

Swords into Plowshares:

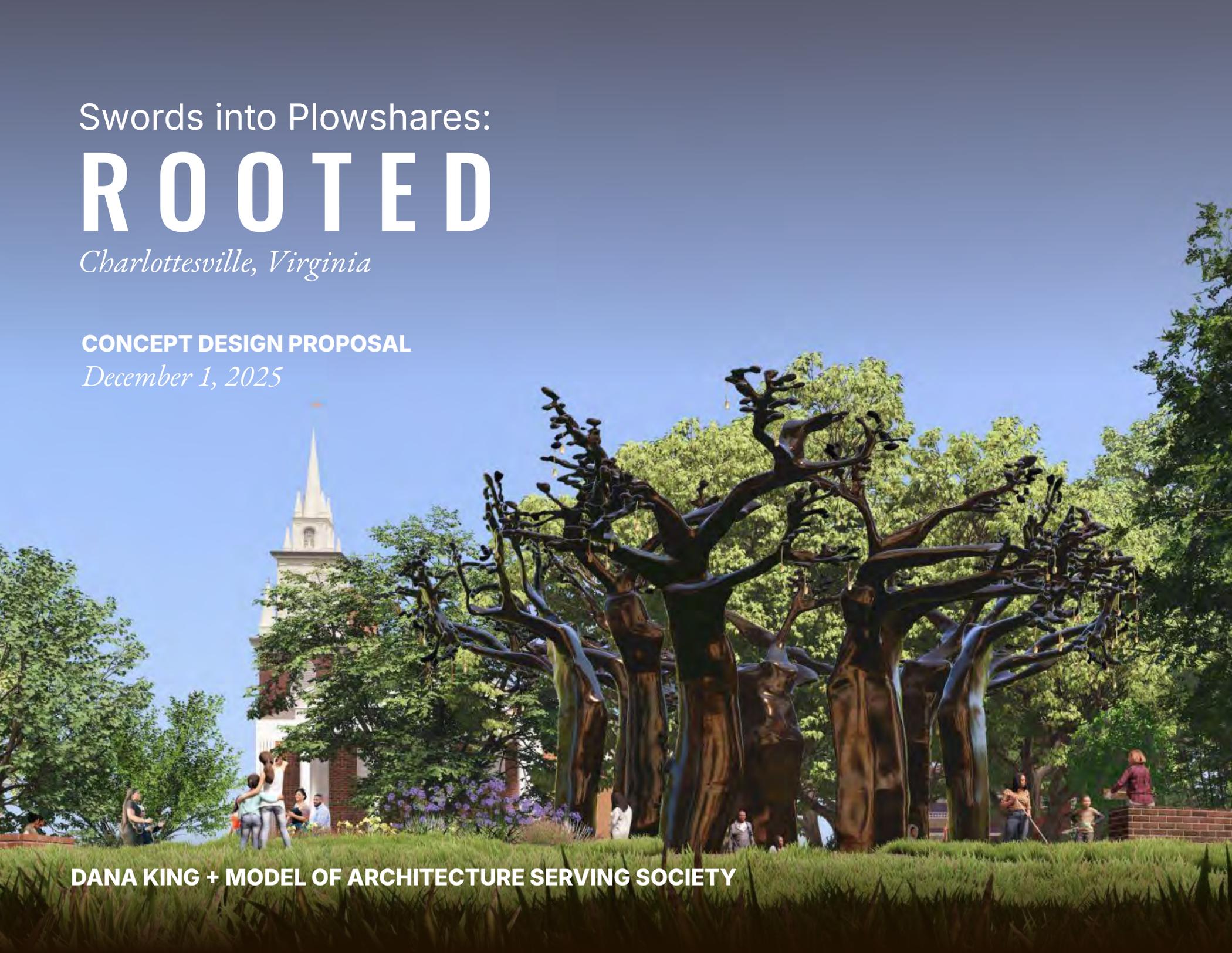
ROOTED

Charlottesville, Virginia

CONCEPT DESIGN PROPOSAL

December 1, 2025

DANA KING + MODEL OF ARCHITECTURE SERVING SOCIETY



SWORDS INTO PLOWSHARES

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OVERVIEW

Provocation & Opportunity

What collective values do we want reflected in our public spaces?

