



Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board



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Date: June 4, 2026
To: Members of the Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board (CAAPB)
From: Inspector Darin McDonald, Ramsey County Sheriff’s Office;
Erik Cedarleaf Dahl, Executive Secretary, Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board

Update on Capitol Vitality June 2026

Overview

The Capitol Area Public Safety & Vitality Project is a partnership between the Ramsey County Sheriff’s Office 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, consistent with the Task Force’s emphasis on co-creation, wraparound services, and long-term sustainability. All activities are centered at Capitol Commons (546 Rice Street), which serves as the 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 such as gardening clubs, running clubs, or youth clubs, 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. Performance indicators and outcomes are currently being refined this year to ensure they accurately reflect community priorities and project impact.

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, with April and May focused on partner engagement, program ramp-up, and building the daily operations that now make it a fully functioning neighborhood hub. The storefront is now staffed consistently and serves as a trusted space for services, programming, and relationship-building.

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

Since August 2025, 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, with a strong emphasis on engagement (191 foot patrols, 95 outreach events, 93 proactive visits). This builds toward the work plan target of a 15% reduction in quality-of-life issues and criminal activity (e.g., disorderly conduct/narcotics) by creating safe spaces that enable broader vitality.

2. Youth and Family Programming Services

Co-created programming continues at Capitol Commons in partnership with Saint Paul City School, Frogtown Community Center, and other community anchors identified by the Task Force. Student artwork created by Saint Paul City School students (kindergarten through twelfth grade) is now on permanent display. Regular weekly offerings include free community meals, CPR training sessions, gaming clubs, chess nights, and the “Community Conversation” series, which has engaged more than 120 residents to date. These align with the work plan goal of 300 annual youth interactions and 80% positive youth feedback by Year 3.

3. Street and Neighborhood Cleanup with Community Ambassadors

Community ambassadors have performed ongoing litter and graffiti removal on Rice Street and surrounding areas. A standout event was the May 2, 2026 Community Cleanup, Planter Build, and Gardening Event, where dozens of neighbors, families, students, and local leaders constructed and planted raised garden beds, removed graffiti, and beautified public spaces. In the weeks preceding

this, ambassadors also completed additional cleanup events, removing over 1,200 pounds of trash and graffiti while strengthening business relationships.

Additional service delivery momentum includes the May 15, 2026 Ramsey County Public Health Mobile Clinic and Financial Assistance Services at Capitol Commons (free health testing, navigation support, and on-site financial assistance with a free lunch).

Beginning May 29, Ramsey County Benefits Services (SNAP, GA, MA, and Coordinated Entry Assessments) will operate on-site Fridays 11:00 am–1:00 pm through July 24, 2026, advancing negotiations to establish Capitol Commons as an in-kind Ramsey County service center.

Partners

Capitol Commons is deliberately positioned as a facilitative hub that complements and supplements the work of other partners rather than duplicating it. We provide the physical space, daily staffing, community relationships, and operational backbone that enable other agencies to deliver services directly to residents. Building these partnerships has taken extensive outreach and relationship-building work over many months.

We have been actively engaging a broad network of community and agency partners to identify how Capitol Commons can best support and amplify their efforts. Current and emerging partners include Karen of Minnesota (KOM), Trellis (Minnesota Board on Aging), Saint Paul City School (Marion and University), City of Saint Paul, Capitol Region Watershed District (CRWD), Mitchell Hamline Law, Saint Paul Parks and Recreation, Ramsey County Public Health, Metro Transit (including integration with Operation Safe and Strong), the Metropolitan Council, Minnesota Horticultural Society, and others.

Through these collaborations we are working to offer residents convenient, wraparound services and programming in areas such as housing stability, food access, workforce development, behavioral health support, environmental stewardship, legal assistance, and youth opportunities. This coordinated approach reflects the significant effort invested in listening to community needs and aligning resources so that Capitol Commons becomes a true one-stop neighborhood resource.

