



# Bulacan Capitol Plaza

*Connecting People and Places while Celebrating Cultural Identity*

*Designed by Madonna P. Danao with Ross Aaron Pabustan and Danilo Flores*

*Text by Madonna P. Danao*

*The Bulacan Capitol Plaza is a civic park located immediately in front of the Bulacan Provincial Capitol building. It serves as both a civic park and a node connecting different spaces and buildings within the Capitol Compound, as well as a pedestrian corridor connected to nearby streets and public transportation points. Before revitalization, the garden park showed signs of deterioration on some of its parts, limited accessibility, and safety concerns.*

*The Capitol Plaza revitalization project focuses on addressing and optimizing movements and efficient space use within the park about its purpose as a civic park and pedestrian node, as well as creating bigger and more relaxing green spaces that incorporate carefully selected native trees and integrate sub-grade rain garden systems. Every space within the park was carefully designed for optimum universal accessibility, and safety, which everyone can enjoy.*

*Every shape, pattern, and element inside the park represents the rich culture and history of the province, such as the arrangement of flags and historical cannons, the fountain, pavement design, and the “Singkaban” pattern ornament at the base of the monuments of our two national heroes, namely Gen. Gregorio Del Pilar and Marcelo H. Del Pilar is situated in the park.*

Bulacan is a province rich in historical heritage, the birthplace of the First Constitutional Democracy in Asia in 1899 at the historic Barasoain Church in Malolos (ARI-NUS, 2008). It also takes pride in its noble heroes, such as Marcelo H. del Pilar, “The Great Propagandist” and Gen. Gregorio Del Pilar, “The Youngest General and Hero of Tirad Pass.” To honor these heroes, then Gov. Alejo Santos, began the beautification of the provincial grounds (Bulacan.gov). He laid out the plan for the Bulacan Military Area (BMA) Park on July 4, 1952, fronting the Provincial Capitol building to commemorate the unsung heroes of World War II. It featured Gen. Gregorio del Pilar’s monument and the BMA flagpoles. It was then called Bulacan Military Area Memorial



## **Madonna P. Danao**

*Madonna P. Danao is a professor in undergraduate and graduate landscape architecture courses under the Environmental Landscape Studio Laboratory at the UP College of Architecture. Have handled several private landscape design development projects and acted as a consultant for government-funded projects. A graduate of BLA and MTLA at UP College of Architecture, currently pursuing her doctoral degree in Environmental Science at UP, Los Baños specializing in protected area planning, development, and management.*





Figure 1. The Capitol building of the Province of Bulacan in the town of Malolos, erected in 1930. Archival photo from Meralco Magazine, April 1958. Courtesy of the Tantoco Family Library and Archives. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/28098727@N00/7041932061/in/photostream/>

Figure 2. Renamed as Gen. Gregorio del Pilar Park in 1991 (<https://wanderingcaloy.blogspot.com/2011/09/malolos-city-short-visit-to-bulacan.html>)

Figure 3. Singkaban Festival (<https://crazycolorfulturtle.wordpress.com/2015/09/28/singkaban-festival-2015/indakan-sa-kalye-singkaban-festival-2015-bulacan/> (opposite page)



Park. It was later renamed Gen. Gregorio del Pilar Park under Provincial Board Resolution 379, way back in 1991. An additional monument, Marcelo H. del Pilar, has been added.

The plaza serves as both a civic park and a node connecting different spaces and buildings within the Capitol Compound, as well as a pedestrian corridor connected to nearby streets and public transportation points. It has been widely used for several purposes. It is also decorated during the “Singkaban” (an intricate bamboo arch used as a traditional Filipino decoration) Festival in the celebration of Bulacan’s culture and history. Before revitalization, the garden park showed signs of deterioration on some of its parts, limited accessibility, and safety concerns.





