

The Spirit Garden

CANADIAN INSTITUTE OF PLANNERS

2012 Awards for Planning Excellence - *Aboriginal Community Planning & Development Category*

March 15, 2012

Canadian Institute of Planners, 2012 Awards
141 Laurier Avenue West, Suite 1112
Ottawa ON
K1P 5J3

March 15, 2012

RE: CIP 2012 AWARDS FOR PLANNING EXCELLENCE
Application Category - Aboriginal Community Planning and Development

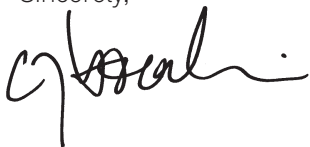
On behalf of Brook McIlroy and Ryan Gorrie (Intern Architect), I am pleased to provide our submission for the CIP 2012 Awards for Planning Excellence, within the 'Aboriginal Community Planning and Development' category.

Our submission details our project - the Spirit Garden on Thunder Bay's Waterfront - which provides a holistic response to the CIP evaluation criteria and category expectations. This submission represents a significant component of a larger master plan effort for the revitalization of Thunder Bay's waterfront - a new mixed-use urban district and waterfront destination that reconnects the downtown to the Lake Superior shoreline and its cultural, historic and natural heritage.

This letter confirms that we have reviewed the entry conditions for the 2012 Awards for Planning Excellence program, and our submission satisfies all requirements.

We look forward to discussing any aspect of our submission with you at your convenience. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me personally at (416) 504 - 5007 x.227 or cbrook@brookmcilroy.com

Sincerely,



Calvin Brook, Principal
MCIP, RPP, MRAIC, OAA, LEEP AP

Title of entry: Spirit Garden, Thunder Bay Waterfront

Category (CHOOSE ONE): Aboriginal Community Planning and Development

**Entry prepared by
or under the direction of:** Calvin Brook

**Company, organization or
community group submitting:** Brook McIlroy, Ryan Gorrie, City of Thunder Bay

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I certify that the entry was prepared by me, or alternatively, was prepared under my direction; and, during the period of January 1st, 2010 and December 31st, 2011 the entry was: (please choose one of the following)

- adopted by by-law or resolution or by other formal mechanism; or
- built or implemented; or
- published by a recognized publisher or planning agency; or
- accepted by a client or community group.

I acknowledge that the submitted materials shall become the property of the Canadian Institute of Planners, and that the submission or summaries of the submission may be made available by CIP to members or other interested parties.

Signature: 

MARCH 14, 2012

Date: _____

(Must be a Fellow, Full or Provisional Member in good standing of the Institute)

Additional Information:

If selected as a finalist you will be required to submit additional material and/or information as follows:

- 200 word summary of the project for the CIP website and awards brochure
- Electronic high resolution (300 dpi) versions of logos from all organizations involved in the project
- Video, PowerPoint or Flash Presentation on CD AND/OR
- Photos depicting the project in various stages

Please supply the name(s) and contact information for these materials.

Materials	Contact Name	Telephone Number	E-mail Address
Photos of the project	Stacy Anderson	416 504 5997 x.235	sanderson@brookmcilroy.com
Video, PowerPoint or Flash Presentations	""	""	""
Summary text for the brochure, etc.	""	""	""
Electronic versions of all logos from the project (300 dpi)	""	""	""

Certificates

Winners receive an award and unframed certificate with the name of the organization that submitted the project. Should there be additional organizations or individuals that should be acknowledged on the award and certificate, please list them below.

Brook McIlroy

Ryan Gorrie

City of Thunder Bay

**Your submission must be received in the CIP office by:
Thursday, March 15, 2012 at 4:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time**

Submissions will not be accepted after the deadline.

You will not be notified of receipt of your submission, so please use a method of shipping that will allow you to track your parcel.

Fax or e-mail submissions will not be accepted.

Canadian Institute of Planners - 2012 Awards
141 Laurier Avenue West, Suite 1112
Ottawa, ON K1P 5J3 Canada

For more information, see the CIP website at www.cip-icu.ca
Telephone (613) 237-PLAN (7526) • 1-800-207-2138
communications@cip-icu.ca

the Spirit Garden

The Spirit Garden is a unique landscape feature – ‘a headland’ - designed as a truly collaborative effort between the BrookMcIlroy design team, local Aboriginal communities, wetland ecologists and the Department of Fisheries.

The Spirit Garden’s design elements were inspired by the ecology of the northern shoreline site and celebrate the historical and contemporary artistic and cultural contributions of the local Aboriginal communities. The 4.4-acre (1.8 hectares) area is a significant component of Thunder Bay’s recently completed downtown waterfront revitalization.

