



Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board

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

Date: June 4, 2026
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

Site Recommendation: Proposed Downtown Baseball Park (“Pillbox”) Commemorative Work

Introduction

CAAPB staff completed a study to formulate a recommended site for the proposed Downtown Baseball Park memorial submitted by Stew Thornley on January 2, 2025. The Board authorized its staff to begin this study with the CAAPB Advisory Committee and the applicant on October 3, 2025.

Staff are asking the Board to approve this recommended site from this study—the plaza between the Minnesota Department of Health and Agriculture Lab building and the Freeman building—and to authorize its staff begin the design review process for the addition request.

History as Presented in 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.



Figure 1. *Downtown Ball Park, St. Paul.* No Date. Minnesota Historical Society.

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.

Recommended Site

On October 3, 2026, the CAAP Board authorized its staff to begin site selection for this addition request. After conducting a site selection study and soliciting stakeholder feedback, through a Site Selection Steering Committee, CAAPB staff, consulting with the CAAPB Advisory Committee, are recommending a site for the proposed work for public comment and Board consideration. Staff and Advisors are permitted to only bring one site to the Board for review per M. R. 2400.2703, Subpart 3, Item F. The recommended site is pictured below.

We believe this site offers a set of advantages. These advantages include:

- (1) Accommodating the site specificity of the commemoration;
- (2) Allowing for variation in scale and type of commemorative work;
- (3) Meeting the “Criteria for determining the location of an artwork” described in M. R. 2400.2703, Subpart 4.

