

C. STREET DESIGN AND BLOCK PATTERN

The Capitol Rice District has the potential to greatly enhance the overall Capitol Area experience for visitors, workers and area residents. Improvements in the streetscape in this area will blur the lines between public and private development, encouraging community interaction and patronage of Rice Street businesses.

All streets redesigns must comply with the *Saint Paul Street Design Manual* and should include early engagement with local land use stakeholders to determine adequate and safe crossings and transit stops.

See 2040 comprehensive Plan Chapter 4 for general policy on Streetscapes in the Capitol Area.

District-Wide Policy

In the Capitol Rice District, the following policies are ‘best practices’ that will guide decisions by the Board, Staff and the Zoning Administrator when reviewing and approving projects, and will guide revisions to the Zoning and Design Rules:

- a) Rice Street as Neighborhood "Mainstreet". Capitol Rice is historically a commercial district. While the vibrancy of the past has waned, the vision for Rice Street is to be reclaimed as the heart of the Capitol Rice District, providing goods and services to neighborhood residents as well as the work-day community. Key components include streetscape improvements and renovation of older buildings and their facades, as well as adding new commercial goods and services that contribute to vitality and serve local needs. Walkability improvements and more vibrant retail should encourage residents, area workers and visitors to walk along Rice Street. Increased street activity is critical to safety and the stability of local businesses.
- b) Smaller Street Grid and Reduced Block Size. Over the years, streets have been closed or removed in favor of superblocks. The most notable example is the Sears site, once a fine-grained urban neighborhood and now a large commercial superblock dominated by surface parking. Large blocks that cut off streets hinder movement and connectivity. Even for pedestrians, crossing vast block faces with few human-scaled elements makes for an uncomfortable experience. Smaller block sizes will help with connectivity and street use.
- c) Accessibility. Ensure that all projects of any scale attempt to meet or exceed ADA requirements, and look for opportunities in new projects to implement universal design principles.
- d) East-West Walkability. Related to the overall goal of reducing block size, special emphasis is placed on movement east-west in the district. Encouraging east-west movement across the Capitol Rice District to Rice Street (in both directions) is critical to the success of the district, creating a safe, amenable environment for access to the Leif Erickson Park area Mobility Hub, the Capitol Mall, downtown Saint Paul and other points south. Block dimensions north-to-south are reduced by adding east-west streets to improve connectivity.
- e) Retain existing streets throughout the district. Related to the overall goal of reducing block size, no additional streets should be closed or removed in the Capitol Rice District.
- f) Green Boulevards. The Central Corridor Development Strategy (2006) identifies both Marion Street and Rice Street as “Green Boulevards”. The Downtown Development Strategy (2005) calls for the completion of the “Green Loop Boulevard” encompassing the central business district, the Capitol Area, and Lafayette Park. Though primarily vehicular connectors, Green Boulevards should be enhanced and made comfortable for both pedestrians and cyclists. Strategies for Green Boulevards include: planting a double row of street trees with internal pathways; a continuous planting strip at curb edge to buffer pedestrians; providing new and enhancing existing bike lanes where possible; and applying cohesive streetscaping and signage to promote wayfinding.
- g) Street Design – Safety Improvements. All streets should be reviewed and improved for safety. Street lighting improves safety and makes the street more inviting at night. Improved crosswalks with signage and better

street markings (as well as a narrowed street) will enhance safety. Today, crossing Marion or Rice at cross streets where there is no traffic light is hazardous.

