



Fortson Square ca. 1912. Photo courtesy of the Museum of History and Industry



Fortson Square: Today

FORTSON SQUARE RENOVATION

August 2023



INTRO | PROJECT SUMMARY

Fortson Square is at a nexus of cultural and civic reawakening. Spurred by the construction of the Chief Seattle Club’s ʔalʔal, the Square has an opportunity to have its own concurrent revival as a gathering place of peoples since time immemorial. It is important, given the Chief Seattle Club’s proximity adjacent to the Square, to honor the Coast Salish people who still call this place home.

As a key crossing point from Downtown into Pioneer Square, Fortson Square offers the opportunity to welcome and celebrate Salish peoples and cultures. Key to creating a culturally resonant sense of place will be the Grandmother Frog Welcome Figure by artist Andrea Wilbur-Sigo. The Welcome Figure will reflect the roots and stories of the Coast Salish people while also bringing a new story as she overlooks Fortson Square and protects the surrounding areas.

In addition to the Welcome Figure, there are number of design challenges at Fortson Square, among them the north-south slope of Second Avenue crossing the and east-west slope of Yesler Way creating a need to improve universal accessibility and clear sightlines across the site. Additionally, root zones of existing trees at sidewalks will need to be considered.



Looking South from Smith Tower, 2020

COAST SALISH TERRITORIES

The Coast Salish People are comprised of nearly seventy tribes or bands who speak fourteen languages. The term “Salish” was used by ethnologists to denote their linguistic ties to a root language. Salish People have been occupying contiguous territories along the Salish Sea in present-day British Columbia and western Washington State. The region was rich with varied food sources—including five types of salmon, shellfish, deer, root, bulb, shoots, berries—that were preserved for use in the winter, the prime time for art-making and spiritual ceremonial activities.

Extended families lived in large plank houses in permanent winter villages and married into different villages, thus creating valuable networks of kinship and increasing access to territories and resources. Cooperative work under the guidance of respected leaders solidified the high ranking of certain families. Lush goat wool robes and carved houseposts, rattles, masks, and ritual paraphernalia were expressions of status but also of the power conferred on families and individuals by spirit entities. Despite devastating incursions into Salish lifeways in the modern era, distinctive Salish arts, oral traditions and ceremonies have endured and nurtured a vital sense of Salish identity.



The shed-style longhouses of this central Coast Salish village are similar, though smaller than those usually built further south, around Puget Sound. 1866 {Royal British Columbia Museum}



SITE | HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD

sd'id'elfaliv LITTLE CROSSING-OVER PLACE

“The southern portion of Occidental Square was once part of a tidal lagoon and island – very likely an island only at high tide. The Duwamish people built a winter village in this area, which included a longhouse used for shelter, celebration, and trade. A southern -flowing stream, now buried under city streets, provided fresh water and emptied into the lagoon near where 3rd Ave S and S Main St intersect today. When early settlers arrived in the 1850's the tribes welcomed and helped settlers build their city. Chief Si'ahl, or Chief Seattle, after whom the city was named, was the leader of both the Duwamish and neighboring Suquamish Peoples. Chief Seattle sought alliances for the prosperity of his people, but urbanization and city policies eventually pushed the Duwamish from the Pioneer Square area. Today the Duwamish Longhouse and Cultural Center along the Duwamish Rivers demonstrates their ongoing presence and strong connections to this city.”

From: [Trail to Treasure](#), Pioneer Square Historic Walking Tour - Trail2Treasure.org

