



Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board

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

Date: October 3, 2025
To: Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board members
From: Ella Coon, 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 #9 – USS Ward Gun: Application for Removal Complete
(September 2, 2025)**

USS Ward Gun Removal Complete: September 2, 2025

The USS Ward Gun was removed from the Minnesota State Capitol Mall on September 2, 2025. This removal marked the **first approved removal** of a commemorative work from the Capitol Area and the first time the CAAP Board saw the new Minnesota Rules process guiding addition, removal, and modification of commemorative works—the *Standards for Commemorative Works (M. R. 2400.2703)*—to completion.

The USS Ward Gun will be restored and permanently installed at the new Minnesota Military & Veterans Museum near Camp Ripley, which is scheduled to open in late summer 2026. The gun—fired by a crew of the Minnesota Naval Reservists aboard a US Navy Destroyer off the coast of Hawaii—announced the US entry into the Second World War on December 7, 1941. The gun is the property of the US Navy. It was first installed on the State Capitol grounds in 1958, as a loan to the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs, under the condition that the artifact would be properly maintained by the State.¹

Eligibility for Removal

The gun was deemed eligible for removal under M. R. 2400.2703, Subpart 4, which relates to the maintenance of existing commemorative works.

Subp. 6. Conditions for modification or removal of an existing artwork. M. R. 2400.2704.

- A. there has been sustained, broad-based, and documented public objection to the artwork;*
- B. the artwork conflicts with the guiding principles in subpart 1, item A;*

¹ The crew petition to the Minnesota Veterans of Foreign Wars to take stewardship of the gun after the War's conclusion.

C. the artwork has faults in construction or requires maintenance such that the Department of Administration is unable to properly care for or store the artwork;

*D. the site for the artwork is no longer safely accessible to the public or is due to be demolished;
or*

E. significant changes in the use, character, or design of the site require a re-evaluation of the relationship of the artwork to the site.

CAAPB Staff, working in consultation with MNHS and the Department of Administration consulting, established that although the gun had been previously maintained to a satisfactory level, there was a lack of dedicated funds for future maintenance. This assessment led Staff and Advisors to conclude the gun would likely degrade over time, given the item's location outdoors. Removal of the gun was then not only allowable under *Subpart 6, Item C* but also necessary from a conservation perspective.

Review Process

General Outline Steps

Removal of a commemorative work from the Capitol grounds proceeds through the following general steps:

1. Submission
2. Staff review for completeness (10 business days)
3. Staff analysis of application under *M. R. 2400.2703, Subpart 6*.
4. Board votes to open a 30-day public comment period on removal question
5. First public comment period & public hearing co-hosted by Staff on removal
6. Board votes to convene a Commemorative Artwork Review Committee (CARC)
7. CARC opens a 30-day public comment period & host a hearing on removal
8. CARC submits a recommendation to the Board
9. Board decides if another public comment period or public hearing is necessary
10. If an additional public hearing is not deemed necessary, the Board votes on request
11. If approved, the applicant provides funding for removal
12. Item is removed (with disposition coordinated by MNHS)

Note: A more detailed description of the review process is delineated in *M. R. 2400.2703, Subpart 7*.

Submission and Staff Acceptance

On August 18, 2024, CAAPB Staff received an application from Randal Dietrich, Executive Director of the Minnesota Military & Veterans Museum (MMVM), for removal of the Commemorative Work USS Ward Gun (No. 3) from the Capitol Mall and relocation to new MMVM facilities.

Upon receipt of the application, CAAPB staff conducted a completeness check. The application was deemed complete, and the applicant was notified of this decision within the necessary 10-day window.

Staff Review

From there, Staff—in consultation with CAAPB Advisors, the Department of Administration, and affiliated personnel from the Minnesota Historical Society (MNHS)—analyzed the application for removal vis-à-vis the conditions for removal described in *M.R. 2400.2703., Subpart 6*.

This analysis led CAAPB Staff to conclude the application for removal meets the conditions for removal under the rules, as described above.

Board Vote on Application's Advancement

The CAAP Board voted on September 24, 2024, to accept that the removal request meets *M.R.2400.2703., Subp.6., Item C* and authorized Staff to open a comment period and host one hearing to gather public input.

First Public Comment Period: Public Comments Summary

CAAPB staff received a total of 17 public comments during the first public comment period. Eight comments were submitted during this period (December 3, 2024 and January 7, 2025) and nine comments were submitted at the public hearing held on December 19, 2024. Of the 17 comments received, only 16 were deemed eligible for inclusion, because one person submitted a comment during both the public comment period and in-person at the hearing.

