

Summary Booklet



ACE Design Build Program
2026

PILSEN



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OVER

VIEW

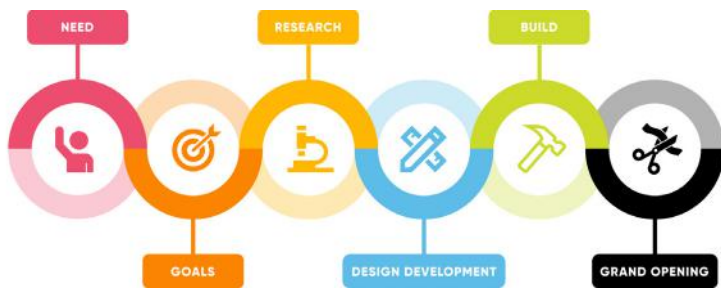
THE PROGRAM

In 2025, ACE Mentor Chicago and Human Scale partnered to redevelop the ACE Design Build program. Through a combination of their missions, both organizations sought to provide high school students with the opportunity to design and build meaningful, functional and beautiful public spaces in historically disinvested neighborhoods while encouraging them to pursue careers in architecture, engineering, and construction. The program partners with a Neighbor-Space garden and construction donors to build these spaces.

Students begin the 18-class summer program by researching the neighborhood, visiting the site and interviewing community members to identify the needs of the project. Then students research precedents, create sketches and experiment with model making to create design concepts that are presented to the community client.



After receiving community feedback, students refine the design concepts to create a masterplan that gets presented at the final design presentation. Once the community approves the design, students identify the components that will be built based on the available budget and schedule. Over the course of 10 build days, students and partner contractors build the elements. The entire process is celebrated at the grand opening ceremony at the site with the students, parents, local officials, community residents, mentors and donors.



ABOUT

ACE Mentor Chicago is the Chicago affiliate of the national ACE Mentor Program. The nonprofit's mission is to engage, excite, and enlighten high school students to pursue careers in architecture, engineering, and construction through mentoring, scholarships and continued support for their advancement into the industry.

Human Scale is a nonprofit organization founded in 2018 by architecture students seeking to use design as a tool for community impact. The organization designs and builds functional, beautiful and meaningful public spaces in historically disinvested Chicago neighborhoods, involving community members throughout the design build process.

NeighborSpace is Chicago's only nonprofit urban land trust dedicated to preserving and sustaining community gardens on behalf of local groups. The organization assumes responsibilities including property ownership, liability insurance, water access and technical support so community partners can focus on gardening and neighborhood stewardship.



ARCHITECTURE • CONSTRUCTION • ENGINEERING



HUMAN SCALE



neighbor**space**

THE PROJECT

This year, Human Scale worked with 26 students from 23 different communities to improve La Huerta Roots and Rays Garden in Pilsen. During eight design sessions, students researched the Pilsen area, visited the site, interviewed garden leaders, toured the neighborhood, visited 18th Street Casa Cultura, spoke with muralist Sentrock and came up with design concepts for various elements of the garden.

The overall concept of the designs revolved around sunshine and plantings due to the garden's name. After receiving feedback from local garden leaders, students refined their concepts to put together a final masterplan. During ten construction days, students along with professional contractors built several components of the masterplan. The new garden elements include a perimeter fence, brick pathway, entrance arbor, storage shed, ice cream truck play zone, pergola, mural from Mena Arte, and modular seating and tables throughout the garden.