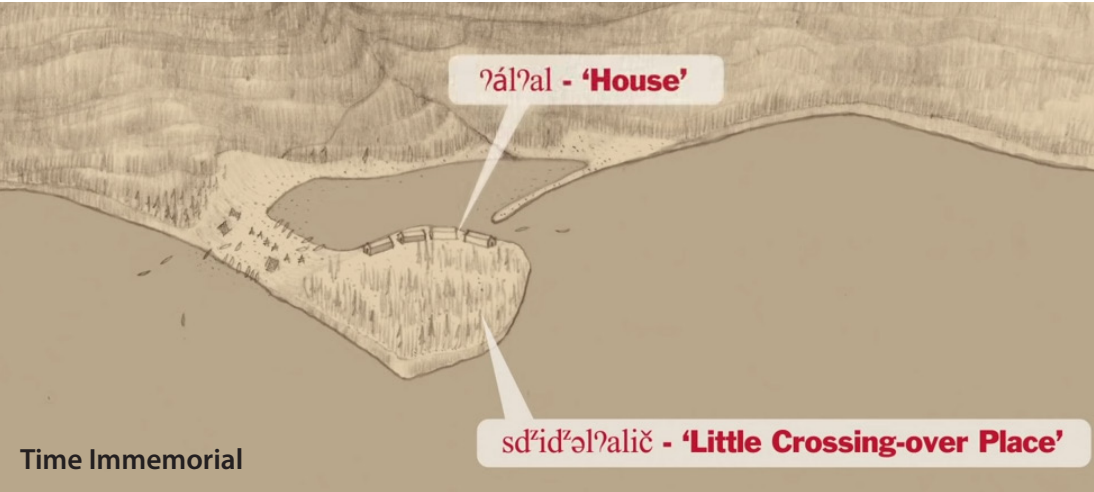
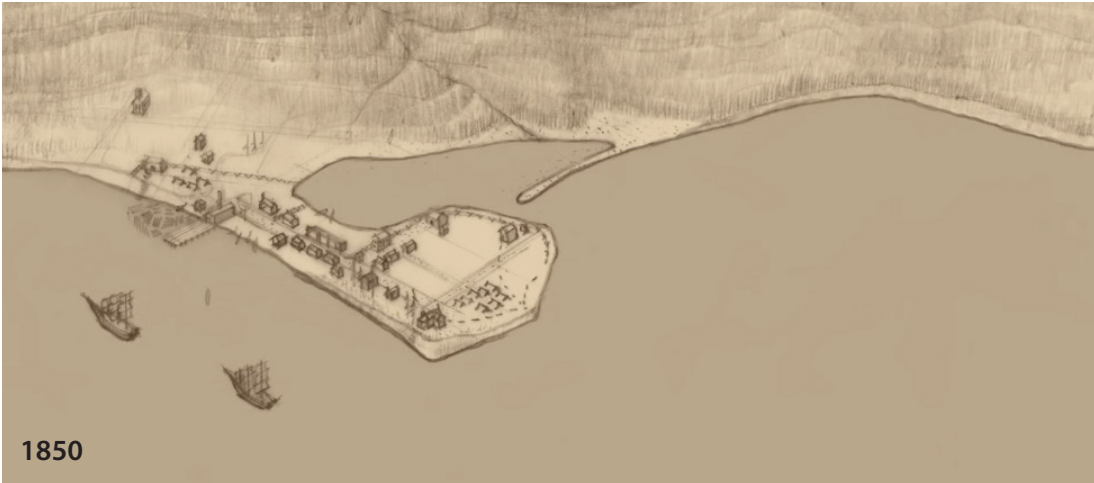
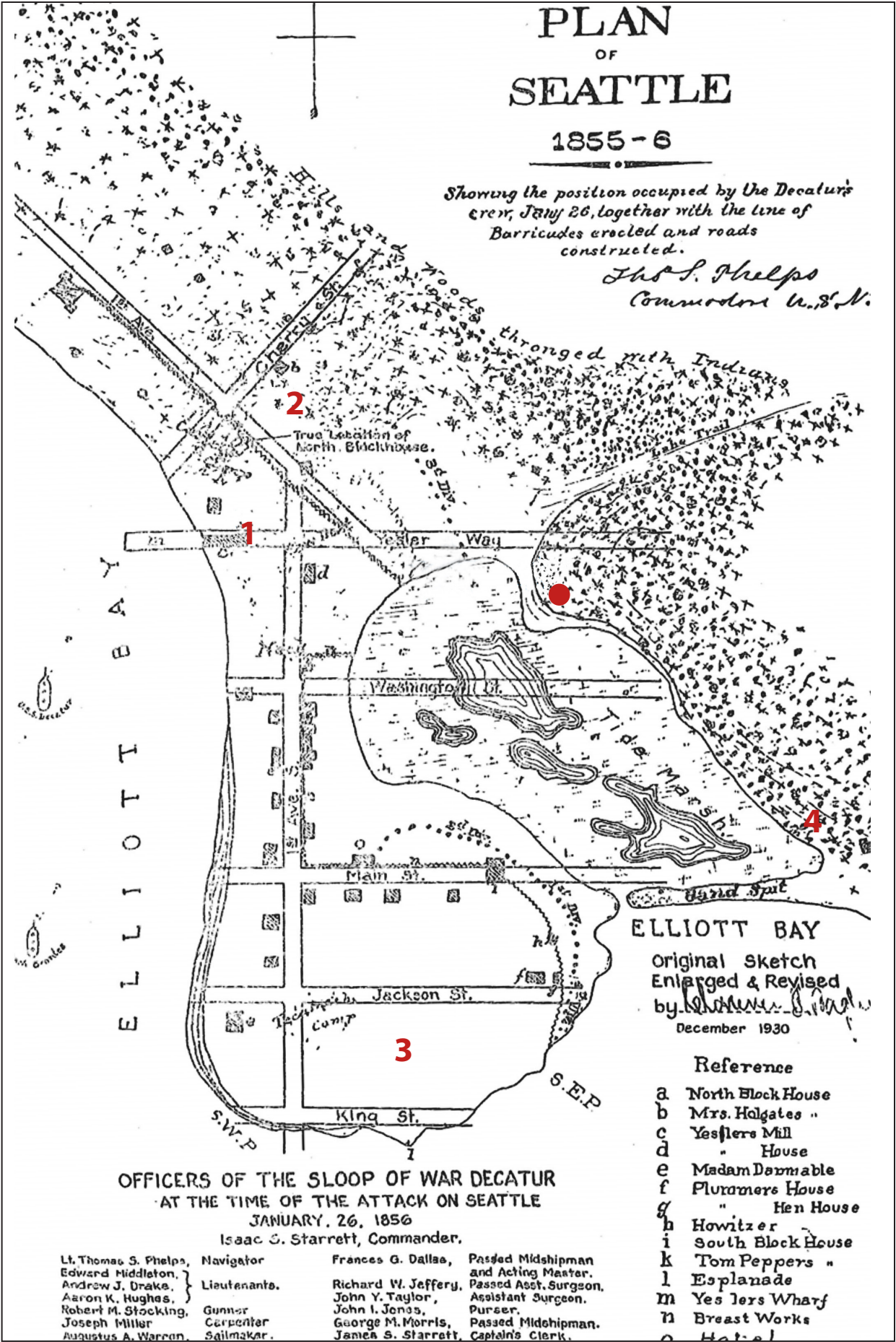
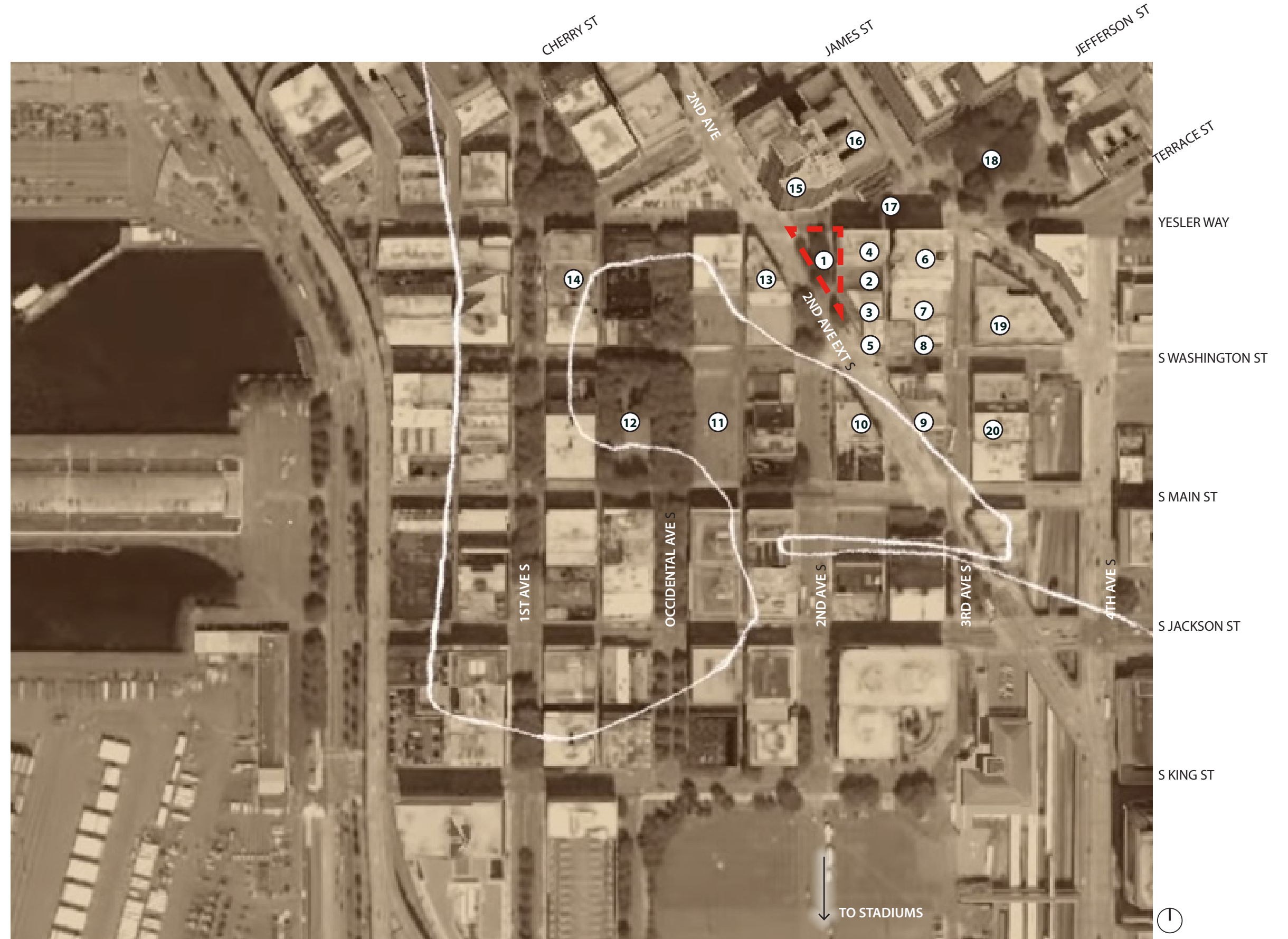