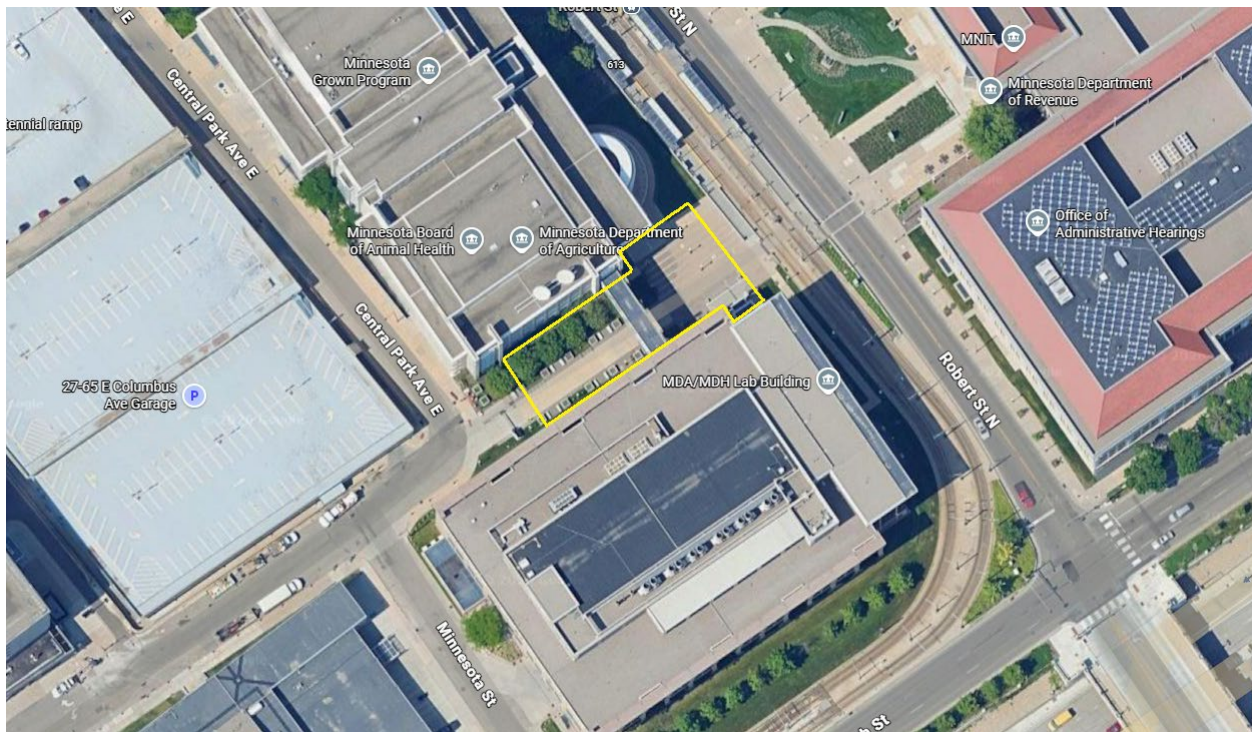


Figure 2. Authors’ rendering.

Note on Site’s Size and Shape

It is not the opinion of staff, the Board’s Advisory Committee, or other stakeholders consulted in this site selection study process that the work’s final design must, or ought to, utilize the entire area indicated above.

Criteria for Board Evaluation

All recommended sites for commemorative work addition requests are evaluated by the CAAP Board against the following criteria:

Subp. 4. **Criteria for determining location of new artwork.** ([M. R. 2400.2703](#)) The board must use the following criteria to evaluate the proposed location for a commemorative artwork in the Capitol area:

- A. The site of the proposed location must be visible to people nearby and accessible to all members of the public.
- B. The scale of the artwork must fit the artwork's location, providing familiarity to the viewer while not being overpowering. The artwork's size must not detract from the Capitol. The board must consider the artwork's visual and spatial relationships to the artwork's surroundings.
- C. The use of the site must not interfere with any existing artwork.
- D. The use of the site must maintain and protect existing open space and the space's public use.
- E. The location must follow all applicable zoning, environmental, code, and public safety rules and regulations.
- F. The artwork must fit within the thematic organization of the Capitol grounds and comply with the design objectives of the Comprehensive Plan for the Minnesota Capitol Area [...].

Items A, C, D, and E are of primary concern. Given the site's off-Mall location, Item F is of less relevance.

Site Selection Process

Site selection is an important part of the review process for commemorative work addition requests. It occurs after the memorial's review of concept and prior to the Board's authorization of design review. Broadly speaking, the process consists of the identification of candidate sites, analysis of candidate sites, review and comment by the Department of Administration, and the formulation of a recommended site by staff and Advisors. This selection and analysis of candidate sites—also called the “site selection study”—involves, at minimum, the applicant, Advisors, and CAAPB staff.

