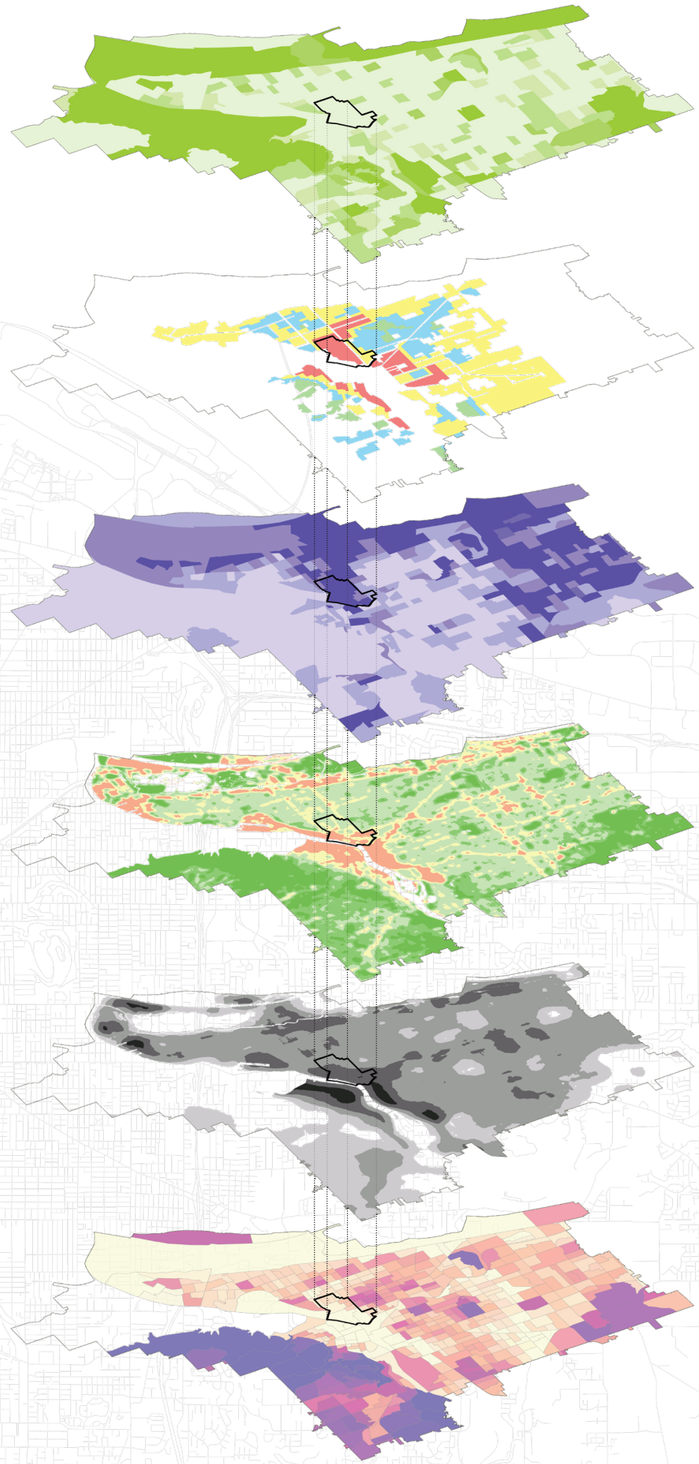
Dahill Shelvy | MLA candidate 2025

a master's project completed in partial fulfillment of MLA degree requirements

Department of Landscape Architecture

# from access to agency

enhancing equitable park access through community-centered landscape design in historically underserved urban neighborhoods



# acknowledgements

This project is lovingly dedicated to Jade, whose unwavering love and support made it all possible. And to Luca—and his soon-to-arrive sibling, joining us in fall ’25—thank you for inspiring me every day to work hard and stay grounded. And to my mom.

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This project repositions park design as a critical tool for advancing equitable park access—shifting the focus from broad planning metrics to the lived experience of historically underserved communities. Foregrounding the qualitative, design-scale elements that shape who feel welcome, represented, and empowered within urban green spaces, this project explores how culturally responsive, community-driven design can transform **access into agency**.

I-5 Rose Quarter Improvement Project (n.d.).


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# 1.0 abstract


Across the U.S., efforts to address inequities in urban park access have primarily focused on large-scale planning—mapping park distribution and using quantitative data to guide where new green spaces should be allocated.[20 23] While important, this approach often overlooks the power of design itself. Unlike planning metrics, the design of a park—its layout, features, and cultural relevance—can deeply influence who feels welcome and who benefits.

This project shifts the focus to the human scale, exploring the qualitative aspects of park design that foster inclusivity and encourage use in historically underserved communities. By analyzing outcomes from community-driven projects and identifying equity-focused design strategies, it reveals how thoughtful design can transform access into genuine belonging.

The project centers on a proposed park in Albina, a historically Black neighborhood in Portland, Oregon whose rich cultural legacy has been shaped—and challenged—by decades of displacement and environmental pressures. Bounded within the city's center by industrial zones and Interstate 5, the neighborhood presents both a critical need and a powerful opportunity for a park that restores connection to nature, especially for youth.

Grounded in spatial and historical research, and informed by precedent studies and literature, the project introduces a set of neighborhood-centered design principles. These principles drive a site-specific proposal to empower local residents through access, representation, and agency in their urban landscape.




Unthank Park. I-5 Rose Quarter Improvement Project. (n.d.).

# 2.0 equitable access to parks at the design scale

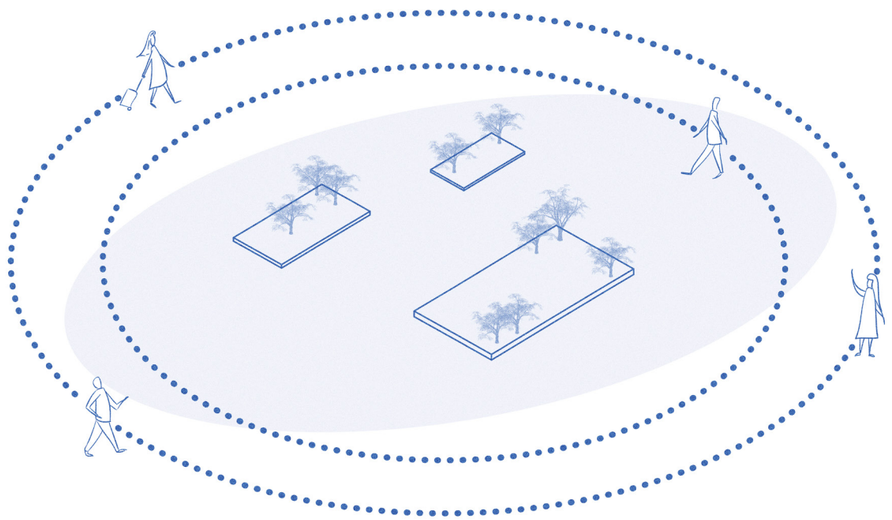
Public parks and green space provide communities with a range of benefits and ecosystem services, including increased physical activity, improved mental health, cleaner air quality, and climate resilience.[20] Across the U.S., historical policies and development patterns have resulted in cities that fail to provide green space equitably to all community members.[17 18 19 20 23]

Park access is often evaluated through a spatial lens—such as the distance to a park, or the size of park space. While these quantitative measures are useful for identifying areas in need of more green space, they often overlook a crucial question: what makes a park truly accessible and welcoming, especially for underserved communities?

Access is about more than distance. It includes the quality and relevance of amenities provided, and how well these amenities serve the diverse needs of the surrounding community. In historically marginalized neighborhoods, barriers to access often extend beyond the map—such as limited transportation options, safety concerns, and a lack of culturally relevant amenities—which can significantly limit residents' ability to fully benefit from public spaces.

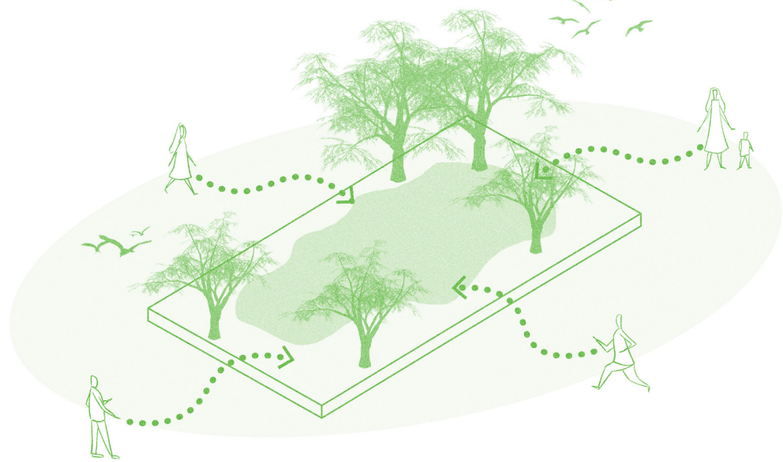
These challenges require a closer look at the qualitative dimensions of park access: the design elements and programming that influence who feels a sense of belonging in a space. By focusing on the site scale, this project emphasizes the importance of designing parks not just to exist, but to serve.

*Equity* is about ensuring fairness in how resources are allocated, taking into account the specific needs and circumstances of different communities. Unlike equality—which assumes that giving everyone the same resources leads to fairness—equity recognizes that historical and systemic disadvantages mean some groups need more support than others. This approach focuses on directing resources toward communities that have been underserved, often along lines of race, income, and other socio-economic factors. Incorporating equity into planning and design is especially important because these same communities have often faced disproportionate exposure to harmful land uses and environmental hazards, such as the strategic placement of polluting industries in neighborhoods primarily inhabited by people of color.[10 22]



**planning-scale park access**

Quantitative measures like proximity and acreage



**design-scale park access**

Qualitiative measure like inclusivity and cultural relevance

# 2.1 process

This project progresses in three phases: site selection, basis for design, and site design. Grounded in spatial and historical analysis, the site selection process identifies a location rooted deeply in community context. Drawing from precedent studies and key literature, the basis for design establishes neighborhood-centered principles that shape each design intervention.

Driven by a research question that pushes beyond traditional park access investigations, the resulting design principles are assembled to ensure that each intervention meaningfully supports those it's meant to serve—amplifying access, agency, and the full array of social, cultural, and environmental benefits that vibrant urban parks can offer.

**In conjunction with quantitative metrics such as park proximity and acreage, what qualitative design elements of parks most effectively enhance access for underserved communities?**

01
## site selection

- spatial analysis
- historical analysis

02
## basis for design

- precedent study
- literature review

03
## site design

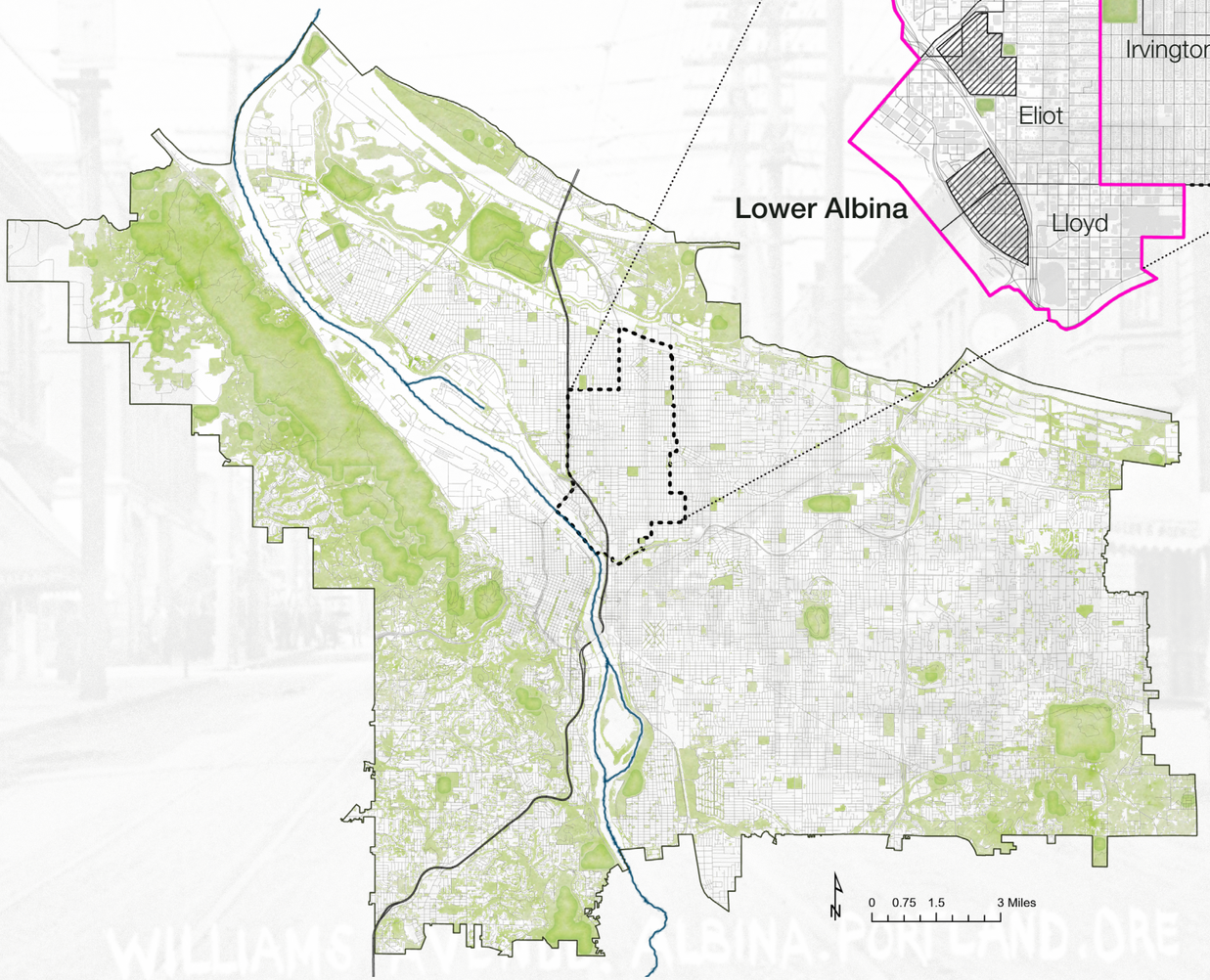
- apply principles to site design

# 2.2 area of focus

Once the center of Portland's Black community, the Albina District holds a compelling legacy shaped by vibrant culture, deep community roots, and a long history of systemic injustice dating back to the early 20th century. Today, the neighborhood of Lower Albina—encompassing the Boise, Eliot, and Lloyd neighborhoods—represents a case study in community resilience and the lasting impact of historical inequities.



