



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: Members of the Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board (CAAPB)
From: Peter Musty, Principal Planner and Administrator of the Rules for Zoning and Design

Proposed Design: University Rice Commons & Mobility Hub



(This image looking north from Aurora above (by Sasaki) is from Capitol Mall Design Framework, showing an aspirational vision for former Lot AA, landscaping, mobility and transit elements with activated shopfronts in new buildings replacing two surface parking lots. At center is the League of Minnesota Cities.)

Implementing a Community Vision

The vision for an active safe and walkable transit station area at University and Rice has been in place for many years (2040 Comprehensive Plan, etc.). We are now at the exciting precipice of approving a design that will allow implementation of several elements of a new public space that will serve as a welcoming community, commuter, and visitor hub.

Before Design: Engagement, Planning, Policy and Legislation

On June 4, 2026, CAAPB staff will bring forward a design for two new spaces created by legislation in 2023 ([Chapter 62 \(HF1830\)](#)). The design the Board will review has going through review by Advisors, community, landowners, the City St Paul, and agency review. It implements many of the community vetted policies previously adopted by the board.

City and CAAPB's Adopted Long Range Policy: Invest in the Connections Between Campus and City

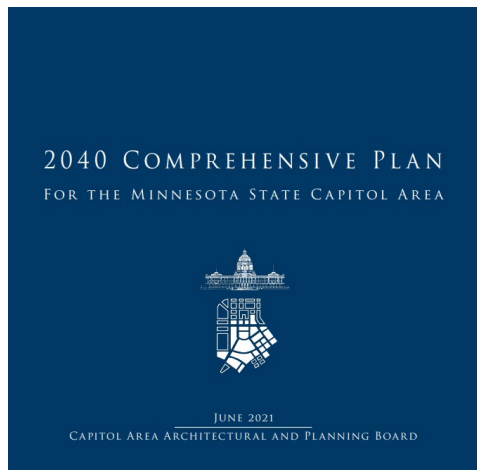
The policy supportive of revitalization on the corridor and investment in mobility and active public spaces at University and Rice are in place in several binding documents with growing specificity over the years:

City of Saint Paul supportive of transit-oriented development and a pedestrian friendly city

- Rice Station Area Plan
- Central Corridor Planning
- 2040 Comprehensive Plan (Saint Paul for All)

CAAPB Planning and Approved Policy calls for connected campus, vital corridors and a more welcoming Mall

- 2018 Lower Rice Street Commercial Vitality Zone Strategy
- 2019 Capitol Rice Development Framework (also Chapter 7A of Comprehensive Plan)
- 2021 Comprehensive Plan (2040) for the Minnesota State Capitol Area
- 2023 Legislation addressing Rice Street, Vitality, Capitol Mall, Public Spaces, Redevelopment of Lot C
- 2025 Capitol Mall Design Framework (included 2024 Charrette at Minnesota History Center)



The 2040 Comprehensive Plan for the Minnesota State Capitol Area and its Chapter 7A, the Capitol Rice Development Framework, clarified the importance of University and Rice.

The primary policy of the Chapter (as introduced on the cover to the right) clearly articulates the role of this location in the community approved vision for the future.

CAPITOL RICE DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

ATTACHMENT TO CHAPTER 7A:

THE CAPITOL RICE DISTRICT IS AN URBAN VILLAGE
WITH LEIF ERICKSON PARK AT ITS CENTER.



The most significant potential for development in the Capitol Area in the next 10 years is within the Capitol Rice District. At the center is the Capitol Rice LRT station and Leif Erickson Park, with a growing vibrancy and unique sense of place integrated with a Mobility Hub for workers, community members and Capitol visitors.

