

THE GRATITUDE PLACE

A Vision for a Lasting Carmel Landmark

A Place to Pause. A Place to Reflect. A Place to Give Thanks.

"Reflect upon your present blessings, of which every person has many—not on your past misfortunes, of which all have some."

— **Charles Dickens**

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A VISION FOR A LASTING CARMEL LANDMARK

Introduction

Great cities are remembered not only for their buildings, streets, and parks, but for the experiences they create and the values they quietly express.

Throughout its history, Carmel has consistently demonstrated that public spaces can do far more than serve practical purposes. They can enrich daily life, strengthen community, inspire conversation, and create lasting memories.

The Monon Trail is a perfect example.

Originally developed as a transportation corridor, it has evolved into something much greater. It has become one of Carmel's defining public spaces—a place where people of every age and background gather to walk, run, bicycle, meet friends, enjoy concerts, visit local businesses, and simply experience the beauty of the city.

Every day, thousands of people pass one another along the trail.

Neighbors greet neighbors.

Children laugh.

Families make memories.

Couples celebrate milestones.

Visitors discover Carmel for the very first time.

It is, in many ways, the city's shared front porch.

This proposal suggests an opportunity to build upon that remarkable success—not by creating another attraction, but by creating something far more personal.

A place devoted to one of humanity's most enduring and universal experiences:

Gratitude.

Why This Idea?

Every day, countless moments occur along the Monon Trail that deserve to be remembered.

A parent watches a child learn to ride a bicycle.

A husband and wife enjoy an evening walk together.

Friends reconnect after years apart.

Someone recovering from illness celebrates being able to walk again.

A visitor discovers Carmel for the first time and realizes what a remarkable community it is.

Most of these moments quietly disappear into memory.

But what if there were a place where people could pause—if only for a minute—to acknowledge them?

Not through a ceremony.

Not through social media.

Not through recognition.

Simply through a quiet expression of gratitude.

The Gratitude Place would invite residents and visitors alike to reflect upon the blessings, relationships, experiences, and opportunities that enrich their lives.

It would not tell people what to believe.

It would not promote a cause.

It would simply offer a welcoming place where gratitude becomes part of the experience of visiting Carmel.

The Vision

Imagine walking along the Monon Trail on a beautiful autumn afternoon.

Ahead, the sounds of bicycles and conversation gradually give way to the gentle sound of moving water.

Shade trees create a quiet canopy overhead.

Native flowers and ornamental grasses soften the landscape.

A limestone pathway gently invites visitors into a small contemplative garden.

The space feels intentionally different.

Not isolated from the trail—but peacefully connected to it.

Beautiful Indiana limestone benches encourage visitors to sit for a few moments.

Some may simply rest.

Others may quietly reflect.

Parents may watch their children explore the garden.

Friends may continue conversations that began on their walk.

Visitors may simply enjoy the calming presence of flowing water.

At the heart of the space stands an elegant architectural feature crafted from Indiana limestone and complementary materials.

It is neither imposing nor elaborate.

Its purpose is simple.

Carved into the stone are seven words.

What are you grateful for today?

Nearby, weatherproof cards and pencils invite visitors to write a brief anonymous thought.

Some may write only a sentence.

Others perhaps only a few words.

"Thank you for another beautiful morning."

"Today I walked with my granddaughter."

"I'm grateful for my health."

"Thank you for bringing our family together."

"I'm thankful to call Carmel home."

"Today I found peace."

The cards are folded and quietly placed into discreet openings within the structure.

No names.

No recognition.

No expectations.

Every expression of gratitude carries equal value.

Some visitors may participate.

Others may simply sit and reflect.

Both experiences fulfill the purpose of The Gratitude Place.

More Than a Wall

Although the original inspiration envisioned a Gratitude Wall, the concept has grown into something much more meaningful.

The Gratitude Place is not a monument.

It is not merely public art.

It is not simply another destination along the Monon.

It is an experience.

Its purpose is to create a setting where people naturally slow down, breathe deeply, reflect, and reconnect with the things that matter most.

Every element of the design should contribute to that experience.

The gentle sound of moving water provides a calming backdrop while masking the activity of the surrounding trail.

Thoughtfully placed benches encourage visitors to linger rather than simply pass through.

Native landscaping changes with the seasons, giving visitors a slightly different experience throughout the year.

Soft architectural lighting extends the beauty of the space into the evening while preserving its peaceful character.

Accessibility should be incorporated from the beginning so that every visitor—regardless of age or physical ability—can fully experience the space.

Whether someone remains for two minutes or twenty, The Gratitude Place offers something increasingly rare in modern life:

Permission to pause.

Why Gratitude?

Communities have long built monuments honoring military service, historical events, civic leaders, artistic achievement, and important moments in history.

These places preserve our collective memory.

The Gratitude Place serves a different purpose.

Rather than looking backward, it invites us to become more aware of the present.