Thunder Bay has a significant Aboriginal population, yet the presence of this founding culture (which has inhabited the Lake Superior shoreline for over 9,000 years) is virtually invisible in the fabric of the cityscape.

The Spirit Garden recognizes this unique attribute of the Thunder Bay community and gives expression to the deep cultural and historic roots that link Aboriginal peoples to the Lake Superior shoreline.

The concept of the Spirit Garden and its relationship to a larger revitalized public park setting, evolved from an integrated consultation approach that drew together community representatives from Fort William First Nation, communities of the Robinson Superior Treaty and Red Sky Métis.



The design of the Spirit Garden features distinct environments, ecological systems and sustainable designs that support both active and passive human use in a public park setting. The Garden includes: a *Living Shoreline*, the *Gathering Circle*, *Fire Circle*, *Medicine Garden*, and a significant public art component.

The *Living Shoreline* breathes life into a built environment - transforming the Garden into the kind of ecologically rich wetland typical to the Thunder Bay Region. What were once sterile mineral soils have been replaced with four ecological zones to provide different habitats based on water depth to sustain fish and a diversity of shoreline plant and aquatic species. There is also a new adjacent path through this area as well as an intimate lookout space and educational signage.

The *Gathering Circle* is an open-air bentwood pavilion, and is the main structure within the Spirit Garden. Its design reflects an adaptation of a traditional Aboriginal bentwood building technique, using modest means of construction and sustainable building practice. This eighty-foot diameter structure is an 'inclusive circle', providing space for ceremonies, music, storytelling and gatherings. The design was a collaboration between Brook McIlroy and a young Aboriginal designer/artist, Ryan Gorrie from Thunder Bay.

The *Fire Circle* is a publicly accessible gathering space, providing breathtaking views of the Sleeping Giant – a renowned natural landform on Lake Superior's horizon. The fire pit is surrounded with rock and granite for seating and rest.

The *Medicine Garden* was developed in collaboration with the horticultural program of the Thunder Bay Correctional Institute. Medicinal herbs will be grown specifically on-site by the inmates in a greenhouse, which will then be planted and maintained as a community garden.

As a whole, the Spirit Garden represents the varied techniques, approaches, and design considerations of a contemporary landscape architectural practice; one that is motivated equally by concerns of ecological restoration, cultural sensitivity and the aesthetics of an urban public space. The Spirit Garden gives expression to a rich culture, and strives to serve as a common ground – a place of meditation, mediation and celebration – a gathering together of all cultures. The Garden reflects Aboriginal concepts of the inclusive circle, peaceful co-existence and respect for the natural world.



A Headland within Thunder Bay's Waterfront Revitalization Master Plan

The Spirit Garden is a component of a larger downtown urban design project - Prince Arthur's Landing. The following describes the larger context within which the Spirit Garden is located.

Thunder Bay is a mid-size city of approximately 110,000, which has lost much of its original resource-based economic base. In recent years, it has had significant success in re-inventing itself through diversification and an enhanced role as a regional centre of northwestern Ontario.

In 2006, Brook McIlroy was commissioned by the City to undertake a comprehensive master plan to transform its downtown waterfront into a mixed-use urban district and waterfront park overlooking one of Canada's most iconic landscapes on the north shore of Lake Superior – the Sleeping Giant.

The Master Plan brought together a myriad of both public and private uses with the objective of creating a year-round destination that would reconnect the downtown to its origins as a shoreline settlement dating back 9,000 years, while creating an exciting place for residents and visitors to enjoy.

The Plan is unique in that it is an unapologetically urban plan - creating a pedestrian scaled fabric of buildings framing public plazas, and activities such as a skateboard plaza, skating rink and water features that invite children to play. The Plan was

also controversial as it occupied what was formerly parkland and a marina, though it actually expands the parkland and marina, while the balance of the site extends the fabric of downtown Thunder Bay to the water's edge.

The Master Plan was adopted in 2009 by Thunder Bay City Council and received over \$30 million from ISF (Infrastructure Stimulus Fund) – one of the largest in Canada and second largest in Ontario. Brook McIlroy were successful in being appointed as continued lead consultants, providing all architectural and landscape architecture services.

The City was also able to attract a private sector partner to build two 7-storey residential buildings and a 150-room Hotel. For a \$22 million investment, the City leveraged a \$130 million revitalization project. The public sector components of the project were completed in October 2011 and private sector construction has just commenced. Since opening on December 16th 2011, the project has exceeded all projections for daily attendance bringing people to the waterfront and the downtown.