Attachment to Chapter 7a of the 2040 Comprehensive Plan for the Minnesota State Capitol Area

Minnesota Legislators funded implementation of Capitol Area comprehensive plan and included specific provisions enabling this project. The 2023 legislation that provided \$25M for the ‘Capitol Rice Street Reconstruction Project’ specifically required construction of “multimodal hub” according to the Capitol Mall Design Framework. The Bolton & Menk Team subsequently selected through a competitive national process by the County, City, and CAAPB included extensive shared mobility and urban design expertise in their proposal. Their team have, since 2024, been cultivating programming for mobility hub elements in the Rice Street project. Urban designers from Bolton & Menk in 2025 augmented the mobility planning with a separate scope that will deliver a master plan for the southwest and northeast corners created by 2023 legislation, with charge to integrate the space design with both the Rice Street project and the State Office Building improvements on the southeast corner.

2023 Legislation

Develop Capitol Mall Design Framework ✓

- o Session Law 62, HR 1830, Sec 124
- o \$1M plan, \$5M implementation;
- o Approved 2024, illustrates active University and Rice

Reconstruct Rice Street and construct Mobility Hub

- o Session Law Chapter 68, HF 2887, Sec 16
- o Integrated into all facilities, designed together
- o \$25 M, must follow Comp Plan, CMDF

New Green Spaces at Lot C - and Lot AA

- o Session Law 62, HR 1830, Sec 124
- o Northeast Corner and Southwest Corner Univ/Rice
- o Build According to CMDF vision

Welcome Information, Visual Markers, Pathway with Interpretive Markers to Capitol and Mall, Tree Canopy

- o Session Law 62, HR 1830, Sec 124
- o Corner of University and Rice, build according to CMDF vision

Future: Active Ground Level on Ford Building/Site

- o Session Law Chapter 62, HR 1830, Sec 122; requires that any redevelopment on former Ford building site (NE corner) must have spaces for local businesses



Excerpt from Chapter 68, passed May 2023: “...plans for visual markers and welcome information for the Capitol campus at one or more corners of Rice Street and University Avenue, anchoring a pathway to the State Capitol building and Capitol Mall that features interpretive markers honoring the importance and stature of the Capitol campus as both a historic site and as a modern, active public gathering space for all Minnesotans...”

In 2024, participants at Capitol Mall Design Framework Charrette ranked the project near the top.

After participants identified a larger list of actionable projects, a poll of participants was conducted by [Sasaki](#) (the CMDF design team) and the [CAAPB](#). The top five included:

1. **Shared Street and Plaza:** Update Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd as a community-focused shared street.
2. **Welcome Hub:** Develop a primary visitor hub at the intersection of University Avenue and Rice Street.
3. **Community Hub and Playscape:** Transform [Cass Gilbert Park](#) into a multi-generational recreation space with a destination playscape.
4. **Water Feature:** Deploy an iconic water feature that celebrates Minnesota’s identity as the "land where the waters reflect the clouds."
5. **Upper Mall Terracing:** Reshape the topography of the Upper Mall to better support large events and civic demonstrations.

The Capitol Mall Design Framework was approved by the board in 2025.



Implementing an Integrated Public Realm Vision for University Avenue and Rice Street

A working vision statement was developed for the Board to consider by Rice Street Design Team – the team is a County, City, and CAAPB collaboration led by the work of Bolton and Menk and consultant partners.

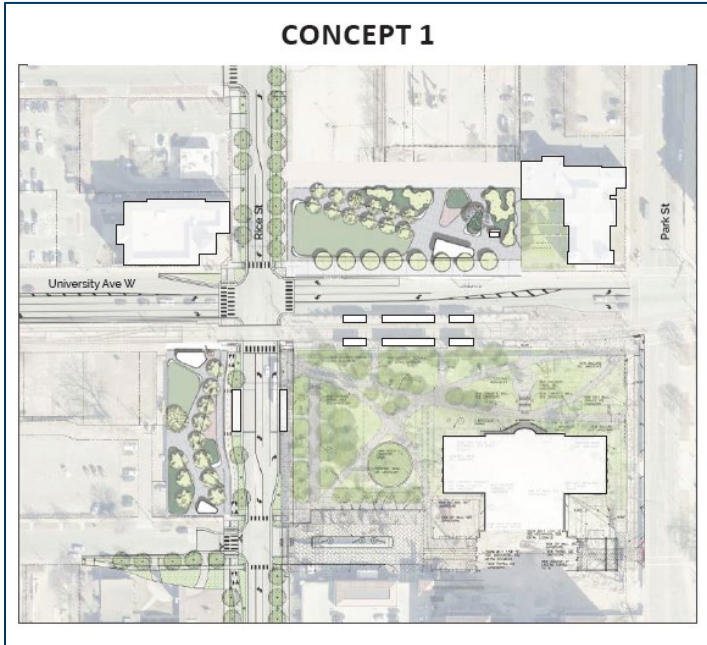
“A UNIFYING VISION:

THE MOBILITY HUB AND PLAZA COMMONS WILL SERVE AS A WELCOMING CIVIC ENTRANCE THAT SEAMLESSLY CONNECTS THE CAPITOL CAMPUS WITH THE SURROUNDING CITY.

THIS WILL BE DONE THROUGH AN ACCESSIBLE, MULTIMODAL, PEOPLE-CENTERED PUBLIC SPACE DESIGN.

IT WILL FUNCTION AS A VIBRANT, RESILIENT GATHERING PLACE THAT SUPPORTS MOVEMENT, SUSTAINABILITY, COMMUNITY LIFE, AND PROGRESSIVE URBAN DESIGN.”

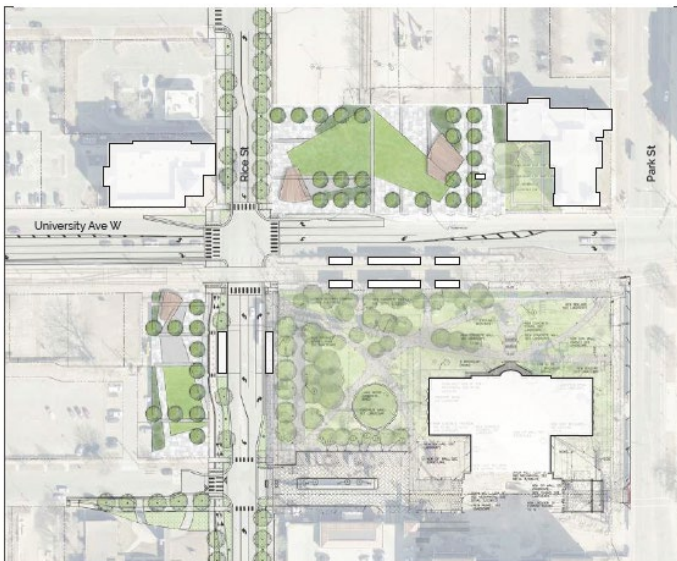
CONCEPT 1



CONCEPT 2



CONCEPT 3



Key Characteristics of the Design Concepts

The design brought before the Board was developed in 2025 and 2026 by the Rice Street team and followed policy guidelines provided by CAAPB staff and Advisors. The designs considered included:

- mobility elements (see chart below developed in 2023 by CAAPB and Metro Transit)
- tree canopy, landscaping and greenery
- benches
- flexible event spaces (varying sizes)
- flexible hardscape areas
- public art and commemorations
- security and pedestrian lighting
- welcome messaging, wayfinding and transit kiosk