When the Robert E. Lee Statue was unveiled in 1924, its purpose was to prop up a caste system privileging "Whiteness" as the dominant structural force across Southern society. Today, in spite of a national political climate steeped in fear tactics designed to divide us, Charlottesville demands a space of justice, dignity, and belonging.

Our mission is community healing.

Driven by the visionary call to transform a symbol of hate into a message of inclusion and a vehicle for hope, the MASS + Dana King team grounds our design by asking:

What is our *plowshare*? How do we deliver a place of enduring value for all?



...we aim to create an enduring form that will reflect values of equity and inclusivity and hold meaning for generations to come.

– Swords into Plowshares RFP

OVERVIEW

Concept Narrative

ROOTED is a process and a promise for Market Street Park, transmuting an exclusionary past into a new civic heart for Charlottesville; a collective commitment to the ongoing work of justice, dignity, and belonging.

Inspired by the mighty Baobab tree — its life-giving fruit and pan-African symbolism for wisdom, longevity, and interconnection — a central pavilion rises amidst the park's mature canopy as a beacon for community care.

Radiating from the tree, seasonally stewarded gardens alternate with intimate brick niches for casual exchange, cultural celebration, or quiet contemplation.

Together we can build a vital sanctuary, forged from the materials of an inherited present, to envision a true commons, sprouting from shared roots.

OVERVIEW

Project Values

All are welcome to put down roots.

Spatial Justice

Redeeming Site and Soil

The design reclaims Market Street Park, transforming a place historically defined by exclusion and intimidation into one of acknowledgement, safety, and possibility.

Dignity

Seeding Collective Wellbeing

The design invites parallel, accessible activations, tied to natural cycles and cultural exchange, in contrast to the formal, ornamental character of the existing park.

Belonging

Affirming Shared Roots

A Tree of Life, set among West African Adinkra geometries, signals inclusion to African descendants while calling forth connections to universal patterns.

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Concept Diagram

1 PARK

Primary walkways across the park are reconfigured to reflect the FAWOHODIE Adinkra, a West African symbol representing independence and responsibility.

2 PAVILION

The BAOBAB tree honors the presence and persistence of Black descendants of American enslavement, with seven passageways inviting all to enter a shared space of possibility.

3 PLAZA

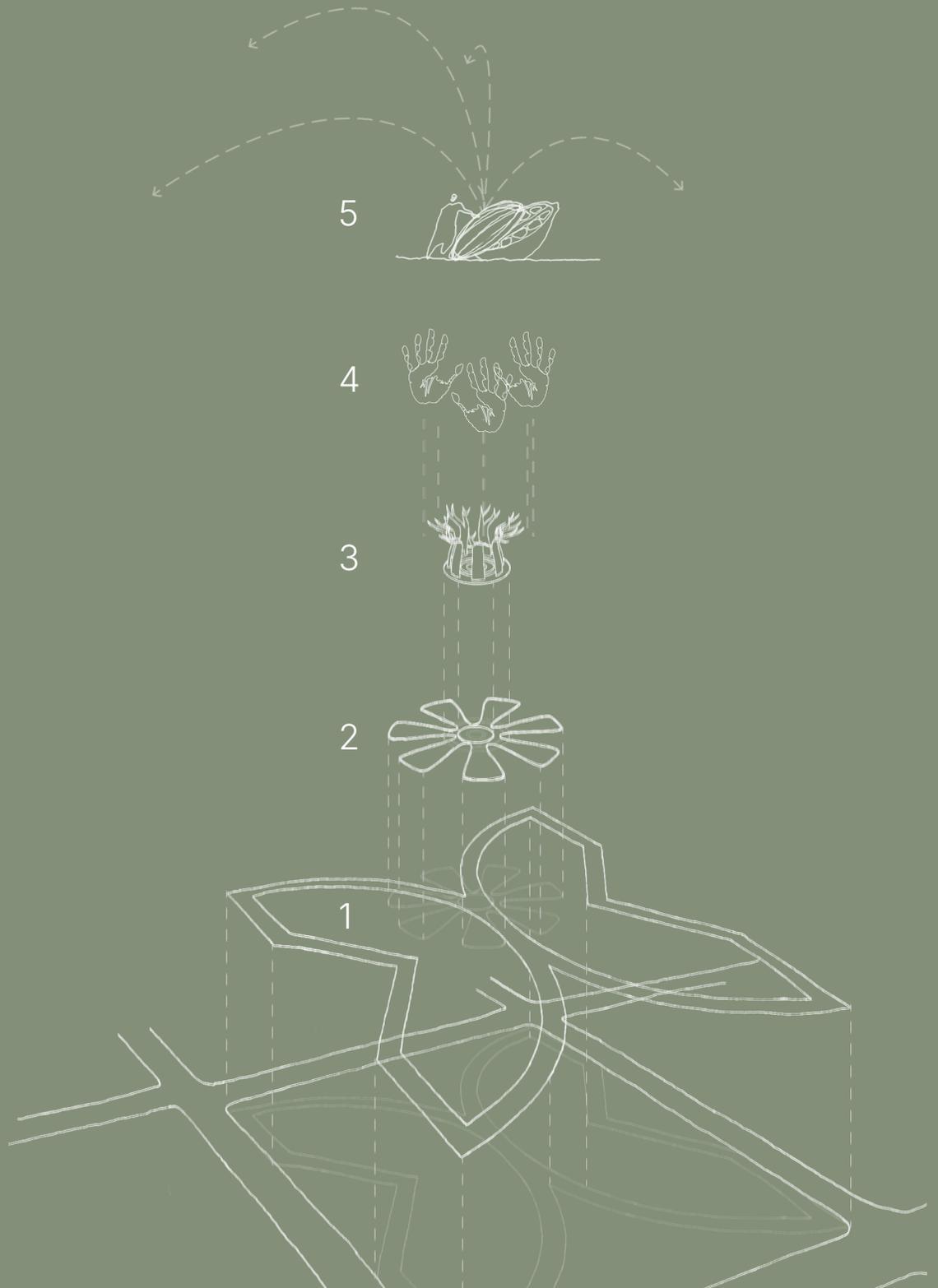
The plaza weaves together gardens and gathering space with an ANANSE NTONTAN Adinkra, the "spider's web," representing wisdom, creativity, and the complexities of life.

