



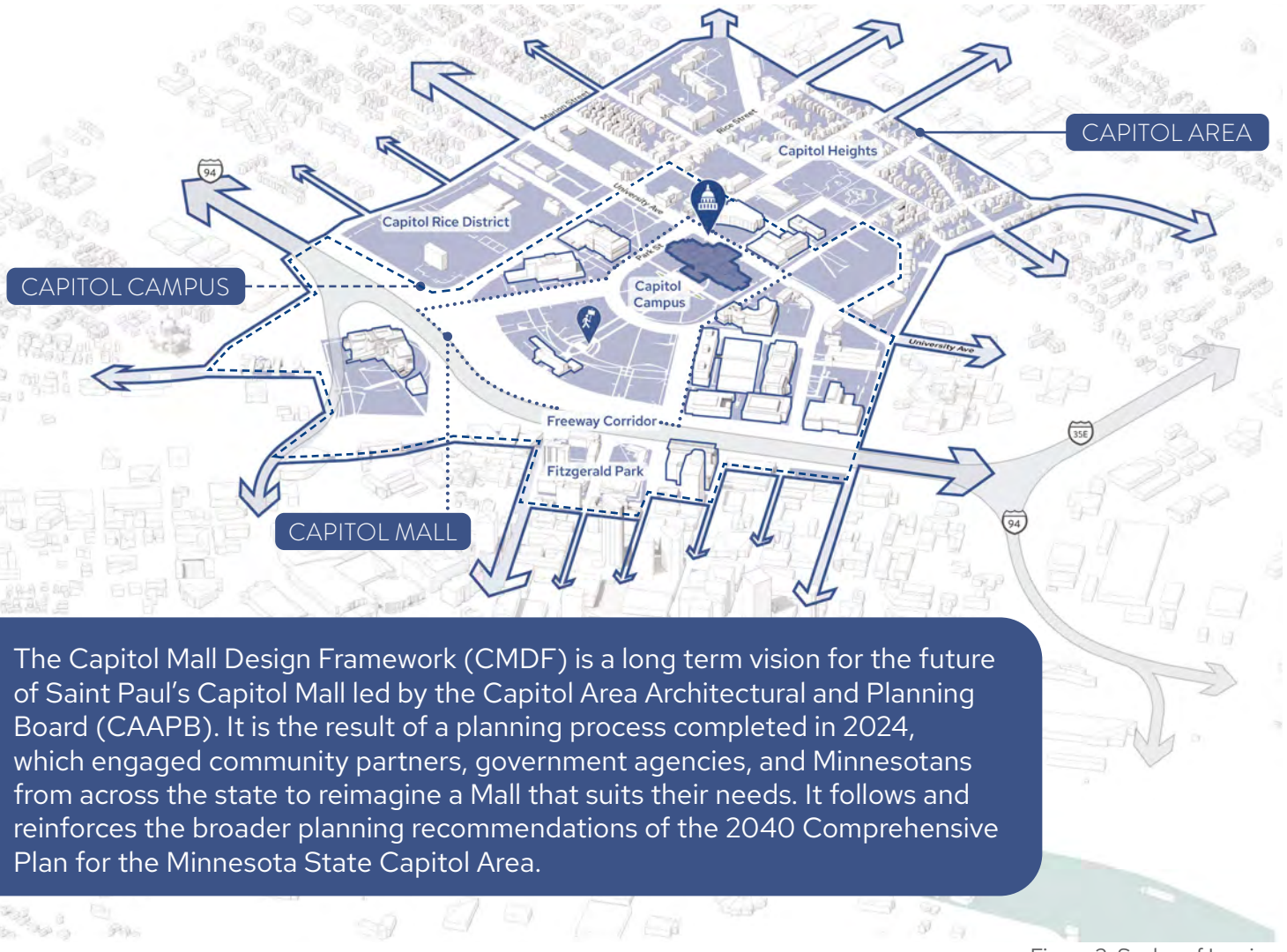


# MINNESOTA CAPITOL MALL DESIGN FRAMEWORK

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



# PLANNING THE CAPITOL AREA, CAMPUS + MALL



The Capitol Mall Design Framework (CMDf) is a long term vision for the future of Saint Paul's Capitol Mall led by the Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board (CAAPB). It is the result of a planning process completed in 2024, which engaged community partners, government agencies, and Minnesotans from across the state to reimagine a Mall that suits their needs. It follows and reinforces the broader planning recommendations of the 2040 Comprehensive Plan for the Minnesota State Capitol Area.

Figure 3: Scales of Inquiry

## SCALES OF INQUIRY

The Capitol Mall Design Framework (CMDf) guides public realm design in the Capitol Mall that is cohesive and well connected to its context. The document studied three different areas to achieve this, each of which has an increasing level of detail:

### 1. CAPITOL AREA

The Capitol Area is the subject of the 2040 Comprehensive Plan for Minnesota's Capitol Area. The CMDf follows the guidance of this plan and seeks to create a Capitol Mall that is well connected to the surrounding city and supports the vitality and well-being of nearby communities. The CMDf includes broad recommendations for this area related to pedestrian and transit connections leading to the Capitol Mall.

### 2. CAPITOL CAMPUS

The Capitol Campus is the area defined by Minnesota State Government Facilities surrounding the Capitol Mall. The CMDf makes planning recommendations for this entire area with the goal of addressing the needs of visitors and government workers as they move between points of interest.

### 3. CAPITOL MALL

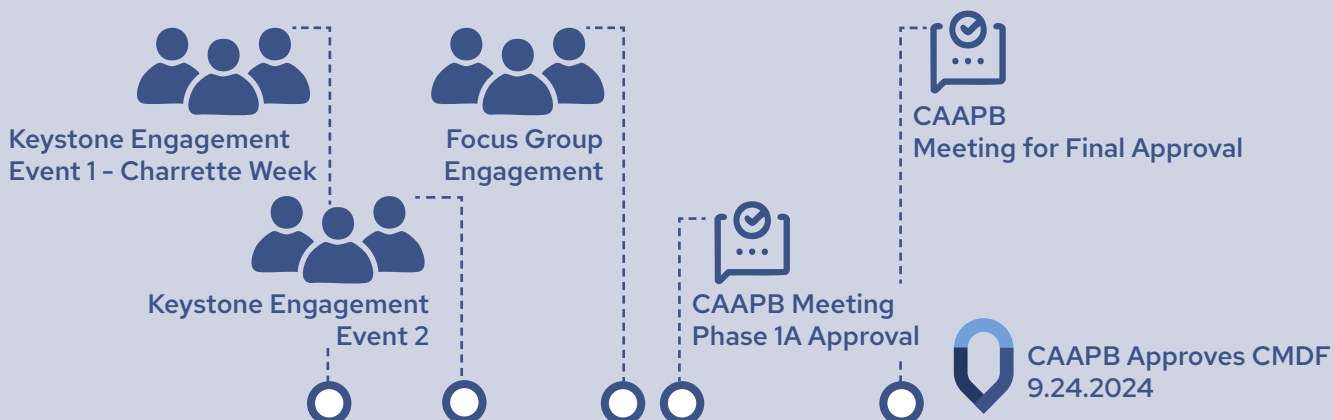
The Capitol Mall is the primary monumental and commemorative landscape surrounding the Minnesota Capitol Building. The CMDf makes detailed design recommendations for this area in order to improve the visitor experience, increase vitality, promote security, address accessibility challenges, organize art, event spaces and commemorative works.