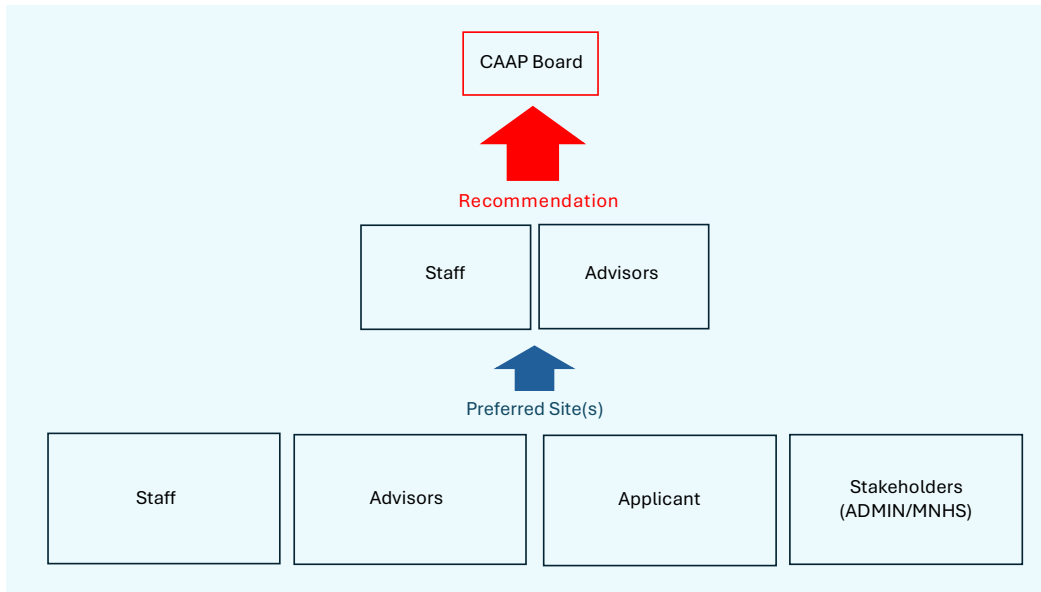


Figure 3. Graphic representation of the site selection process. Author’s rendering.

Site Selection Steering Committee

On October 3, 2026, the CAAPB authorized its staff to begin site selection for this addition request. Following this decision, staff began research into candidate sites. This research centered on the baseball park’s historic footprint and discussed possible locations’ relationship to the “Criteria for determining the location of new artwork” outlined in M. R. 2400.2703, Subpart 4.

After initial research was complete, staff convened a Site Selection Steering Committee to troubleshoot candidate sites and to make progress towards formulating a recommendation for Board consideration. The committee format was chosen over less direct forms of engagement as a recognition of the importance of stakeholder feedback. The committee was composed of the applicant (Stew Thornley), a CAAP Board member (Michael Bjornberg), a CAAPB Advisory Committee member (Joe Favour), a representative of MNHS (Lindsey Rulon-Miller), a representative of the Minnesota Department of Administration (Kari Suchy, Facilities Management Division), and CAAPB staff members (Executive Secretary Erik Cedarleaf Dahl and Planning Fellow Ella Coon).

The Steering Committee convened once, on January 16, 2026. After reviewing staff research, the Committee expressed interest in the site above, given its proximity to the historic park, adherence to the criteria for determining the location of an artwork above, and flexibility vis-à-vis design review and due diligence.

Staff subsequently took this site to the CAAPB Advisory Committee for further consideration on April 23, 2026. The CAAPB Advisory Committee affirmed the viability of this site and agreed with its recommendation to the Board.

Selected Site Research

The Ballpark's Historic Location

Staff reconstructed the ballpark's approximate location and layout from historical maps and ariel images. Research focused on the footprint of the historic ballpark and the park's immediate vicinity.

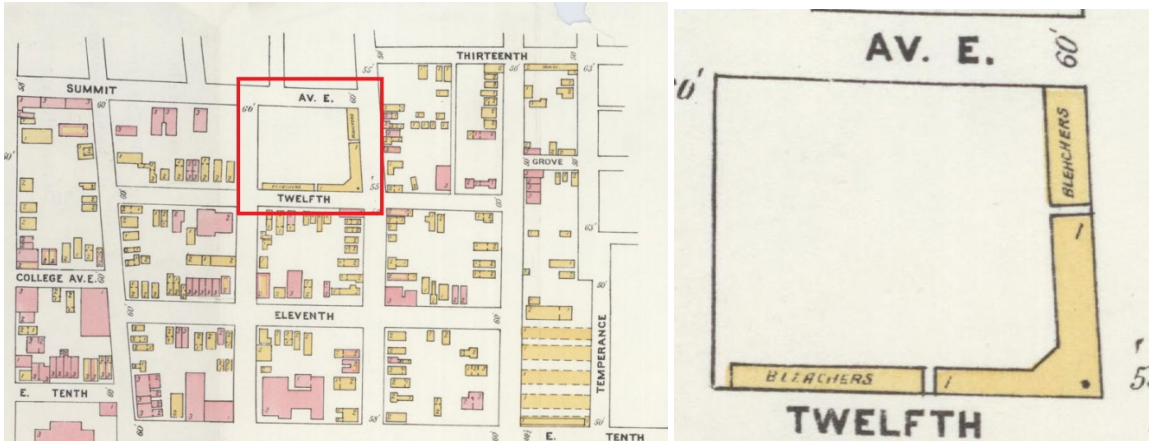


Figure 4. Ballpark location from Sanborn Insurance Maps, 1903.