Over the past several decades, researchers have consistently found that practicing gratitude is associated with improved emotional well-being, stronger relationships, greater resilience, lower stress, increased optimism, and a deeper sense of connection with others.

The Gratitude Place is not intended to teach those lessons.

Instead, it quietly creates an environment in which they occur naturally.

In a world where so much of daily life competes for our attention, gratitude gently redirects our focus toward what is already good.

Sometimes the most meaningful public spaces are not those that tell us what to think.

They are the ones that simply provide an opportunity to reflect.

Perhaps that is the greatest contribution The Gratitude Place can make.

Not by changing the city.

But by changing, if only for a few moments, the experience of those who walk through it.

Inspiration: Great Places Begin with Great Ideas

Many of the world's most memorable public spaces are not remarkable because of their size.

They are remarkable because of how they make people feel.

Some become places of celebration.

Others become places of remembrance.

Some become places where families gather year after year without ever asking why. They simply become part of the life of a community.

The Gratitude Place is envisioned as one of those places.

Its success would not depend upon its size or cost.

Its success would depend upon creating an experience people remember.

Inspiration: Paley Park

One of the finest examples of thoughtful urban design is Paley Park in Midtown Manhattan.

Created in 1967 on what had once been an abandoned building site, the park occupies less than one-tenth of an acre. Yet for nearly six decades it has remained one of New York City's most beloved public spaces.

Its design is remarkably simple.

A dramatic wall of cascading water softens the sounds of the city.

Shade trees create a cool canopy during the warmer months.

Comfortable seating invites visitors to remain rather than simply pass through.

Carefully designed landscaping provides beauty throughout the changing seasons.

The result is far greater than the sum of its physical parts.

Visitors experience something unexpected.

A sense of calm.

A feeling of refuge.

A moment of peace in the middle of one of the busiest cities in the world.

The Gratitude Place is **not** intended to duplicate Paley Park.

Rather, it embraces the same philosophy:

That even a modestly sized space, thoughtfully designed, can profoundly enrich the lives of those who experience it.







Carmel's Opportunity

Carmel has never sought to imitate other communities.

Instead, it has consistently looked beyond what already exists to create places that become uniquely its own.

The Monon Trail...

Midtown Plaza...

The Japanese Garden...

The Palladium...

Each reflects a willingness to invest in experiences that improve everyday life.

The Gratitude Place represents another opportunity to continue that tradition.

Rather than creating another destination for recreation, it would create a destination for reflection.

Rather than asking people to do something, it would simply invite them to pause.
Few communities have intentionally created a public space dedicated to gratitude.
That alone makes this concept distinctive.

Design Possibilities

The Gratitude Place should never be viewed as a single structure.
Instead, it should be envisioned as a carefully composed environment.
Every element should contribute to one unified experience.
Possible design elements might include:

Indiana Limestone

Locally sourced limestone immediately connects the project to Indiana's architectural heritage while creating a timeless and enduring appearance.

Flowing Water

Perhaps the single most important design element.
The gentle sound of cascading water immediately transforms the emotional character of a space.
It softens surrounding noise.
It encourages conversation.
It creates a feeling of calm.

Places to Sit

Stone benches, sculptural seating, or thoughtfully placed movable chairs would encourage visitors to remain for a few moments rather than simply continue walking.
Sometimes gratitude needs only a place to sit.

Landscape Design

Native trees.
Flowering shrubs.
Seasonal color.
Ornamental grasses.

The Gratitude Place should feel different in spring than in autumn, different in summer than in winter, encouraging people to return throughout the year.

Soft Evening Lighting

Tasteful architectural lighting could extend the beauty of the space into the evening while preserving its peaceful atmosphere.

The goal is not spectacle.

The goal is welcome.

The Gratitude Wall

Whether expressed as a limestone wall, sculptural installation, artistic panels, or another creative form, the wall itself should be beautiful without becoming dominant.

Its purpose is not to impress.

Its purpose is to invite participation.

The Message

At the heart of the design might appear only seven simple words:

What are you grateful for today?

Sometimes the simplest questions invite the deepest reflection.

A Community-Created Landmark

One of the most exciting possibilities is allowing the people of Carmel to help shape The Gratitude Place from the very beginning.

Rather than commissioning a design behind closed doors, the City could sponsor a design competition inviting architects, landscape architects, artists, universities, and design students to submit their vision for this unique civic space.

Such a competition would celebrate the creativity for which Carmel has become known while encouraging broad public participation.

Finalists could be displayed at City Hall, the Carmel Clay Public Library, The Palladium, or another public venue where residents could view the concepts and offer comments before a final design is selected.

The winning design would become not merely the work of one designer.

It would become a reflection of the community itself.

This approach offers another important benefit.

Because the project begins with ideas rather than construction, the conversation naturally centers on vision, creativity, and community values before discussions of budgets, engineering, or schedules.

The result is stronger public ownership and a greater sense that The Gratitude Place belongs to everyone.