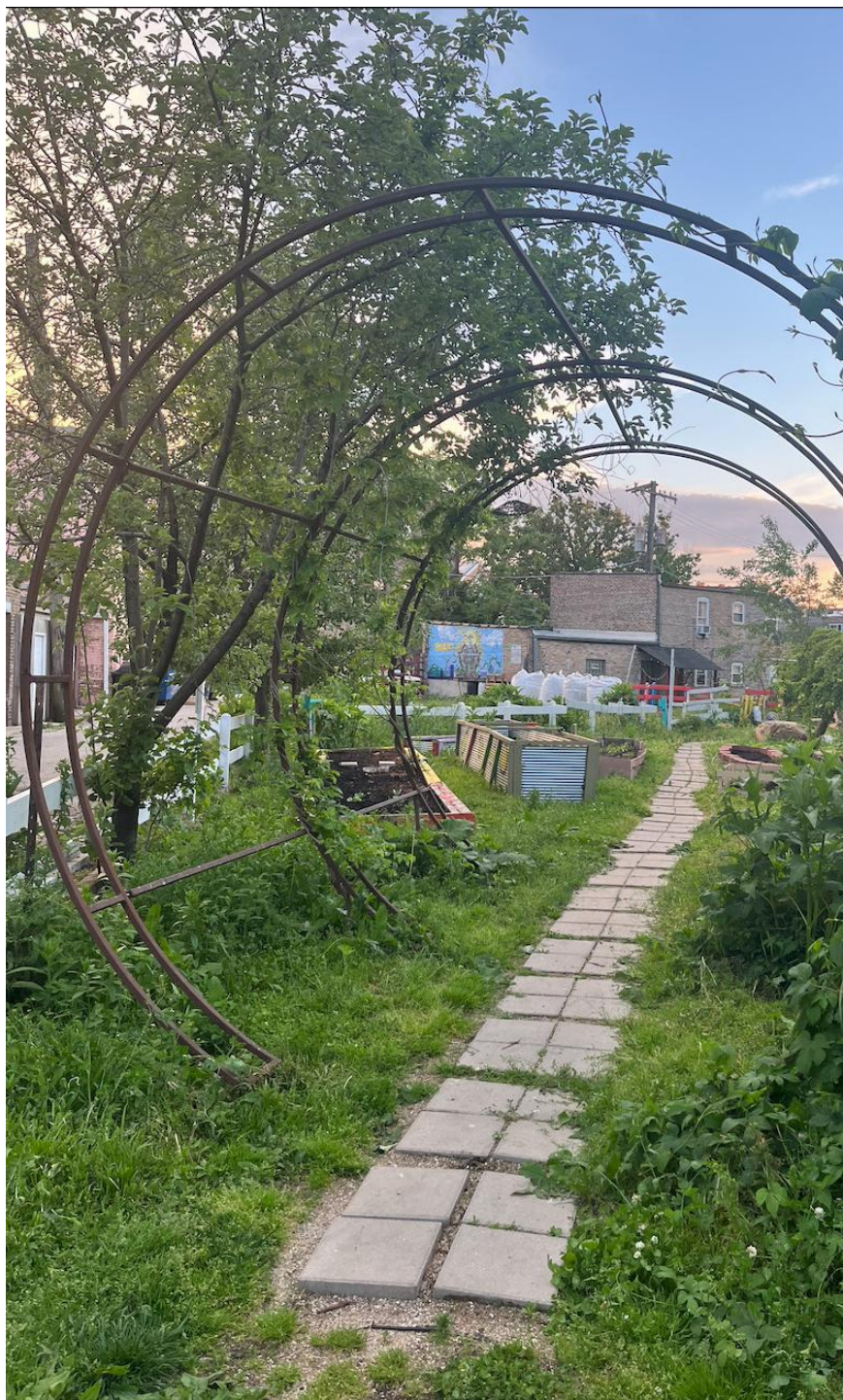
The grand opening occurred on July 31, 2026 with students, parents, community residents, local officials, mentors and donors in attendance.

This year's project was a result of over 81 people who came together to support the program in various ways including material and labor donations, mentorship guidance, program coordination and general volunteering. The estimated value for this year's project is over \$200,000, all at no cost to the community client.



NE

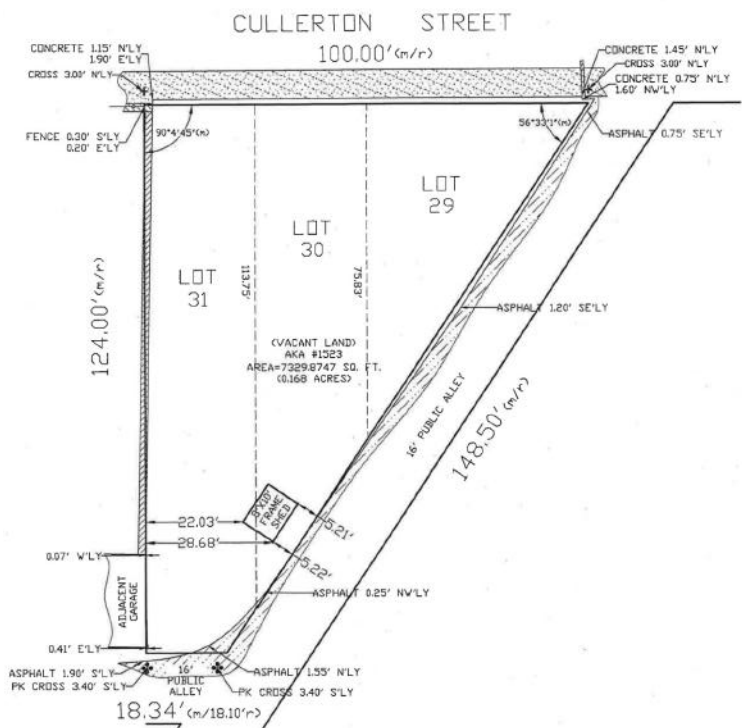
ED



LA HUERTA ROOTS & RAYS

La Huerta Roots and Rays is a volunteer-run urban garden established in 2007 in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood. The garden grows organic food, provides opportunities for shared learning and offers residents a safe community green space. It has been protected by NeighborSpace since 2014.

