



The Grounding Meadow
OAA Landscape Competition
Team Chestnut



Grounding Meadow tries to bring the experience of the ravine into the site. The ground is sculpted to capture water, while planting treats and gradually releases it. The undulating landscape recontextualizes the building and reminds visitors of the vast natural features of the city around them.

The Grounding Meadow

Architects build on a ground plane that is often horizontal, but not flat. They work on ground that has history; millennia of geologic time shapes our landforms, thousands of years of Indigenous stewardship is followed by centuries of settler resource extraction and construction. The land bears the scars of the forces that have acted on it. Buildings are no different. The OAA Headquarters is a clear modernist paradigm in its typology (The Corbusian villa on Pilotis), its monoculture landscape, and its location next to the Don Mills neighborhood, where the first corporate suburb of Toronto was proposed and developed in 1954 (Hancock and Lee). The OAA has identified their landscape as a canvas to question that which has come before, and as a place to respond to two of the most pressing issues of our time; reconciliation and climate change. Mississaugas of the Credit identify as a people of the water and have called for settlers to work with them in environmental stewardship of water to restore a respectful, harmonious, and grateful relationship with water¹. The OAA can answer this call by shaping ground to capture stormwater on-site and celebrate these natural processes.

Design Strategies

Three operations transform the site; cut, bridge, and plant. The act of accepting and treating water is the driving force that shapes each decision.

Cut

Today, much of the site sheds water directly into the storm sewer system, contributing to peak flows and downstream pollution in the Don River, or Wonscotonach to the MCFN people. By removing some of the non-permeable hardscapes, we can make room for water. Infiltration is increased, and a series of sculptural bio-retention ponds are created along Moatfield Drive. The excavation also severs the direct storm sewer connection, allowing stormwater to be treated on-site through filtration and sedimentation.

Vertical planes are removed to enhance the horizontality of the ground and highlight the building's delicate structural pillars. Excavated fill is reused to undulate the meadow, softening the presence of cars and capturing more drainage area within the site.

Equally important is what is not removed. Much of the existing parking lot can remain, reducing the amount of disturbance and waste. Reclaimed paving blocks of the entry drop-off areas are stacked as a series of plinths within the pond's landscape, around which the pedes-

trian will ascend. The space, defined by the cut of the ground and the pedestrian ramp, can act as an outdoor gallery, which acts as an ideal interface between the public and the OAA. There is potential for an annual exhibition curated through a competition amongst the emerging and new members of the association.

Bridge

Ground is not two-dimensional but the aggregation of a series of layers, both physical and immaterial. Where previously there was a paved path, this proposal dissolves the ground surface by dividing layers and adding space between them. A permeable metal grid is overlaid on the main landscape design episode, the stormwater management strategy, and the public art program at the moment of entry into the site, turning the arrival experience into an immersive sequence of passing through an ecological threshold.

At the northeast corner of the property, a metal grate surface projects north from the parking lot, providing more maneuvering room for service vehicles. Like the entry bridge, the surface is permeable, allowing the meadow to intersect and grow through.

The form of the bridge is a negotiation between circulation and stormwater management. By overlaying the two processes, a form emerges which is in conversation with both.

