INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL MEMORIAL

Phase 1 | Validation Report

December 2025



Prepared for The City Of Calgary by:

groundcubed

HEREBY

Many Chief Consulting Ltd.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Land Acknowledgment

In the Blackfoot language Calgary is Moh'kin'stis; in Stoney Nakoda, Wiçispa Oyade; in Tsuut'ina, Gu'tsi'tsi; and in Michif or Cree, it is Otoskwunee. For each of these Indigenous languages, the words translate to 'Elbow,' representing the confluence of the Bow and Elbow Rivers. This is where the story of Calgary begins as the confluence has been a trading hub for Indigenous peoples for millennia and the site where they celebrated natural abundance, ceremony, culture, and partnerships.

This design acknowledges the traditional lands of the Nations that were signed Treaty Seven: the Blackfoot Confederacy (Siksika, Kainai, Piikani), the Tsuut'ina, the Stoney Nakoda Nations (Bearspaw, Chiniki, Wesley), as well as the Otipemisiwak Metis Nation within Alberta, and all people who have made Calgary their home. This memorial honours their long history and deep connections to this land, and the ongoing legacy of Residential Schools and their impact on our Indigenous communities.

The Indian Residential School Memorial (IRSM) is an important project that advances The City of Calgary's commitment to Truth and Reconciliation, specifically Call to Action #82, to establish a monument to commemorate all Indian Residential School Survivors, lost children, and inter-generational trauma survivors. While discussions continue regarding our own actions and efforts, The City is committed to explore ways to redefine our understandings, our assumptions, our relationships, and our abilities to build a more inclusive and equitable city.

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FOREWARD

This Phase 1 Validation Report marks an important milestone in advancing the vision for the Indian Residential School Memorial. As a place of remembrance, learning, and reflection that honours Survivors, the children who never made it home, and the generations carrying their stories forward, the design concept is rooted in land-based memory, shaped through close collaboration with Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, community members, and project partners. It proposes a meaningful, grounded landscape experience where visitors move through spaces that acknowledge truth, support healing, and create opportunities for connection.

The work completed in this phase sumarizes the alignment between emerging concept and applicable regional district plans, municipal policies, and Area Redevelopment Plans (ARPs). These findings ensure that the project proceeds with a clear understanding of context and site-specific realities.

This report represents the first step in testing the presented concept against program needs, cultural priorities, and site conditions. It also summarizes key design considerations to carry forward into schematic design and provides an updated costing overview to support transparent planning and informed decision-making.

Together, these components confirm that the project is ready to move into the next phase of design with confidence, clarity, and shared purpose. The validation work reaffirms the strength of the concept, the depth of community guidance received to date, identified gaps in engagement efforts identified through the competition review efforts, and the ongoing commitment to creating a memorial landscape that honours truth, supports healing, and stands as a place of enduring remembrance.

01 | Working Concept Summary

1.1 | Summary of Concept, Goals, & Aspirations

1.1.1 Project Location

The project site is located at the confluence of the Bow and Elbow Rivers, within The Confluence Historic Site and Parkland (formerly known as Fort Calgary) and just east of downtown. This confluence has been a place of gathering, stewardship, and cultural significance for Indigenous Peoples since time immemorial, and it remains a defining feature of Calgary's historical and contemporary landscape.

The Confluence Historic Site & Parkland, as modern stewards for this location and initiative, have recognized that the success of this project depends on restoring the site to its original use, as a place for healing, ceremony, and community.

While the memorial is rooted in this specific place, we also recognize its connection to the broader context across Alberta and Canada, where the impacts of residential schools and day schools continue to shape communities, families, and generations.

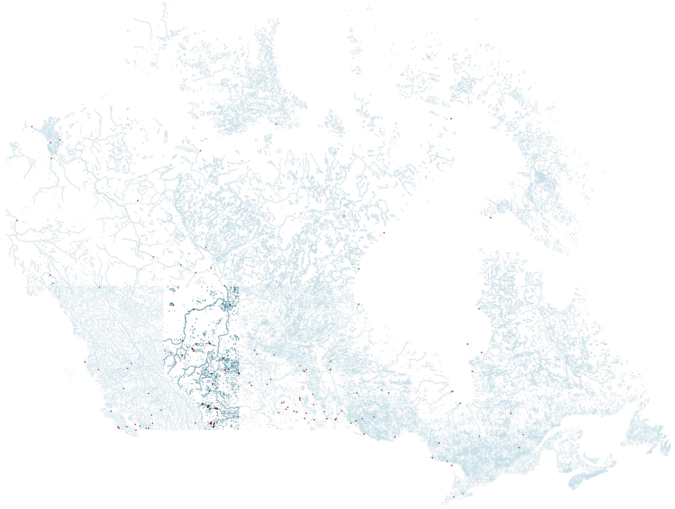
The relationship between this site and the 37 Residential Schools that operated in Alberta is a primary design consideration and is reflected in the competition submission.

"This was the location of the Eagle Rib Camp - a place where people came to heal."

-Blackfoot Elder Clarence Wolfleg, Project Advisor



PROJECT CONTEXT MAP - CITY OF CALGARY



COMPETITION GRAPHIC - CANADIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL LOCATIONS

1.1.2 Competition Design Summary

"The road we travel is equal in importance to the destination we seek. There are no shortcuts. When it comes to truth and reconciliation, we are forced to go the distance."

-Honourable Justice Murry Sinclair

Reconciliation is the road we must travel, and like the road, there is a place of starting, a place of being, and a place we move towards. The past, present, and future is inherent to any journey, and when that journey is the pursuit of reconciliation, the path we all walk is reflective of our individual truths.

This work calls on us to recognize the diversity of experiences and to focus, together, on actions that lead to deeper knowing, reflection, and growth. Once we truly come to know—how will that change the path we walk together? Within the context of understanding the generational impact of Indian Residential Schools, the systematic removal of children from their homes had radiating repercussions, affecting families and communities well beyond the officially quantified populations of the institutions.

Despite the painful legacy of the physical separation and destruction of families, of critical importance is acknowledging the resiliency of the individuals, families, and communities, and how that resiliency manifests through the expression of the eternal spirit.

To achieve this, we have grounded the proposed design through the narrative of a journey, with specific focus on past, present, and future.

Past | West | The Calf

The road to reconciliation begins with understanding and accepting our collective past – our physical beginning. Representative of our physical form, the child, and of innocence, a bison calf is found in the landscape. The calf is isolated - representing the separation of children from their homes and communities.

Positioned slightly off of the west cardinal direction line, the calf has no grounding or direction, and is stranded in an unfamiliar environment.

Present | Heart | The Individual

As one moves through the site, we are reminded the road to reconciliation demands recognition of our different perspectives and individual stories, and of our emotional presence.

Giving space for vulnerability, reflection, and respect, the mid-point of the journey brings into focus the role of the individual. Whether alone or in ceremony, space is reserved for acknowledgment, healing, and growth.

No matter the direction one enters from, the center of the experience is grounded in the person - recognition of all children as individuals; recognition of those who give life to community; and recognition of the visitor as an active participant in reconciliation.

Future| East | The Spirit

To the east, located at the confluence of the rivers, lies the eternal spirit. As the ephemeral form of our future self, the adult bison waits in comfort as part of the land. Whether seen as a parent awaiting the return of her calf, or as the child's future self in quiet reflection, the spirit remains deeply connected.

As one looks back towards the east, the partially visible calf is looking back. It's only from this view that we connect past to future, recognizing we must always look to a place of hope and resiliency.

<u>Artist Statement</u>

Every path we walk creates movement — through time and between times.

The essence of our project is to acknowledge those still wandering — between past and future, between truth and falsehood, between grief and healing, and between memory and memorial.

It is a place of journey; to experience, to reflect, and to breathe. A place to come together in defiance of those who sought to separate, and a place to steward the memory of those who never found their way home.

1.1.3 Design Process

The development of the concept followed a deliberate, step-by-step process that grounded the work in relationships, community direction, and cultural responsibility.

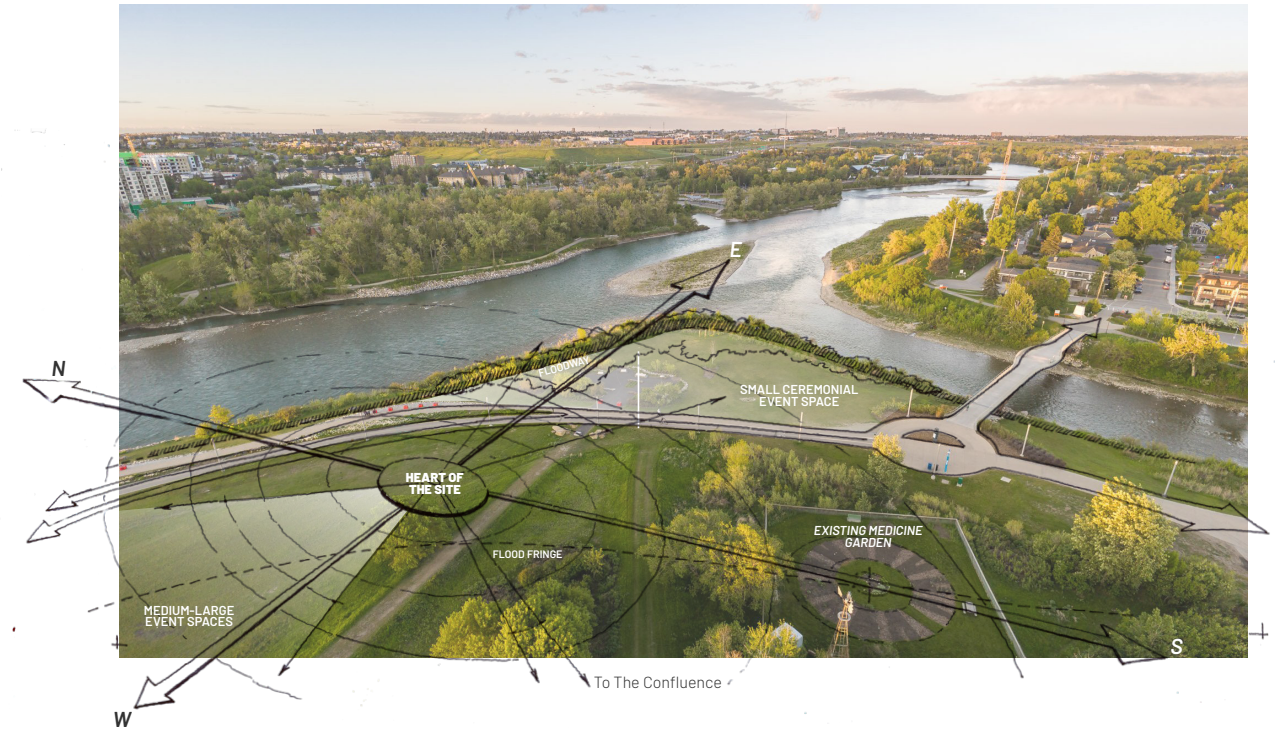
The team first came together on site to understand the land and its significance, followed by a blessing to ensure the work began in a good way. From there, the Project Artist led an early visioning stage, which helped shape the initial intent and thematic direction.

This was followed by a period of "thinking and inking," where the team translated emerging ideas into preliminary drawings and spatial concepts.

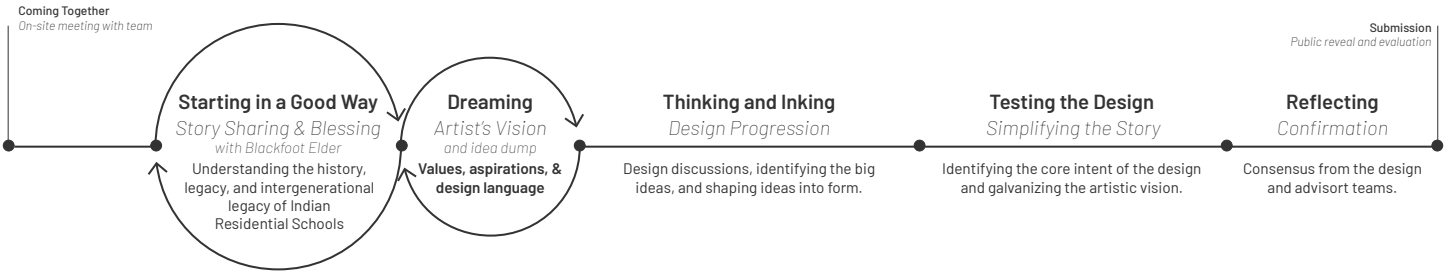
These early explorations were then tested against the 2023 What-We-Heard Report, community guidance, and the core values identified at project outset.

A reflective stage allowed the team to confirm direction, assess alignment, and refine the concept based on feedback and cultural considerations. This iterative process culminated in the preparation and delivery of the design submission.

The design process focused on integrating elements that reflect Indigenous ways of knowing and acknowledge the impacts carried across generations.



COMPETITION GRAPHIC - CONCEPT LAYOUT



COMPETITION GRAPHIC - DESIGN PROCESS

1.1.4 Aspirations and Design Process

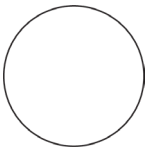
We worked to identify six primary aspirations that reflected content from the 2023 What-We-Heard Report, first-hand experience and guidance from the Project Artist, and what we came to understand as key tenets of the Indigenous design lens.

These aspirations informed the hierarchy of elements, the sequencing of experience, and the cultural and spatial framework that underpins the overall concept, while holding the design accountable to community voices, grounded in place, and aligned with the project's cultural responsibilities.



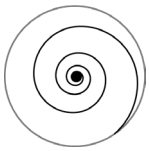
COMPETITION GRAPHIC - ASPIRATIONS AND DESIGN LANGUAGE

1.1.5 Key Elements of Design



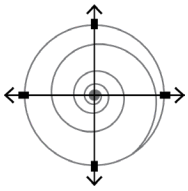
THE CIRCLE | CEREMONY

The circle defines the outer boundaries of the memorial design, establishing a strong and continuous form. It spans across the bisecting pathway, creating distinct primary and secondary spaces on either side. The extents of the circle are loosely defined, allowing for the memorial to seamlessly blend into the surrounding landscape.



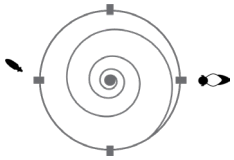
THE SPIRAL | JOURNEY

The spiral shapes the pathways of movement within the site, guiding visitors along **non-linear routes that converge at a single central point**—the epicenter of the memorial. No matter where one enters, the spiral leads all journeys to the same destination, symbolizing a wandering nature and shared experiences despite different paths.



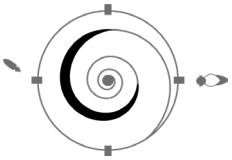
THE DIRECTIONS | TRADITION

The cardinal directions are marked by a series of large-scale erratics, each symbolizing a core aspect of Indigenous ways of knowing. North represents intellect, east embodies spirit, south signifies ceremony, and west reflects the physical form. These monumental stones ground the site in cultural meaning, connecting visitors to the land and **positioning spaces of healing within the sacred shape of the medicine wheel**.



THE BISON | SPIRIT

Two bison are positioned along the west and east cardinal lines; the calf to the west symbolizing the physical form of the child, and the adult bison to the east representing the embodiment of the spirit. **Together, they honour the past and future**, serving as powerful symbols of the resilience and unwavering strength of the human spirit.



THE SHOES | MEMORIAL

A core element of the memorial design is respecting the temporary memorial at City Hall. Representing not only the children who once wore them, but also the families and communities who grieve - by carrying this symbolism forward into the permanent memorial, **the design acknowledges the immensity of loss** and ensures that the tragedies faced by these communities remain visible, honored, and central to the ongoing journey of healing and reconciliation.

