

INDIAN MOUNDS: A SACRED BURIAL PLACE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE STUDY AND MESSAGING PLAN

PROJECT SUMMARY STATEMENT

The landscape of Indian Mounds is a sacred place of burial. It is a cemetery built by ancestors of living people. The place has deep significance to the Upper Sioux Community, Lower Sioux Community, Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community, Prairie Island Indian Community, Ho-Chunk Nation of Wisconsin, Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska, Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate, and other descendants of those who are buried here. It is home to the only known remaining burial mounds within the Minneapolis-Saint Paul urban core.

The Cultural Landscape Study and Messaging Plan is an initial step to update the City's practice for preservation, awareness, and understanding of sites significant to American Indians. The project team conducted rigorous research to create a basis for a shared understanding among diverse project collaborators. The Study presents a comprehensive framework for acknowledging the sacred site and the living Indigenous People whose ancestors are buried there while

- protecting, preserving and emphasizing the unique heritage of the place;
- strengthening appreciation of American Indian heritage;
- improving environmental sustainability and resilience to climate change;
- reducing carbon footprint; and fostering understanding through physical transformation of, and messaging within, the landscape.

The Cultural Landscape Study and Messaging Plan presents an inspirational and holistic guide to

- gradually replace recreational features and activities with preservation of the burial ground,
- expansion of native plants, messaging acknowledging the sacred site, and
- removal of impacting elements.

The transformed landscape will support use for contemplation, prayer, and connections for people to whom it is sacred. Landscape interventions and messaging strategies were created through a collaborative process with the Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPOs), the Project Advisory Team (PAT), the community, and the City of St. Paul Parks and Recreation Department. Active collaboration with the THPOs from the Upper Sioux Community, Lower Sioux Community, Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux, Prairie Island Indian Community, and The Ho-Chunk Nation of Wisconsin, the Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska, and the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate—was essential to the process.

The Minnesota Indian Affairs Council (MIAC) and the Office of the State Archeologist (OSA) are working to formally designate a cemetery in this location. This is a step toward protection of the burial ground and acknowledgment of the importance of this place to the cultures of living Indigenous People.

This Cultural Landscape Study and Messaging Plan is another positive step, but it is still a beginning. For members of the Upper Sioux Community, Lower Sioux Indian Community, Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community, Prairie Island Indian Community, The Ho-Chunk Nation of Wisconsin, Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska, and Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate, this plan is a compromise. Its recommendations improve the condition, but they do not repair the damage done through desecration of this sacred site and do not reunite them with this landscape where their ancestors are buried.

THIS IS A PLACE OF BURIAL

The Indigenous burial ground that is currently called “Indian Mounds Regional Park” **has been a sacred site and place of burial for over a thousand years.** It is significant to living Indigenous Peoples as a cemetery where their ancestors are buried.

It is a place of reverence, remembrance, respect, and prayer. When the City of Saint Paul established a park in this location in 1892 with the purpose of protecting the historical setting and spectacular views, connections of contemporaneous Indigenous Peoples to the sacred site were not understood, considered, or valued. Over the last century the condition, name, and use of the landscape as a park have become beloved to the surrounding community. Yet many non-Indigenous people have wondered about this powerful landscape without knowing how to learn more about it. Through public gatherings with generous sharing by Indigenous Peoples and members of the public, strong support for protection of this sacred site has been revealed.

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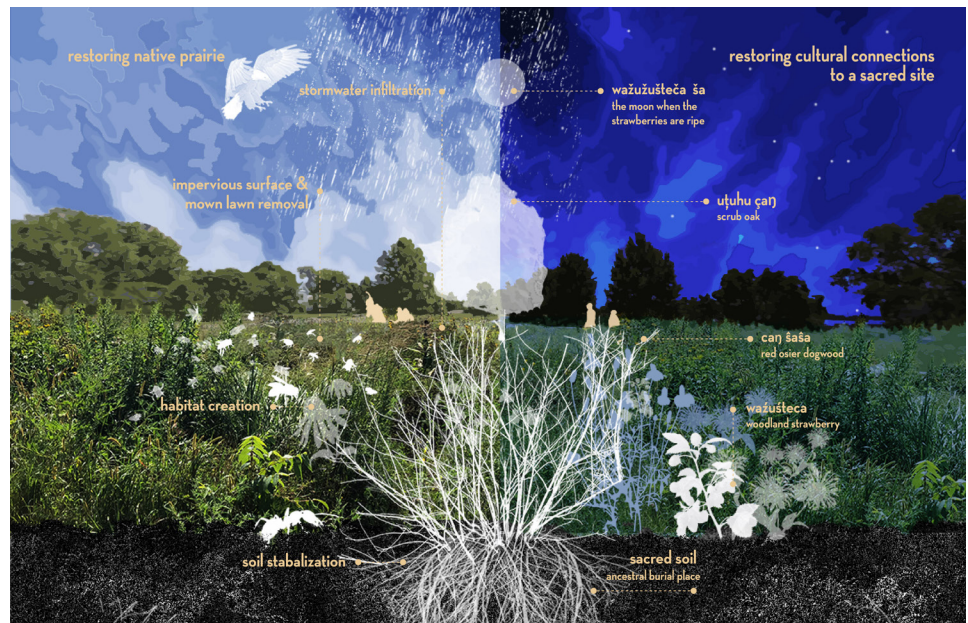
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VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Mitákuye Owás’in guides the design concept, including the improvement of ecological health and cultural connections to the landscape.

