Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan opened the Board meeting of Jan. 23, 2019 at 1:30 p.m., acknowledging the incredible asset in our Capitol Building and the surrounding community, then asked for all present to introduce themselves.

Agenda Item #1:

Board meeting minutes from Dec. 11, 2018. Board Member Mathis MOVED approval, and Board Member Buck SECONDED approval. Motion PASSED.

Agenda Item #2: Capitol Commutes

Kelly Morrell of Metro Transit spoke of the work of the Capitol Area Commutes partnerships, and she was joined by Will Feeney (Green Corps worker with the CAAPB), Marcus Grubbs, a planner with the Administration’s Office of Enterprise Sustainability and Becky Alper of MOVE MN. The partnership is one including public, private and non-profits with a shared interest in improving mobility for workers and visitors in the Capitol Area – especially given the limited amount of available land in the area and ever pressing demand for parking. Strategies incorporating Travel Demand Management (TDM) serves as a focus for all. Such strategies could include capital improvements as well as other options from staggered hours away from peak times to transit options including bike and other, which may need policies to remove obstacles or barriers to sustainable practices.

She noted that for over a year now representatives from the City of Saint Paul, the Dept. of Administration, the CAAPB, Administration’s Office of Enterprise Sustainability, MNDOT, Health, Metro Transit and MOVE MN have been involved in planning efforts.
Marcus Grubbs of Office of Enterprise Sustainability spoke of Executive Order 17-12 tracking greenhouse emissions and employees. Kelly spoke of MOVE MN and their work as Saint Paul’s designated transportation management organization working with employers on behalf of their employees, recognizing the Capitol Area as one of the four largest employment centers along the Green line. With Saint Paul’s final work on their own 2040 Comprehensive Plan and the CAAPB doing the same, Rice Street revisited the Commercial Vitality Zone Program (CVZ) which becomes a new focus for strengthening.

It was noted that all the area hospitals anticipate growth, and with it, more people and more cars; and at the same time, with a majority of the State workforce within years of retirement, we need more options, including expanded transit options. The work we find ourselves in the midst of consists of four phases. The first was the Capitol Rice Area parking analysis which has been completed. Phase 2 is underway with the assistance of AmeriCorps gathering more quantitative and qualitative data. Marcus noted that the two area hospitals are involved, and all are looking to policies, new options and strategic solutions to moving the needle on people selecting modes of transportation.

Will, our AmeriCorps worker for the current year (through August 2019), detailed six components: a survey with interviews, and a review by sustainability coordinators of the different agencies regarding how the different agencies inform employees about commute choices. The third and fourth part will focus on the physical environment of the Capitol Area and how we measure pedestrians and/or bike use, as well as gaps in service or possibly needed improvements; while the fifth will be commuter outreach and sixth is documenting best practices from other sites.

Senator Nelson asked if the Board could get a copy of the parking study and asked how this work was funded. Kelly responded by stating that she could get the report (from Phase 1) to the Board, and added that part of the work in Phase 1 was paid for through the City of Saint Paul, and that Will is paid through Green Corps (Federal program) with support from both CAAPB and OES. Moving forward however, will be another matter as work for future phases is currently unfunded, though possibly Metro Transit, or some regional planning fund will become available. Until that time, in Kelly’s words, it will be a “labor of love.”

Senator Nelson re-iterated her concern for visitor parking for people coming from all corners of the State. Kelly acknowledged that and stated that one of the reasons they are focused on employees is with the hope of freeing up some of the existing parking for visitors, citing some tools and innovations which could help.
Board Member Lentz echoed his desire that we see a reallocation of spaces, as well as greater use of available parking after hours, especially in light of the improvements for the public after the Capitol restoration.

Executive Secretary Mandell noted that while we were going to be discussing Sears later in the agenda, once redevelopment of the seventeen acres starts happening, many visitors and lobbyists who are used to parking in their lot will need to find an alternative. Additionally, he spoke of his renewed efforts to have the City clamp down on the food trucks when they take up more than 20-30 public meters along John Ireland Blvd., for which they may or may not pay, and are there for more than the 2 hour window they’re allowed. This happens in May when the legislature is at its peak and the weather is nicer. Mandell noted that the previous Mayor was far more interested in street life than in enforcing the rules, while hopefully Mayor Carter will understand the total picture and the need to keep the spaces available for visitors for at least the majority of time each day.

