



## Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board



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Date: February 18, 2025  
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CC: Erik Cedarleaf Dahl, Executive Secretary, CAAPB  
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### **PRELIMINARY FINDINGS FOR AN APPLICATION TO ADD NEW COMMEMORATIVE WORKS AT THE STATE CAPITOL GROUNDS: THE PILLBOX PLAQUE**



*Downtown Ball Park, St. Paul. No Date. Minnesota Historical Society*

### **The Downtown Baseball Park – The Pillbox**

**History from the Application by Stew Thornley, Halsey Hall Chapter of the Society for American Baseball Research.**

“The Downtown Baseball Park also known as the Pillbox due to its small size, was a historic baseball park which was located on the northwest corner of 12<sup>th</sup> and Robert, on the site now occupied by the laboratory building for the Minnesota departments of Health and Agriculture. The ballpark which was in use from 1903 to 1910 by the St Paul, was used by St Paul Saints Minor league team and as a frequent home of a significant all black team, the St Paul Gophers (also called the St Paul Colored Gophers).

The Saints were all-white teams, as were the others in what was called “organized baseball,” because of a racial barrier that existed until the 1940s. Some integrated teams existed at various levels outside the professional ranks, although mostly the game was completely segregated. Even before the formal Negro Leagues were formed, many all-black professional teams existed, sometimes playing against white teams, both amateur and professional.

The Pillbox in its final years was one of the local homes for the St. Paul the Colored Gophers, who played a series of games against the Saints in 1907. Both teams recruited outside players, including a couple of Minneapolis Millers to play with the Saints. The Gophers benefited from the presence of Andrew “Rube” Foster, the manager of the Chicago Leland Giants as well as one of the best black pitchers in the country (and the man who would organize the Negro National League in 1920). Foster was back with the Colored Gophers in 1908 and pitched a no-hitter over a team from Hibbing August 28.

The following year, the Gophers matched up with the Leland Giants in what was billed as the “world’s colored championship.” Rube Foster was back with his regular team, the Giants, but he broke his leg prior to the games in St. Paul, and the Chicago pitching duties fell to others. The Colored Gophers had Bobby Marshall, one of Minnesota’s most remarkable athletes. A multi-sports star at Central High School in Minneapolis, Marshall became an All-America football player at the University of Minnesota. The Gophers beat the Leland Giants in the series, a victory that established their reputation as one of the best black teams in the Midwest. The Colored Gophers continued playing at the Pillbox through 1910, when the ballpark was abandoned, hastening the demise of the team.

Through the years, the ballpark had found many uses beyond baseball, from speed skating in the winter to professional wrestling in the summer. The Pillbox site is now occupied by a laboratory building for the Minnesota Departments of Health and Agriculture on the north side of Interstates 94 and 35E, a one-mile stretch of freeway known as Spaghetti Junction.”

## **CAAPB Staff Analysis and Findings: Does the Application Meet the Required Conditions to Move Forward?**

According to the rules, once CAAPB staff determine the application to be complete, “they must review the addition request and analyze whether the request meets all of the conditions in [Minnesota Rules 2400.2703, Subpart 2](#), and prepare a written report of the staff’s findings.”

*Subp. 2. **Conditions for adding new artwork.** The board must consider displaying new commemorative artwork in the Capitol area if the artwork meets all of the following conditions:*

- A. there has been documented public support of the artwork;*
- B. the artwork has lasting statewide significance for Minnesotans;*

*C. the artwork is respectful of the diversity of Minnesotans;*

*D. viewing the artwork provides a rich experience to broaden the understanding of Minnesota's shared history, heritage, and culture; and*

Therefore, CAAPB staff conducted a review of the application and observed that

- In regard to Condition A: The applicant asserts statewide support for markers by naming commemorative markers for the Metropolitan Stadium at the Mall of America, Lexington Park Ballpark in St. Paul and Nicollet Park in Minneapolis as examples. Also including The Society for American Baseball Research as a firm supporter of nationwide commemorative markers through their Baseball Landmarks committee.
- In regard to Condition B: The applicant cites the artwork's statewide significance by articulating that the game of baseball has always been important in Minnesota's history, starting in 1857 before Minnesota became a state. He further asserts the central role of St Paul in the state's baseball history and the impact of the game on the Twin Cities' rivalry.
  - Additional Staff Note: There is established anecdotal popularity of exhibits installed at Target Field in Minneapolis documenting the importance of professional, amateur and local levels of baseball in communities all over Minnesota.
- In regard to Condition C: The application states and showcases intent throughout the application, to highlight Minnesota's diverse history of baseball by identifying all Black players and teams that were associated with the Pillbox.
- In regard to Condition D: Though the application doesn't quite elaborate on how the artwork broadens the understanding of Minnesota's shared history, heritage and culture, the applicant generally asserts that by spotlighting the underrepresented teams and documenting the evolution of Minnesota's baseball history before and after racial segregation.
- Overall, though the primary themes presented by the applicant related to the ballparks' significance to baseball history in Minnesota are documented clearly, there are also important secondary aspects not included in the application that hold opportunities for helping a viewer understand important aspects of local urban history, including:
  - the loss of the Rondo community to investments in interstate infrastructure, and;
  - the existence of the old Central Park immediately north also demolished in middle of the 20th century

Thus, whilst acknowledging the need for verification of historical facts stated in the application, CAAPB staff determine that so far, the request meets all the conditions in Minnesota Rules 2400.2703, Subpart 2.