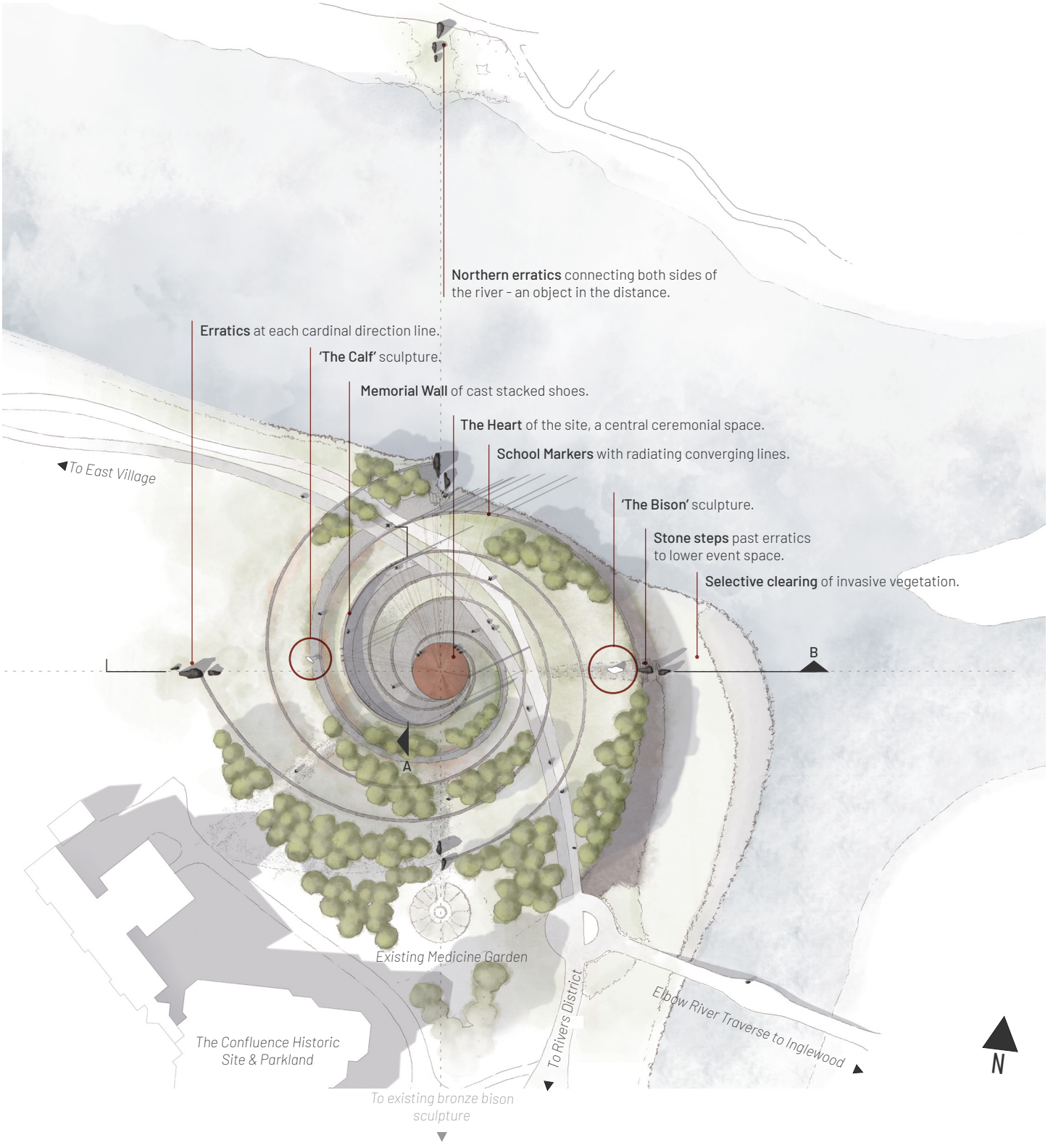


THE MARKERS | REGION

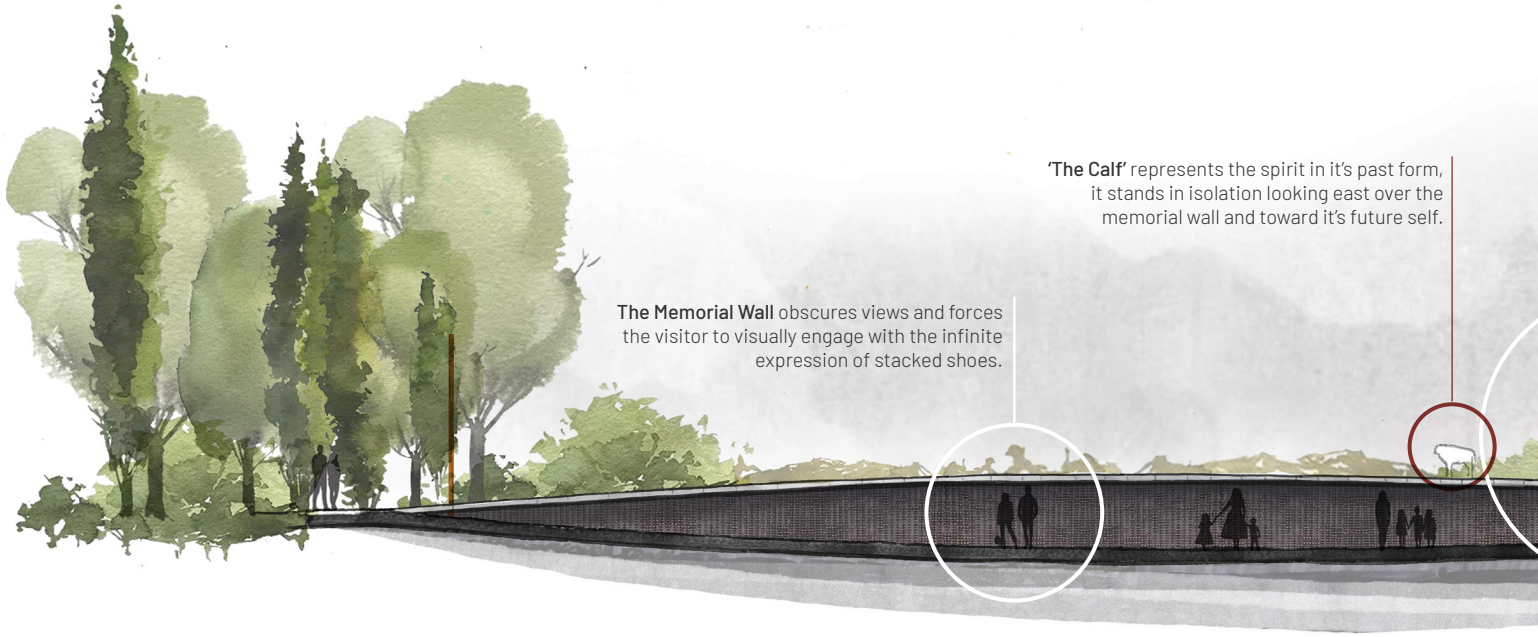
The memorial is grounded in the regional context of Alberta's Residential School history through the placement of 37 steel markers, each representing the province's Residential Schools. Positioned in relation to the center of the memorial, these markers stand as solemn, tactile reminders of **the physical presence and enduring legacy of each school**, making visible the widespread impact and trauma inflicted across the land.

COMPETITION GRAPHIC - KEY ELEMENTS OF DESIGN

1.1.6 Competition Graphics



COMPETITION GRAPHIC - SITE RENDER (NTS)



COMPETITION GRAPHIC - CROSS SECTION A



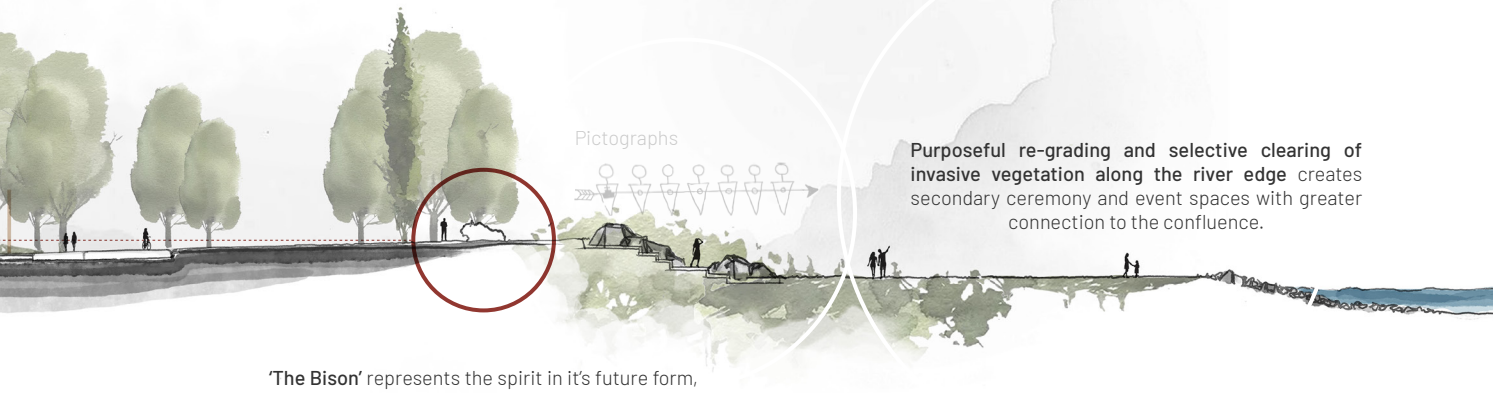
COMPETITION GRAPHIC - CROSS SECTION B



School markers provide geographical direction of each of the 37 schools in relation to the center of the site. Each fin is cut with the English name and distance away.

Topographic changes give visitors different views into the site. Pathways follow the shape of the spiral, converging on the center of the memorial.

Existing pathways provide accessible access points into the memorial site.



Purposeful re-grading and selective clearing of invasive vegetation along the river edge creates secondary ceremony and event spaces with greater connection to the confluence.

'The Bison' represents the spirit in it's future form, it lays in patience looking west to it's past self. The distance between them encapsulates the distance created through the separation of families.



COMPETITION GRAPHIC - RENDER OF MEMORIAL WALL

"For Indigenous peoples, stone surfaces provide a way of telling our stories across time."

-Project Artist



COMPETITION GRAPHIC - RENDER OF STACKED SHOES



IMAGE A.10 | COMPETITION GRAPHIC - RENDER OF THE SPIRIT



IMAGE A.11 | COMPETITION GRAPHIC - RENDER OF THE HEART CEREMONIAL SPACE

2.1 | Inglewood Area Redevelopment Plan

Introduction

The Inglewood and Ramsay neighbourhoods are located within a landscape long used by the First Peoples of the region. Archaeological and culturally significant sites remain, including the confluence of the Bow and Elbow Rivers and the proposed location of the Indian Residential Schools Memorial (IRSM).

Goals and Aspirations

The Inglewood Area Redevelopment Plan (ARP) identifies population densification as a key strategy to support:

- Investment in rapid transit infrastructure and a greater diversity of services for Inglewood and Ramsay.
- Inclusion of Indigenous Peoples—one of Calgary's most diverse populations—and advancement of reconciliation and equity.

Inglewood, Calgary's oldest neighbourhood, dates to the 1870s. Its distinctive character is to be protected through the preservation of historic architecture, streetscapes, and green spaces. This history also includes the much older presence of Indigenous Peoples and the legacy of residential schools following settler arrival. The IRSM responds to this gap by providing a public place to learn about Indigenous histories, perspectives, and the lasting impacts of residential schools on Indigenous communities and Canadian society.

The ARP outlines improvements intended to:

- Maintain the neighbourhood's distinct character.
- Accommodate population growth and diversity.
- Support healthy transportation and recreation options.
- Create meaningful destinations for residents and visitors.
- Foster community identity and a strong sense of place.

Central to these objectives is a connected cycling and pedestrian network that encourages movement through the neighbourhood and supports local businesses and events. Current public-realm improvements along 11 Street and 12 Street SE contribute to ARP goals by enhancing:

- Healthy lifestyles.
- Social connectivity and community cohesion.
- Universal access and mobility.
- Neighbourhood identity.

The City of Calgary is also advancing Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) within Inglewood and Ramsay. Key components include the Green Line LRT station at 26 Avenue SE and Bus Rapid Transit (BRT). While increased density may result in higher vehicular traffic, the intent is to shift travel toward transit, walking, and cycling, improving overall accessibility and reducing reliance on private vehicles.

Design Alignment with the Inglewood ARP

The IRSM directly supports and extends the objectives of the Inglewood ARP by enhancing inclusivity and cultural recognition in the public realm. The design:

- Provides a safe and meaningful gathering space for Indigenous communities to reflect, learn, and practice culture.
- Integrates with existing pedestrian and cycling infrastructure while enriching the experience of moving through the site.
- Incorporates native and culturally significant plant species, offering shade, medicinal plants, and opportunities for ecological restoration along the river.
- Improves access to the river, strengthening connections to the natural environment and local wildlife.
- Enhances safety for those using the Confluence for recreation or daily commuting.

The IRSM also supports the ARP's goals of heritage preservation and community building by serving as a gateway between The Confluence and the Inglewood and Ramsay neighbourhoods. The design includes:

- An open brick gathering space for ceremonies, teaching, reflection, and community events.
- Surrounding seating areas that support informal gathering and contemplation.
- A southern medicine garden that fosters shared learning and connection.

Connectivity and Resilience

The site is embedded within a broader network of corridors linking transit routes, downtown Calgary, and the Bow and Elbow Rivers—waterways of deep ceremonial, ecological, and cultural significance to Indigenous Peoples. The design also acknowledges the site's floodplain context. As a primarily landscape-based space, it is resilient to periodic flooding, allowing the river to expand and recede naturally while minimizing long-term damage.

2.2 | Calgary Rivers District Master Plan (RDMP)

Introduction

The Calgary Rivers District Master Plan (RDMP) envisions transforming east Victoria Park into a major Culture and Entertainment District that blends residential, cultural, and economic activity. It targets approximately 8,000 new residents and millions of square feet of mixed-use development integrated with major civic venues such as the Event Centre, the expanded BMO Centre, and a revitalized Stampede Trail.

The plan focuses on creating a walkable, bikeable, and highly connected urban district that links downtown, the Beltline, East Village, the river pathway network, and future transit. Its guiding themes emphasize authenticity, resilience, vibrancy, and strong public realm design, positioning the area as both a welcoming neighborhood and a premier destination for culture, festivals, tourism, and year-round activity.

Goals and Aspirations

- Create Calgary's Culture + Entertainment District anchored by Stampede Park and east Victoria Park, with a 20-year buildout.
- Deliver a large mixed-use downtown neighborhood (approx. 4M sq ft of new development) and accommodate ~8,000 new residents alongside major venues and employment.
- Integrate modernized civic/event infrastructure (new Event Centre/arena, expanded BMO Centre, Stampede Trail retail spine, etc.) while keeping the plan flexible to evolving projects.
- Guiding vision themes: an Authentic, Connected, Resilient, and Vibrant district that is heritage-aware, highly urban, and lively year-round.
- Reconnect to the city and rivers with stronger links to downtown, Beltline, East Village, the river pathway system, and the future Green Line LRT.
- Prioritize a cohesive public realm and streetscape identity: walkable blocks, bikeable routes, open-space network, and consistent "C+E" character across new development.
- Support economic diversification and tourism draw making the district a premier regional destination for festivals, conferences, sport, culture, and nightlife, while also being a livable neighborhood.

Design Alignment with the RDMP

The Wandering Spirit Memorial aligns with the Rivers District Master Plan goals of creating a vibrant mixed-use destination, reconnecting the city to the rivers, and supporting culture-driven activation.

Located at The Confluence Historic Site & Parkland, where the Bow and Elbow Rivers meet, the memorial directly advances the RDMP objective of strengthening connections to the river system and pathways. Its siting physically and symbolically engages the rivers as central elements of the district.