Lt. Governor Flanagan spoke to “recognition” of the Capitol as “the People’s House” and the need to serve the public while keeping the business of government running smoothly. Then Mandell expressed appreciation to all the partners, both those testifying and others involved in the project.

Agenda Item #3:

Executive Secretary Mandell introduced the next item: Rice Street Commercial Vitality Zone (CVZ) City funding, reminding Board Members that Peter Musty had briefed them at least twice on the year-long public process leading up to today.

Nora Riemenschneider, from Saint Paul Planning and Economic Development introduced co-workers Vong Thao and Tony Johnson, and spoke of the CVZ Program history dating back to 2013, investing in over nine different neighborhood and commercial district zones for the goal of economic vitality, funded with a half-cent sales tax in Saint Paul that also funds the City’s Cultural STAR Program. She described the goal of façade improvements, new signage and interior business improvements that directly impact the customer experience, and the City’s commitment to $325,000 for Rice Street, looking at close to twenty catalytic projects that leverage other investments, with a 12-18 month time frame.

According to Nora, another stated goal is equity, with regards to Met Council’s definition and the surrounding areas of concentrated poverty as well as looking at housing and commercial controlled reinvestment. Musty is working on behalf of the City to document 2017 CVZ applications.
Tony Johnson described the initial seed money to the CAAPB for a City match of Peter’s time and expenditures on the Capitol/Rice project – as part of his larger effort for the Comprehensive Plan for the entire Capitol Area. He also described the engagement process involving himself, Peter and Becky on behalf of MOVE MN and others in canvassing.

Tony spoke of the events of outreach and engagement and the five themes arising from the work: support for small business development and improvements, greater focus on Leif Erickson Park and for integrated mobility in the area, another being redesign for improved walkability for both Rice Street and Como Avenue, and lastly anti-displacement or controlled growth. Nora added reference to the new market analysis.

Vong Thao, who works for the City of Saint Paul, briefed the Board on the fifteen applications (only one was denied) for the CVZ grant monies capped at $20,000 each – in sum, leveraging over $675,000 with the City’s $322,000.

Rep. Dehn asked of the impact of Sears redevelopment on the neighborhood. Nora acknowledged both CAAPB and City has already engaged with Seritage and its prospective development team. Paul Mandell added, that includes Lucy Thompson, who’s been at the City as long as Paul has been with the CAAPB, along with Kady Dadlez (also at PED) and Parks and Public Works as well. He reported that Seritage continues to shop around initial concepts while continuing to market. Now with completion of 7A, which will serve as a Design Framework for Seritage, Department of Administration and other large property owners in the Capitol Rice Area, Mandell noted that what staff and Advisors had seen from Seritage to date was very compatible with CAAPB goals and direction.

In response to a more detailed question from Mathis, Vong reported:

Hmongtown was looking for an architectural gate like a pagoda, Christ Lutheran an industrial kitchen for serving meals, Clear Channel for beautification of their corner at Rice and Como, HealthEast Physicians for improvements to their lobby, the Max Mart a new sign and awning, Focus MN exterior and interior updates in the building that was previously the Women’s Building, El Bravo for kitchen and floor improvements, several others for new signs, and Rice Auto a new and improved fence and gate.

All in all, these will improve the appearance of this commercial strip. Paul told the Board that Linda, in Peter’s absence, would brief them on the changes to 7a that they gave preliminary approval at the December 2018 meeting. He added that staff
continues to monitor the Sears plans. In fact, he and Peter had been interviewed by Tom Hauser of KSTP-TV5 for a piece on Sears Site redevelopment. He added that the Board would likely be seeing parts of the Seritage plans for the Sears site over the next year or so in far greater detail than we’ve seen to date and these plans will be guided by Chapter 7a.

Agenda Item #4

Senator Nelson asked if it’s possible to track changes to Comprehensive Plan. Mandell noted it will be done but it’s being thoroughly revised and reformatted so it will be difficult for any side-by-side. Linda Spohr noted that Chapter 7a was written specifically to serve as a design framework for Capitol Rice Area large sites, though in the final Comprehensive Plan, much of it will be disseminated out to other chapters as appropriate. Linda advised the Board that the first attachment in their packet included the Capitol Area Principles, the newest version 10 of Chapter 7a, and the Glossary. Minor grammatical changes to the Principles are tracked in red. The second attachment is the list of Stakeholder groups for chapter 7a and a summary of the revisions since approval in December 2018. Linda added that if anyone wants to see it, there’s also a compilation of all the raw comments available.

