



# Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board



204 Administration Building  
50 Sherburne Avenue  
Saint Paul, MN 55155  
651-757-1500

<https://mn.gov/caapb/>

Date: Updated September 20, 2023  
To: Members of the Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board (CAAPB)  
From: Peter Musty, Principal Planner and Administrator of the Zoning and Design Rules, CAAP  
Paul Mandell, Functional Project Manager, CAAPB

## RE: Staff and Project Updates

### Staff Transitions, 2023 Legislation and Office Moves

We are even smaller, and exhausted, but just as mighty. Paul Mandell agreed to return from retirement from CAAPB and take on a part time interim manager role as we transfer from one Executive Secretary to another by this fall. A legislative provision (now posted on the CAAPB website) changed responsibility for appointments of Executive Secretary from the “board” to the “chair of the board” with consult of the Board.

In addition, due to office consolidations, the CAAPB Office has been relocated to Fifth Floor (south) of Centennial Building. We will, however, only be there until next June, when we will have to vacate to make room for the MN House, who will be taking over majority of the building during their SOB Project. Your staff, with new leadership, will work to find a space most conducive and best suited for the work of the CAAPB, recognizing the public nature of our agency.

### Recent legislation for Capitol Area

Please find detailed language of all legislation provisions in the [Board Memo posted in June](#).

#### + Capitol Area Community Vitality Task Force and Account (\$5.15M)

A Task Force has been formed with a first meeting September 11. The Task Force (see CAAPB page: <https://mn.gov/caapb/planning/vitality/>) sunsets with release of the report, and as of now, that must occur by February, a very tight timeline; but that report will serve to help guide investment of the appropriated \$5 million. There is funding to support the work of the Task Force which will be procured via RFQ using the State’s equity-select guidelines.

**A word of thanks to the 2023 legislature: The Account is a new opportunity to help Capitol Area community with some of the solutions they have been asking for, at a range of scales.**

The Capitol Area Community Vitality Account created by the 2023 legislature is an opportunity for the CAAPB to assist our community in the shadow of Capitol directly by funding some of the priorities THEY identify through the community-based process we will support (including identification of cultural and community assets, stakeholder ideas and transparent reporting). Many in our community are navigating through a situation of

current stress, and others would like to be ready for coming changes. Some struggle with rent or lease rates. For some there is a daily struggle for housing and food.

Through our work long range planning, regulating zoning and design proposals and permitting, community members often (naturally) assume CAAPB is a center-point in dealing with an increasing need for day-to-day solutions. Even though our Statute includes no mandate nor direct roles or responsibility in the community development arena, our statutory purpose and comp plan vision implicates us as a steward of the campus AND the community. The Account provides CAAPB with one conduit to support community leaders as *they* continue to address livability issues, and as we encourage the community to organize on the ground. The Account will give strength to CAAPB staff support for community networking, participation and coordination with groups such as the evolving Good Neighbor Group (Capitol Rice, Rice Street and Capitol Heights stakeholders) convened by the Church, and during broader collaboration with established landowners, community members, and groups such as Capitol Heights Block Club. Staff looks forward to supporting the Task Force with its work to help the community express its priorities.

### + Capitol Mall Design Framework (\$6M)

The Capitol Mall Design Framework provided funding and parameters for future planning, design and review of the remaining open space in Leif Erickson, as well as for new open spaces at Rice and University, existing open space on the Capitol campus and campus streets. An RFP for a consultant team is now available as of August. It represents extensive consultation with numerous State and other public bodies, as well as extensive involvement of our Architectural Advisors over the summer. Public Notice was published on Monday, August 21<sup>st</sup> and is being shared widely, but release of the actual RFP requires written inquiry to CAAPB in order to track names of all interested respondents. The Notice ran in the State register through the third week of September to cast nets as widely as possible, with responses due back by September 23. Review of responses and selection of a team will follow. The new Design Framework is, as of now, due by March, though the \$1 mil. Appropriation is available until end of 2024. This does create a very tight timeline, but it will serve to inform the implementation work by the Administration Department with the \$5 million appropriation.

### + Redesign of Capitol Rice Corridor (Rice Street from Pennsylvania to John Ireland) (\$25M)

A major initiative of the *2040 Comprehensive Plan for the Minnesota State Capitol Area*, ([profiled in Chapter \(Principle\) 4](#)) was to transform the “Capitol Rice Corridor” (Includes portion of Como, Rice, 12<sup>th</sup> Street across interstate to St Peter).