How appropriate that a place celebrating gratitude should itself be created through the collective imagination of the community it will serve.

Partnerships & Stewardship

The Gratitude Place represents more than a capital improvement project.

It is an investment in community culture.

Like many of Carmel's most meaningful civic projects, its success need not depend upon a single source of funding. Instead, it presents an opportunity for collaboration among public agencies, private philanthropy, local businesses, charitable organizations, and residents who believe in creating places that enrich the lives of others.

Potential partners might include:

- The Hamilton County Community Foundation
- Private family foundations
- Individual philanthropists
- Civic organizations
- Public art initiatives
- Future park improvement programs
- Estate gifts and legacy donations

One of the unique characteristics of The Gratitude Place is that its very purpose may inspire the generosity needed to create it.

People are often moved to support projects that leave future generations with something meaningful.

A place dedicated to gratitude offers precisely that opportunity.

Operational stewardship would naturally become part of the planning process.

Periodic collection of gratitude cards, landscape maintenance, seasonal plantings, accessibility, lighting, and long-term care should all be thoughtfully incorporated into the project's design and management.

The Gratitude Place should never become a static monument.

It should remain a living part of Carmel's daily life.

Imagine...

It is a crisp October afternoon.

Golden leaves drift quietly across the Monon Trail.

A grandfather and his eight-year-old granddaughter are enjoying one of their Saturday walks together.

As they approach the gentle sound of flowing water, she looks toward the garden ahead.

"Grandpa...what's this place?"

He smiles.

"It's called The Gratitude Place."

They walk together beneath the shade trees and find a stone bench overlooking the waterfall.

For several moments they simply sit.

People quietly come and go.

Some write notes.

Others simply enjoy the peaceful surroundings.

Nearby, the little girl notices weatherproof cards and pencils.

"What do we do?"

Her grandfather smiles again.

"You write down something you're thankful for."

She thinks for a long moment.

Carefully she writes only four words.

"I'm thankful for Grandpa."

She folds the card.

Together they walk to the limestone wall.

She slips the note into one of the narrow openings.

No applause.

No ceremony.

No one else even notices.

Yet, in that quiet moment, something important has happened.

Years later, after her grandfather is gone, she returns to The Gratitude Place with children of her own.

She remembers.

She smiles.

She writes another note.

And a tradition quietly continues.

That is how communities are strengthened—not only through buildings and infrastructure, but through shared experiences that become part of family memories.

A Legacy for Future Generations

Great cities are remembered for far more than roads, buildings, and public improvements.

They are remembered for the values they choose to express.

Carmel has earned a national reputation for thoughtful planning, exceptional public spaces, beautiful parks, public art, and a commitment to quality of life.

The Gratitude Place represents an opportunity to build upon that legacy in a way that is both timeless and uniquely human.

Unlike many civic projects, its value cannot be measured by attendance figures or economic impact alone.

Its success would be found in quieter moments.

A child learning the importance of gratitude.

A family remembering a loved one.

Friends celebrating life's milestones.

Visitors discovering not only the beauty of Carmel, but the character of the community that created such a place.

The Gratitude Place would never truly be finished.

Every day another expression of gratitude would quietly become part of its story.

Every season new visitors would add their own reflections.

Every generation would discover new reasons to return.

Because its purpose is deeply personal, The Gratitude Place should never be experienced as a sponsored venue or commercial destination. It should remain a gift to the community—offered freely to every resident and visitor without expectation, commercialization, or distinction. Should philanthropic support make the project possible, donor recognition should be handled with great restraint, preserving the quiet dignity of the experience. The place itself should never belong to a corporation, an organization, or an individual. It should belong to the people of Carmel and to every visitor who finds comfort, peace, or gratitude there.

The monument itself would not simply be constructed of Indiana limestone.

It would be built from thousands upon thousands of hopes, memories, joys, acts of kindness, and expressions of gratitude entrusted to it by those who visit.

In that sense, The Gratitude Place would never belong to the City alone.

It would belong to everyone whose life it quietly touches.

Closing Thoughts

The purpose of this proposal is not to present a finished design.

Nor is it to recommend a specific location or construction schedule.

Its purpose is much simpler.

It is to begin a conversation.

Every meaningful civic project begins with an idea.

Some ideas improve traffic.

Some improve parks.

Some improve buildings.

Occasionally, an idea has the potential to improve the human experience itself.

The Gratitude Place is offered in that spirit.

Not as another attraction.

Not as another monument.

But as a quiet invitation for residents and visitors alike to pause, reflect, and recognize the many blessings that surround them each day.

If, years from now, families walking the Monon Trail find themselves saying,

"Let's stop at The Gratitude Place before we head home,"

then Carmel will have created something extraordinary.

Not simply another destination.

But a tradition.

Not simply another public space.

But a place where gratitude becomes part of the identity of an already remarkable community.

Respectfully submitted,

Alan Potasnik

Melissa Martin

"Great cities are remembered not only for what they build, but for what they inspire."