The Spirit Garden is a significant destination and space within the revitalized waterfront park; knitting Thunder Bay's rich heritage and cultural fabric together with the future of the City's renewed connection with the shores of Lake Superior.

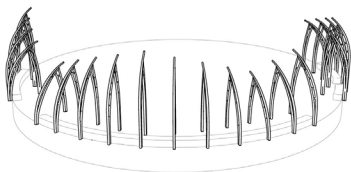


(above) Prince Arthur's Landing master plan, with location of Spirit Garden indicated.

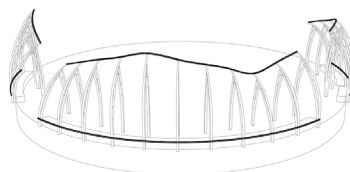
An Inclusive Process

The concept and design for both the Spirit Garden and the Gathering Circle evolved from a series of four workshops involving representatives from Fort William First Nation, Robinson Superior Treaty Communities and the Red Sky Métis. Through these sessions, the design team identified a young artist/architect intern (Ryan Gorrie) originally from Thunder Bay who was able to collaborate with the architecture/landscape team and had a central role in the design of the Spirit Garden's elements.

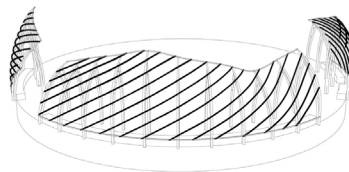
The Gathering Circle is the main structure within the Spirit Garden, and gives expression to the deep cultural and historic roots that link Aboriginal peoples to the Lake Superior shoreline. The Gathering Circle reflects Aboriginal concepts of the inclusive circle, peaceful co-existence and respect for the natural world created through adaptations of traditional building methods.



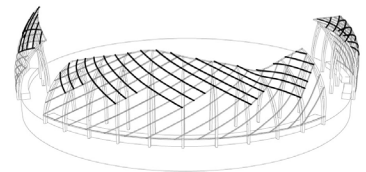
erect bent wood trusses



assemble top & bottom rails



assemble lower substructure



assemble upper substructure



(above) Schematic design and construction drawings of the Gathering Circle's construction process, through traditional building techniques.

(bottom left) Traditional Aboriginal building methods. **(bottom right)** Aboriginal artwork panels adorn the Gathering Circle's concrete base and retaining wall - by artist, Randy Thomas.

Textured Programming and Diverse Destinations

The Spirit Garden is a component of a larger downtown urban design project - Prince Arthur's Landing – a master plan that transforms Thunder Bay's downtown waterfront into an urban, mixed-use destination. Supporting the overall vision of this Plan, the Spirit Garden includes a series of unique environments and activity areas for enjoyment and use year-round. Each key environment is described below in further detail.

The **Living Shoreline** breathes life into a built environment. The original site - a constructed headland planted with trees and lawn - has been transformed into the kind of ecologically rich wetland typical to the Thunder Bay Region. Bioengineering techniques were used to rehabilitate a derelict, man-made beach into a fish habitat and naturalized shoreline. What were once sterile mineral soils have been replaced with four ecological zones providing a diversity of habitats based on water depth to sustain fish and a diversity of shoreline plant and aquatic species. The Living Shoreline has reshaped the land within the Spirit

Garden. Boulders and logs have been added, along with other natural minerals and plants suitable to this inner harbour site, including Pussy Willow, Blue Flag Iris, Feather Reed Grass and Broadleaf Cattail. There is a new adjacent path through this area as well as an intimate lookout space and educational signage.

The **Fire Circle** is a publicly accessible gathering space, providing breathtaking views of the Sleeping Giant – a renowned natural landform on Lake Superior's horizon. The fire pit is surrounded with rock and granite for seating or rest. The fire can also be seen from a higher vantage point upon a nearby hillside.

The **Medicine Garden** was developed in collaboration with the horticultural program of the Thunder Bay Correctional Institute. Sweetgrass, Ceremonial Tobacco, Sage, Chamomile and other medicinal herbs will be grown specifically for the site by the inmates in the greenhouse, which will then be planted and maintained as a community garden.



(above left) Site Plan of the Spirit Garden, identifying uses, destination and activity areas. (above right) A view onto the Fire (Honouring) Circle and overlooking the Sleeping Giant.



