

CHAPTER 1

FRAMEWORK INTRODUCTION

PROJECT PURPOSE



“MNISÓTA MAKHÓČHE, THE LAND WHERE THE WATERS ARE SO CLEAR THEY REFLECT THE CLOUDS, EXTENDS BEYOND THE MODERN BORDERS OF MINNESOTA AND IS THE ANCESTRAL AND CONTEMPORARY HOMELAND OF THE DAKHÓTA (DAKOTA) PEOPLE. IT IS ALSO HOME TO THE ANISHINAABE AND OTHER INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, ALL WHO MAKE UP A VIBRANT COMMUNITY IN MNISÓTA MAKHÓČHE,” (RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY). THE MINNESOTA CAPITOL MALL DESIGN FRAMEWORK ACKNOWLEDGES THAT THE CAPITOL CAMPUS IS LOCATED ON THESE SACRED DAKOTA LANDS AND STRIVES TO HONOR, CELEBRATE AND SHARE THESE HISTORIES.



Figure 15: Aerial view of Capitol looking North

Source: Damon Farber.
Cedar St. Jan 2024.

As required by MN Statute and the 2040 Comprehensive Plan for the Minnesota State Capitol Area (2021), the Minnesota State Legislature enabled the Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board (CAAPB) to produce the 2024 Capitol Mall Design Framework (hereafter referred to as the Design Framework) for the Capitol Area in Saint Paul, Minnesota. The Design Framework builds upon the 2040 Comprehensive Plan for the Minnesota State Capitol Area and the prior Capitol Mall Redesign Plan (mid-1980s) to shape, guide, and manage the Minnesota State Capitol Campus environment and its physical form. The Design Framework provides location-specific development guidelines and calibrates the 2040 Comprehensive Plan's larger organizing principles to a specific area, detailing distinct goals for stability, change, and growth. Collaboration amongst various agencies, including the State of Minnesota Department of Administration, informed and guided the Design Framework.

The Design Framework primarily focuses on the Capitol Mall itself and the area bounded by University Avenue, Rice Street, Robert Street, and the Interstates. However, it does consider the larger 60-block Capitol Area as an integral part of the overall design. More specifically, the Design Framework addresses design principles, standards, and guidelines for landscape systems (including increased tree canopy as a legislative priority alongside native planting strategies), lighting, security, wayfinding, circulation, stormwater management, commemorative/public art siting, street typologies and regulation, as well as the preservation and interpretation of historic resources in alignment with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and the 2024 Minnesota State Capitol Mall Cultural Landscape Report.

As the original architect of the Minnesota State Capitol, Cass Gilbert's vision was to create a canvas for civic life—to establish a ceremonial landmark with spaces that can accommodate gatherings of different sizes and create physical connections between the Capitol Grounds and nearby neighborhoods. Since then, the Capitol Mall has become a place of civic demonstration, cultural celebration, and reverent memorial. Gilbert's vision is strengthened through the 2040 Comprehensive Plan, which strives to turn "boundaries into connections" and restore the historic urban fabric between the Capitol Area, surrounding neighborhoods, and Downtown. Through extensive community and stakeholder engagement at local and statewide scales, the Design Framework reinforces these ideals to create a public space that is more welcoming to more Minnesotans and that is an embodiment of the great ecological, historical, and social diversity of both the Twin Cities and the State of Minnesota.

CAPITOL CONTEXT

CASS GILBERT'S CAPITOL PLAN FOR SAINT PAUL, LIKE THE BURNHAM PLAN OF CHICAGO AND THE L'ENFANT PLAN FOR WASHINGTON DC, WAS AN EFFORT TO UNIFY AND INTERCONNECT THE CITY FABRIC, CONNECTING STREETS AND APPROACHES TO A CENTRAL MALL AS THE CENTERPIECE OF A GRAND CAPITAL CITY. MINNESOTA STATUTE, THE 2040 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AND THE CAPITOL MALL DESIGN FRAMEWORK ARE AN EFFORT TO REINFORCE THIS UNIFYING VISION.