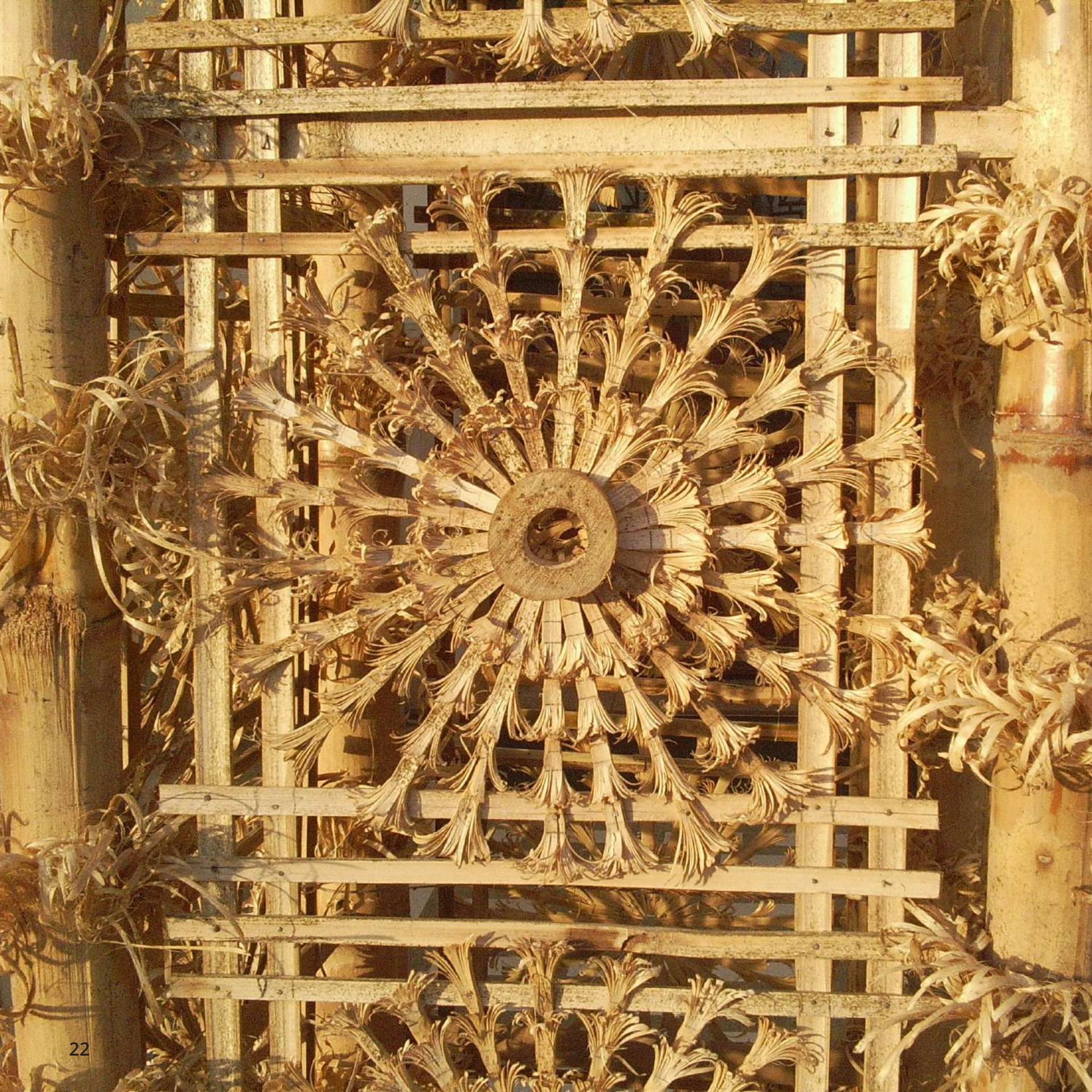






Figure 4. Detail of the singkaban (opposite page) Figure 5. Aerial view of the project (above).



In 2017, the government of Bulacan decided to revitalize the plaza while renovating the Capitol building. Major developments occurred in nearby areas, such as the construction of elevated railways, road improvement, and widening in front of the Capitol grounds, prompting them to redevelop the old plaza. Since the plaza does not serve its purpose as a node and is less attractive, unmaintained landscape elements exhibit degradation and exclusivity in terms of accessibility and safety issues.

The revitalization project of the Capitol Plaza will focus on urban heritage, planning, and design to revitalize property, spatial trees, and landscapes for future development. Through the strategic reuse of heritage, the project will capitalize on the inherent qualities of heritage parks to make the city more attractive and stimulate economic growth. According to Pradana and Setyastama (2020), heritage in the context of tourism is not static or permanent but rather a dynamic and evolving representation of the past. Therefore, the design should incorporate elements that allow for the interpretation and presentation of different historical periods and narratives. Additionally, the design should prioritize the conservation of the park's ecological integrity while accommodating ongoing human presence. To achieve this, parks should provide opportunities for various stories of human presence and ecological importance to be brought into the present.

