



President William Anderson, FAICP  
Vice President Chloe Lauer  
Treasurer Javier Santos, AIA  
Secretary Laura Burnett, FASLA

**Meeting Date: May 5, 2026**  
**Agenda Item No. 14**  
**Distribution Date: May 4, 2026**  
**Batch No. 01**

Ruocco Design Center  
3605 Fifth Avenue  
San Diego, CA 92103

April 30, 2026

Supervisor Montgomery-Steppe  
County of San Diego Fourth District  
Attn: Joshua Dunn

Re: San Diego Black Arts + Culture District

Ref: San Diego County Board of Supervisors Meeting, May 5, 2026  
Agenda #14: Investing in Arts, Culture and Creative Opportunity for All  
1f: Investment in the Black Arts + Culture District

Dear Supervisor Montgomery-Steppe:

It is with great pride and honor that the San Diego Coalition for Public Places was asked to assist the Black Arts + Culture District (BACD) prepare conceptual designs for their proposed Gathering Space. The Coalition is a newly formed organization of San Diegans with experience in urban planning, design, and community development. We provide pro-bono services to place-based non-profits and advocate for quality public places that bring people together. We submit this letter in support of their important community-building project and County funding that will enable them to proceed.

Prior to our formation as an organization, members of our Coalition have had the privilege to work with the BACD in its formative stages: with the NewSchool of Architecture & Design on the development of conceptual designs for Imperial Avenue, with the District and the City of San Diego on the repair and upgrading of The Marie Widman Memorial Park, and the Imperial Avenue Specific Plan.

Last fall, Carolyn Smith asked if we could help by developing conceptual designs for the vacant lot at Imperial Avenue within the District. Scenarios were sketched based on ideas resulting from BACD's community workshops, BACD's program for the site, and the site's condition and context. A design team of architects, city planners and landscape architects, Michael Robinson, Caroline Robinson, Laura Burnett, Marty Poirier, Bill Anderson, and Michael Stepner organized a design charrette to develop preliminary plans. The plans were refined during the following months and were presented to and discussed with the BACD committee on April 21, 2026. The Presentation follows this letter.

The Coalition believes the proposed Gathering Place will be an important asset to the development of the Black Arts + Culture District. We also believe it will be a model for how small vacant and underutilized parcels can be turned into valuable community building assets and will be an inspiration for many place-based community organizations in the county.

The San Diego Coalition for Public Places urge the Board of Supervisors favorable consideration for the Black Arts + Culture District.



Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "William Anderson".

William Anderson, FAICP  
President  
San Diego Coalition for Public Places

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Michael Stepner".

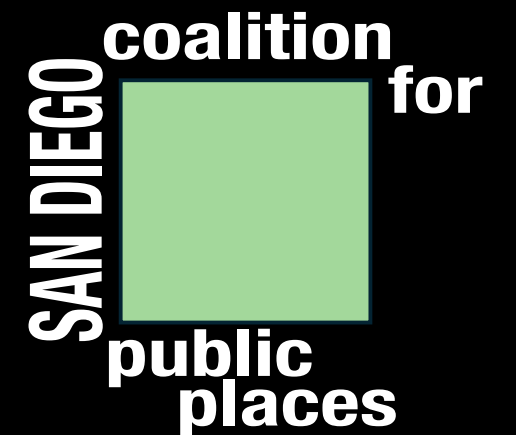
Michael Stepner, FAIA, FAICP  
Workshop Organizer

*San Diego Coalition for Public Places works with communities to bring social, intrinsic and economic value by using professional design strategies that promote accessibility, functionality and beauty.*



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A PLACE TO GATHER





**The District has recently conducted a Visioning Exercise and developed a list of desired functions and improvements for the Gathering Space:**

- Art classes
- Outdoor Art Gallery
- Film Festivals/movie nights
- Story telling
- Portable Library
- Music live and recorded
- Live performances [music, dramatic]
- Community markets
- Installation of Art and/or lights
- Dance Programs, Community networking
- Game Tournaments [board and card games]
- Book Club meetings for children and adults
- Small Pop-ups featuring home-based businesses.

**Other recommendations from the Visioning session include:**

- New fencing along the perimeter of the site
- The ability to add art to the space
- Adding plants where appropriate
- Create shading elements
- Location for the newest porta-potty being used by the city [throne ports potty [\[https://thronelabs.co/\]](https://thronelabs.co/)]
- Level the concrete, make the site ADA compliant
- Add stage
- Artistic gate in the front of the property.

## **A PLACE TO GATHER**

This place on Imperial Avenue is nestled at the base of the north slope of South Encanto bookended between two of the community's proud assets – The Block Club and Raimo Residences providing community gathering and sanctuary to veterans and the needy – and Ministerios Ebenezer a place of worship and fellowship. Its location – framed by topography and generosity – is a physical manifestation of nurture and protection. Truly a place to gather.

This place gives a central location in the Black Arts + Culture District for gathering and celebration.

This place will celebrate the arts with exhibitions and performances.

True to its mission, this place will be created in collaboration with community artists and designers in support of landscape architects and civil engineers. All elements in the design are seen as works of art.

To achieve this, the District intends to modify the property with selective demolition and new improvements. These improvements will enhance the functionality of the place with basic features such as new security fencing, paving, state of the art portable restrooms, shade canopies, built-in seatwalls, plant material, drainage and irrigation.