MITÁKUYE OWASIN

Dakota people are taught that “all” includes “everything seen and unseen” – animals, plants, humans, rocks, earth, waters, spirits. For many, a shift in thinking is required to see all of creation as our relative and not as objects or property



- Protect the sacred site.
- Identify and preserve or restore important characteristics.
- Guide toward a desired condition for the Mounds.
- Increase understanding and respect of the sacred burial ground, relatives, and ancestors.
- Identify and support appropriate experiences.
- Establish active partnerships with Indigenous communities to guide decisionmaking and management.

RECOMMENDED TREATMENT



Recommendations are organized into five categories:

PARTNERSHIP

It is critical that a partnership be established between the City of Saint Paul and representatives of the Upper Sioux Community, Lower Sioux Indian Community, Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community, Prairie Island Indian Community, The Ho-Chunk Nation of Wisconsin, Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska, and Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate, MIAC, and OSA, to inform decision making related to use, messaging, treatment and maintenance of the landscape. The partnership is a basis for working together to adjust steps in the process to incorporate new knowledge and adapt to changing conditions. Most importantly, the partnership ensures that the associated Indigenous communities, to whom this site is sacred, are included in guiding the care of the landscape.

EXPERIENCE

This site presents unique considerations and challenges for site experience. As a burial ground and sacred site, the site must accommodate Indigenous people who visit to honor their ancestors. Simultaneously, the site is a popular destination for walking, biking, and site-seeing from the bluff. Use that is sensitive to the sacred nature of this place is established through careful phasing of landscape treatment and reinforced through extensive integrated messaging.

LANDSCAPE CONDITION

Appropriate treatment and maintenance of the physical condition of the landscape is important to the preservation of the burial ground. Advisors have advocated for addition of native healing and protecting plants throughout the sacred landscape and removal of pavement and structures that are located on mound sites, mown fields that encourage active recreation in the cemetery, and other features that impact the burial ground. Improved resilience to environmental conditions is desired. The "Landscape Condition Plan" includes recommendations for treatments that improve resilience of the landscape while establishing a place of acknowledgement, reverence and respect for the sacred site.