Plant

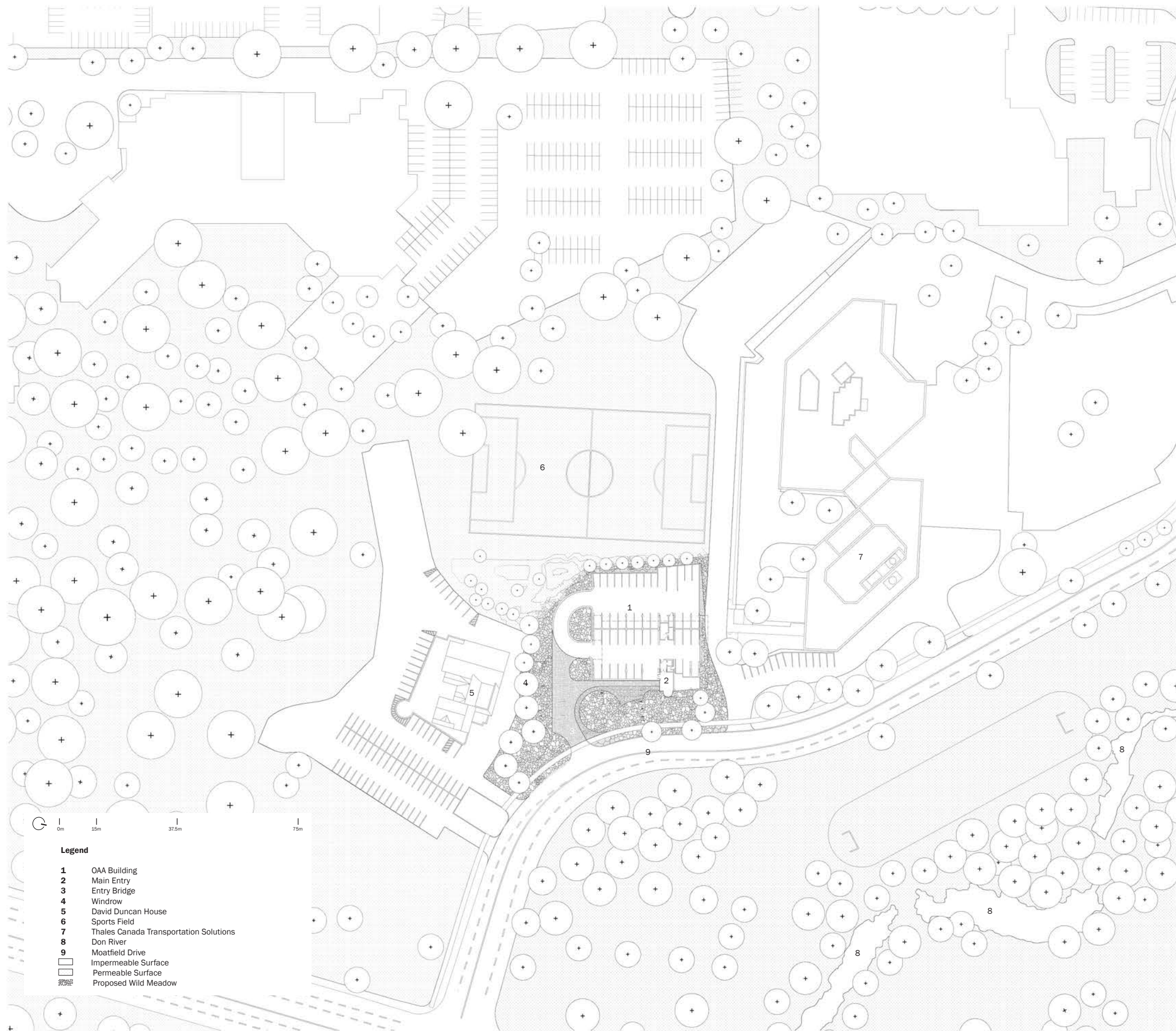
As an association that deals with building on the land of the Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit, it is only fitting that the planting scheme for this building reflects some of the ethos and respect the Indigenous communities show towards the land.

A wild meadow is a rejection of the manicured, unproductive lawn that exists today. The meadow will be a rich biotic layer, providing habitat, attracting pollinators, and managing stormwater.

Depressions created by the cut operation create bioretention cells. These cells have three distinct moisture zones: Dry, medium and wet. Each zone is planted with a combination of low-maintenance native perennials and grasses, creating a wild meadow registered precisely to the anticipated degree of wetness. The proposed plants are selected for their cultural significance amongst the Indigenous communities.