The site is 50' wide and 150' deep, divided into three spaces:

### **The Front Room**

- 3,000 square foot area for arrival, gathering and exhibitions

### **The Back Room**

- 2,000 square foot area for gathering and performances

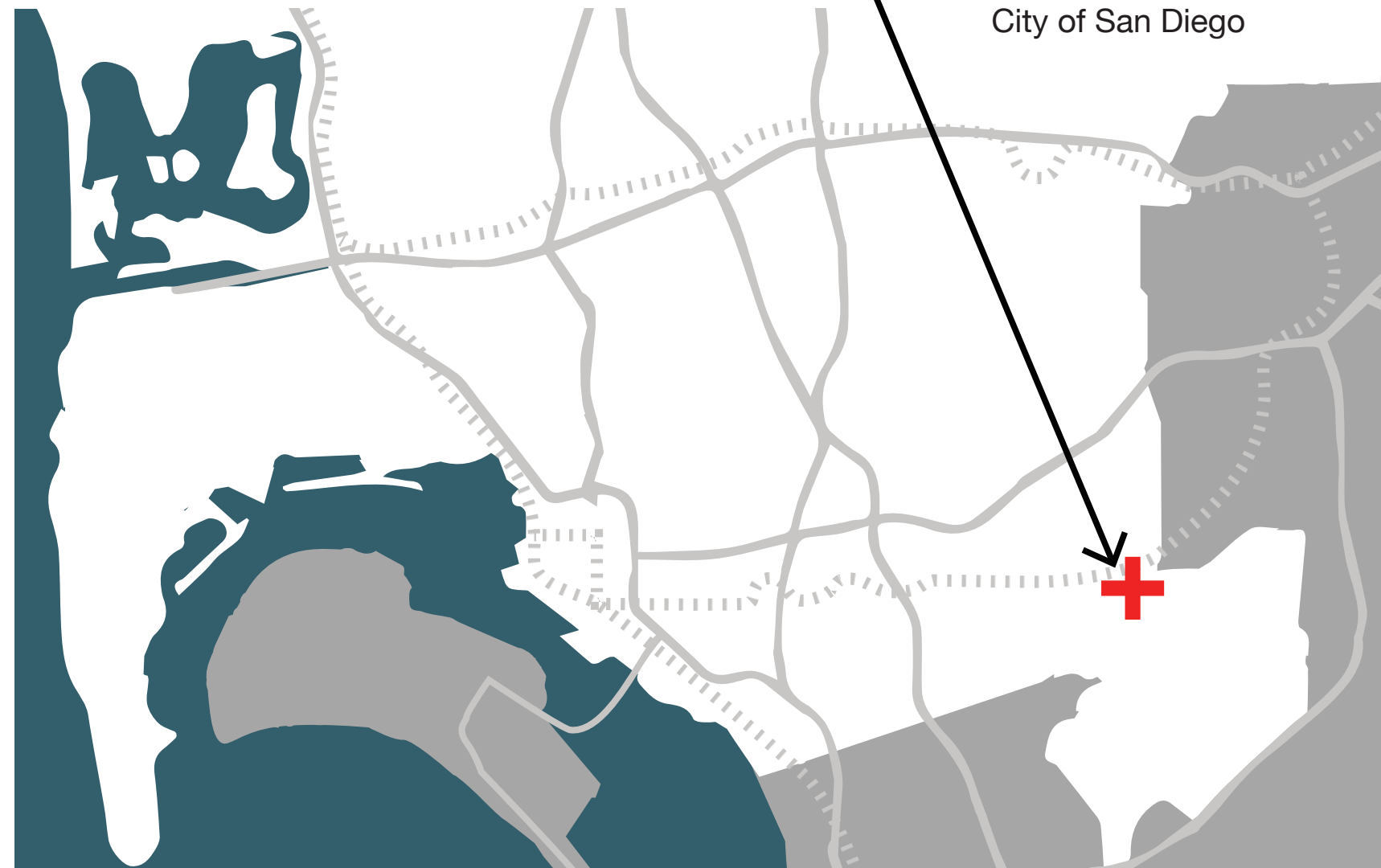
### **The Garden**

- 2,500 square foot steeply sloped native plant garden area for collection, cleansing, and re-use of stormwater

## **The specific components of the project are:**

- Work with the City of San Diego to repair/replace the public sidewalk to be ADA compliant
- Demolish and remove existing concrete surfaces
- Repair and infill damaged concrete block retaining wall at stage area
- Artist designed 8'-6" tall, perforated metal fence and entry gate at the sidewalk along Imperial Avenue
- 8'-6" chain link fencing around the remaining perimeter of the site with access gates in the alley. Fence and gate covered with artist designed patterned fabric.
- Permeable pavers in a labyrinthian pattern throughout the Front and Back Room areas
- 8'-6" tall solid metal access gates to screen and provide access for the installation of the portable restroom
- Provide one (1) Throne Lab portable restroom with electrical power hook-up and concrete 5% sloped access ramp to door.
- Tensile shade structure with string lights
- Wall murals on existing concrete block walls
- Five (5) 36" box size native California Sycamores in the Front Room for shade and CO<sup>2</sup> capture
- 3,000 square foot low water use succulent and native grass garden

