

Reimagining Franceschi House Community Outreach



1.0 Introduction

Franceschi Park comprises 17 acres of City parkland in the Riviera foothills above Santa Barbara. Alden Freeman gifted Franceschi House and Park to the City in 1931 in remembrance of Dr. Franceschi who settled the land and operated one of Southern California's first botanical garden and nursery in this location from 1903 to 1913. The Franceschi House was designated a City Structure of Merit in 1981.

Maintenance of the Franceschi House has always been a challenge due to limited funding and higher priority needs in other City parks and recreational facilities. The site does not generate revenue, is deed restricted for parks and recreation purposes, and therefore is unable to offset maintenance costs for the house and park grounds. Several unsuccessful attempts to restore Franceschi House have taken place since the 1960's, with each effort ultimately unable to secure the necessary capital and on-going funding to restore and maintain the house.

The City considered demolition in 1971, 1988, and most recently in 2018 when City Council recommended the Parks and Recreation Department (Department) pursue a project that replace the house with an interpretive open air structure that commemorates the historical significance and horticultural heritage of the Franceschi House, Dr. Franceschi, and Alden Freeman. City Council's recommendation was based on an economic analysis that considered the costs of 1) full house restoration and Master Plan implementation; 2) rehabilitation and preservation of the exterior of the house; and 3) house demolition and construction of an interpretive pavilion. These options were considered after an over-decade-long fundraising agreement was terminated with the Pearl Chase Society (PCS), whereby the PCS would raise the funds to rehabilitate the house and fund a \$250,000 maintenance endowment.

To initiate the Re-imagining Franceschi House Project, the Department in coordination with the Design Team, DesignARC Architecture and EPT Landscape Architecture, conducted two community workshops and two online surveys to determine the public's preferred design concept and project elements.



2.0 Project Objective

To re-imagine the Franceschi House and surrounding area to honor its heritage, Dr. Franceschi's horticultural legacy and Alden Freeman, while improving accessibility, safety, and resiliency.

3.0 Site Considerations

The site has spectacular panoramic views overlooking the city, waterfront, and the Channel Islands. The site is a regular destination for the neighbors who hike onto the property, with occasional use by other residents of the city and tourists who come for the exceptional views. The hilltop site which makes Franceschi Park so interesting, also makes it hard to reach and difficult to meander around. The Park and adjacent neighborhood are also located within a high fire risk area. The existing house and site features have fallen into disrepair, which is aggravated by the unstable soils. Very few specimen plantings and trees from the Franceschi-era remain, and there is limited funding available for maintenance.



Attributes:

- Views
- Landscape
- Pathways
- Parking
- Historical significance
- Unique features

Constraints:

- Limited access to & within the site
- Dilapidated structures & site features
- Steep slopes & erosive soils
- Limited funds for maintenance

Opportunities:

- Improve site access & safety
- Enhance views
- Honor heritage
- Increase wildfire resiliency



4.0 Community Workshop #1

The first community workshop took place on Saturday, February 10th, 2024 at the Riviera Ridge School, a short distance away from the park. The workshop was publicized by local media sources, and both email and physical mailers were sent out to neighbors, local stakeholders, and interested parties. Approximately 80 local residents attended the workshop. A webpage was created for the project and materials were posted online in advance of the meeting.

The presentation and subsequent Q&A were conducted by Parks and Recreation (P&R) staff and by the Design Team. This presentation described the project area, summarized the design and approval process, and introduced the audience to a series of image boards in order to prompt feedback from the community regarding potential design concepts. This was followed by a breakout session in which participants got to review the image boards and ask questions on an individual basis. During this period the public also had the opportunity to reply to prompts designed to encourage discussion and submit additional anonymous input on comment cards.

In the weeks following the workshop, a Survey Monkey poll, as well as the presentation materials, were posted online and received 698 responses.

4.1 Breakout Session

During this portion of the workshop, participants reviewed the image boards and engaged with staff and the Design Team on an individual basis. Participants had general questions in addition to concerns about the funding, types of activities proposed, the use of native plants, and what could be done within other areas of the park. There were advocates for restoring the Franceschi House, in addition to those supporting tearing it down.



4.2 Post It Responses

During the breakout session, participants could add comments on oversized post it notes that included various prompts about the site and potential design considerations. Twenty-seven comments were received which have been summed up into these categories.



4.3 Anonymous Comment Card Responses

Attendees were also able to leave anonymous feedback on comment cards provided by P&R staff. The 26 responses on the cards covered a wide range of subjects and went into more detail than the comments received on the post it notes. The comments are summarized to the right.



- Tear down the house
- Save the house
- Preserve the "mystery" of the space
- Put more emphasis on the horticulture
- What can be done to improve the park outside the project area?
- Keep the medallions
- What about the adolescent users of the park?