The memorial introduces a significant cultural and public-realm anchor within the Rivers District, reinforcing its identity as a Culture + Entertainment District while adding a destination beyond commercial and residential uses. As an Indigenous-led, ceremonial space grounded in story, memory, and healing, it expands the range of district uses and supports cultural and economic diversification.

By prioritizing reflection, gathering, and education, the memorial contributes to a walkable, layered public realm and establishes a strong civic presence. As a permanent, non-commercial cultural anchor, it supports year-round activity, complements surrounding entertainment venues, and advances the RDMP vision for an authentic, inclusive, and resilient district.

2.3 | East Village Master Plan

Introduction

The East Village Master Plan (EVMP) aims to transform the area into a complete, vibrant downtown neighborhood with roughly 11,500 residents, 7,500 homes, and a mix of shops, services, and cultural destinations. The vision centers on arts, culture, public art, and temporary activations to build identity early while supporting walkable, human-scaled streets and a high-quality public realm. Environmental repair and resilience guide redevelopment through brownfield cleanup, flood mitigation, and sustainable systems, alongside heritage preservation and reinvestment. The plan encourages mixed-income housing, flexible mixed-use development, and a diversified local economy that supports creative industries, small businesses, and hospitality.

Goals and Aspirations

- Transform East Village into a vibrant, mixed-use urban neighbourhood over approximately 20 years.
- Support the downtown community of approximately 11,500 residents and 7,500 homes, with local retail and services.
- Align the East Village ARP, Centre City Guidebook, and MDP to enable flexible, consistent mixed-use development.
- Position arts, culture, and animation as the heart of the neighbourhood through public art, cultural destinations, and temporary activations.
- Create human-scaled, walkable, and multi-modal streets and public spaces with strong pedestrian priority.
- Embed environmental repair and resilience through brownfield remediation, flood-mitigation landscapes, and sustainable infrastructure.
- Conserve and reinvest in heritage assets while integrating contemporary density and mixed-income housing.
- Attract new economy uses—creative, technology, small business, and hospitality—to support a lively, all-hours downtown.

Design Alignment with the East Village Master Plan

The East Village Master Plan's goals included: transforming a formerly under-utilized area into a vibrant mixed-use urban village, making arts/culture integral, creating human-scaled walkable public realm, environmental repair and heritage conservation. Here are alignment points:

- The memorial introduces a strong cultural and civic presence within the downtown fabric, reinforcing East Village's role as a vibrant, mixed-use urban neighbourhood by adding a walkable public memorial and gathering space beyond residential, retail, and commercial uses.
- By centering Indigenous narratives, ceremony, and truth-telling around residential schools, the memorial directly supports East Village's aspiration to place arts and culture at the heart of the neighbourhood. Its location at The Confluence and an Indigenous-led, inclusive design process strengthen placemaking, identity, and neighbourhood character.
- The memorial prioritizes the public realm, encouraging walking, reflection, and ceremony rather than vehicle-oriented activity, aligning with East Village goals for human-scaled, walkable, and multi-modal public spaces. It also responds to the area's layered Indigenous and colonial history, supporting heritage conservation and reinvestment objectives.
- Integrated within a resilient riverine landscape, the memorial celebrates the Bow and Elbow Rivers and reinforces connections between ecology, history, and public space. Through its capacity for ceremony, education, and gathering, it contributes to an active, socially connected, and lived-in neighbourhood.

2.4 | The Confluence Site Concept Plan (CSCP)

Introduction

The Confluence Historic Site & Parkland is currently developing a Site Concept Plan (CSCP) to shape the future of the area and wants to know what the community envisions for this space. Since February 2025, The Confluence has been engaging with hundreds of participants, including community organizations, Indigenous partners, visitors to the site and Calgarians across the city to gather insights and ideas to inform the site design. While the Site Concept Plan development is still early in the process a few key values have emerged along with themes that are drivers of the design.

Goals and Aspirations

The Confluence Historic Site & Parkland seeks to be a place of:

- Inclusivity and welcomeness—a site for all
- Sharing and Learning
- Gathering and Celebration
- Healing and Contemplation
- Accessibility and Comfort
- Economic Collaboration and Reciprocity

Key design themes include:

- Truth of the Site – and all its histories
  - Including geology, water, plants, animals, and humans
  - "We are all Treaty people." The Confluence is a place where visitors, Calgarians, and Indigenous Peoples can learn what this means
- Importance of the Land
  - Sharing why this place is sacred and significant
  - Sharing the connection between animals and the land, i.e., bison, beavers
  - Demonstrating the balance of nature, the preservation of protected areas, and the human use spaces
- Importance of the Water
  - Sharing the significance of the rivers and the confluence, the "elbow"
  - Celebrating water as the giver of life
  - Sharing that different Nations connect with water in different ways; there is an opportunity to learn from each other
- Importance of Language
  - Many Indigenous languages have historically been spoken at the confluence site, including, Blackfoot, Sioux, Stoney, Dene, Tsuut'ina, and Michif
  - Other Indigenous languages may also have been spoken, such as Cree
  - Sign Language should also be considered among the languages included at the site
  - Colonial settler languages were also spoken, including French, English, and other cultures in the surrounding areas, including Chinese
- Interconnectedness and Significance of the Site to other Sites within the Area
  - Surrounding neighbourhoods have a direct connection to the site's history and its community history
  - The Confluence is a significant part of Calgary's history and its establishment as a city
  - There are direct connections with other Indigenous sites in Calgary and around southern Alberta, specifically erratics, sacred sites, and cultural sites, including Okotoks, Nose Hill, and Medicine Hill
  - Seasonality is important. There are stories that can only be told, or not told, in certain seasons. Some stories should only be told while holding certain Ceremonies, for example at Solstice.
- Importance of Relationships
  - This site is a place of healing, rebuilding, and nurturing relationships with Nations, communities, organizations, and individuals
  - This is a place for Indigenous Peoples to reconnect with their culture, especially for those who have been disconnected
  - This site is a place for healing, rebuilding, and nurturing relationships with the land
  - This is a place to share about medicines, dances, and ceremonies honouring the land
- Accessible and Comfortable Environment
  - There is an opportunity to shift the built spaces to a less colonial-look from the Barracks building and Interpretive Centre to support safety and comfort of all visitors
  - There is an opportunity to work with Indigenous architects, designers, and artists to Indigenize the built spaces
  - For young people specifically, The Confluence has the potential to be a place that provides a sense of belonging, or a "home away from home" feeling
  - "Walk both ways." Consider not only Indigenous Peoples' perspectives but other perspectives as well.

Design Alignment with The Confluence Site Concept Values
The Wandering Spirit concept design is inclusive and Welcoming—a site for all. It is strategically positioned in close proximity to the RiverWalk, with direct river access to the Confluence buildings. Working together The Confluence and the IRSM allow opportunities for sharing and learning. The IRSM concept is centered around a brick podium and is a place for gathering and celebration and all elements help tell the story of Indian Residential Schools and offer a place for healing and contemplation no matter what your cultural history with this place happens to be.

The site design is accessible to all, and offers natural protection from the elements throughout the year. The IRSM concept design is flexible and is positioned as to not incumber the rest of the Confluence site to allow for a wide-range of programming for a wide spectrum of events, which aligns with the value of economic collaboration and reciprocity.

Next Steps
As the design advances to the schematic design phase we will apply what was heard through the Site Concept Plan engagement to the IRSM design as outlined in the Themes above.

03 | Site Analysis & Ground Truthing

3.1 | Archaeology at The Confluence Site

The archaeological significance of The Confluence Historic Site and Parkland led to its designation as a Provincial Historic Resource in 1982 under the Alberta Historic Resources Act. To date, archaeological investigations have largely focused on colonial Fort structures, with limited exploration of deeper strata or broader areas of the site. As a result, many earlier layers and narratives remain undocumented.

Engagement undertaken as part of the Site Concept Plan revealed strong interest in using archaeology to deepen, expand, and connect known and lesser-known stories of the site. By applying an Indigenous lens to archaeological research is essential to avoid reproducing colonial narratives and to ensure that material findings are interpreted within appropriate cultural and historical contexts.

Archaeology of Related Areas

Recent developments in Stampede Park, Inglewood, East Village, and Chinatown have included archaeological excavations that raise important questions about their relationship to The Confluence as a historic gathering place. Findings such as stone circles, railway infrastructure, and Chinese porcelain suggest opportunities to better understand interconnected Indigenous, settler, and immigrant histories when combined with oral and written records.

Indigenous Perspectives

Indigenous perspectives on archaeology vary, with some viewing archaeological sites not as historical remnants but as living places that sustain cultural relationships and ancestral knowledge. Differences between archaeological interpretations and oral histories often reflect gaps in cultural context rather than inaccuracies. Indigenous scholars emphasize the need for researchers to relinquish colonial assumptions and recognize the depth of Indigenous knowledge rooted in millennia of lived experience.

Future Considerations

Given the limited scope of past excavations, any future archaeological work at The Confluence must be carefully considered, including whether excavation is appropriate, who leads the work, and how findings are interpreted. As Calgary is a recognized archaeological hotspot, the site holds potential for further discovery, provided research is undertaken ethically, collaboratively, and with Indigenous leadership.

3.2 | Site Walks

Following confirmation of the competition win, the Design Team initiated planning for the next phase of work. The process began with ceremony. Prior to any design development, an Indigenous Elder was invited to lead a pipe ceremony, grounding the project in respect and setting the work forward in a good way.

Following the ceremony, two site walks were held with the Design Team and representatives from The City of Calgary and The Confluence. These walks focused on reviewing the Wandering Spirit concept, including proposed design interventions and their specific locations across the site.

Key discussion items as follows:

- The proposed memorial location aligns well with the overall Confluence site and supports the vision and guiding principles of the Confluence Site Concept Plan.
- Strong physical and visual connections to the Bow and Elbow Rivers are essential, along with the removal of invasive plant material to support ecological healing and address CPTED considerations.
- A direct connection to The Confluence buildings is desired to support accessible and transparent educational and Indigenous programming.
- The adjacent pathway experiences peak volumes exceeding 10,000 users per hour, requiring the design to carefully balance opportunities and constraints associated with high pedestrian traffic.
- The design must accommodate Indigenous ceremonies of varying scales, while also providing strategies for separation from large events such as Country Thunder and the Stampede Parade.
- The memorial landscape should incorporate an Indigenous planting strategy that offers environmental protection, is resilient, and is easy to maintain.

3.3 | Historic Photos



First Nations camp near first Hudson's Bay Company store at Fort Calgary, Alberta, 1886

GLENBOW MUSEUM ARCHIVAL PHOTO



THE CONFLUENCE - 1924-1926



North-West Mounted Police post (looking northwest), Calgary, Alberta, 1885

GLENBOW MUSEUM ARCHIVAL PHOTO



1948



FORT CALGARY CIRCA 1880



1962



1972



2009



FORT CALGARY – 1979



FLOOD – 2013



1999

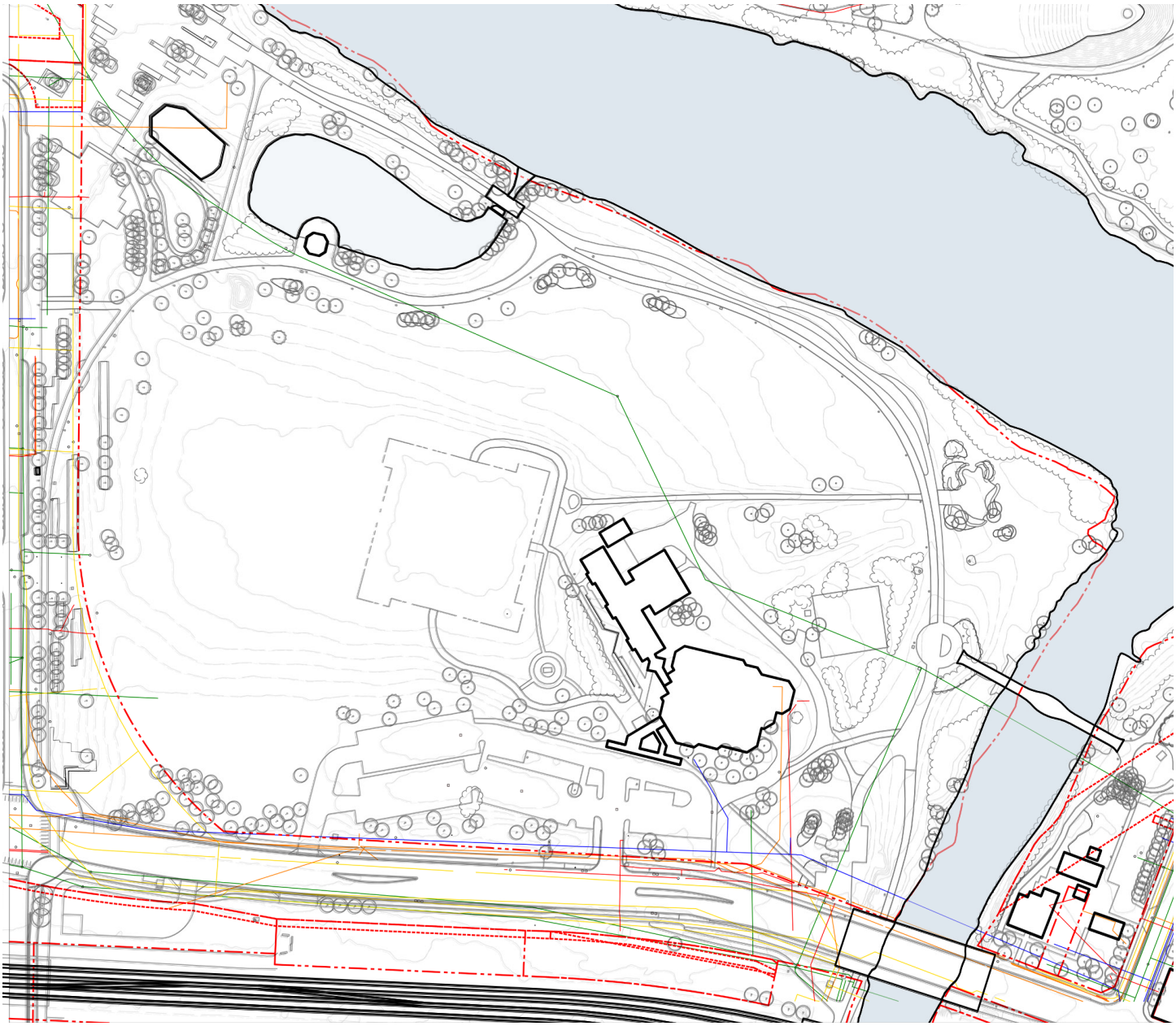


2024

3.4 | Context Mapping

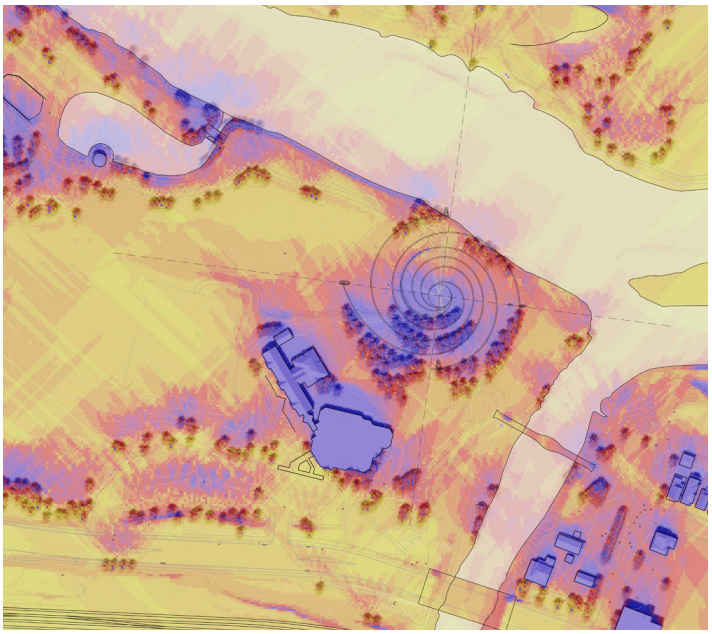
3.4.1 Existing Conditions Site Plan

The Existing Context Conditions Map provides an overview of key site constraints and physical characteristics that inform the design. It identifies legal boundaries, existing utility infrastructure, and current grading conditions.