From a substantive standpoint, during the public comment period, of the eight comments submitted: over a third of the comments (37.5 percent or three comments) opposed moving the USS Ward Gun from the Capitol grounds; another 37.5 percent (three comments) raised questions about the removal process; 12.5 percent (one comment) supported the relocation of the USS Ward Gun to the Minnesota Military and Veterans Museum; and a final 12.5 percent (one comment) affirmed that the removal would meet the conditions in *Minnesota Rules 2400.2703 Subpart 6., Item C*.

Regarding the December 19th public hearing, of the eight eligible comments, seven (87.5 percent) supported relocating the USS Ward Gun to the MMVM. Only one comment at the hearing (12.5 percent) opposed the gun's removal and relocation.

Overall, of the 16 eligible comments, eight (50 percent) supported removal, one (6.2 percent) affirmed relocation meets the criteria in the Rule, four (25 percent) opposed moving the gun, and three (18.75 percent) represented general queries to the CAAPB Staff regarding the removal process.

Board Vote on CARC

The Board approved, on March 24, 2025, a resolution to convene a Commemorative Artwork Review Committee (CARC) to further review the removal request as well as open a second public comment period and hold an additional public hearing.

The criteria relevant for evaluation at this stage are described in *Subpart 9* of the Rules.

CARC Composition

The CARC assembled to review the removal application at this stage included the necessary stakeholders, as defined by the rules:

1. One Board member (Rep. Isaac Schultz)
2. One architectural advisor (Michael Bjornberg)
3. One person appointed by the commissioner of the Department of Administration (Kari Suchy, Facilities Director)
4. A representative of MNHS (Lindsey Rulon-Miller)
5. Two professionals appointed by the Board in the relevant fields (Dr. Kate Bean, Tom Braun)
6. Two members of the public appointed by the Board (Paul Mandell, Roger Brown)
7. Up to five additional committee members, as needed (Dave Bellefeuille, Greg Donofrio, Chad Roberts)
8. Board staff to oversee and support committee work (Erik Cedarleaf Dahl, Tina Chimuzu)

Second Public Comment Period: Public Comments Summary

Comments gathered during the second public comment period (March 31-May 5, 2025) overseen by CARC expressed overwhelming support for relocating the gun to the new MMVM, with 40 of 41 comments gathered (97.56 percent) expressing this opinion.

A public hearing was held at the Rondo Community Library on May 22, 2025, by the Commemorative Artwork Review Committee. No additional public comments were provided at the time.

Formal CARC Recommendation

Following the second public hearing and comment period, CARC submitted a formal recommendation to the Board.

This recommendation specified supported the application for removal and affirmed the idea that the application met the necessary criteria for removal (*Subpart 9* of the Rules).

CARC further recommended:

- The transfer of the gun to prominent interior placement in the new Minnesota Military and Veterans Museum in Fort Ripley, Minnesota;
- Removal of the stone sign with the engraved names of the Minnesota soldiers associated with the USS Ward (DD139) and the historic use of the gun at the very beginning of WWII, with disposition of the sign to be determined by the Minnesota Historical Society, (as required by Statute 15B);
- Demolition of the concrete bases of the stone sign and the gun and restoration of the site, as outlined in the report from the Department of Administration report dated January 27, 2025.

These recommendations—submitted to the Board via a Staff memo dated May 23, 2023—were affirmed by CARC at the public hearing on May 22, 2025.

Board Votes to Remove Ward Gun

The Board voted affirmatively on CARC's recommendations to remove the USS Ward Gun on June 3, 2025.

Removal ceremony: September 2, 2025

Timeline

Application Received from Randal Dietrich (MMVM): August 19, 2024

Review and Staff Acceptance: August 26, 2024

First Public Comment Period: December 3, 2024-January 7, 2025

First Public Hearing: December 19, 2024

First Board Vote: March 24, 2025

MN Department of Admin notified: March 25, 2025

Commemorative Artwork Review Committee Formed: March 2025

Second Public Comment Hearing: March 31-May 5, 2025

Second Public Hearing: May 22, 2025

CARC Recommendation: May 22, 2025

CAAP Board Vote: June 3, 2025

Removal: September 2, 2025

Attachments

Attachment A: Approved application

Attachment B: Complete listing of public comments (first comment period and hearing)