- Highlight the original Franceschi plants
- Utilize native plants
- Protect the medallions and honor Freeman
- Incorporate stone walls
- Honor the Chumash
- How will the City fund and maintain this?
- Dislike for the steel ghost structures
- More public comment

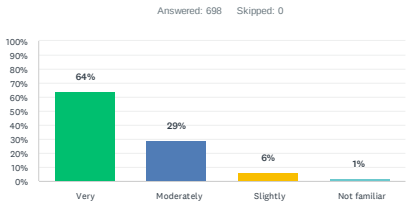
4.4 Survey Monkey Poll

Following the workshop, a 16 question was posted on-line. The presentation materials and project resources were also posted online, and respondents were encouraged to review the materials before responding. The survey remained open for three weeks and received 698 responses.

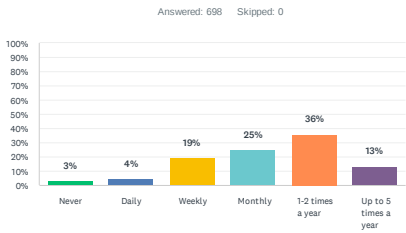
Questions 1-15 were formatted to gather an awareness of the respondent’s knowledge and usage of the park, as well as their preferences on design considerations. Question 16 was an open opportunity to provide suggestions. Question 17 gathered participant’s zip codes and Question 18 gave respondents a chance to sign up for future updates by providing their email address.



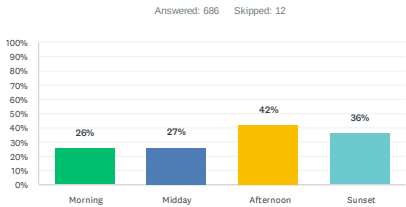
Q1 How familiar are you with Franceschi Park?



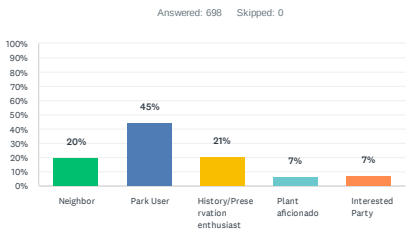
Q2 How often do you visit the park?



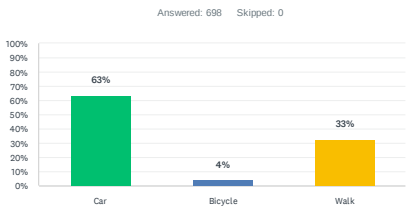
Q3 What time of day do you typically visit the park?



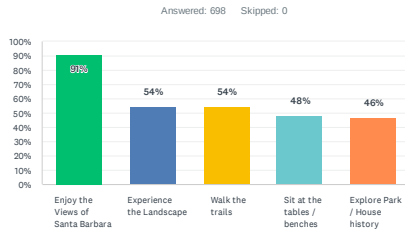
Q4 What best summarizes your interest in the Park?



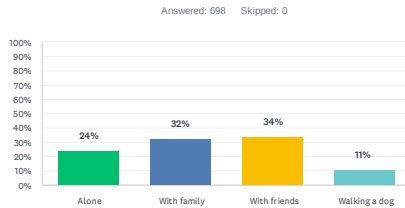
Q5 How do you get to the Park?



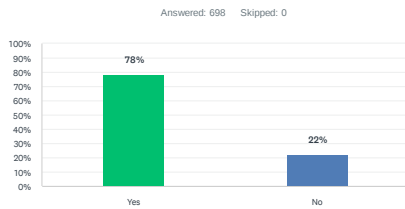
Q6 Why do you visit the Park? Select all that apply.



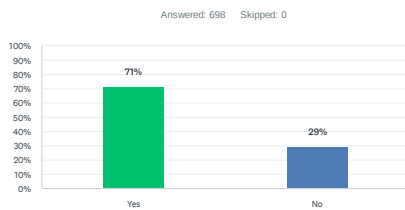
Q7 When you visit the Park are you most frequently:



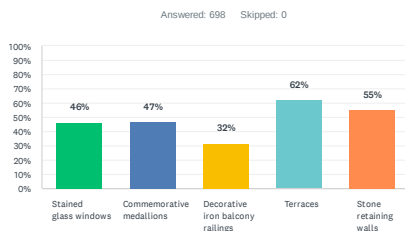
Q8 Are you familiar with the history of Dr. Franceschi and the house?



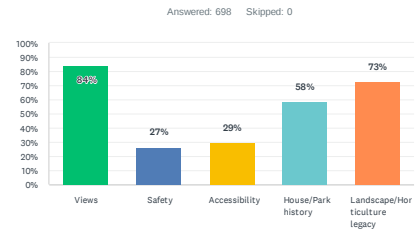
Q9 When at the Park, do you spend time around Franceschi House and the adjacent terrace/flat space?



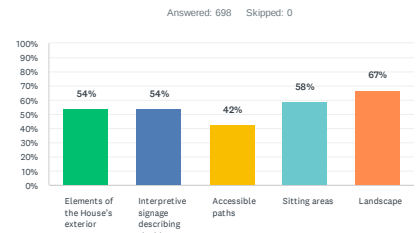
Q10 What elements of the Franceschi House and project site do you value? Select up to three.