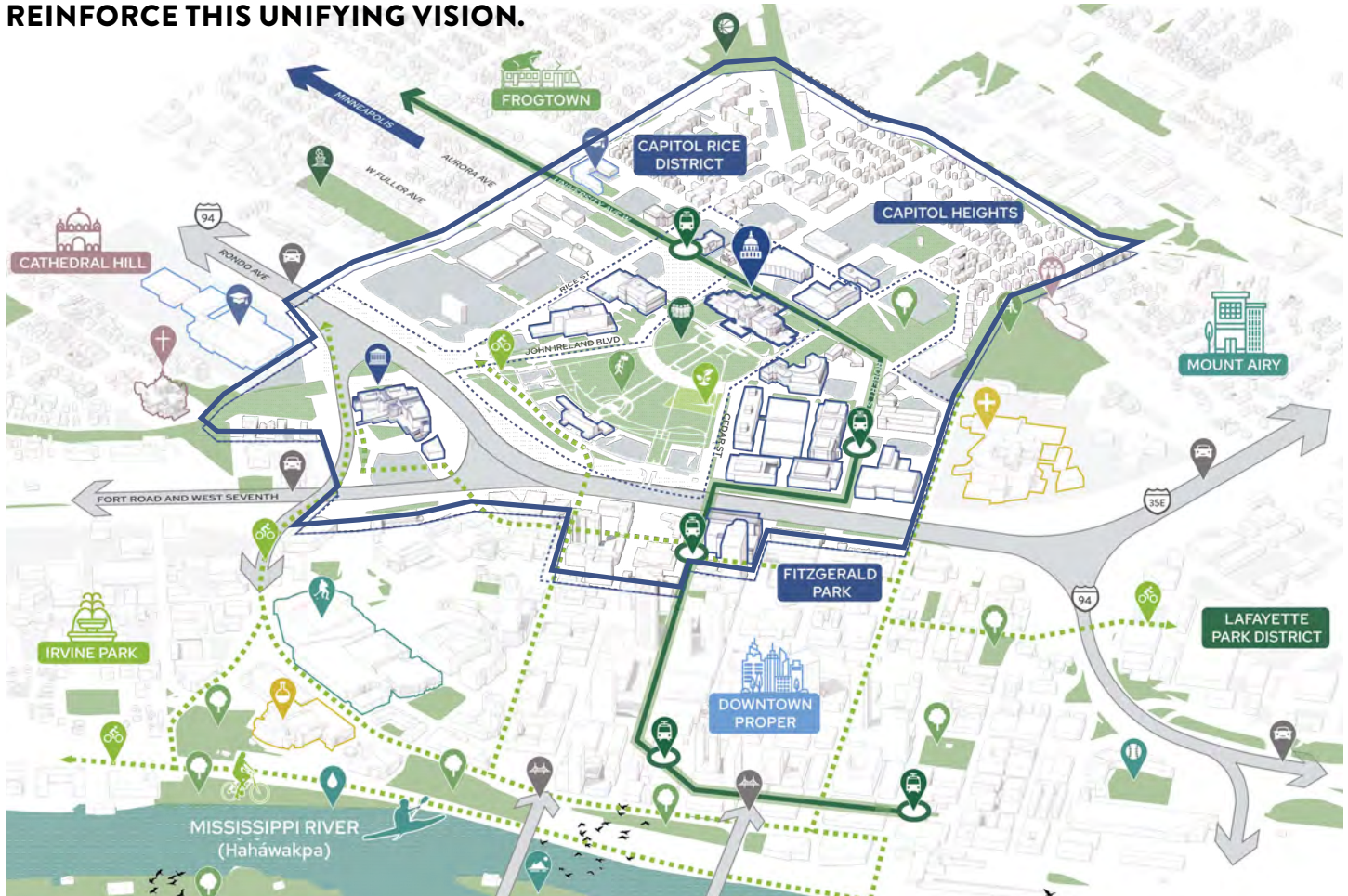


Figure 16: Capitol Context Axon

THE MALL IN CONTEXT

The Capitol Mall is centrally located in the city of Saint Paul, Minnesota. Saint Paul and Minneapolis collectively make up the Twin Cities—the largest metropolitan area in the state. Just north of Interstates 94 and 35E, the Capitol Mall is bounded by various distinct neighborhoods, including Capitol Heights, Capitol Rice District, Downtown, Fitzgerald Park, Frogtown, and others. The Mississippi River (HaHáwakpa) flows just one mile south of the Capitol Mall, connecting the Twin Cities to northern Minnesota and the Gulf of Mexico. For more information regarding this history of Saint Paul (including pre-colonial settlement, see *Appendix B: Inventory and Analysis*).

SCALES OF INQUIRY

To achieve the goals and visions set forth by Gilbert, the 2040 Comprehensive Plan, Minnesota Statute 15B, and people of Minnesota, the Capitol Mall must be studied and considered at multiple scales. These include the Capitol Mall itself, the Capitol Campus, and the Capitol Area. It is important to note that while scales of inquiry provide a means to think about the Capitol Mall and ensure a comprehensive framework, most design strategies ultimately transcend these scales. Therefore, Capitol Area scale items will likely require intervention at the Capitol Mall scale (and vice versa).

CAPITOL AREA

The Capitol Area is the largest scale of inquiry and includes approximately 333 acres or 60 blocks; it is also the area governed by the CAAPB. It is bounded by West Pennsylvania Avenue, Jackson Street, Marion Street, and Downtown. The Capitol Area includes several neighborhoods and a plethora of land uses, ranging from government offices