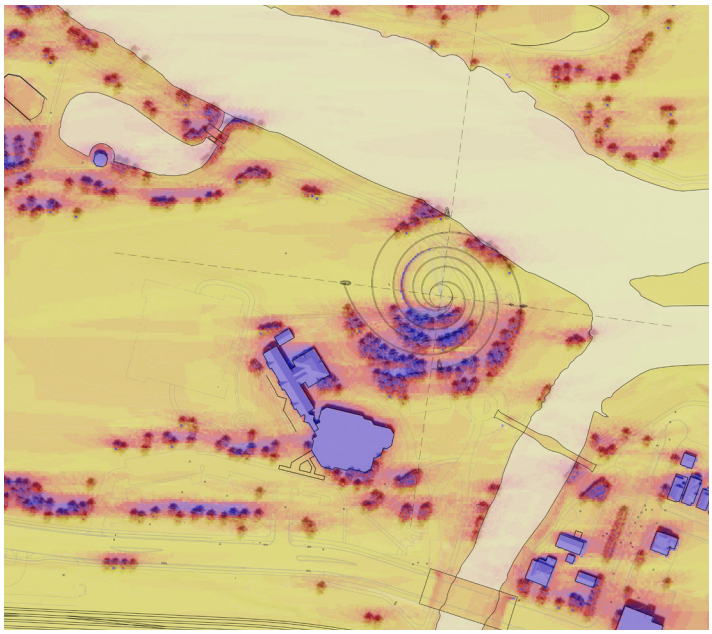


3.4.2 Proposed Design Direct Sunlight Hours

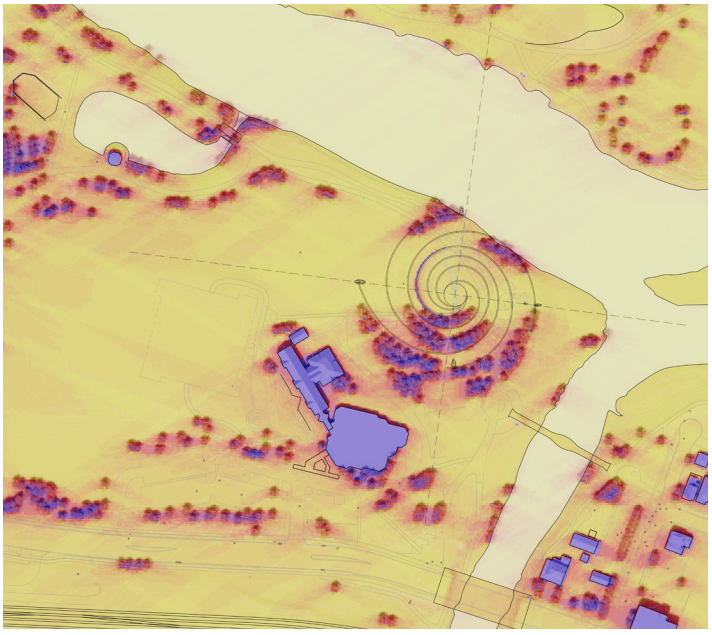
The following series of images illustrates direct sunlight exposure and areas of shade across the site, including the anticipated shade coverage provided by proposed trees. Together, these studies help evaluate seasonal comfort, inform planting and canopy strategies, and support design decisions related to user experience.



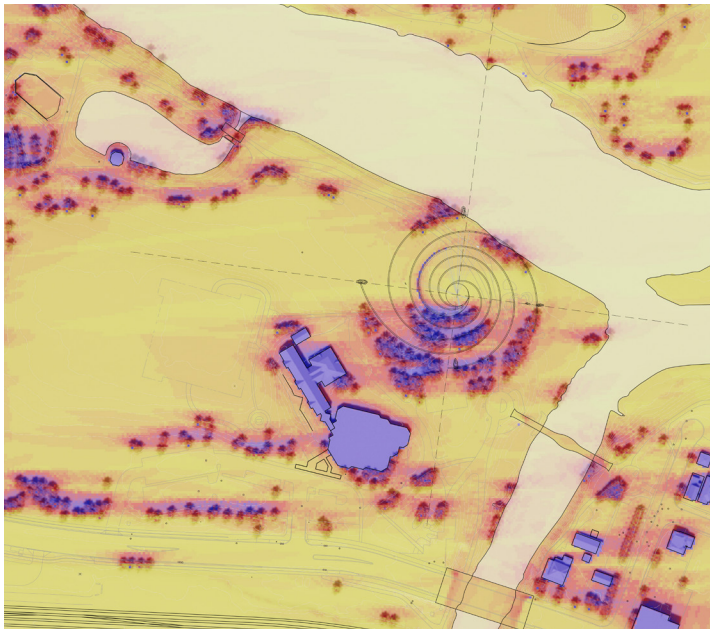
WINTER SOLSTICE - DECEMBER 21



SPRING SOLSTICE - MARCH 21



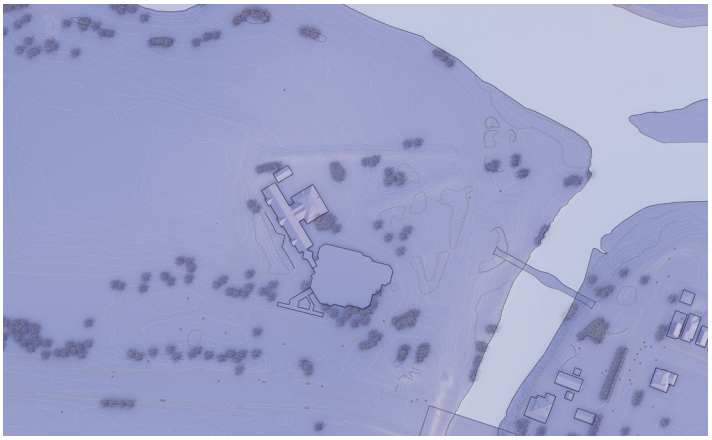
EQUINOX - JUNE 21



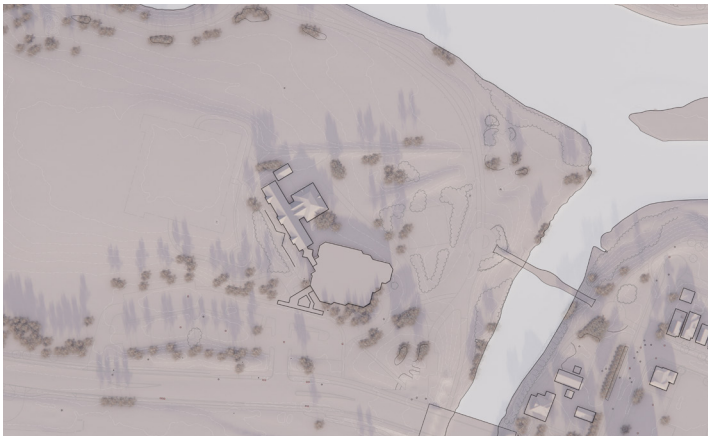
SEPTEMBER 21

3.4.3 Existing Conditions Shadow Study

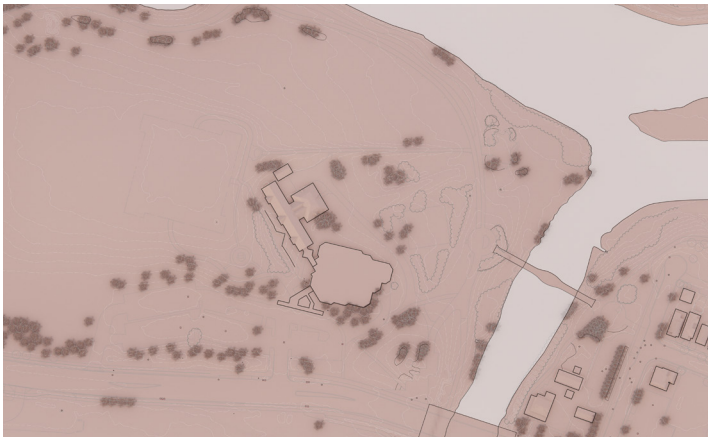
The following series of images presents the existing conditions shadow study, illustrating how current buildings, landforms, and vegetation cast shade across the site at different times of day. These studies establish a baseline understanding of existing light and shadow patterns and inform future design interventions.