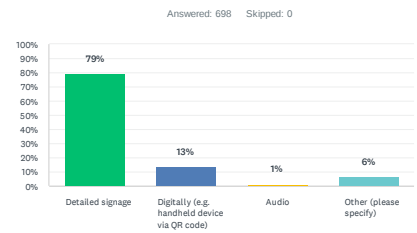
Q11 What are important considerations for the re-envisioning of the Franceschi House? Select up to three.



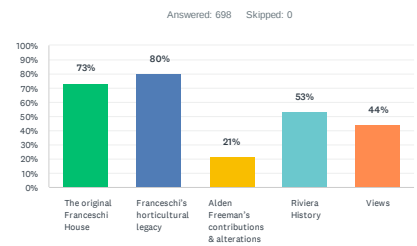
Q12 The purpose of the project is to re-envision the house with an open area that provides opportunities for park visitors to enjoy and learn about the site's heritage. What do you think would be important to include? Select up to three.



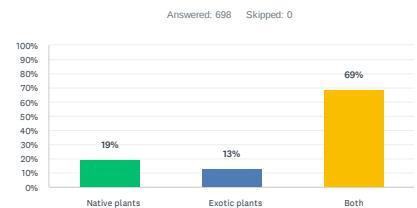
Q13 What is your preferred way to interact with interpretive site elements?



Q14 What topics should interpretive site elements include? Select up to three.



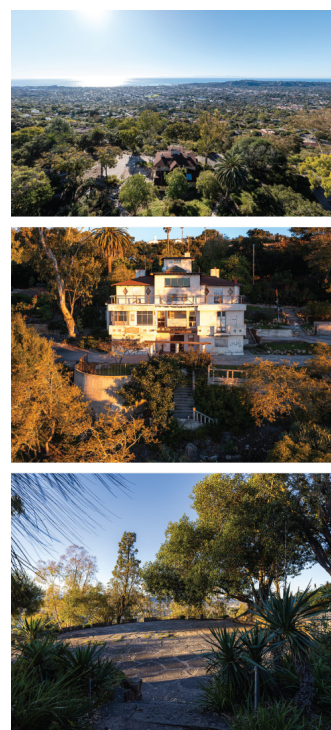
Q15 Francesco Franceschi was a pioneer plantsman who introduced hundreds of new plants to the Southern California region, many of which are considered exotic flora. Would you prefer to see native plants or exotic plants associated with the project?



Of the 698 survey respondents, 343 shared their personal suggestions to question 16.

Suggestions covered a wide range of viewpoints and ranged from opining on one project component to suggesting comprehensive design schemes. As expected, opposing viewpoints were shared on whether the house should be demolished or preserved in various fashions, while others suggested public-private partnerships to fund the preservation of the house and new park programming options or commercial enterprises that could generate on site revenue. Additional common suggestions included:

- Preserving the “feel” and not changing the intensity of the use of the park.
- The importance of the views.
- Remembering Dr. Franceschi for his horticultural contributions.
- Planting both native and introduced species when done responsibly.
- Interpretive suggestions varied from signage to digital options, and focused on plants/Dr. Franceschi, artistic elements of the house (e.g. medallions), and the history of the site.
- Improving access, including multi-modal options, accessibility, on site parking, walk-ability, and keeping the park free.
- Providing seating and viewing opportunities.
- Improving fire resiliency and soil stability.
- Improving the Park’s trail system.
- Improving Park maintenance.
- Suggestions for events or on site commercial enterprises.



5.0 Community Workshop #2

The second community workshop took place on Saturday, May 11th, 2024 at the Riviera Ridge School. The workshop was noticed in advance again with a mix of email, mail, and local news publications. The presentation materials were also posted on the project webpage in advance of the meeting. Approximately 40 to 50 local residents attended the workshop, which made for a productive meeting.

The public presentation and subsequent Q&A were conducted by P&R staff and by the Design Team. This presentation reiterated the basic project parameters followed by an introductory presentation of the proposed site improvements, signage ideas, and the four concept options for the Franceschi House location.