Attachment C: Complete listing of public comments (second comment period and hearing)

Attachment D: USS Ward and VJ Day Commemoration Day proclamation

DATE: 16 August 2024

TO: Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board

RE: Application for Removal of an Existing Artwork

PART 1 – CONTACT INFORMATION

Organization: Minnesota Military & Veterans Museum
Contact: Randal Dietrich
Email: rdietrich@mnmilitarymuseum.org
Phone: 320-616-6050
Address: Camp Ripley
15000 Highway 115
Little Falls, MN 56345

PART 2 - SUBJECT

USS Ward Number Three Gun

This large gun, from a World War I-era Navy Destroyer, fired on and sank an enemy vessel in the very early morning of December 7, 1941. The crew was comprised of Naval Reservists from Minnesota. After the war, the United States Navy agreed to loan the gun to the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs with the assurance that the state properly maintain it (please see supplemental materials, Part 2/Items A & B). The gun was installed on the State Capitol grounds in 1958. The gun is owned by the United States Navy.

In 2023, the Minnesota State Legislature allocated funds to the Minnesota Department of Military Affairs for the construction of a new 40,000 square foot Military and Veterans Museum on 32-acres at Camp Ripley (Just north of Little Falls). The new facility, to open in 2026, will replace a very modest museum at Camp Ripley that has served veterans and their families for more than 40 years.

This new facility, dedicated to veterans of all service branches, will be a more appropriate location for this military artifact.

The Museum's current collection includes extensive archives of the USS Ward and artifacts from the Minnesota veterans who served on-board (Part 2/Item C).

The Museum's commitment to Naval history is further evidenced by the recent acquisition, with the assistance of Governor Walz, of the sail and rudder of the USS Minneapolis-St Paul. The SSN-708 was a Los Angeles-Class nuclear submarine decommissioned in 2008.

The Navy approved this request and the Museum promptly dispatched four semi-trailers to Bremerton, Washington to retrieve these immense artifacts (Part 2/Item D). Extensive restoration is underway with work to be completed in time for the 2026 grand opening.

PART 3 – REMOVAL CONCEPT

As the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs is currently identified on the Navy's loan agreement, the Museum shared plans for the removal, restoration and relocation of the Ward gun with MDVA and has secured the department's endorsement (Part 3/Item A). MDVA has requested that the Navy draft a new loan agreement inserting Museum in place of MDVA.

In addition, representatives of the Museum (Part 3/Item B) and the Minnesota Navy League (Part 3/Item C) traveled to Washington D.C. to brief the United States Naval History and Heritage Command (NHHHC) who is also in support of the plan.

The Museum has commissioned a local conservator to issue a report on the current condition of the gun (Page 1 of this report provided as Part 3/Item D).

The museum will remove, restore and relocate this artifact according to standards set by NHHHC and prominently display it indoors at the new camp Ripley Museum for better long-term conservation and year-round interpretation (Part 3/Item E). As the centerpiece of the WWII exhibit gallery, visitors will be immersed in the sights and sounds that these Minnesota sailors would have encountered on December 7, 1941.

After the move, the former location of the gun will be seeded with grass (Part 3/Item F).

PART 4 – CONDITIONS AND CRITERIA

Generally, the new Military and Veterans Museum at Camp Ripley will be a more appropriate location for the USS Ward gun as it is a military artifact owned by the United States Navy. It is important to note that the story of the USS Ward and crew is featured on the first panel of the WWII Memorial (dedicated in 2007) just north of the Veterans Service Building on the State Capitol grounds (Part 4/Item A).

Current Museum board member and former MDVA Commissioner Larry Herke was in support of this plan and, prior to his retirement, had briefed the Governor's Office.

Further, this proposed move might align with the recent Capitol Mall Design Framework to develop a process that will create a Capitol Mall that is *more welcoming for more Minnesotans*.

If approved, the removal could begin later this year.

PART 5 - FUNDING

In May 2024, The Legacy Committee of the Minnesota State Legislature provided \$275,000 "for a grant to the Minnesota Military and Veterans Museum at Camp Ripley for the restoration, relocation, and interpretation of the USS Ward Number Three Gun and World War II display. Funding can also be used for site reclamation and improvements at the location of the removed work."

There was broad, bipartisan support for this bill with Representatives Lillie, Newton, and Schultz and others signed onto the bill in the House and Senators Mitchell, Hawj and Howe in the State Senate.

The Museum will cover any additional costs with private funds.