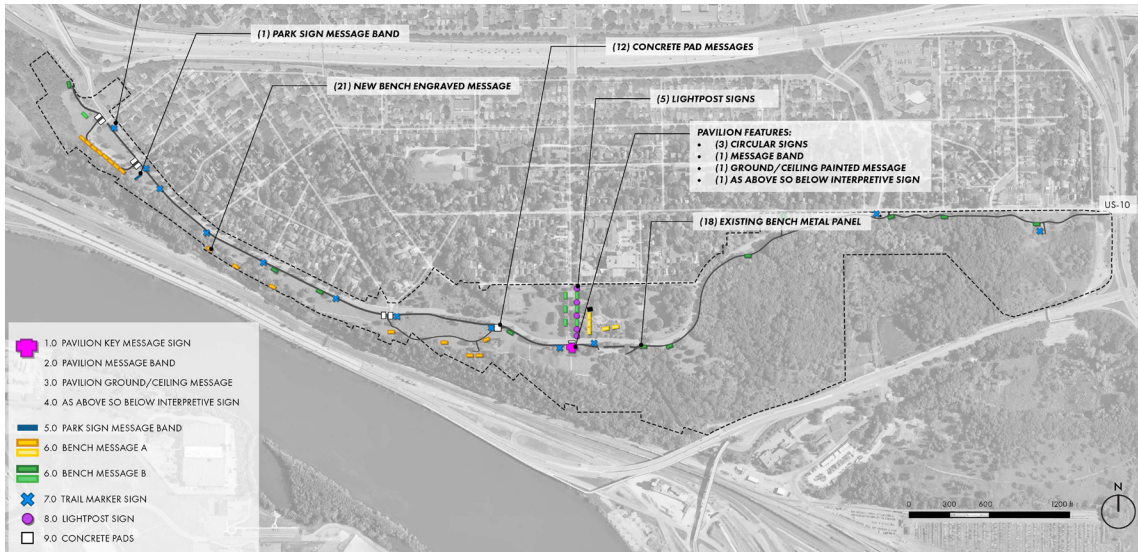
MESSAGING

How can we change a community's perception of this place — an Indigenous cemetery drastically altered over the last two centuries to function as a public park — toward a perspective that is informed, empathetic, and respectful of its sacredness? The messaging plan uses communication to transform the perception of the site from that of a park to a sacred place of burial.

PHASING

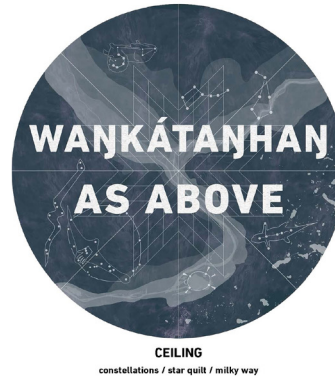
To achieve the long-term VISION a phased approach is used for implementing messaging, landscape condition, and experiences of the site. Three phases are recommended for messaging and landscape condition.

IMMEDIATE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



Acknowledgement of the burial ground and people to whom it is significant has begun. Some of these measures are temporary and will be replaced as the phased implementation of recommendations occurs.

- Removal of trails that impact significant land.
- Removal of sign with inaccurate information.
- Addition of messages throughout the site:
 - Signs at the Pavilion and messages on the ceiling and ground.
 - Site Identifier Sign
 - Messages on benches
 - Trail Marker Signs
 - Lightpost Signs
 - Pavement messages and graphics.



The ceiling and floor of the Pavilion convey Dakota messages of unity.



Dakota messages installed at the Pavilion (April 2021).



Acknowledgement of the Cemetery added to site identification sign (April 2021).



Dakota language added to existing benches (April 2021).



Information about the Cemetery added to existing lightposts (April 2021).

PHASE 1



Phase 1 includes the following:

- Establish working relationship between City and representatives of the Upper Sioux Community, Lower Sioux Indian Community, Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community, Prairie Island Indian Community, The Ho-Chunk Nation of Wisconsin, Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska, and Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate.
- Continue relationship with Lower Phalen Creek Project and plans for Wakan Tipi Center.
- Follow MIAC Mound Management Plan.
- Retain fences around above-grade mounds until THPOs feel they can be removed.
- Establish threshold plantings along the south side of Mounds Blvd. from the west end of the site to Thorn Street.
- Establish prairie plantings at the East and West Gateways.
- Maintain existing oak-basswood forest, oak savannah and prairie vegetation. Continue to manage these areas for invasive species.
- Discontinue use of trails extending repair erosion damage associated with trails extending from the top of the bluff into the Woodlands to the east and discontinue use of the trails.
- Add messages of Dakota Land and honor at Pavilion
- Implement Trail Reconstruction Project recommendations
- Add stone seating at the Clearing
- Add stone seating at the Gathering Circle
- Initiate process to remove Indian Mounds Park "Airway" Beacon



Existing Mounds bounded by retaining wall.



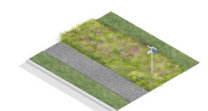
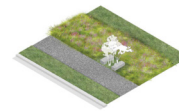
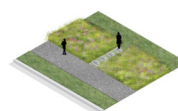
Prairie vegetation replaces mown lawn and hides retaining wall.