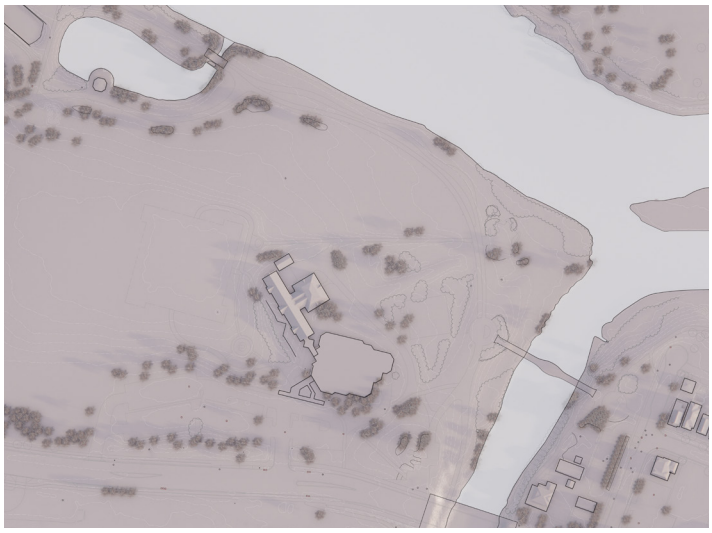
DECEMBER 21 - 8AM



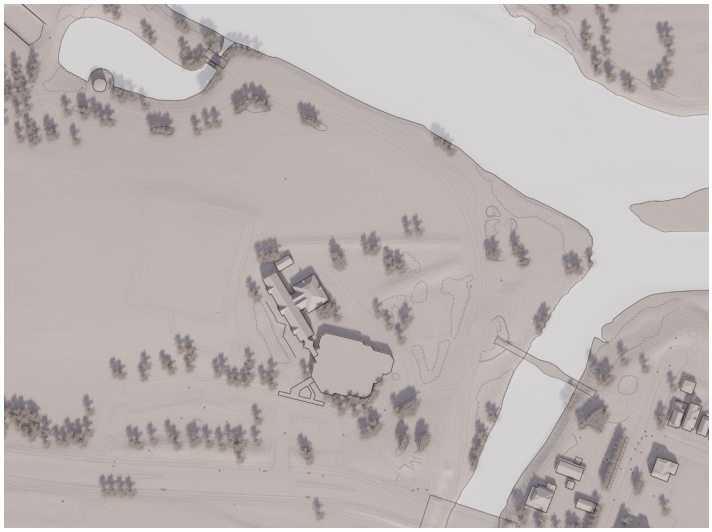
DECEMBER 21 - 12PM



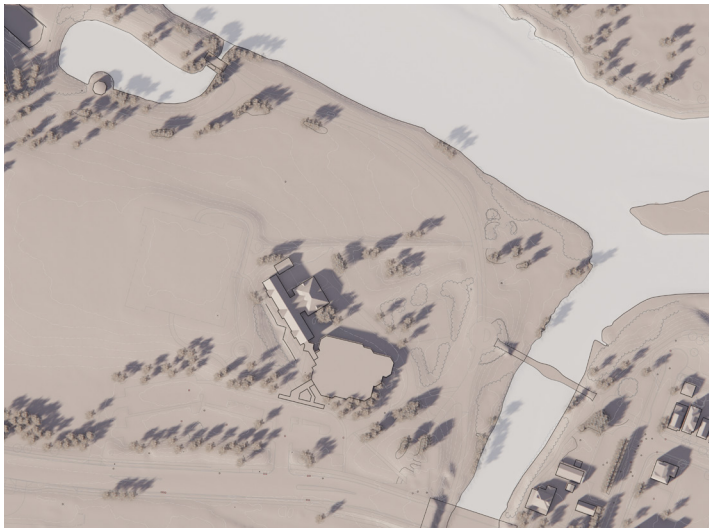
DECEMBER 21 - 4PM



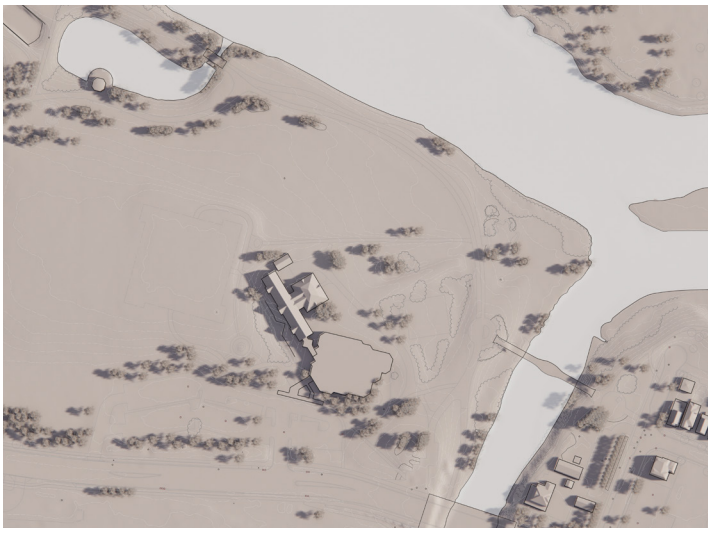
MARCH 21 - 8AM



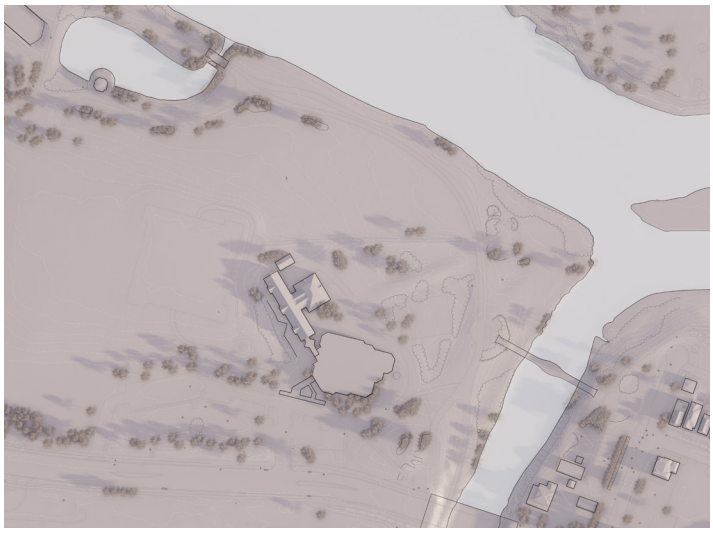
MARCH 21 - 12PM



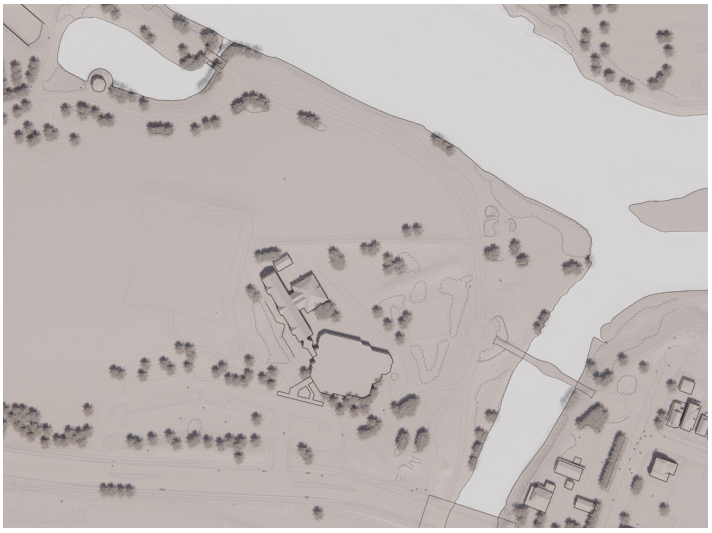
MARCH 21 - 4PM



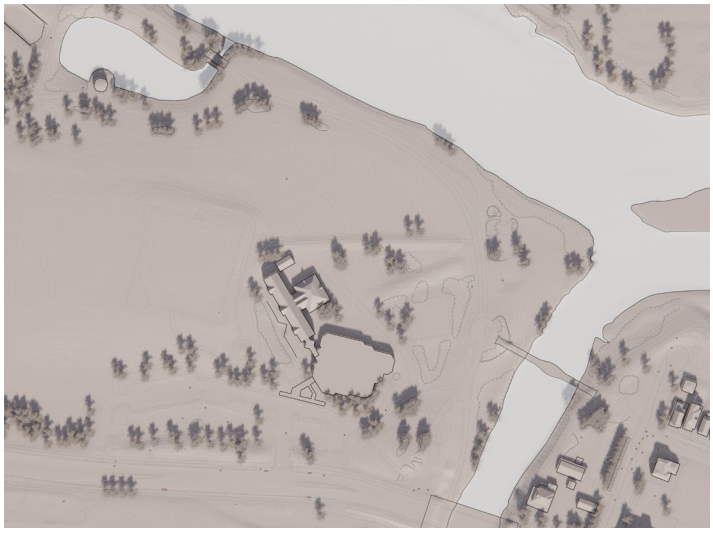
JUNE 21 - 8AM



SEPTEMBER 21 - 8AM



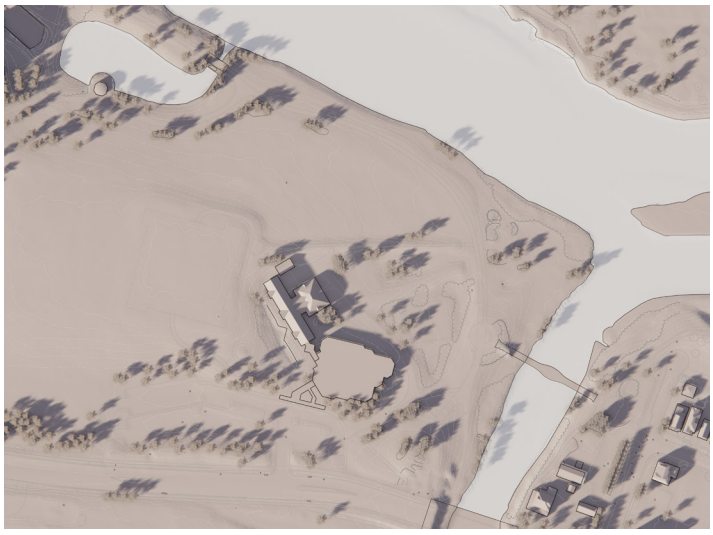
JUNE 21 - 12PM



SEPTEMBER 21 - 12PM



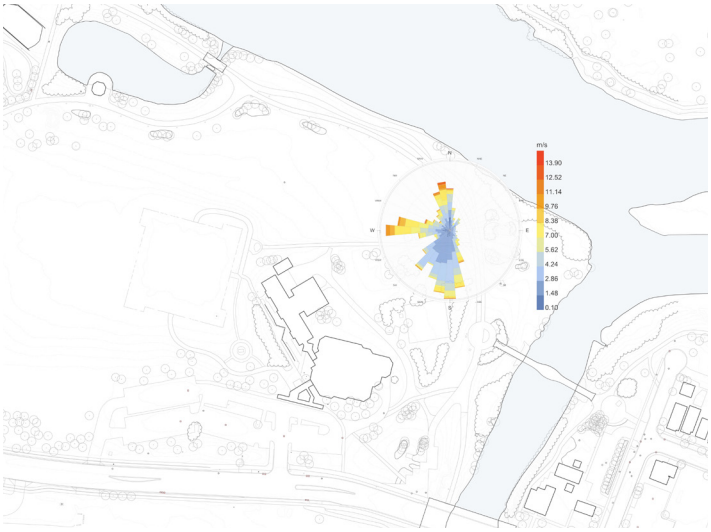
JUNE 21 - 4PM



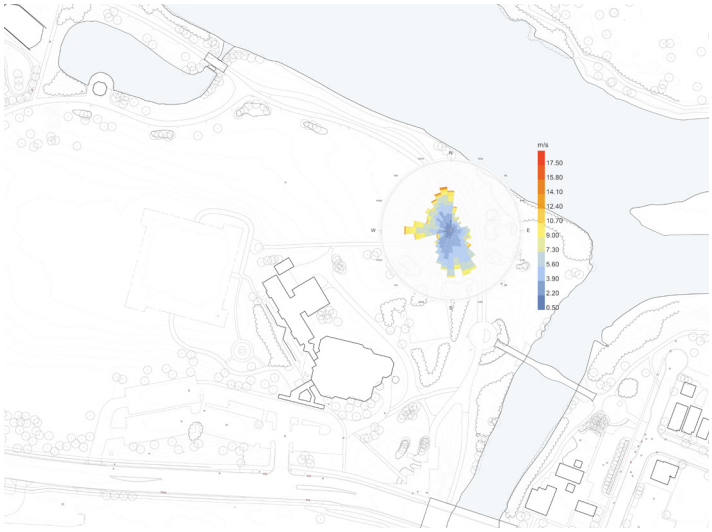
SEPTEMBER 21 - 4PM

3.4.4 Wind Anaylsis

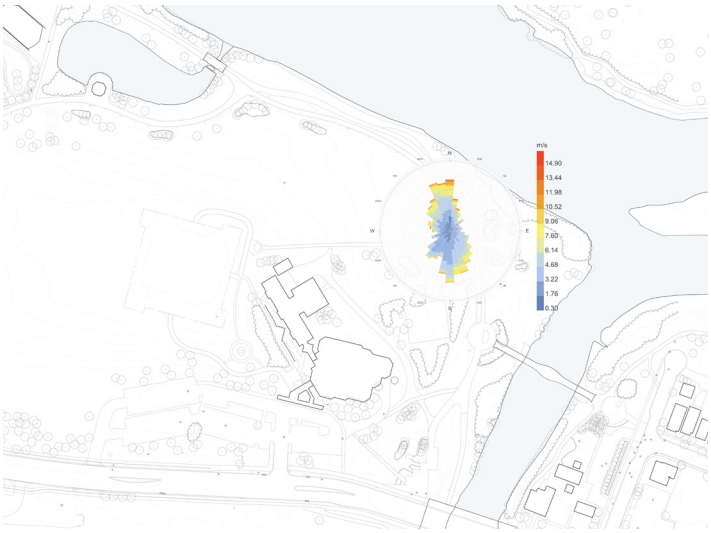
The following series of images presents the wind analysis for the site, illustrating prevailing wind directions, areas of exposure, and zones of relative shelter.



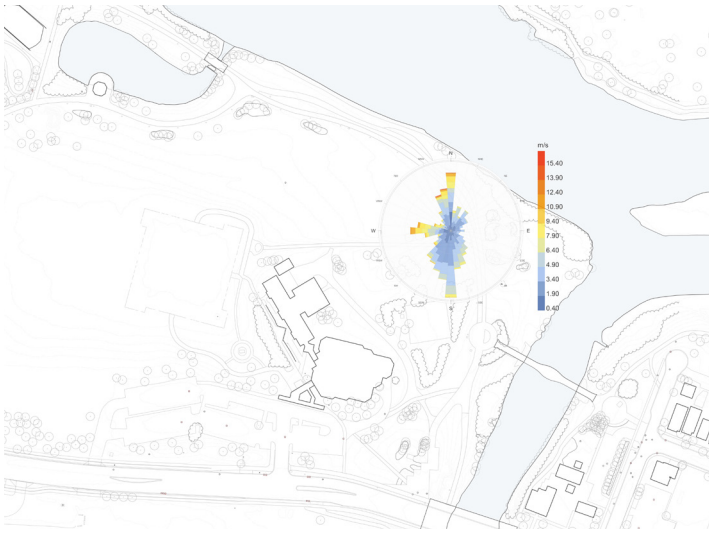
AUTUMN



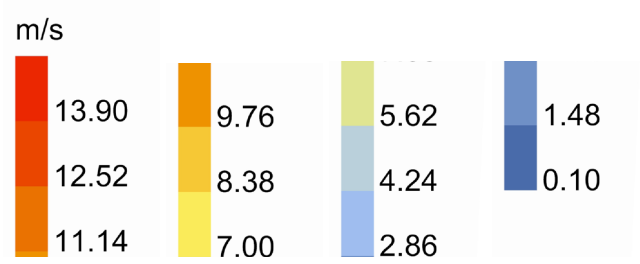
SPRING



SUMMER



WINTER



3.5 | Historical Timeline

Time Immemorial (Pre-Contact)

- The confluence of the Bow and Elbow Rivers is a long-standing gathering place for Indigenous Peoples, including the Blackfoot Confederacy (Siksikaitsitapi), Îyârhe Nakoda (Stoney Nakoda), Tsuut'ina, and Métis.
- The site functioned as a place of meeting, ceremony, trade, seasonal movement, storytelling, and diplomacy.
- Knowledge of the land, rivers, and ecological systems was passed through oral tradition and lived experience over thousands of years.

1700s–Mid-1800s (Early Contact & Fur Trade)

- Increasing presence of European traders and explorers along the Bow River corridor.
- The confluence remains an Indigenous-controlled landscape, though impacted by shifting trade dynamics and introduced diseases.
- Indigenous Nations continue to use the site as a gathering and travel node.

1875 (Establishment of Fort Calgary)

- The North-West Mounted Police (NWMP) establish Fort Calgary at the confluence to assert Canadian sovereignty, control trade, and enforce colonial law.
- The fort marks a major shift from Indigenous stewardship to colonial occupation of the site.

1877–1890s (Treaty Era & Settlement)

- Treaty 7 is signed in 1877, profoundly altering Indigenous land rights and access.
- Fort Calgary becomes a hub for colonial administration as settler populations increase.
- Indigenous presence is increasingly restricted through reserve systems and colonial policy.

Early 1900s (Urban Expansion)

- Calgary grows rapidly; the fort is decommissioned and many original structures are demolished.
- Railways, industry, and infrastructure reshape the surrounding lands.
- Indigenous histories are largely excluded from official narratives of the site.

1930s–1970s (Historic Recognition)

- Efforts begin to commemorate the fort as a historic place, primarily through a colonial lens.
- Reconstruction of select fort buildings reinforces settler-focused interpretation.
- 1982 (Provincial Historic Resource Designation) The archaeological significance of the site leads to its designation as a Provincial Historic Resource.
- Archaeological work remains largely focused on colonial-era features.

2000s–2010s (Reframing History)

- Growing recognition of the site's deep Indigenous history and its role as a shared gathering place.
- Calls increase for Indigenous-led interpretation and acknowledgment of colonial impacts.

2020s–Present (Reconciliation & Re-Interpretation

- The Confluence Historic Site and Parkland is re-envisioned as a place of layered histories, ceremony, learning, and healing.
- Indigenous voices, knowledge keepers, and artists play a central role in shaping new narratives.
- Projects such as the Indian Residential Schools Memorial reflect a shift toward truth, reconciliation, and Indigenous-led storytelling.

4.1 | 2023 "What We Heard" – Themes Identified For The Design Competition

The 2023 What We Heard report established the foundational cultural, spatial, and emotional requirements that the Indigenous community expected to guide the future design competition. These themes came from Elders, Survivors, intergenerational Survivors, Indigenous organizations, Métis and Inuit participants, urban Indigenous individuals, and non-Indigenous Calgarians.

The themes below summarize what participants said must be included, honoured, or considered in the design of a permanent Indian Residential School Memorial.

A. Central Cultural Themes for the Memorial

Participants consistently identified four core themes that the future design must embody:

- Healing - A place that supports emotional release, quiet reflection, and comfort for Survivors, families, and community members.
- Ceremony - A site capable of hosting ceremony, drumming, dancing, gatherings, and cultural practices in a respectful, safe environment.
- Truth - A memorial that names the harms of Residential Schools honestly, acknowledges the schools and their impacts, and helps educate the public.
- Acknowledgment - Honouring the children who never returned, as well as Survivors and intergenerational families.

These four themes were confirmed as the central pillars for Phase 2 of the design competition.

B. Essential Design Qualities Participants Wanted

Traditional Indigenous Design Over Contemporary

- Participants strongly preferred a design grounded in traditional Indigenous worldviews, symbols, and land relationships rather than contemporary or abstract forms.

Incorporating the Temporary Memorial

- Participants were clear that the spirit of the temporary memorial at City Hall must be carried into the permanent memorial.
- This includes the children's shoes.
- Bronzing some of the shoes was the most preferred option.

C. Symbolism and Natural Materials

People wanted symbolism tied to:

- Four directions
- Medicine wheel colours
- Orange (Every Child Matters)

Natural materials were seen as most meaningful, including grasses, trees, stones, and elements such as wind, fire, and light.

D. Spatial and Environmental Requirements

A Quiet, Natural Setting

- Participants preferred a naturalized landscape with pathways, trees, and places to sit.

Seating and Accessibility

- Seating was considered a high priority, particularly for Elders and Survivors.
- Accessibility (by transit, pathways, and mobility aids) was essential.

Open with Some Semi-Covered Spaces

- People wanted the memorial to be predominately open to the sky, with options for semi-covered areas to support ceremony.

E. Location Priorities for the Future Design Competition

Top Location: Fort Calgary / River Confluence

- Participants overwhelmingly chose the Confluence as the most meaningful site for the memorial because of its historical and cultural significance.

Safety and Security

- A safe environment was essential—both cultural safety and physical safety (CPTED).

Participants worried about vandalism, harassment, and maintaining the sacredness of the space.

F. Spiritual and Cultural Elements Participants Wanted

Participants clearly stated that the memorial must include spiritual features:

- Recognition of the four directions
- A place for ceremony, drumming, dancing, and gatherings
- Mood settings for healing, contemplation, and celebration

Offerings and Mourning Practices, participants wanted:

- Places for tobacco, cloth, or biodegradable offerings
- Spaces that support mourning, reflection, and the ability to leave items safely

G. Additional Concerns & Expectations Budget Limitations

Participants questioned whether the allocated budget was enough and offered support to help raise funds if needed.

Long-Term Maintenance

- They emphasized that the memorial must be cared for permanently.

Fear of Non-Indigenous Backlash or Vandalism

- Participants noted fears that the memorial would face vandalism and non-Indigenous pushback.

The Memorial Is a Beginning, Not an End

- People saw the memorial as the start of truth-telling and reconciliation, not the conclusion.

4.2 | Indigenous Representation Review & Cultural Insights - The Wandering Spirit

Analysis of the What We Heard Report 2025, and the design team's conceptual narrative for The Wandering Spirit memorial.

4.2.1 Cultural & Identity Themes Emerging from What We Heard and the Concept Narrative

The cultural insights that align strongly across engagement findings and the design team's Indigenous design rationale. These themes are both community-expressed and culturally grounded within the Artist Statement, Elders' teachings (from the what we heard reports), and the design team's six Indigenous design aspirations.

A. Healing: Returning the Land to Its Original Role

Engagement participants repeatedly emphasized healing not as an aesthetic preference, but as a spiritual and emotional imperative.

The design documentation reinforces this by explicitly noting:

- "This was the location of the Eagle Rib Camp – a place where people came to heal."
- The memorial's success depends on restoring the site to its original use as a place for healing, ceremony, and community.