How It Is Working

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* highlights Capitol Commons as a growing community hub. These early results demonstrate progress toward work plan performance measures, including increased resident interactions, trust-building, and the foundation for the targeted 15% reduction in quality-of-life calls for service, 300 annual youth interactions, and 500 storefront interactions.

| What It Costs The full three-year grant is \$2.865 million (\$955,000 per year). As of March 31, 2026 (eight months into Year 1), \$565,966 has been spent—a responsible startup pace well within the annual allocation. Budget Category | Budget per Year | Spent through 3/31/26 | Projection through 6/30/26 | Ending Balance (Year 1) |
|---|------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Community Policing/Safety – Personnel | \$302,194 | \$243,474 | \$353,760 | (\$51,566) |
| Community Engagement/Youth Services – Personnel | \$313,303 | \$221,310 | \$309,418 | \$3,885 |
| Mobile Public Safety Equipment | \$60,000 | – | – | \$60,000 |
| Community Connection through Shared Meals and Refreshments | \$25,000 | \$6,417 | \$11,417 | \$13,583 |
| Program Supplies/Equipment | \$40,000 | \$17,299 | \$27,450 | (\$4,117) |
| Infrastructure/Accessibility – Office Space | \$88,508 | \$50,268 | \$115,268 | (\$52,432) |
| Administrative Overhead – Ramsey County (5%) | \$95,000 | \$27,199 | \$41,199 | \$8,801 |
| Column Total | \$955,000 | \$565,966 | \$858,511 | \$96,489 |

Year 1 Spending Snapshot (as of 3/31/26)

*Early-year spending in select categories reflects one-time startup and launch costs for Capitol Commons; overall Year 1 remains on track.

Significant In-Kind Support

Substantial in-kind contributions (not charged to the grant) include:

- Two licensed officers providing full-time salary support (≈\$250,000 value)
- All equipment for officers and Community Service Officers (vehicles, radios, computers, etc.)
- Existing youth services and programming brought into Capitol Commons at no additional grant cost

Remaining budget for the next 27+ months: \$2,281,334

Looking Ahead

The project continues to evolve through daily and weekly co-creation with CAAPB, residents, and community groups, directly supporting Vitality Task Force priorities and work plan timelines. We are expanding regular litter and graffiti patrols and rolling 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. We will also launch a monthly “Safety & Vitality Forum” with residents, business owners, and elected officials to ensure programming remains responsive to neighborhood priorities.

We have now applied for two complementary grants to support “Vitality Through Art and Engagement at The Capitol Commons.” We submitted a \$50,000 request to the Saint Paul & Minnesota Community Solutions program, and a \$178,000 application for the 2026 Knight Cities Challenge. Both proposals build directly on the \$3M state-funded Capitol Area Public Safety & Vitality Project and our partnership with CAAPB to deliver expanded youth- and community-led murals, intensive resident engagement, and cultural activation at The Commons.

Closing

This work is steady, relationship-driven, and focused on building trust and opportunity while delivering measurable progress toward the Vitality Task Force goals and work plan outcomes. 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, including the next quarterly CAAPB check-in.

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 to schedule a tour, join a Community Conversation, or discuss potential partnerships.

TODAY WAS JUST THE BEGINNING.

One of the core pillars of the Capitol Vitality Program is beautification and environmental improvement throughout the Capitol communities we proudly serve.

Today, our team spent time at Capitol Heights Park working on landscaping, cleanup efforts, and OPTED-focused improvements designed to help create a cleaner, safer, and more welcoming space for the neighborhood.

TODAY WAS JUST THE BEGINNING. You will continue to see us investing in this park and other spaces throughout the year. This is ongoing commitment to building stronger, safer, and more vibrant communities.

BETTER SPACES. STRONGER COMMUNITIES.

SAFER NEIGHBORHOODS. TOGETHER.

PRIDE IN OUR COMMUNITIES. WORK THAT LASTS.

CLEANER SPACES. BETTER VISIBILITY. STRONGER COMMUNITIES. TOGETHER, WE BUILD A BETTER FUTURE.

WE'LL CONTINUE THE WORK. ALL YEAR LONG.

CAPITOL VITALITY PROGRAM

#CapitolAreaVitalityProgram #CapitolCommons546 #SaintPaulStrong #CPTED