to small-scale single-family homes. By studying the Capitol Mall as part of the larger area, the Design Framework can address existing barriers like the interstates and vacant Sears site; connect to valuable community assets like Downtown Saint Paul and various public and private institutions like the Minnesota History Center (MNHS), Saint Paul College and nearby hospitals; and integrate into larger ecological and social networks like the Mississippi Flyway and nearby residential neighborhoods.

CAPITOL CAMPUS

The Capitol Campus spans over 100 acres or 20 blocks, and includes the Capitol Building, Mall, and various government buildings immediately adjacent. It is bounded by University Avenue, Jackson Street, Rice Street, and Downtown. By studying the Capitol Mall as a part of the larger Capitol Campus, the Design Framework can better address the needs of visitors and government workers as they travel between buildings and other points of interest. The Design Framework can also propose new public amenities in currently underutilized spaces like Cass Gilbert Park, the proposed Rice and University Mobility Hub, and the vacant lots just north of University Avenue.

CAPITOL MALL

The Capitol Mall spans over 40 acres and focuses on the Upper and Lower Malls, which hold the Capitol Building, Veterans Services Building, and most commemorative works. It is bounded by University Avenue; Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard; John Ireland Boulevard; West 12th Street and Cedar Street. It is at this scale that the Design Framework can best address landscape typologies and planting strategies; pedestrian networks and ADA accessibility; public realm design; security implications; lighting; and more.