Over several decades, the garden was in need of general maintenance and improvements. Some of the most pressing items included the replacement of the existing perimeter fence, the replacement of the storage shed, a new shading structure and a new ADA pathway to bring accessibility to the space.



RESE

ARCH

PILSEN

HISTORY

- Early settlers were Czech immigrants
- Railroads in late 1800s stimulated growth
- Many Mexican families moved in around mid 1900s
- Known for its Mexican culture and traditions
- New businesses and public improvements
- Gentrification caused people to move out
- 73% of population are Hispanic/Latino

COMMUNITY ASSETS

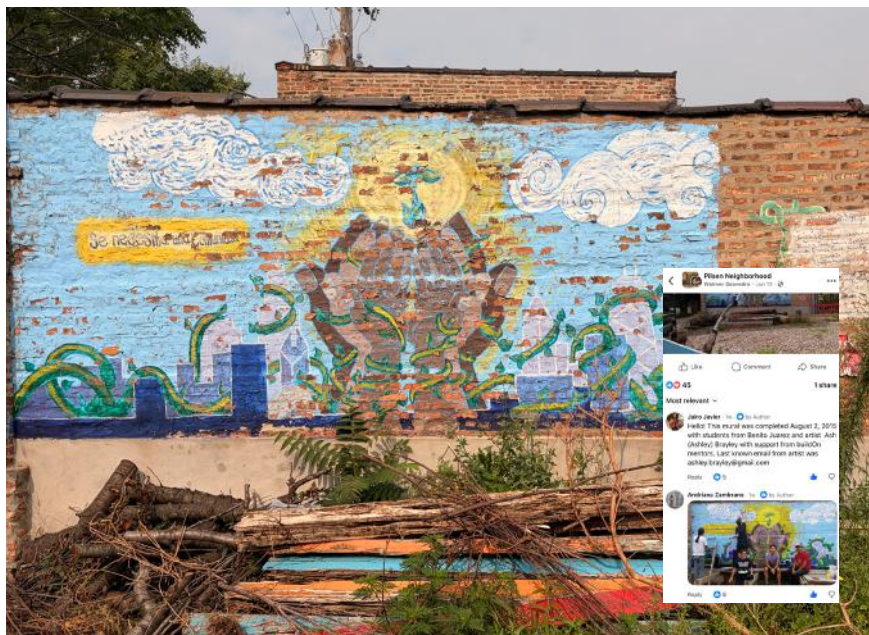
- Pink Line
- National Museum of Mexican Art
- Harrison Park
- The Resurrection Project
- 18th Street Casa de Cultura
- Pilsen Alliance
- 18th St Commercial Corridor
- Community Murals and Public Art
- Community Gardens like El Paseo





