



CAPITOL AREA ARCHITECTURAL AND PLANNING BOARD

CAAPB

Tribal Flag Plaza Background



September 2025

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Background: Tribal Flag Plaza, Opening Ceremony

The Tribal Flag Plaza flag-raising ceremony on September 5, 2025, marks a historic moment at the Minnesota State Capitol: for the first time, the flags of the eleven sovereign Tribal Nations sharing land with Minnesota will be permanently raised on the Capitol grounds. The Plaza includes each Tribal Nation's flag, plantings selected by each Tribe at the base of each flagpole, and Minnesota-sourced granite pavers and benches. These elements, taken together, create a lasting place of recognition, respect, and acknowledgment of the government-to-government relationship between the State of Minnesota and the sovereign Tribal Nations.

The Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board (CAAPB), chaired by the Lieutenant Governor, played a central role in the vision, design, and realization of the Plaza. The project was developed in close coordination with Tribal Nations, the Minnesota Legislature, and the Department of Administration.

Eleven federally recognized tribes:

[Cansa'yapi / Lower Sioux Indian Community](#)

[Gaa-waabaabiganikaag / White Earth Nation](#)

[Gaa-zagaskwaajimekaag / Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe](#)

[Gichi-Onigaming / Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa](#)

[Mdewakanton / Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community](#)

[Misi-zaaga'iganiing / Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe](#)

[Miskwaagamiwi-Zaagaiganing / Red Lake Nation](#)

[Nah-gah-chi-wa-nong / Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa](#)

[Pezihutazizi / Oyate \(Upper Sioux Community\)](#)

[Tinta Wita / Prairie Island Indian Community](#)

[Zagaakwaandagowiniwag / Bois Forte Band of Chippewa](#)

Legislative Action

Funding for the Tribal Flag Plaza was provided through an appropriation by the Minnesota State Legislature for Capitol Mall improvements in 2023. (This appropriation included \$6 million for planning and improvements to the Capitol Mall and \$30 million for off-campus priorities, including the reconstruction of Rice Street and vitality activities in larger the Capitol Area district.)

Inception

The idea for a Tribal Flag Plaza was raised as early as 2021, during the 2021 Governor’s Tribal Summit. Calls for better tribal recognition in the Capitol Area resurfaced again and gained traction during a lengthy period of public engagement process leading up to drafting the *CMDF*.

More information on Phase 1A improvement plans can be found here:

[https://mn.gov/caapb/assets/20240515_Phase%201A%20CAAPB%20Board%20Presentati
on-5_15_24_tcm1087-624355.pdf](https://mn.gov/caapb/assets/20240515_Phase%201A%20CAAPB%20Board%20Presentation-5_15_24_tcm1087-624355.pdf)

A complete version of 2024 *CMDF* is also accessible on the CAAPB website:

<https://mn.gov/caapb/planning/rfp-cmdf/>

CAAPB and the Capitol Mall Design Framework (CMDF)

Design and construction of the Plaza was approved by the CAAP Board under a larger approval for Phase 1A improvements described in the *Capitol Mall Design Framework*.

The 2024 *CMDF* provides a long-term vision for the State Capitol Mall and a series of design guidelines for implementing this vision. These guidelines reinforce broader planning recommendations described in the CAAPB’s 2040 *Comprehensive Plan for the Minnesota State Capitol Area* (See below).

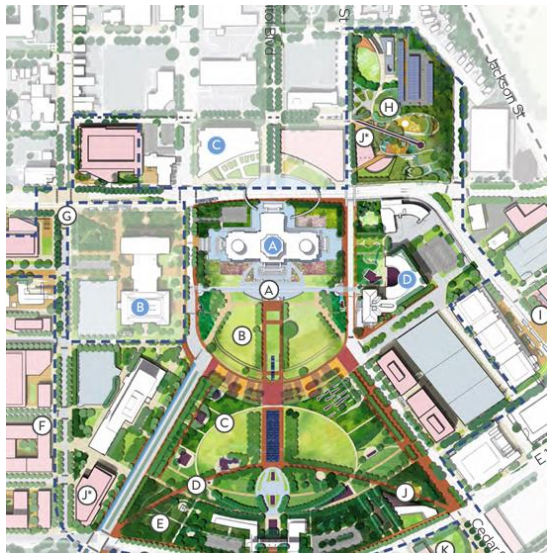


Other improvements in addition to the Tribal Flag Plaza under Phase 1A consist of ‘greening’ the campus, through planting approximately 171 new trees on the Upper and Lower Mall as well as in and around Cass Gilbert Memorial Park. Later improvements (Phase 1B +) will require further legislative support.