# PROCESS OVERVIEW

2023 2024

2025

NOV DEC JAN FEB MAR APR MAY JUN JUL AUG SEP OCT NOV DEC JAN



**TASK 1**  
**LEARN +**  
**CREATE**

**TASK 2**  
**REFINE+**  
**DESIGN**

**TASK 3**  
**COMMENT +**  
**APPROVAL**

**TASK 4**  
**PHASE 1**  
**DETAILED DESIGN +**  
**IMPLEMENTATION**  
*Upper Mall + Tribal Flag Plaza*

The team developed inventory and analysis; gathered impressions of the Capitol Mall; built awareness around the project; and engaged with the community and stakeholders through pop-ups, a charrette, and online survey.

The team finalized inventory and analysis; developed a project approach (bold design moves); and engaged with community members using visualizations. Additionally, the team promoted community interest and awareness through educational materials and sought additional feedback with another online survey.

The team refined the approach (bold design moves); crafted a draft framework; and communicated what was heard in previous phases. Additionally, the team expanded Indigenous Peoples engagement; connected stakeholder input to outcomes; and conducted one last online survey.

The team solidified a final direction for the CMDF and developed a detailed plan for implementation. They also assembled a comprehensive plan document and published a final project website.

The Design Framework process occurred over six months, from December 2023 to May 2024, with Phase 1 Schematic Design extending into the latter half of 2024. Thousands of diverse and distinct voices shaped the Design Framework and created a plan that is truly authored by the people of Minnesota.



# ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

## ENGAGEMENT APPROACH + METHODS

The engagement approach plans and executes a comprehensive process focused on rigorous site analysis and robust stakeholder and community engagement. It also identifies feasible and phaseable design strategies and implementation steps.

### PRINCIPLES



GO TO WHERE  
PEOPLE ARE.



EVERYONE HAS  
A RIGHT TO BE  
INVOLVED



CLOSE THE  
FEEDBACK LOOP



PARTNER



### ONLINE SURVEYS

Three online community surveys captured more than 2,400 distinct responses from across the state of Minnesota. Offered in English, Spanish, Hmong, Somali, and Karen, the survey enabled Minnesota's diverse communities to provide input in the language they prefer.



### FOCUS GROUPS

Focus Groups were used to inform the approach, engagement process and final framework. The Focus Groups included leaders from their communities and experts in their fields. The Focus Groups were comprised of the Technical Advisory Taskforce (TAT), the Executive Steering Focus Group; the More Minnesota Focus Group the Saint Paul Community.



### TABLING + POP-UP EVENTS

Various tabling and pop-up events throughout the entire CMDf process reached diverse communities near and far. In addition to these pop-ups, educational packages sent to schools across the state engaged and taught children about the Capitol Mall.



## DESIGN CHARRETTE

A design charrette gathered all stakeholders together in a multi-day process of listening, co-designing, critiquing, iterating, and refining ideas at the Minnesota History Center. This iterative process started with a review of analysis which would form the basis for a series of collaborative work sessions. Participants were divided into different teams, comprising of individuals from the Focus Groups. These groups collectively developed a synthesized framework that was then presented back to the group. Key to the charrette was the development of the bold design moves that would inform the design framework.

The top five priorities for the CMDF were:

- Create a shared street and plaza on Rev Dr MLK Jr Blvd
- Develop a Welcome Hub at Capitol/Rice
- Create a Community Hub and Playscape at Cass Gilbert Overlook
- Deploy an iconic water feature on the Mall
- Terrace the Upper Mall to support events
- Bridge over I-94 and Cedar at Wabasha



## PROJECT APPROACH

## THE CAPITOL AREA PRINCIPLES

*per the 2040 Comprehensive Plan*

Planning Principles

1. A STATE-WIDE DESTINATION

2. A UNIFYING FOCAL POINT

3. A MODEL FOR MINNESOTA

4. INTEGRATED, HIGH-QUALITY, PEDESTRIAN SCALE PUBLIC REALM

5. SEAMLESSLY CONNECTED TO DESTINATIONS

6. LAND USE DIVERSITY

7. FULLY COORDINATED DEVELOPMENT

Analysis Lenses



Framework Themes

VITALITY

DIVERSITY

INCLUSIVITY

Eight Bold Design Moves

1. ENHANCE EXPERIENCE

2. REINVIGORATE NODES

3. RIGHT-SIZE THE STREETS

4. SCULPT TOPOGRAPHY

5. PUBLIC SPACE STRATEGIES

6. CELEBRATE WATER

7. PLANTING STRATEGIES

8. CASS GILBERT MEMORIAL PARK

## CAPITOL MALL DESIGN FRAMEWORK

### EIGHT BOLD DESIGN MOVES

The eight bold design moves were born out of extensive community and stakeholder engagement. They collectively make up the culminating Capitol Mall Design Framework.



**THE MINNESOTA STATE CAPITOL WAS BUILT  
“ON THE THEORY THAT NOTHING WAS TOO  
GOOD FOR MINNESOTA”, AND THE DESIGN  
FRAMEWORK SEEKS TO CARRY THAT NOTION  
FORWARD BY MAKING THE MALL  
MORE WELCOMING FOR MORE MINNESOTANS.**