She reminded the Board of the seven Principles – in effect eleven, if one counts each of the four geographic sections initiated with 7a on Capitol Rice. The square format had been adopted over a year ago on the recommendation of staff, Architectural Advisors and the Board’s Comprehensive Plan Committee (following an example from the National Capitol Parks and Planning Commission). The CAAPB Plan, in contrast to the 2000 Plan and the 2009 Amendment, will be Principle-based rather than location-based, with the first six principles designed around urban form, public realm and orientation for visitors, workers and residents. Principle seven addresses policy and guidance specific to several districts of the Capitol Area: Capitol-Rice, Capitol Heights, Fitzgerald Park and the commons between the Capitol and downtown. It is in chapter 7, and the sub-chapters, that we will most strongly address neighborhood concerns, such as the need for more services, or more housing, changing or increased traffic with new development, loss of on-street parking, and fears of displacement and gentrification.

She noted that much of the content underlying the first six chapters, and, to a degree, the entire document, is pre-existing policy from the CAAPB, Admin. and the City. She addressed the various stakeholders and eleven groups who had been consulted or involved in review at least once on the drafts of 7a. This chapter has six sections on urban form (sections A-F); one on mobility (section G); and one covering
the approval process (section H). She spoke in depth of the major areas of changes since the Board’s December 2018 meeting; referencing her memo and citing page 5 on the role of the State, page 8 on the policy summary, and pages 10 and 11 on the urban village, Leif Erickson as a central park and mobility hub in the area and lastly a redesigned and improved Rice Street as a main street and corridor connector north and south. Other changes that were noted included traffic impact, parking and the detailed mapping of the approval process beyond just CAAPB design approval.

Vice Chair Buck congratulated the staff on this work, and Exec. Sec. Mandell noted for the Lt. Governor and Board the extensive involvement of their CP Committee (Members Buck, Fink, Mathis and Lanegran). With regards to a question of push back against any dramatic changes to Leif Erickson Park, Linda noted that the call for elimination of the surface parking in the G-2 Zoning area is consistent with current policy and is made in full recognition of the need for replacement of those and other surface lots with structured parking that currently is unfunded, with the likely sites including Lot C or AA at Rice and University, which are State-owned and thus eligible for bonding, should such a project move forward.

Mandell referred all to the Board memo, Agenda Item 4, page 3 for recommended motion. Mathis MOVED approval, citing the language. Lentz SECONDED. Motion PASSED.

Agenda Item #5:

Executive Secretary Mandell distributed the new 2017-18 Biennial Report released the prior day in testimony before the House State Government Finance and next week to the Senate State Government. He spoke to the fact that all the aerial photos were new, from this fall and are a snapshot in time showing no construction or temporary parking lots on the Mall. So they’re beautiful shots showing the fully restored Capitol Building and surrounding neighborhoods.

He also reminded all that the CAAPB was fifty-two years old, reflecting details in the report, with a yearly budget of $350,000, which is actually lower than it was in 2008. He reported that the Board had been reviewed by the Legislative Auditor in 2014, and found no merit for a full review at the time. He reminded them that he had hired Merritt Clapp Smith of TKDA to help lay out the full approval process should the Sears project come forward regarding CAAPB and environmental review, demolition permit, City approval and such. She was chosen since she had project managed the Ford Site redevelopment. He also noted the pending construction of the medical clinic at Rice and Como and the ninety-unit apartment building at Park and Como replacing a vacant medical office building and parking ramp.
Lastly, in response to a question about the Sears’s site and Seritage, Mandell explained that Seritage, a private company, owns this and about a dozen other Sears sites ripe for re-development. He was asked when the Board might expect to see something for the Sears site, and responded that it would likely be within the next two-three months though it’s uncertain when they might have something official to initiate a process which is likely to span months if not years in phasing. He announced that the next Board meeting would likely be in late March or April.

The meeting adjourned at 3 p.m.