Three Concepts Explored Organizing Principles

Concept 1: frame views of the Capitol

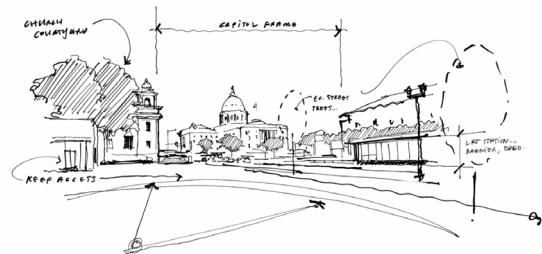
Concept 2: sweeping walks like the Mall

Concept 3: tracing historic patterns

Attachment A: Engagement List

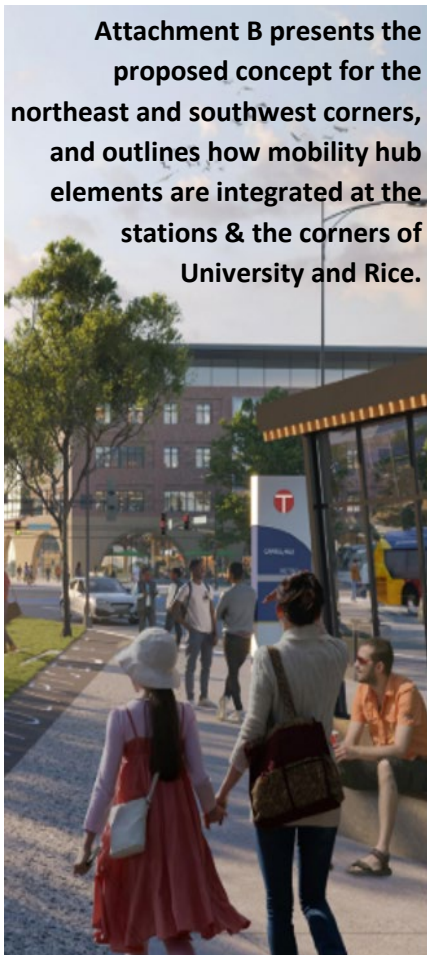
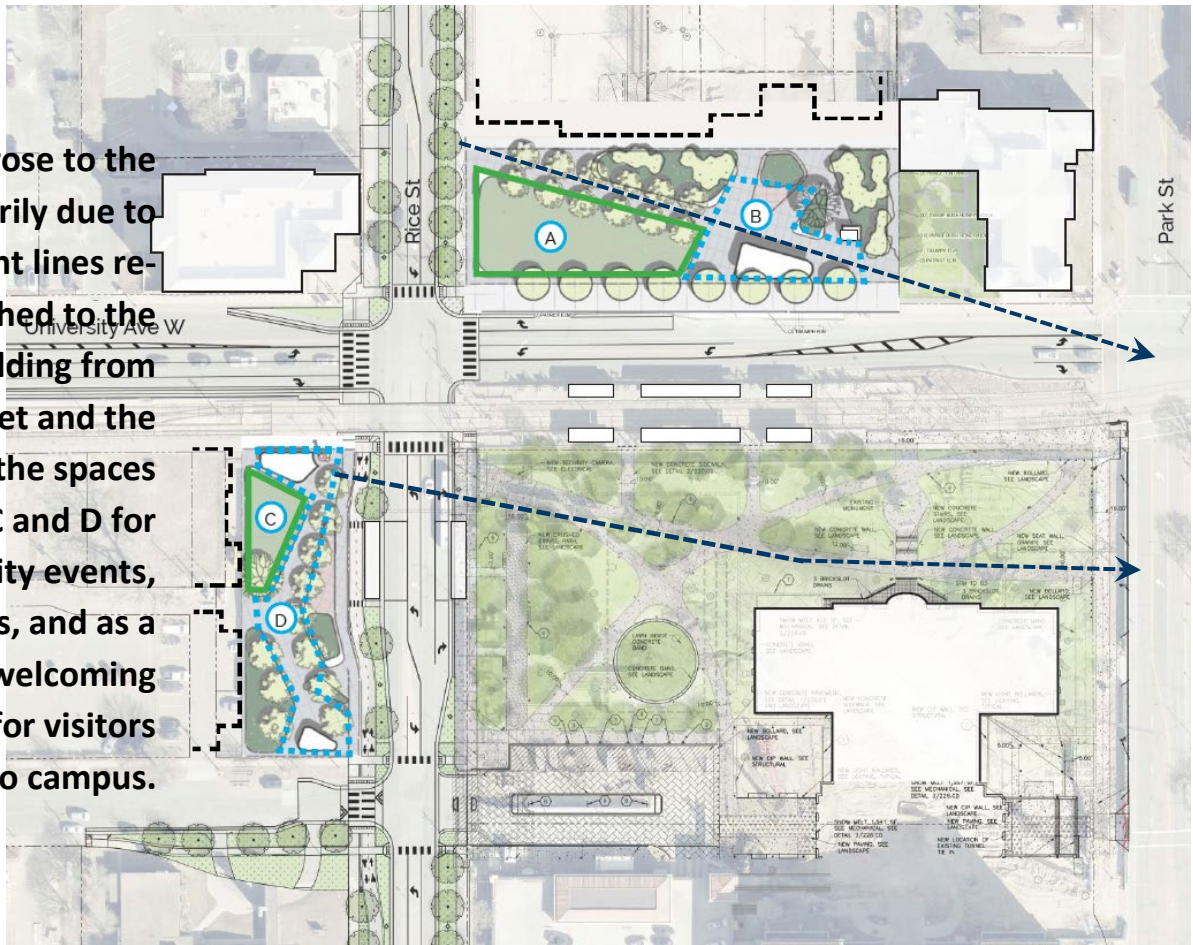
Three months of meetings, open houses, lunchtime conversation at the Commons, meeting with stakeholders were conducted. The list of partners, neighbors, institutions is included in Attachment A.