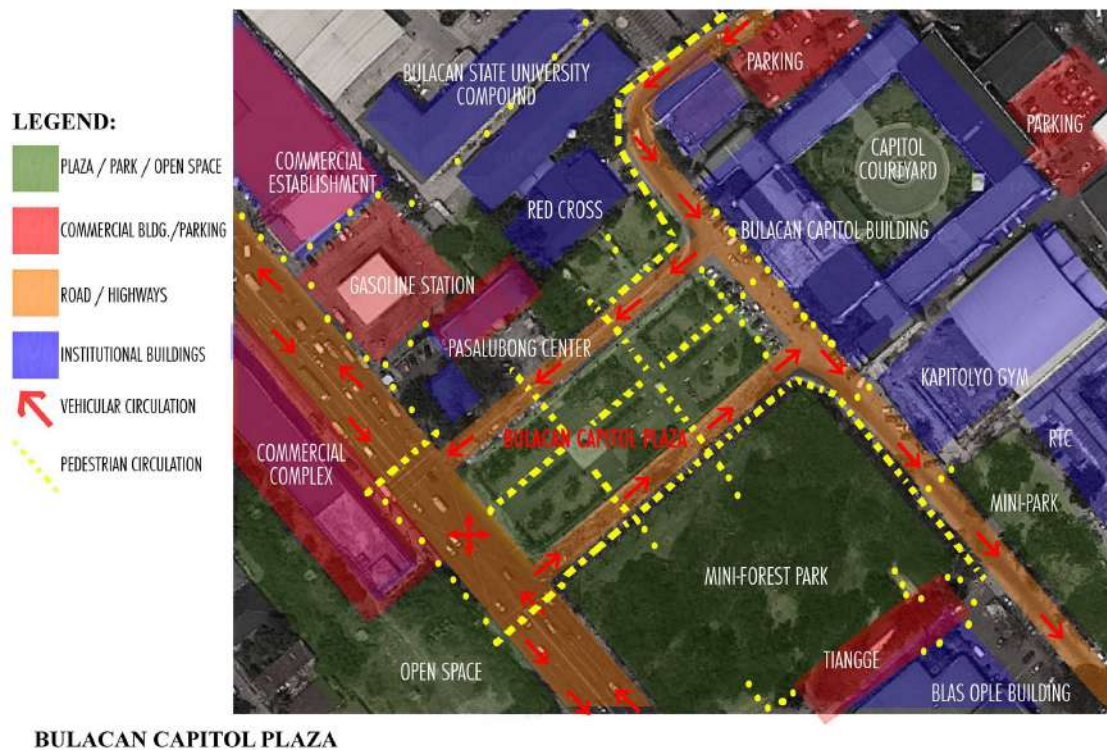


Figure 6. Site Analysis





Figure 7. Survey of existing structures



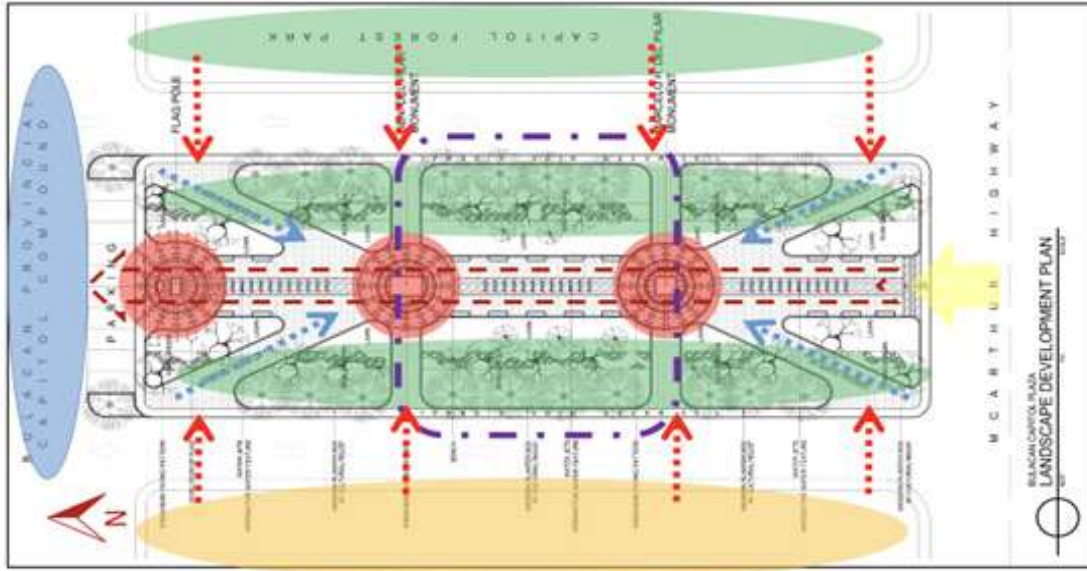


Figure 8. Schematic bubble diagram

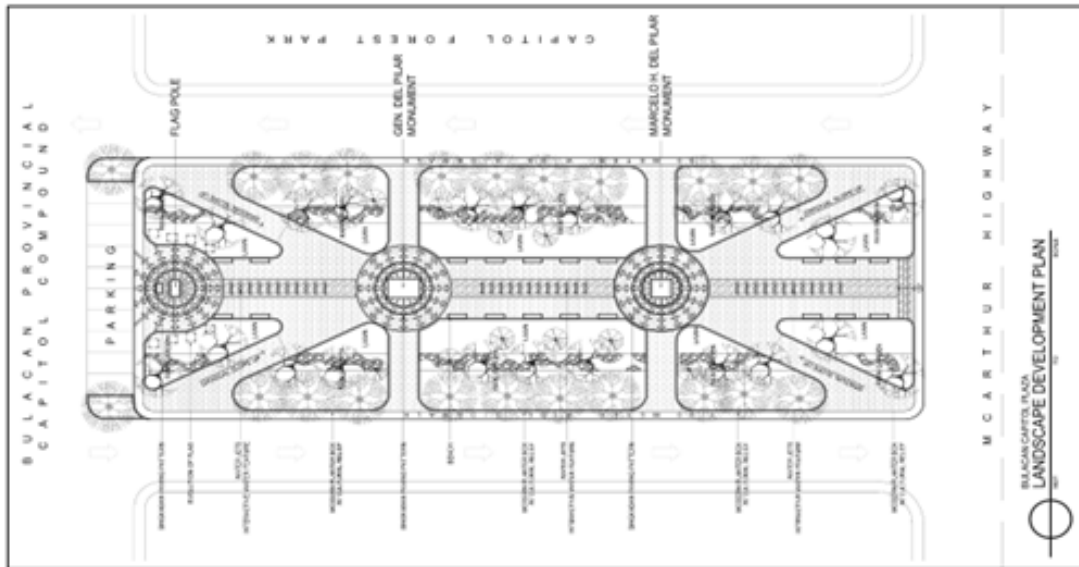
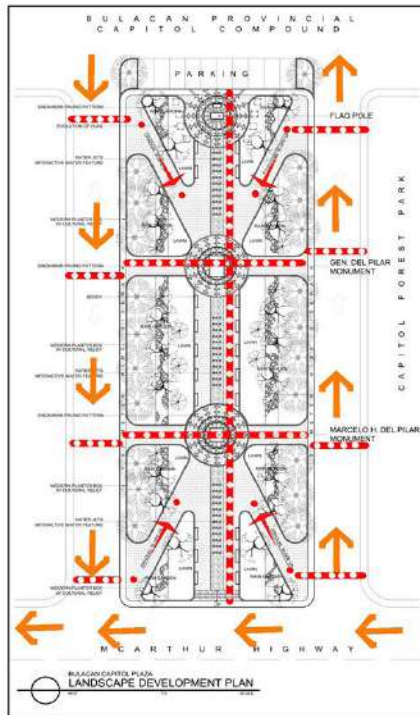


Figure 9. Initial landscape development plan

To better understand the conditions of the plaza, a site analysis was conducted. The relationships between the different spaces surrounding the plaza and their functions were considered in the schematic diagram and initial design. Planning studies have been conducted on vehicular connectivity, environmental connectivity, and site legibility. Pedestrian and vehicular connectivity is very well integrated into the design. This integration creates a park that delineates the existing line of movement of pedestrian traffic, thus promoting a PWD-friendly park. The park also promotes nature as part of its identity. It attracts other living organisms such as birds by introducing native plants and tree species as part of the vegetative component. A rain garden system was integrated into the design to absorb rainwater runoff from the elevated