Image & labels from: *Native Village to Metropolis*, Burke Museum 2012

- KEY:
- Fortson Square
 - 1 Little Crossing-Over Place
A small portage where the ruins of up to 8 longhouses were found in 1852
 - 2 Grounds of the Leader’s Camp
Also known as “chief place”, the name of the village where Soowalt (Chief Seattle’s brother) was headman.
 - 3 Tecumseh’s Camp
 - 4 Fresh water stream

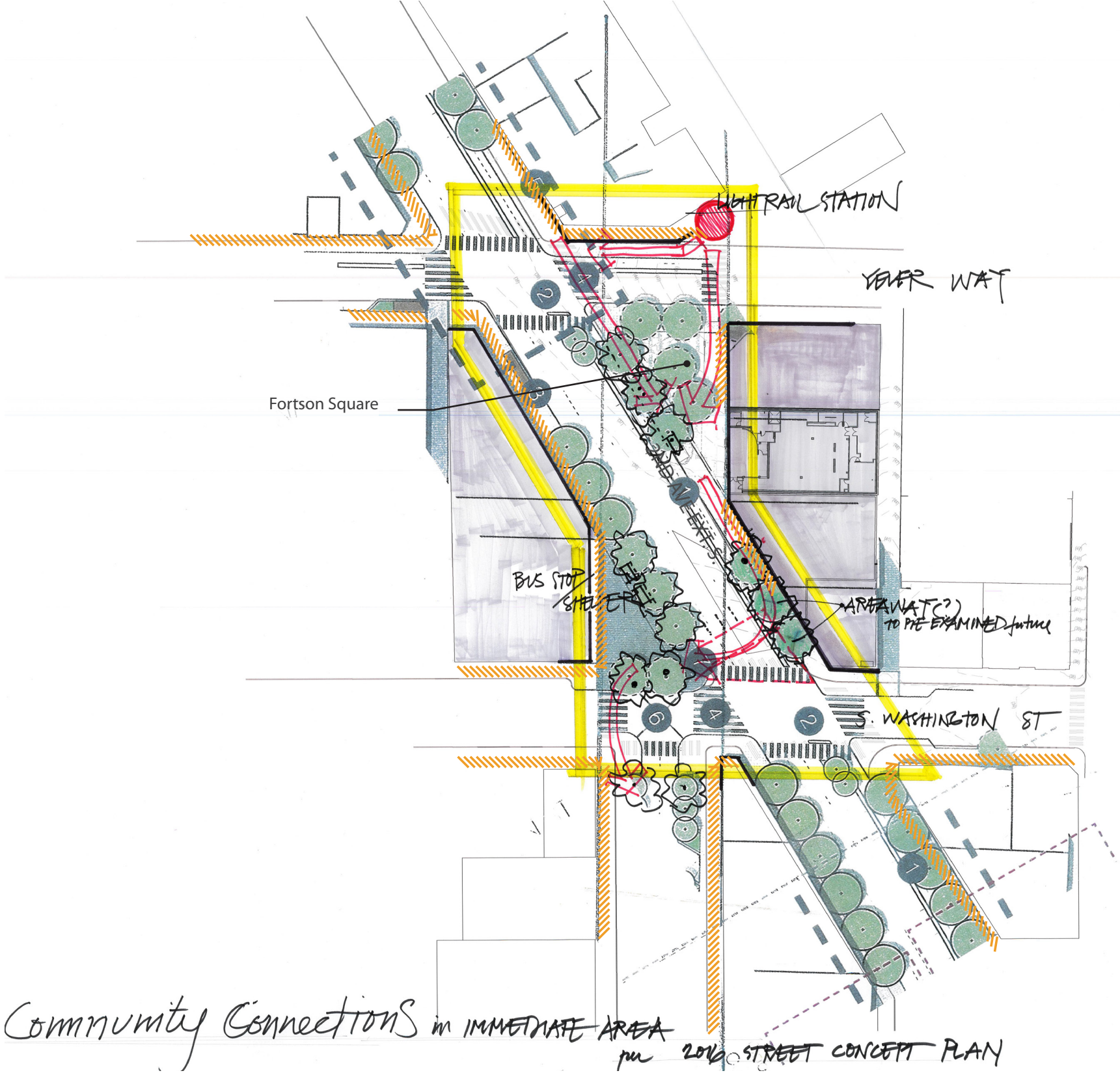




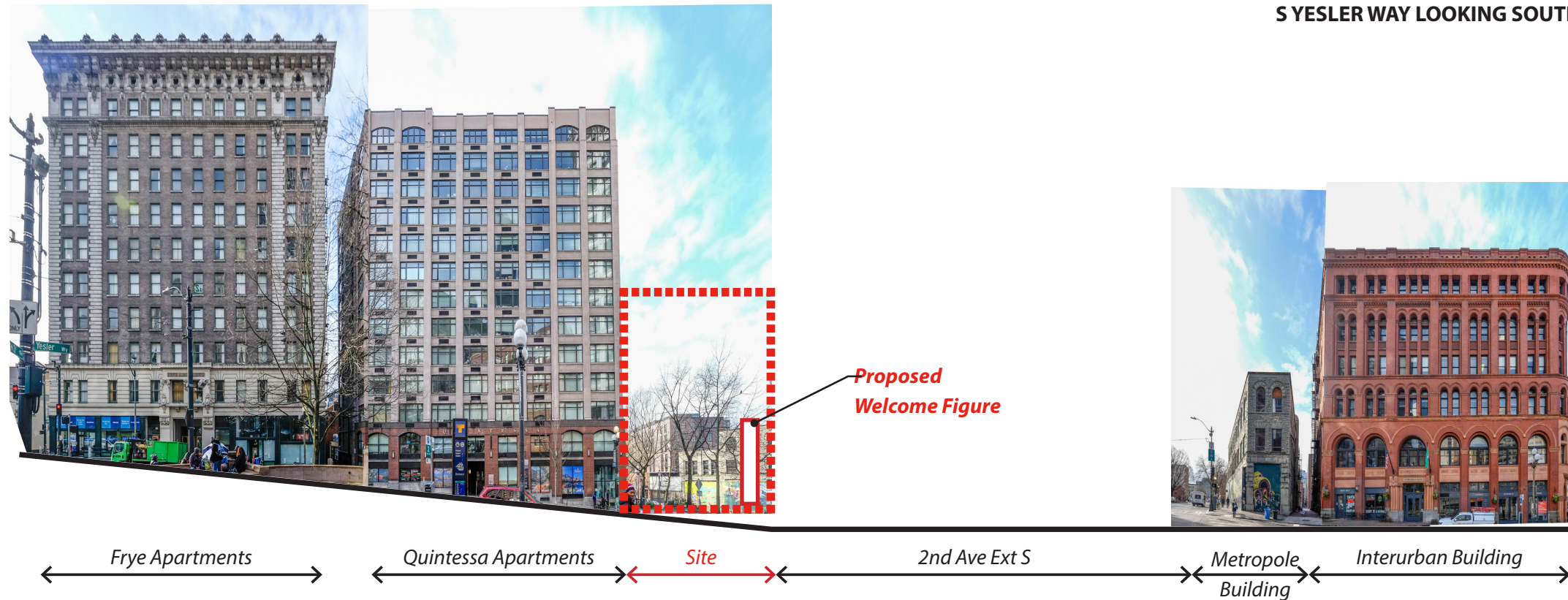
Neighborhood Context

1. Fortson Square
2. Chief Seattle Club - ?ál?al