Tribal Flag Plaza within the CMDF

A significant public space strategy described in the *CMDF* for cultural and commemorative works on the Mall is a cultural/commemorative loop/circle on the Lower Mall between Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard and the Veterans Service building.¹ The loop/circle is aimed at honoring the State’s cultural diversity on the Mall.

¹ The *CMDF* describes the Capitol Mall as “primary monumental and commemorative landscape surrounding the Minnesota Capitol Building.” *CMDF*, 12.



The Tribal Flag Plaza comprises the first section (northern arc) of a new elliptical loop organizing the lower mall - and is one of the first improvements made in Phase 1A.

Note: Leaders from the eleven federally recognized tribes in Minnesota became key participants in developing a vision for the first arc for a new Commemorative Circle. Each tribe shared guidance with CAAPB. Through this process, the Plaza became a formal expression of the key natural and cultural symbols and values of each tribe.

Public Engagement

The guidelines introduced in the *CMDF* were the result of an extensive planning process—completed in 2024—that engaged government agencies, community partners, and Minnesotans from across the state to reimagine a Mall that suits their needs.

CAAPB and the design framework team collaborated with roughly 14,000 Minnesotans and community members over the course of five months in creating this document. Public engagement included: a four-day design session (“charrette”) with 75 community members; two online surveys (with 2,425 responses); thirteen pop-ups across the metro area and Greater Minnesota; focus groups; a virtual workshop; attendance of meetings of community groups, state agencies, and others; and the CAAPB and design (Sasaki) staff participation in meetings with MIAC (Minnesota Indian Affairs Council) staff and Tribal Leaders via the Governor’s Office weekly call.

Important themes emerging out of this public engagement: increasing the vitality of the Capitol Mall and surrounding community; creating resilience to future economic and environmental changes; and increasing the inclusivity, comfort and accessibility of the Capitol Mall. These themes are illustrated in eight Bold Moves the structure [Chapter 2 of the CMDF](#).

These themes, taken together, culminated in an overarching strategy to make the Mall “more welcoming for more Minnesotans.” (This phrase is *CMDF*’s subtitle.)

TFP Design Elements

The plaza is distinguished by its comprehensive, site-integrated design.

- Eleven tribal flags are—installed in an arc running parallel to adjacent to Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard, on the Lower Mall—are set against the white marble facade of the Capitol Building.
- North of the plaza, between the installation and the Capitol building, stand eight white pines. These pines, selected with Tribal consultation, ground the installation in the built environment and symbolize a connection to the land.
- Sacred plantings at the base of each flagpole aim to create a living landscape of meaning and representation. The plants—chosen in collaboration with the Director of Tribal State Relations Systems Implementation, Patina Park, and Tribal representatives from all eleven Tribal Nations—are all important cultural and ecological significance. Each Tribe selected two plants to be included.
- The plaza’s pavers and benches are made high-quality granite sourced from Cold Spring Minnesota—selected for its longevity, ease of maintenance, and ability to complement the surrounding Capitol Mall.

Tribal Flag Displays in Other States

Only a handful of states honor sovereign Tribal Nations on a permanent basis outside of Minnesota. These states are:

- A Tribal Flag Plaza was established in Helena, Montana in 2020. Here, eight Tribal Nations’ flags fly equally alongside the US and state flags.
- Tribal flags are prominently displayed in Oklahoma, just north of the Capitol Building, as has been a requirement of State law since 2003.
- In 2024, South Dakota introduced two Tribal flags to the Capitol rotunda. However, broader inclusion still remains a work in progress.

