Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board

Freeman Building
625 Robert Street North
Saint Paul, MN 55155
651-757-1500
https://mn.gov/caapb/

Date: July 15, 2026
To: Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board
From: Inspector Darin McDonald, Ramsey County Sheriff's Office;
Erik Cedarleaf Dahl, Executive Secretary, Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board

Update on Capitol Vitality July 2026

Overview

The Capitol Area Public Safety & Vitality Project is a partnership between the Ramsey County Sheriff's Office (RCSO) and the Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board, funded by a $2.865 million net state grant (after 4.5% administrative overhead).

Rooted in the **2024 Capitol Area Community Vitality Task Force** recommendations, the project implements three of the Task Force's core pillars:

- Public safety through community engagement
- Youth and family programming services
- Street and neighborhood cleanup with community ambassadors

These efforts integrate public safety with vitality to create secure, livable neighborhoods that support economic growth and community cohesion. All activities are centered at Capitol Commons (546 Rice Street), which serves as a co-created storefront hub for services, programming, and partnerships.

Who We Are

The on-the-ground team delivering this work includes:

- Darin McDonald – Lead Inspector - Capitol Vitality (In Kind Salary)
- Daryl Gullette Sr. – Lead Inspector - Youth Services (In Kind Salary)
- Marcus Edwards – Deputy (In Kind Salary)
- Marco Barton – Deputy
- Jordan Wild – Deputy
- Andrew Johnson – Deputy (In Kind Salary)
- Kaw Ku – Deputy (In Kind Salary)
- Shontel Booker – Program Coordinator (In Kind Salary)
- Cleo Stowers – Community Service Officer
- Johnny Howard – Community Service Officer
- Bashir Waged – Correction Officer
- Demetrius Boyd – Correction Officer

Approach

The RCSO and CAAPB are taking a collaborative approach to bring resources and services directly to the Capitol Area community — a neighborhood of concentrated poverty that has significant needs but limited current capacity for traditional community development models. Rather than expecting residents to lead or volunteer to run specific programs, RCSO, CAAPB, and partner staff are actively establishing and leading programming so that community members can participate without first needing the capacity to organize and lead these efforts themselves. This work follows the Integrated Work Plan & Budget (August 2025) and is guided by the 2024 Capitol Area Community Vitality Task Force recommendations.

Capitol Commons

Capitol Commons (546 Rice Street) is the physical and programmatic heart of the project. The building was identified in December 2025, brought under lease in January 2026, and held its first open house in February 2026. It opened for regular activities in March 2026 and is now a consistently staffed, trusted neighborhood hub.

What We Have Been Doing

Activities are organized under the three core purposes outlined in the Integrated Work Plan & Budget (August 2025).

1. Public Safety through Community Engagement

Deputies have conducted regular proactive foot patrols, community outreach, and proactive police visits. From August through December 2025, 671 proactive cases were logged in the Capitol Area.

2. Youth and Family Programming Services

Co-created programming continues at Capitol Commons in partnership with Saint Paul City School and other community anchors. Student artwork is on permanent display. Regular weekly offerings include free community meals, CPR training, gaming clubs, chess nights, and the “Community Conversation” series.

3. Street and Neighborhood Cleanup with Community Ambassadors

Community ambassadors continue litter and graffiti removal on Rice Street and surrounding areas. The May 2, 2026 Community Cleanup, Planter Build, and Gardening Event engaged dozens of neighbors, families, students, and local leaders.

Additional service delivery has included the May 15, 2026 Ramsey County Public Health Mobile Clinic and Financial Assistance Services, and looking to have Ramsey County Benefits Services available on site soon (SNAP, GA, MA, and Coordinated Entry Assessments)

Recent Developments and Expanded Partnerships at Capitol Commons

Capitol Commons continues to expand its role as a community hub:

- The Safe and Strong University Ave Initiative now uses the Commons as its weekly roll call location.