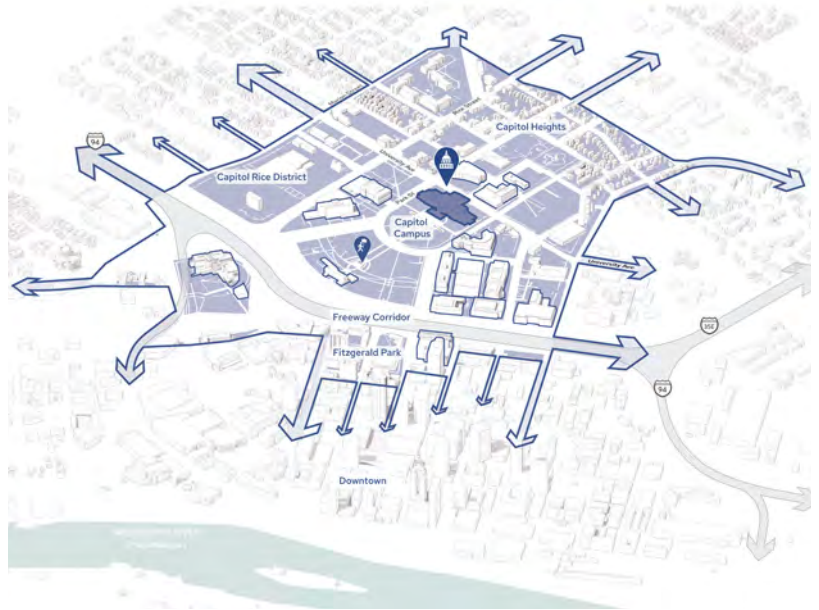


Figure 19: Capitol Area

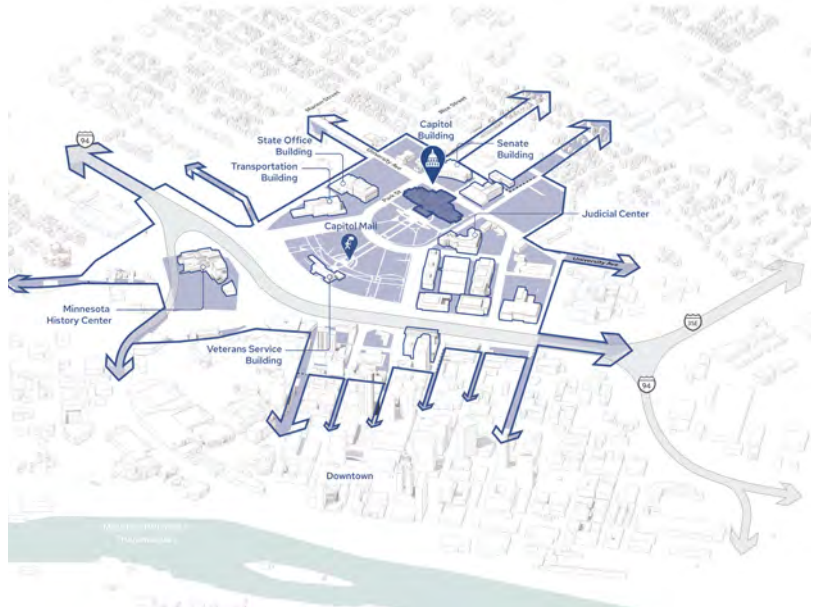


Figure 18: Capitol Campus

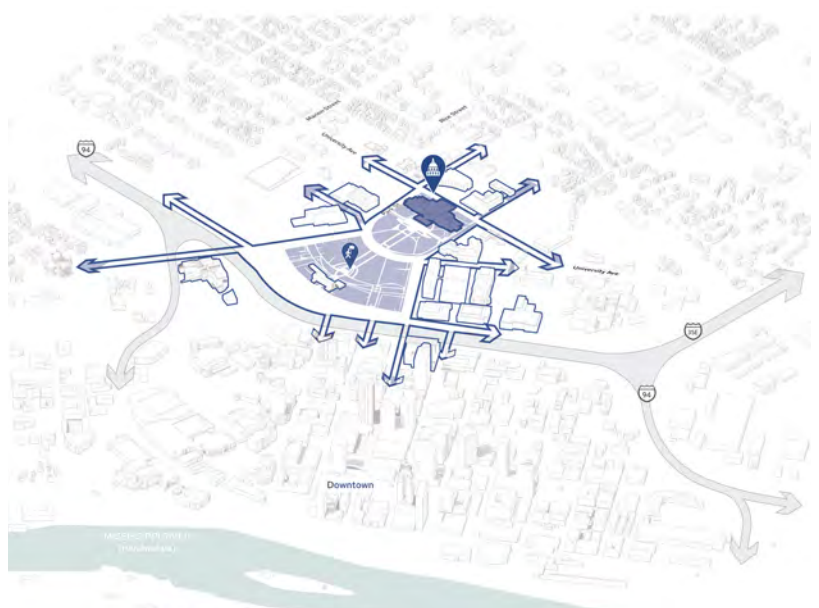


Figure 17: Capitol Mall

PURPOSE OF A FRAMEWORK

UTILIZING THIS DOCUMENT

THE CAPITOL MALL DESIGN FRAMEWORK SEEKS TO FOSTER A HOLISTIC VISION WITH AN INCLUSIVE RANGE OF STRATEGIES TO ENSURE THE HIGHEST STANDARDS OF IMPLEMENTATION WITHIN THE CAPITOL AREA.

WHAT IS A DESIGN FRAMEWORK

As previously described, the Design Framework functions similarly to municipal small area plans by providing more location-specific development guidelines than the 2040 Comprehensive Plan. It calibrates the comprehensive plan's larger organizing principles to a specific area, detailing distinct goals for stability, change, and growth. At a high level, the Design Framework includes a detailed master plan as well as design guidelines, management practices and policy recommendations for the Capitol Campus. It also outlines guidance for future implementation on public land within the Capitol Area. More specific requirements of the Design Framework include the following:

- An overview and summary of previous/related plans
- Local and statewide community and stakeholder engagement
- A strategic vision with short- and long-term goals
- An analysis of existing site conditions and histories
- A detailed and phased master plan
- Coordination with the 2024 Cultural Landscape Report
- Campus- and area-wide systems plans
- Implementation plans and prioritization matrix
- Sustainable landscape design and maintenance standards

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

The Capitol Mall Design Framework is organized accordingly:

- Chapter 1: Framework Introduction (this chapter) provides a brief overview of the project; explains the purpose and requirements of a design framework; and describes the scales of inquiry utilized to study the Capitol Mall.