- Oregon features a ‘Walk of Flags’ on its Capitol grounds, which incorporates flags of recognized Tribes in the State into a broader cultural display.
- Tribal flags are housed within an indoor display case in Iowa. Although acknowledged, the flags are not flown in a ceremonial or official capacity.

2040 Comprehensive Plan

The *CMDF* reinforces the central principals and design guidelines for the Capitol Mall described in the CAAPB’s *2040 Comprehensive Plan for the Minnesota State Capitol Area*. The CAAPB published this plan in June 2021.

The *Comprehensive Plan* envisions the Capitol Area through 2040 and defines how the district will relate to its surrounding context and support its diverse community. The plan outlines seven Capitol Area Principles guiding planning:

- (1) Providing the highest quality experience to visitors of the Minnesota State Capitol
- (2) The Capitol Building and Mall are central to the identity of Saint Paul and a unifying focal point for the city
- (3) The Capitol Area is a model for Minnesota, where best practices in planning, design and development of public and private projects are expected
- (4) The Capitol Area provides a human-scale public realm experience
- (5) The Area is a multi-modal, urban district, seamlessly connected to destinations
- (6) Land use diversity is encouraged
- (7) New development respects community, assets, and context [...]

(Paraphrased. *2040 Comprehensive Plan*, p. 7)

A copy of the 2040 Comprehensive Plan can be found here:

<https://mn.gov/caapb/planning/>.

Tribal Flag Plaza Timeline

June 3, 2021: 2040 Comprehensive Plan approved and adopted by the Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board

2023: Minnesota State Legislature approves funding for implementation of the CMDF

Late 2023-early 2024: Public Engagement for drafting CMDF begins

February 5-8, 2024: CAAPB holds a charette for the CMDF

September 2024: the CAAP Board authorizes the final edits to the full CMDF document

September 2024: Design and construction of the Tribal Flag Plaza begins

May 2024: CAAP Board approves Phase 1 improvements

July 2024-July 2025 – Construction of TFP/coordination with Tribes on plants/trees.

- Excavation: 10/5/24-11/26/24
- Flagpole bases: 11/18/24-11/22/24
- Concrete: 12/5/24-12/15/24
- Flagpoles: 12/23/25-12/27/25
- Pavers: 6/5/25-7/18/25
- Plantings: 8/4/25-8/8/25
- Site Restoration: 8/11/25-8/15/25

August 2025: Construction on the Tribal Flag Plaza is complete.

Implementation Details

Tribal Flag Plaza (Design and Construction)

Funding

The Minnesota Legislature (2023 and 2025; majority appropriated in 2023).

Design Management, Tribal Engagement, Oversight and Approvals

CAAPB, led by offices of CAAPB Chair Lt Governor Peggy Flanagan and CAAPB Executive Secretary Erik Cedarleaf Dahl, working with representatives of eleven federally recognized tribes in Minnesota.

CMDF Schematic Design - Phase 1

Sasaki - under the management and oversight by CAAPB advisors and staff - developed, submitted, gained CAAPB board member approval, then advised on design development.

CMDF Project Implementation Phase 1

- **Project Architecture, Design Development and Construction Administration**
HGA under project management by Department of Administration Real Estate and Construction Services (with collaboration and oversight by CAAPB)

- **Construction and Material Suppliers**

Reiling Construction, Winco Landscape, CD Tile & Stone, American Fence, Lloyds Construction Services, Cold Spring Granite, Concrete Arts, Gunnar Electric

2024 Capitol Mall Design Framework

Funding

The Minnesota Legislature (2023)

Plan Leadership and Approvals

Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board led by Chair Lt Governor Peggy Flanagan and Executive Secretary Erik Cedarleaf Dahl

Planning and Design Team

Sasaki, Barr, Damon Farber, Zan Associates, Davey Tree, Stone Survey Engineering, Eden Resources, 106 Group