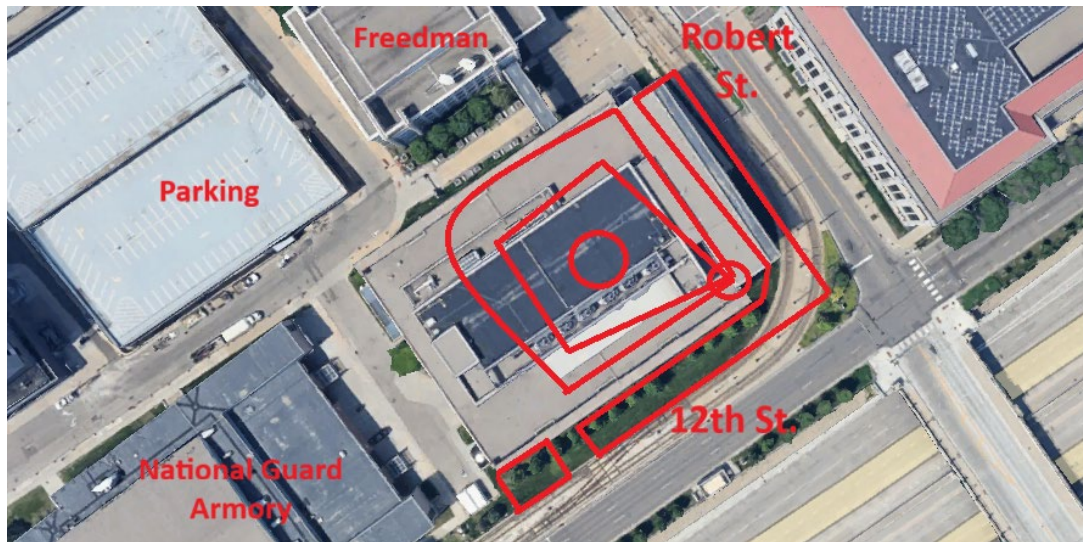


Figure 5. Authors' rendering of historic ballpark.

Site Specifics: Accessibility, Zoning, and Ownership

A primary issue when reviewing candidate sites for the proposed work concerned visibility and accessibility. The historic ballpark was located on the grounds of the Lab building. However, the walkways surrounding this building are largely obstructed by the METRO Green Line. Staff identified, due to this light rail infrastructure: limited walkability on the western sidewalk of Robert Street; the

missing sidewalk on 12th Street; and limited access to Old Columbus Avenue and Minnesota Street between National Guard Armory building and Minnesota Department of Health.

The work's off-Mall location also raised questions around the site's zoning and ownership. Staff confirmed that the area above is under ownership by the State of Minnesota and is managed by the Minnesota Department of Administration. The recommended site, furthermore, excludes the area under the City of St. Paul's Right of Way (ROW).