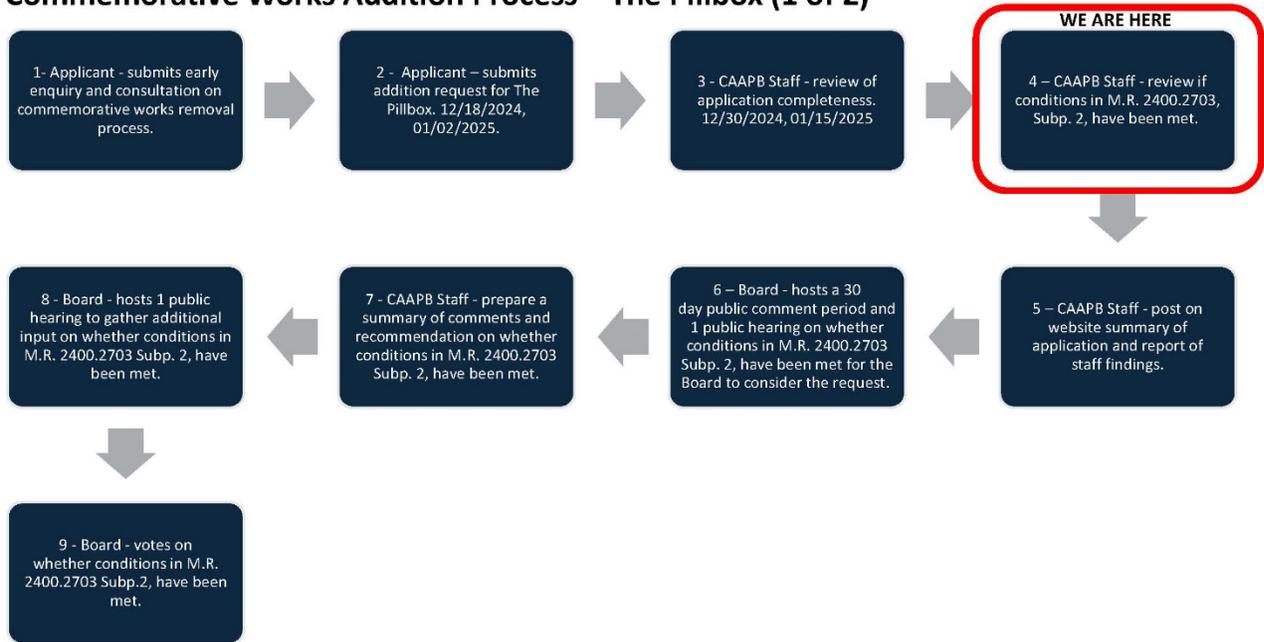
Following this determination and upon the Board's affirmation, staff will set a 30-day public comment period and host at least one public meeting to gather input on whether the addition request meets all of the conditions in [M.R. 2400.2703, Subpart 2](#). The public meeting will be hosted, organized, and managed according to subpart 10.

Once the 30- day comment period and public meeting are complete, CAAPB staff will prepare a written summary of the public comments and provide a recommendation to the CAAPB on whether to accept

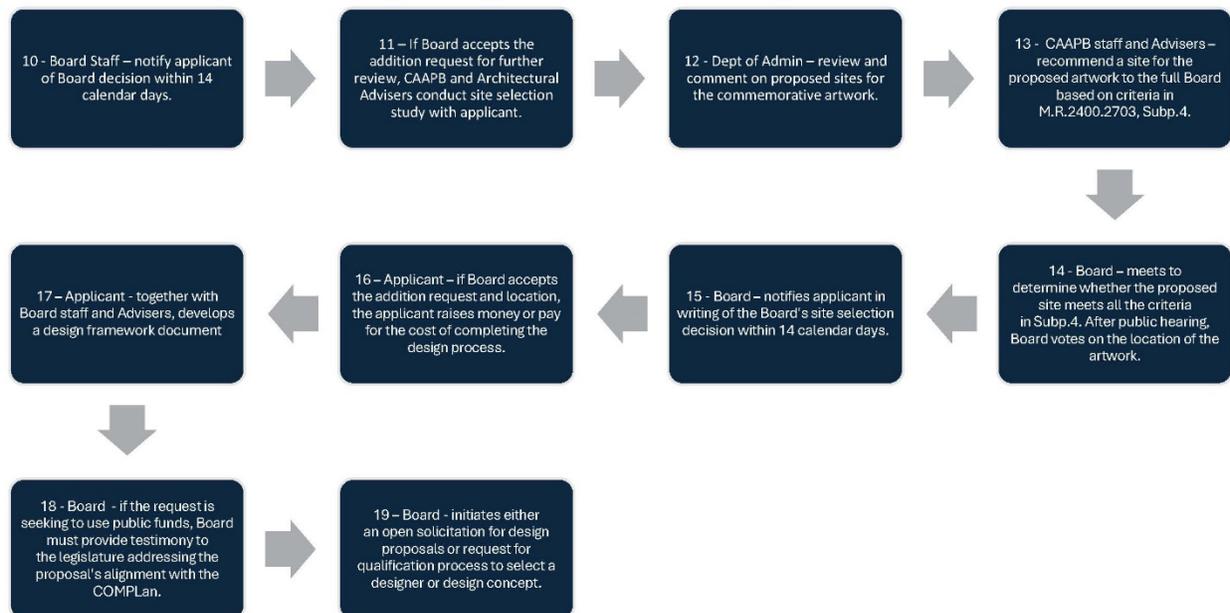
that the application meets all the conditions in Subpart 2 and may proceed to the next step in review process. A majority vote of the full CAAP Board is required to accept the application for addition as complete and therefore affirming the conducting of a site selection study by the Board staff, Architectural Advisers together with the applicant.

# Application to add a new Commemorative Work process

## Commemorative Works Addition Process – The Pillbox (1 of 2)



## Commemorative Works Addition Process – The Pillbox (2 of 3)



### Commemorative Works Addition Process – The Pillbox (3 of 3)