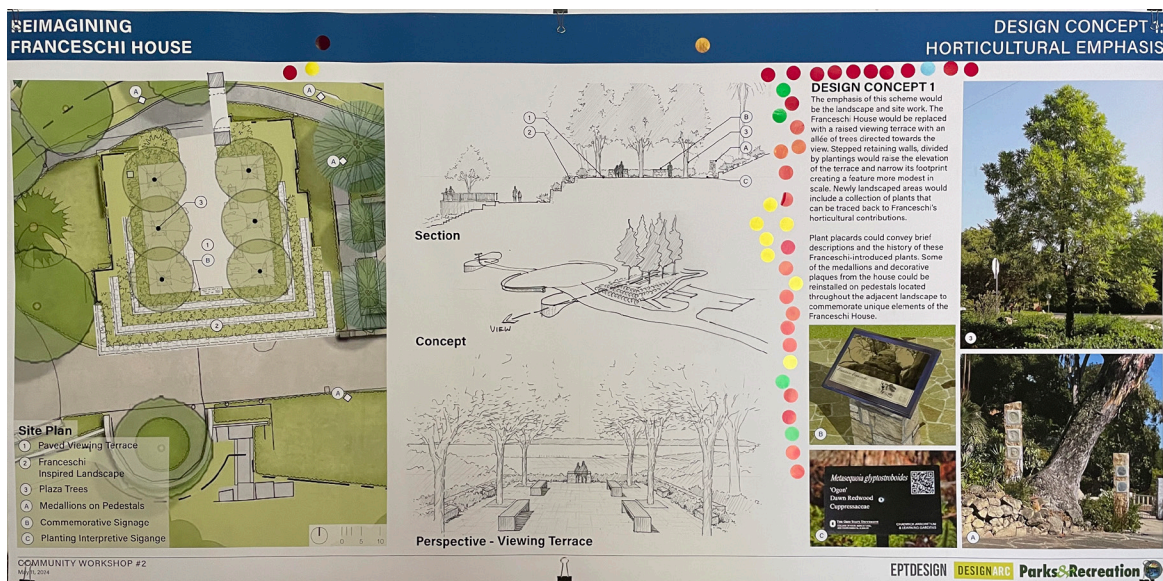
The Q&A session covered a range of topics from the general to the specific.

5.1 In-Person Concept Ranking

During the breakout portion of the workshop, participants ranked the four conceptual designs with colored dots. Concept 1 was the favorite, followed by concept 4. Each concept, as well as the overall site design is shared on the following pages.



- How will the City fund and maintain these improvements
- Questions about the medallions
- Do the proposed concepts conform to the Secretary of the Interior's standards?

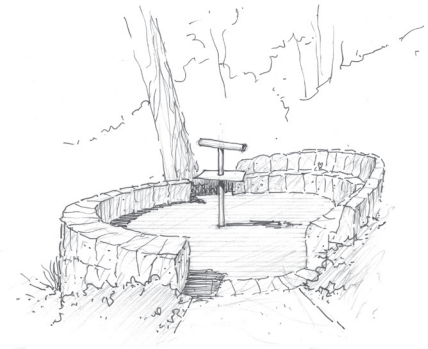
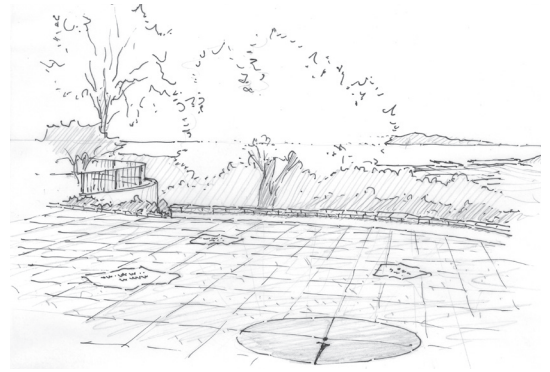


5.3 Overall Site Design

Without substantially altering the layout and feel of the space, improvements to the landscaping, storm water treatment, and accessibility path of travel will be added to the project site to increase functionality, safety, and resiliency.

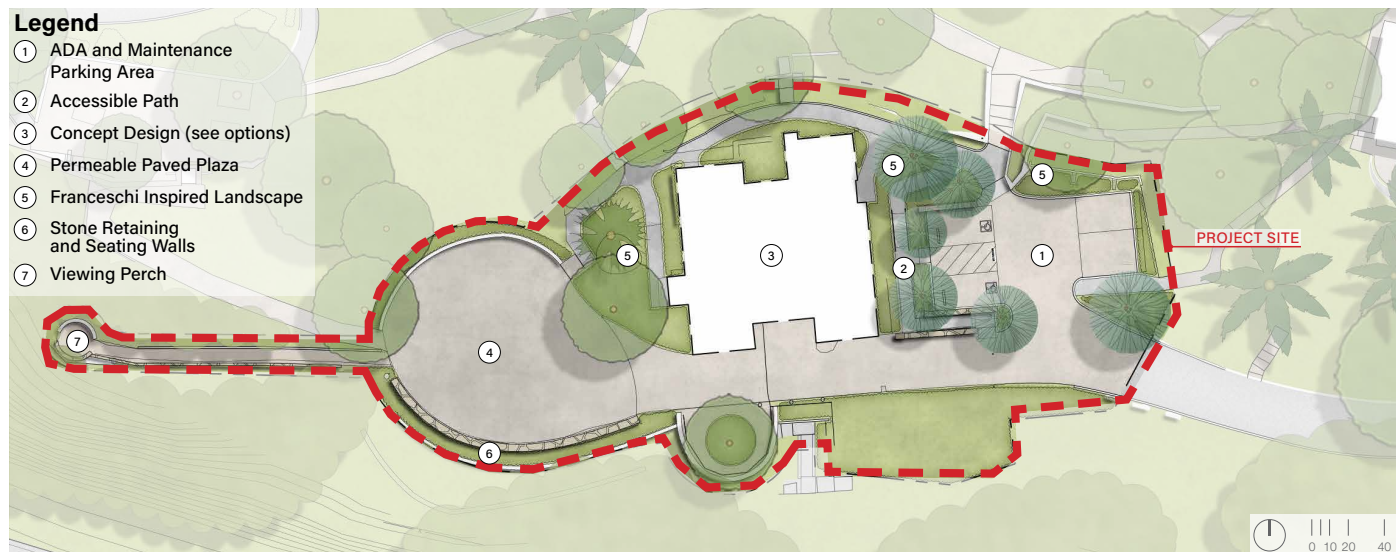
A small parking area and pathway will be provided to the east of the house. The retaining walls south of the house will also be improved. To the west, the circular plaza will be resurfaced with a smooth, permeable surface and a new stone seating wall will be added along its southern edge. Further west, the existing viewing perch will be rebuilt with an accessible path, improved seating, and viewing scope.