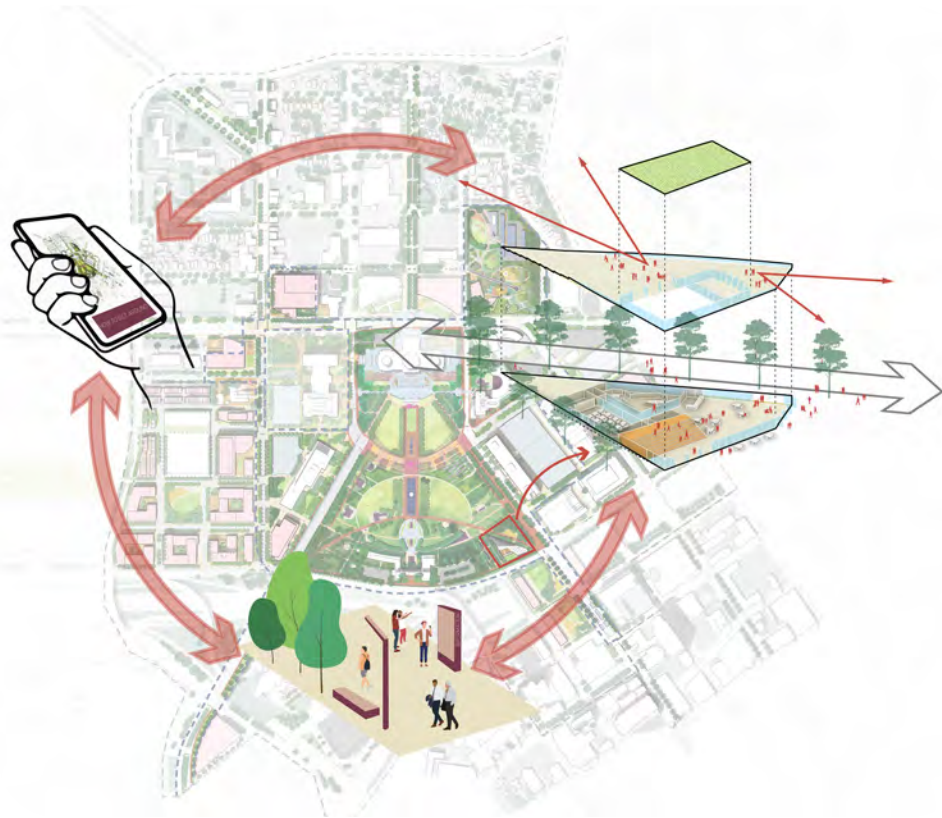
# EIGHT BOLD DESIGN MOVES

## CAPITOL AREA

### ENHANCE THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE AND MAKE FOR A MORE INCLUSIVE AND WELCOMING SPACE.

Creates a better user experience through the deployment of digital infrastructure and amenities that will make the Mall a daily destination.

- Enhance the Visitor Experience through wayfinding, safety and human comfort
- Craft the Framework around the "Day in the Life" of visitors.
- Develop Amenity Principles to guide future project.
- Locate a Visitor Amenity Building

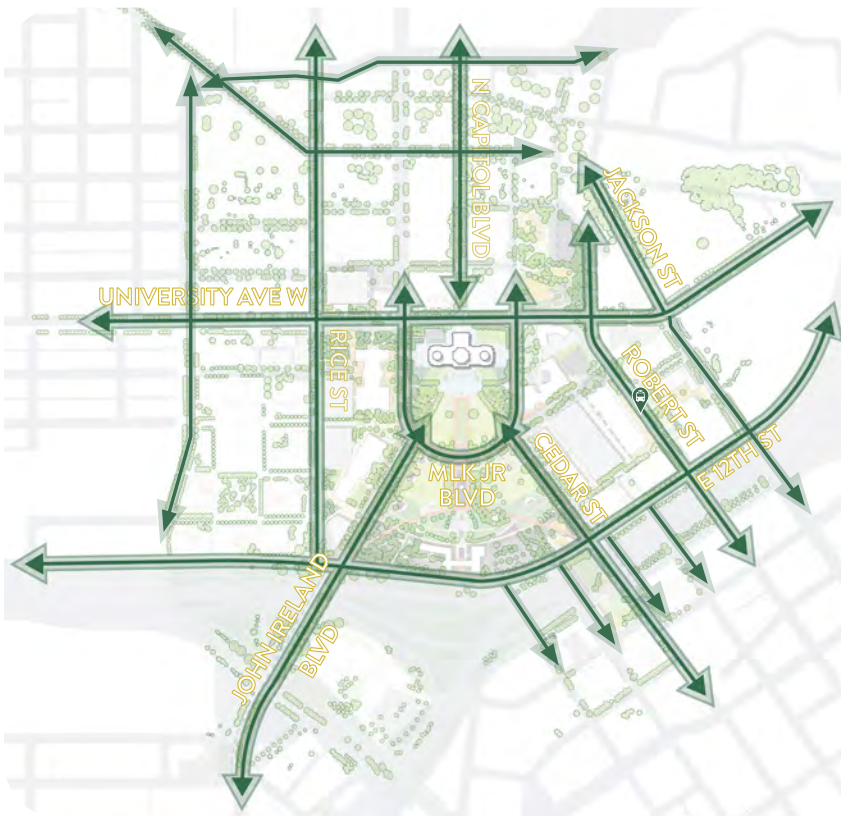


### REINVIGORATE NODES THAT CONNECT THE COMMUNITY TO THE CAPITOL IN EACH DIRECTION.

Places investment emphasis on six key nodes within the Capitol Area that should become true multimodal hubs and destinations with vibrant a public realm for residents and visitors alike.

- Create a kit of parts for each node that establishes physical improvements and characteristics of each
- Create an identify and program for each node
- Develop connections between nodes and the Capitol Building and Capitol Mall

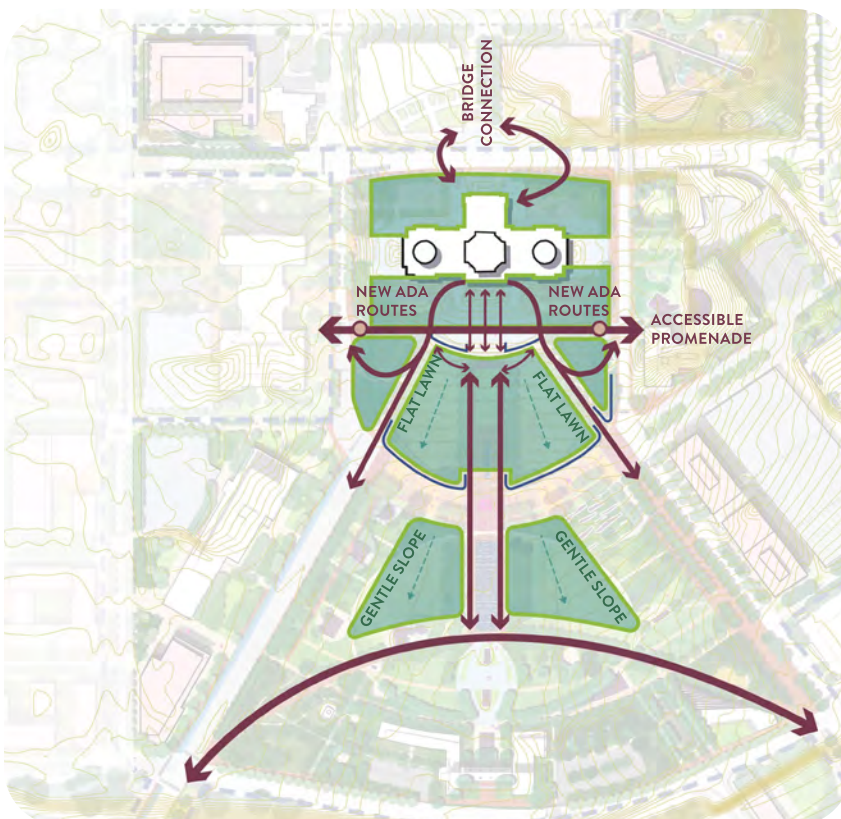




## RIGHT SIZE THE ROADS TO PRESERVE HISTORIC VIEWSHEDS AND PROVIDE COMFORTABLE PEDESTRIAN EXPERIENCE.

Develops an approach to each street within the Capitol Campus to increase the quality and quantity of space dedicated to pedestrians, street trees, and green infrastructure.