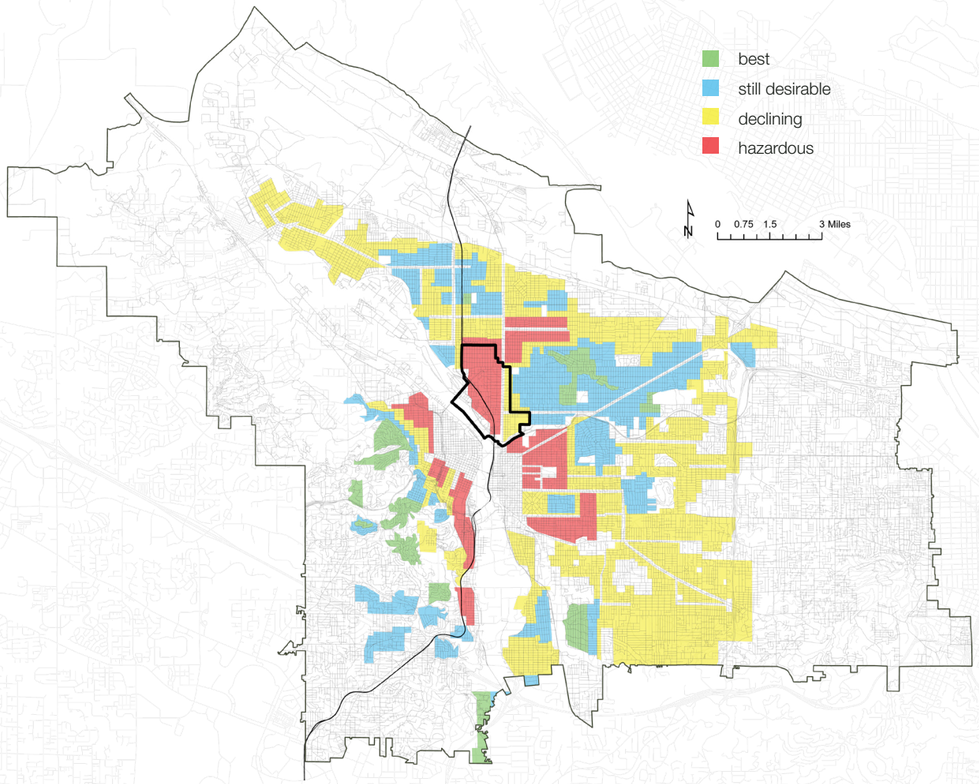

*1909 Image of Albina. Oregon History Project. httpswww.
oregonhistoryproject.orgarticleshistorical-recordsalbina-portland-1909



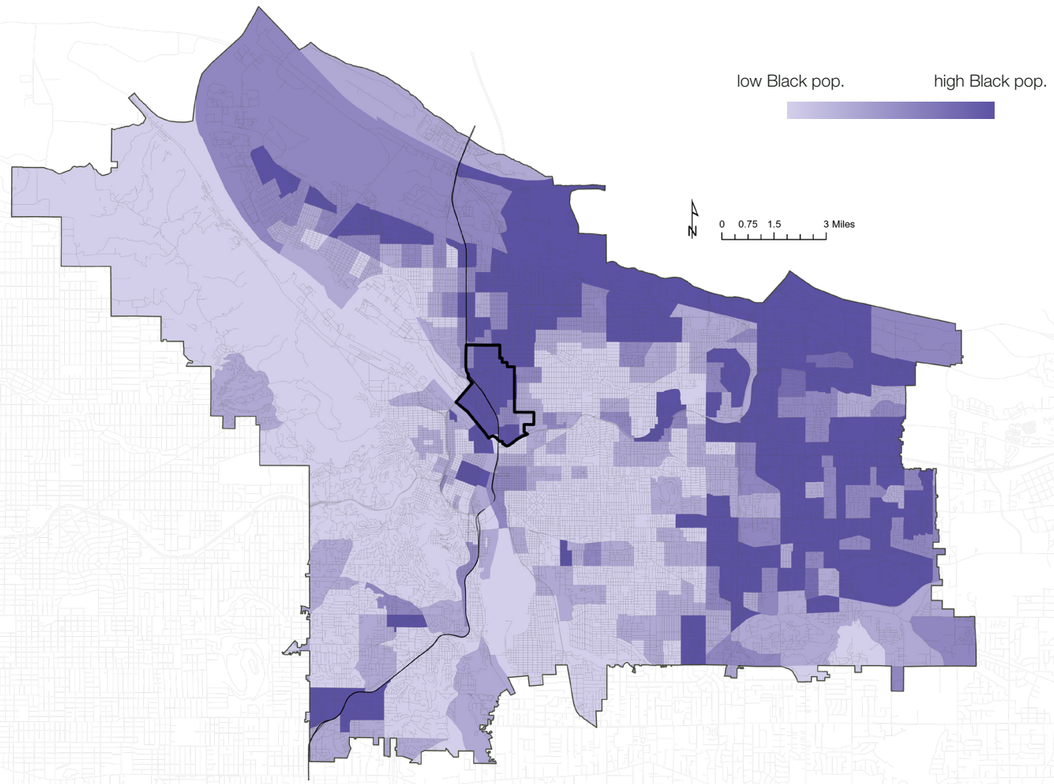

*Williams Ave 1909. Alameda History. httpsalamedahistory.
org20200319albinas-williams-avenue-1909

# 3.0 spatial analysis

A series of six spatial analyses investigates disparities in park access and environmental benefits in Lower Albina relative to the broader Portland region.[3 14]

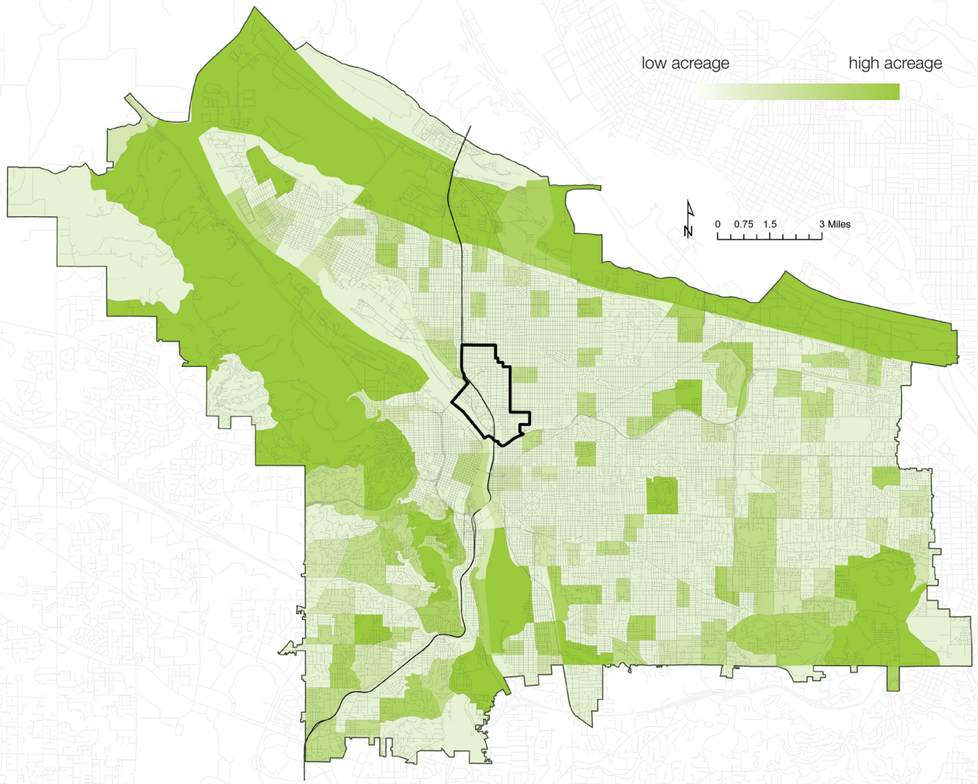



The Home Owners' Loan Corporation's (HOLC) 'Residential Security' map of 1933 classified Lower Albina predominantly as a 'hazardous' lending area, reflecting discriminatory lending practices that shaped neighborhood disinvestment and racial segregation in Portland and across the US. Black residents of Portland had little opportunity to move outside of Albina.

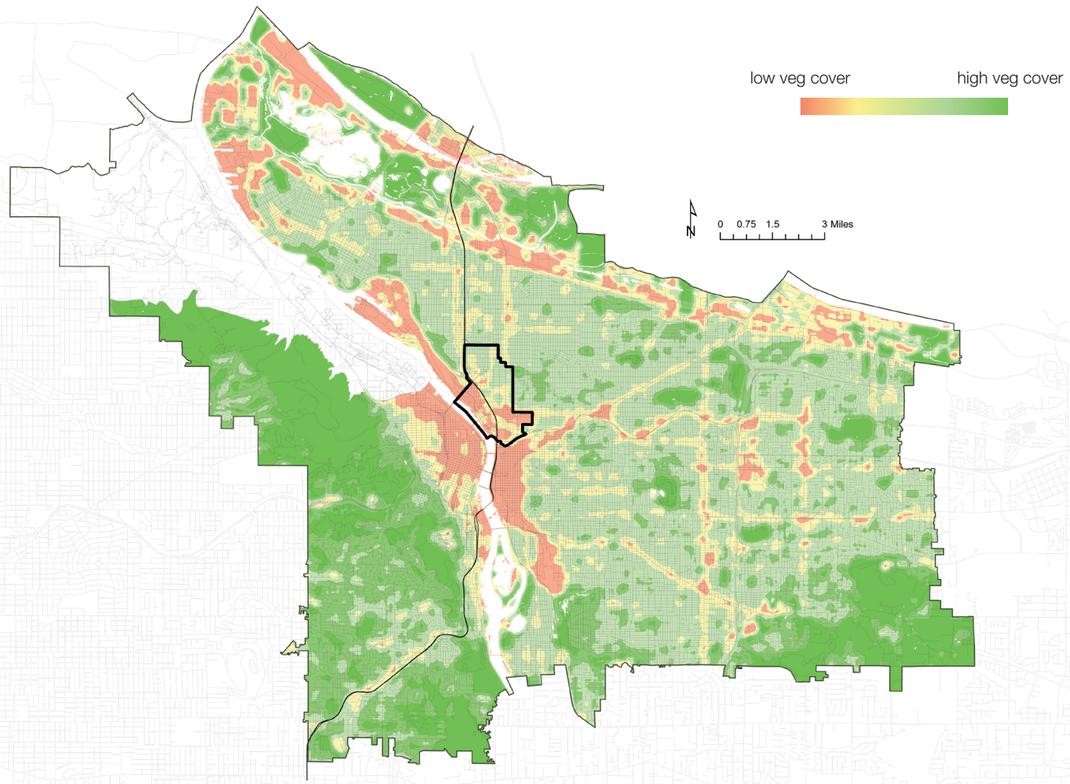



The distribution of the Black population based on the 2020 Census reveals a continued concentration in the Albina neighborhood, despite ongoing displacement trends toward Northeast and East Portland. This spatial pattern underscores the lasting legacies of redlining and discriminatory housing practices that persist in shaping demographic distribution today.

# 3.1 spatial analysis

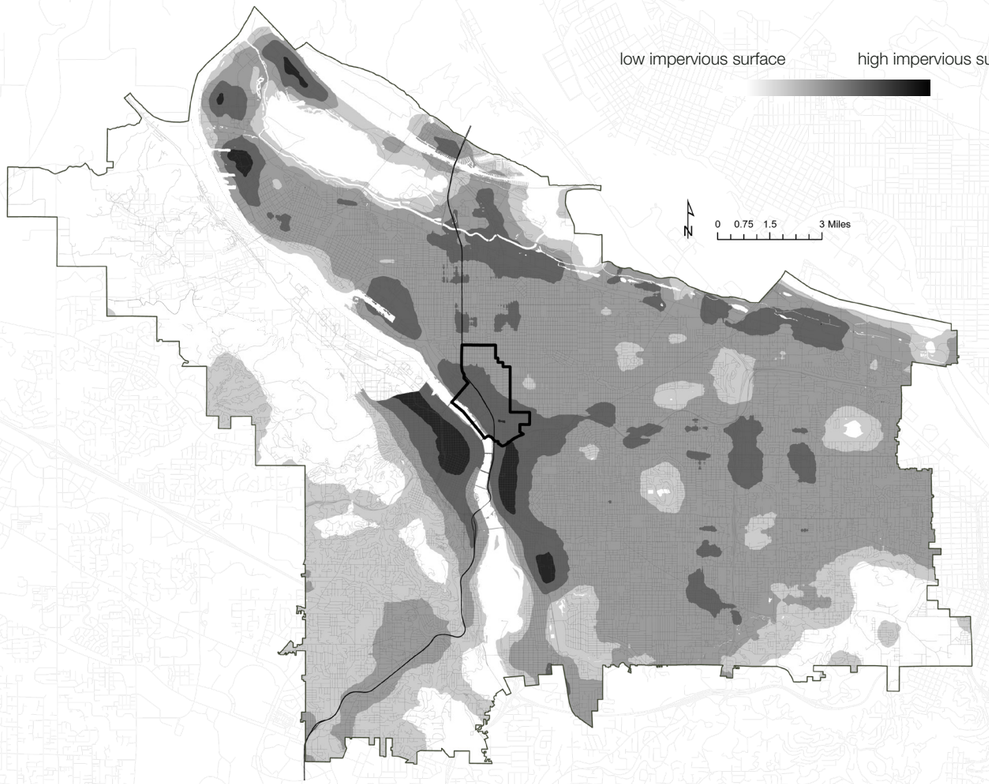



The distribution of park acreage across census block groups highlights the notably low park acreage throughout Lower Albina, especially in contrast to the broader city of Portland. Although Lower Albina residents may live near parks, the smaller size of these parks limits the availability of amenities and the range of benefits typically associated with larger green spaces.