The **Gathering Circle** is an open-air bentwood pavilion, and is the main structure within the Spirit Garden. Its design reflects an adaptation of a traditional Aboriginal bentwood building technique, using modest means of construction and sustainable building practice. This eighty-foot diameter structure is an 'inclusive circle', providing space for ceremonies, music, story-telling, theatre and gatherings. Young spruce trees were harvested in the spring by a local Aboriginal craftsman and were bent and lashed to create twenty arched, truss-like column supports. The trusses were then mounted along the circumference of the circular platform and layered with a pattern of curved cedar strips to create a semi-enclosed shroud. The pattern echoes imagery associated with Anishinabe woodland art. The design was created as a collaboration between Brook McIlroy and a young Aboriginal designer/artist, Ryan Gorrie from Thunder Bay. The outer wall of the drum is lined with ten weathering steel laser-cut panels designed by local Aboriginal artist Randy Thomas.

The Gathering Circle tucks into the south hillside providing a natural amphitheater configuration. Large ash tree logs drape across the hillside – recycled from a nearby park. The eighty-foot diameter Gathering Circle provides the City's residents and visitors with an event space for ceremonies, blessings, music, story telling, theatre and gatherings. A main pedestrian path connects with the Circle's archway entrance at the cardinal east and west points inviting visitors in, while a circular footpath circulates between the twenty-bentwood arches. The shroud is a 'light-catcher' – a patterned surface of overlapping, divergent planes that enables views through its wooden frame onto the adjacent waterfront as well as the City's downtown. By night, a network of soft lighting highlights the curving, luminous shell form that can be seen from many vantage points throughout the City. The bentwood shroud transforms depending on the season and time of day - reflective of the profound beauty and spiritual resonance of Lake Superior's north shore.



(above) 'Nana-bijou': The Sleeping Giant. (bottom) Overlooking downtown Thunder Bay at dusk, with recycled log seating in the foreground.

Respecting and Materializing Aboriginal Tradition

Similar to many Canadian communities, Thunder Bay has a significant Aboriginal population that is growing. While an important part of the community's past and future, there is no tangible expression of Aboriginal culture within the City. No public places, objects or installations exist which one could clearly point to as a place that signified the important and proud culture of the Anishinabe communities who have inhabited this shoreline for 9,000 years.

A key objective of the Spirit Garden project was therefore to provide a prominent space that would draw people to events that would celebrate all of the City's cultures, as well as provide a source of identity and pride for Thunder Bay's aboriginal citizens.

The Spirit Garden – and its dramatic bentwood structural form, the Gathering Circle - occupies a highly visible location on Thunder Bay's downtown waterfront overlooking Lake Superior and the Sleeping Giant landform. It serves as a central landmark in the downtown that grounds residents and visitors in a fuller understanding of the City's deep origins – spanning 9,000 years – while giving expression to its Aboriginal founding culture. Just as importantly, it provides a gateway to the vast beauty of Lake Superior - the world's largest freshwater sea.

The design of the Spirit Garden is holistic in its role as the prominent headland on Thunder Bay's waterfront – it includes architectural and landscape architectural environments that enliven local heritage and Aboriginal tradition. The Garden includes: a Living Shoreline, the Gathering Circle, Fire Circle, Medicine Garden, and a significant public art component.



(above) View of the Gathering Circle with aboriginal artwork outlining its base as laser-cut steel panels; (middle) The Living Shoreline within the Spirit Garden provides a rich wetland on the waterfront (bottom) The Healing Garden, rendering.

The Spirit Garden in 2012

The Thunder Bay waterfront officially opened to the public on December 16, 2011 and has since received record attendance and use of the waterfront. The Spirit Garden is being actively used as a gathering space for story telling, ceremonies, concerts and contemplation.

Recently, the Faculty of Education at Lakehead University made arrangements to use the Gathering Circle as an outdoor classroom to teach students Canadian history in a manner that truly represents the important role of Aboriginal societies in the making of the nation. It is also becoming a central destination for tourists who travel from Europe and internationally who seek to learn of aboriginal society in Canada.



... on being Canadian

We are not a civilization of British, French or European inspiration – we never have been. We are a people of Aboriginal inspiration organized around a concept of peace, fairness and good government.

We.....praise ourselves for the great mix of cultures with which we so comfortably live. On the single issue of diversity, we seem unable to notice the obvious – that it is based on the idea of an inclusive circle. That expands and gradually adapts as new people join in.

This is not a Western or European concept. It comes straight from Aboriginal culture.

- John Raulston Saul

(above) Signage located throughout the Spirit Garden educates and inspires, describing the site's history as well as recent developments.

(below) The Gathering Circle's amphitheatre configuration provides a unique setting for 'outdoor education', classroom settings, presentations and storytelling.

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