3. Chief Seattle Club - Monterey Hotel
4. Quintessa Apartments
5. 405 2nd Ave Ext S
6. Frye Apartments
7. Frye Garage
8. Canton Lofts Project
9. Union Gospel Mission
10. Masins Building
11. Weyerhaeuser Building
12. Occidental Square
13. Metropole Building
14. Interurban Building
15. Smith Tower
16. Morrison Hotel
17. Prefontaine Place
18. City Hall Park
19. Tashiro Kaplan Artist Lofts/Arts Building
20. The Loft

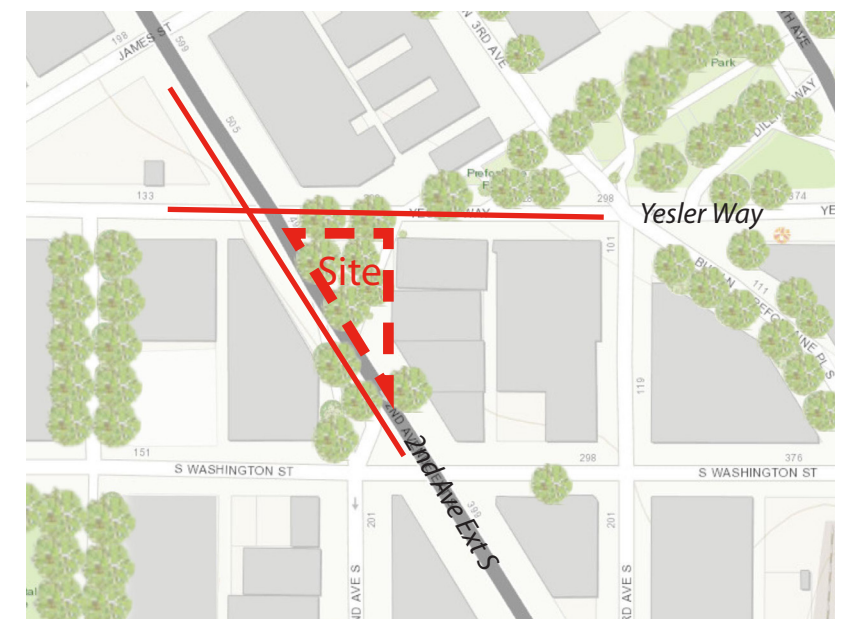
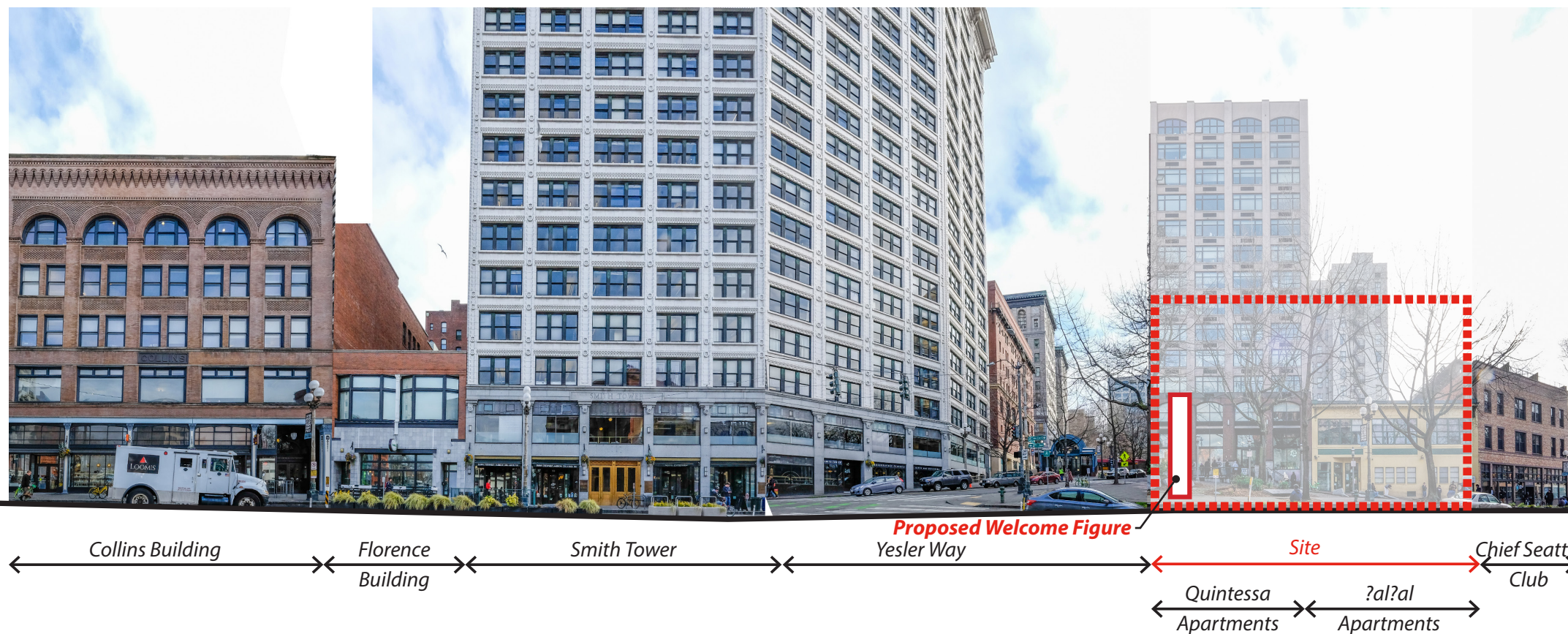
From: Native Village to Metropolis, Burke Museum 2012