# Project Location



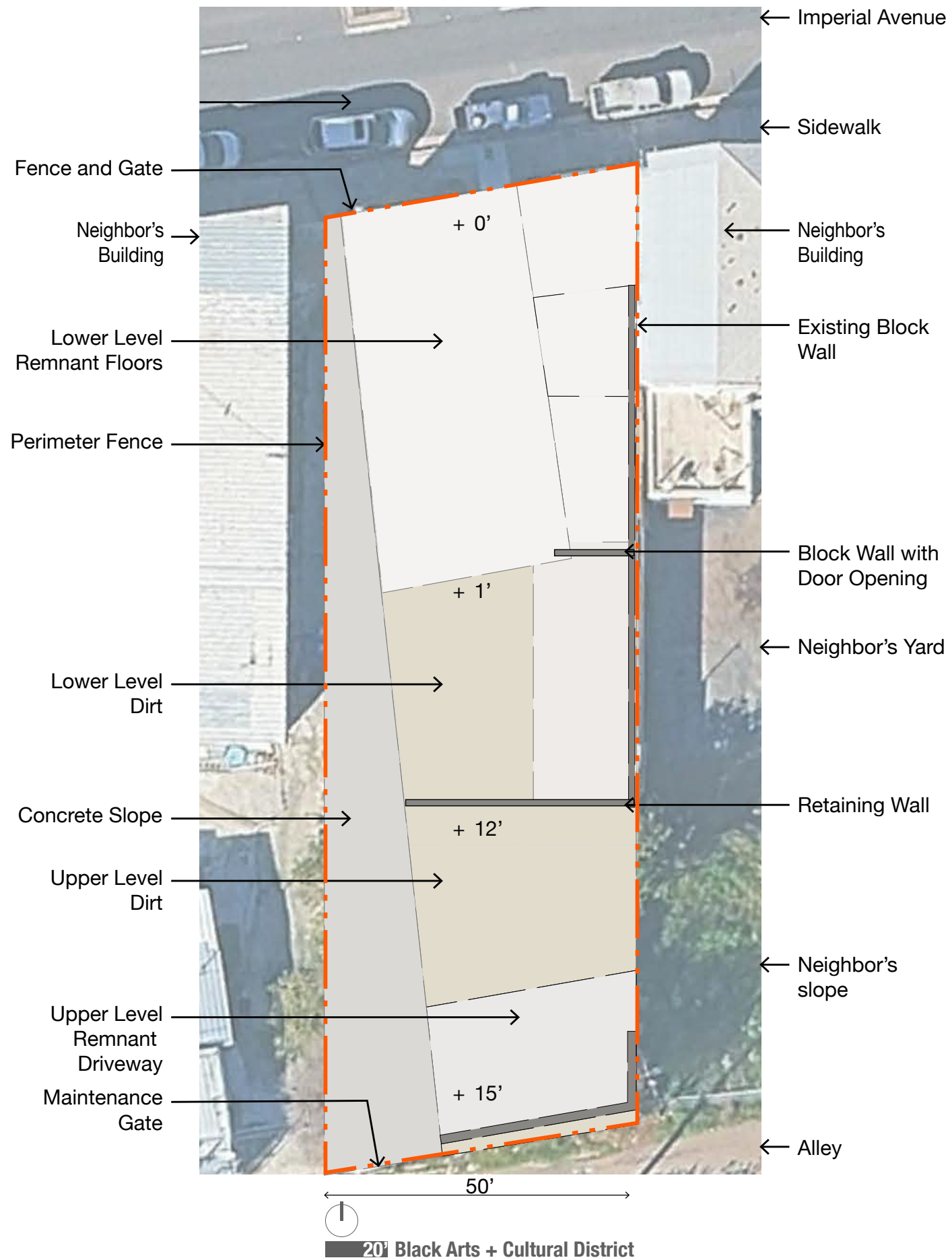
Trolley Station  
Encanto / 62 St.