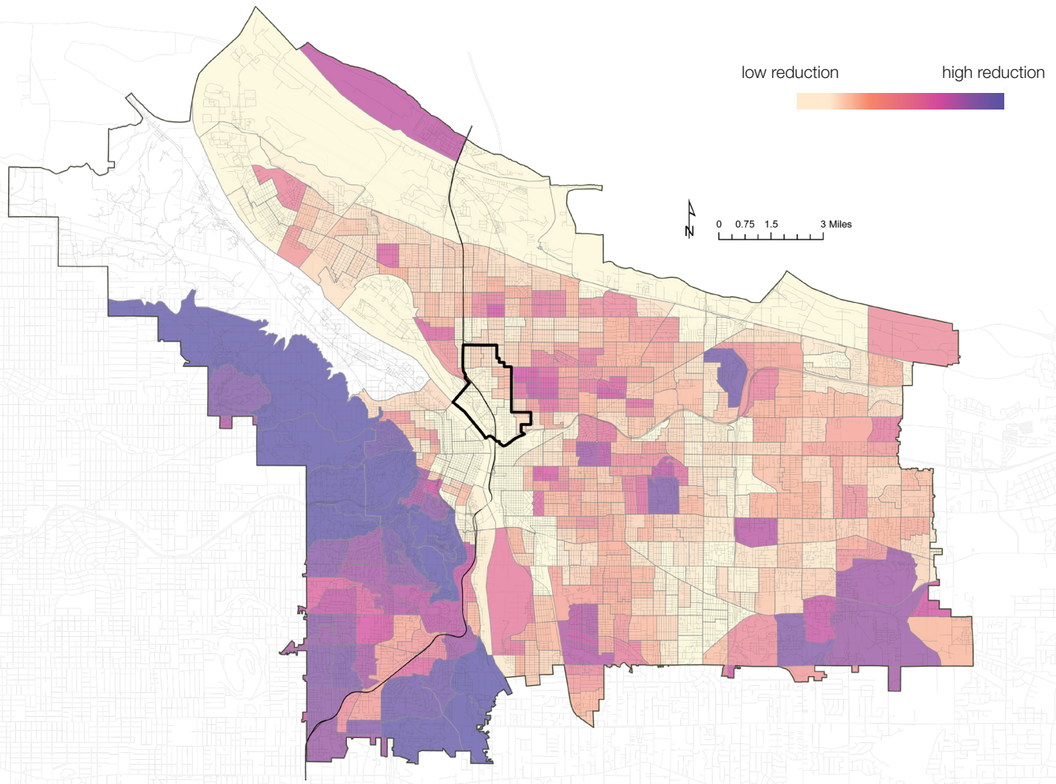



Analysis of percent vegetation cover reveals that Lower Albina, along with much of Portland's urban core, exhibits significantly lower vegetation cover compared to other city neighborhoods. Such limited vegetation diminishes the capacity of these areas to provide critical environmental and public health benefits, including improved air quality, temperature regulation, and overall ecological resilience.

# 3.2 spatial analysis



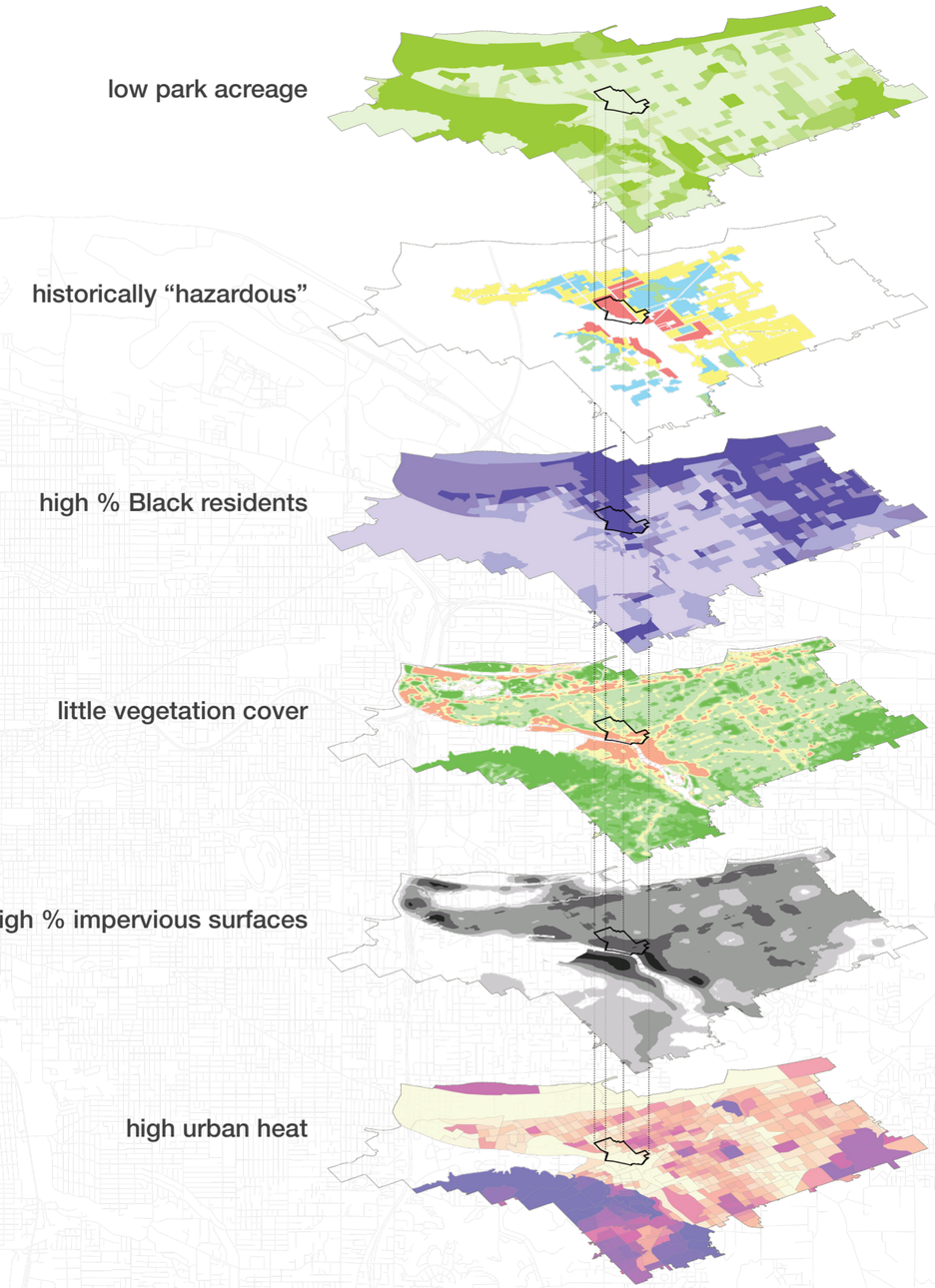

An analysis of percent impervious surface cover reveals that Lower Albina, situated in the heart of the city, is characterized by notably high levels of impervious surfaces. Such impermeability exacerbates issues of stormwater runoff, reduces groundwater recharge, elevates local temperatures through the urban heat island effect, and limits the presence of green spaces essential for community well-being.




Analysis of average nighttime temperature reduction indicates that Lower Albina experiences significantly less cooling compared to the majority of the city. This limited reduction is largely attributable to the neighborhood's low vegetation cover and high impervious surface areas, intensifying the urban heat island effect and exacerbating thermal discomfort for residents.

# 3.3 spatial analysis

Given this context, parks in historically disadvantaged neighborhoods like Lower Albina must do more than offer basic recreational amenities. They should be designed as multifunctional spaces—equipped to filter air, manage stormwater, reduce heat, and reconnect residents with nature—enhancing both environmental health and community well-being.



# 4.0 history

The Albina District was once the vibrant heart of the city's Black community—a hub of music, culture, activism, and Black-owned businesses. Despite Oregon's Black exclusion laws, which remained in the state constitution until 1926, a small but resilient Black population settled in Albina, drawn by jobs in the rail and service industries. These early residents built a close-knit community across what are now the Lloyd, Eliot, and Boise neighborhoods.[1 4 7 21]

The neighborhood's vibrancy was challenged by a wave of so-called 'urban renewal' projects. The construction of Interstate 5, the Veteran's Memorial Coliseum, and the expansion of Legacy Emanuel Medical Center cut directly through the community, displacing hundreds of families.[1 4 7 21]

Despite the hardship, displacement, and systemic exclusion, a strong and connected Black community remains in Albina. Local leaders, activists, and cultural organizations continue to advocate for policies, projects, and investments that honor the neighborhood's history and support its future. Efforts to reclaim space, preserve cultural landmarks, and promote Black homeownership are all part of a broader movement to make Albina a place where Black residents not only return—but thrive.[1 4 7 21]

*Albina merges with Portland*

*Portland Realty Board mandated agents not to sell to Black populations in "white neighborhoods"*

*HOLC designated Albina "hazardous" lending neighborhood*

*Legacy Hospital expansion displaces 171 families - 74% were Black*

*Disinvestment leads to attractive prices for white buyers outside community*

1880 1890 1900 1910 1920 1930 1940 1950 1960 1970 1980 1990 2000 2010 2020

*City of Albina incorporated*

*Oregon's Black exclusion clause repealed by voters*

*Nicknamed "Jumptown" for booming jazz, blues scene*

*Albina Riot after years of civil rights activism*

*Several community initiatives currently work to build back the Black community*

From the start, Albina's growth was shaped—and constrained—by systemic racism. Between 1919 and 1956, real estate practices barred Black residents from purchasing homes in white neighborhoods. In the 1930s, federal redlining policies deepened this exclusion, denying loans and investment to anyone living within Albina's boundaries. Yet even amid these challenges, the neighborhood flourished. By the 1960s, Albina was a thriving neighborhood, marked by community institutions and cultural expression.[1 4 7 21]

By the 1990s, reinvestment returned to Albina through gentrification. As white residents moved in and property values rose, the same community that had been excluded and displaced for generations was further pushed out.[1 4 7 21]