- Utilize a Street Regulating Plan to control future improvements coupled with proposed street sections
- Create an approach to parking and access that balances parking supply and distribution with other public realm needs
- Consider transit and micromobility needs based on current conditions and future plans



## SCULPT TOPOGRAPHY TO IMPROVE ACCESSIBILITY, SEAMLESSLY INTEGRATE SECURITY AND PROVIDE A PLATFORM FOR EVENTS.

Deploys a comprehensive approach to circulation and access for people of all abilities while emphasizing historic design values and security.

- Sculpt topography to create a more universally accessible Mall
- Develop innovative security strategies that work with the site rather than present barriers
- Consider pedestrian circulation holistically to promote connections within the Mall and from the Mall to the larger Capitol Area



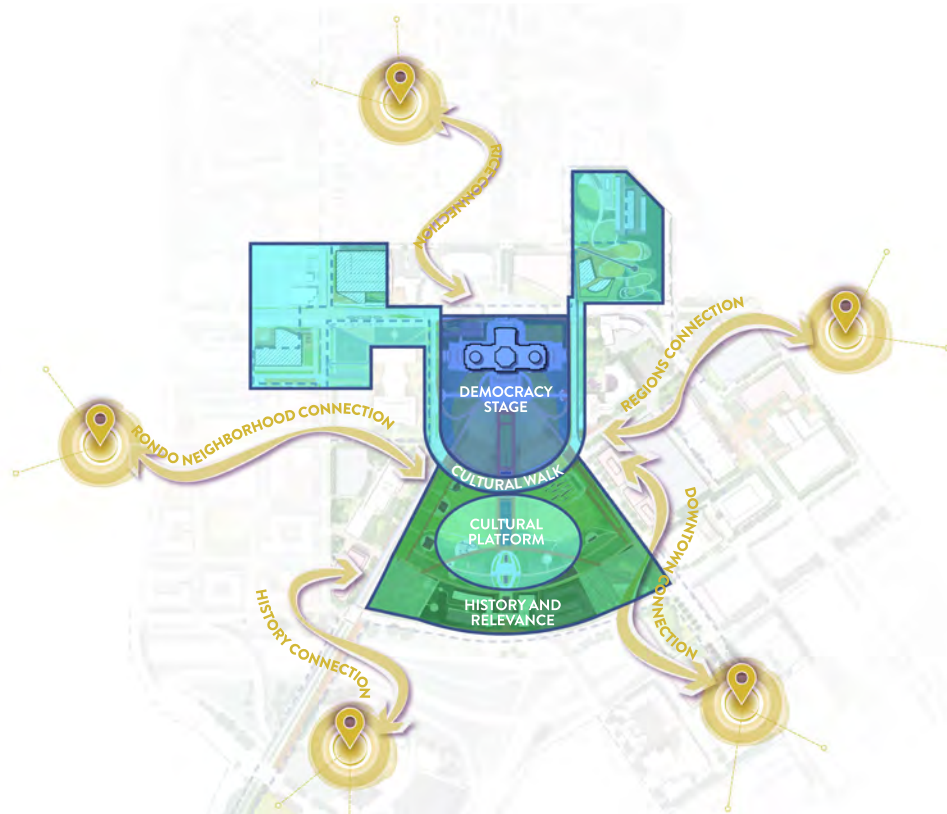
# EIGHT BOLD DESIGN MOVES

## CAPITOL AREA

### INTRODUCE NEW PUBLIC SPACE STRATEGIES TO INCLUDE AND CELEBRATE MORE OF MINNESOTA REPRESENT ITS CULTURAL DIVERSITY.

Connects to the community and develops spaces to become better suited for flexible programming while tying together the various destinations within the Mall.

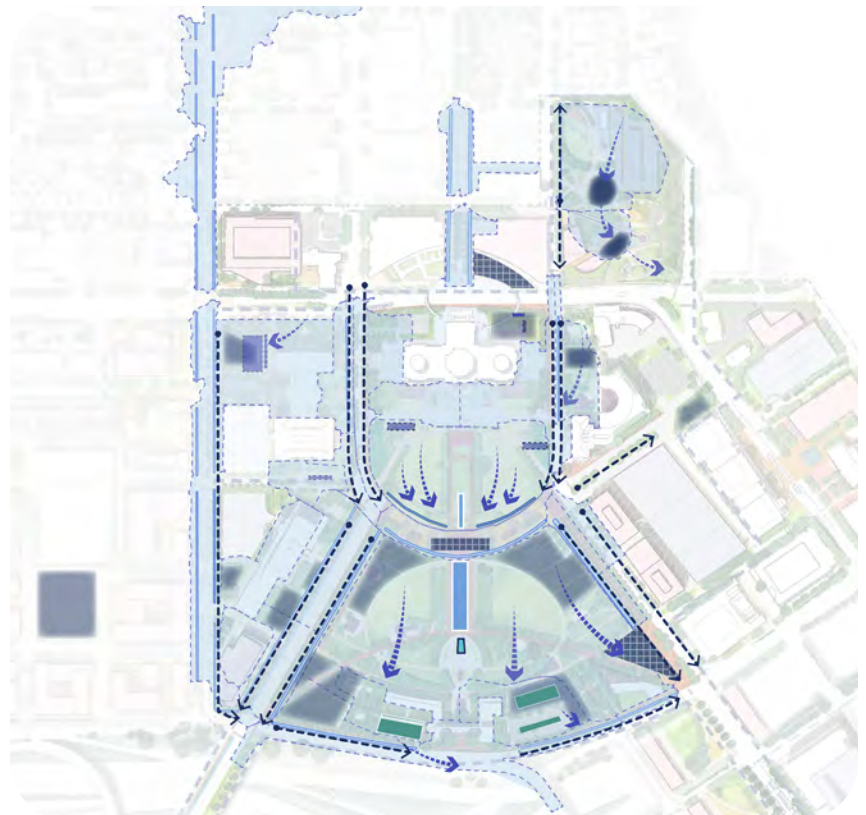
- Create a Democracy Stage that provides a neutral space for demonstrating
- Develop a Cultural Platform that facilitates smaller gatherings and events while forming the Commemorative Loop, Cultural Walk and Community Commons
- Embrace History and Reverence that honors existing commemorative works and new strategically located works