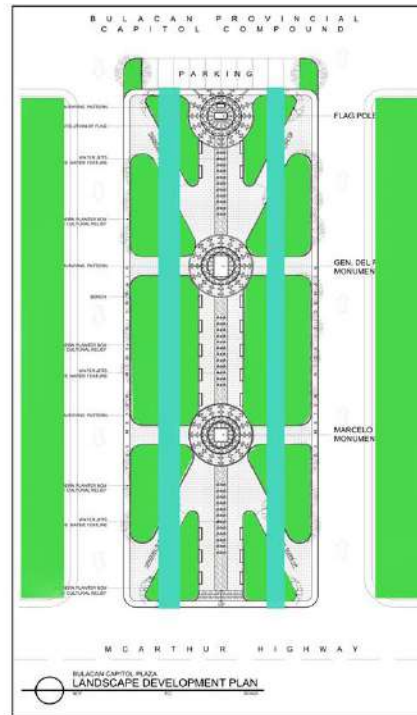




#### VEHICULAR & PEDESTRIAN CONNECTIVITY:

The pedestrian & vehicular connectivity are very well integrated in the design.

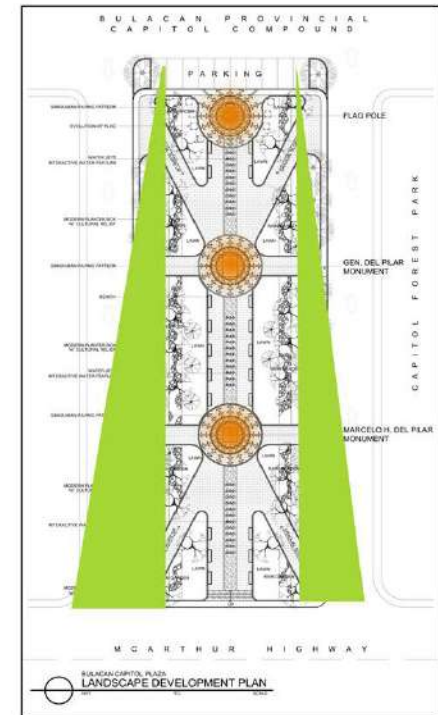
These integration creates a park that clearly delineates the existing line of movement of pedestrian traffic, which also promotes PWD friendly park.



#### ENVIRONMENTAL CONNECTIVITY:

The park promotes nature as part of its identity. Where it attracts other living organisms like birds.

The integration of rain garden system that absorbs rainwater run-off, which also reduces surface run-off going to storm drains in this plaza.



#### SITE LEGIBILITY:

The site legibility in terms of cultural and historical aspects can be created thru the use of materials and with the design integration of singkaban as a design inspiration.

The park also stages the monument of two of the great heroes in our country, as well as framing the existing architecture of the capitol.

Figure 10. Planning Studies

landscaped areas, which also reduced surface runoff to storm drains in this plaza. The plaza was elevated in such a way that it was unaffected by new road improvements. Site legibility in terms of cultural and historical aspects can be created through the use of materials and with the integration of "Singkaban" as a design inspiration. The park also stages the monuments of two of the great heroes in our country, and the location of the BMA flags and cannons was relocated to achieve balance and frame the existing architecture of the capitol.

Due to budget constraints, a water fountain at the entrance to the plaza was suggested instead of the interactive fountains, which was the initial proposal. Water fountains add a relaxing and captivating attraction to park users, especially at night. It also helped in cooling down the temperature inside aside from the trees and plants present. The park was designed such that visitors experienced movement and flow while navigating inside the park. This was achieved