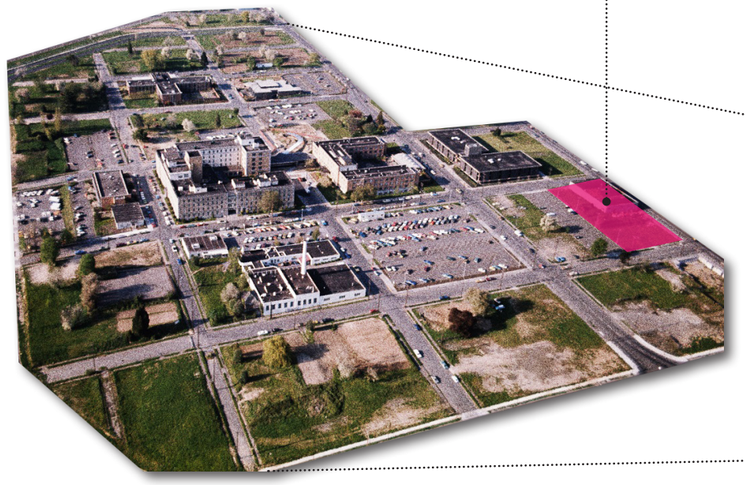
# 5.0 site selection

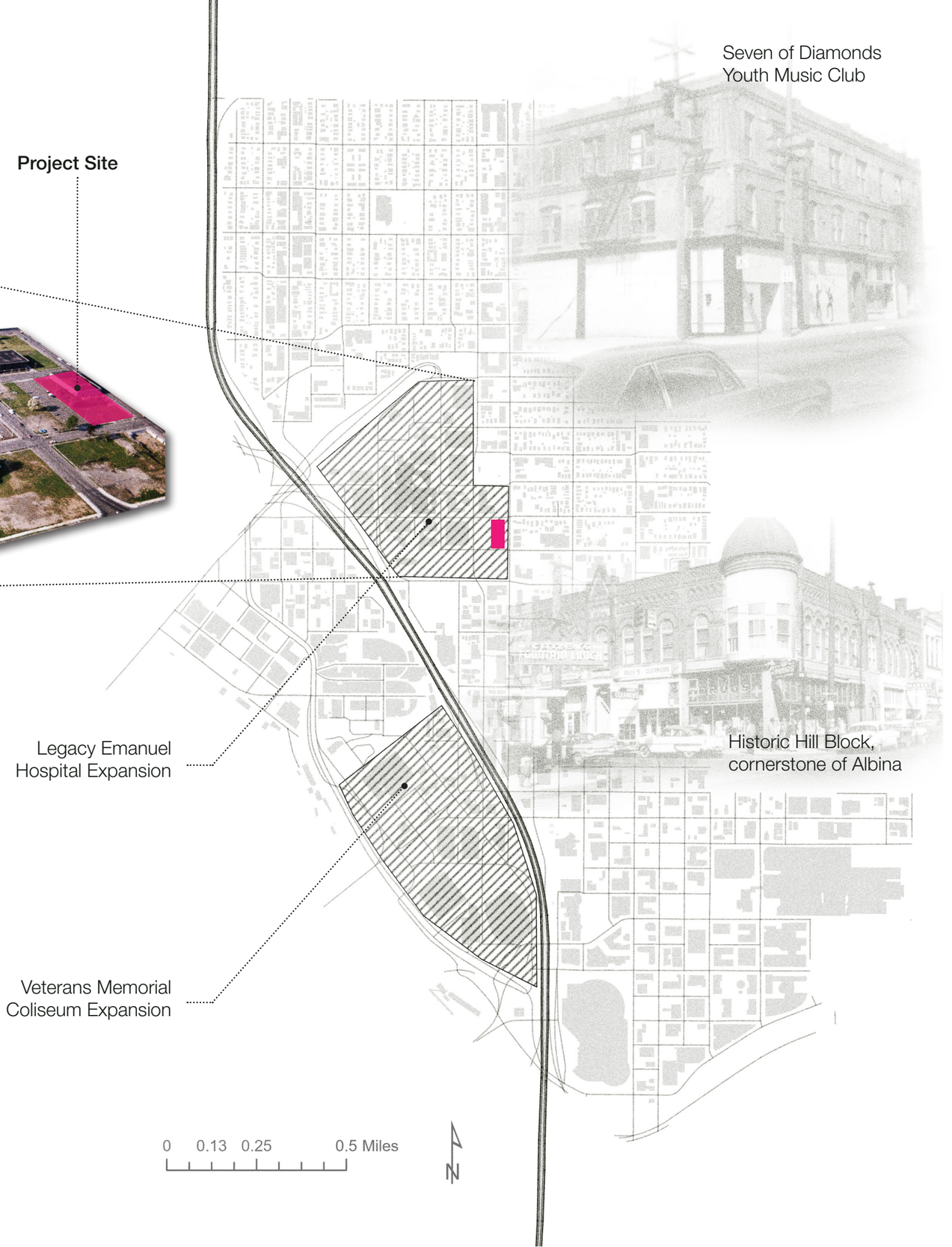
## Legacy Emanuel Hospital expansion

The selected site holds deep historical significance, directly tied to the expansion of Legacy Emanuel Hospital—a 1970s 'urban renewal' project that devastated the heart of Albina. Framed by the City of Portland as a response to 'urban blight,' the project leveled 55 acres of homes and businesses, displacing 171 families—nearly three-quarters of whom were African American.[21] Among the buildings lost was the Seven of Diamonds club, a beloved gathering space where Albina's youth connected with the neighborhood's thriving music scene.[6] Today, this lot—like many others—remains vacant. Its selection for this project is a call to redress past injustice and reimagine the site as a place invested in the community that was once uprooted.



Project Site, May 2025





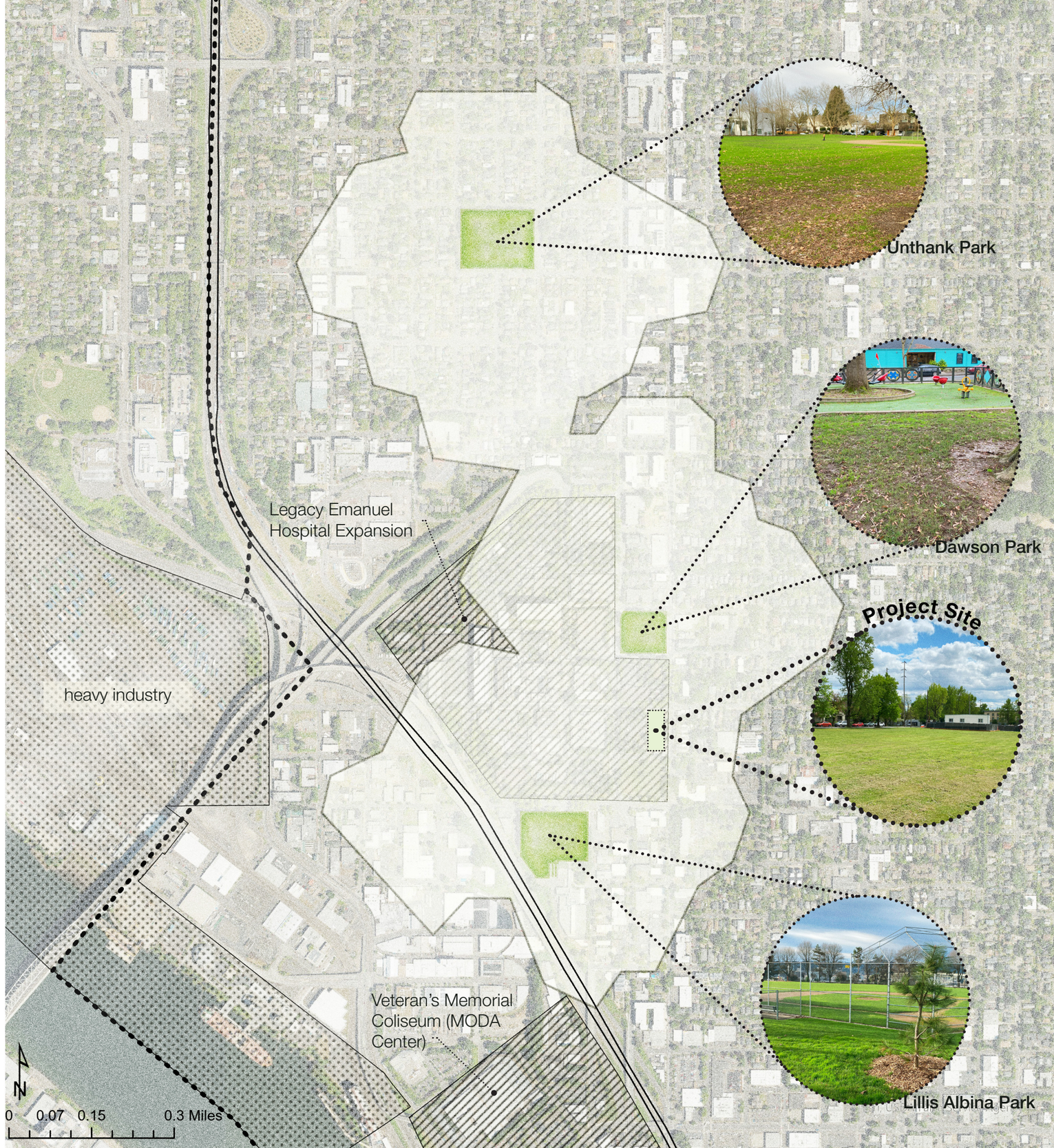
# 5.1 site selection

This project's site selection process goes beyond simple proximity metrics, emphasizing the importance of historical context and community need. The chosen site might be overlooked if relying solely on proximity to existing parks. However, a deeper historical analysis revealed its significance as land once belonging to the Albina community—now sitting underutilized. Further research identified nearby affordable housing led by efforts from local community organizations.

Although parks exist nearby, they offer limited variety—dominated by open lawns, sports fields, and standard amenities. Missing are the kinds of inclusive, multifunctional spaces that serve the unique needs of this neighborhood. The historically disenfranchised community that still anchors the neighborhood deserves a park intentionally designed to foster agency, connection, and well-being.

**road network analysis**

1/4 mile walking distance



# 5.2 neighborhood analysis

The site occupies a strategically significant location within a neighborhood rich in opportunities for community engagement and connection. Just one block away lay the Matt Dishman Community Center and the Albina Library—civic institutions fostering social cohesion and lifelong learning. Near the site are the headquarters of the Urban League of Portland, an organization whose longstanding activism since the 1960s has played a crucial role in empowering Albina's youth and strengthening community ties. Adjacent to the site, the Williams & Russell Housing development—spearheaded by Black-led community organizations—further exemplifies localized efforts to support and uplift Black residents of Albina. Together, these neighboring assets position the site as a pivotal opportunity to deepen neighborhood reconnection, amplify community agency, and reinforce a sense of representation.



# 5.3 target users

The primary users of this project are the families of Albina's historic Black community—those directly impacted by past urban renewal efforts—as well as current residents working to rebuild and reclaim their neighborhood. Just south of the selected site once stood the Hill Block, a vibrant commercial hub and cultural landmark. Though the building was demolished during the Legacy Emanuel expansion, its iconic domed roof was salvaged and relocated to Dawson Park, symbolizing the neighborhood's enduring legacy.

Today, that same area is being developed through the Williams & Russell project, a community-led housing initiative developed by a coalition of 11 organizations serving Portland's Black residents. The 1.7-acre site will include 85 affordable rental units, 20 affordable townhomes, and 30,000 square feet of office and retail space dedicated to Black-owned businesses and community partners.[21]

The Reconnecting Albina Planning Project is a collaborative effort between Albina Vision Trust and the City of Portland to develop urban strategies focused on restorative development for Portland's Black community, aiming to reconnect and revitalize the built environment of Lower Albina. As part of their initiative, community members were invited to pin their thoughts and ideas on an interactive map, informing where future efforts and resources should be directed.[13]

These quotes reflect the voices of residents from the area surrounding the proposed project site, underscoring a collective call for culturally resonant and inclusive park spaces that honor the history and identity of Lower Albina.[13]

## Williams & Russell Project



* Image from Williams & Russell Project. https://www.williamsrussellcdc.org/

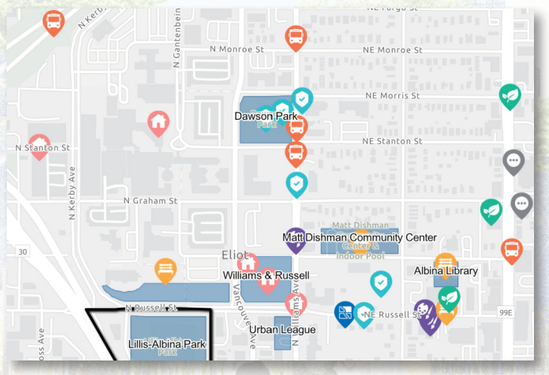
85 Affordable Apartments

20 Affordable Homes

30,000sf Black Business Hub

Project Site

## Reconnecting Albina Planning Project




* Image from Pin, It Portland. https://www.portland.gov/bps/planning/reconnecting-albina

*"Especially with the new affordable housing development coming to N Russell and Williams Ave, this street could really use some space activation."*

*"...curated for art & culture, housing and business growth for the descendants of those who were pushed out and our marginalized community members."*

*"This lot would make a lovely small park with benches and tables for elders, flower beds and shade structures"*

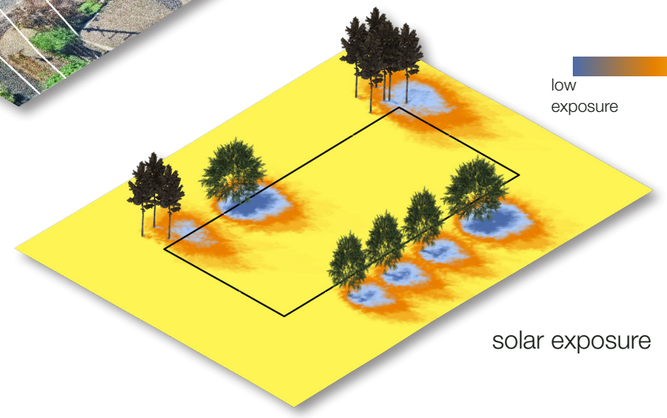
*"Small services or parklet spaces along Russell could help connect this portion and add value for the neighbors."*

*"More open green space is needed in this neighborhood. Too many huge buildings and concrete, not enough plants and trees."*

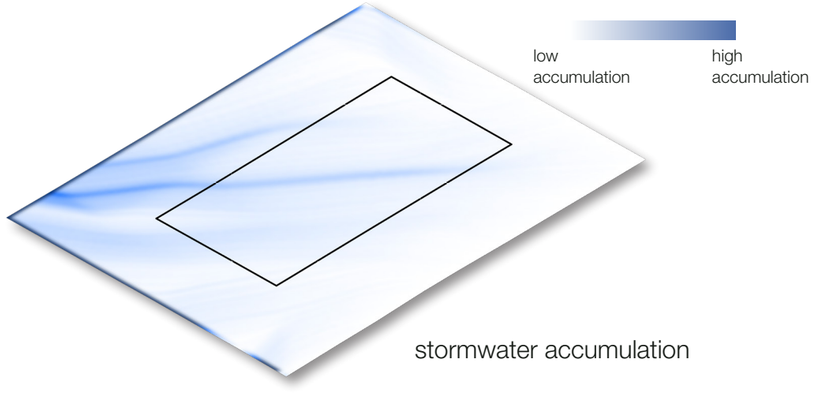
# 5.4 site analysis

The site, currently owned by Legacy Health, encompasses approximately one acre within the Eliot neighborhood. The site sits underutilized with a maintained lawn and four sweetgum street trees. The area receives abundant sunlight and gradually slopes from the northeast to the southwest. Flanking the site is an adjacent parking lot, where a cluster of Douglas-fir and a single Bigleaf Maple add greenery and character to the site.




solar exposure




stormwater accumulation







site photos, May 2025

# 6.0 basis for design

To ensure the site thoughtfully and intentionally supports its primary users, the design rationale is grounded in research. Drawing from precedent studies and key literature, the design is guided by neighborhood-centered principles that inform and shape each intervention. This evidence-based approach ensures that every aspect of the design is tailored to the community's needs, aspirations, and cultural context.