- h) Greening Guidelines to Guide Rain Gardens. Rain gardens and street trees make streets more pleasant for pedestrians and improve stormwater management, sending less runoff to the river. As improvements to Marion Street, Rice Street and University Avenue are made, street trees and stormwater management should be incorporated in the design. These guidelines also apply to new streets and edges of green spaces. *Defer to municipal standards (Capitol Watershed District) for stormwater detention or ponding, if any is required.*
- i) Continuous Canopy of Street Trees. Street trees have several benefits, from making the street more pleasant for pedestrians to a wide range of environmental benefits, including stormwater management, urban heat island mitigation, and improvement of air quality. *Refer to municipal standards (City Forestry Department) for guidance on street trees.*
- j) On-Street Parking. On-street parking should be retained and increased in the Capitol Rice District, possibly with special areas reserved for vanpools or other transit links.
- k) Compliance with Saint Paul Pedestrian Plan. See <https://www.stpaul.gov/sites/default/files/Media%20Root/Public%20Works/Saint%20Paul%20Pedestrian%20Plan%206.13.19%20Compressed.pdf>
- l) Compliance with Saint Paul Bicycle Plan. See <https://www.stpaul.gov/sites/default/files/Media%20Root/Public%20Works/Saint%20Paul%20Bicycle%20Plan.pdf>

Location-Specific Policy

The following are additional *location-specific* guidelines for the Capitol Rice District (all following the *Saint Paul Street Design Manual*):

C-1 Rice Street

Rice Street is designated by the City of Saint Paul as a “Mixed Use Corridor.” Mixed Use Corridors are thoroughfares that are served by public transit and include two-or more uses (residential, commercial, retail, office, small scale industry, institutional, and open space).

The intersection at Rice and Pennsylvania marks the transition to the Capitol Area from the north. A distinct transition should be apparent as one moves from the industrial rail area (aka North End Commercial District) north of Pennsylvania to the Rice Street commercial zone of the Capitol Area to the south of Pennsylvania.

C-1.1 Work with MN Department of Transportation, Ramsey County and City of Saint Paul staff to collaborate on street improvements for Rice Street in the Capitol Area to accommodate multi-modal transportation. Improvements may include: narrowed drive lanes, turn lanes, bike lanes, curb bump-outs, and bus loading areas.

C-1.2 The streetscape should be strengthened through the provision of new pedestrian amenities and landscaping. Pedestrian improvements may include items such as street trees, pedestrian-scale lighting,

What is a “Mixed Use Corridor” classification?

“Mixed Use Corridor streets provide access to a mix of small and medium size businesses. They have the highest volumes of vehicles and transit service as well as moderate to high volumes of pedestrian activity. These streets may host a variety of uses such as farmers’ markets, street fairs and community gatherings. Where bicyclists cannot be accommodated, facilities are provided on adjacent streets to create a ‘complete corridor’.”(Saint Paul Street Design Manual, 160)



wayfinding, street furniture, and widened sidewalks with space for sidewalk cafés and public art where space permits.

- C-1.3 Create safe crosswalks at logical points to connect to future development.
- C-1.4 Retain on-street parking.
- C-1.5 Recommendations for improvements to Rice Street should be addressed at the same time as any Sears site Master Plan.
- C-1.6 Redesign should include early engagement with local land use stakeholders to determine adequate and safe crossings and transit stops.

C-2 Marion Street

Marion Street is a broad boulevard with mature trees along the central green. The street is primarily residential, with multi-family housing south of University Avenue and single family homes to the north. South of University Avenue the street, like Rice Street, is designated as a “Mixed Use Corridor” in the *Saint Paul Street Design Manual* (however it currently has and should continue to retain a less active, more residential land use character to the south and to the north of University). Marion Street is wide and difficult to cross for pedestrians. In 2017 a community group at the Ravoux Hi-Rise succeeded in getting a temporary crosswalk at two points on Marion, including Ravoux Street. Still, the crossing of this wide boulevard is difficult for pedestrians. There is also no accommodation for bicycles.

- C-2.1 Encourage on street improvements for Marion Street to accommodate multi-modal transportation. Improvements may include: narrowed drive lanes, turn lanes, bike lanes, curb bump-outs, and bus loading areas, but such improvements shall not come at the cost of loss of existing green infrastructure.
- C-2.2 Create safe crosswalks at logical points to connect to future development.
- C-2.3 Where possible, preserve existing levels of tree canopy within right-of-way.
- C-2.4 Retain on street parking.
- C-2.5 Recommendations for improvements to Marion Street should be addressed at the same time as any Sears site Master Plan.
- C-2.6 Redesign should include early engagement with local land use stakeholders to determine adequate and safe crossings and transit stops.
- C-2.7 The Marion Street bridge should be reviewed for multi-modal capacity, transitioning from downtown to the residential area just north of the freeway.