S YESLER WAY LOOKING SOUTH



2ND AVENUE SOUTH/2ND AVE EXT SOUTH LOOKING EAST



SITE | FORTSON SQUARE EXISTING CONDITIONS

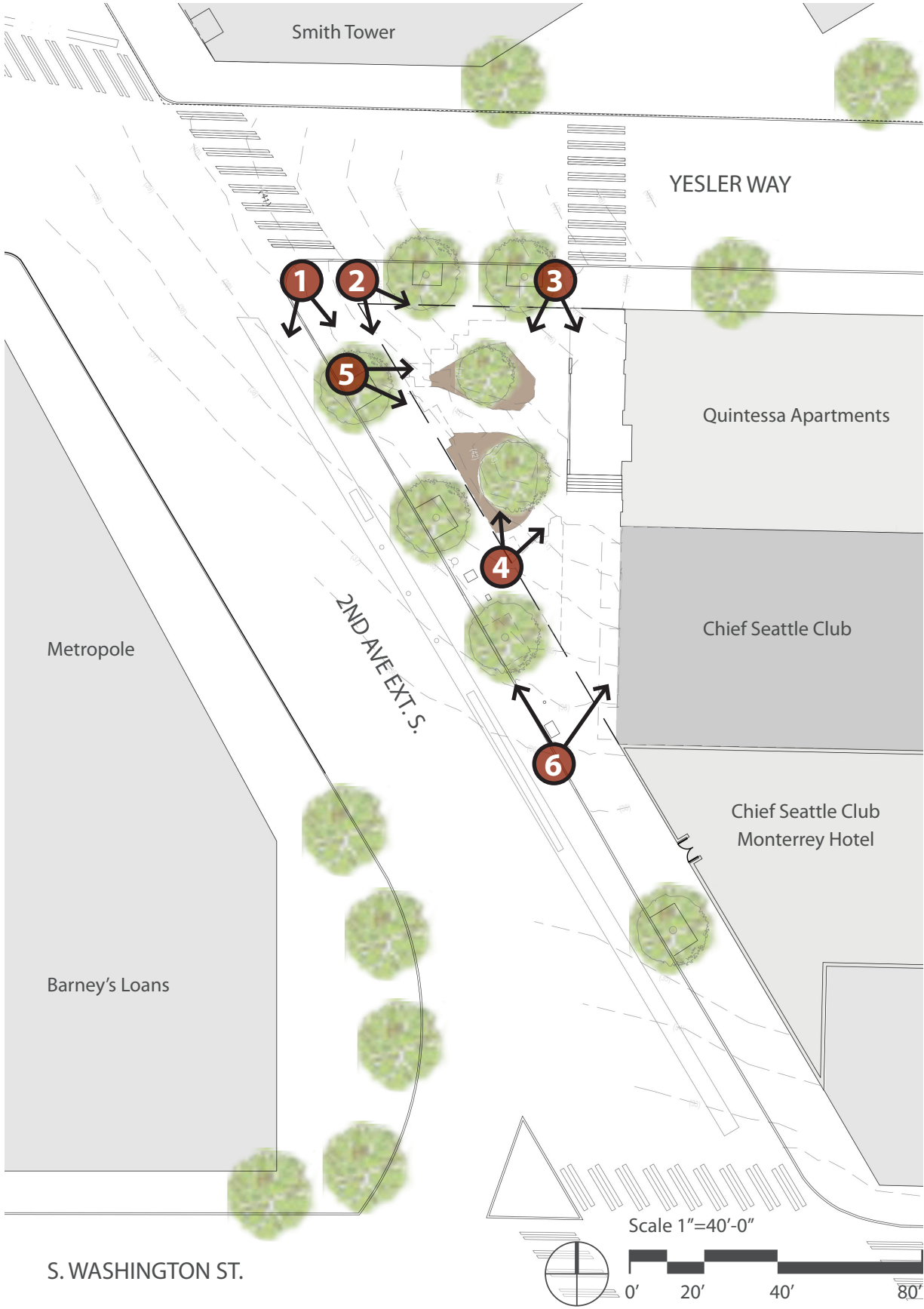
Fortson Square was dedicated in 1901 in honor of Captain George H. Fortson of the United States Navy and other Seattle war dead, who were killed in the Philippines during the Spanish-American War. A plaque in recognition of Captain Fortson is embedded in the pavers toward the northwest corner of the site. The process is underway to rename the Square with an indigenous name, reflecting the important connection the site has to the historic and current connection to the Coast Salish people.

Archival research note that the Square was planted and paved around 1907. The shape of the Square was impacted by the 1928-1929 Second Avenue Extension, likely responsible for ensuring the triangular shape of Fortson Square. In 1968, the same area was again planted and five street lamps were installed. The last major improvement was completed in 1999 when artist Elizabeth Conner and landscape architect Cliff Willwerth redesigned Fortson Square, adding a “sculptural ruin” of art that referenced the period between 1890 to 1950.

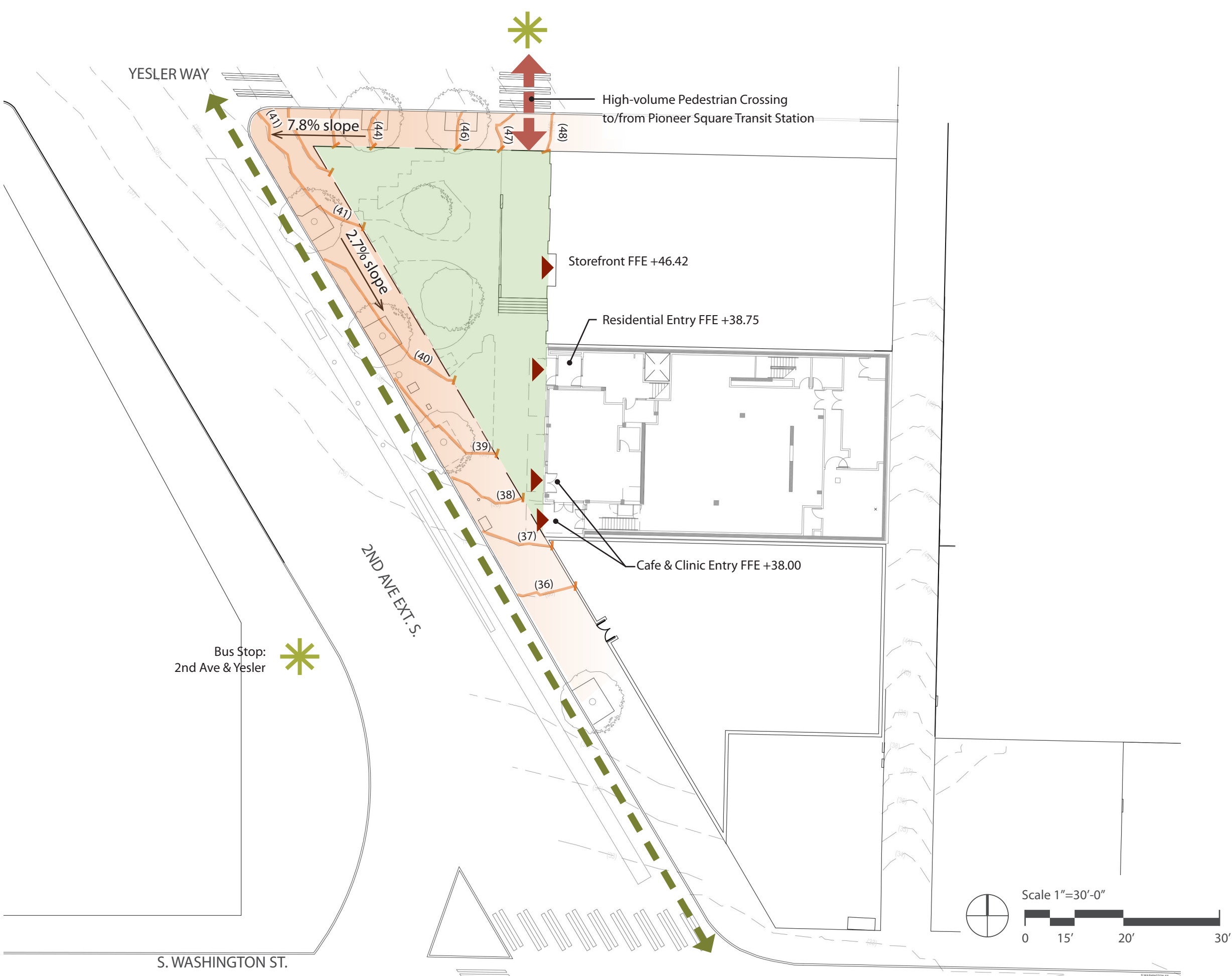
The site is bound to the west and north with healthy street trees in the oak family. Two oaks also currently stand in the interior of the site. These interior oak trees receive inadequate sunlight due to the shading of the street trees, they limit light to the site during winter and evening hours, and they are sited in planting beds that contribute to challenging grading conditions across the interior of the site.