Attachment B: Proposed Concept



After rounds of input and coordination meetings, Concept 1 was selected, developed further, and is presented in Attachment B for your consideration.

Concept 1 rose to the top, primarily due to the strong sight lines re-established to the Capitol Building from Rice Street and the flexibility of the spaces A, B, C and D for community events, gatherings, and as a welcoming environment for visitors to campus.



Attachment B presents the proposed concept for the northeast and southwest corners, and outlines how mobility hub elements are integrated at the stations & the corners of University and Rice.

Mobility Hub Elements - A “Kit of Parts”

Identified Mobility Need	Mobility Hub Solution(s)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rice and University are difficult & unsafe to cross for pedestrians. Few crosswalks on Rice south of University. Pedestrian safety after dark 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marked pedestrian crosswalks; Pedestrian curb extensions/refuge islands where applicable; pedestrian scramble crossing Human-scale lighting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of pedestrian destinations and amenities/commerce Lack of seating Urban heat island effect & lack of shade 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flexible public space for community events, food trucks (with utility hookups), etc.; Encourage street-level commercial land uses in areas adjacent to Mobility Hub Tables and chairs, benches Increase urban tree canopy; shade structures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of wayfinding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wayfinding signage, map of Capitol Rice area in central locations. Tactile maps can improve wayfinding access for visually-impaired users.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of public art & cultural amenities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public art; interactive art; interpretive cultural and campus information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bicycling: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of dedicated bike paths through Capitol Campus Lack of end-of-trip facilities Lack of secure bike parking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dedicated (or mixed-use) bicycle infrastructure on Rice Street; bicycle pathway through Leif Erickson Park; secure bicycle parking (e.g., lockers); End-of-trip facilities should be encouraged in buildings throughout the Capitol Campus
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scooters / Bikeshare – lack of dedicated parking areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scooter & Bikeshare dedicated parking zones
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrate transit connections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Green Line LRT platform; G Line BRT platforms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carshare – no HOURCAR or Evie carshare parking within Capitol-Rice area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dedicated carshare parking/charging stations for HOURCAR and Evie
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of carpool/vanpool parking Lack of dedicated TNC drop-off/pick-up zones (One taxi zone exists on Aurora Ave west of Rice Street, but is not very visible or centrally-located) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dedicated carpool/vanpool parking More visible drop-off/pick-up zones, including pedestrian crossing if needed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Few EV charging stations and lack of visible signage indicating EV charging stations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Add more dedicated EV charging stations. Stations should include visible signage.

Statements Provided from Advisory Committee and Large Neighboring Institutions

Policy, planning, and design guidance developed by the CAAPB represents ongoing collaboration with public partners such as the City of Saint Paul, Ramsey County, Metro Transit, Capitol Region Watershed District and agencies of the State of Minnesota. (See Attachment A). We have also engaged neighbors for input on Rice Street and the new spaces. The following are direct statements from CAAPB Advisory Committee and three of the (off campus, non-governmental) larger neighboring institutions along University that are immediately impacted by vitality and safety of the environment around them, and rely on easy access for those they serve.



new 'commons' spaces under consideration, created by 2023 Legislation.