Importantly, this approach is not intended to replace community engagement, but rather to complement it. Direct input from residents remains the most effective means of capturing the unique character and priorities of a specific neighborhood. The design principles developed through this project aim to provide a set of general, yet robust, guidelines derived from recurring themes in community-driven projects. In contexts where comprehensive community engagement may not be feasible, these principles offer a means of maintaining a neighborhood-centered orientation in the design process.

01
- spatial analysis
- historical analysis

site selection

02
- precedent study
- literature review

basis for design

03
- apply principles to site design

site design

# 6.1 precedent study

project database: Trust for Public Land
keywords: equity, local parks, black history & culture, community

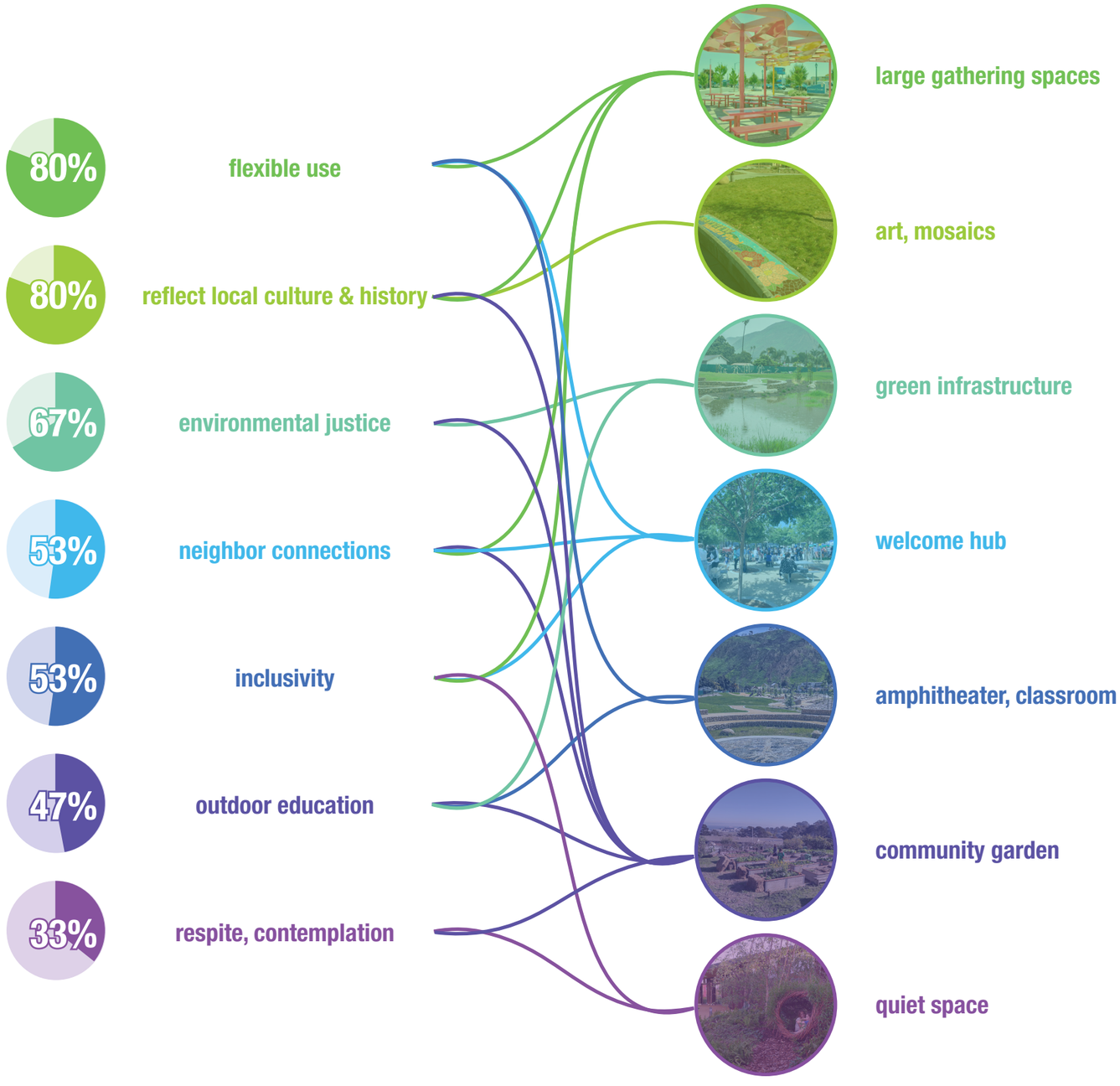
**Ashland Zócalo Park** (Hayward, CA, 2024)
**Cuatro Vientos Park** (Denver, CO, 2014)
**Hilltop Park** (San Francisco, CA, 2017)
**Kellogg Park** (Ventura, CA, 2018)
**Madison Avenue Park** (Los Angeles, CA, 2019)
**Methow Park** (South Wenatchee, WA, 2020)
**Mifflin Square Park** (Philadelphia, PA, 2024)
**Montbello Open Space Park** (Denver, CO, 2021)
**Panorama Park** (Colorado Springs, CO, 2022)
**Rodney Cook Sr. Park** (Atlanta, GA, 2021)
**Rudolph Park** (Lawndale, CA, 2016)
**South Lynwood Park** (Lynwood, WA, 2022)
**South Oak Cliff Renaissance Park** (Dallas, TX, 2021)
**South Victoria Avenue Park** (Los Angeles, CA, 2019)
**Watts Serenity Park** (Los Angeles, CA, 2015)

Each precedent examined shared a fundamental aim: to bring more residents within a 10-minute walk of a park while actively involving the community in the design process. A detailed analysis of these precedents informs the design of the selected site, focusing on how community engagement shaped both the project goals and the resulting design interventions. This analysis helped identify park features and amenities that most effectively advance equitable access.

By examining the relationships between goals and design elements implemented in each case, patterns emerged that highlighted successful design strategies. This process clarified how specific design decisions can address broader social and environmental challenges. As a result, an actionable set of neighborhood-centered design principles was developed that will directly inform the design and programming of the site. These principles ensure that the final park design authentically reflects the needs of the surrounding community, fostering inclusive and equitable access.

these **key goals** reflect recurring themes and focus areas from community engagement processes

the goals were achieved through a variety of amenities and programs, these are recurring **design components**



# 6.2 **neighborhood-centered design principles**

The overarching goals identified through community engagement in the precedent study were distilled into a set of design principles: community autonomy, sense of belonging, climate resilience, and tranquility —reframing community-derived insights into a concise, design-oriented framework. This translation bridges the gap between the lived experiences of community members—who may not have formal training in landscape architecture—and the technical language of design, transforming grassroots ideas into actionable strategies applicable across diverse sites.

For instance, one frequently expressed goal was flexible use. In practice, this manifested through design elements such as expansive gathering spaces that could accommodate a variety of community-driven activities. This emphasis on adaptability underscored the importance of allowing residents to shape the programming and use of the space according to their needs and preferences. As a result, the principle of community autonomy was established, reflecting the value of local agency in decision-making around amenities, events, and spatial features.

Another prominent goal was environmental justice—a broad and multifaceted concept that poses challenges for direct design translation. By analyzing the design responses in precedent projects, key components such as green infrastructure, shade provision, and stormwater management emerged as tangible expressions of this goal. To refine this into a more targeted and actionable principle, the idea of climate resilience was adopted, offering a clearer pathway for implementation.

The remaining goals were translated into design principles through the same thoughtful process: identifying recurring themes from community input, analyzing how these were addressed in precedent projects, and distilling those patterns into clear, actionable principles. This consistent methodology ensured that each principle was grounded in both community-derived insights and concrete design strategies, maintaining a strong, traceable connection between lived experience and spatial intervention.

## principles from **precedents**



### Community Autonomy

spaces that can be programmed by community, fostering agency, land stewardship, food security, cultural traditions, skill building, and education



### Sense of Belonging

spaces that are universally accessible & inclusive, culturally relevant, safe, and welcoming



### Climate Resilience

spaces that provide shade, stormwater management



### Tranquility

spaces for children & families that might not have a sense of tranquility at home

# 6.3 neighborhood-centered design principles

To further refine and enhance this framework, a review of key literature was conducted, leading to significant updates to the list of principles. Notably, the principle of climate resilience has been broadened to ecosystem services—a concept that not only encompasses climate resilience but also integrates a wider array of ecological and cultural benefits not fully captured in the precedents studied. The literature identified a comprehensive suite of urban park ecosystem services that should be prioritized in the new park's design, particularly those experienced and valued at a human scale.[2 9 12] These services include stormwater management, air quality improvement, wind and noise reduction, microclimate regulation, biodiversity and habitat enhancement, opportunities for nature experience, and the nurturing of cultural connections and identity.[2 9 12]

Additionally, the literature review prompted the addition of a fifth design principle: youth access to nature. While several precedents incorporated child development and recreation programming, the literature underscored the systemic barriers that prevent many inner-city youth of color from engaging meaningfully with nature.[5 11 16 17] Recognizing this disconnect, the design framework now explicitly prioritizes creating spaces and experiences that invite and empower youth to connect with nature and native ecosystems within the urban realm. This approach is further supported by Oregon's Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), which identifies declining youth engagement in the outdoors as a critical issue requiring intentional interventions.[11]

principles from **precedents**

**Community Autonomy**
spaces that can be programmed by community, fostering agency, land stewardship, food security, cultural traditions, skill building, and education

**Sense of Belonging**
spaces that are universally accessible & inclusive, culturally relevant, safe, and welcoming

**Climate Resilience**
spaces that provide shade, stormwater management

**Tranquility**
spaces for children & families that might not have a sense of tranquility at home

added from **key literature**

**Youth Access to Nature** [5 8 11 16]
spaces for children to interact with and learn about native ecosystems

**Ecosystem Services** [2 9 12]
- stormwater management
- air quality improvement
- wind and noise reduction
- microclimate regulation
- biodiversity and habitat enhancement
- opportunities for nature experience
- nurturing of cultural connections and identity

These refined principles form a robust, evidence-based foundation for the design and programming of the selected site, fostering inclusive and equitable access.

# 7.0 site design

The proposed design thoughtfully integrates neighborhood-centered principles with the specific social and physical context of the surrounding community to shape the site's spatial organization and programmatic elements. This deliberate, context-sensitive approach results in a park that is not only site-specific but also inclusive and empowering—welcoming the diverse needs, identities, and aspirations of nearby residents.

01
**site selection**

- spatial analysis
- historical analysis

02
**basis for design**

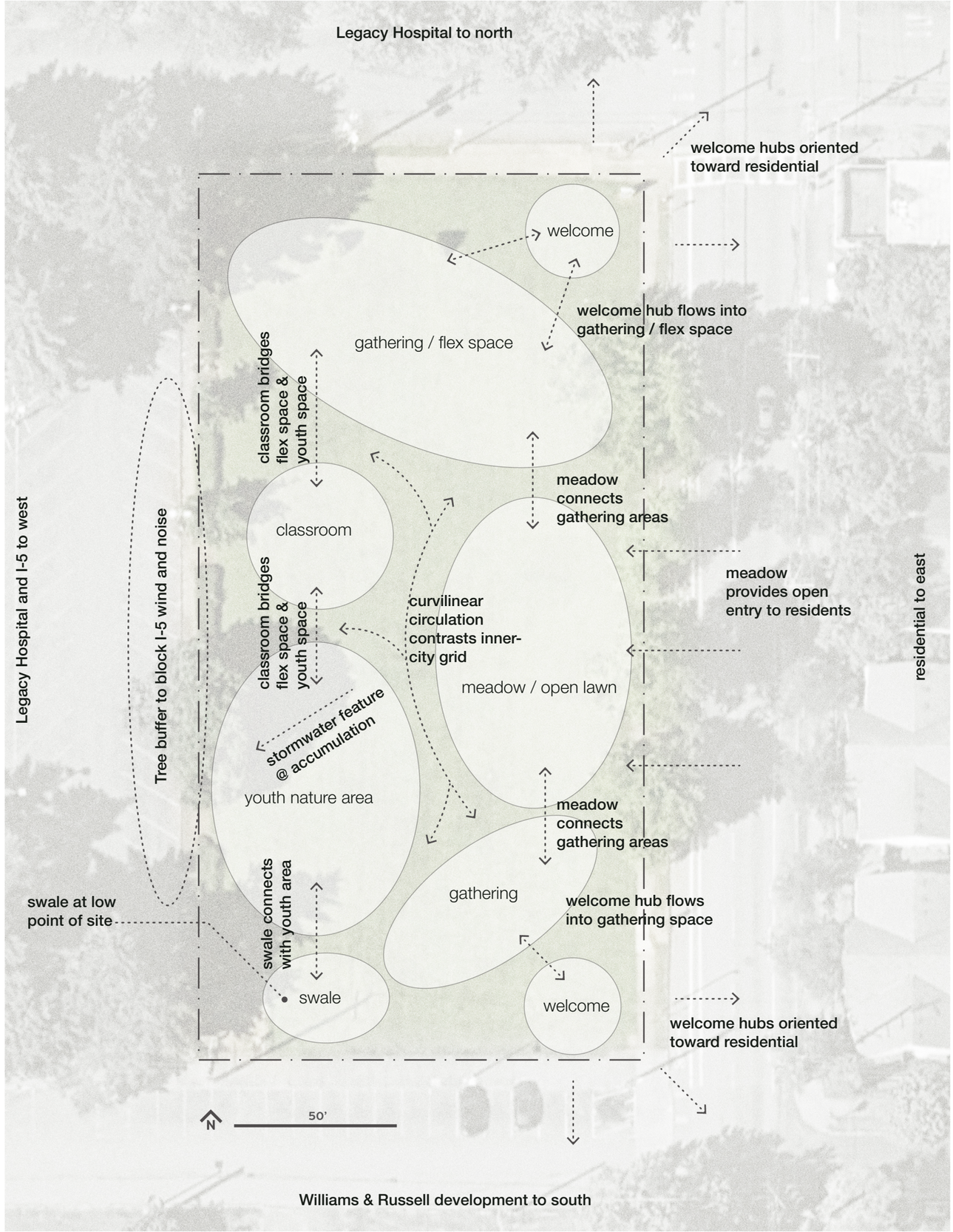
- precedent study
- literature review

03
**site design**

- apply principles to site design

# 7.1 site configuration

The proposed site configuration is informed by the spatial context of the surrounding neighborhood. Residential areas and community institutions are primarily located to the east of the site, while the expansive Legacy Hospital campus and Interstate 5 lie to the west. In response, the welcome hubs are strategically oriented toward the east, fostering a strong visual and functional connection with the community. From these hubs, gathering areas and flexible-use spaces extend into the park, creating generous zones for family and community events. A central open meadow serves as a unifying element, linking the northern and southern gathering spaces through a programmable area that offers broad and accessible entry from the eastern edge. The site's natural topography informs the strategic placement of a stormwater swale and stream corridor, channeling runoff toward the site's lowest elevation. This hydrological feature is seamlessly integrated into a designated area designed to support youth engagement with nature, reinforcing both ecological function and educational opportunity. Bridging this youth-oriented nature area and the large flexible space is an outdoor classroom designed to support both structured and informal learning, as well as performances and other community activities.