Facing South from Yesler Way showing line of replica gas light fixtures



SITE | CONSTRAINTS



SITE | GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND DESIGN DIRECTION

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Fortson Square should be redesigned to optimize usability of the site by neighbors (i.e. Chief Seattle Club and the indigenous peoples of this area), provide safe and legible circulation routes, and to offer provide a compelling space for cultural engagement and positive visitor experience.

Native people in urban areas face unique challenges; by remaking the Square to embrace the diversity of Native cultures, languages, and traditions of American Indians and Alaska Natives, it recognizes their presence here and gives the “white settlers” a chance to experience and honor the original inhabitants on an important location in their history. Fortson Square will be a place to embrace and honor the indigenous presence here, becoming a place that is resonant of meaning and a source of pride to the Native community as well as our community at large. Design inspiration for the Square will be true to Salish culture: its art, music, story, food, plants, and animals.

DESIGN AND LAYOUT

- **Create the first native-focused public space in Pioneer Square.**
- Honor the site and use water as the theme - it was a marsh on the edge of the Salish Sea. Water is the original medicine and gives life.
- Utilize native plantings and native art installation(s).
- Review regrading options to create flat area for desired programming
- Study the urban tree canopy in immediate area to determine locations for new street trees to improve the canopy of the area

PROGRAMMING

- Determine neighborhood’s programming desires for the Square
- **Design a cultural performance space** to accommodate for following:
 - Drumming and Singing Space: Fortson Square programming would include drumming and singing, consisting of approximately 4-8 drummers, and 4-10 singers circling them. Additional space would be needed for singers and audience.
 - Prayer Ceremonies: Last October the Club conducted a Mayan smudging ceremony with more than 10 members, staff and community circled on the pavement, and were blocking pedestrian space. Additional smudging might occur as well.
- Native Works café space (Café at new building would put chairs and tables out on Square)
- Native Works Kiosk
- Place for eating lunch and possibly Food trucks to park (along Yesler Ave – not in the Square)

SECURITY

- Improve the public safety of the space.

SITE | FOREST TO SHORE CONCEPT

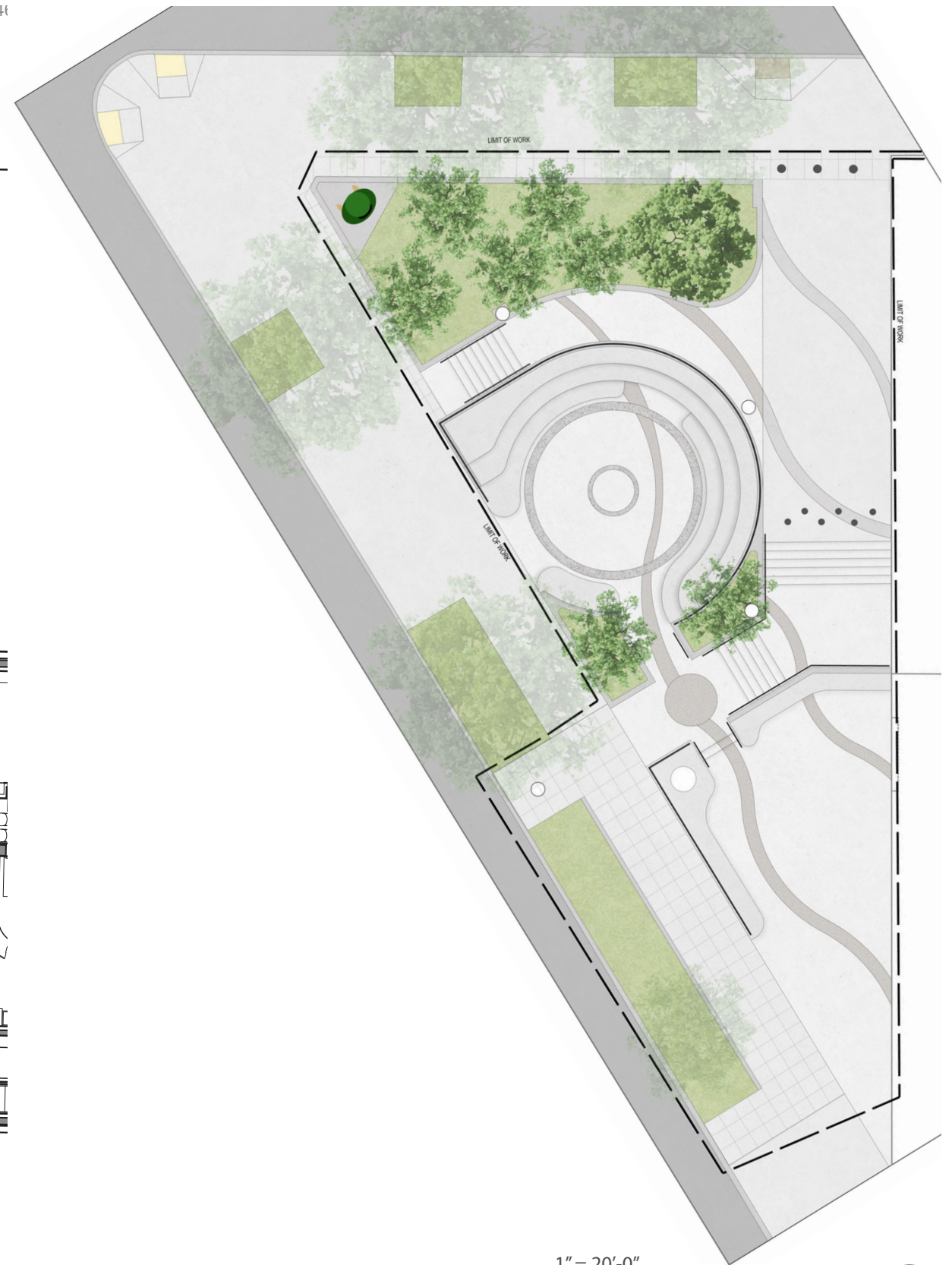
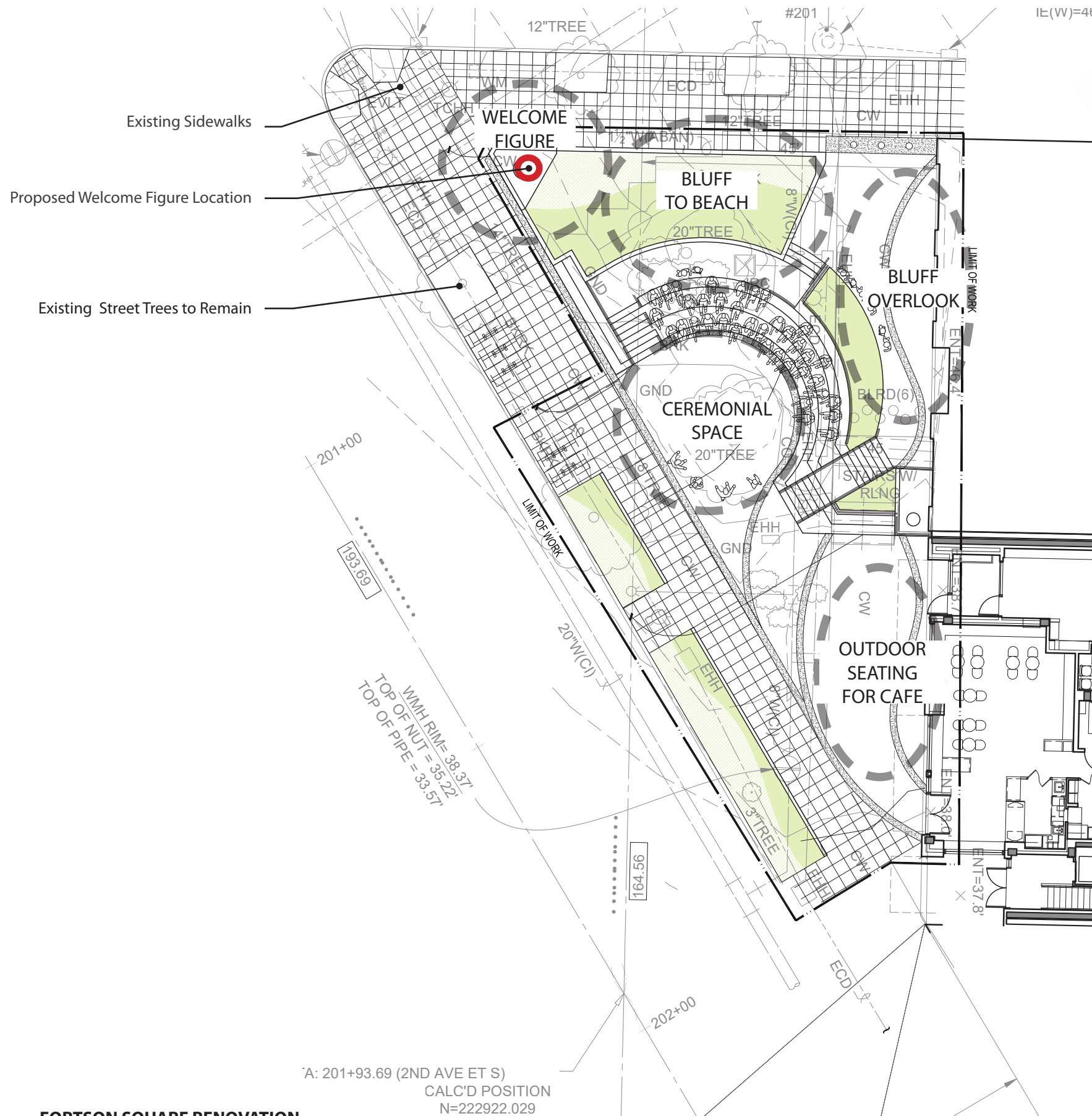
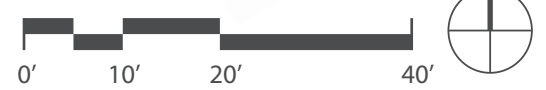
FOREST TO SHORE