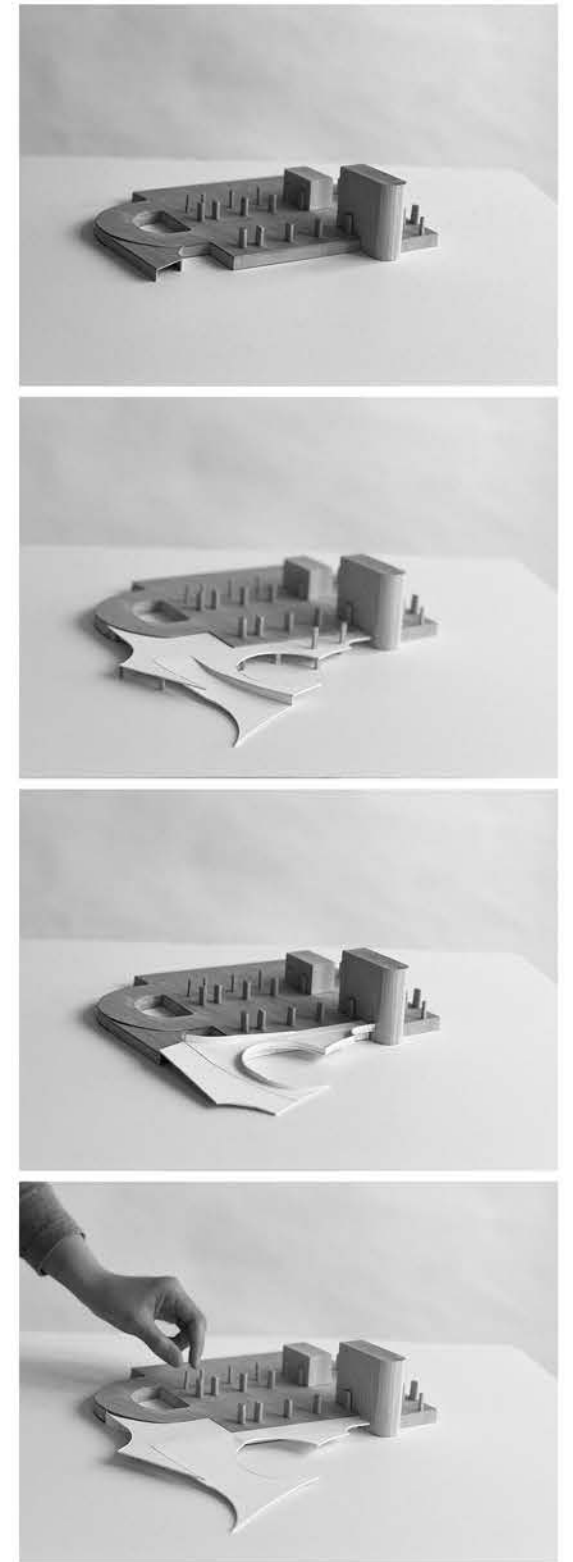
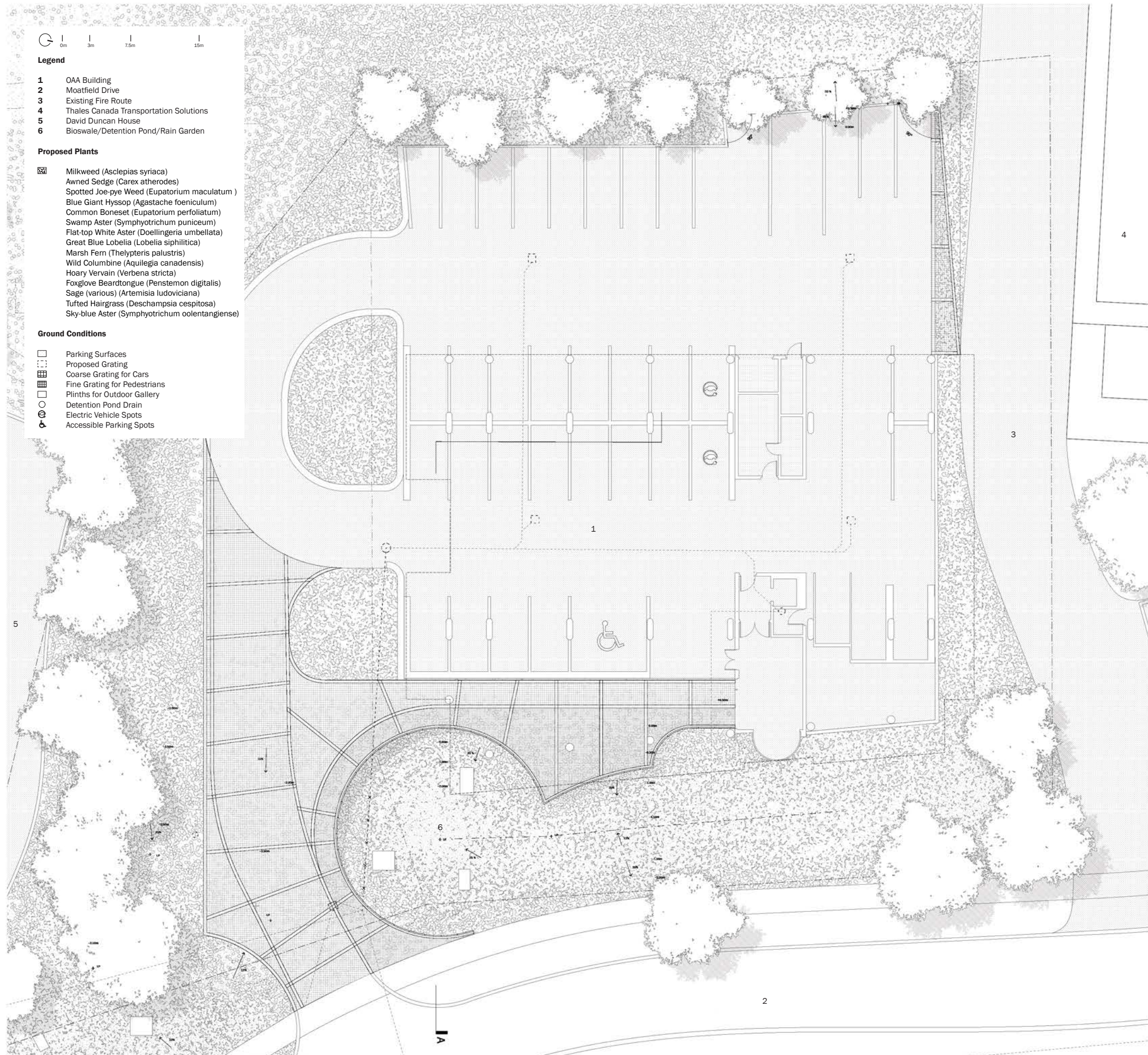
In the end, our planting scheme will become a tapestry that records the history of this land on which we build, as a sign of our gratitude for being able to live and work there.