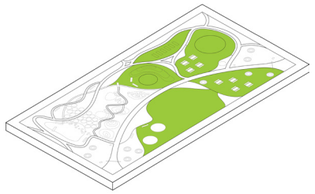


# 7.2 site plan

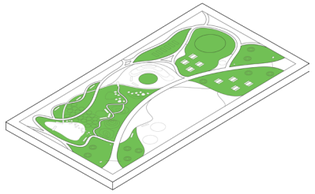
Building upon the initial site configuration, the detailed site plan refines the broader spatial zones into a site-specific design that responds directly to the physical context and community needs. This refined plan translates conceptual frameworks into tangible spatial arrangements, ensuring that each design element actively supports and reflects the core neighborhood-centered principles. Through careful attention to scale, access, programming, and ecological integration, the detailed design advances the original vision by offering nuanced responses to community identity, connectivity, inclusivity, and well-being.



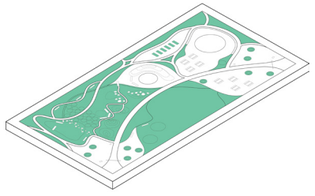
# 7.3 neighborhood-centered design principles



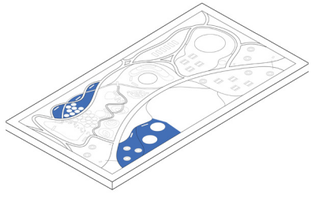
**Community Autonomy**



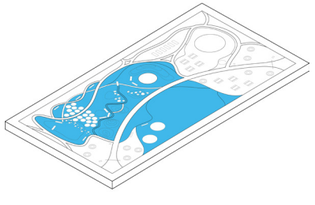
**Sense of Belonging**



**Ecosystem Services**

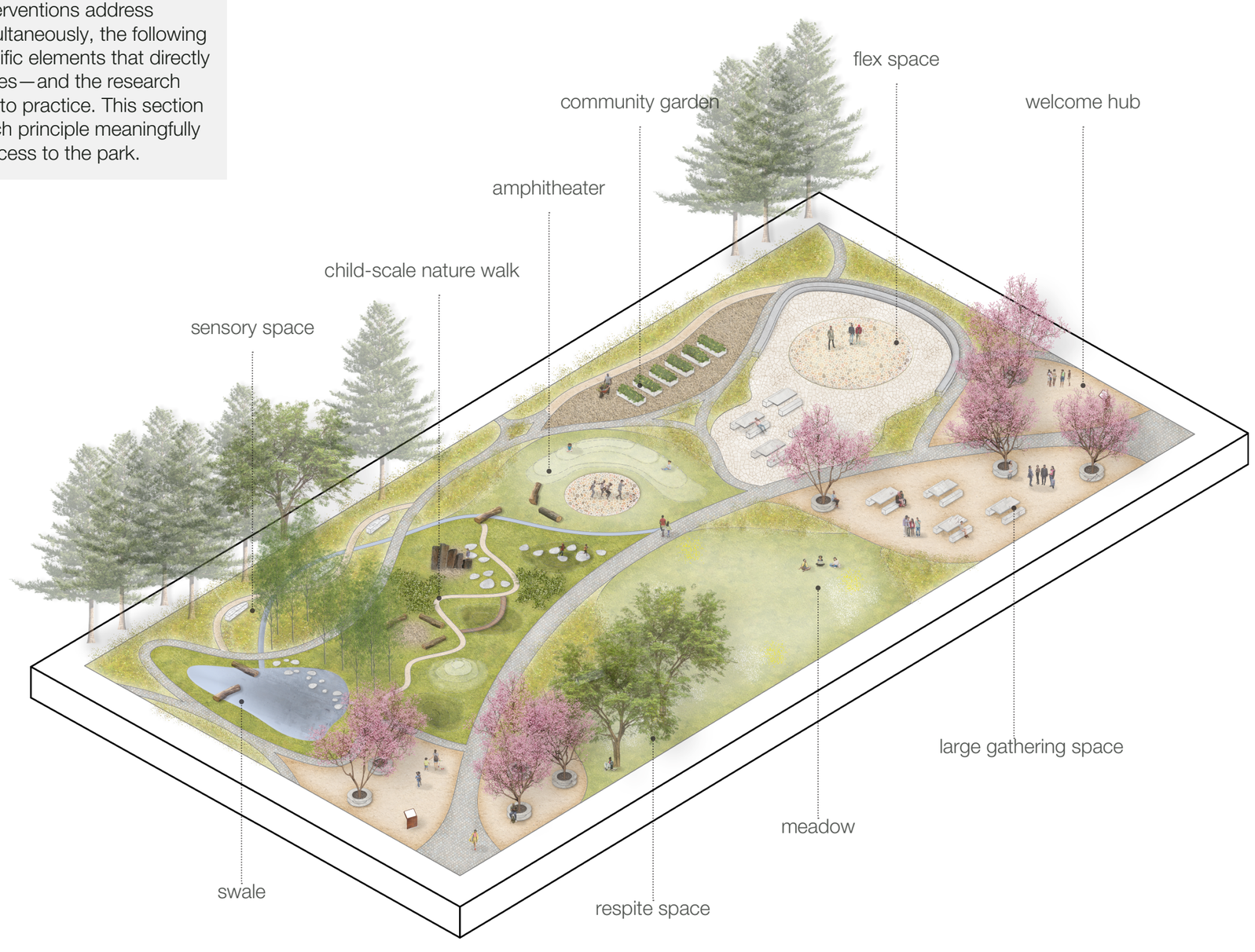


**Tranquility**



**Youth Access to Nature**

While many design interventions address multiple principles simultaneously, the following section highlights specific elements that directly translate these principles—and the research underpinning them—into practice. This section demonstrates how each principle meaningfully advances equitable access to the park.



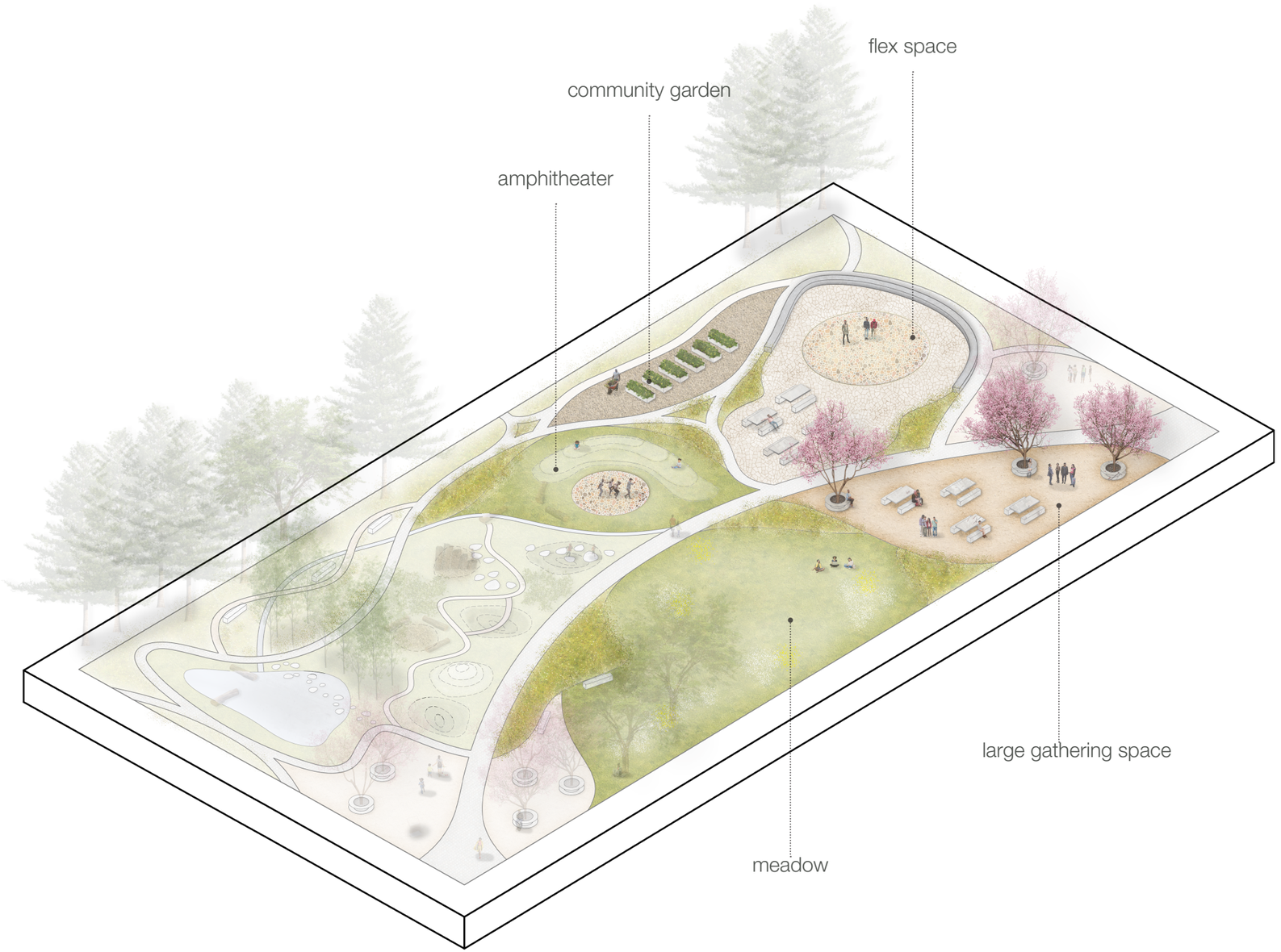


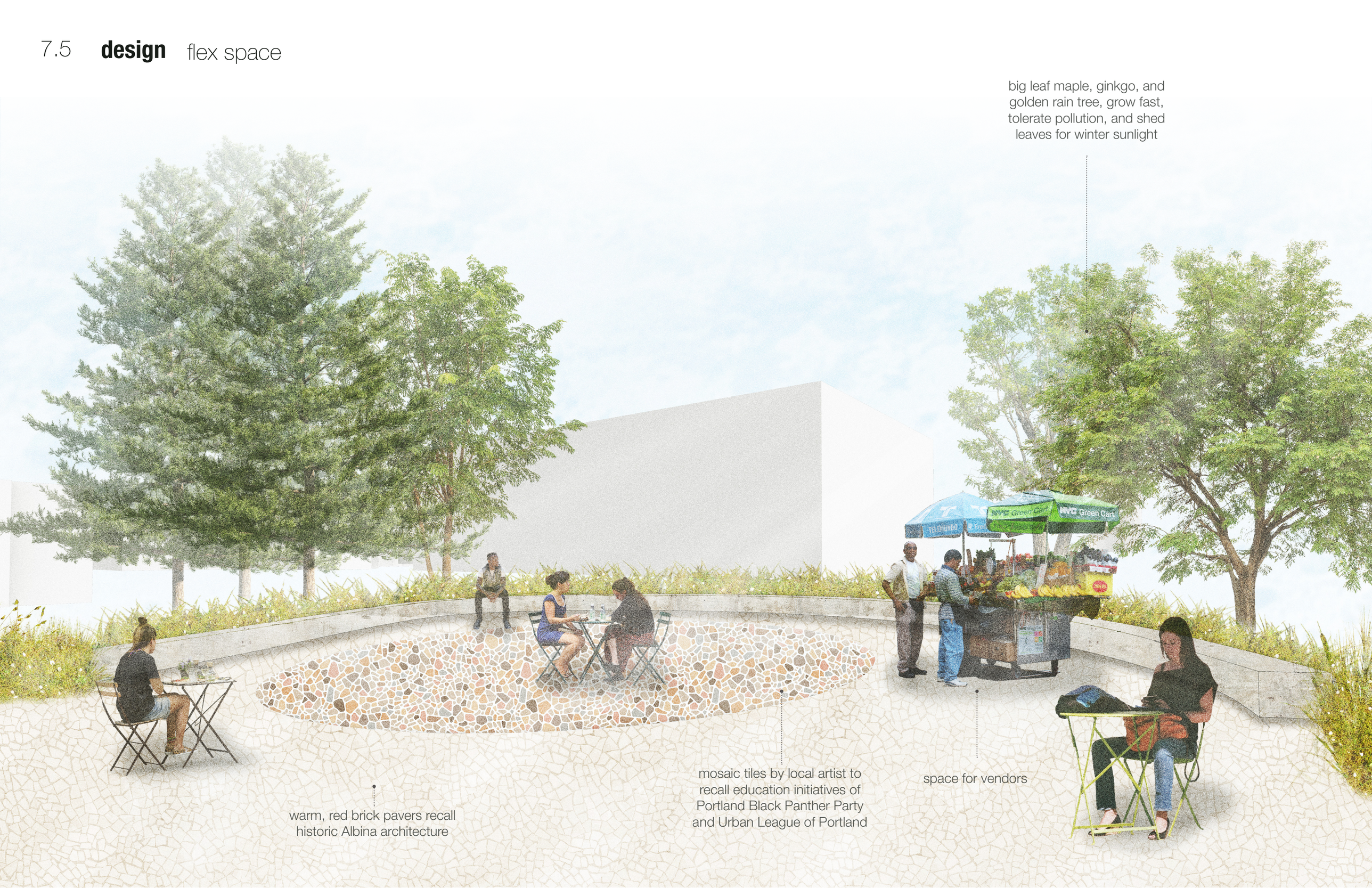
## Community Autonomy

The proposed design features several spaces intentionally crafted to foster community autonomy. At its core is a flexible open space that invites community-led programming, accommodating an array of events, from festivals and markets to vendor fairs and more. This flexible space seamlessly transitions into expansive communal gathering areas, including picnic tables and tree-shaded benches—elements that align directly with one of the most frequently expressed desires in the precedent study: spaces for large family gatherings.