The surrounding landscape will be updated with a mix of native and Franceschi inspired plantings. There were four potential conceptual designs to commemorate the house that were reviewed and ranked by the participants.



REIMAGINING FRANCESCHI HOUSE

PROJECT SITE SITE DESIGN



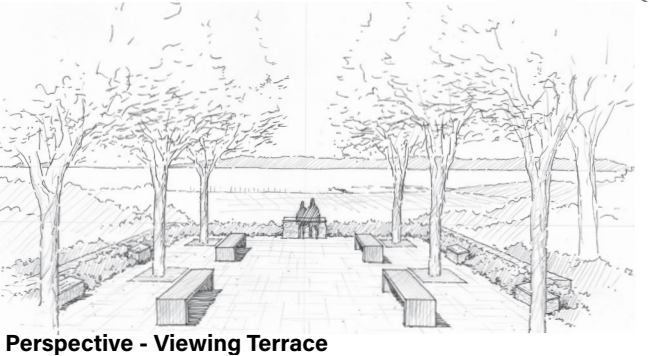
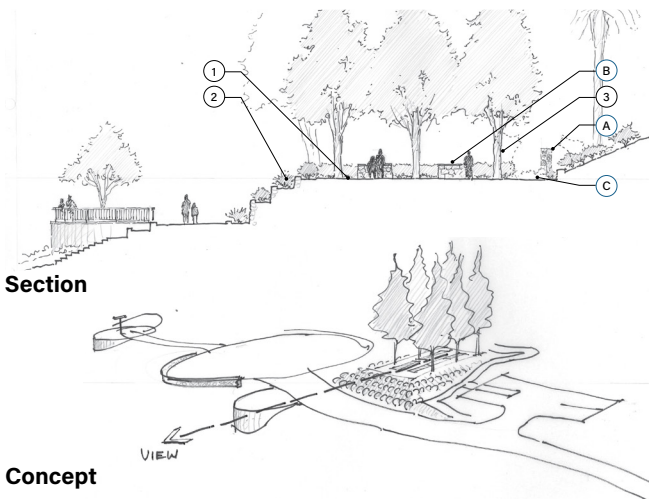
5.4 Concept Design #1

The emphasis of this scheme is the landscape and site work. The Franceschi House would be replaced with a raised viewing terrace with an allée of trees directed towards the view. Stepped retaining walls, divided by plantings would raise the elevation of the terrace and narrow its footprint creating a feature more modest in scale. Newly landscaped areas would include a collection of plants that can be traced back to Franceschi’s horticultural contributions.

Plant placards could convey brief descriptions and the history of these Franceschi-introduced plants. Some of the medallions and decorative plaques from the house could be reinstalled on pedestals located throughout the adjacent landscape to commemorate unique elements of the Franceschi House.