SITE VISIT & INTERVIEWS





PILSEN WALKING TOUR





DESIGN DEV

VELOPMENT

PRECEDENTS

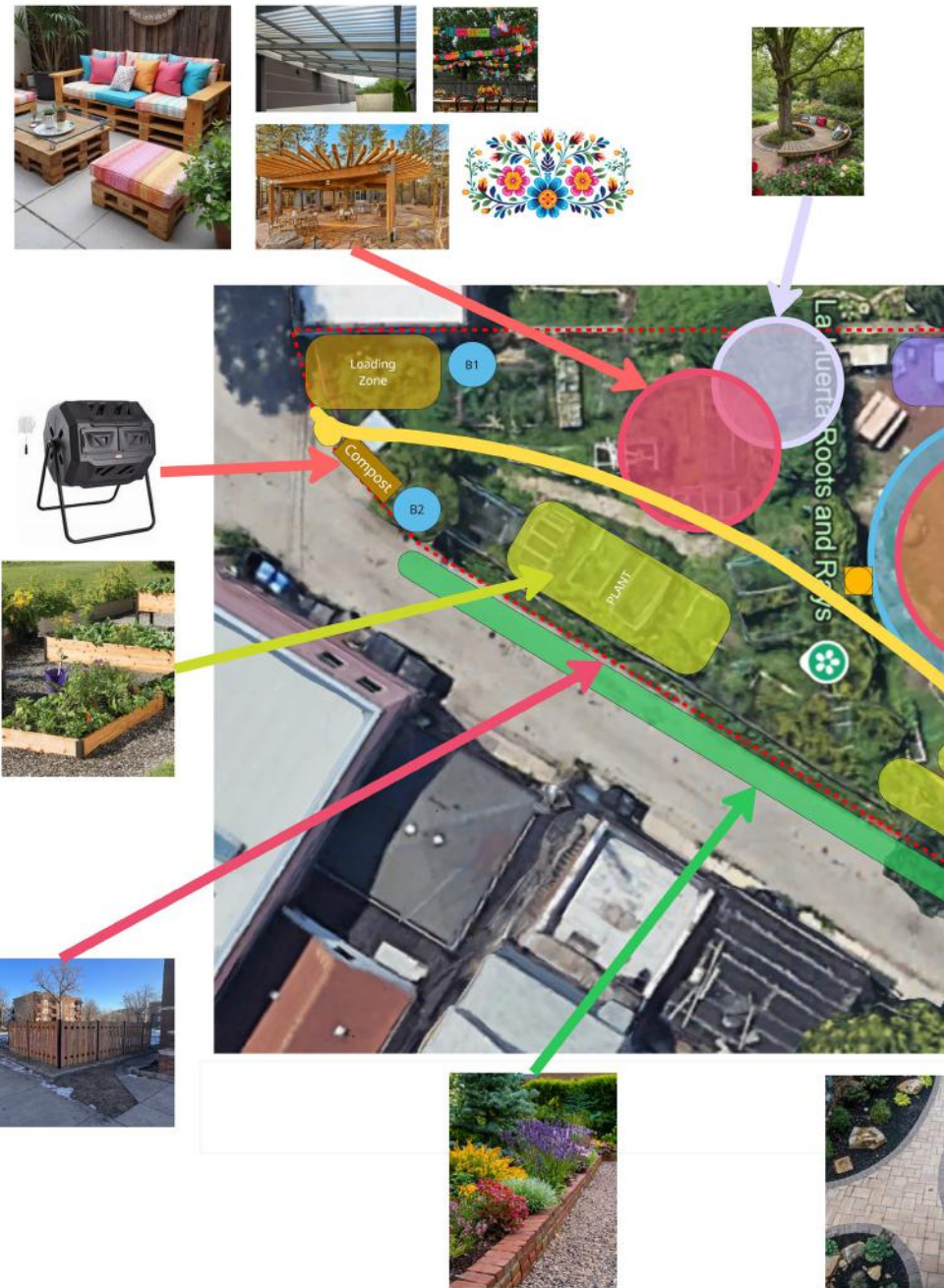


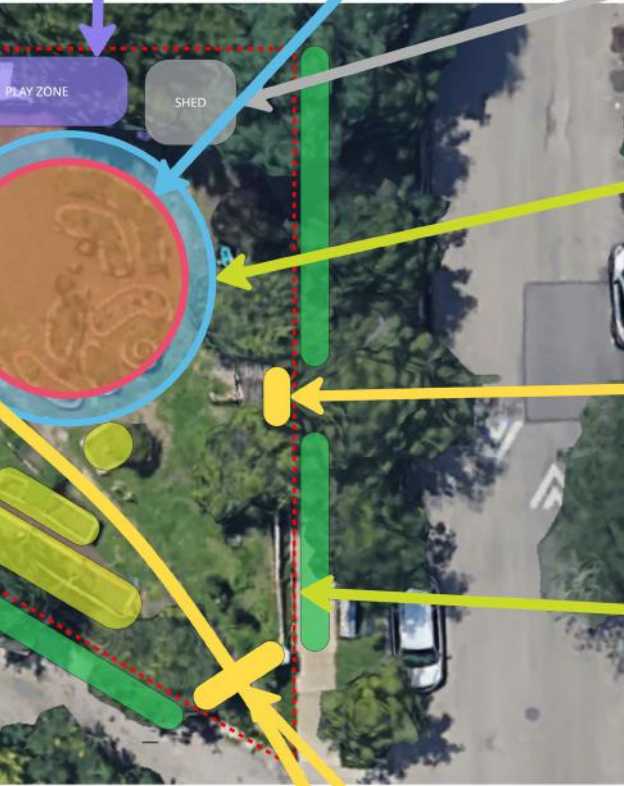


MODEL MAKING



INITIAL SITE CONCEPT





COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

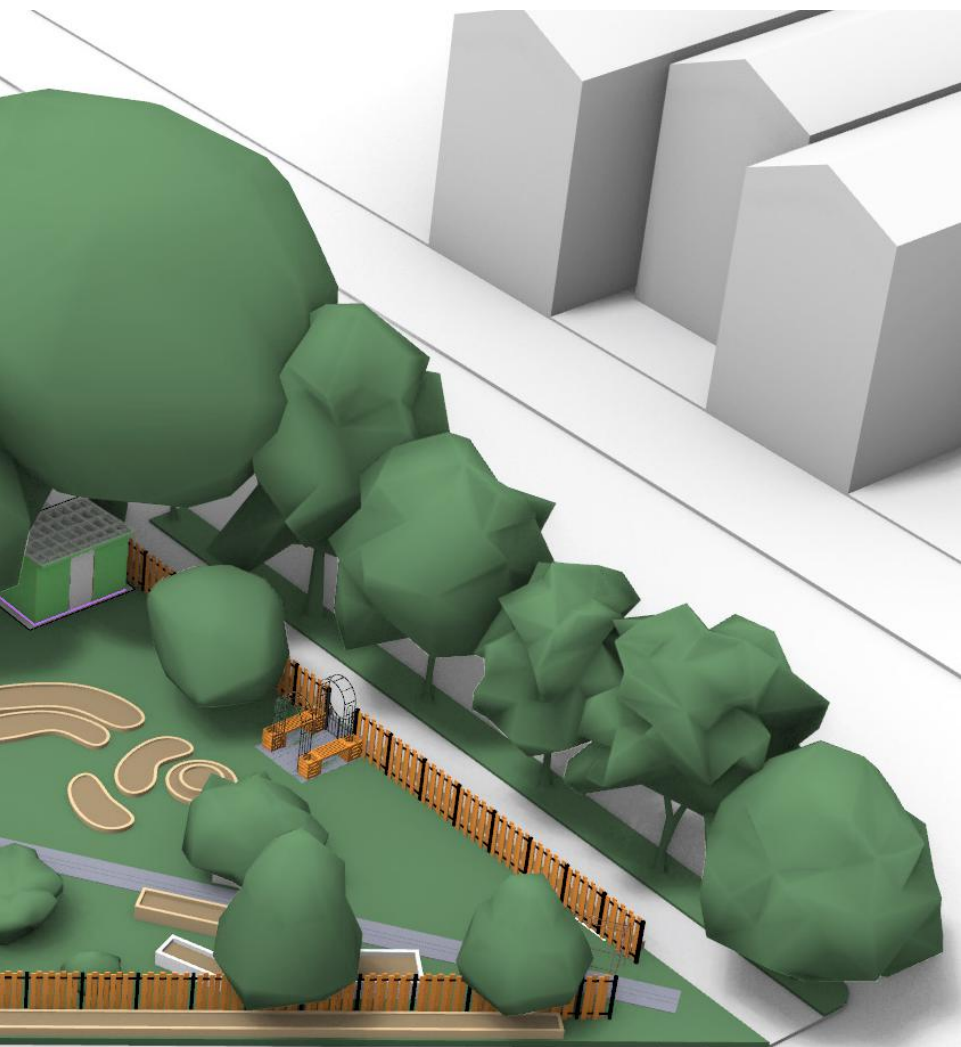
- Increase height of fence on the alley side
- Shade structure should not have walls for visibility
- Add roof to shade structure for rain protection
- Add greenery and flowers throughout
- Add colors to make the garden pop during winter