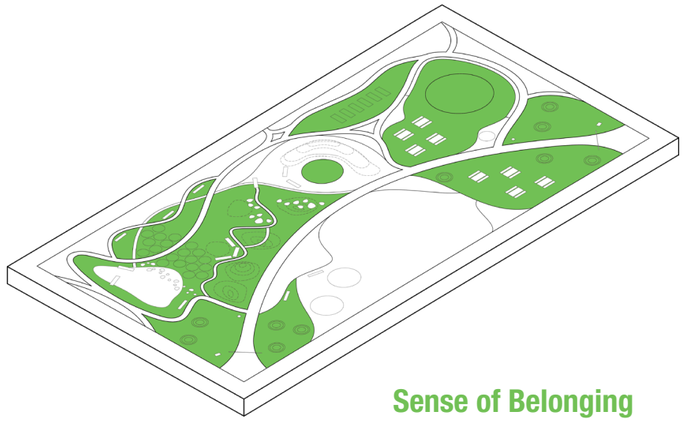
The design further reinforces community autonomy through the inclusion of a community garden, which serves as a catalyst for social interaction, skills development, and food security. By creating a space for collaborative cultivation and knowledge-sharing, the garden offers a wealth of benefits to local residents while reinforcing community bonds.

A stage and an amphitheater-style grassy mound provide a venue for performances, educational programs, and cultural events. This amphitheater extends into an expansive meadow—an open field that can be activated by the community for large-scale gatherings and celebrations, thereby enriching the site's capacity to support diverse and inclusive uses.




big leaf maple, ginkgo, and golden rain tree, grow fast, tolerate pollution, and shed leaves for winter sunlight
warm, red brick pavers recall historic Albina architecture
mosaic tiles by local artist to recall education initiatives of Portland Black Panther Party and Urban League of Portland
space for vendors
NYC Green Cart


community owned garden
beds support food security, skill
and community building, and
agency in the neighborhood

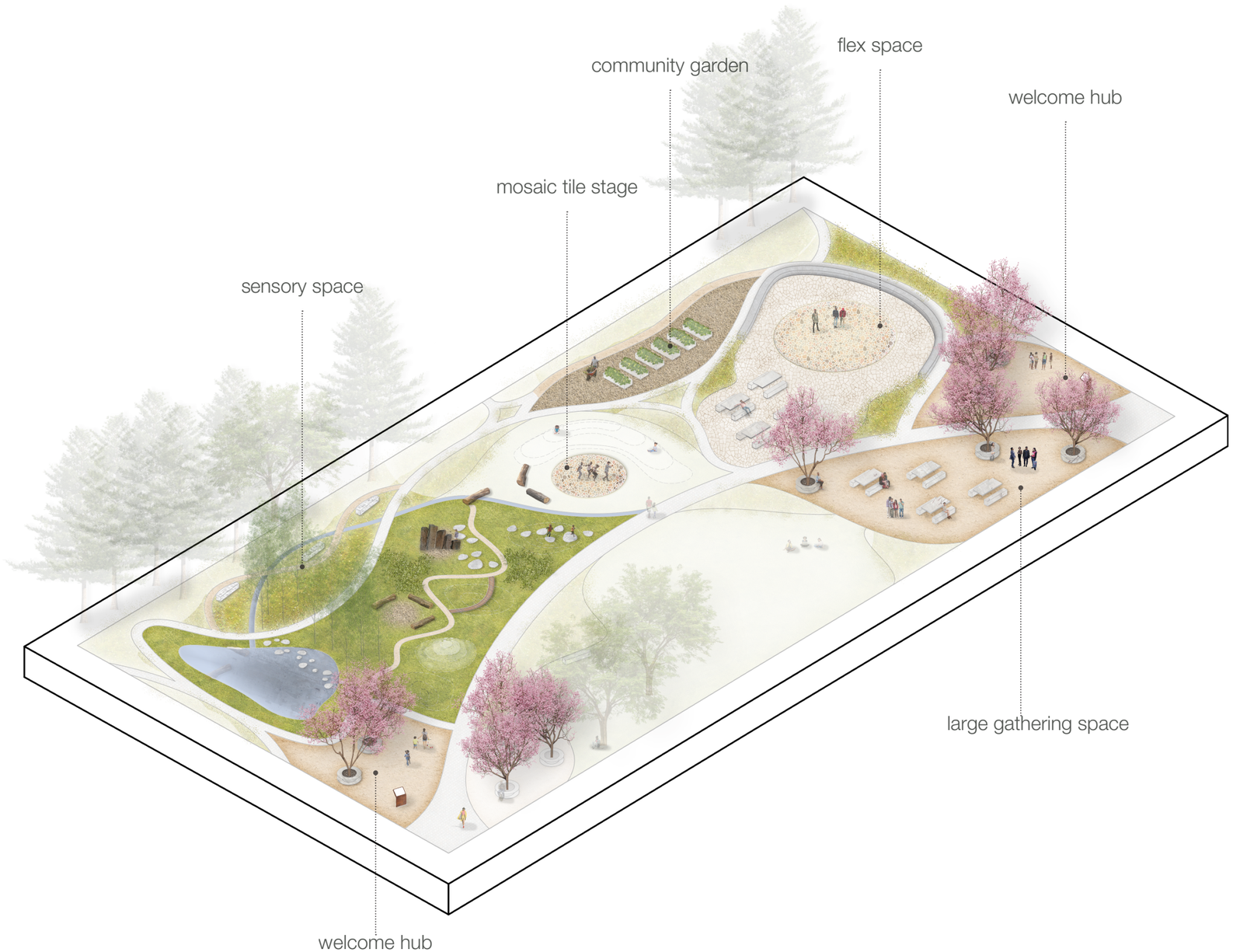


## Sense of Belonging

A sense of belonging is fostered through a range of neighborhood-specific design interventions that honor local heritage and cultural identity. Mosaic tiles crafted by local artists visually narrate the site's rich history and the broader context of the surrounding neighborhood. Welcome hubs, featuring signage commemorating the history of Albina, establish inviting gateways to the park that both orient visitors and celebrate the community's past. These hubs feature Kwanzan Flowering Cherry trees, a direct nod to the Albina Neighborhood Improvement Plan of the 1960s, whose plantings still grace the neighborhood today.

The design's flex space and expansive gathering areas accommodate a wide range of events, from community festivals to cultural celebrations, facilitating meaningful connections and reinforcing collective identity. The community garden further supports this sense of belonging by fostering a shared sense of purpose, encouraging stewardship, and cultivating pride among local residents.

The design includes a child-scale nature walk and a sensory space—environments thoughtfully tailored to the needs and imaginations of children—ensuring that a sense of belonging is nurtured from an early age. The park's active edges and clear sight lines prioritize safety through thoughtful visibility rather than through excessive lighting and surveillance, creating an environment that is secure yet welcoming.

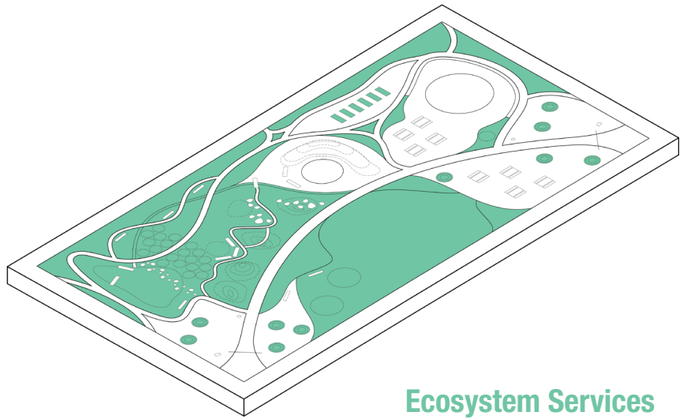



Kwanzan Flowering Cherry trees recall the community-led Albina Neighorhood Improvement Plan of 1960s
welcome signage commemorates Albina history and orients visitors
open gathering area



typical plantings include
tufted hairgrass, camas,
Oregon sunshine, yarrow,
clarkia, poppy, Hall's aster

space for community-led programming

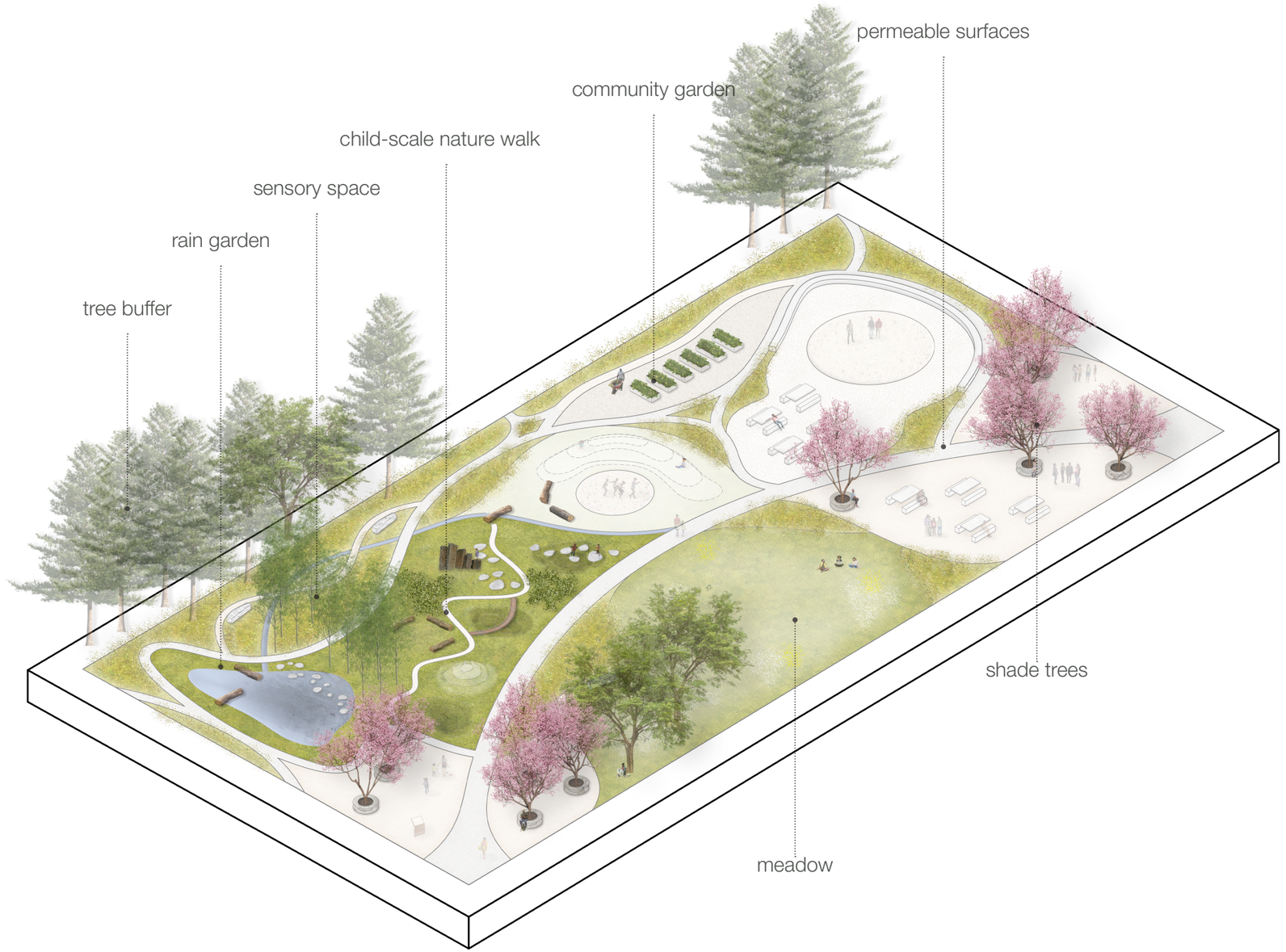


## Ecosystem Services

The proposed design integrates ecosystem services throughout the site, prioritizing ecological resilience and environmental stewardship. Native and climate-adaptive plant species are distributed across the site, supporting biodiversity and providing habitat for local pollinators. A central meadow composed of native, drought-tolerant grasses and plants offers an environmentally responsible alternative to a traditional lawn, maintaining the flexibility of open green spaces while reducing resource demands.