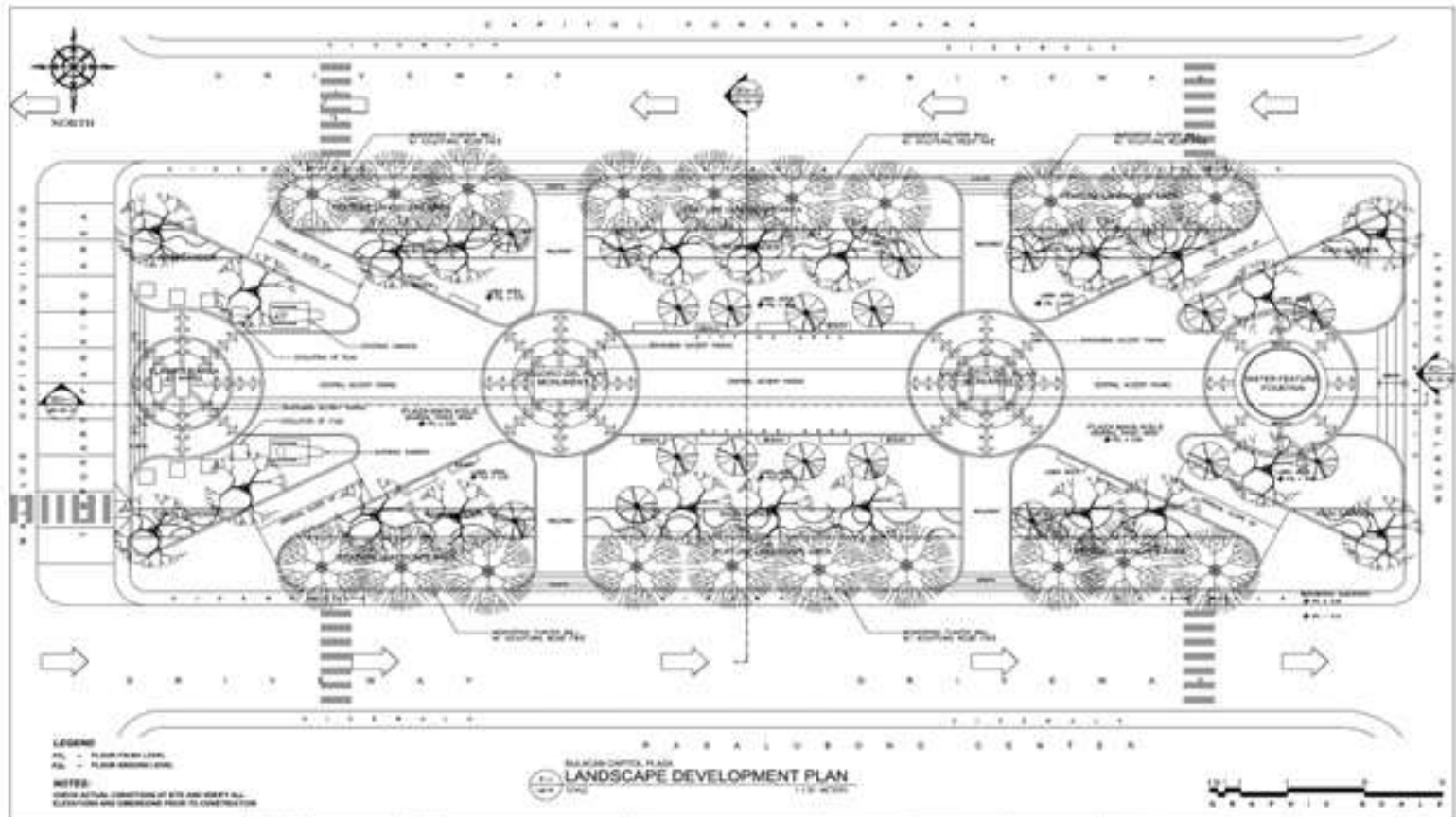


Figure 11 -12 . Landscape development plan and Site development plan



















by maximizing gradual elevation change, meandering hardscape and softscape elements, and design balance, which also drew the attention of visitors to the focal elements of the park. The integration of historical and cultural elements in the park design creates a unique and authentic experience for visitors, while also preserving and honoring the site's heritage.

The Bulacan Capitol Plaza serves as an urban hub that connects people and locations while celebrating cultural identity. It was awarded the Citation Merit in Landscape Architecture Category in the 2022 Haligi ng Dangal by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), a biennial award bestowed upon works of Architecture and the Allied Arts that exemplify and express Filipino cultural identity.

#### References

Bulacan Provincial Government. (2023, November 21). Alejo Santos – provincial government of Bulacan. Bulacan.gov.ph. <https://bulacan.gov.ph/general-info/provincial-governors/alejo-santos/>.

Pradana, C.S., & Setyastama, R. (2020). Tourism impact on conservation and utilization of Borobudur Temple after being declared as ten new Bali tourist destination in Indonesia. *Journal of Indonesian Tourism and Development Studies*,8(20). <https://doi.org/10.21776/ub.jitode.2020.008.02.03>.