¹ Wybenga, Darin, and Waterfront Toronto. "Mississaugas Were a People of the Waters." *Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation*, November 21, 2021. <https://mncfn.ca/mississaugas-were-a-people-of-the-waters/>.



Context

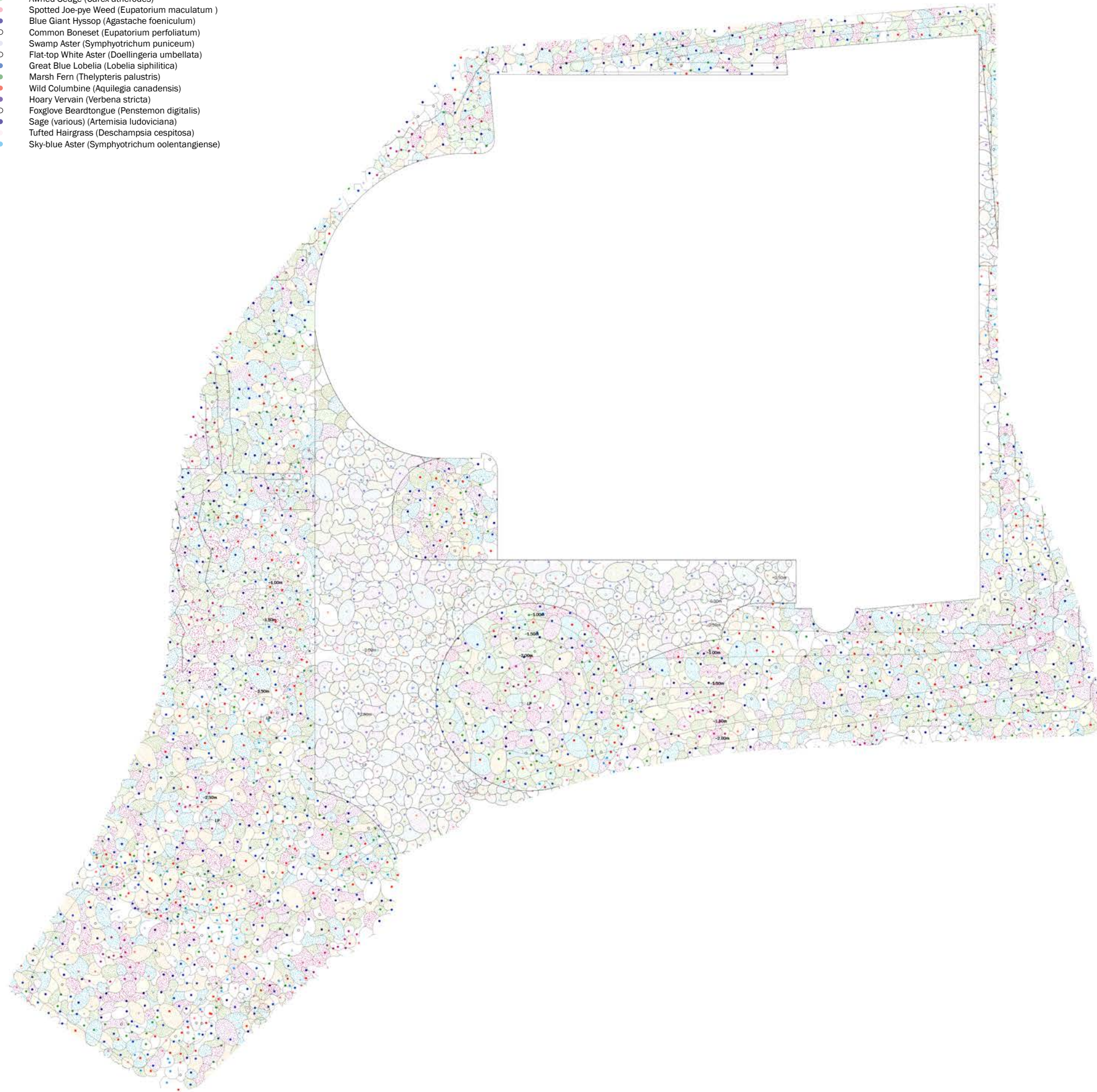
A new landscape for the OAA headquarters must adhere to Toronto and Region Conservation Authority and City of Toronto regulations regarding natural heritage systems, including use of native species and meeting water balance metrics. This proposal is sensitive to the ravine edge conditions, intervening the existing engineered stormwater conveyances, and bringing a more natural ecology to the site. Bridges over the Don River / Wonscotonach are echoed on site, forming the central element of the approach sequence.