- Consider pollinators vegetation
- Create more seating throughout, modular is best
- Create a permanent space for toys
- Remember that names have meanings
- Gates should have latches but not be locked
- What will the space look like in the winter?
- What will happen to the shed?
- The pathway should be ADA compliant
- Reach out to the original muralist to get permission to replace mural
- Overall, the initial design ideas are great



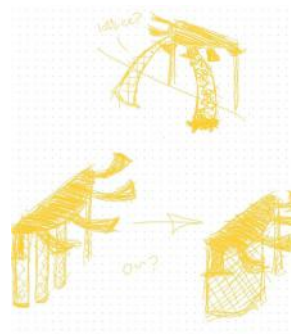
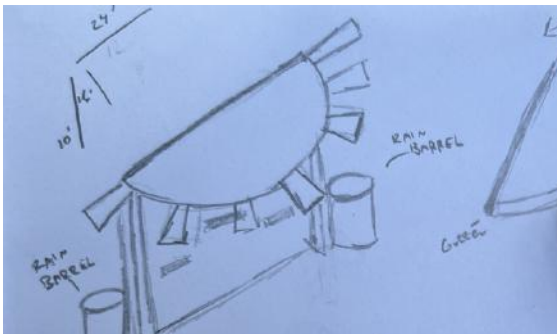