A child-scale nature walk and sensory space introduce children to diverse plant communities and ecosystems, encouraging exploration, play, and even foraging in a natural and stimulating environment. A seasonal ‘stream’ and swale not only provide a visually compelling landscape feature, but also enhance the site’s stormwater management through natural processes. The stream flows between the amphitheater and child-scale nature walk, and through the sensory space into the swale, where stepping stones and habitat logs immerse visitors in the space.

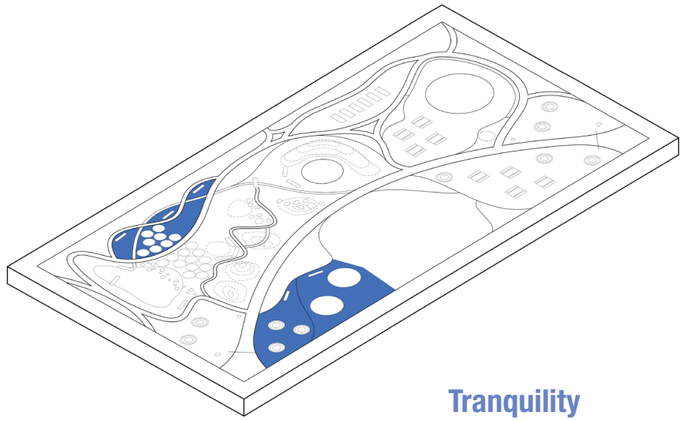
Strategically placed trees contribute further ecological functions, offering essential shade while buffering wind and noise from the adjacent Interstate 5, thus creating a more comfortable and serene environment. Additionally, the community garden extends the array of ecosystem services by enhancing food security, supporting local biodiversity, and fostering a deeper connection between residents and their environment.




Habitat logs support biodiversity
while providing a feature
for resting and climbing
permeable paths
throughout site
stepping stones invite visitors
to closely explore the bioswale

mown ‘eco-lawn’ xeriscape
lawn alternative
with native, drought tolerant,
pollinator friendly plants:
perennial ryegrass, fescue mix,
yarrow, clover, sweet alyssum,
lupine, poppy, daisy, clarkia

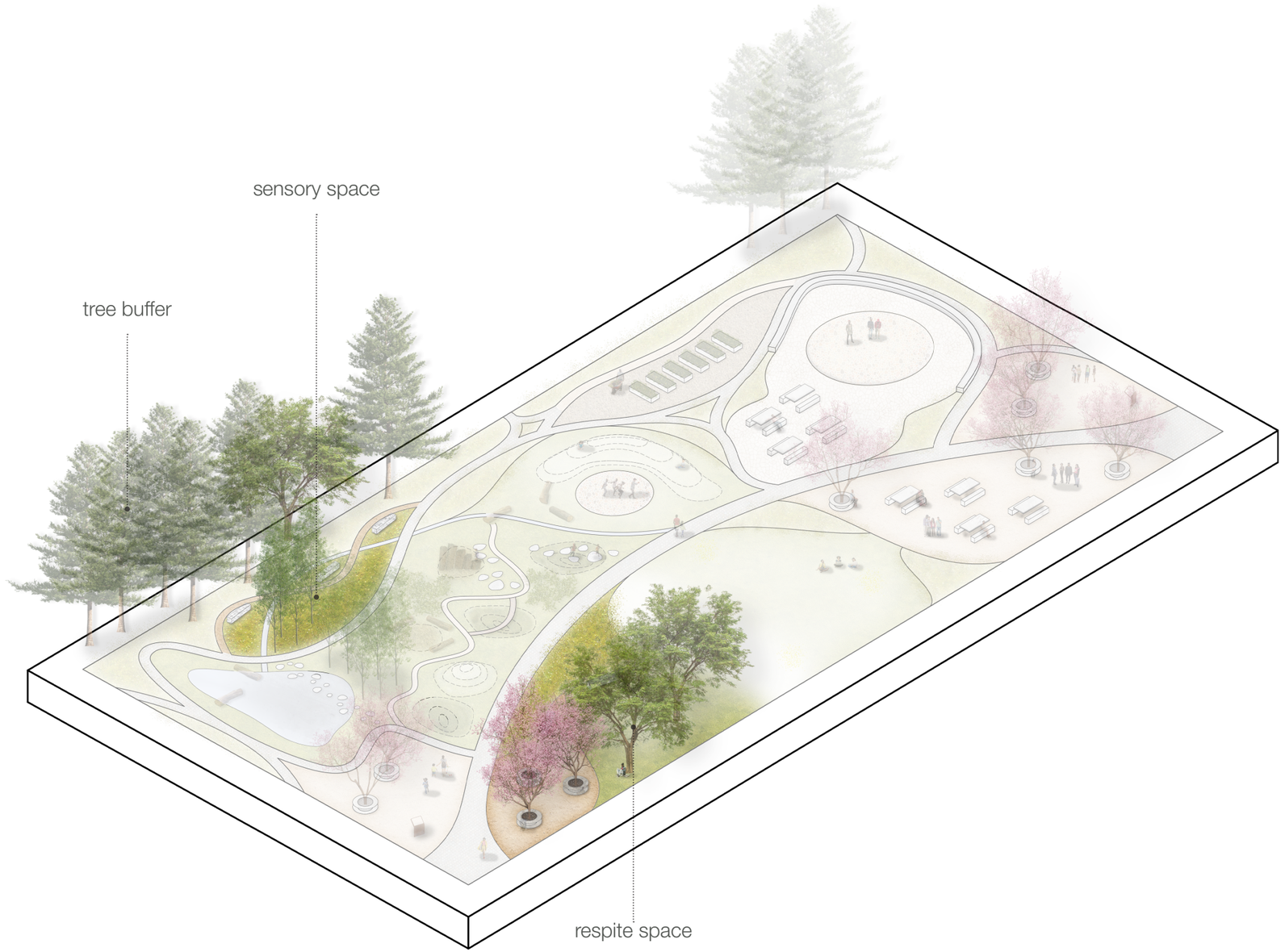
unmown ‘eco-lawn’ planting
surrounds the mown meadow



**Tranquility**

Tranquility is at the heart of two key spaces within the park: the sensory space and the respite space. In the sensory space, a narrow, winding path meanders alongside a seasonal stream, inviting children and families to engage in a rich, multisensory experience. This space features a thoughtfully curated palette of plantings—fragrant, soft, and visually captivating—that encourages visitors to slow down and appreciate subtle natural details. Encircled by a buffer of trees, the sensory space is further enriched by the gentle sounds of flowing water and the rustling of quaking aspens, creating an immersive retreat that contrasts with the bustling urban environment beyond.

The respite area, designed for individual contemplation and rest, offers shaded seating options that cater to a range of personal preferences. Here, visitors can find moments of solitude and reflection, reinforcing the park's role as a restorative refuge within the city.



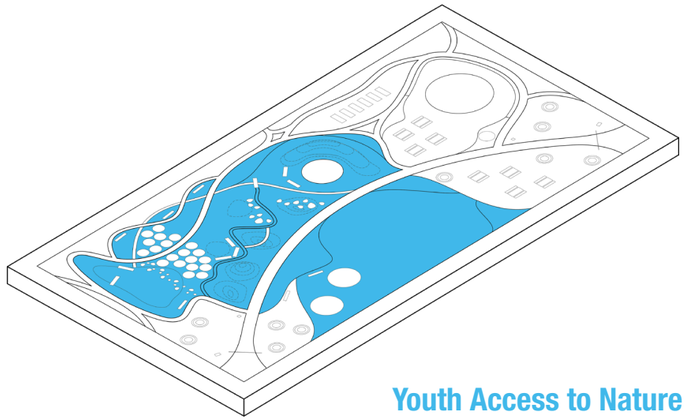
dense tree buffer for I-5
noise, particulate, and wind

quaking aspen trees provide
visual and audible interest

multisensory planting includes
lamb's ears, corsican mint,
lavender, creeping thyme,
sage, carex, rosemary, showy
milkweed, echinacea

bigleaf maple offers cooling shade
in summer and lets in winter sun

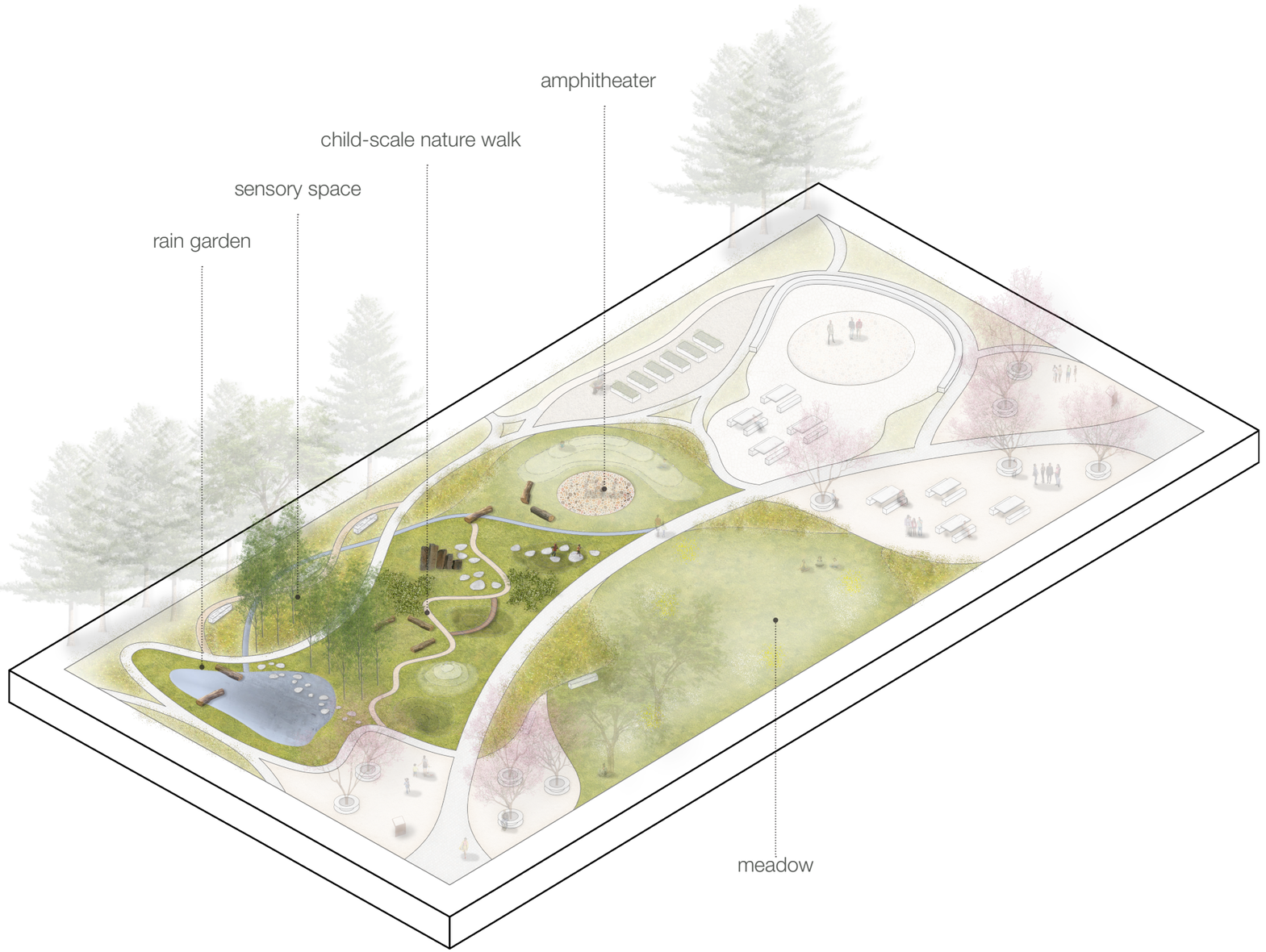
tall meadow planting
separates space
from rest of site



**Youth Access to Nature**

The proposed design prioritizes meaningful engagement between children and nature through intentionally designed spaces like the child-scale nature walk and the sensory space. These areas offer immersive, multisensory experiences that foster curiosity, ecological literacy, and active exploration. The native meadow planting serves as an ecologically rich alternative to traditional lawns, providing ample space for play while immersing children in the native ecosystem.

Adjacent to the child-scale nature walk, the amphitheater acts as an outdoor classroom and reflection space, supporting both structured educational programs and informal discovery. Collectively, these elements highlight the design's commitment to nurturing environmental stewardship and inspiring a lifelong connection to nature among the park's youngest visitors.




natural elements like log seating and a grass mound encourage exploration, while the amphitheater creates space for outdoor learning
mosaic tiles by local artist to recall Seven of Diamonds Club and “Jumptown” through jazz music theme


quaking aspen grove
native basalt climbing columns
native berry plants for foraging including blueberry, elderberry, wild strawberry, huckleberry
small boardwalk over seasonal swale
varied terrain offers opportunities for discovery and play
log circle
plant diversity inspires curiosity and ecological literacy

# 8.0 conclusion

This project builds on urban park access research by emphasizing the role of design in advancing equity. While traditional methods focus on a planning-scale, quantitative approach, this work demonstrates that how parks are designed—and for whom—can be just as critical in addressing access disparities.

Through a research-based, neighborhood-centered proposal in Albina, the project highlights how inclusive, culturally attuned design can respond to community needs often overlooked by spatial data alone. The proposed design offers a model for how parks can serve as platforms for community belonging, particularly in neighborhoods that have been disenfranchised from the benefits of urban development.

This project contributes to the evolving field of landscape architecture by foregrounding the qualitative aspects of park design—affirming that inclusivity, cultural relevance, and social connectivity are not secondary considerations, but essential criteria for equitable parks. It underscores the potential of design to not only enhance access, but to build agency.

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