- Chapter 2: Design Framework includes the overall master plan and eight supporting (bold) design moves; campus- and area-wide systems plans; as well as how the Design Framework reflects the 2024 Cultural Landscape Report findings.
- Chapter 3: Design and Maintenance Standards summarizes guidelines and best practices for public realm enhancements throughout the Capitol Mall.
- Appendix A: Process summarizes the overall schedule of the project and details the extensive community and stakeholder engagement conducted over a six-month period. Reference the Appendix for full chapter.
- Appendix B: Inventory and Analysis outlines the Design Framework's connection to the 2040 Comprehensive Plan in more detail and organizes existing site investigations into four specific lenses (connect, preserve, activate and grow). Reference the Appendix for full chapter.
- Appendix C: Implementation provides the Design Framework phasing plan, prioritization matrix, and Phase 1 Schematic Design. Reference the Appendix for full chapter.



Figure 20: Minnesota Capitol looking south. Capitol Boulevard reinforces a north axis from the Capitol stairs, which is currently only a visual connection across University Avenue. Following Gilbert's plan, Administration Building (left) and Senate Building (right) flank Capitol Boulevard, and form the north edge of campus at Sherburne Avenue. Restoring this historic connection from the Capitol Building to the north is captured in the Capitol Mall Design Framework. Source: Damon Farber. *Minnesota Capitol*. Jan 2024.

PREVIOUS PLANS

IMPORTANT PLANS FOR THE CAPITOL AREA

Reference the 2040 Comprehensive Plan and/or historic analyses later on this document for more information.

1903, 1907, 1931 Cass Gilbert Plans

- 1903: Established three major axes (commerce, culture, and nature), network of green gardens to river, and primary views. 1907: Revised to include various government buildings. 1931: Revised to include State Office Building.

