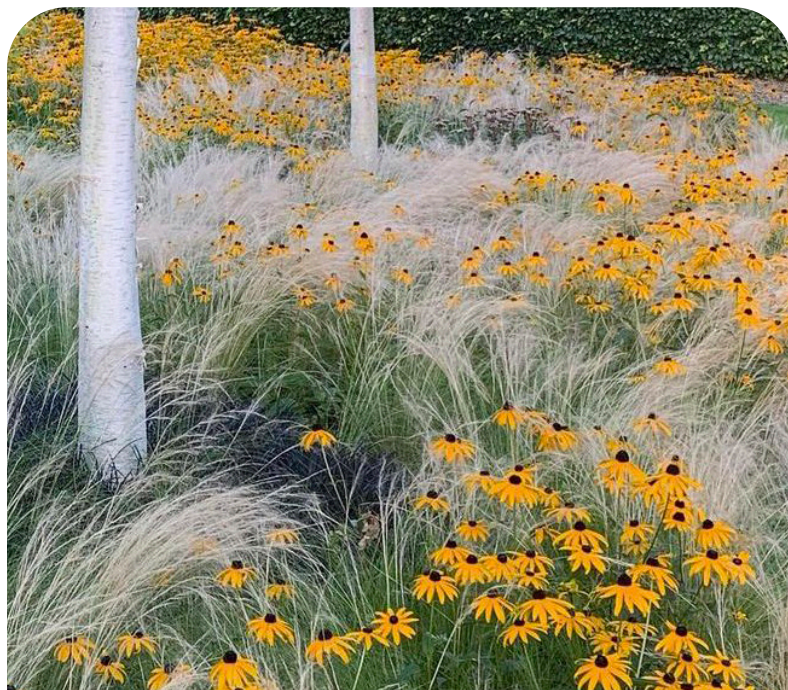
Striking reds



Smoke-like textures



Columnar showy seasonal trees



Movement



Year-round interest



Year-round interest

Furnishings



S Swinging Benches



T Cafe Tables



B Benches



P Picnic Tables



C Circular Learning Bench



Note: furnishings shown are a blend of mostly Vestre and LandscapeForms products.