



Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board

Freeman Building
625 Robert Street North
Saint Paul, MN 55155
651-757-1500
<https://mn.gov/caapb/>

Date: May 23, 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 #5 - Application to Propose a New Commemorative Work: The Pillbox**



Figure 1 *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 new commemorative work noting the site of the historic Downtown Base Ball Park - the Pillbox.

Per M.R.2400.2703, upon receipt of the application, CAAPB staff immediately conducted a completeness check, followed by an assessment on whether the addition request meets all of the conditions in M.R. 2400.2703., Subpart 2.

*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, in March 2025 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.**”

This determination was presented to the Board on March 24, 2025, and with the Board’s affirmation, a 35 day public comment period was opened from March 31 to May 5, 2025, and a public hearing conducted on May 15, 2025, to gather input on whether all of the conditions in M.R.2400.2703., Subpart 2., have been met for the Board to review the application to commemorate the Pillbox Ballpark at the State Capitol Grounds.

A SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS

CAAPB staff received a total of 16 public comments submitted during the March 31 to May 15, 2025 public comment period and the May 15, 2025 Public Hearing, which requested for input on whether all of the conditions in M.R.2400.2703., Subp.2., have been met for the Board to review the application to commemorate the Pillbox Ballpark at the State Capitol Grounds.

However, only 13 of the 16 comments were counted because 3 comments were submitted twice both via email and in person at the public hearing.

Of the 13 comments counted,

- 4 comments affirmed that the application meets of all of the conditions in M.R.2400.2703., Subpart 2.
- 8 comments were in support of the request to commemorate the Pillbox Ball Park on the State Capitol Grounds.

- 1 comment opposed the request to commemorate the Pillbox Ball Park on the State Capitol Grounds.

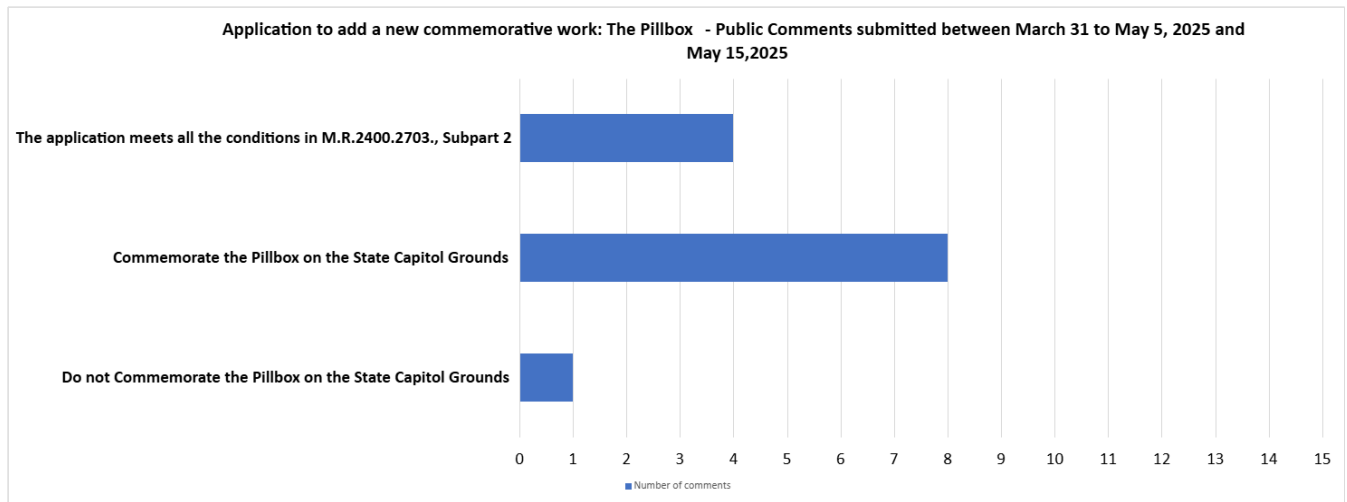


Figure 2 A pictogram of the public comments submitted between March 31 to May 5, 2025.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND REPORT ON THE PILLBOX

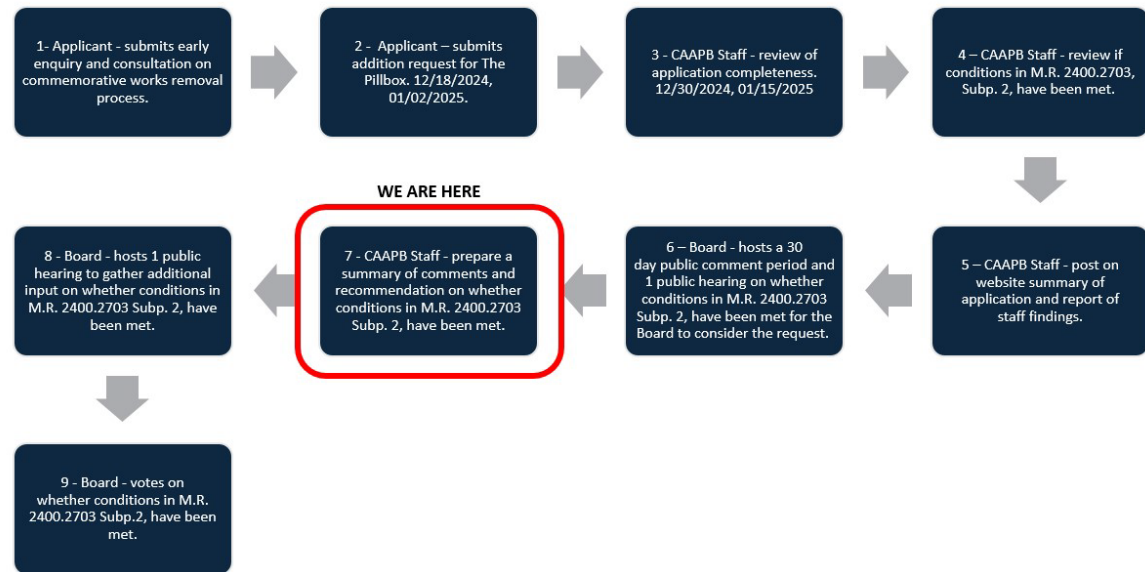
After the public comment period, the next step of the commemorative rules process would be for the CAAPB staff to present the Pillbox application before the Board for action on whether all of the conditions in M.R.2400.2703., Subp.2., have been met for the Board to review the application to commemorate the Pillbox Ballpark at the State Capitol Grounds.