THRESHOLD STEPPING STONES

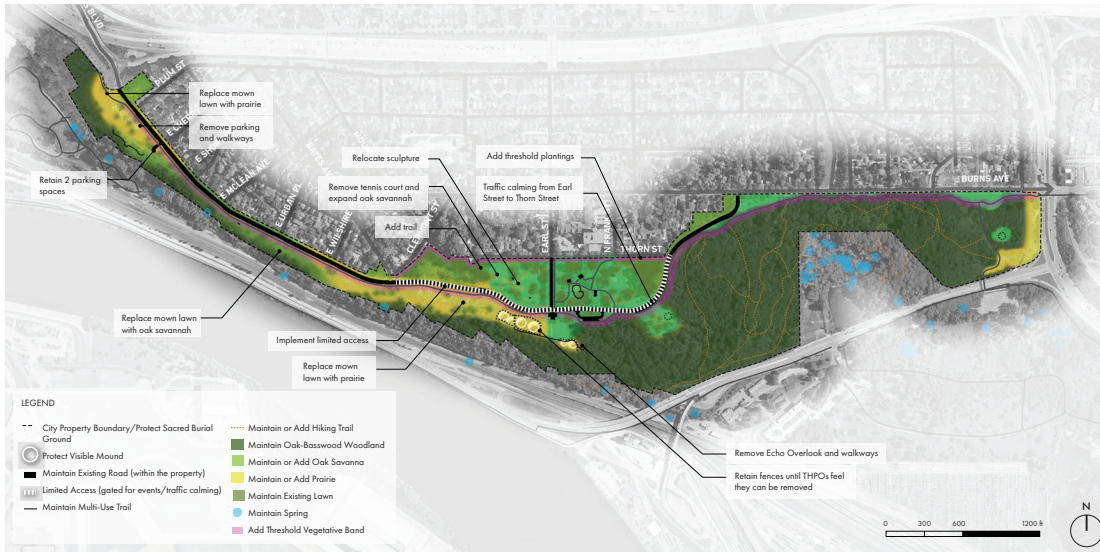
STONE BENCHES AND TREES

TRAIL MARKER POSTS



Phase 1 includes establishing a threshold of native plants and messages of Dakota Land and honor, along the south side of Mounds Blvd. from the west end of the site to Thorn Street.

PHASE 2



Phase 2 includes the following:

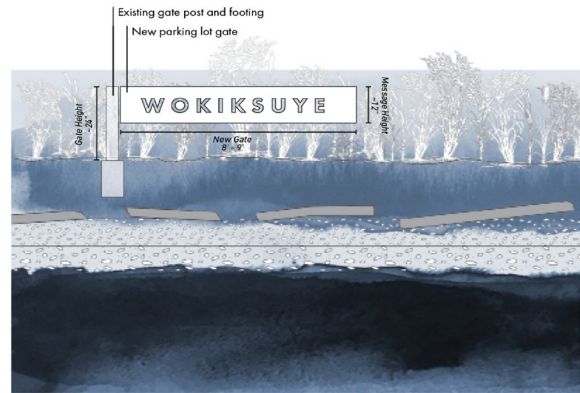
- Continue working relationships established during Phase 1.
- Follow MIAC Mound Management Plan.
- Establish threshold plantings along Thorn Street. Allow threshold plantings along Mounds Blvd. to naturalize into the prairie.
- Establish prairie and oak savannah plantings within Bluff.
- Maintain existing oak-basswood forest, oak savannah and prairie vegetation. Continue to manage these areas for invasive species.
- Initiate traffic calming and limited access on Mounds Blvd. between Clermont Street and Earl Street.
- Remove tennis courts and replace with oak savannah plantings.
- Remove paved trails south of Multi-Use Trail in the Bluff and replace with prairie plantings.
- Remove west parking lot and pavement associated with the overlook and replace with prairie plantings. Retain retaining walls until further study determines if these features can be removed.
- Remove Echo overlook and replace with prairie plantings.



Existing west parking lot and surrounding area.



Prairie vegetation replaces pavement and mown lawn.



Proposed Gate Detail

During Phase 2, the west parking lot pavement is replaced with prairie plantings to protect sacred land and improve environmental sustainability.

PHASE 3



Phase 3 includes the following:

- Continue working relationship established during Phase 1.
- Follow MIAC Mound Management Plan.
- Establish threshold plantings in the eastern portion of the site.
- Replace mown lawn with oak savannah and eco-lawn plantings in the Oak Savannah.
- Replace mown lawn with oak savannah along the north edge of the Woodland.
- Maintain existing oak-basswood forest, oak savannah and prairie vegetation. Continue to manage these areas for invasive species.
- Replace existing lawn with eco-lawn in the Clearing and the Circle.
- Continue traffic calming and limited access on Mounds Blvd. between Clermont and Thorn Street and explore options to remove this segment of street.
- Initiate traffic calming and limited access on Earl St. between Thorn St. and Mounds Blvd. and Mounds Blvd. between Earl St. and Thorn St. Explore options to remove this segment of street.
- Remove playground and eastern picnic shelter and replace with oak savannah plantings.



Over time the landscape of the bluff will be transformed with native plants.



The Pavillion will gradually metamorphose.