4 PEOPLE

On the tree's interior, HANDPRINTS of community members honor the project's collaborative effort and collective realization.

5 PLANT

Extending the project's message of hope, BAOBAB FRUIT & SEEDS appear at community-selected locations throughout the city.



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Project Approach | Pavilion Form



PAVILION: TREE OF LIFE

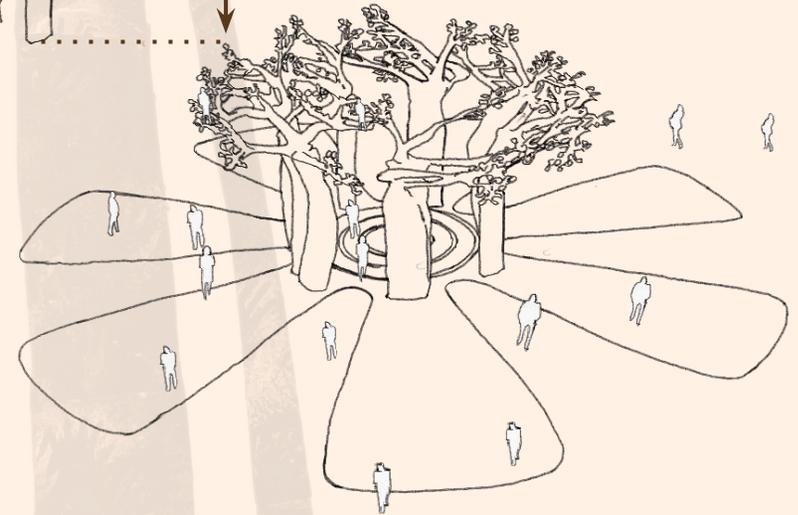
In Africa, the baobab tree provides shelter, safety, and nourishment. It is a shared resource, revered for its immense trunk and longevity. It is a place for gathering, storytelling, shared meals, and celebration.

For Black Americans, the tree speaks to roots refused — and calls forth instead a future of safety, stability, ownership, and the generational wealth that emerges from honored ancestors.

Our baobab is not just a monumental form, but a shared, inhabitable place. With branches outstretched like arms, seven pillars in the round connect to the plaza below, rooting our actions and agency in place.