Figure 4.1: The Capitol/Rice Corridor

\$25 million in funding to advance that project (but just for Rice Street itself – **the length shown in green above**) was appropriated to Department of Transportation, to include collaborative work with City of Saint Paul, Ramsey

County, Metropolitan Council, State of Minnesota and, of course, the CAAPB. The project must include implementation of a multi-modal (mobility) hub at University and Rice. (Legislation details can be found in [June Board Memo](#).) Appropriation is available until June of 2029. Look for a separate memo coming later with a full update on first and next steps.

### **+ State Office Building Expansion into Leif Erickson Park**

Following the CAAPB action determining the project to be in substantial compliance with the 2040 Comp Plan, CAAPB's statutory authority to review and approve the rehabilitation and expansion (as was proposed and reviewed, extending into Leif Erickson Park) of the State Office Building was then ultimately removed by legislation. This came during collaborative efforts to rezone open space, conduct reviews and permitting, just before formal application by the Department of Administration that preceded lead to a final set of CAAPB Board actions related to its zoning, design and statutory authority. For more information on the legislation, see previous [June Board Memo](#) now posted on CAAPB homepage. The following is the provision passed citing sections in CAAPB's Statute 15B and Department of Administration's Statute 16B pertaining to Commissioner's duties to CAAPB which "do not apply":

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*"Sec. 11. CAPITOL AREA LAND USE PROJECTS; ZONING AND DESIGN. Minnesota Statutes, sections 15B.05, subdivision 3; 15B.06; 15B.08; and 16B.31, subdivision 4, and any rules adopted under the authority of those sections, do not apply to any project to address critical health, life safety, and security needs on the State Capitol complex and for which funds are available on or before December 31, 2023, if the primary affected tenant has given final approval to the project."*

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### **+ Ford Building Proposed Demolition**

Among the legislation summarized above, three separate provisions addressed the Ford Building and its site/block. CAAPB Comprehensive Plan policy authority was specifically removed, as was further requirement that the building "be adequately analyzed as a resource within redevelopment at the time of an actual proposal", and would allow demolition to proceed). The provision did not otherwise remove CAAPB Statutory or zoning authority (See Agenda Item 4 of the October 3 Board Meeting). At the same time, there was also legislation addressing the following:

- provision supporting CAAPB policy requiring any redevelopment proposed to be mixed use with ground level activation.
- provision establishing requirement for new open space to be established on the block, related to in-kind replacement of Leif Erickson Park.

These provisions reinforce the need for planning on the site, as has interactions with neighbor Christ on Capitol Hill Lutheran Church. Staff has letters expressing concern from Christ on Capitol Hill Lutheran Church, (the neighboring church on the block). In June, the Department of Administration applied to CAAPB to proceed with demolition of the building. It is now under review by CAAPB Staff and Advisors.

## **Updates on Capitol Area Projects**

### **Former Sears Site**

A new owner holds the site and has just recently come forward to engage on any proposal. We can confirm only that during the period of listing, that all prospective developers are counseled the same; that due to the long-range planning and policy framework in place, and given the community input, if a new owner follows the transit-oriented urban village vision for the site – it would shorten any development timeline and make for fastest reviews/engagement and approval time. Any new visions for the site would likely necessitate a revisit of



the planning and development framework for the site and lengthen timelines. We know that the former owner listed the site within the same premise and had added images in the listing supporting that vision. As always, staff will update the Board and the community with information as soon as we are able.

**New Ownership Team:** The new owner Asian Media Access led by Ange Hwang in partnership with Asian American Business Alliance, is currently promoting a range of ideas for long range reuse of the building as a centerpiece of larger site redevelopment. Their promotion of the site is gaining attention in the press and the region. They have sought guidance from CAAPB and City staff as they begin embarking on three important steps that stand between the ownership team and realization of their vision: First, they are building a development team to support the ownership team. Secondly, since the ‘big box’ pattern of the old Sears is currently not legal by Zoning regulations nor Comp Plan policy, that new combined team will embark on development of site master plan – aspiring to meet requirements of the Capitol Rice Development Framework (2040 Comp Plan). Lastly, their team is building support to explore technical barriers and development related environmental studies connected with the current site and building realities, and that may take some time.

**Temporary Use Permits:** The new owner has launched a weekend fair on the site called St Paul Marketplace, a mix of food, art and vendors: <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2023/09/16/st-paul-marketplace-teases-vision-for-sears-site> CAAPB has worked with the ownership team to permit the site for six weekend this Fall.