Healing themes are woven through:

- Land as medicine
- Water as spiritual connection
- Use of natural materials (erratics, stone, grassland species)
- Regenerative design (removing invasive species, restoring ecosystems)
- Trauma-informed movement through the site

Participants described healing in terms of:

- Private grief
- Community gathering
- Intergenerational recognition
- Feeling emotionally safe

The design narrative further aligns healing with spirit, noting that spirit survives colonial attempts at erasure and remains a source of resilience.

B. Ceremony: Circle, Spirit, and Storytelling

Ceremony was the second most consistent theme across engagement and concept materials. The design team's Indigenous design lens includes:

- A Place for Ceremony (Circle)
- The circle mirrors natural cycles, seasons, interconnectedness, balance, and community healing.
- A Place for Journey (Spiral)
- Interpreted by participants as healing, movement, and relational storytelling.
- A Place with Traditional Expression (Medicine Wheel)
- Grounded in cultural teachings of physical–emotional–mental–spiritual balance.

Participants echoed ceremonial needs such as:

- Smudging
- Drumming
- Sundance-related movement
- Pipe ceremony
- Memorial events
- Ceremonial seating
- Comfort and accessibility for Elders and Survivors

Some participants noted that additional seating and shade would be necessary to fully support ceremonial use.

C. Truth: Naming the Harm and Acknowledging the History

Truth is central to both engagement data and the design narrative. Participants described truth as:

- Recognition of genocide
- Naming all 37 Alberta residential schools
- Acknowledging children who never came home
- Preserving the meaning of the temporary memorial shoes
- Storytelling through materials (red bricks, weathering steel, stone, shoes)
- Accuracy in representation without euphemism
- The design team's Concept Wording reinforces this through:

The Colonial Project Narrative

- "What we can show through time is the systematic unfolding of events designed to fundamentally erase a people — to commit cultural genocide."
- Timeline references the Indian Act, mandatory attendance, 130 schools in operation, the Sixties Scoop, TRC Calls to Action, and unmarked graves.

Truth-Telling Through Materials

- The wall of stacked shoe castings expresses:
  - evidence of children who never returned,
  - a continuation of the temporary memorial's truth-telling,
  - layers of offerings and memory.
  - Weathering steel school markers commemorate the exact number and location of Alberta's residential schools to anchor regional truth.

D. Acknowledgment: Survivors, Families & Spirits

Acknowledgment Was Expressed Through:

- Honouring Survivors and their families
- Recognizing intergenerational trauma and resilience
- Welcoming spirits home
- Ensuring each Nation and identity feels seen
- Holding space for grief and remembrance

The Design Narrative Explicitly Acknowledges:

- "The memory of those who never found their way home"
- "The separation of children from their homes and communities"
- "The eternal nature of our past, present, and future selves"

Participants Emphasized That Acknowledgment Must Be:

- Visible
- Interpretive
- Accurate
- Distinctions-based

E. Land-Based Worldview and Place-Based Identity

The Concept Wording adds substantial cultural meaning.

Restoring The Confluence

The Design Team States:

"The Confluence was used by Blackfoot, Îyârhe Nakoda, Tsuut'ina, and Métis peoples since time immemorial."

This reinforces participant teachings that the memorial must:

- Honour Treaty 7 stories
- Restore Indigenous use and stewardship
- Celebrate land as healer and teacher
- Embed historical and spiritual meaning into place

Indigenous Ecologies

- Prairie Grassland and Aspen Parkland ecosystems
- Traditional medicinal plants
- Removal of invasive species

Relational Geographies

- Connection to water
- Four cardinal directions
- Spirit and land-based teachings

Land, in this worldview, is not a backdrop; it is an active participant.

F. Intergenerational Trauma & Resilience

- Engagement participants discussed trauma linked to:
  - Family separation
  - Cultural suppression
  - Loss of language
  - Ongoing grief
  - Intergenerational impacts
- The concept narrative amplifies this through the calf and bison metaphors:
  - Calf = child, physical form, separation
  - Bison = spirit, future, reconnection
- This reflects teachings shared by Survivors who described being taken from:
  - Their families
  - Their homelands
  - Their cultural identities
- The narrative emphasizes resilience:
  - "Despite the physical, emotional, and cultural separation, spirit endures."
  - "The memorial becomes a place of resiliency, ceremony, and healing."

4.2.2 Representation Findings

Analysis of where Indigenous groups saw themselves reflected or absent in the design concept.

A. Where Indigenous Groups Saw Alignment

Symbolic Resonance with Indigenous Worldviews

- The design team's six aspirations paralleled many community values:
  - Ceremony (circle)
  - Journey (spiral)
  - Spirit (bison)
  - Traditional expression (medicine wheel)
  - Honouring the temporary memorial
  - Regional specificity (37 schools)
- Many participants saw these as respectful, powerful, and emotionally thoughtful.

Regional Grounding

- The concept's explicit recognition of the 37 Alberta residential schools was viewed as strong alignment with community expectations for truth-telling and place-specific acknowledgment.

Cultural Alignment with Land-Based Teachings

- Participants resonated with the return of the Confluence to:
  - A healing site
  - A place of gathering
  - A place aligned with traditional uses
- The spiralling paths and flexible gathering areas were interpreted as culturally appropriate for ceremony and storytelling.

Educational Depth

- The Colonial Project narrative, historical timeline, and preserved symbology align strongly with expectations for public education.

B. Where Indigenous Groups Saw Misalignment or Gaps

Missing Métis Identity

- Despite Métis presence on the design team, visual symbolism did not reflect:
  - Métis sash patterns
  - The infinity symbol
  - Michif language
  - Métis-specific storytelling forms

Absence of Inuit Representation

- Participants repeatedly noted:
  - A lack of Inuit symbolism
  - No Inuksuk or northern references
  - Inuit experiences feel unrepresented or peripheral

Emotional Weight of the Shoe Wall

- Some described the wall as:
  - "Dark,"
  - "Overwhelming,"
  - "Painful,"

*Alignment with existing temporary memorial.

- Elders' Comfort and Accessibility Concerns
  - Seating not integrated
  - Safety along the wall
  - Height of features creating fear
  - Desire for shaded or sheltered ceremony spaces

Name Misalignment

- Some felt "Wandering Spirit" implied children were still lost, contradicting:
  - Ceremonies to call spirits home
  - Teachings about rest and returning

- Elder preferences for Indigenous-language names

Symbolism Requiring Clarification

- Several participants echoed:
  - "I'm not sure what I'm looking at."
  - "The documents are overwhelming."
- Without clear interpretation, symbolism risks being inaccessible.

4.2.3 Potential Cultural Misalignment & Representation Risks

This section provides high-level notes on design language risks alongside community feedback.

A. Distinctions-Based Representation Risk

Potential Impacts

- Inuit communities feel excluded
- Métis representation perceived as symbolic only, not embodied
- Tension within Treaty 7 if cultural expressions appear dominated by Blackfoot teachings
- Risk of pan-Indigenous interpretations

Without distinctions-based components, the memorial risks being seen as incomplete or culturally narrow.

B. Name & Narrative Risks

"Wandering Spirit" Interpretations

While rooted in the Artist's story and spiritual teachings, several participants expressed:

- Unsettled feelings
- Concerns the spirits remain lost
- Desire for names rooted in Indigenous languages

This could create cultural misalignment if not contextualized through interpretation.

C. Symbolic Readings of the Shoes

The Cast Shoes Represent:

- Offerings
- Memory
- Loss
- Truth

But some participants found the imagery too heavy or reminiscent of other genocide memorials, risking unintended comparisons.

D. Emotional Safety Risks

Based on CPTED principles and trauma-informed care (outside of my area):

- Height of the wall can create fear
- Blind spots may be unsafe
- Overwhelming emotional triggers may require support services

Limited seating complicates Elders' participation

The design's emotional intensity must be balanced with healing.

E. Interpretation Risk

Given the complexity of the symbolism:

- Visitors may misunderstand the bison metaphor
- Spirit teachings vary across Nations
- The timeline and history must be carefully contextualized

Interpretive strategies must support a wide range of cultural backgrounds and knowledge levels.

4.2.4 Indigenous Worldviews Connected to the Design Context

This portion connects the six Indigenous design aspirations directly into worldview themes raised through engagement.

A. Ceremony: Circle as Cosmology

The circle is a fundamental cultural form recognized across many Nations:

- Ceremony
- Guidance
- Balance
- Holistic experience
- Equal voices
- Community gathering

The concept uses the circle as both structure and spiritual expression.

B. Journey: Spiral as Non-Linear Healing

The spiral reflects:

- Trauma recovery
- Grief cycles
- Learning cycles
- Shared journeys
- Interconnectedness

It aligns deeply with participants' sense that healing is not a straight path.

C. Spirit: Animal Metaphor and Continuity

The bison and calf represent:

- Child and adult
- Past and future
- Broken and restored relationship
- Spirit as enduring
- Reconnection despite colonial rupture

These metaphors align with teachings shared by some Elders, though not all participants resonated equally.

D. Traditional Expression: Medicine Wheel & Pictographs

Symbolism includes:

- Four directions
- Pictographs
- Balance teachings
- Interconnectedness

Participants interpreting the design favored symbols they could recognize and connect to.

E. Honouring the Temporary Memorial

The design team acknowledges:

- Sacredness of the original offerings
- Need for transition ceremony
- Cataloging and preservation of shoes
- Importance of bringing offerings into the new space

Participants strongly supported this continuity.

F. Regional Specificity: Alberta Truth-Telling

Identifying all 37 Alberta residential schools was seen as:

- Essential truth-telling
- Educational
- Powerful
- Grounding the memorial in treaty 7 context

4.3 | 2025 Feedback – Design Response

2023 What We Heard: Direction	Design Response	2025 Feedback: Evaluation of Response
Healing	• Located at The Confluence, a Blackfoot healing site. • Natural grasses, restored river edge, quiet landscape. • Circular central space for reflection. • Materials chosen for grounding (stone, earth, natural textures). • Journey narrative supports emotional processing.	Resonated: Land felt healing; spiral supported reflective movement. Concerns: Shoe wall felt "too heavy" for some; emotional overwhelm; need for more Elder seating & shade.
Ceremony	• Central circular gathering space. • Amphitheater-like berm seating. • Semi-open areas for drumming, prayer, dance. • Accessible paths for Elders/Survivors.	Resonated: Circle strongly aligned with ceremony. Concerns: Seating insufficient; uncertain if space is large enough for events; safety concerns near wall.

Truth	• 37 Alberta Residential School markers. • Shoe wall as symbol of children who never returned. • Past–Present–Future timeline. • Strong educational narrative in concept materials.	Resonated: Clear truth-telling; strong connection to temporary memorial. Concerns: Wall evoked Holocaust comparisons; some misunderstood symbolism; need for more interpretation.
Acknowledgment	• Bison calf (child) + adult bison (spirit/future). • Inclusive language referencing First Nations, Métis, Inuit. • Space for offerings and remembrance.	Resonated: Many felt acknowledged by narrative; strong emotional impact. Concerns: Missing Métis and Inuit-specific symbols; Blackfoot representation felt dominant to some.
Traditional Indigenous Design	• Circle, spiral, medicine wheel principles. • Connection to land, water, directions. • Use of natural materials, erratics, and plant medicines.	Resonated: Strong alignment with traditional design expectations. Concerns: Some symbolism unclear without explanation; risk of appearing pan-Indigenous.
Natural Materials & Land Relationship	• Prairie and Aspen ecosystem restoration. • Natural grasses, trees, and earth shaping. • Permeable pathways; integration of water.	Resonated: Positive response to land healing and nature. Concerns: Some areas felt too open or exposed; need for sheltered seating.
Accessibility & Elders' Needs	• Accessible pathways, gentle slopes. • Seating integrated into berms. • Open space for wheelchairs and mobility aids.	Resonated: Paths seen as accessible. Concerns: More seating, shade, comfort needed for Elders; long walking distances; wall height created discomfort.
Safety	• CPTED-informed layout; open views. • Lighting improvements; restored sightlines to river.	Resonated: General appreciation for openness of site. Concerns: Wall created blind spots; nighttime safety concerns; vandalism risk to shoe wall.
Temporary Memorial Integration	• Shoe wall referencing offerings at City Hall. • Plans to respectfully preserve and catalogue original shoes. • Space for future offerings.	Resonated: Strongest point of positive connection. Concerns: Emotional intensity too strong for some; questions about preservation and vandalism.
Location – The Confluence	• Fully aligned with top community choice. • Restores land as healing and gathering place.	Resonated: Strong universal support for Confluence. Concerns: Need for clear interpretation of why the site is culturally important.

4.4 | Understanding Reviewer Feedback: Perception vs Design Intent

Below is a clear breakdown of which concerns were considered by The Wandering Spirit design, but may not have been communicated to reviewers based on information provided.

A. Ceremony Space Size & Function

Concern:

Reviewers were unsure if the central circle was large enough for ceremonies (powwow, drumming, gatherings), or how it functioned.

Design Elements

- The central circle is intentionally designed as a multi-purpose ceremonial space.
- The berm seating and open field accommodate large gatherings.
- The gradual slopes and wide paths were designed specifically to support Elder mobility during ceremonies.

Understanding the Concern

- The competition boards emphasized symbolism, not dimensions.
- The "flexibility" of the space wasn't clearly explained.

B. Accessibility (Elders, Survivors, Mobility Needs)

Concern:

Reviewers worried about long walking distances, lack of seating, mobility challenges.

Design Elements

- The pathways were designed to be fully accessible, meeting or exceeding slope requirements.
- Seating is integrated into the landform berms, not always shown clearly in renders.
- The spiral path includes multiple rest points and gradual inclines.

Understanding the Concern

- Seating was represented subtly through landforms, not benches.
- Absence of explicit signage like "accessible route."
- Renderings did not highlight resting points or slope diagrams.

C. CPTED & Safety

Concern:

Reviewers expressed fear of blind spots, nighttime safety, and vandalism.

Design Elements

- The concept incorporated CPTED principles:
  - Open sightlines across the entire site
  - Low planting for visibility
  - Lighting along paths
  - High visibility edges linking to RiverWalk
- Shoe wall was positioned in a public-facing, high-visibility zone.
- Removal of dense planting along riverbank

Understanding the Concern

- Renderings emphasized atmosphere, not lighting plans.
- CPTED diagrams weren't included on public boards.
- Reviewers focused on emotional interpretation, not technical design.

D. Interpretation & Storytelling

Concern:

Symbolism was hard to understand, and meaning wasn't clear.

Design Elements

- The designers prepared a robust interpretive plan:
  - Narrative sequence (past > present > future)
  - Interpretive markers
  - School markers
  - Story-based movement through the spiral
  - Pictographs + timeline + educational layers

Understanding the Concern

- People reviewed static boards, not the full competition submission.
- Interpretive text was summarized/simplified for public display.
- Some interpretive elements are planned for schematic design, not fully rendered yet.

E. Métis & Inuit Representation

Concern:

Métis and Inuit representation was not visible enough.

Design Elements

- The design includes distinctions-based cultural acknowledgment at the narrative level.
- The design team's Indigenous design aspirations reflect shared Indigenous worldviews.
- Inclusivity is embedded in the Four Tipi Pole framework, which the project is centered on from the city side.
- Inuit and Métis stories are included in the interpretive plan, although not yet visualized.

Understanding the Concern

- Distinction elements were in the text narrative, not yet in physical form.
- No clear symbol was shown; reviewers look for symbols.
- Métis and Inuit reviewers often need clearer visibility due to histories of erasure, so subtle representation can be missed.
- Should be flagged for future consideration to add visual representation, depending on feedback.

F. Shoe Wall Emotional Impact

Concern:

Some felt the shoe wall was too heavy or reminiscent of other genocide memorials.

Design Elements

- The design narrative explains the wall as:
    - A continuation of the temporary memorial
    - A place of offerings
    - A remembrance of the children
    - A truth-telling form tied to "absence"

Understanding the Concern

- Renderings emphasize the emotional tone but not the interpretive text.
- Meaningful context wasn't visible at a glance on exhibition boards.
- Reviewers may have reacted emotionally before understanding the narrative.