1946 Johnston / Nelson / Nichols Plan

- Extended Capitol Mall fan & located Veterans Service Building, bifurcating Gilbert's original plan.

1970 Comprehensive Plan for the Minnesota State Capitol Area

- CAAPB's first Comprehensive Plan proposed a large plaza around the Capitol Building as well as a series of plazas connecting the Capitol Building to Downtown. It also proposed parkways that connect the Capitol Mall to other surrounding neighborhoods.

1986 Project for the Completion of the Capitol Grounds

- Design competition that restored Gilbert's vision for a Capitol approach. The Upper Mall featured a large plaza for events flanked by gardens, while the lower Mall was a large public park. Plan not fully realized.

1989 Green River Planting Enhancements

- Beautified the interstates going through the Capitol Area. Construction completed in late 1980s.

1998 Comprehensive Plan for the Minnesota State Capitol Area

- Proposed a vision that the Capitol Campus is a good neighbor to the surrounding area and reenvisioned various parking lots / ramps as open space.

2009 Comprehensive Plan for the Minnesota State Capitol Area

- Amended the 1998 Comprehensive Plan for the Minnesota State Capitol Area

2017 Capitol Restoration

- Included landscaping around the Capitol Building and the restoration of Aurora Promenade as a more prominent open space

2018 Lower Rice Street Commercial Vitality Zone Strategy

- Outlined strategic investments along Rice Street.

2020 "Saint Paul for All" - City of Saint Paul 2040 Comprehensive Plan

- Guides development in Saint Paul for the next 20 years (2020-2040).

(2021) 2040 Comprehensive Plan for the Minnesota State Capitol Area

- Proposed a vision that the Capitol Campus is a unifying factor for those who come to live, work, learn and play. It also emphasized the importance of the Capitol Area as a connector.

2021 Capitol Rice Development Framework

- Outlined development strategies for the Capitol Rice District, including the vacant Sears site.

2022 Historic Context Report

- Documented the historic context of land use history in the Capitol Area; proposed an eligible historic district; and listed all Nationally Registered Historic Properties (NRHP) properties in the Capitol Area.

2022 Commemorative Works Task Force

- Outlined a process and series of guidelines for new or revised commemorative works within the Capitol Campus.

2024 Cultural Landscape Report

- Describes the physical history and existing conditions of the Capitol Mall and recommends treatment actions to rehabilitate the landscape.

2024 Capitol Area Community Vitality Account

- Strategic investment of \$5 million to plan and design essential physical infrastructure improvements in the Capitol Area.



DISTRICT
MINNEAPOLIS
PLANNED
6-11
MAY 1931

Figure 21: 1931 Cass Gilbert Plan



**THE CAPITOL IS THE BEST
WORK I HAVE EVER DONE,
OR SHALL EVER DO, AND I
AM GLAD TO HAVE GIVEN
IT TO SAINT PAUL.**

— CASS GILBERT





Figure 24: 1931 Minnesota Capitol Mall Plan by Cass Gilbert
Source: <https://cassgilbertsociety.org/works/mn-capitol/mn-capitol-axis/>

PROCESS OVERVIEW

REFER TO APPENDIX A FOR MORE INFORMATION



A COMPREHENSIVE PROCESS FOCUSED ON RIGOROUS SITE ANALYSIS AND ROBUST STAKEHOLDER AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, AS WELL AS IDENTIFYING FEASIBLE AND PHASEABLE DESIGN STRATEGIES AND IMPLEMENTATION STEPS.