Concept Design #1

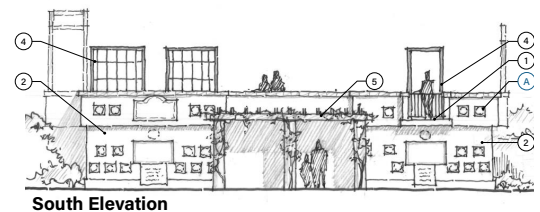


5.5 Concept Design #2

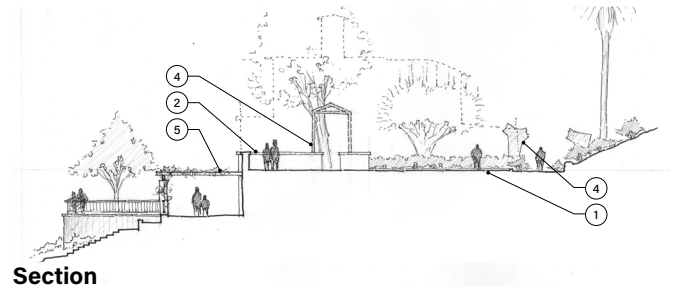
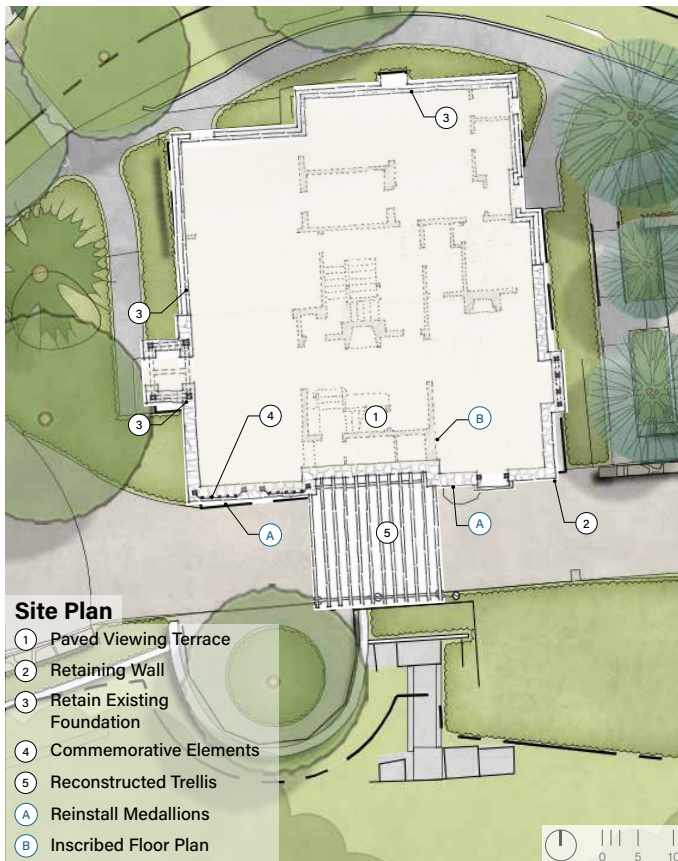
This scheme is architecturally inspired and includes commemorative elements of the Franceschi House. The walls of the house would be replaced with retaining walls to match the current footprint of the house.

The lower level would be backfilled to form an elevated viewing terrace at the main level of the house. Most of the medallions could be reinstalled on the new plastered retaining walls, potentially in their original locations as installed by Alden Freeman.

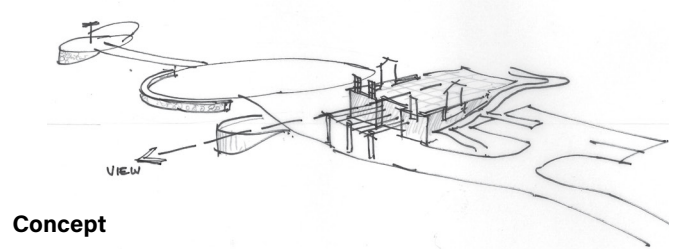
The terrace's ground surface would be paved in concrete and inscribed with the floor plan of the house to evoke a sense of place. Select elements of the house, such as the entry porch and windows could be reconstructed out of more durable materials to help define the perimeter of the terrace and commemorate the original house. The landscaping surrounding the terrace would include Franceschi inspired plantings and the trellis to the south of the house would be reconstructed.