G. Ceremonial Offerings & Cultural Protocol

Concern:

Where do people leave offerings?

Will there be space for cloth, tobacco, food, objects, etc.?

Design Elements

- The shoe wall incorporates offering ledges.
- The bison area includes space for land-based offerings.
- The spiral journey includes intentional points for pausing, leaving items, or prayer.

Understanding the Concern

- These features were subtle and not labeled as "offering zones."
- Reviewers may assume offerings must be placed on static surfaces (tables, altars), not landscape-integrated features.

05 | Validation Strategy (Unheard Voices, Heard)

5.1 | Validation Strategy Summary

The Validation Strategy for the Indian Residential School Memorial (IRSM), The Wandering Spirit – Unheard Voices, Heard, describes the structured approach used to share the memorial design with Indigenous Elders, Survivors, Knowledge Keepers, artists, and community partners. As this phase represents the first opportunity for reciprocal dialogue with the winning Design Team, it was essential to confirm that the design aligns with cultural teachings, lived experiences, and earlier community guidance. Guided by The City of Calgary's Engagement Plan and operating at the IAP2 Inform Level, this strategy emphasizes transparency, cultural accuracy, and relationship stewardship rather than design revision.

This section provides an overview of the full validation approach, including:

- Engagement Plan Overview – the purpose, scope, guiding principles, trauma-informed considerations, and tools used to share the design and ensure accessibility for Indigenous partners.
- Primary Validation Session Summary – a detailed narrative of the presentation and dialogue with The City of Calgary Indigenous Elders Advisory Group, the central and most comprehensive session of this phase.
- Three Additional Validation Touchpoints – summaries of presentations and discussions with:
    - The Native Information Exchange at Mount Royal University,
    - The St. Dunstan's Industrial School Project & Calgary Arts Development Steering Committee, and
    - The Sober Crew Drum Group - These sessions offered diverse perspectives and confirmed resonance across community contexts.
- Integrated "What We Heard & What We Learned" Analysis – a synthesis of key themes from all sessions, including truth-telling, cultural integrity, representation, emotional resonance, and expectations for educational elements.

Together, these components demonstrate that The Wandering Spirit reflects the stories, truths, and cultural responsibilities shared throughout the project. The validation process confirms that the design is aligned with community guidance and ready to move forward into refinement, fabrication, and implementation while maintaining transparency and relationship continuity with Indigenous partners.

5.2 | Engagement Plan & Event Summary

The Engagement Plan and Event Summary for The Wandering Spirit memorial outlines how the project team worked collaboratively to share the memorial design with Indigenous Elders, community partners, artists, and cultural practitioners across Calgary.

Guided by The City of Calgary's formal Engagement Plan and operating at the IAP2 Inform Level, this phase focused on providing clear, transparent information about how earlier community guidance shaped the design and ensuring that Indigenous partners had opportunities to hear the narrative directly from the Design Team.

The following sections describe the engagement approach, the primary Validation Session, and the four core community touchpoints that together formed a culturally grounded, relationship-centred validation process.

5.2.1 Engagement Plan Overview

The engagement approach for the Indian Residential School Memorial (IRSM), The Wandering Spirit, was developed collaboratively between The City of Calgary's Engage Resource Unit, Many Chief Consulting, Ground Cubed, and project partners. The City's formal Engagement Plan (Nov. 7, 2025) establishes that this phase of work operates at the IAP2 Inform Level of Engagement, ensuring that Indigenous partners receive clear, transparent information about the memorial design, how earlier guidance shaped it, and how the design team interpreted "What We Heard" themes. At this level, input is not solicited to redesign elements; instead, the purpose is to share information, validate alignment, and confirm that the design reflects the intent and values already expressed.

The Inform-level purpose of engagement was central to the Validation Session:

- To present the memorial design narrative and conceptual development,
- To explain how previous engagement informed the work,
- To ensure cultural and narrative accuracy,
- To confirm alignment with themes of truth, healing, ceremony, and remembrance, and to provide clarity on next steps in the project.

The engagement plan identifies a broad circle of relational partners, Indigenous Elders, Survivors and family representatives, the Indigenous Advisory Committee, The Confluence, Indigenous community organizations, the Design Team, and The City of Calgary project team, all of whom hold roles within the Inform-level engagement purpose. Barriers to participation were identified, including distance, technology, emotional readiness, and time commitments, and the plan incorporated trauma-informed practices, flexibility, and in-person access wherever possible.

To support transparency and accessibility, The City's engagement plan outlined multiple tools and techniques, including:

- A video interview with the artist explaining how previous feedback shaped the design,
- The Engage Portal page to share design information publicly,
- In-person validation opportunities, and
- A community drop-in event hosted in partnership with The Confluence.

This foundation ensured that the validation process honoured Indigenous experiences, supported relationship continuity, and kept engagement activities aligned with the IAP2 Inform level while providing space for Elders' reflections and emotional responses.

5.2.2 Validation Session Narrative Summary

The first and primary Validation Session marked the formal introduction of The Wandering Spirit memorial design to The City of Calgary Indigenous Elders Advisory Group. It was also the first time the winning design team led by artist Adrian Stimson, with Ground Cubed (also representing Hereby), presented the full memorial concept directly to Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and Survivors. Members of The Confluence and The City project team were present, creating a collaborative and culturally grounded space consistent with the approach outlined in the engagement plan.

The session opened with introductions, cultural grounding, and shared mealtime, recognizing the emotional gravity of the topic and reinforcing trauma-informed practice. The Design Team then presented the memorial concept, sharing the narrative structure, symbolism, and how "What We Heard" themes shaped the work. Continuous dialogue and thoughtful pauses allowed Elders to offer reflections while staff and designers listened respectfully, maintaining the Inform-level approach.

Elders spoke candidly about what resonated, sharing statements such as "I can feel the spirit moving through this," and "This needs to hold both the heaviness and the hope." The discussion reaffirmed the need for passive interpretive elements, ensuring space for personal journeys of remembrance without imposing Nation-specific teachings. Elders emphasized that plant selections and symbolic elements must hold meaning across Nations, not serve as exclusive or specific cultural references—an approach already integrated into the design.

While no redesign was requested, consistent with the Inform-level intent, Elders' reflections affirmed cultural accuracy, emotional resonance, and the memorial's readiness for broader community sharing and City review. The session closed with a commitment to integrate reflections into the reporting, finalize design materials, and maintain ongoing transparency with Indigenous partners.

5.2.3 Expanded Event Summary: Four Core Validation Sessions

To honour the diversity of Indigenous perspectives across Calgary and to remain consistent with the IAP2 Inform level of engagement, the project team supported four key validation touchpoints. Each session provided an opportunity to share information, present the design, and listen for reflections that confirmed alignment with earlier guidance.

1. City of Calgary Indigenous Elders Advisory Group (including The Confluence)

This was the central, most comprehensive session. Elders and Knowledge Keepers reviewed the design in detail, offering emotional, cultural, and narrative reflections. Their insights affirmed that the memorial aligns with themes of healing, truth, and remembrance and is responsive to the lived and intergenerational experiences of Survivors.

2. The Wandering Spirit Presentation with Native Information Exchange (Mount Royal University)

This session created space for Indigenous students and youth community members to engage with the design. Participants highlighted the importance of educational visibility, accessibility, and the memorial's role in fostering intergenerational understanding. Their reflections affirmed the value of passive interpretation and the memorial's potential as a site of learning.

3. The Wandering Spirit Pop-Up Engagement with Sober Crew Drum Practice

A more informal, culturally grounded pop-up validation opportunity occurred during a Sober Crew drum practice. Presenting the design in this setting allowed the Design Team to hear immediate, organic reactions from knowledge holders deeply connected to healing, sobriety, and cultural revitalization. Participants reflected that the memorial felt alive and emotionally resonant and underscored the importance of creating a space that feels safe and accessible.

4. The Wandering Spirit Presentation with the St. Dunstan's Industrial School Project & Calgary Arts Development Steering Committee

This session engaged St. Dunstan's Industrial School Project Steering Committee in dialogue about materiality, symbolism, and artistic intention. Their insights emphasized the importance of authenticity, shared cultural meaning, and a balance between solemnity and resilience. The creative space and context added depth to the understanding of narrative coherence and visual storytelling.

5.2.4 Integrated Summary of the Multi-Session Validation Approach

Together, the four sessions created a comprehensive, community-informed validation process centered firmly at the IAP2 Inform level of engagement. Participants across all sessions affirmed that:

- The memorial reflects the "What We Heard" guidance.
- The cultural narrative aligns with the shared teachings and experiences of Indigenous communities.
- The design honours Survivors, families, and those who never returned home.
- Passive interpretive elements support personal reflection rather than prescriptive storytelling.
- The design is ready for refinement, final documentation, and next steps toward implementation.

Elders, students, artists, and cultural practitioners each contributed perspectives that validated the design's integrity and resonance. The multi-session approach strengthened relationships, increased transparency, and ensured continuity in how Indigenous partners engage with the project as it moves forward.

5.3 | What We Heard & What We Learned

5.3.1 Indigenous Validation Session Summary #1

- The City of Calgary Indigenous Elders Advisory Group
- December 4, 2025

Introduction

The Design Team, led by Blackfoot (Siksika) artist Adrian Stimson and the Ground Cubed team, representing themselves and Hereby, met with The City of Calgary Indigenous Elders Advisory Group for the first formal Validation Session. Members of The City of Calgary Project Team were also in attendance.

This session marked a major milestone: it was the first time the design competition winners for the Indian Residential School Memorial were able to present their concept directly to Elders, Survivors, and community representatives. Because the competition required the design team to work independently without engagement during earlier stages, this gathering became the first opportunity for reciprocal dialogue.

It created a space where Survivors spoke their truths, Elders shared teachings and lived experience, and the design team listened deeply to ensure that the memorial continues to be shaped by those most affected by the Residential School system.

What We Heard

The validation session was characterized by profound honesty, vulnerability, and truth-telling. Elders and Survivors shared experiences that were at once personal and representative of widespread impacts. Many spoke of growing up inside or beside residential schools, where daily life blended trauma, family, and survival. One participant shared, "My early years were spent in and around residential schools, from nursery to Grade 4… that was my home, and yet it was not a home at all."

These stories revealed the layered complexity of being raised in institutions created to erase Indigenous identity, culture, and family structures. Survivors described the long-term consequences of separation, loss of language, and emotional dislocation. They spoke of the psychological burden of being told their ceremonies, teachings, and identities were wrong, leaving many with lifelong mistrust and disconnection.

A central theme was the disconnection of spirit. Elders emphasized that residential schools did not only remove children from their families but also separated them from their spiritual selves. One Elder reflected, "Those schools separated us from our spirits… and many of those spirits are still out there, wandering." The memorial was repeatedly described as a space that must help call those spirit's home.

Participants highlighted the often-overlooked history and resilience of Indigenous women. Many recounted how colonial systems targeted Indigenous women, undermining their authority, pushing them into silence, or erasing their contributions. As one Elder stated, "Our women carried the languages, the teachings, the protocols—yet their stories were taken from the record." The group expressed that the memorial must honour Indigenous women's experiences as foundational to the truth.

Truth-telling was a major emphasis. Elders stressed that the memorial cannot be softened to avoid discomfort: "People forget too quickly. This must be a reminder—a permanent one—that this really happened."

Healing was described as continuous, personal, and deeply tied to culture, land, and ceremony. Survivors explained that healing is not a defined stage or outcome but "something we walk with every day, in balance, even when the triggers come."

The land itself was recognized as a witness and teacher. The Confluence, long a gathering place for ceremony and healing, must remain central to the design. Participants spoke of the importance of water, medicines, and natural elements in supporting reconnection.

An especially strong response emerged around the design's use of bison imagery. Elders described the bison calf as a

powerful metaphor for the children, "alone, wandering, looking for their parents", and the bison mother as the embodiment of love and protection. They affirmed the emotional and spiritual resonance of these choices.
Finally, we heard strong guidance around representation. Survivors and Elders stressed that the memorial must honour all Nations and all survivors, including Treaty Nations, Métis, Inuit, Sixties Scoop survivors, urban Indigenous people, and those disconnected from their communities. "We are not one kind of Indigenous person. Our experiences are different, but connected," one participant noted.

There was a clear call for careful protocol, accuracy, and respect throughout the process.

What We Learned
From this session, the design team learned that the memorial must be anchored in truth, not comfort. Survivors made it clear that reconciliation without full acknowledgement of harm is incomplete. The memorial must hold space for the full truth—including the pain, injustice, and ongoing impacts—while also making room for culture, strength, humour, and resilience.
We learned that the community is not seeking symbolic gestures or detached aesthetics; they are asking for depth and integrity. The physical design must be inseparable from the stories and knowledge shared. The validation session affirmed that storytelling, both historical and ongoing, must remain central. As one Elder expressed, "Every time you come back to it, you should find something new. That is how our stories work."

The concept of The Wandering Spirit resonated deeply, confirming its spiritual and cultural appropriateness. Elders validated the idea that the memorial should act as a place of return and reconnection, "a place to call the spirits home."

We also learned that healing is not linear. Healing, as described by participants, is a lifelong journey connected to ceremony, land, family, and daily acts of balance. This shaped our understanding of what must be incorporated in the design: places to sit, ground oneself, offer medicines, connect with water, and gather for ceremony. The land must not be overshadowed; instead, the design should respect and elevate the natural environment.

Representation emerged as both a responsibility and a requirement for trust. Ensuring that diverse Nations, identities, and protocols are represented accurately and respectfully is essential. Survivors stressed that the memorial would live far into the future, serving young people, urban Indigenous families, those reconnecting with culture, and future generations seeking understanding. "It's not just for us," an Elder said, "but for the ones coming after us who need to know the truth."

Most importantly, we learned that this process is relational and ongoing. Trust is not built in a single meeting but through consistent listening, responsiveness, honesty, and transparency. This session affirmed that continued engagement is not only expected but required, and that the design must evolve with the teachings and stories shared along the way.

Summary
The first Validation Session with The City of Calgary Indigenous Elders Advisory Group offered the design team a meaningful opportunity to share The Wandering Spirit concept directly with Elders, Survivors, and community representatives, many of whom spoke openly about their experiences with Residential Schools and the lasting impacts on spirit, identity, and community. Elders emphasized that the memorial must help call home the spirits of the children who never returned and must present the truth without softening or avoiding the difficult history.

Participants expressed strong resonance with the cultural symbolism, particularly the bison calf and mother, and highlighted the importance of honouring women's roles, grounding the work in Treaty 7 knowledge, and ensuring accurate and inclusive representation across Nations.

The significance of The Confluence as a place of healing and ceremony was reinforced, and the session affirmed that the memorial must remain rooted in authenticity, cultural

integrity, and ongoing engagement, evolving through continued listening and relationship-building with the community.

5.3.2 Indigenous Validation Session Summary #2

- The Native Information Exchange at Mount Royal University
- December 9, 2025

Introduction

As part of the Phase 1 community-informed validation activities for The Wandering Spirit memorial project, the Design Team, represented by Indigenous artist Adrian Stimson and supported by Harold Horsefall from The City of Calgary, met with the Native Information Exchange community at Mount Royal University to share the emerging memorial design. Twenty-eight participants attended from various Indigenous-serving organizations, including the Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary, the Indigenous Research Support Team (IRST) at the University of Calgary, and the First Nations Health Consortium.

The Native Information Exchange is a collective of practitioners who support Indigenous peoples in accessing services, navigating government systems, strengthening cultural and community connections, and advancing Indigenous data sovereignty. Their collective expertise in community advocacy, cultural continuity, and health navigation made them an important audience to inform at this early stage.

The session began with opening remarks by Harold Horsefall, followed by a design presentation and storytelling from Adrian Stimson, who introduced the themes, intent, and cultural grounding of The Wandering Spirit. This session served to inform participants of the design direction, answer questions, and introduce opportunities for ongoing input through an upcoming online feedback link.