Figure 25: Executive Steering Focus Group, charrette week

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. The process included three distinct design tasks and windows of engagement. Task 1: Learn and Create focused on rigorous site analysis and development of the draft cultural landscape report (see Appendix for more details), in addition to extensive community and stakeholder engagement to develop a collective vision and foundation for the Capitol Mall Design Framework. Task 2: Refine and Design thoughtfully transformed this analysis and vision into a draft master plan. Community and stakeholder engagement during this task focused on bold supporting design moves to ensure comprehensive alignment with the original vision. Additionally, Task 2 included a final draft of the Minnesota Capitol Mall Cultural Landscape Report and a Phase 1 Schematic Design proposal. Task 3: Celebrate and Launch generated the final Design Framework for submission and approval (see Chapter 2 for more details). Engagement throughout this time included a thorough draft review by various stakeholders and unpacked specific design details with the larger community necessary to inform future work. Lastly, Task 4: Detailed Design and Implementation utilized this information to document Phase 1 Schematic Design, with projected implementation (or completed construction) by the end of the year.

Community and stakeholder engagement was integral to all these tasks. Thousands of diverse and distinct voices shaped the Design Framework and created a plan that is truly authored by the people of Minnesota. To achieve this, a multifaceted and robust engagement approach utilized digital communications, in-person events, surveys, stakeholder interviews and one-on-one conversations both within the Twin Cities and the larger state. This chapter outlines this engagement process in more detail by providing a deeper look into the people engaged as well as how their feedback directly shaped the Design Framework.

The Capitol Mall Design Framework built upon a robust series of previous engagement efforts, including the 2040 Comprehensive Plan, Lower Rice Commercial Vitality Strategy, Capitol Rice Development Framework, Visitor Experience Survey, Capitol Connections and the Downtown Commons Study, Capitol Area Commutes, Capitol Area Stormwater Management Study, Public Engagement Task Force on Commemorative Works, and the Capitol Area Community Vitality Task Force.

The Capitol Mall Design Framework was completed in conjunction with the Cultural Landscape Report for the Minnesota State Capitol Mall Historic District (Damon Farber, 2024).

COMMUNITY DESIGN BUILT ON COMMUNITY PLANNING

CONNECTING THE 2040 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
TO THE CAPITOL MALL DESIGN FRAMEWORK

“AS THE SYMBOLIC HEART OF THE STATE, THE VISION FOR THE CAPITOL AREA IS TO BE A UNIFYING FACTOR FOR ALL THOSE WHO COME TO LIVE, WORK, LEARN AND PLAY.”

-(2040 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN, 2021).

PLAN VISION

“The vision adopted in 1998, of the Capitol Campus as a good neighbor to the surrounding area, has been updated and strengthened [in the 2040 Comprehensive Plan]. Compared with the Good Neighbor vision, the 2040 vision strives to turn boundaries into connections, integrating the elements of the Capitol Area to each other better, while also continuing policies that restore historic urban fabric between the Capitol Area and downtown and surrounding neighborhoods. The 1998 plan was organized by geography, treating the Capitol Campus and Capitol Area neighborhoods differently. This plan seeks to remove boundaries for a truly integrated Capitol Area. While the Capitol Building and Mall is acknowledged as a symbol

and focus of Minnesota, the sixty-block area in which it is located, the Capitol Area, is now recognized not just as a neighbor, but as an integral and critical functioning part of Saint Paul, providing connections between downtown and neighborhoods,” (2040 Comprehensive Plan, 2021).

To read the document in full, visit mn.gov/mn/reports/caapb/2040ComprehensivePlan_full.pdf.

INFORMING THE DESIGN FRAMEWORK

The 2040 Comprehensive Plan is organized by a set of aspirational outcomes that support the vision, which are called The Capitol Area Principles. These principles are applied to the entire Capitol Area, not just the campus or neighborhoods and districts of the Capitol Area. The Capitol Area Principles anchor the policy that serves to guide the CAAPB in transforming the Capitol Area into a complete and healthy community with vibrant public spaces, a range of movement options, a diverse mix of land uses, and attractive buildings framing lively, pedestrian-friendly streets. They are designed to reinforce the visual pre-eminence of the Capitol Building, maintain the Capitol Campus as a visitor destination, preserve its component neighborhoods as vibrant urban villages, acknowledge the inherently productive nature of community building

and neighborhood interdependence, and produce a clear direction for a future in tune with Saint Paul’s aspirations.