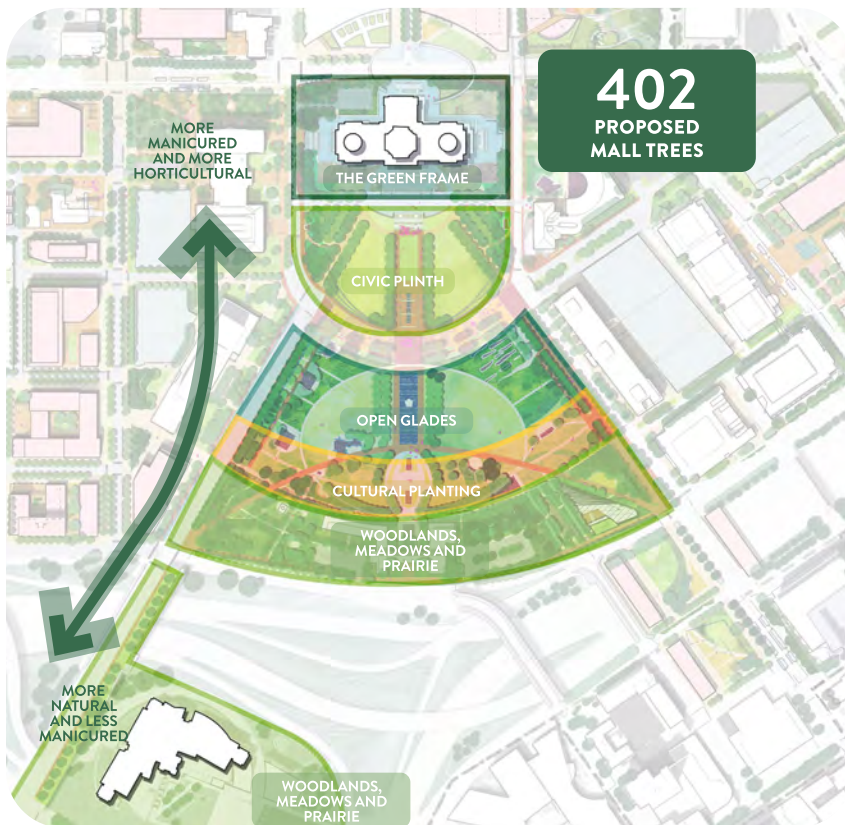


### CELEBRATE MINNESOTA'S CONNECTION TO WATER IN ALL SEASONS.

Approaches stormwater management at the District level and site scale through a variety of interventions in the right of ways and open space.

- Develop a District-wide approach to stormwater management
- Deploy stormwater Best Management Practices for water quality and water volume
- Create strategies for water reuse for irrigation

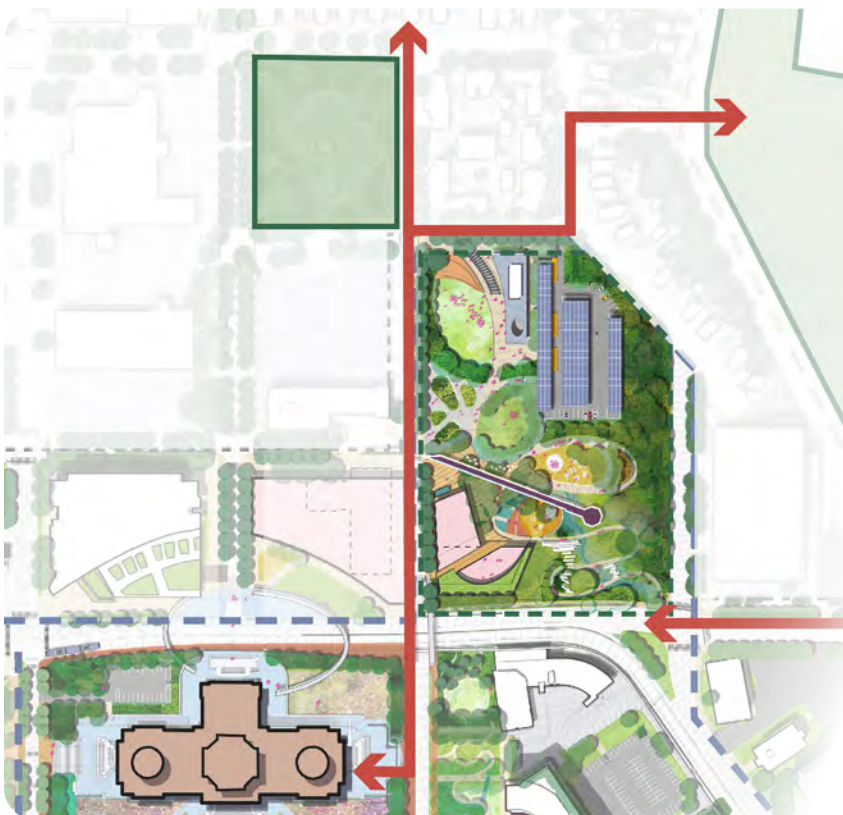




## CREATE A GRADIENT OF PLANTING STRATEGIES THAT SUPPORT CULTURAL PROGRAMMING, SUSTAINABLE MAINTENANCE AND HUMAN COMFORT

Craft planting strategies that reflects the diverse ecologies of Minnesota. The landscape will transition from more wild near the southern edge of the Capitol Campus to more curated at the Capitol Building.

- Define Landscape Typologies and corresponding planting palettes
- Increase tree canopy cover and diversity of species to increase thermal comfort while maintaining views



## TRANSFORM CASS GILBERT MEMORIAL PARK INTO A MULTI-GENERATIONAL SPACE FOR PLAY, RECREATION AND VIEWS.

Reimagines Cass Gilbert Memorial Park into a public space for the wider community. Increased amenities will provide opportunities for flexible events, play, interaction with nature and revenue generation.

- Create a multi-generational space that is safe, welcoming and inviting for people of all ages and abilities
- Develop a comprehensive approach to programming and amenities
- Consider the variety of user types and their needs throughout the day and year



# THE CAPITOL MALL TODAY

## MINNESOTA CAPITOL MALL

The Capitol Area is a **celebrated piece of Minnesota's heritage** that represents the State's past and inspires the authors of its future. However, today, it has many challenges which make it difficult to access, enjoy and utilize effectively. The Design Framework seeks to address and mitigate these challenges.

## OVERARCHING THEMATIC CHALLENGES

### TRANSPORTATION AND ACCESS

- Transit **accessibility**
- Built and perceived **barriers** exist around the Capitol Campus
- **Arrival points** to the Capitol Area are **uncomfortable** and **infrastructure-heavy**
- **Pedestrian circulation is incomplete** on the Capitol Campus
- **Roads are oversized** for current traffic demands and do not prioritize the pedestrian

### HISTORY AND PRESERVATION

- Historic and non-contributing features present
- **Unfulfilled or disrupted** historic plans
- **A loss of historic urban fabric** and neighborhoods

### AMENITIES AND USE

- Weak **inclusive and holistically** curated commemoration
- Minimal landscape to **adjacent building use relationship**
- The Capitol Mall is not welcoming to all
- There are **limited everyday amenities**
- There is a need to **balance security and public assembly**

### RESILIENCE AND OUTDOOR ENVIRONMENTS

- **Human comfort challenges** related to shade and wind patterns on site
- **Disconnection from natural process** and pre-settlement ecologies
- Lacks investment in ongoing **maintenance and operations**
- **Climate adaptability** and resilience to extreme natural events









# CAPITOL MALL DESIGN FRAMEWORK PLAN

FROGTOWN

CREATE MULTIMODAL  
TRANSIT HUBS

DIVERSIFY USES  
AND CONNECT  
COMMUNITIES

CAP  
D

CAPITOL CAMPUS

CAPITOL MALL

John Ireland Blvd

Western Sculpture Park

## MORE WELCOMING FOR MORE MINNESOTANS

The Proposed Capitol Mall Design Framework makes a Mall that is MORE WELCOMING FOR MORE MINNESOTANS. The Design Framework lays out a multi-phase implementation strategy and a series of design guideline recommendations to be used as a decision making tool moving forward.