**Review:** Sears closed in 2018. Subsequent planning led to final approval of the Capitol Rice Development Framework in 2021, confirming the longstanding transit-oriented walkable vision for an urban village, reestablishing an urban pattern of mixed uses reconnecting neighborhood across the site around a central green space. Seritage, as the former owner, participated with CAAPB and the City to engage the community on design alternatives for the urban village vision as found on CAAPB website. The process affirmed the public realm vision of smaller blocks within a network of tree lined streets with a new central park, and the market research reported by owner and community input steered land use toward the predominantly mixed residential demand (vs new office). In early 2022 came an investor related delay due to uncertainty around St Paul’s new rent control regulations. In late 2022, Seritage decided to list the site for sale.

## **New Behavioral Health Hospital (@ old Bethesda Hospital Site): Demolition and Construction**

The old Bethesda hospital is now undergoing demolition, and the site will soon be in preparation stages for construction of the new hospital. CAAPB has been tracking the process and will be reviewing final construction drawings for the new hospital in a required step called CAAPB ‘Certificate of Design Compliance’ – a step that ensures that what is permitted by the City of Saint Paul remains in alignment with CAAPB permitting.



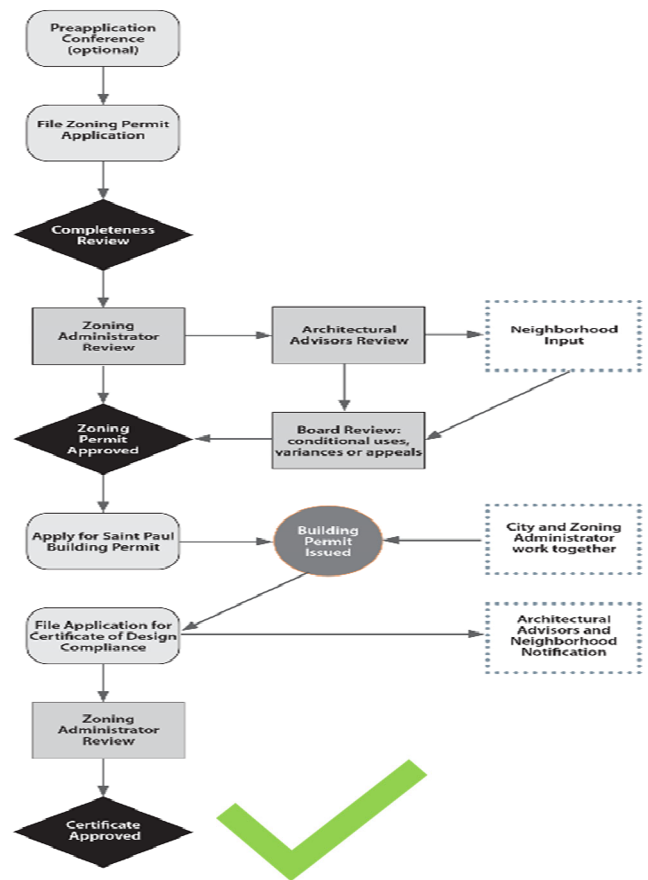
View from Como and @ Capitol Boulevard. Demolition of the former Bethesda Hospital began in late spring. Construction of the new behavioral health hospital will begin late summer or fall 2023.

**New Hospital Review: The planning and design review meetings led by staff with oversight of Advisors are a hallmark of the CAAPB process.**

Working with ‘good neighbor’ groups, block club and local stakeholders in an orderly design and zoning review process is the way we ensure that buildings meet carefully established land use, built form, material standards, sustainability metrics, parking ratios, mobility goals, and walkable frontage regulations. In the Capitol Area, it’s how we ensure that the Capitol Area’s comprehensive principles, as well as city and county are addressed. It includes healthy communities, energy, mobility, historic resources and economic best practices. Its how we protect trees and public spaces. Its how we ensure that historic resources are protected, and its how we ensure that the COMMUNITY values are clearly translated to others that want to invest (change) the community. It is also how our values as a Capitol Area community become embedded into projects. Undergoing the review and approval process with Fairview+Acadia ensured best practices, including:

- demonstration of highest and best land use;
- sensitivity to immediate urban context, including compliance with district frontage, height and frontage (walkability), parking and lighting standards;
- adequate provisions for traffic, parking and site circulation;
- calibration to regional climate (materials, landscaping and planting);
- reuse of materials;
- reservation of major and minor public art locations;
- careful disposition of site historic resources, including careful documentation of existing building;
- collaborative development of innovations in site stormwater practices, building energy performance;
- public streetscape enhancements and improvements including art, canopy and privately funded benches for the public;
- enhanced street landscaping;
- higher standards in building design and massing;
- site and worker mobility/access best practices.