MASTERPLAN



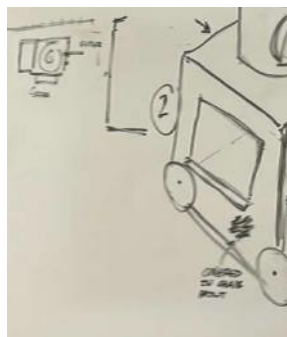


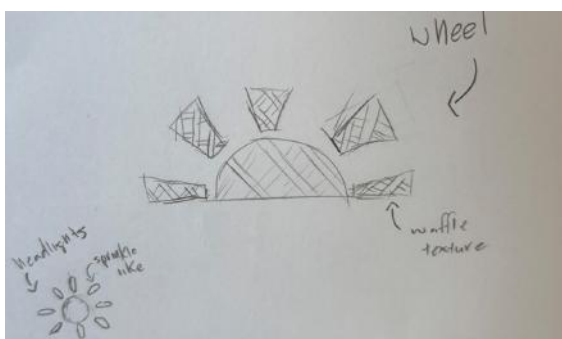
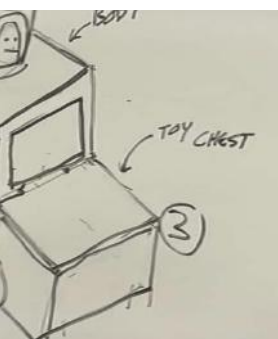
SHADE STRUCTURE



