

What will the \$3M for public safety/outreach near state Capitol entail?

Besides the \$3M, the St. Paul Port Authority will oversee \$1M in business grants, mostly along Rice Street

[Frederick Melo](#)

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Ramsey County Sheriff Inspectors Daryl Gullette, left, and Darin McDonald, outside the Minnesota State Capitol building in St. Paul on Tuesday, July 15, 2025. (John Autey / Pioneer Press)

With a whoop of joy, state Rep. Maria Isa Pérez-Vega, DFL-St. Paul, slid down the giant slide of an inflatable obstacle course erected for an evening earlier this week at Cass Gilbert Memorial Park, which overlooks the Minnesota State Capitol building.

Most lawmakers agree that the 60 blocks surrounding the Capitol campus in St. Paul aren't routinely associated with family fun, recreation and vitality, but a new \$4 million, three-year initiative led in large part by the Ramsey County Sheriff's Office aims to increase public safety while offering more opportunity for community in public areas.



Rep. Maria Isa Perez-Vega, DFL-St. Paul, slides down an inflatable slide erected for the evening at Cass Gilbert Memorial Park, which overlooks the State Capitol building in St. Paul, on Monday, July 14, 2025. (Frederick Melo / Pioneer Press)

"We want to see kids having a good time, and we want to see most importantly them having a safe time," said Pérez-Vega later Monday, noting state lawmakers are tied to the area, as even lawmakers from Greater Minnesota live in and around downtown when the Legislature is in session. "They work in our capital city. ... (But) when the session's over, the community isn't over."

Just outside downtown St. Paul, [the Ramsey County Sheriff's Office will use \\$3 million in state funds](#) to dedicate two deputies to patrol the 60-block area that stretches from East Frogtown and Capitol Heights down to the Minnesota History Center, or from Marion to Jackson streets and from Pennsylvania Avenue down to Kellogg Boulevard.

Additional staff in the next three years will work with the city's recreation centers to host family nights, movies in the park and other community outreach. At least four civilian ambassadors from St. Paul nonprofits will serve as neighborhood greeters, mostly near transit stops.

\$1M for economic development

In addition, the St. Paul Port Authority will soon offer new and existing businesses in the area \$1 million in economic development grants, each ranging in size from \$50,000 to \$150,000. Special focus is likely to land along Rice Street as it undergoes a \$25 million reconstruction from Pennsylvania Avenue to 12th Street, most likely in 2028.



The \$4 million in total funding for the new “Capitol Area Public Safety and Vitality Initiative” — which includes \$1 million from the latest state bonding bill for business grants — represents one of the few high-dollar wins for St. Paul out of the most recent legislative session.

“Urban areas didn’t get a lot out of the bonding bill,” said state Sen. Sandy Pappas, DFL-St. Paul, who was instrumental in securing the business funding. “It mostly went to rural Minnesota.”

The Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board, which oversees zoning, planning and design in the 60-block area around the State Capitol building, is still working with the sheriff’s office and the Port Authority on the details, but a joint kickoff celebration Monday evening at Cass Gilbert Memorial Park drew optimistic remarks from

Pappas and three state lawmakers — Pérez-Vega and state Reps. Samakab Hussein and David Pinto.

The DFL lawmakers, among others, participated in a year-long task force dedicated to wading through community concerns and priorities for the area surrounding the Capitol campus. “We heard really loud and clear people wanted more safety, wanted more programming, wanted to feel free to walk around,” said Erik Cedarleaf Dahl, executive secretary of the CAAPB board. “This money is focused on the neighborhoods around the Capitol, not the Capitol complex itself.”



Ramsey County Sheriff's deputies Marco Barton, left, and John Gleason at Cass Gilbert Memorial Park, which overlooks the State Capitol building in St. Paul, on Monday, July 14, 2025. (Frederick Melo / Pioneer Press)

Big changes ahead

Officials noted that big changes are coming to those neighborhoods,

including [the ongoing reconstruction of Rice Street](#) in stages and the upcoming reconstruction of Jackson Street from Pennsylvania Avenue to University Avenue, which is scheduled to begin this month. Work on a new John Ireland Bridge will get underway in early October, the day after the Twin Cities Marathon.

Also on the horizon is a new [Capitol Park Mental Health Hospital](#) that opens this fall where Bethesda Hospital once stood, the possible redevelopment of the old Sears department store on Rice Street and the future Tribal Flag Plaza, which will place emblems of 11 tribal nations on the Capitol Mall.

In the years ahead, two new bus rapid transit lines will roll along both Rice and Jackson streets. A tree-planting effort has already installed 200 of 400 new trees in and around the State Capitol campus.

Daryl Gullette, a Ramsey County sheriff's inspector in charge of youth services, said the sheriff's office will spend months crafting specific youth and family outreach based on community input, hand in hand with the city's Frogtown Community Center. Organized kickball nights are a possible outcome, he said, as are other activities ranging from outdoor movies to youth mentorship.

Part of the goal, said Gullette, is to create both a consistent and approachable law enforcement presence in the community. In addition to Gullette, the "Vitality Team" includes sheriff's office inspectors Darin McDonald and Mike Whisler, as well as patrol deputies Marco Barton and John Gleason. "Our assignment is partnership with the community, to build trust and engage with the youth," Barton said.

The St. Paul Fire Department made a showing at Monday evening's event, as did St. Paul City Council Member Anika Bowie, who represents Frogtown, though neither party delivered remarks. In a brief phone interview Tuesday, Council President Rebecca Noecker said while she was not in attendance, she supported the concept.

"We obviously welcome the investment," said Noecker, noting the effort was primarily driven by statement lawmakers and the sheriff's office. "We need all hands on deck to improve the sense of vibrancy downtown, and that includes around the Capitol."

'They have a plan'

Asked why the \$3 million was directed to the sheriff's office and not to the St. Paul Police Department, which has jurisdiction over city streets, Pérez-Vega — who chairs the St. Paul legislative delegation — said the county sheriff's office had been in touch with her for months, and the city's police department had not.

"They pick up the phone," she said. "They come to the rec center and flip burgers and throw the football around. And they have a plan."

On Tuesday, a spokesperson for the St. Paul Police Department confirmed that the department is not involved in the sheriff's outreach effort, though she said they were generally supportive of the concept.

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More information about the initiative is online at
tinyurl.com/StateCapOutreach25.

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