General Application Process



**The new behavioral health hospital will be the fourth major new building entitled by CAAPB in six years.**

Since 2017, Fairview Acadia's new behavioral health hospital is now the fourth new building in the Capitol Area that has successfully navigated CAAPB planning, design and zoning review and approvals and through subsequent City infrastructure and building permitting. Three other buildings have also been approved by CAAPB using the same approach, including the **new clinic/shopfront** building at Rice and Como (opened 2018), the **new micro-unit apartment building** at Park and Como (2019), and the **new K-12 St Paul City School** at University and Marion (2022)!

## Multiple Infrastructure Planning Projects Ongoing in Capitol Area

CAAPB planning activity is in full swing following Board adoption of the 2040 Comprehensive Plan for the Minnesota State Capitol Area in June 2021, structured by The Capitol Area Principles. See table on next page for updated status. (Questions: contact Peter Musty)

### John Ireland Bridge Repair and Reconstruction: Planning Continues

MNDOT continues conducting a planning and design process for the John Ireland freeway bridge, which is due for structural repair. CAAPB staff and Advisors are assisting MnDOT in their effort at gathering input of community and immediate stakeholders. The gatehouses of the bridge are not affected by any part of the project, and MnDOT has expressed interest in keeping any new bridge details within the character of the landscape design vision established during the mall design framework competition in the 1990's. Discussion is still centered on functional considerations of improvements at the intersection of 12<sup>th</sup> and John Ireland. New design changes will be tracked for approval, and updates brought to the Board.

Most recently: four preliminary options have now been developed and are under review that retain the function and existing design character, including restoration of the existing grassy median (at its current width) to maintain views and to accommodate large civic events. Based on suggestions from the community, City and CAAPB, project staff are reviewing feasibility of reducing the bridge from four lanes to two, much like John Ireland north of the bridge to MLK Boulevard.

Planning	Sponsor/Lead Agency	CAAPB role	Timing
<b>Sears Site: MX District Plan</b>	public/private team (Developer (tbd), CAAPB, City)	process and review lead	New owner in pre-application meetings with City and CAAPB staff.
<b>Commemorative Works Policy (2022 Update to Rules) Funded \$500K, one time sending, available thru FY27</b>	CAAPB (working with MNHS, Administration under new Rules)	Staff receives inquiries under Rules, looking to improve process with Lindsey Dyer of MNHS	Ongoing. Some "early inquiries", but no applications yet filed under new CW Rules.
<a href="#">Capitol Area Stormwater Management Study</a>	Capital Region Watershed District	co-lead	Ongoing, Fall 2022 Technical Advisory Group kickoff and tour, June 2023 TAG meeting
<a href="#">Rethinking I-94</a>	MNDOT	committee(s)	ongoing (2018 start)
<a href="#">Downtown Commons Study (off-shoot of Rethinking 1-94)</a>	MNDOT	steering	ongoing, near completion
<b>Capitol Heights Development Framework</b>	CAAPB (leveraging Station Area Planning process)	lead	On hold. 2023 (see Station Area Planning)
<a href="#">BRT Station Area Planning: METRO Purple Line (Robert to Jackson)</a>	Ramsey County and Metro Transit	Staff is on Technical Advisory Committee, Design Review Team, updates Admin and Capitol Heights reps	Station approved, delay due to alignment studies, planning to resume 2024-25?

BRT Station Area Planning: METRO G-Line (Robert to Rice)	Ramsey County and Metro Transit	Staff on Technical Advisory Committee, CAAPB approves station location and design in Capitol Area	Stations being located, design teams to be hired by Metro Transit
<b>FUNDED: \$25M Capitol Rice Corridor (Rice Street Redesign/Rebuild</b>	funds held by MNDOT for City/County/ CAAPB leads design coordination	lead, approval	funding expires 2029
<b>FUNDED: \$185K Mandatory Update to Rules for Zoning and Design</b>	CAAPB		2024-2025
<b>FUNDED: \$1 mil. Capitol Mall Design Framework ( Admin. w/ \$5 mil. For implementation)</b>	CAAPB (w/ Dept of Administration)	lead	RFP in development for 2023-24
<b>FUNDED: \$5.15 mil. Capitol Area Community Vitality Task Force</b>	CAAPB (broad set of appointees)	Lead, must start meetings by fall, '23	work in 2023-24, report to CAAPB in Spring 2024

**Bottom Line:** Staff is implementing the 2040 Comprehensive Plan. Implementation of the recently adopted Comprehensive Plan policies is underway, with a big boost from 2023 legislation. There are several tracks that continue from before adoption of the plan, and several that are new. All of which will be brought forward to the Board where the timing dictates, or when action is required. For many items, Board Members may be offered chances to observe, participate in, or advise steering committees or community discussions. Questions? **Please contact CAAPB Staff (Peter) directly at or 612-743-5994.**