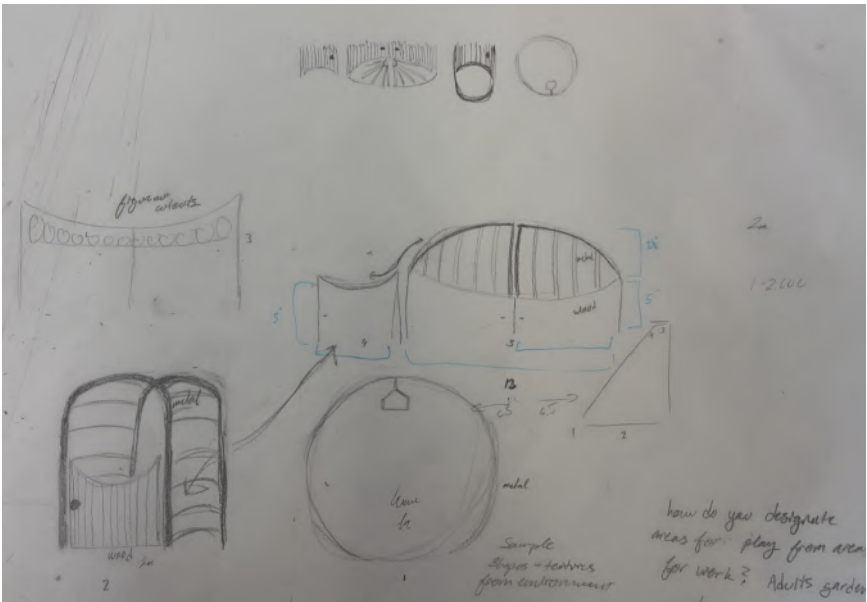


KIDS ZONE

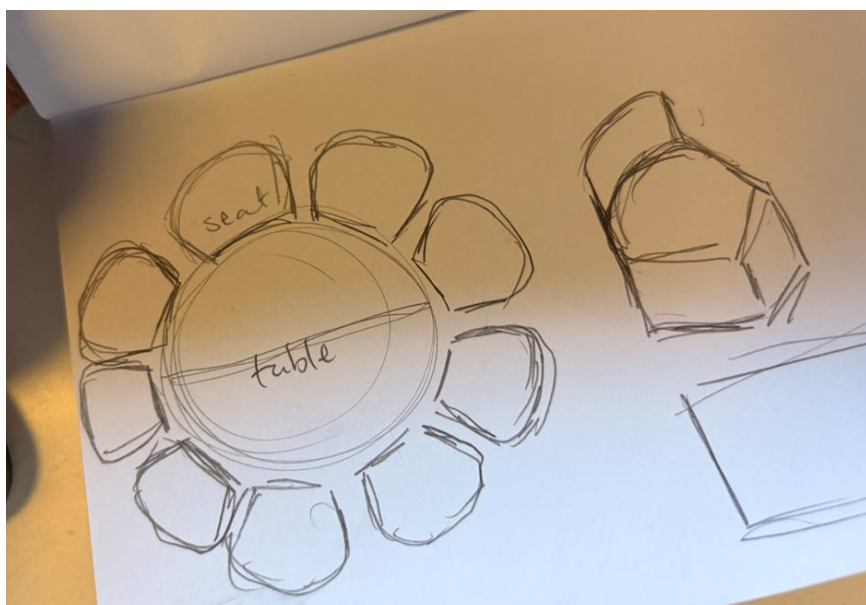
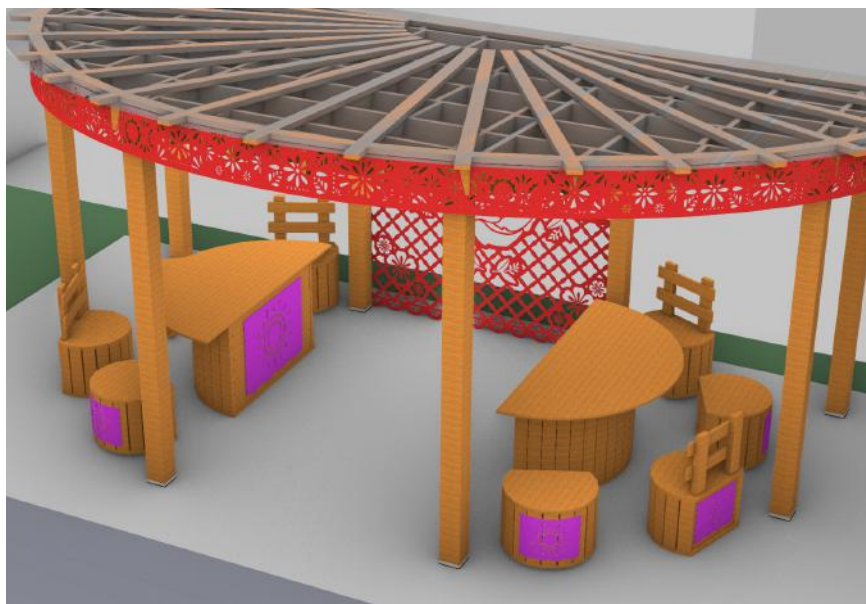




ENTRANCE ARBOR



SEATING



PROJECT SHIRT

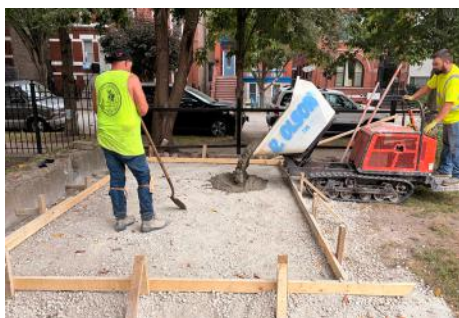




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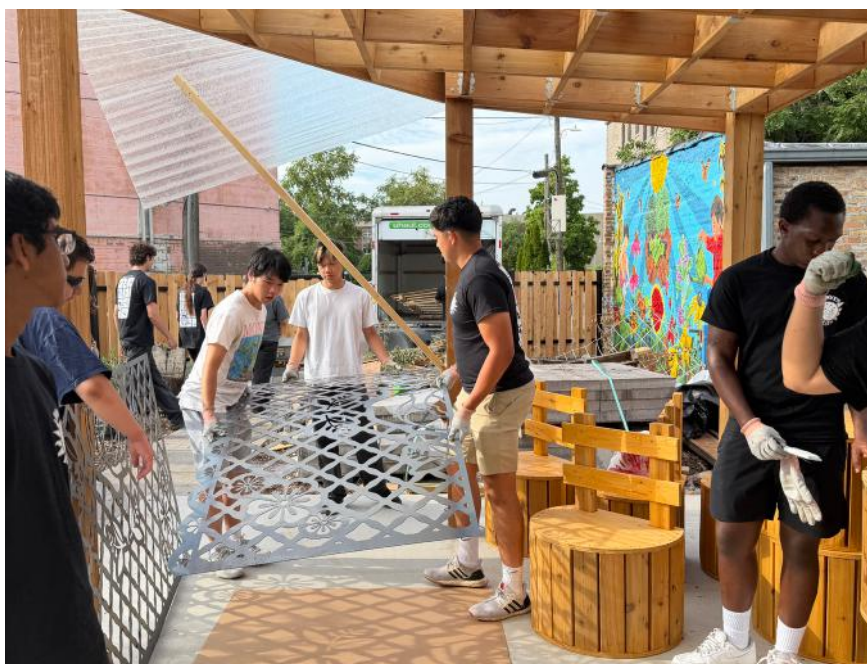
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CONSTRUCTION PARTNERS





