



Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board



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Date: March 24, 2025
To: Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board members
From: Tina Chimuzu, Planner Fellow, Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board (CAAPB)
CC: Erik Cedarleaf Dahl, Executive Secretary, CAAPB
Peter Musty, Principal Planner & Zoning Administrator, CAAPB
RE: **AGENDA ITEM #4 - Application to Propose a New Commemorative Work: The Pillbox**



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 12th 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, 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 an all-white team, 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 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.”

Staff Acceptance of Application, Review, and Preliminary Findings

On December 18, 2024, CAAPB staff received an application from Stew Thornley, of the Halsey Hall Chapter of the Society for American Baseball Research, to add a commemorative plaque noting the site of a historic Downtown Base Ball Park - the Pillbox.

CAAPB staff reviewed the application per Minnesota Rules 2400.2703, Subpart 3, Item A, and deemed it to be incomplete. The applicant was advised of the determination via memo on December 30, 2024, including information on what was missing in the application. The applicant resubmitted the request on January 2, 2025, and after a second review, CAAPB staff found it to be complete on January 15, 2025.

The application from Stew Thornley is included in the packet, along with a detailed description of the proposal.

According to the rules, once CAAPB determines the application to be complete, Board staff must review and analyze whether the application for new commemorative artwork meets all of the conditions in M.R. 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:

- Regarding 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.
- Regarding 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 ballpark’s 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, staff concluded that, 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.**

Per M.R. 2400.2703, a report of this determination and a summary of the addition request were posted on the CAAPB website.

Following this determination, CAAPB staff are seeking the Board’s affirmation to 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 M.R. 2400.2703, 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 and Architectural Advisers, together with the applicant.

Suggested Board Resolution

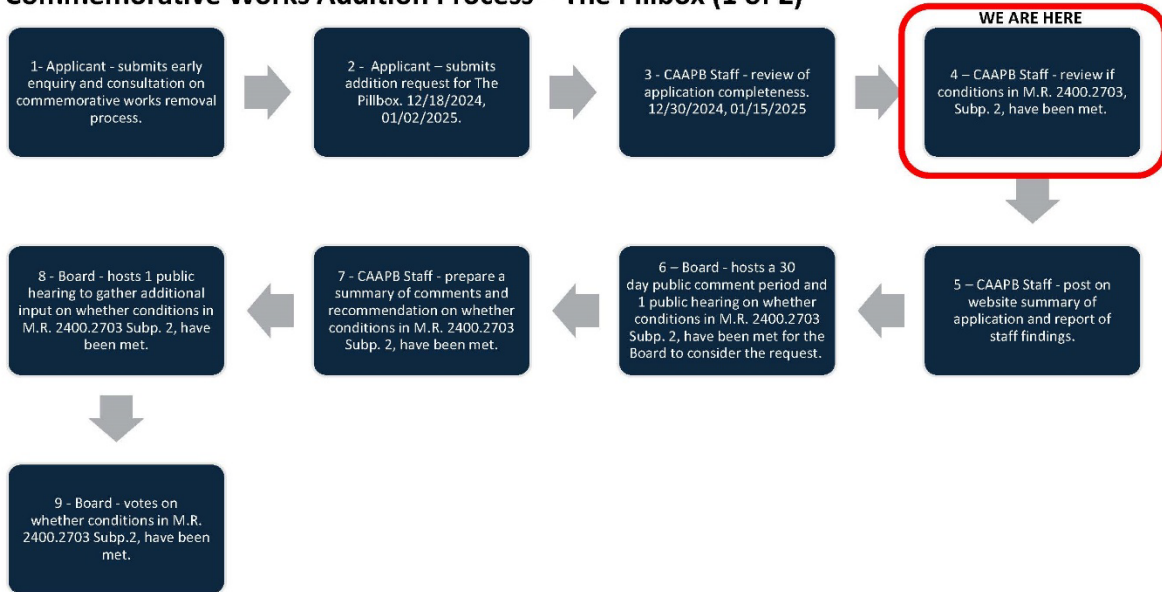
The Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board (“Board”) authorizes its staff to move forward in the CAAPB’s Commemorative Works Rules process regarding the application to add new commemorative artwork to the Capitol Grounds – The Pillbox Plaque, submitted by Stew Thornley on December 18, 2024. The Board specifically authorize the Board Executive Secretary to:

- Hold a 30-day public comment period and one Public Hearing to gather input on whether the addition request meets all of the conditions in M.R. 2400.2703, Subpart 2.