27 ft tall



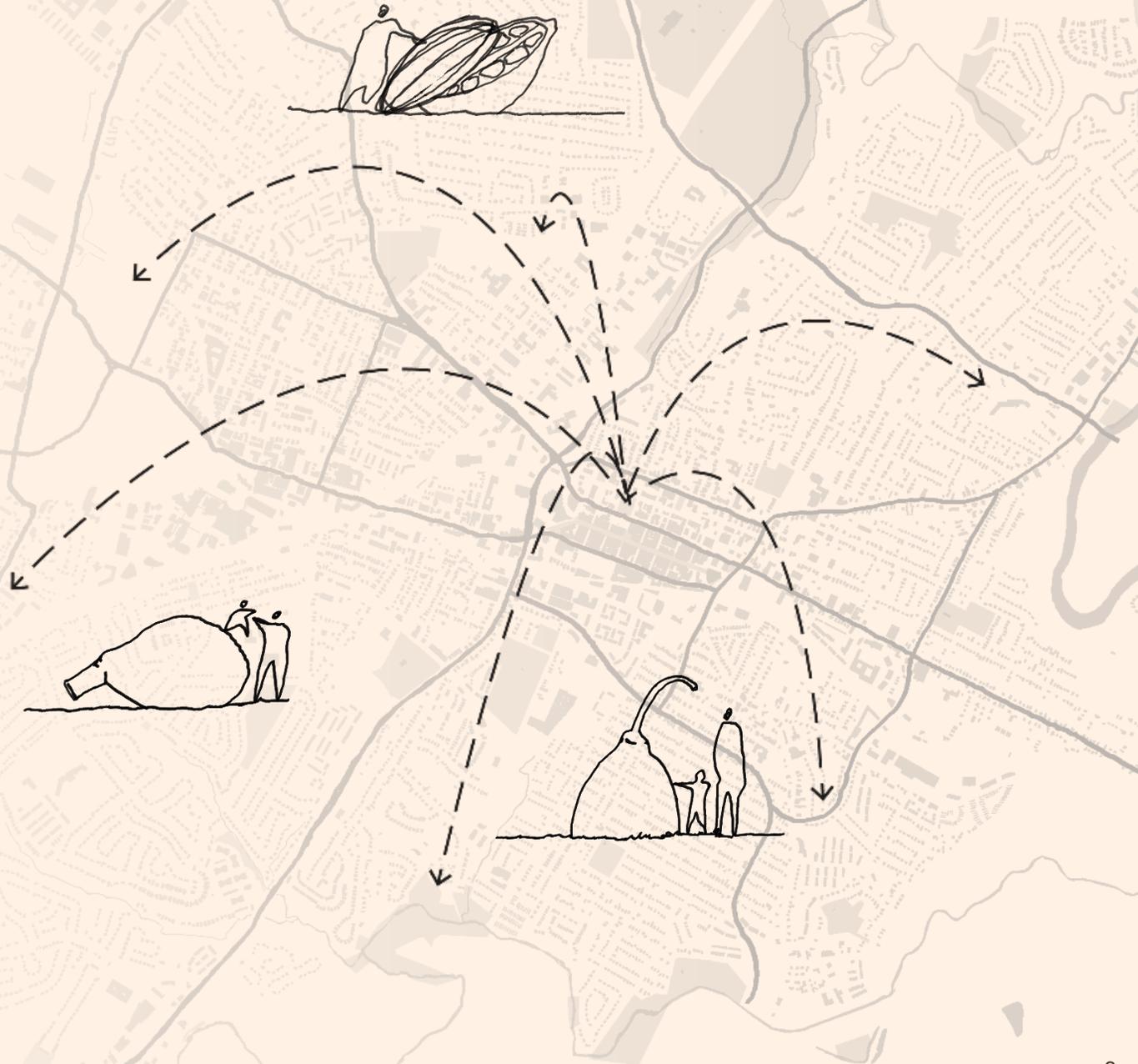
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Project Approach | Distributed

PLANT: FRUIT & SEEDS

Sculptures representing the life-giving fruit of the baobab, enlarged to measure roughly 8 feet long and 5 feet wide, extend the welcoming spirit of the mother tree. Variations of flowers, fruit, and seeds distribute the power of reclamation in public spaces, empowering community members to challenge injustice and imagine alternative futures.

While the project is anchored at Market Street Park, this distributed approach would bring sites across the city into dialogue with one another and the project. Publicly selected sites could include other city parks such as Washington, Belmont, Forest Hills, or Tonsler.