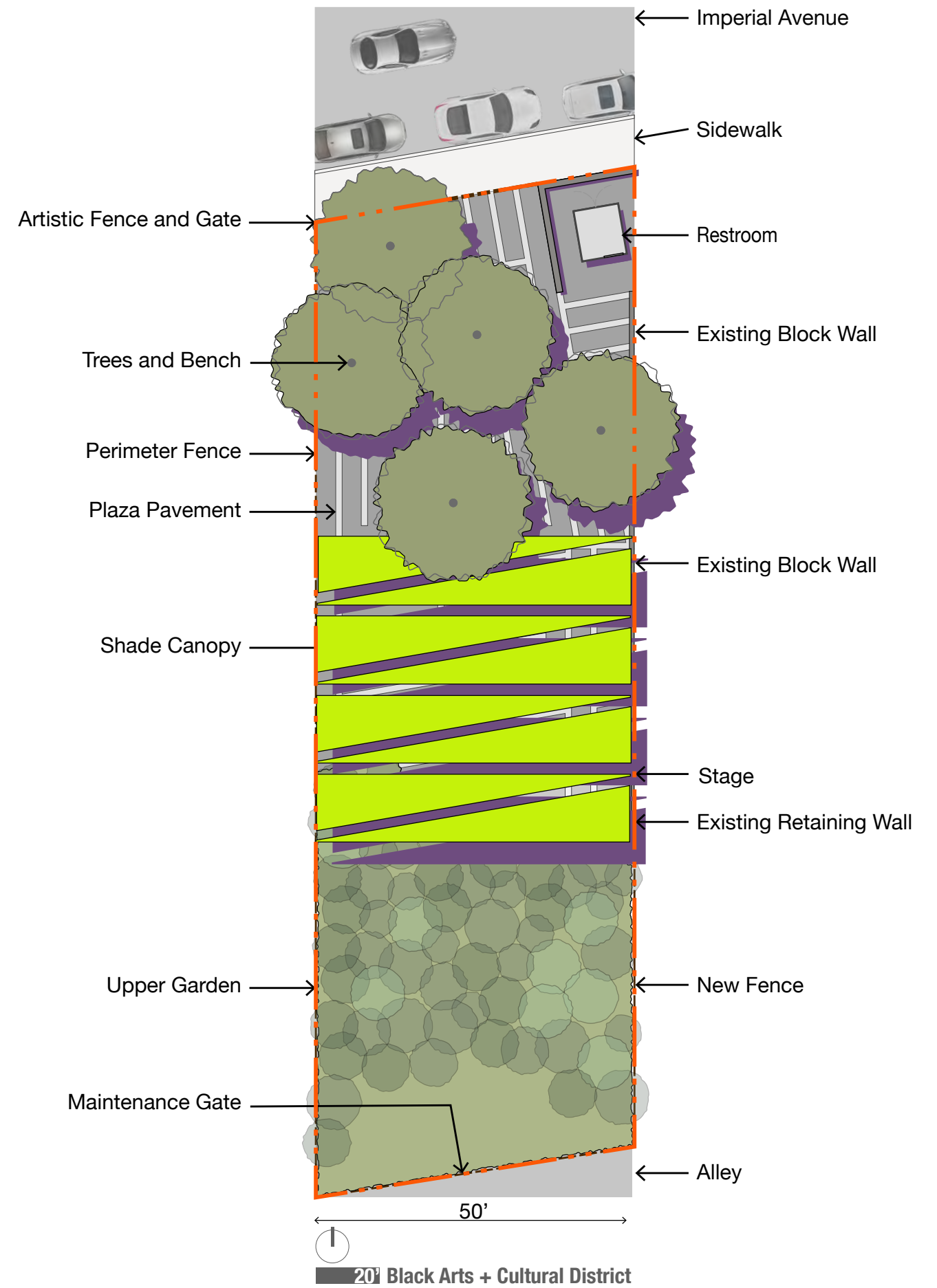
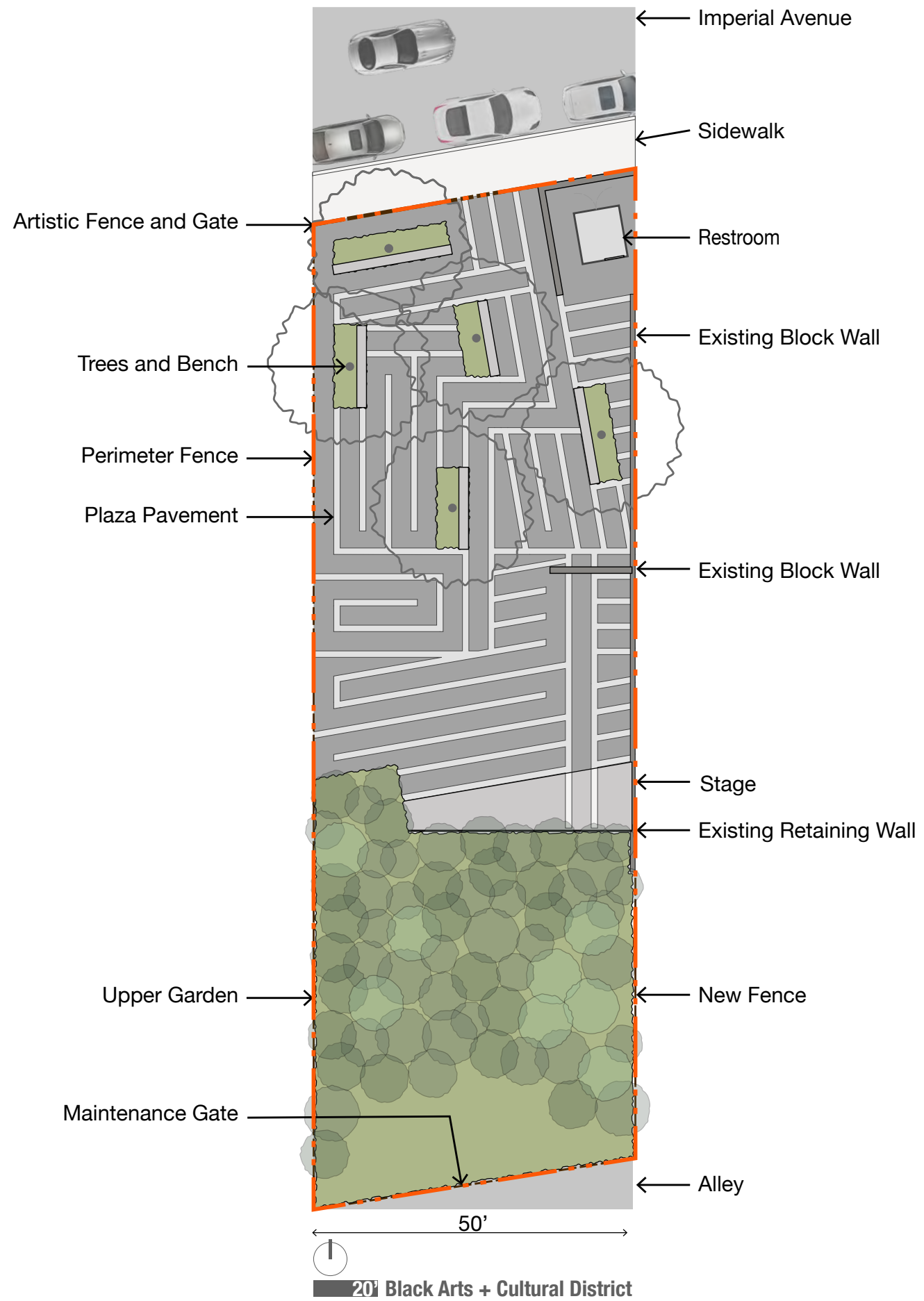
63rd St.