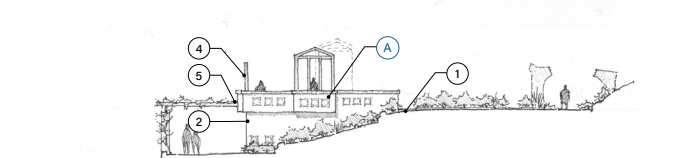
South Elevation



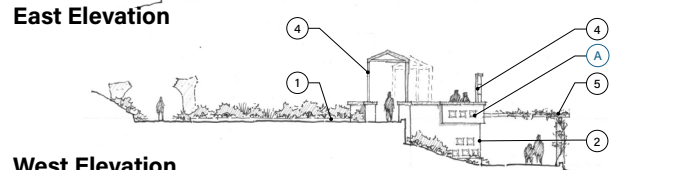
Section



Concept



East Elevation



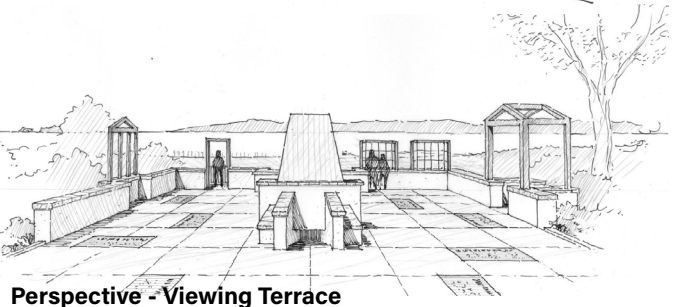
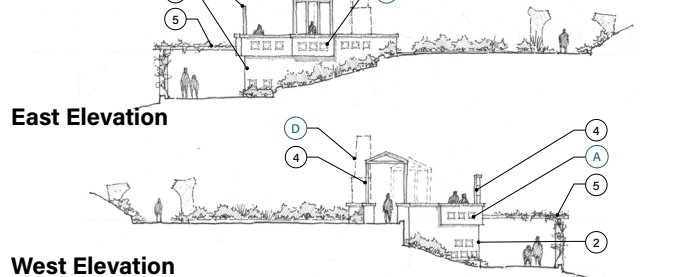
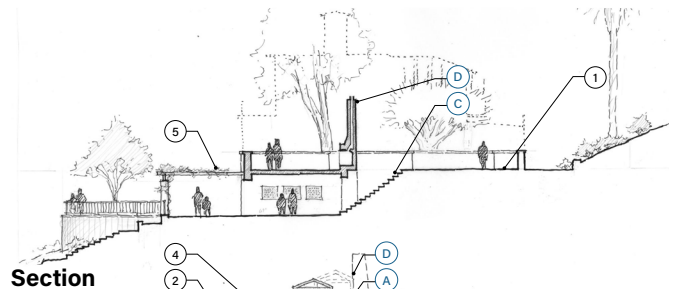
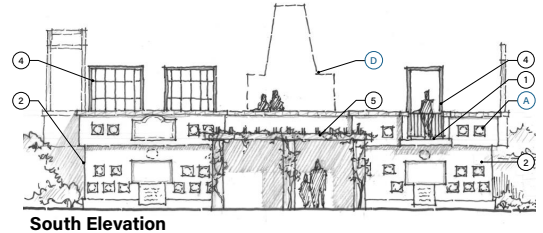
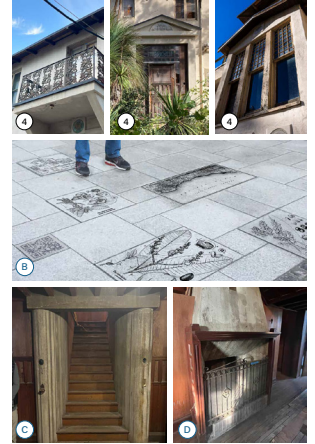
West Elevation

Concept Design #2

5.6 Concept Design #3

This concept is a slight modification of the architecturally inspired Concept #2. The viewing terrace would be constructed in the same manner and location of the house as in #2, but offers an alternative approach for the interpretive site elements.

The terrace would be paved in concrete and embedded with commemorative plaques that illustrate Franceschi's horticultural contributions and/or other historical points of interest. The fireplace and stairway to the home's lower level could be retained as unique architectural elements, although modifications would be required to ensure they do not create safety hazards. Medallions and other select elements of the original house would continue to be incorporated into the design, as well as Franceschi inspired plantings around the perimeter.



Perspective - Viewing Terrace

Concept Design #3



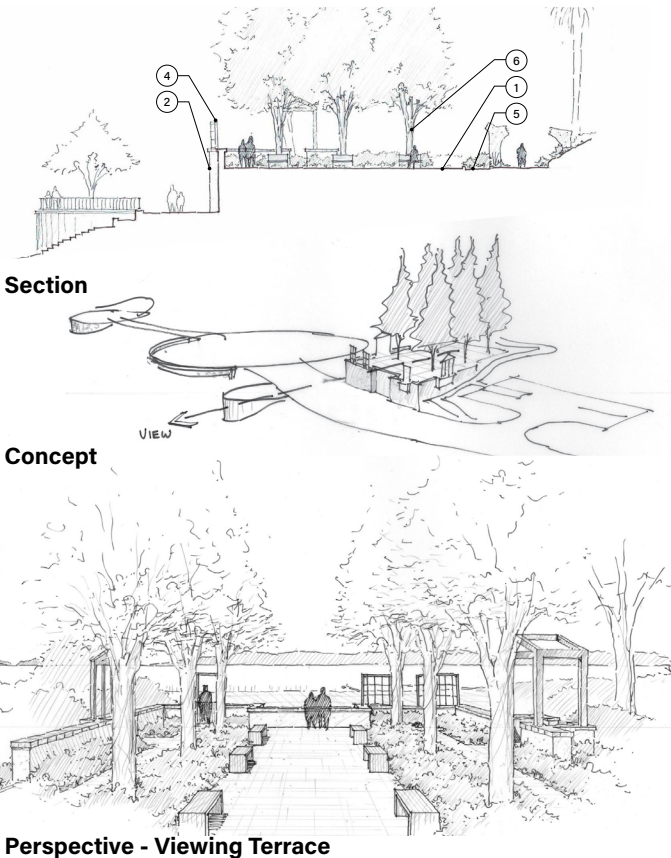
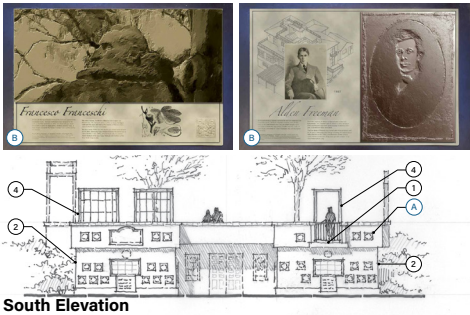
5.7 Concept Design #4

This concept would be a hybrid that blends the landscape and architectural emphasis of the prior three concepts. The terrace footprint and construction would be similar to Concepts 2 and 3, but the openness of the floor plan would be broken up with additional landscaping similar to Concept 1.