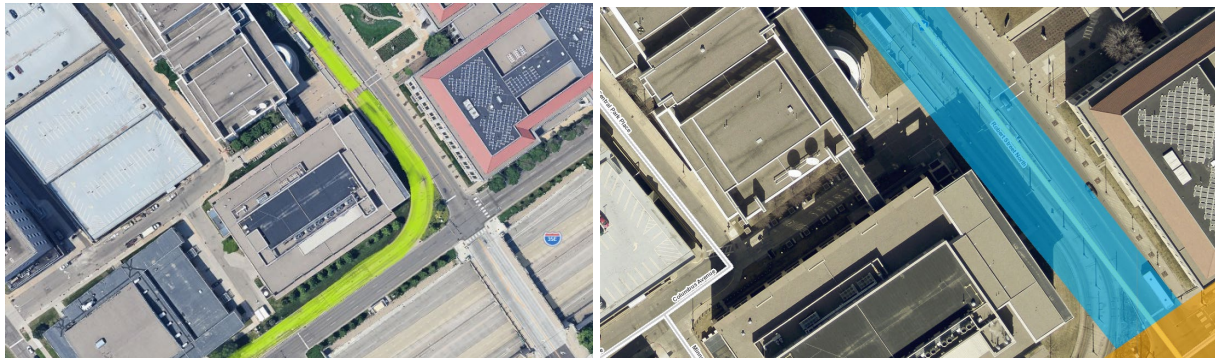


Figure 6. Authors' rendering of Green Line (R); **Figure 6.** City of St. Paul Right of Way (ROW) (L).

<https://maps.co.ramsey.mn.us/MapRamsey/>

Finally, staff discussed the possibility of putting a marker at the park's historic "home plate." However, this site would have also presented issues around visibility and public accessibility, given restrictions on building access. The difficulty in determining said plate's precise location was also discussed and affirmed by the applicant himself.

Next Steps: Design Review (Phase 1)

Under M. R. 2400.2703, Subpart 3, if a recommended location is approved by the Board, the Board may authorize to begin design review for the proposed work. Design review is a multi-stage process, with a minimum of two Board authorizations. The process can be divided into three phases: (1) selection of a design, designer, or design concept; (2) review of design development and final schematics; and (3) construction.

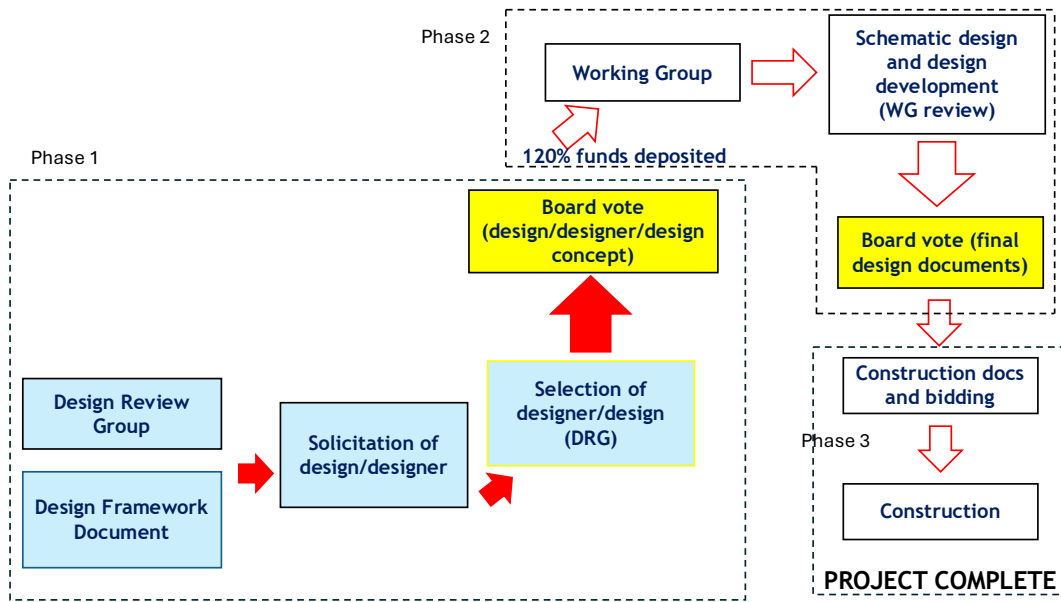


Figure 7. Graphic representation of the design review process for addition requests.

Two items are important to highlight regarding Phase 1, which is the phase of the design review process culminating in the selection of a design, designer, or design concept. The two items are the design framework document and the design review group. Both items are central to establishing the design of commemorative work suitable to the public and to relevant stakeholders.