The 2040 Comprehensive Plan explicitly calls for an update to the Capitol Mall Design Framework before 2025. Specific enabling legislation was passed by the Minnesota Legislature in May 2023 to fund this planning work by early 2024. Therefore, the Design Framework builds upon the 2040 Comprehensive Plan to shape, guide, and manage the Capitol Campus environment and its physical form. The Vision and Capitol Area Principles inform and guide every step of the Design Framework, most notably the analysis lenses that form the foundation for all design decisions moving forward. These analysis lenses include connect, preserve, activate, and grow.

THE CAPITOL AREA PRINCIPLES

ANALYSIS LENSES

1 DESTINATION

As Minnesota's seat of government and destination for thousands of people each year, the Capitol Area offers the highest quality experience to visitors.

2 FOCAL POINT

The Capitol building and Mall are central to the identity of Saint Paul and are a unifying focal point for the city, as Cass Gilbert once envisioned.

3 MODEL FOR MINNESOTA

The Capitol Area is a model for Minnesota, where best practices are utilized in the planning, design, and development of public and private projects.

4 PUBLIC REALM

The entire Capitol Area provides an integrated, high quality, human scale public realm experience.

5 SEAMLESSLY CONNECTED

The Capitol Area is an urban multi-modal district, seamlessly connected to destinations and the larger mobility network of Saint Paul.

6 LAND USE DIVERSITY

Land use diversity is encouraged throughout the Capitol Area.

7 COORDINATED

In all parts of the Capitol Area, new development respects community, assets and context, including the distinct identities of the Capitol Rice District, Capitol Heights and Fitzgerald Park neighborhoods.



CONNECT



PRESERVE



ACTIVATE



GROW

INVENTORY + ANALYSIS

REFER TO APPENDIX B FOR MORE INFORMATION



CONNECT

The Connect analysis lens seeks to answer the following questions: What mobility modes connect the Capitol Campus to the surrounding area? How do most people arrive at the Capitol Mall? What is the existing streetscape experience? And much more. The following investigation topics unpack these questions:

- City Connectivity
- Campus Connectivity
- Thresholds to the Capitol Campus
- Capitol Campus Parking
- Area Street Hierarchy
- Streetscape Experience
- Utilities and Infrastructure

PRESERVE

The Preserve analysis lens seeks to answer the following questions: What is the history of the Capitol Mall and surrounding area? How have the communities living near or adjacent to the Capitol Mall changed over time? What features are important to preserve? What stories are being told and which are missing? And much more. The following investigations topics unpack these questions:

- Historically Diverse Communities
- Capitol Area through Time
- Campus Timeline
- 2022 Historic Context Report
- Viewshed Analysis
- Sculptures, Monuments and Memorials



ACTIVATE

The Activate analysis lens seeks to answer the following questions: How does the Capitol Mall fit into the larger urban network? How do Minnesotans currently use the Capitol Mall? What kinds of events occur there? How is security integrated into the design? And much more. The following investigation topics unpack these questions:

- Citywide Recreation
- Neighborhood Demographics
- Capitol Area Amenities
- Capitol Mall Programing
- Slope and Future Programming
- Security and Public Assembly
- Security Typologies

GROW

The Grow analysis lens seeks to answer the following questions: How does the Capitol Mall fit into the larger ecological network? How has the landscape changed over time? What types of landscapes currently exist in the Capitol Area? How is the Capitol Mall mitigating ongoing climate change? And much more. The following investigation topics unpack these questions:

- Minnesota's Ecosystems
- Mississippi Flyway
- Ecosystem Heritage
- Landscape Typologies
- Capitol Area Tree Canopy
- Thermal Comfort
- Stormwater Systems