Statement from **CAAPB's Advisory Committee** - by Advisor Joe Favour, Advisor Kimberly Sandbulte



"The CAAPB Architectural Advisors have reviewed and support the proposed conceptual design for the Lot C and Lot AA spaces at the corner of Rice Street and University Avenue. The concept development for the Capitol Rice Commons proposes a viable framework for integrating the Capitol campus with the surrounding urban fabric. By building upon the axial principles of Cass Gilbert's 1903 plan, the proposed design establishes a formal orientation that prioritizes sightlines to the Capitol dome while accommodating contemporary multimodal functions. The programmatic division of Lots C and AA into specific zones for transit and public use addresses the practical requirements of the site, though the density of transit infrastructure necessitates careful spatial coordination to maintain the intended civic atmosphere. The inclusion of BRT amenities and sustainable site features, such as regional stormwater management, aligns with current urban standards and CAAPB goals for the spaces. However, the long-term utility of these spaces will be contingent upon the consistent implementation of an operations and maintenance plan that is compatible with FMD resources and capabilities. Overall, the proposed design provides a thoughtful and grounded approach to the district's evolution, requiring continued focus on balancing transit efficiency with the campus's historical character as the project moves into detailed design and implementation." (received May 20, 2026)

Statement from **Saint Paul City School** – submitted by Benjamin Magras, Executive Director

“SPCS supports the vision for a more welcoming and accessible public space that better connects the Capitol area with the surrounding community. As a school, we appreciate the focus on green space, transit access, and flexible gathering areas. Continued attention to safety and opportunities for community use and programming are also especially important.”
(Received May 20, 2026)



Statement from **League of Minnesota Cities** – submitted by John McCarthy | Chief Financial Officer

“The League of Minnesota Cities (LMC) is pleased to submit this statement in support of the proposed Capitol Rice Commons project. As a direct neighbor to both planned park spaces, we have a significant stake in the project’s success and offer the following perspective.



LMC’s Support for the Project - We believe this development represents a net positive for the Capitol Area. Active green space with trees, seating, and multimodal transportation options can transform a challenging urban corner into a welcoming public amenity. We also see potential for this project to strengthen the connection between our facility and the Capitol complex, which would be a benefit to our staff and our members.

Our Key Concerns - While we are broadly supportive of the project, we want to ensure the CAAP Board give serious attention to the following priorities:

- **Operations and Maintenance:** The long-term success of this project will depend on consistent maintenance and active oversight. We encourage the Board to establish clear standards and dedicated resources for ongoing maintenance.
- **Visibility and Sight Lines:** The design should preserve sight lines throughout the park spaces. Lighting, landscaping, and structures should be arranged to avoid creating concealed areas, especially along the pedestrian routes our staff and members use to access the Capitol outside of standard business hours.
- **Safety and Security.** We encourage coordination with Capitol Security and local law enforcement on an ongoing operational security plan.

LMC is a supportive neighbor and looks forward to seeing this vision for a more pedestrian friendly and welcoming corner fully realized. Thank you for considering our perspective.” (Received May 20, 2026)

Statement from **Christ Lutheran Church on Capitol Hill** - submitted by Pastor Peter Weston Miller



“Christ on Capitol Hill’s support for the preferred concept has been clear: additional livable public green space, permit-able areas for community gatherings for hospitality and advocacy events, as well as intentional intergenerational neighborhood amenities along University to serve our diverse neighbors.

Feedback from the congregation has also included the desire for a small, fenced play area with a public restroom as well as a small ice-skating rink. These areas would send a clear message of inclusion, welcome, beauty and joy to our block.

The church’s Peace Garden (adjacent to Lot C) stands as a beacon of life and hope, investing in this vision, with a mix of benches, native plants, and pollinator-friendly landscape. We would like this property to blend permeably (removing large trees along state-own property line) with the preferred concept, allowing for neighbors to feel both peace and purpose here.” (Received May 21, 2026)

Staff Recommendation

CAAPB Staff requests that the Board act (see suggested language on the next page) to affirm established community policy, accept the design alternative concept, and support continued planning for design development and implementation.