The design framework document is a document created by Board staff, working with the applicant and with the Board’s Advisory Committee. It establishes the general parameters of the design and its selection and outlines: (1) the goals and objectives of the applicant; (2) the applicable zoning standards, planning parameters, or design guidelines; (3) the proposed budget, schedule, location, site-specific conditions, and technical parameters; (4) a public and stakeholder engagement plan; and (5) additional design process guidelines, including design criteria. The design framework document is used as reference during design selection. It is also referred to again during the Board’s final review of design documents.

The design review group assists with the selection of a work’s design, designer, or design concept from a pool of proposals or applications. The group reviews design proposals and applications and votes on said applications and proposals to recommend to the Board. The Board then votes on whether to approve or reject the group’s recommendation. The review group is comprised of: (a) the applicant; (b) two Board members; (c) two or three Advisors; (d) one person appointed by the Commissioner of Administration; (e) a representative from the Minnesota Historical Society staff; (f) two professionals experienced in the fields of visual art, public art, art history, architecture, or history; (g) two members of the public; (h) up to five additional committee members as needed for professional expertise; and (i) Board staff to oversee and support the group’s work.

All projects proceed through a competitive process, such as an open solicitation or a request for qualification.

Prior Review

December 18, 2024: Application received

December 30, 2024: CAAPB staff finds submission incomplete and informs applicant of the determination

January 2, 2025: Revised application received

January 15, 2025: CAAPB staff finds application complete and informs applicant

March 24, 2025: CAAPB staff analyzes the application under M. R. 2400.2703, Subpart 2 (“Conditions for Adding New Artwork”) and submits this report to Board and posts these findings publicly

March 24, 2025: Board votes to authorize staff to open a 30-day public comment period and host of one public hearing on the application*

March 31-May 5, 2025: Public comment period

May 15, 2025: Public hearing

October 3, 2025: Board approves staff to start site selection process

October 3, 2025: Staff research into candidate sites begins

December 18, 2025: Staff meeting with the Council of Minnesotans of African Heritage (CMAH)

January 16, 2026: Meeting of the Site Selection Steering Committee

April 23, 2026: Advisors and staff meet to formulate a recommended site

* Note: Staff engaged an independent historical consultant for fact-checking purposes between the public hearing/public comment period on the application and Board approval to open the site selection process. The consultant found no significant factual errors with the application as received.

Please see attachments A-C for a copy of the application, details on review of concept, public comment, and consultant feedback. Attachment D provides a graphic representation of the application and review process for commemorative work addition requests.

Suggested Board Resolutions

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 a new commemorative artwork to the Capitol grounds—the Downtown Baseball Park (previously referred to as “The Pillbox Plaque”)—submitted by Stew Thornley on January 2, 2025.

The Board:

- Opens public comment at the Board meeting on the recommended site.

After hearing comments from the public, the Board affirms:

- The recommended site meets the criteria in M. R. 2400.2703, Subpart 4 (“Criteria for determining the location of new artwork”) and the application may advance to design review.

The Board authorizes the Executive Secretary to:

- Develop a design framework document with the applicant and the Board’s Advisory Committee in accordance with M. R. 2400.2703, Subpart 3, Item I;
- Establish a design review group for later Board approval. This group will oversee and ultimately vote—in accordance with the competitive process described above—on a design, designer, or design concept for Board review; group membership shall comply with that described in M. R. 2400.2703, Subpart 3, Item K.

The Board wishes to make clear that approval of these intermediate steps in the Rules process does not communicate approval or disapproval of any portion of the current proposal by the applicant and that approval of these steps does not equate to agreement or judgement as to the veracity of any claim or assertion within the received application.

Attachments

Attachment A: Application as submitted by Stew Thornley; and staff analysis.

Attachment B: Complete listing of public comments collected during the comment period (3/31-5/5/2025) and the public hearing (5/15/2025); and staff analysis.

Attachment C: Historical report on the history of the baseball park and the historic significance of its location in the Capitol Area produced by Pigeon Consulting.

Attachment D: Graphic representation of rules process for adding a new commemorative work to the Capitol grounds.

Attachment E: Department of Administration feedback on recommended sites.