CAPITOL RICE  
DISTRICT

CAPITOL AREA

CAAPB BOUNDARY

# CAPITOL HEIGHTS

INCREASE TREE  
CANOPY HUMAN  
COMFORT

CREATE MULTI-  
GENERATIONAL  
PUBLIC SPACE

MAINTAIN  
VIEWSHEDS  
AND RIGHT SIZE  
ROADS

CONNECT  
MEMORIALS

INCREASE  
AMENITIES AND  
WAYFINDING

FITZGERALD  
PARK



# DESIGN FRAMEWORK PLAN

## CAPITOL AREA

### A NEW VISION

The result of this planning process presents a vision for the site that offers daily life activities and amenities, new forms of cultural expression, more culturally and regionally specific landscape strategies, and integrated security measures, all while respecting and celebrating the historic legacy of the site.

The Capitol Mall Design Framework represents a **21st-century vision for a historic architectural legacy** authored by the Minnesota community and key stakeholders. The Framework weaves quality of life amenities, sustainable infrastructure, and a new landscape framework supported by **eight bold design moves serve as the foundation of the vision**, which also includes recommendations for operations, maintenance, governance, and detailed design services for a first phase of implementation. The ideas embody concepts for how to best represent the cultural diversity of the region while honoring the historic structure of the site. They adopt strategies that **bring intergenerational uses to the campus**, such as play spaces, event centers, retail, and food and beverage offerings located in strategic nodes. Lastly, they offer infrastructure suggestions, such as how to **integrate stormwater management** and how to **bridge over I-94 to better connect to downtown**. All of this works to support the values of **Vitality, Diversity and Inclusivity** to make a capitol that is **More Welcoming for More Minnesotans**.

### LEGEND

- |                                |   |
|--------------------------------|---|
| ----- CAAPB Boundary           | (D) Arboretum   |
| — CMDF Limit of Work           | (E) Native Prairies                                       |
| Proposed Building              | (F) Sears & Rice BRT Node                                 |
| Memorials                      | (G) University & Rice Mobility Hub                        |
| (A) MN State Capitol           | (H) Cass Gilbert Memorial Park                            |
| (B) New State Office Building* | (I) Robert Street Station Plaza                           |
| (C) MN Senate                  | (J) Visitor Amenity Building (*other potential locations) |
| (D) MN Judicial Branch         | (K) Cedar and Wabasha Deck Node                           |
| (A) Aurora Promenade           | (L) MN Historical Society                                 |
| (B) Civic Plinth               | (M) Western Sculpture Garden                              |
| (C) Open Glades                | (N) Atrium or Street Connection                           |

\* SOB Landscape to be Coordinated







**DOWNTOWN  
SAINT PAUL**

Figure 5: Capitol Mall Design Framework  
Executive Summary 27



# THE MALL IN DETAIL

## MINNESOTA CAPITOL MALL

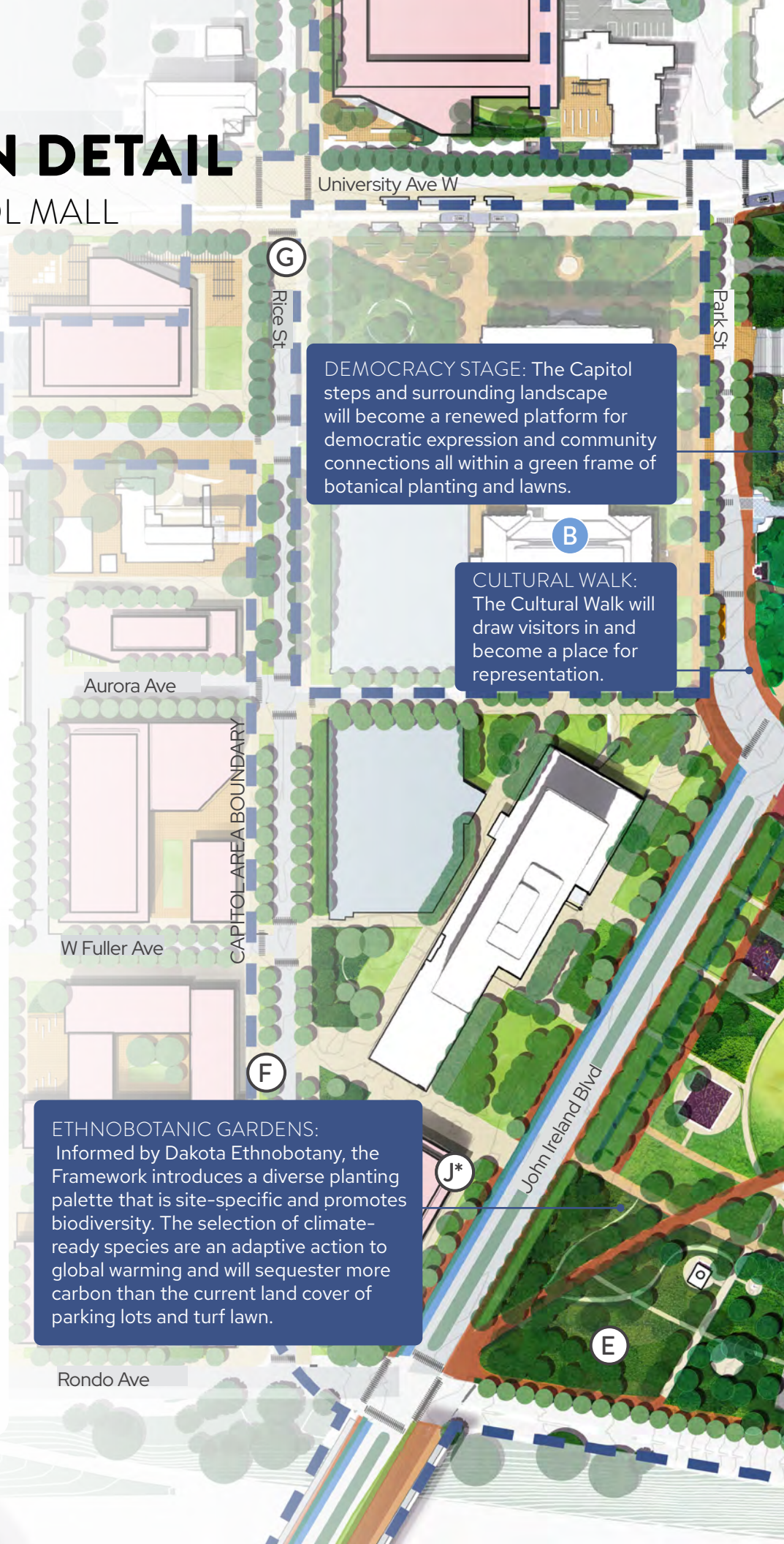
### LEGEND

- CAAPB Boundary
- CMDF Limit of Work
- Proposed Building
- Memorials
- (A) MN State Capitol
- (B) New State Office Building\*
- (C) MN Senate
- (D) MN Judicial Branch
- (A) Aurora Promenade
- (B) Civic Plinth
- (C) Open Glades
- (D) Arboretum
- (E) Native Prairies
- (F) Sears & Rice BRT Node
- (G) University & Rice Mobility Hub
- (H) Cass Gilbert Memorial Park
- (I) Robert Street Station Plaza
- (J) Visitor Amenity Building (\*other potential locations)
- (K) Cedar and Wabasha Deck Node

\* SOB Landscape to be Coordinated

N 0' 60' 125' 250'

Figure 6: Capitol Mall Design Framework  
Zoom In



**DEMOCRACY STAGE:** The Capitol steps and surrounding landscape will become a renewed platform for democratic expression and community connections all within a green frame of botanical planting and lawns.