C-3 University Avenue

The intersection at Marion and University marks the transition to the Capitol Area from the west. As one moves along University Avenue from Marion Street to Rice Street, the transition from the commercial frontages of University Avenue give way to important governmental institution and civic gathering spaces.

University Avenue is both a vehicular and transit corridor. Since 2014 the LRT Green Line has run down University Avenue, connecting Saint Paul and Minneapolis by train. Several bus lines also run along this corridor. University Avenue is designated a “Mixed Use Corridor” in the *Saint Paul Street Design Manual*.

The unique condition along University Avenue between Marion and Rice Streets created by the south running alignment of the LRT creates a pedestrian safety hazard as the LRT runs adjacent to the pedestrian with no buffer. The Central Corridor Development Strategy calls for a University Avenue Pedestrian Promenade in this area, offering a high level of pedestrian amenity and buffering from the adjacent LRT infrastructure.

- C-3.1 Work with City staff to collaborate on street improvements for University Avenue.
- C-3.2 On the south side of the street between Marion Street and Rice Street, add deliberate, well-designed buffering amenities such as street furniture, street trees and vegetation to protect pedestrians from the adjacent LRT tracks.

C-4 Como Avenue

Como Avenue is a major vehicular entry into the Capitol Area from the northwest, as well as a freight corridor. Additionally, Como Avenue between Marion and Rice Streets is an important connection from Hmongtown Marketplace to the Rice Street commercial zone and the Capitol Area.

Como Avenue in the Capitol Area is designated a “Mixed Use Corridor” in the *Saint Paul Street Design Manual*. Right-of-way width is wider than necessary for the current function of the street. Como Avenue between Marion and Rice is wide and difficult for pedestrians to cross. The street’s adjacency to residences and a city park calls for improved pedestrian access and safety to provide a connection for people from Como Place Apartments to Frogtown Community Center and Hmongtown Marketplace. Today the street is more of a barrier than a connector.

- C-4.1 Work with County staff to collaborate on right-of-way improvements for Como Avenue between Rice Street and Marion Street.
- C-4.2 Complete the “Main Street” experience of Rice Street through Como Avenue to Frogtown Community Center and Hmongtown Marketplace.
- C-4.3 Encourage the County to re-stripe Como (between Marion Street and Rice Street) to test changes to the street; explore lane narrowing and/or reduction to two lanes and adding parking - (where it can be safely accommodated), while retaining bicycle accommodations. Explore short-range and long-range options that allow for the possibility of an outdoor market in the right-of-way and/or neighboring public space. *Refer to Section B. Open Space and Public Art, item B-6.*
- C-4.4 Encourage the county to do a Walkability/Access Study of Como/Pennsylvania/Marion to inform long-term decisions about pedestrian access to Rice Street, Como Place, Hmongtown Marketplace, and Frogtown Community Center.
- C-4.5 Encourage the City to perform a long-term land use study of NW quadrant and neighboring community to inform future development.
- C-4.6 Explore ways to celebrate the rich cultural and immigrant history of the Capitol Area, such as murals or sidewalk art.

C-5 New East-West Street Connections

C-5.1 In new developments, introduce new streets where possible, extending existing streets west of Marion across to Rice Street. Candidates for extension include:

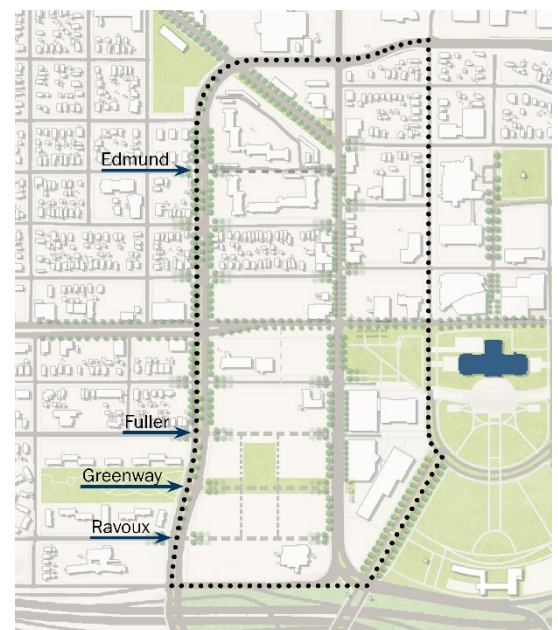
- Edmund Avenue (Converted to a through street between Marion and Rice, if feasible.)
- Fuller Street (Extended across the Sears site to Rice Street.)
- Ravoux Street (Extended across the Sears site to Rice Street, or as a street for internal movement due to proximity to 12th Street and land ownership.)
- Greenway Connection from Western Park to Mall. *Refer to Section B: Open Space and Public Art, policy B-2.*

C-6 New North/South Street in Sears Site

C-6.1 Explore creation of at least one north/south street connection from Aurora south to Community Green Space and/or Western Park - Mall Connection.

C-7 Pedestrian Connection to University Avenue

C-7.1 Allow for possibilities of a mid-block pedestrian passageways that connect to University Avenue.



C-8 Establish a continuous alley system along east side of Rice Street

The City should work with landowners and developers to encourage the development of a coherent rear alley system on the east side of Rice Street, starting with the block between Sherburne and Charles. This network will reduce demand for new curb cuts on Rice Street (thus reducing conflict with pedestrians), improve traffic operations on Rice Street, and provide access for limited on-site, surface parking opportunities

- C-8.1 Encourage the City to work with landowners and developers to develop a coherent rear alley system on the east side of Rice Street, starting with the block between Sherburne and Charles.
- C-8.2 Loading and service areas should not be visible from Rice Street. Where this condition cannot be avoided, the areas should be screened from public view with landscaping.

C-9 Connections to/from Community Greenspace

Connections to and from the community green space in the Sears site redevelopment should be made.

- C-9.1 Provide walkable (well-lit, protected, accessible, safe and interesting with engaging frontages) connections from the park to:
 - 1) Western Sculpture Park,
 - 2) the south end of the Capitol Mall and
 - 3) Leif Erickson Park and the Capitol Rice LRT station.

C-10 Connection to Downtown

Improve the civic connection between the Capitol Area and downtown. Safe accommodations for all modes of movement should be included.

- C-10.1 At the time of redevelopment of the Sears site, comprehensively redesign the thoroughfares, intersections and bridges connecting the Capitol Rice District and downtown, including careful reconsideration of the intersection of John Ireland Boulevard, Rice Street and 12th Street.
- C-10.2 The Capitol City Bikeway should be implemented to John Ireland. The existing Bikeway plan shows termination on 12th Street at John Ireland Boulevard.
- C-10.3 Explore the extension of the Capital City Bikeway via protected bikeways or bike lanes northward along St. Anthony Boulevard, Rice Street and Marion Street.



Image: Capital City Bikeway Network Study and Design Guide, pg 7

C-11 Impacts on Park Street and Capitol Heights

Any changes to Rice Street have the potential to impact Park Street and the Capitol Heights area. Impact to traffic on Park Street, currently a wide 2-lane road with meter parking on both sides of the street south of Como Avenue, should be studied concurrent with studies of Rice Street. Further, street parking throughout the district should be studied to ensure residential parking in Capitol Heights is not unreasonably encroached upon by commuters.

- C-11.1 Study traffic impact to Park Street with any changes to traffic patterns on Rice Street.

- C-11.2 Encourage on-street improvements, including stop signs, bump-outs and other traffic calming measures, to maintain the neighborhood usage of Park Street, and discourage use as a through street.
- C-11.3 Explore the parking utilization on Park Street and potential impact to the neighborhood and nearby office and institutional uses.
- C-11.4 All traffic impact studies related to redevelopment in the Capitol Rice District shall include analysis of traffic patterns and on-street parking in Capitol Heights.