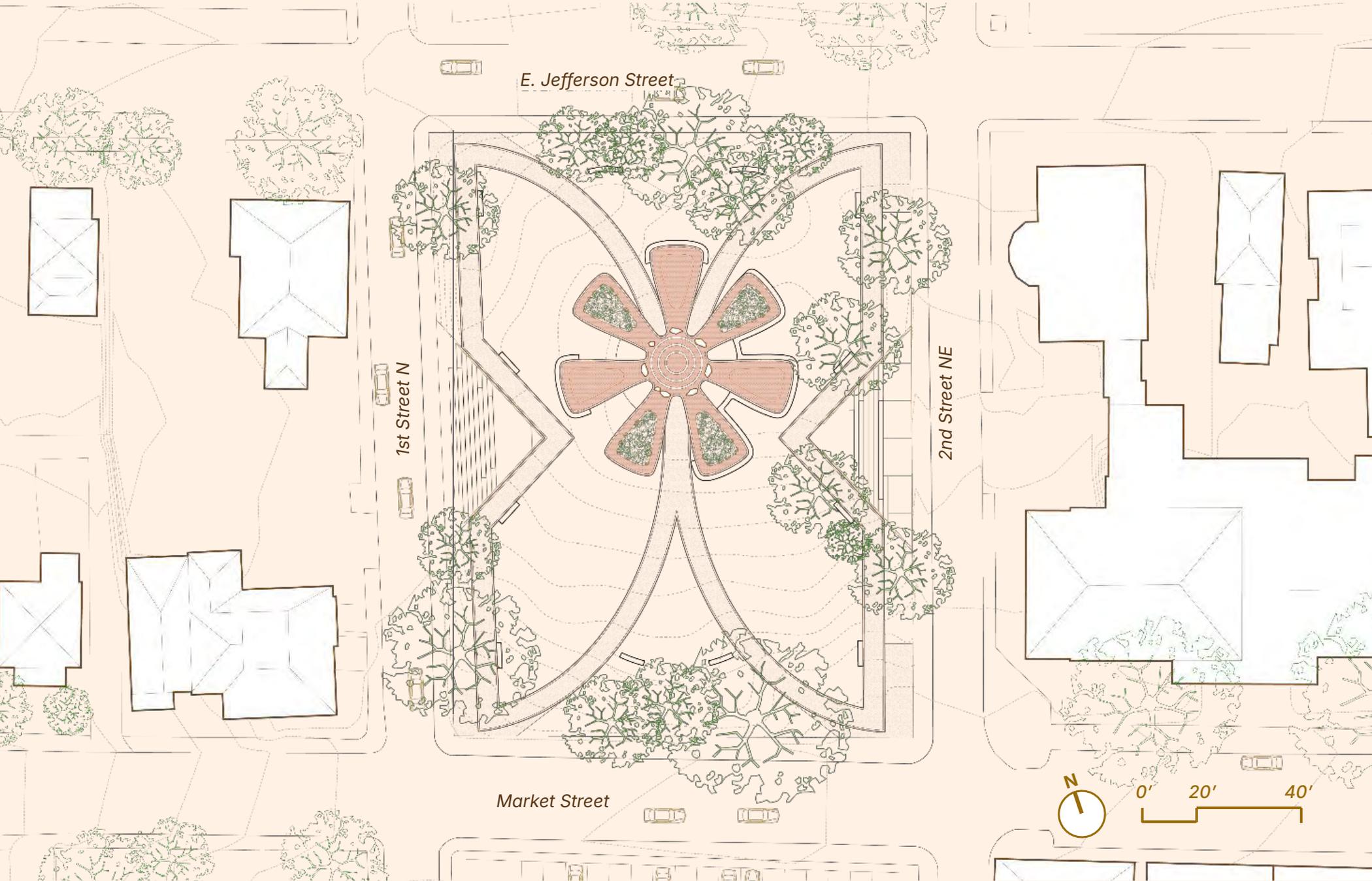
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Context Analysis