**CULTURAL WALK:** The Cultural Walk will draw visitors in and become a place for representation.

**ETHNOBOTANIC GARDENS:** Informed by Dakota Ethnobotany, the Framework introduces a diverse planting palette that is site-specific and promotes biodiversity. The selection of climate-ready species are an adaptive action to global warming and will sequester more carbon than the current land cover of parking lots and turf lawn.







# GUIDANCE FROM THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE REPORT

## GENERAL TREATMENT GUIDELINES

The strategies below are intended to guide the preservation of the Capitol Mall Historic District's landscape character and sense of place as a forecourt to the Saint Paul Capitol Building; as a civic space available to all residents; as a place to practice First Amendment Rights; and as a landscape which is evolving with climate change. Reference the 2024 Cultural Landscape Report (Damon Farber, 2024) for more information. In addition to the Cultural Landscape Report, the State of Minnesota should formalize a consultation process between the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), State Archaeologist, and CAAPB, as well as determine the responsible governmental unit (RGU) status.

- (A) **Retain the volumes and spatial definition created by the three main approaches to the Capitol Mall intended by the original designers.**
- (B) **Continue to allow the Mall to serve its cultural purpose as a civic gathering space, open to all.**
- (C) **Maintain a deliberate and impactful design intent for the positioning of canopy trees within the Mall, respecting the historical viewsheds and spatial delineation.**
- (D) **Retain extant contributing resources within the district.**
- (E) **Enhance district-wide Universal Access**
- (F) **Respect the distinct character of the ground plane as a verdant open space.**
- (G) **Plan for future commemorative spaces.**
- (H) **Reinforce urban connections as historically intended.**
- (I) **Establish guidelines for a cohesive family of site furnishings, wayfinding elements, and educational interpretive features to ensure district-wide continuity.**
- (J) **Foster resiliency within the campus.**







**DOWNTOWN  
SAINT PAUL**

Figure 8: CLR Guidance on the Framework Plan

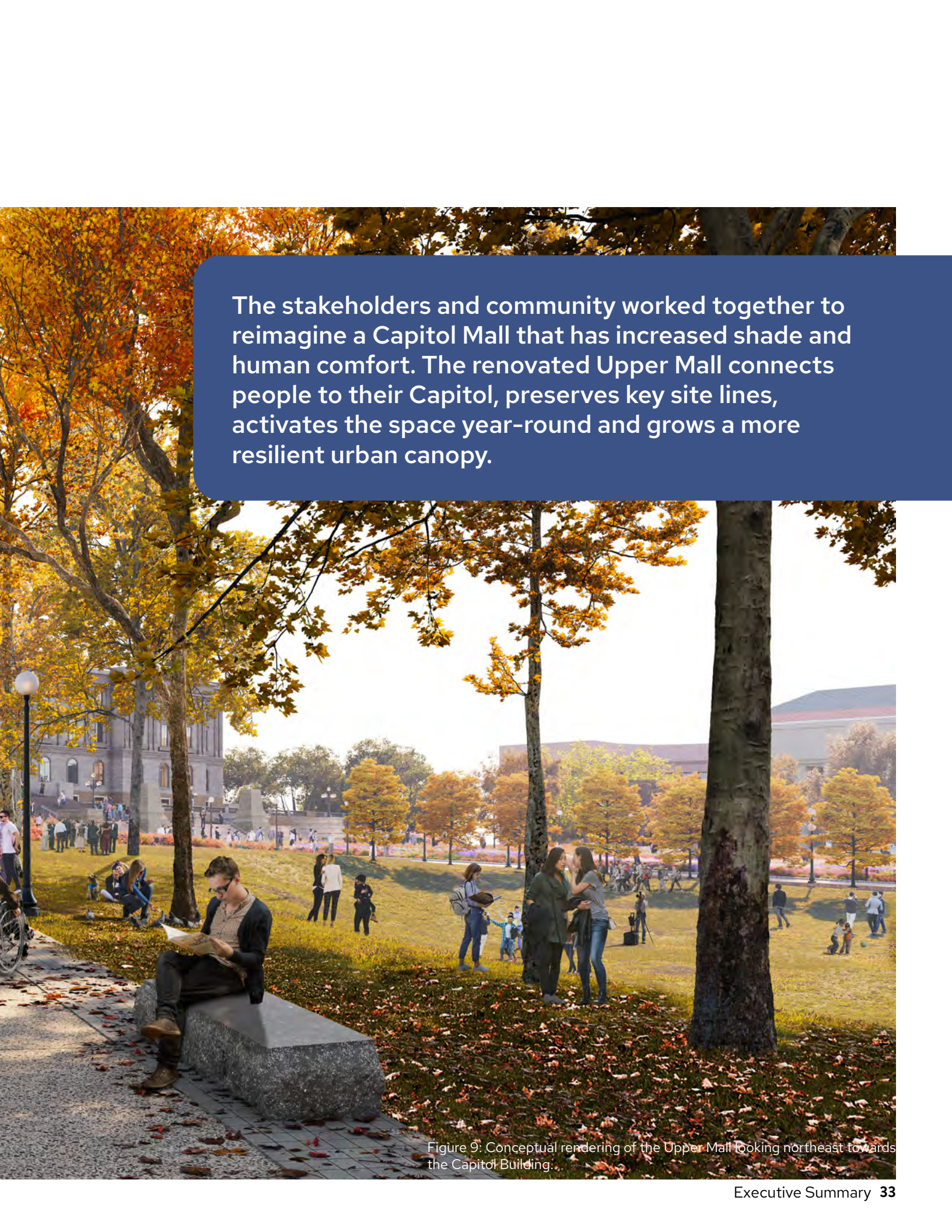


# A REIMAGINED MALL

## UPPER MALL





A conceptual rendering of the Upper Mall, showing a wide, open green space with many trees, some with autumn-colored leaves. People are walking, sitting on a low stone wall, and playing in the grass. In the background, the Capitol Building is visible. A blue text box is overlaid on the top left of the image.

The stakeholders and community worked together to reimagine a Capitol Mall that has increased shade and human comfort. The renovated Upper Mall connects people to their Capitol, preserves key site lines, activates the space year-round and grows a more resilient urban canopy.