- Conceptually mimics the transect of a Puget Sound shoreline - from beach to bluff
- Provides visually distinct spaces
- Creates active and passive places
- Existing Street Trees to remain, would be underplanted with native plants
- Existing Below Grade Utilities to remain
- Maintain minimum sidewalk clearances
- Maintain flexibility within Fortson Square for future TBD renovation
- Relatively low slope grade
- Will coordinate final location & base details with artist and design/engineering team
- Will go through SDOT SIP permitting process to finalize location



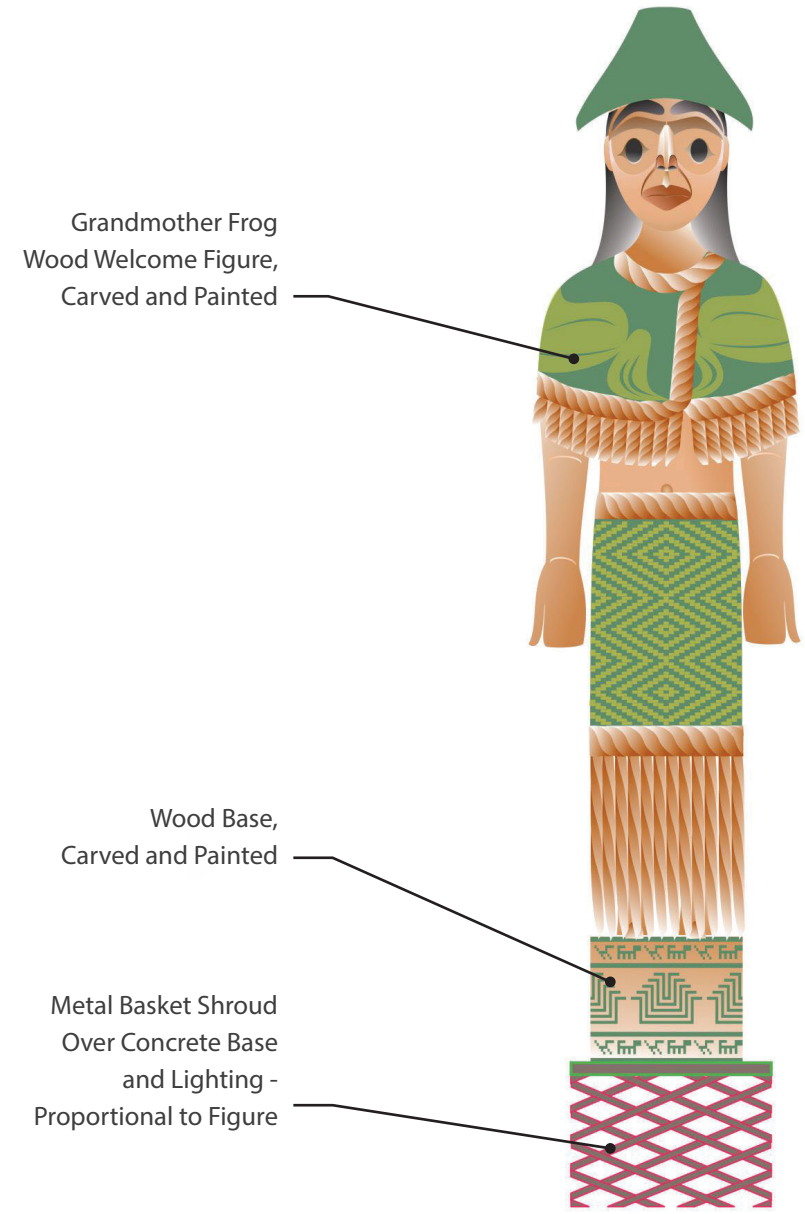
SITE | FOREST TO SHORE CONCEPT

YESLER WAY

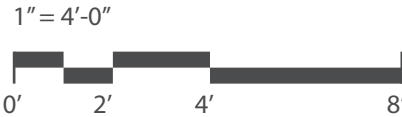

$$1'' = 20'-0''$$


FOREST TO SHORE

- The site slopes in two different directions - the Yesler slope to the north and the Second Avenue slope to the west
- These slopes create universal accessibility challenges
- Create spaces that are accessible
- Maintain minimum sidewalk clearances
- Use planting areas and low walls to absorb grade changes
- Will go through SDOT SIP permitting process