What We Heard

Participants shared a range of thoughtful questions and reflections that highlighted both cultural and practical considerations for the future memorial. Several attendees expressed curiosity about how movement might feel within the space, including whether dancing on the brick surface would be physically demanding. Adrian explained the thematic reasoning behind the material choices and how movement connects symbolically to the narrative of the memorial. Others asked whether the design would incorporate digital or interpretive technology that could support storytelling or educational elements.

Questions also focused on how the memorial could remain respectful and protected during major nearby events (such as Country Thunder) with participants noting the need for visual or spatial separation to support ceremony. There was interest in whether a fire space was included in the design, and Harold and Adrian confirmed that an outdoor fire area is planned, and that The Confluence also houses an interior ceremonial room available for cultural activities.

Participants asked for clarification on design elements such as steel markers, brick layout, and embedded symbolism, seeking a deeper understanding of how these elements will be interpreted by the public. One attendee highlighted the importance of having "a space to tie up your house," emphasizing the need for culturally functional infrastructure tied to ceremony and gathering.

Finally, there was considerable interest in the project timeline, with participants asking when construction would begin and when the memorial would be available for community use.

What We Learned

The feedback from this Inform-level engagement underscored the importance of communicating both the cultural symbolism and the functional aspects of the memorial design. Participants emphasized that cultural use, such as dancing, gathering, and ceremony, requires thoughtful material choices and clear explanation to ensure the space is welcoming and usable. Their concerns about the memorial's proximity to large entertainment events further reinforced the need for proactive operational planning and future communication about how the space will be protected and respected.

Questions about digital interpretation and the detailed meaning of design elements demonstrated a desire for accessible and culturally grounded educational materials that can accompany the design as it moves toward implementation. The strong interest in ongoing updates and the forthcoming online feedback tool confirmed that community-serving organizations value continued opportunities to stay informed, even within an Inform-level engagement process.

Overall, these reflections helped the project team better understand where clarification, communication, and storytelling will be most beneficial as the design continues to evolve.

Summary
The engagement session with the Native Information Exchange at Mount Royal University offered valuable early insights into how Indigenous-serving organizations understand and respond to The Wandering Spirit memorial design.

Participants expressed support for the cultural grounding and narrative direction of the project while raising thoughtful questions about movement, materiality, ceremony, digital interpretation, site respect during major events, and the project timeline. These reflections will guide the development of future communication materials and help the project team anticipate community expectations as Phase 1 validation activities continue.

The next steps include sharing the online feedback link, maintaining transparent communication with partners, and integrating this early input into preparations for upcoming sessions with Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and other Indigenous community groups.

5.3.3 Indigenous Validation Session Summary #3

- Validation Session with the St. Dunstan's Industrial School Project & Calgary Arts Development Steering Committee
- December 10, 2025

Introduction
On December 10, 2025, the IRSM Design Team presented The Wandering Spirit memorial concept to the Calgary Arts Development St. Dunstan's Industrial School Public Art Steering Committee. Eight committee members attended, many with personal and familial connections to the history of St. Dunstan's and Treaty 7 communities.

The session opened with introductions before artist Adrian Stimson offered a detailed narrative of the design, speaking to the cultural foundations, artistic process, and significance of the memorial's name, which honours the wandering spirits of children who attended residential schools, particularly those who never returned home. Adrian also shared the significance of the Eagle Rib Camp, linked to his own family history, as a conceptual anchor for the work. He emphasized the memorial's placement along a highly trafficked river pathway, where thousands of people pass each day, highlighting its potential as both a healing space and a powerful educational presence within the city. The anticipated opening date of September 2027 was shared, aligning with the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.

What We Heard
The discussion that followed reflected a strong desire for Indigenous-led storytelling, narrative accuracy, and thoughtful educational integration. Several committee members, beginning with Marina, emphasized concerns about misinformation surrounding St. Dunstan's Industrial School, including online references incorrectly placing the school at The Confluence site. She stressed that information shared with the public must be validated by Indigenous knowledge keepers from Treaty 7 and must clearly center Indigenous narrative sovereignty.

Marina also noted the urgency of documenting accurate histories, as many original voices connected to these experiences are aging, and their stories risk being lost. She encouraged the development of a digital content strategy that could connect the St. Dunstan's site with the IRSM memorial to ensure continuity and clarity for visitors.

Additional reflections emerged around representation and inclusivity. Cindy Daniels shared that her mother attended St. Dunstan's, emphasizing the need to acknowledge the experiences of women and girls, whose stories are often underrepresented in public history. She also offered insight into cultural teachings around calling one's spirit home, noting that many Indigenous children came from spiritually strong families and did not lose their spiritual connections despite being taken to residential schools.

Cindy expressed curiosity about the visual markers within the memorial, including the 37 steel markers representing residential schools, and how their meaning and content would be developed. She questioned how universal symbols such as the buffalo would be contextualized to reflect both widespread significance and local histories.

Committee members also discussed the potential for stronger connections between the IRSM memorial and the St. Dunstan's project. Jared Tailfeathers suggested opportunities for shared signage, story markers, or digital tools that link the two sites and their histories. He expressed interest in ongoing collaboration and the involvement of Treaty 7 research teams as the project continues to evolve.

Others, including Lowa and Dawn, emphasized grounding the project in Blackfoot territory while ensuring appropriate inclusion of the Îyâxe Nakoda, Tsuut'ina, and the Otipemisiwak Métis Government. They also spoke to the importance of educational programming, including signage, podcasts, digital tools, and story-based learning, that could bridge knowledge gaps for non-Indigenous visitors.

Further comments and questions focused on programming and ceremonial access. Participants were curious about how the temporary memorial would transition into the permanent memorial, what materials would be used for the shoes, who would manage ceremonial use of the space, and how accessible the site would be for communities wishing to conduct ceremony.

Tamara in particular expressed interest in understanding how the site would be governed and how stories, including names, might be shared in partnership with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Throughout the dialogue, participants consistently emphasized the importance of balancing artistic expression with robust, accurate educational content.

What We Learned

This session reinforced several critical themes already emerging through other validation touchpoints. There is a strong community expectation that the memorial's narrative must be Indigenous led, historically accurate, and grounded in Treaty 7 knowledge and experiences.

Participants expressed a desire for thoughtful educational tools, digital and physical, that allow visitors to understand the history of residential schools in the region and the cultural significance of the site.
The conversation highlighted the importance of inclusive representation, ensuring the experiences of women, children, and all Nations connected to residential schooling are acknowledged.

The feedback also affirmed the need for clear communication over time, both about the project's development phases and about how stories will be preserved and shared. The session made it clear that the memorial must function not only as a powerful artistic expression but also as a living site of education, ceremony, and cultural continuity.

Summary

The Steering Committee offered rich, insightful, and deeply grounded reflections shaped by lived experience, cultural knowledge, and longstanding community stewardship.
The discussion emphasized Indigenous sovereignty over historical narrative, the urgency of preserving accurate

histories, and the value of connecting the IRSM memorial with the St. Dunstan's project through shared storytelling and educational approaches.

Participants expressed strong support for Adrian's artistic vision while underscoring the importance of representation, validation, and ongoing collaboration with Treaty 7 communities.

Their feedback will strengthen the project's alignment with community priorities and ensure the memorial evolves as both a meaningful artistic work and a respected site of learning, remembrance, and ceremony.

5.3.4 Indigenous Validation Session Summary #4

- Validation Session with the Sober Crew Drum Group
- Date

Introduction

The IRSM Design Team, led by Indigenous artist Adrian Stimson, shared The Wandering Spirit design concept with the Sober Crew Drum Group as part of the Inform-level engagement activities.

This session served primarily as an opportunity to introduce the project, walk participants through the design intent, and provide space for any initial reflections or questions. Adrian delivered the full presentation, highlighting the narrative themes, site elements, and intended visitor experience.

What We Heard

Participants were overall receptive to the presentation, offering minimal but meaningful feedback, which is consistent with the Inform-level intention of the session. The comments and questions that did arise were positive, practical, and focused primarily on how the memorial space will function for both public use and ceremony.

Participants expressed interest in the anticipated opening date for the memorial, and the Design Team confirmed that the planned unveiling is scheduled for September 30, 2027, aligning with the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation—a date that was met with support. There was also a question regarding how community members could share feedback outside of in-person sessions; Harold noted that The City of Calgary's Engage Portal will include an open feedback tool where individuals can submit short comments as the project progresses.

One participant, reflecting on their recent experience taking a dance class, shared a positive observation about the red brick circular space within the memorial design, noting that it appeared inviting and suitable for dance or movement-based gathering. This comment reinforced the sense that the design felt functional, welcoming, and aligned with community use.

What We Learned

This session reinforced that community members are primarily interested in understanding the project timeline, how they can stay informed, and how the space may support cultural expression. With limited concerns raised, the feedback aligns with earlier engagement themes supporting the design's flexibility and cultural responsiveness.

Summary

The engagement with the Sober Crew Drum Group was supportive and encouraging, with no design changes requested. The clarity around the opening date and the availability of the engagement portal were well received. The positive comment about the red brick circle further affirmed that the design resonates as a welcoming and usable cultural space.

6.1 | Next Steps

As part of Phase 1 validation, the Design Team reviewed feedback and insights gathered through ceremonial engagement, site walks, and technical discussions with project partners. These sessions confirmed the overall direction of the schematic design while also identifying key considerations to be further tested and refined as the project advances. The following considerations reflect priorities related to ceremonial use, respectful alignment with adjacent programming, and inclusive representation, and are intended to guide continued design development.

Ceremonial Functionality
The memorial must function first and foremost as a ceremonial landscape. Spaces should comfortably support a range of ceremonial practices, including standing, movement, gathering, drumming, and smudging, without becoming overly prescriptive or programmed.

Spatial layouts should prioritize flexibility, allowing ceremonies to unfold organically and adapt to different cultural practices and group sizes. Clearances, ground surfaces, and transitions between spaces should be carefully reviewed to ensure accessibility, comfort, and safety, while maintaining the dignity and intent of ceremonial use. Materials and detailing should also consider fire, smoke, and wear associated with repeated ceremonial activities.

Respectful Separation from Adjacent Events
Given the proximity of large-scale events within the broader Confluence precinct, the memorial must establish a clear sense of separation while remaining connected to the site as a whole. Spatial buffers and threshold moments should be reinforced through subtle but legible design moves, such as landform shaping, planting strategies, and changes in material or grade.

These elements can signal entry into a place of reflection and ceremony without relying on physical barriers. Consideration should also be given to acoustics, sightlines, and orientation to reduce visual and auditory intrusion during nearby events, ensuring the memorial remains a respectful and contemplative environment even during periods of heightened activity.

Inclusive Representation
The design must convey inclusion of all Indigenous Peoples in a way that is respectful, collective, and non-hierarchical. Representation should avoid ranking, prioritization, or comparative framing between Nations, cultures, or experiences.

Rather than attempting exhaustive or literal representation, the design should rely on symbolic and relational approaches that communicate shared presence, continuity, and respect. Spatial relationships, shared gestures, and common materials can express interconnectedness while still allowing space for distinct identities and interpretations.

Care should be taken to avoid isolating or compartmentalizing Nations into separate elements; instead, the memorial should read as a unified landscape that honours diversity through collective form, narrative, and experience.

7.1 | Independent Cost Estimate Review

The City of Calgary appointed BTY to provide an Independent Cost Review of the Class IV estimates prepared for the Indian Residential Schools Memorial project. The following is a summary of BTY's comments related to our Team's Class IV estimate for the Wandering Spirit concept submission and how the Team plans to respond.

General Findings
Based on BTY's review, the Class IV estimate for the winning submission was more detailed and presented lower overall cost risk. While further discussion with all the respective design teams was required for clarity, the estimate for the winning submission was considered more reliable than those for Concepts 2 and 4, which show signs of over- or underestimation and require additional clarification. Concept 3 presented the same level of cost clarity as the winning submission.

Schedule & Escalation
None of the Class IV estimates included a cost escalation allowance. BTY strongly recommended that the client allocate a separate budget to account for potential escalation.

BTY's forecasting is typically based on a three-year horizon due to market volatility. While 2025 is included in the analysis, escalation rates may fluctuate depending on market conditions and are therefore considered approximate. BTY's current projected escalation ranges are as follows:

2026 3% - 5%
2027 3% - 5%

The Design Team will account for escalation using the rates above in the Opinion of Probable Cost (OPC) to be submitted at the end of the schematic design phase.

Overall Summary
The winning submission ranked third highest overall in terms of projected cost. Key cost drivers included detailed site work, extensive hardscaping, sizable softscape allowances, and a substantial irrigation budget. While the Class IV estimate is comprehensive and includes detailed cost breakdowns, certain areas require additional clarification and discussion.

The Design Team will undertake a detailed review of the primary cost drivers as part of the OPC submission at the end of schematic design and will identify opportunities to refine the design and explore strategies to reduce overall project costs.

Pricing Review: Detailed Commentary on Pricing
Site Preparation and Grading
The winning concept includes allowances for substantial site preparation and grading, requiring extensive clearance and filling. The team has also allocated a significant cost for topsoil stripping ($156,085), which appears to be unusable within the design. This is the third most expensive element among the four concepts presented.

The Design Team will look at strategies to re-use all topsoil on site and will reflect cost savings in the OPC to be submitted at the end of the schematic design phase

Structures and Hardscape
The winning concept ranked as the third most expensive for this element, primarily due to the allowance for nearly 4,000m^2 of rundlestone paving. While the costs appear reasonable given the scope, there may be opportunities to reduce costs by optimizing the paving area. Additional costs in this element cover feature sculptures, shoe walls, and feature erratics, which also seem appropriate for the proposed scope of work.

The Design Team will look at strategies to reduce the amount of rundlestone paving on site and will reflect cost savings in the OPC to be submitted at the end of the schematic design phase

Softscaping
The winning concept was the most expensive for this element, with limited detail provided on softscaping

allowances. Most of the cost is attributed to aspen stands with natural seeding, which appears high based on the quantities shown in the sketch designs.

The Design Team will look at strategies to reduce the amount of trees on site and will reflect cost savings in the OPC to be submitted at the end of the schematic design phase

Site Furnishings & Signage
The winning concept was the second most expensive for this element but includes only lump sum allowances for signage and furnishings, with no further detail on project-specific items.

The Design Team will provide more detail on the specific site furnishings and signage in the OPC to be submitted at the end of the schematic design phase.

Site Services
The winning concept was the most expensive, primarily due to a $388,930.00 allowance for irrigation, which does not appear in the other concepts. Allowances for water and electrical connections seem reasonable, though the feature lighting allowance appears low and should be reviewed with the team.

The Design Team will review the irrigation strategy and reflect any savings in the OPC to be submitted at the end of the schematic design phase.

Soft Costs
The winning concept was the third most expensive for this element, with overall costs appearing slightly elevated compared to other schemes. The team included a 10% soft cost allowance based on construction costs, excluding consulting fees. A breakdown is recommended to clarify what is covered under this allowance.

The Design Team will provide more detail to what is included the soft cost allowance in the OPC to be submitted at the end of the schematic design phase.

Recommended Contingencies
Typical Construction Project Contingencies:
Design Contingency: An allowance for design adjustments during the design phase (excluding major scope changes). This is typically 10% or more during early project stages.

Construction Contingency: An allowance for change orders during construction which commonly ranges between 5 - 10%.

Escalation Allowance: Accounts for market price fluctuations over the project duration, based on the anticipated construction start date. In Calgary, this is currently estimated at 3–5% per annum.

Project Contingency: Typically, 5% of soft costs, allocated to cover adjustments to non-constructionrelated items.

While each submission included contingencies in their Class IV estimates, BTY recommended the client maintain a separate contingency to cover additional unforeseen items as noted above.

The Design Team will carry construction project contingencies as listed above in the OPC to be submitted at the end of the schematic design phase.