However, before the request can be presented, CAAPB staff has engaged Pigeon Consulting, a historic preservation consulting firm to conduct a historical background study on the Pillbox for fact-checking purposes.

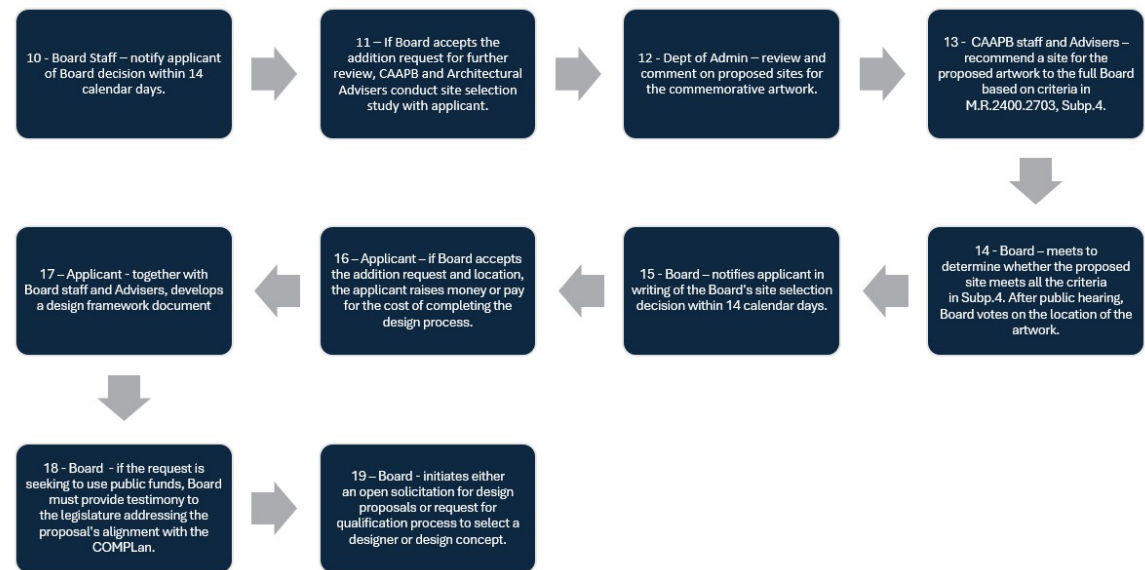
The research is still ongoing, and the Board will be updated on its findings in the near future.

Application to add a new Commemorative Work process

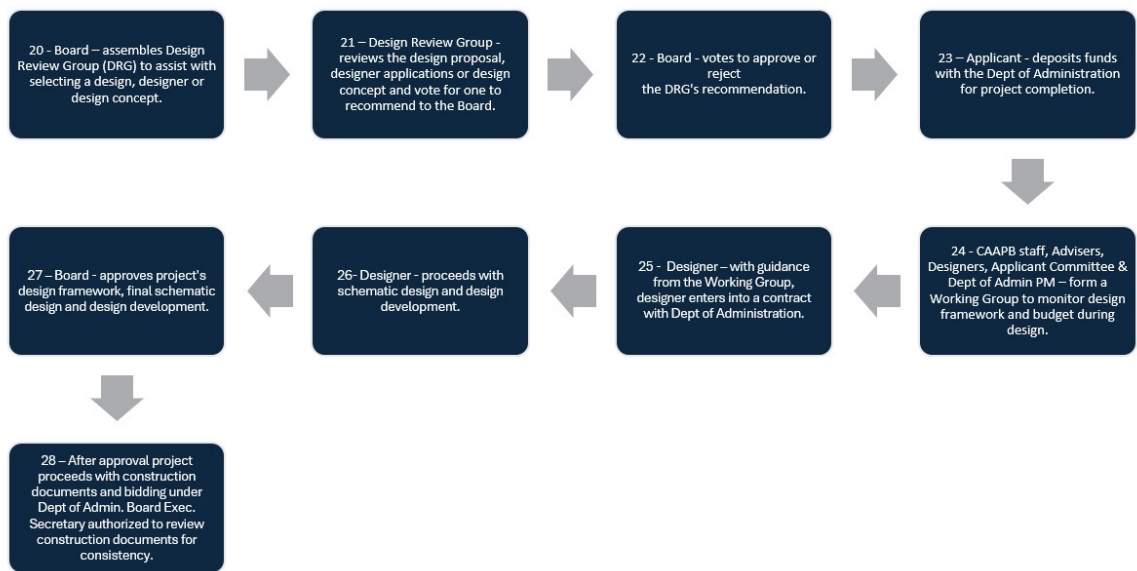
Commemorative Works Addition Process – The Pillbox (1 of 3)



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 Ballpark from Stew Thornley of the Halsey Hall Chapter of the Society for American Baseball Research.
2. **Attachment B: A Complete listing of public comments received between March 31 to May 5, 2025, and May 15, 2025.**