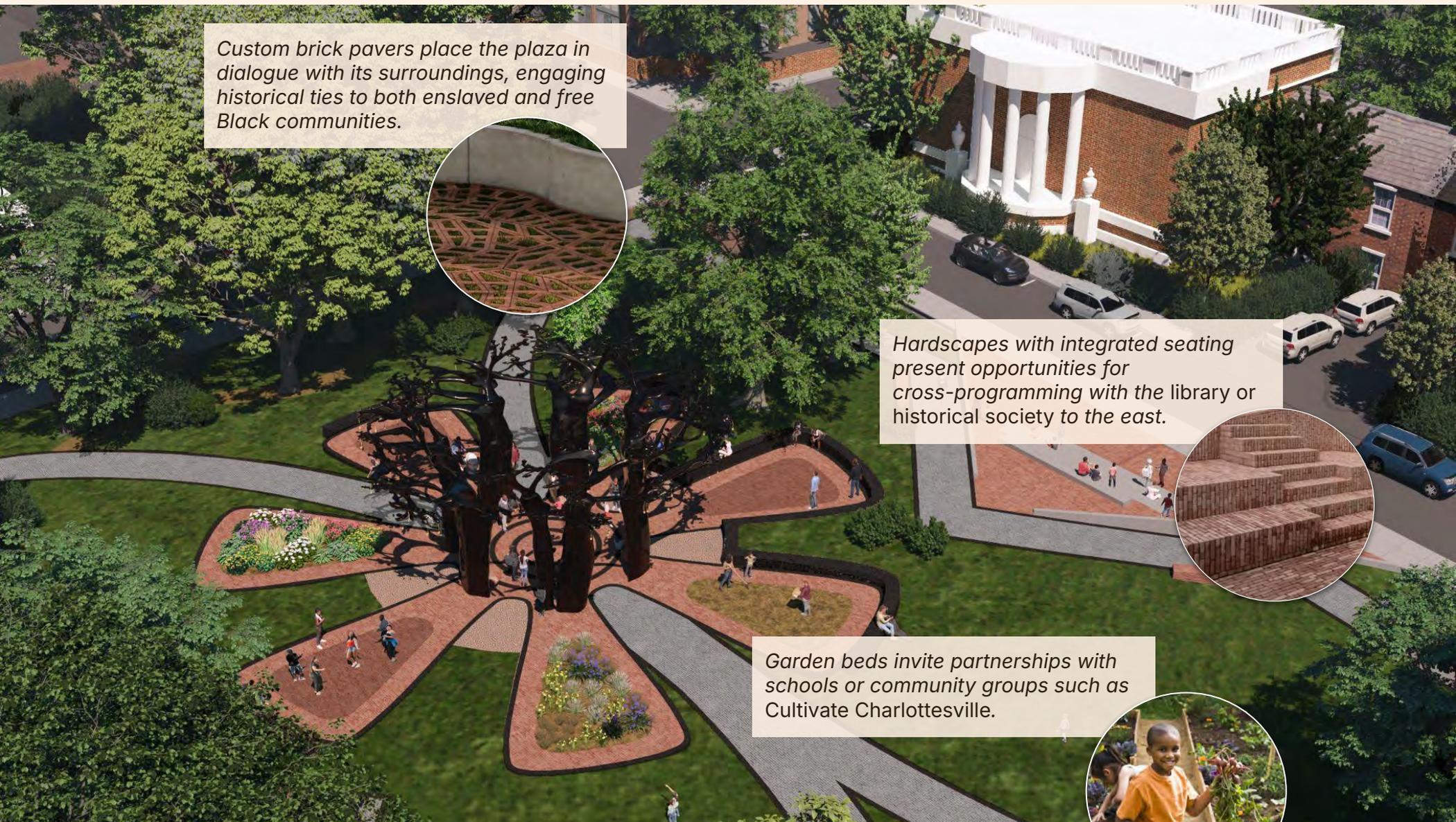
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Park Plan



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Visitor Experience



Custom brick pavers place the plaza in dialogue with its surroundings, engaging historical ties to both enslaved and free Black communities.



Hardscapes with integrated seating present opportunities for cross-programming with the library or historical society to the east.



Garden beds invite partnerships with schools or community groups such as Cultivate Charlottesville.



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Visitor Experience



Accessible pathways across the park and plaza welcome all mobility needs — a kinetic rewriting of how visitors move through the site.

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Visitor Experience



Handprints reflect the project's collective effort and invite touch, connecting our efforts.

The patina is layered for deep bronze saturation with golden highlights, bringing focus to high points.

A generative soundscape by Aric Attas translates the Baobab's electrical energy patterns into music.



*All are welcome to
put down roots.*