STUDENT BUILD





GRAND C

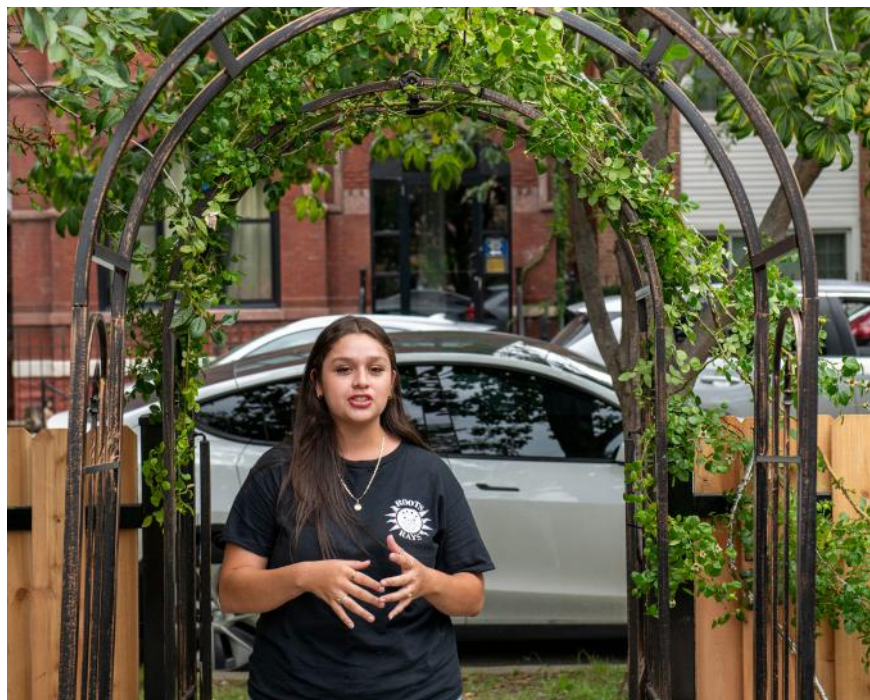
OPENING

































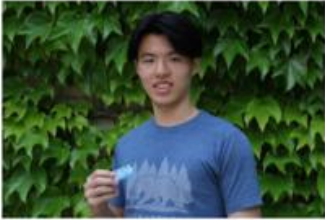




PEO

OPLE

DESIGN BUILD GROUP





STAKEHOLDERS

ACE MENTOR CHICAGO

- Mary Jo M
- Carol M
- Siobhan S
- April W
- Matt S

HUMAN SCALE

- Walmer S
- Cody L
- Uriel G
- Danna V
- Katelyn T

NEIGHBORSPLACE

- Ben H
- Robin C
- Yari G

LA HUERTA ROOTS & RAYS

- Sophia
- Pei-Yu H
- Chris
- Patricia D
- Leonard D
- Ren D

STUDENTS

- Abigail L
- America F
- Brianna H
- Daniel A
- Dilipan E
- Emily F
- Emma G
- Fiona L
- Jacquelyn
- Jakob H
- Jenna G
- Julian M
- Justin M
- Keion Y
- Logan B
- Matthew Z
- Mauricio M
- Mia W
- Nathan P
- Omar M
- Parker K
- Ricardo M
- Samantha G
- Sarai B
- Tobi O
- Valentina D

CONSTRUCTION SUPPORT

- Andres L - Building Brown Workshop
- Bill - Skender
- Brent A - Ascher Bros
- Brian B - Skender
- Chris R - Clune
- Dan N - Clune
- Dan T - R Olson
- Daniel W - Lurvey
- Darryl P - Walsh
- Dave C - Human Scale
- Dennis - Turner
- Edgar - L&N Fencing Inc
- Emily K - Walsh
- James W - Brightview
- Jared - Clune
- Jennifer H - Lurvey
- Joe C - Cushing
- Karrie K - Gilbane
- Laurel C. - Chicago Rolled Metal
- Mario - Christy Webber
- Mario M - Mena Arte
- Mike M - Turner

- Nate V - Turner
- Nicole O - Turner
- Patrick K - Power
- Pete H - R Olson
- Stephanie C - W.E.O
- Tim S - Turner

VOLUNTEERS

- Carolyn I
- Christine M
- Eliot E
- Francisco L
- Hsu A
- Joseph Sentrock
- Joseph A
- Maya F
- Mike M
- Nate T
- Nick J
- Pat M
- Shreya S

PHOTOGRAPHY

- Francisco Lopez de Arenosa © SOM
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- Eliot England

DONORS







HUMAN SCALE

www.humanscale.org