- The Capitol Heights Block Club holds its monthly meetings at the space.
- RCSO is leading a summer long East African Parents Academy at the Commons (20+ parents engaged to date) to connect families to services for at-risk youth.
- Two Saint Paul Right Track interns began work at the Capitol Commons this summer.
- Warm Meal Fridays continue to grow in popularity.
- Trellis (Metropolitan Agency for Aging) is looking to begin offering senior Medicaid counseling on-site, in addition to programming offered in partnership with Saint Paul Parks and Recreation.
- Mitchell Hamline Law School is exploring offering legal aid services from the Commons.
- A public mural on the side of the City School is targeted for completion by Labor Day.
- RCSO is negotiating a long-term contract with a youth services provider to deliver culturally responsive programming, with services expected to begin at the start of the school year.
- Ramsey County has committed to partnering on additional services in the near future.

Program Impact and Early Results

According to Saint Paul Police Department data, total crimes in Grids 90 and 91 (Part I and Part II combined) dropped 68% in the first four months of 2026 compared to the full year of 2025. Significant reductions were recorded in theft (the dominant Part I crime), disorderly conduct (the largest Part II category), domestic incidents, aggravated assaults, and weapons violations. These improvements align directly with the launch and early implementation of the Capitol Area Vitality Program.

From August through December 2025, twenty-five community meal and outreach events reached 2,345 attendees. Positive media coverage in the *Monitor Saint Paul* and *Spokesman-Recorder* has highlighted Capitol Commons as a growing community hub. These results demonstrate clear progress toward the work plan performance measures.

Livability, Compliance, and Abatement Coordination

In early June, RCSO partnered with CAAPB to begin issuing code compliance and livability notices to residential properties and businesses. This coordinated approach produced immediate positive changes, including at the liquor store and adjacent exterior spaces previously used for unsafe and nefarious behaviors.

RCSO also responded to concerns raised by the Fitzgerald Neighborhood Alliance group regarding the abandoned St. Joe's Hospital courtyard. Coordinated efforts are underway to clean up the parcel and address drug-related behaviors in the area. These examples illustrate how RCSO's on-the-ground presence and direct communication with CAAPB are driving tangible improvements in neighborhood livability and code compliance.

Partners

Capitol Commons is positioned as a facilitative hub that complements and supplements the work of other partners. We continue to actively engage a broad network of partners, including Karen of Minnesota (KOM), Metropolitan Area Agency on Aging (formerly Trellis) (MAAA), Saint Paul City School, City of Saint Paul, Capitol Region Watershed District, Mitchell Hamline Law, Saint Paul Parks and Recreation, Ramsey County Public Health, Metro Transit (including Operation Safe and Strong), the Metropolitan Council, Minnesota Horticultural Society, and others.

Looking Ahead

The project continues to evolve through daily and weekly co-creation with CAAPB, residents, and community groups. We are expanding regular litter and graffiti patrols and have rolled out a formal summer youth employment and internship program in partnership with Saint Paul City School. A major community celebration event is planned for August, and we will launch a monthly "Safety & Vitality Forum" with residents, business owners, and elected officials.

We have applied for two complementary grants to support expanded youth- and community-led murals, resident engagement, and cultural activation at the Commons. A public mural on the City School is targeted for completion by Labor Day, and a long-term contract with a culturally responsive youth services provider is expected to begin at the start of the school year.

Closing

This work is steady, relationship-driven, and focused on building trust and opportunity while delivering measurable progress toward the Vitality Task Force goals. Every interaction at Capitol Commons advances safety, youth engagement, and neighborhood vitality. We are grateful for the Board's continued support and look forward to providing further updates at future check-ins.

Stay Connected

Capitol Commons is open to the community and welcomes Board members, residents, and partners to visit, participate, or suggest new ideas.

- **Website**: www.capitolcommons546.com
- **Facebook**: @Capitol Area Vitality Program
- **Instagram**: @capitolcommons_546
- **Email**: info@capitolcommons546.com
- **Phone**: (651) 757-1500

Board members are encouraged to stop by Capitol Commons (546 Rice Street) during regular hours or contact us directly, join a Community Conversation, or discuss potential partnerships.