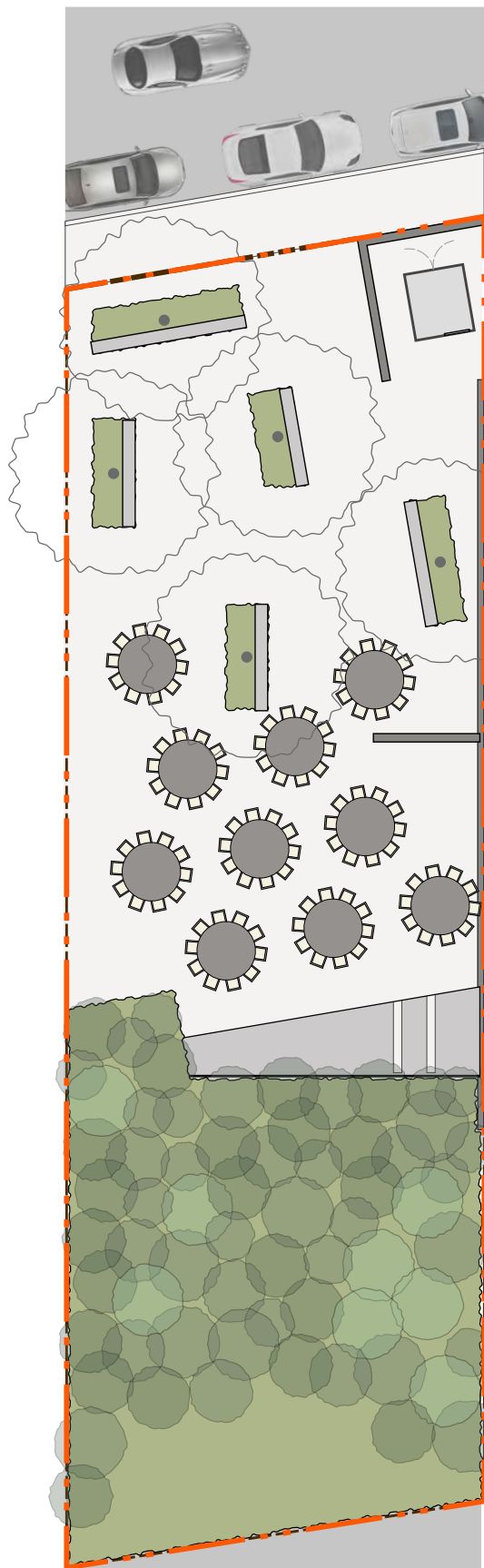
Project  
Location

65th St.

69th St.