The Capitol Area is now poised for a community-based renewal. The convergence of several projects presents an opportunity to honor the intent of previous legislation and allow integrated investment here at the center of the Capitol Area community.

Moving forward will support renewal as the community merges from a long cycle of disinvestment and more recent layers of stress. The new spaces will also become a **common ground**, establishing a safe and active center for any traveler, visitor, commuter, or resident as the community accommodates hundreds of millions of dollars of changes in the landscape, tying together in one integrated public space the new vision for Leif Erickson Park created by State Office Building expansion, a reimagined Rice Street, the redevelopment of the former Sears site – all will bring welcome vital new activity to the campus and the Capitol Area.

Proposed Next Steps for Staff (in 2026)

- 1. Request Board member affirmation of design direction and additional guidance** – See suggested language below.
- 2. Continue collaboration with major public and private owners and public realm agencies** – This will entail scheduling a second round and in some cases third round of meetings with major stakeholders and community members and groups. See Attachment A for list of direct engagements so far.
- 3. Complete the integrated schematic design scope** – for the corner commissioned by the Ramsey County led multi-agency team. Coordinate at each step with Department of Administration.
- 4. Announce period of open community review and evaluation of the proposed (board preferred*) alternative.**
 - a. announcement of a public comment period of 60 or more days web release at CAAPB website and request for comments via emails, mail, phone, or in person and GovDelivery from workers and residents
 - b. establish open gallery at Capitol Commons and host weekly visitation hours
 - c. virtual presentation
 - d. continue to offer reviews with board members, landowners, and agency leaders
 - e. documentation of questions and comments for possible revisions
- 5. Work collaboratively on an integrated implementation plan** – including costs, maintenance roles, timing, with Department of Administration and the Ramsey County contracted Rice Street multi-agency team along with partners such as Metro Transit and the Capitol Region Watershed District.
- 6. Return to Board** – for approval of the implementation plan, refined design and/or further direction (in 2026).

Suggested Language for Board Action

"The Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board (CAAPB) reviewed the information provided in June 2026 board memo provided by CAAPB staff that includes the summary of engagement process to date, a summary of design elements and a proposed design as represented in design packet provided by Ramsey County's consultant Bolton & Menk. Further, the board addresses the following in this action:

Board preferred design.

The Board approves the direction of the design presented in Attachment B, and supports further development of the schematic drawings and plan for implementation to be considered at a future board meeting.

Additional space programming and implementation guidance.

The Board approves the following guidance:

- a. **Public Spaces serving Minnesotans.** The Board affirms policy and that the spaces are to be designed serve the state needs/activities as defined by the parameters for use and safety established by the Department of Administration.*
- b. **Community use.** The Board affirms established policy to activate and use the space with elements that are designed for the wider community as a public space designed to serve visitors and guests to campus, Saint Paul and Capitol Area such as residents, workers and commuters, transit and mobility users.*
- c. **Permitting, Maintenance, and Operations.** The Board recognizes and clarifies this is the primary responsibility of the Department of Administration.*
- d. **2026 Design Coordination.** The Board recommends that coordination continue with southeast corner (Lot AA) design team commissioned by the Department of Administration to mandate design approaches that creates complementary spaces and makes maintenance and operations more efficient and affordable.*
- e. **2027 Improvements.** The Board authorizes the agencies involved in 2027 construction projects create an implementation plan for 2027 that reflects a set of improvements for Lot AA and Lot C that establishes spaces as shown in the concept and outlined in a and b above.*
- f. **Funding.** The Board recognizes that funding for the 2027 phase described above will be made available from several public projects with a plan for maintenance that is established collaboratively by Rice team and Administration and parties identified in the implementation plan.*

Attachments

Attachment A: List of Direct Engagement Updates, Meetings and Reviews

Attachment B: Design Packet – University & Rice Proposed Alternative