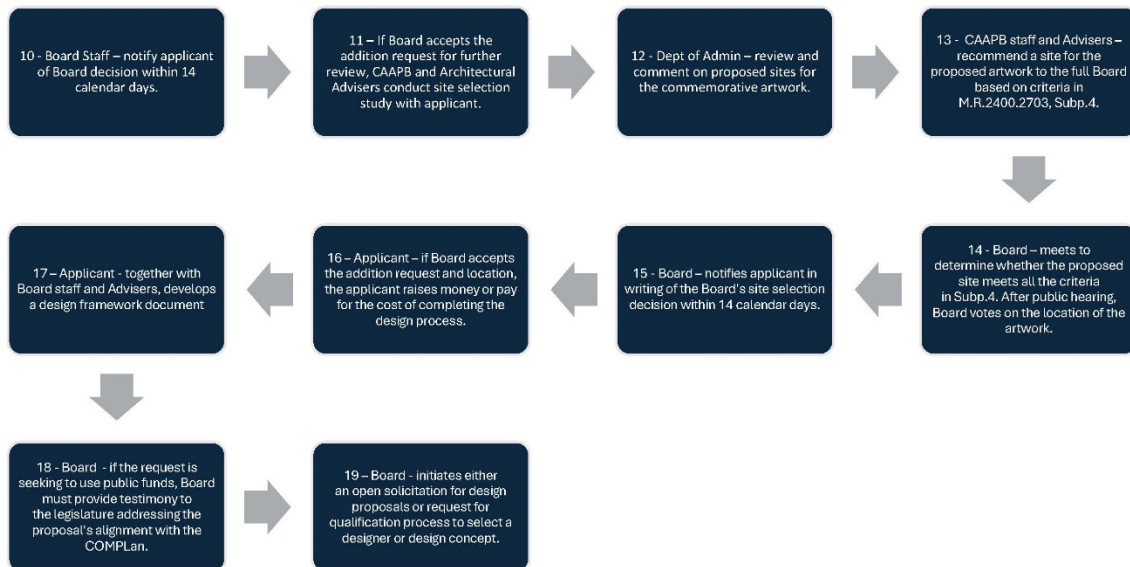
The Board wishes to further make clear that approval of these intermediate steps in the Rules process does not communicate approval nor disapproval of any portion of the current proposal by the applicant, and approval of these steps does not equate to agreement or judgement as to the veracity of any claim or assertion within the received application.

Application to add a new Commemorative Work process

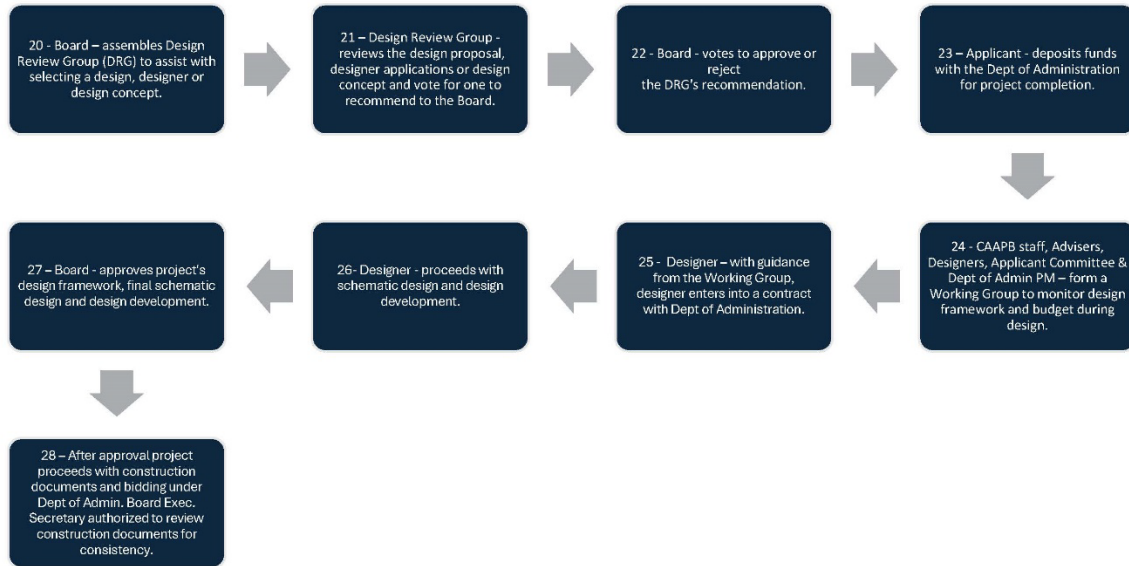
Commemorative Works Addition Process – The Pillbox (1 of 2)



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



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



Attachments:

1. **Attachment A: The Pillbox Applicant documents** – this includes the Application to add a new Commemorative Work – The Pillbox Plaque from Stew Thornley of the Halsey Hall Chapter of the Society for American Baseball Research.
2. **Attachment B: CAAPB Staff Report** – this includes a report of CAAPB staff’s preliminary findings on whether the addition request meets all the conditions in Minnesota Rules 2400.2703, Subpart 2.