Figure 9: Conceptual rendering of the Upper Mall looking northeast towards the Capitol Building.



# A COMMUNITY COMMONS

REVEREND DR MARTIN LUTHER KING JR BOULEVARD



Figure 10: Conceptual rendering of the Community Commons (Reverend Dr Martin Luther King Jr Boulevard) looking northeast.



The community and CAAPB united around a shared street on Reverend Dr Martin Luther King Jr Boulevard as a catalytic project to create a multi-functional and welcoming community commons to the Capitol. This was identified as the #1 most important project.





# RESILIENCE + REMEMBRANCE

## LOWER MALL



Figure 11: Conceptual rendering of the Commemorative Circle and ethnobotanic gardens looking east.



The Framework looked to Indigenous plant communities to develop ethnobotanic landscapes that integrate stormwater management and resilience into the Mall. The site is made legible through interpretation and a comprehensive wayfinding program that addresses concerns of safety, access and user orientation.





# A PLACE FOR PUBLIC LIFE

## JOHN IRELAND BOULEVARD



Figure 12: Conceptual rendering of John Ireland Blvd looking northeast towards the Capitol building.





The Cultural Landscape Report (CLR) placed heavy importance on maintaining critical viewsheds, of which John Ireland Blvd is one. The newly reimagined space will continue to have visual and physical connections between the Capitol, the Saint Paul Cathedral and Minnesota History Center. It will become a space to host new and existing events under a double allée along a pedestrian promenade that will provide a continuous canopy of shade in summers. John Ireland Boulevard will be the platform for daily life.



# A NODE OF VITALITY

UNIVERSITY AND RICE MOBILITY HUB



The mobility hub and a transformed Rice Street is a centerpiece of the 2040 Comprehensive Plan vision for the Capitol Area, one that will transform Rice Street back into a more comfortable shared corridor of commerce and community activity.

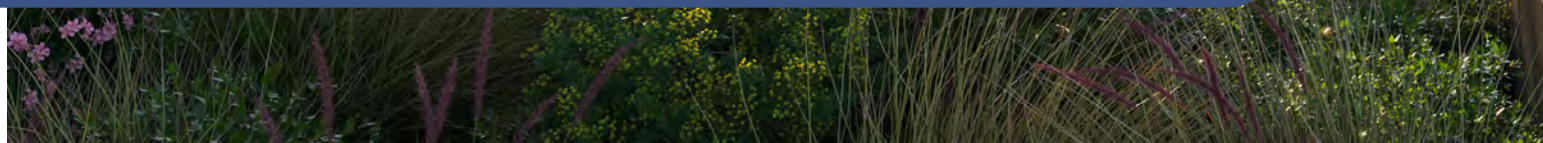




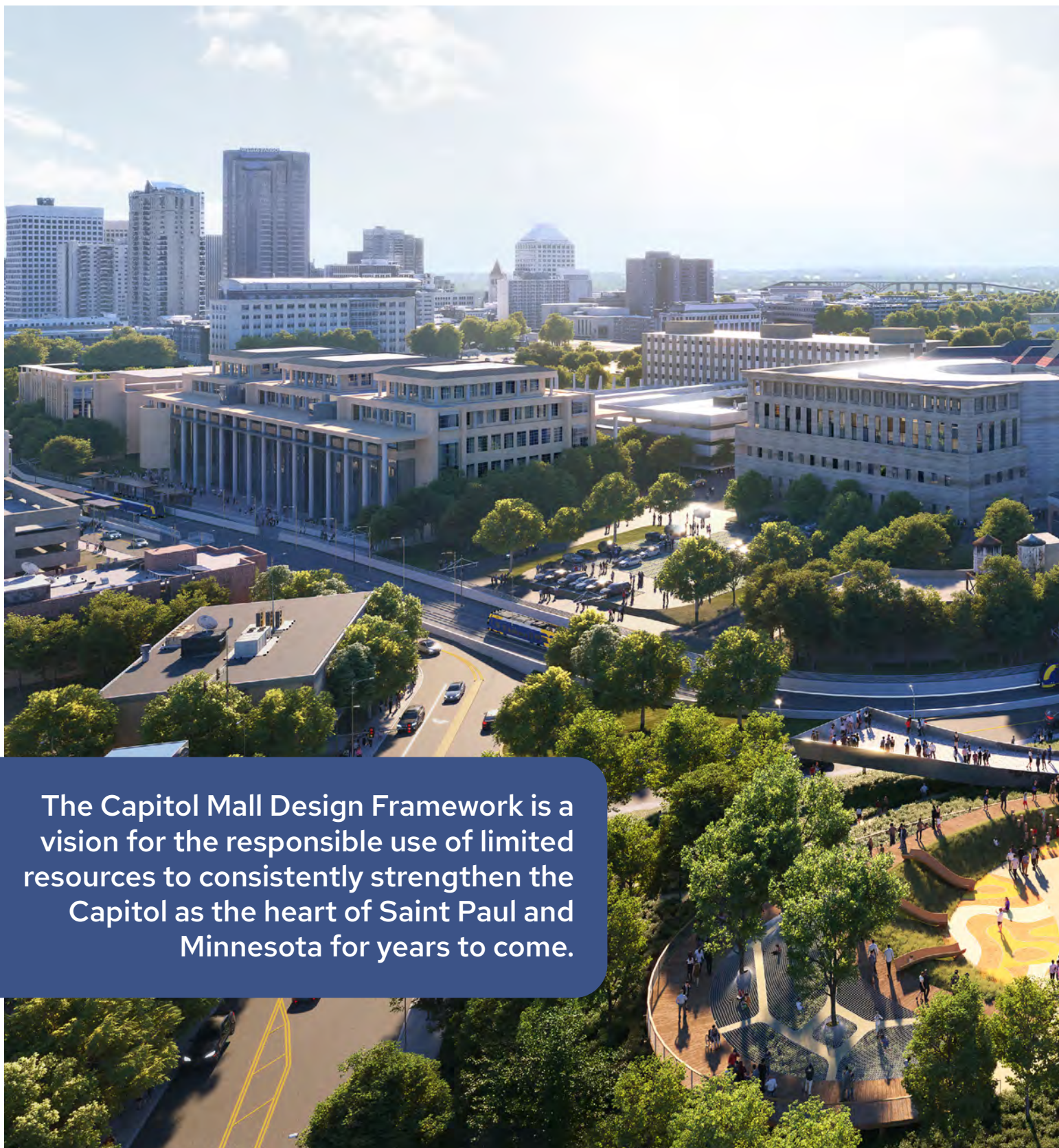


Figure 13: Conceptual rendering of the University and Rice Mobility Hub looking north along Rice Street.



# A HOPEFUL VISION

## CASS GILBERT MEMORIAL PARK AND CAPITOL AREA



The Capitol Mall Design Framework is a vision for the responsible use of limited resources to consistently strengthen the Capitol as the heart of Saint Paul and Minnesota for years to come.





Figure 14: Conceptual rendering of Cass Gilbert Memorial Park looking southwest towards the Capitol and Saint Paul's Cathedral.