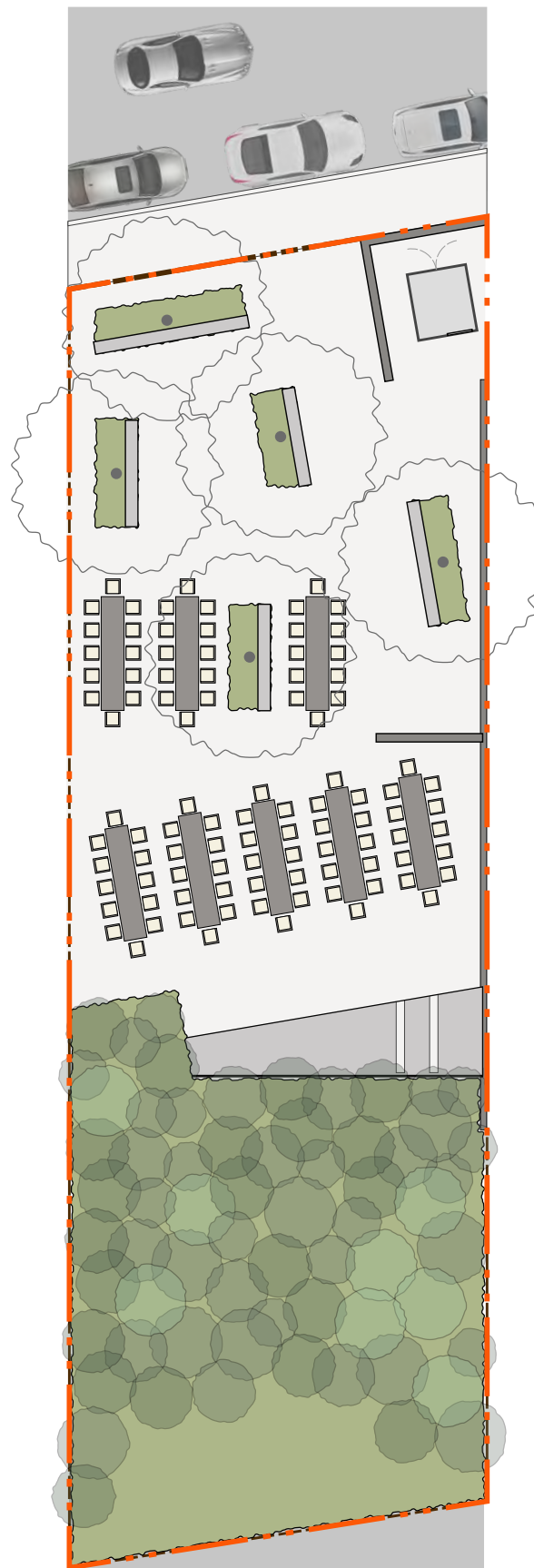






Black Arts + Cultural District

Round Table Seating for 90



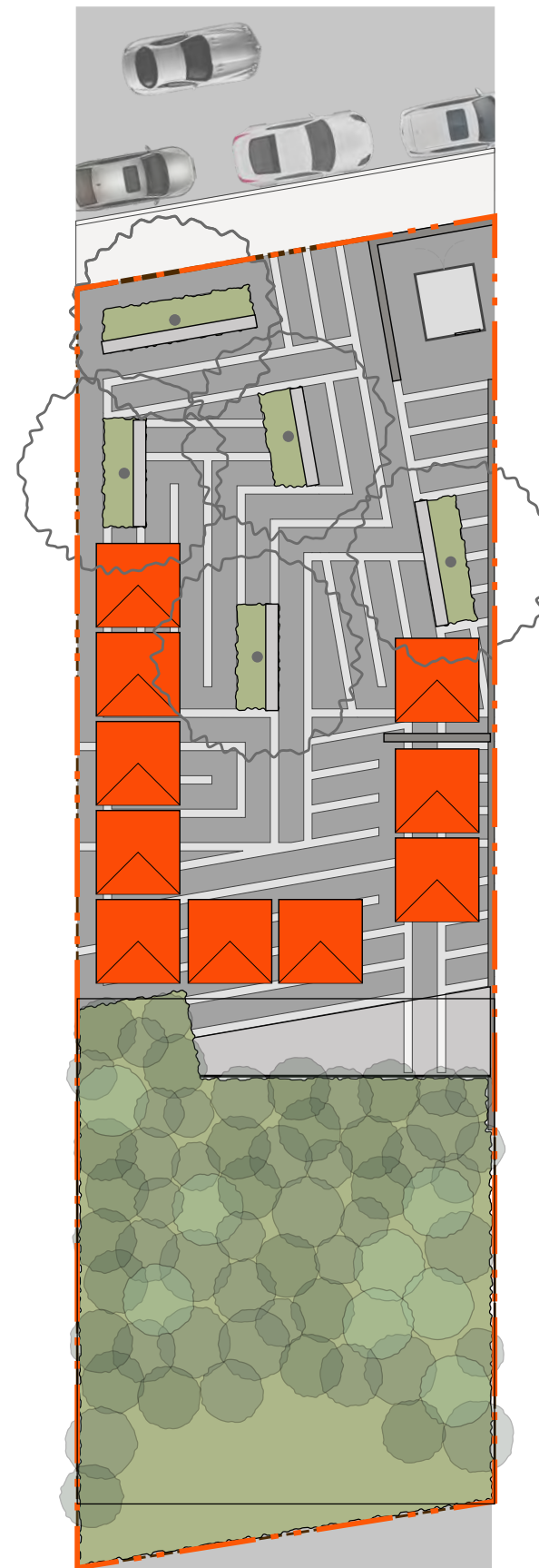
Black Arts + Cultural District

Long Table Seating for 80



Black Arts + Cultural District

Seating for 100



Black Arts + Cultural District

Tents

Gathering Capacity



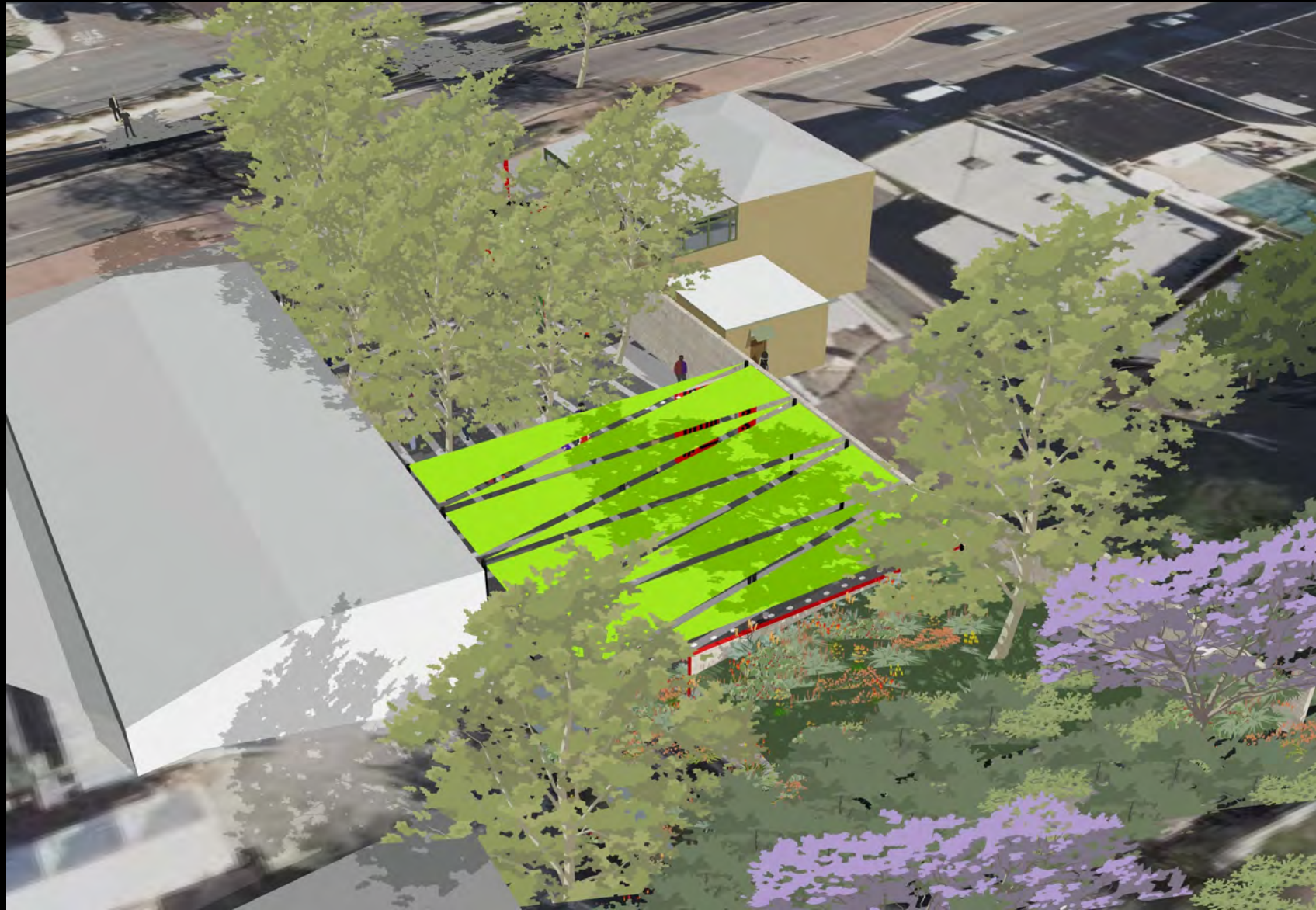
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Aerial View looking southwest