Select elements of the house, such as the window frames could be reconstructed out of more durable materials to help secure the perimeter of the terrace and commemorate the original house. The approaching visitor would see remnants of the house and medallions, then at the terrace level experience landscaping attributed to Franceschi. Overall, the design would commemorate both Dr. Franceschi and Alden Freeman.



Concept Design #4



5.8 Comment Card Responses

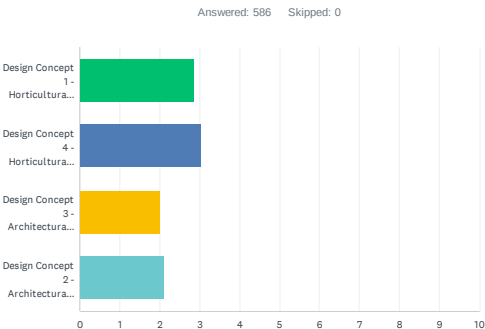
The attendees were once again invited to leave anonymous feedback on comment cards provided by P&R staff. The 10 responses on the cards covered a range of topics, which are summarized to the right.

- Focus on the horticultural contributions of Franceschi
- Feature the view, and provide trees and benches on the terrace
- Lesson the formality of the house footprint
- Concept #1 is elegant and simple
- Use stone benches

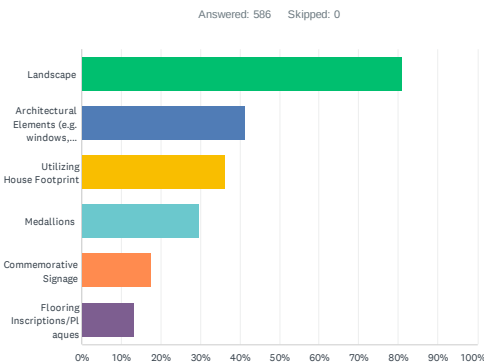
5.9 Survey Monkey Poll

Following the workshop, a second Survey Monkey poll was available online to allow those unable to attend the workshop the opportunity to rank the concept designs. Respondents were asked to review the project materials online before responding. In total, there were 568 responses to the survey, with Concept #1 receiving the most 1st place votes. Concept #4 had a slightly higher overall score based on Survey Monkey’s averaging, but it did not receive as many 1st places votes. Therefore, Concept #1 was the most popular among online respondents, as well as in-person ranking.

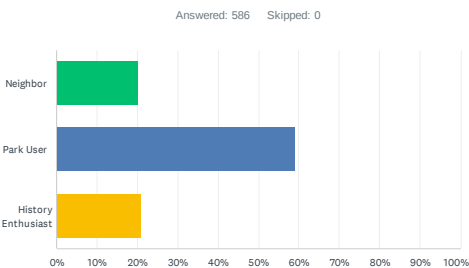
Q1 Which design concept is your favorite? Rank your choices from 1 to 4, with 1 being your preferred concept and 4 being the least favorable.



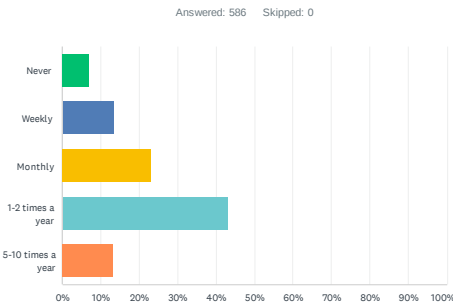
Q2 What aspects of your preferred design concept resonate with you the most? Select up to three.



Q3 What best summarizes your interest in the park?



Q4 How often do you visit the park?



6.0 Conclusion

The community workshops and public surveys provided P&R and the Design Team valuable opportunities to inform the community and receive beneficial feedback. Concept Design #1 was determined to be the preferred concept due to its emphasis on landscaping and vegetation. It's evident park users predominantly visit the park for the views and want to prioritize the horticultural contributions of Dr. Franceschi when honoring the history of the site. Park users value a certain quirkiness about the park and do not wish to change the feel of the place or create something more than a neighborhood park.

Additionally, the workshop participants and survey respondents asked for accessibility improvements and expressed a desire to keep Alden Freeman's medallions. Interpretive signage is the preferred way to commemorate the history of the park and choosing the right landscaping will be key in honoring the history of the site and Dr. Franceschi. Less support was given for the architecturally complex concepts; however, commemorative aspects of the house should still be tastefully incorporated into the design. This feedback will be built upon as the project develops further.