FRONT ELEVATION



Artist:
Andrea Wilbur-Sigo
Squaxin Island



Art: Welcome Figure,
paving, walls, stand-
alone pieces

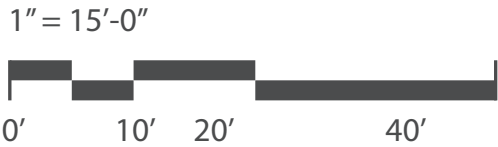
Plantings: seasonality,
texture, durability

Outdoor spaces:
gathering, sitting,
performance

Walls: texture, text, patterns,
skateboard deterrents

Paving: patterns, banding,
color, materials (seashell
aggregate), finishes

Stairs: railing, tread lighting



SITE | MATERIALITY

WALLS



PAVING



LIGHTING



SOURCE: SEATTLE CITY LIGHT

GUARDRAILS AND ART



SOURCE: NOEL BROWN AND AMANDA HALL, CORE GRAVEL

SITE | CONCEPTUAL PLANTING PALETTE

FOREST TO SHORE

- Conceptually mimics the transect of a Puget Sound shoreline - from beach to bluff
- Provides visually distinct spaces
- Creates active and passive places
- Existing Street Trees to remain with understory of native plants
- Plantings represent seasonality, texture, durability

SMALL TREES/LARGE SHRUBS

‘Pacific Fire’ Vine Maple, *Acer circinatum*



Western beaked hazel, *Corylus cornuta californica*



MEDIUM SHRUBS

Oregon Grape *Mahonia aquifolium*



Salal, *Gaultheria shallon*



Snowberry, *Symphoricarpos albus*



Evergreen huckleberry, *Vaccinium ovatum*



Dwarf rose, *Rosa gymnocarpa*



Sword fern, *Polystichum munitum*



GROUND COVER

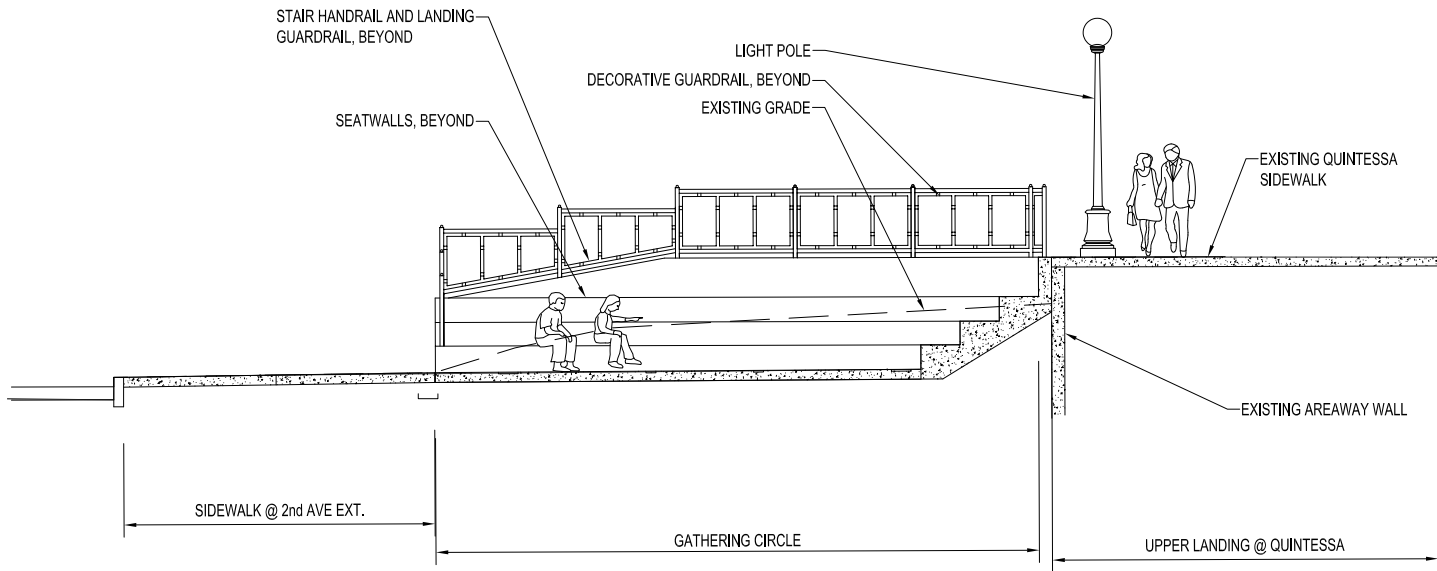
Creeping Oregon Grape, *Mahonia repens*



White inside-out flower, *Vancouveria hexandra*

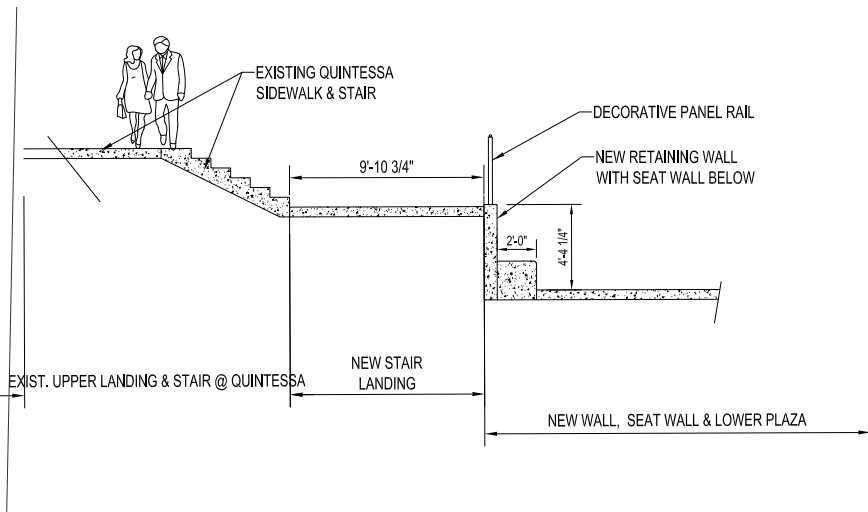


SITE | CONCEPTUAL SITE SECTIONS



1 SITE SECTION THROUGH THE GATHERING CIRCLE

SCALE: 1" = 5'-0"



2 SITE SECTION FROM QUINTESSA STAIRS TO LOWER PLAZA

SCALE: 1" = 5'-0"





1 SITE ELEVATION - 2ND AVENUE EXTENSION - NORTH TO SOUTH
SCALE: 1" = 10'-0"