Technical Advisory Team and Public Sector Partners

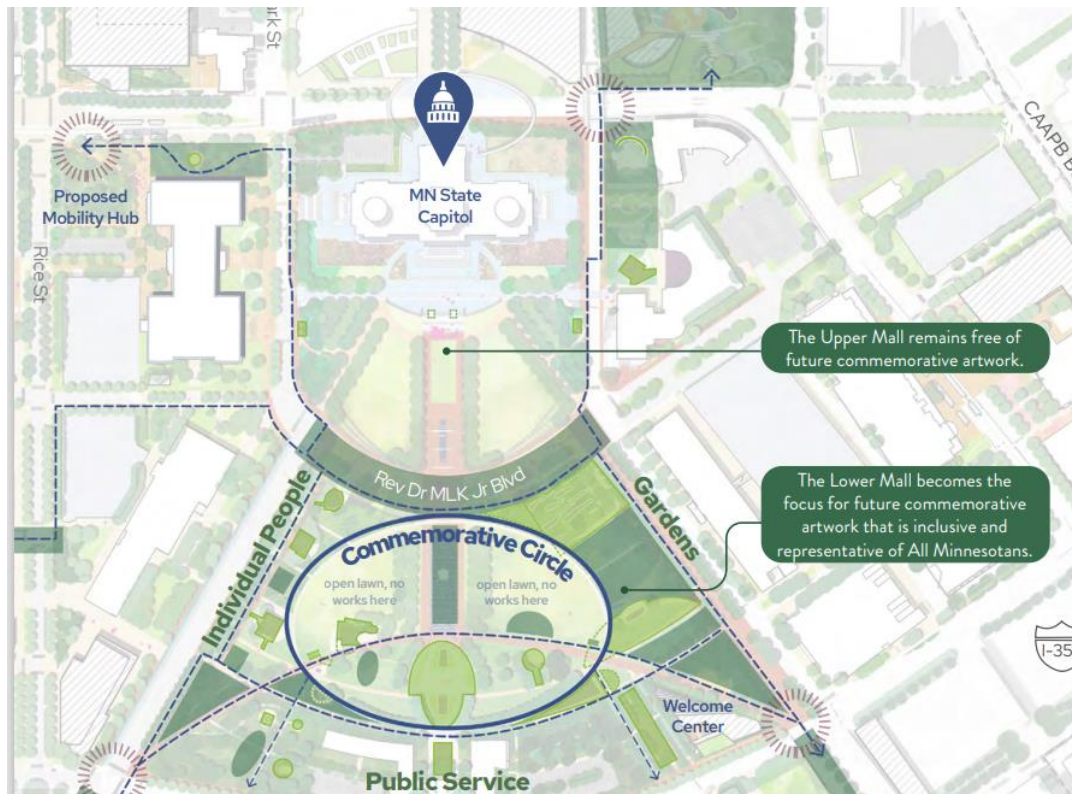
The Office of Governor Tim Walz and Lt Governor Peggy Flanagan, Minnesota Historical Society, Minnesota Council on Disability, State of Minnesota Department of Administration (including Commissioners Office, Facilities Management Division, Office of Enterprise Sustainability, and State Historic Preservation Office), Minnesota State Patrol, Capitol Region Watershed District, Ramsey County, City of Saint Paul (including Heritage Preservation Commission, Public Works, Department of Safety and Inspections, Parks, and Planning and Economic Development), Minnesota Department of Transportation (including consultation with several offices)

2040 Comprehensive Plan

Funding, Plan Development, Steering Committee and Approvals

Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board, including work by a Comp Plan Steering Committee, Advisors and Staff, led by offices of CAAPB Chair Lt Governor Peggy Flanagan and CAAPB Executive Secretary Paul Mandell. The plan chapters are organized by seven Capitol Area Principles, with policy formed through surveys, written input and multiple reviews from many public and private partners from 2018-2021.

Images



From 2024 CMDF, p. 181. ^



From CAAPB website ^



From CAAPB website ^



From CAAPB website ^



From CAAPB website ^



From CAAPB website ^



From CAAPB website ^

Partners:

Sasaki

HGA

Reiling Construction

Winco Landscaping

Minnesota Historical Society

Department of Administration

Minnesota Legislature

City of St Paul