Aerial close-up at entry



Aerial looking northeast over south garden and shade structure



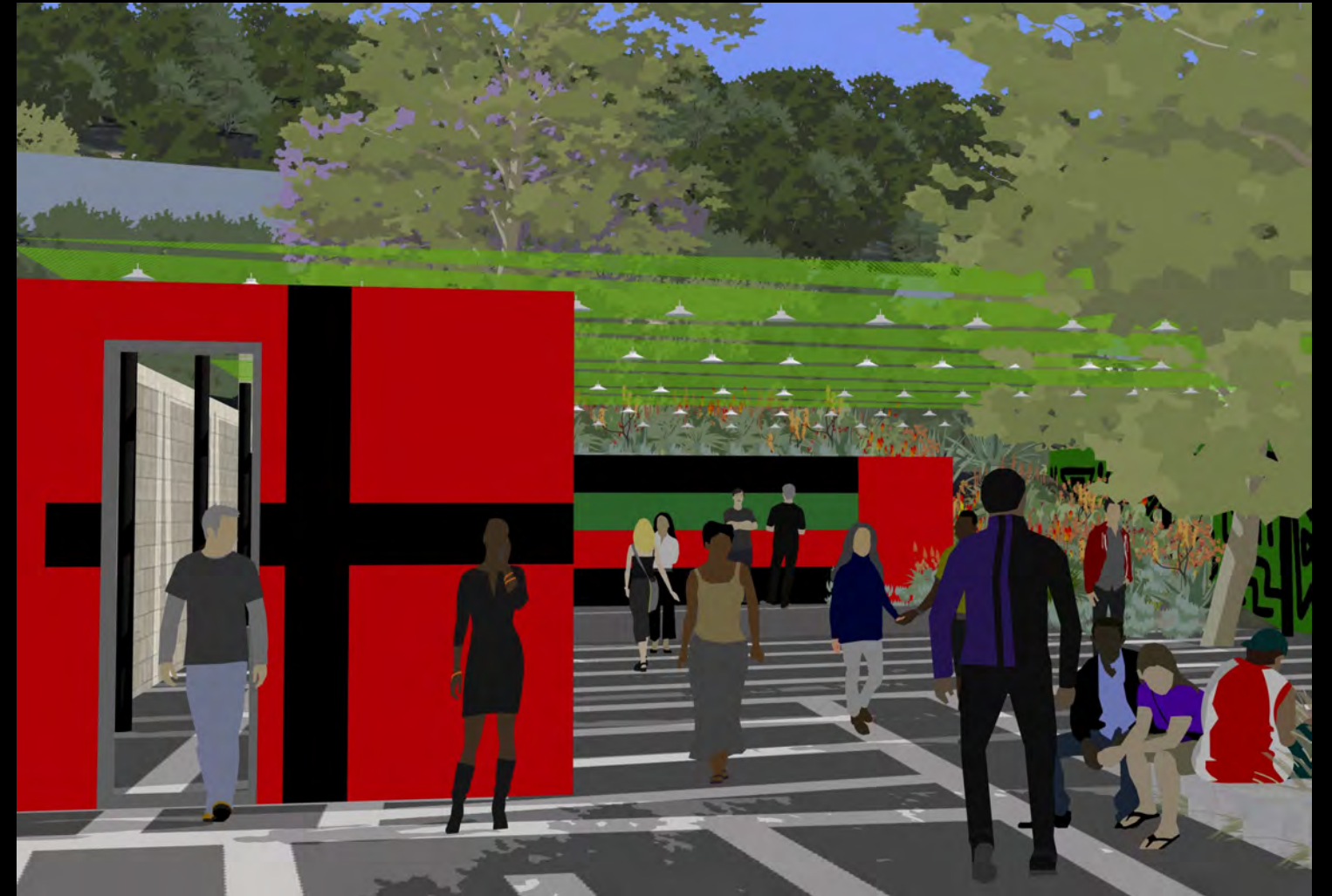
Imperial Avenue sidewalk looking east



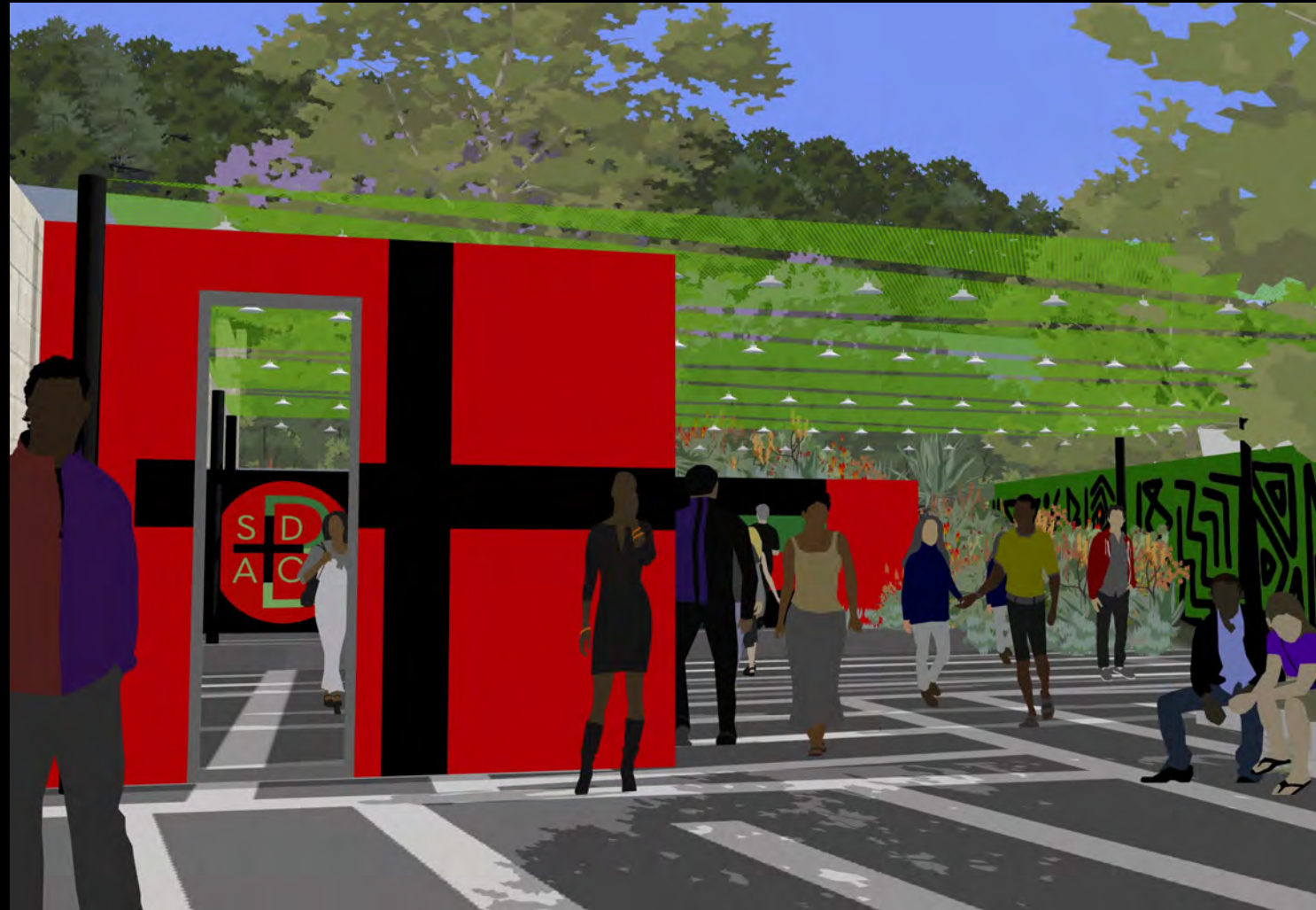
Main Entrance



Front Room Gathering looking south



Stage beyond the "Door to Nowhere" looking south



View through the “Door to Somewhere”



Looking north to Front Room gathering area



Looking north from the stage



View northeast to restroom in the corner



“Throne” restroom closed with artist gate



“Throne” open showing accessible entry

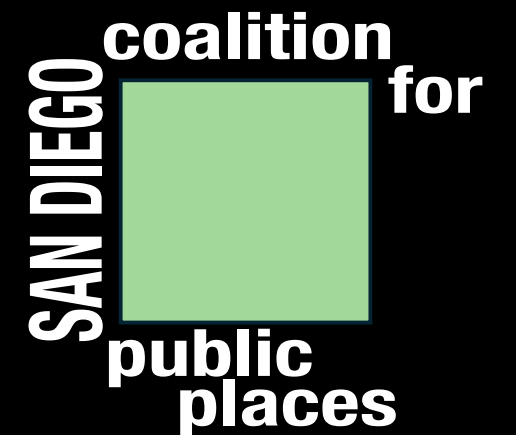



“Throne” restroom access gates open for maintenance from Imperial Avenue



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A PLACE TO GATHER



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**coalition**  
**for**  
  
**public**  
**places**

The San Diego Coalition for Public Places, independently and in collaboration with place-based and allied organizations in San Diego, will apply our members' multi-disciplinary experience in public place-making to San Diego in accordance with our principles. We will help identify opportunities, introduce inspirations from elsewhere, formulate concepts, articulate the value that is created, support funding for implementation, programming, and maintenance, and ADVOCATE!

In this regard, we are an advisory resource, organized as a mission driven, public purpose non-profit. As a 501(c)4, we are not constrained in our ability to advocate, endorse, and lobby.

We advocate for accessible, well-designed, funded, managed, and maintained public-serving places that create and sustain a beautiful, socially inclusive, and economically vibrant city of San Diego and its communities. We partner with and help allied organizations imagine programs and design ideas for such public places. We outline management approaches, financing strategies, and acquisition priorities for public consideration to ensure these places are sustainable and well cared for in perpetuity.