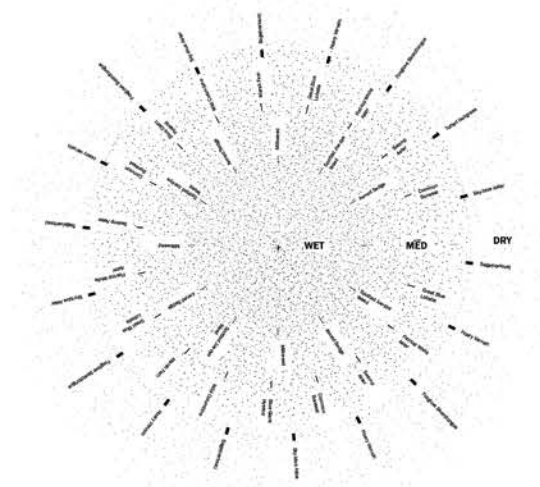
Design Iteration

A new approach. A variety of bridge conditions were tested physically to study how the entryway meets the sidewalk and building.

- Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*)
- Awned Sedge (*Carex atherodes*)
- Spotted Joe-pye Weed (*Eupatorium maculatum*)
- Blue Giant Hyssop (*Agastache foeniculum*)
- Common Boneset (*Eupatorium perfoliatum*)
- Swamp Aster (*Symphotrichum puniceum*)
- Flat-top White Aster (*Doellingeria umbellata*)
- Great Blue Lobelia (*Lobelia siphilitica*)
- Marsh Fern (*Thelypteris palustris*)
- Wild Columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*)
- Hoary Vervain (*Verbena stricta*)
- Foxglove Beardtongue (*Penstemon digitalis*)
- Sage (various) (*Artemisia ludoviciana*)
- Tufted Hairgrass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*)
- Sky-blue Aster (*Symphotrichum oolentangiense*)

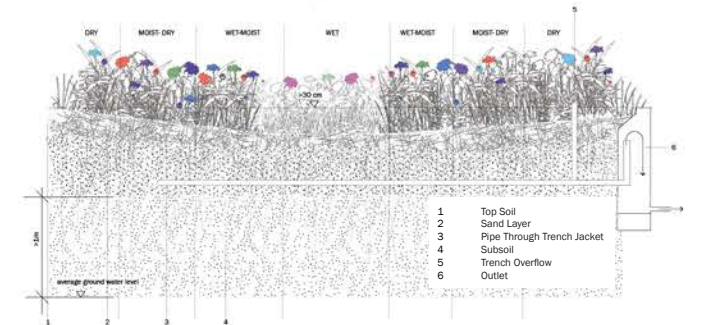


The ephemerality of the metal grating surface is enhanced by lighting the meadow below. The entry sequence is transformed from day to night, especially dramatic during evening public events hosted at the OAA Headquarters.



Ecological Threshold

Our design proposal for the OAA headquarters tries to re-form the land to retain and control its surface water runoff, reshape the outlines of its vehicular traffic areas to reduce its presence from the main iconography of the building and substitute it with a permeable territory to define the arrival experience as an ecological threshold at the scale of the site. A combination of low-maintenance native perennials and grasses, creating a wild meadow registered precisely to the anticipated degree of wetness. The proposed plants are selected for their cultural significance amongst the indigenous communities.





Outdoor Gallery

The reclaimed paving blocks of the entry drop-off areas will remain on site and stacked as a series of plinths within the pond's landscape around which the pedestrian will ascend. This will naturally act as an outdoor gallery for the OAA and an ideal interface between the public and the OAA.