



# REPORT TO COUNCIL

## City of Sacramento

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[www. CityofSacramento.org](http://www.CityofSacramento.org)

Staff Report  
**November 10, 2009**

**Honorable Mayor and  
Members of the City Council**

**Title:** Capitol Mall Plan

**Location/Council District:** Capitol Mall between the Sacramento River and 9<sup>th</sup> Street,  
District 1

**Recommendation:** Adopt a **City Council Resolution** directing staff in partnership with the American Institute of Architects and stakeholders, to develop a program to hold a design competition for a comprehensive Capitol Mall Plan from the riverfront to 9<sup>th</sup> Street and to select a specific location for project level design.

**Contact:** Beth Tincher, 808-7730, Leslie Fritzsche 808-5450

**Presenters:** Beth Tincher

**Department:** Economic Development

**Division:** Downtown Development

**Organization No:** 18001021

### **Description/Analysis**

**Issue:** Capitol Mall between the Sacramento River waterfront and the State Capitol Building (see Attachment 2) is "Sacramento's Front Door," an historic landmark street with significant importance to both the City of Sacramento and the State of California. Capitol Mall serves many vital purposes:

- A gateway into the City of Sacramento and the Downtown area
- A vital view corridor to the State Capitol buildings – the center of government for the 8<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world.
- A critical link to destinations in Sacramento, Old Sacramento and West Sacramento
- A prime location for corporate office space and commercial uses in Downtown Sacramento
- A linkage for an employment center for thousands of public and private employees including primarily state, federal and private office buildings

In 1911, Capitol Mall was developed as the main entrance into Sacramento. At that time, Capitol Mall was one of Sacramento's most heavily traveled streets,

and was an important commercial corridor until the 1960s when it was replaced as a main access point with the introduction of freeways (Attachment 3). Over the years, Capitol Mall has changed radically. Some of these changes include the development of state, federal and private office buildings, the introduction of a new Downtown Plaza commercial center, the introduction of Interstate 5, diversion of traffic from freeways to other arterial streets, and introduction of north/south light rail connections at 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> streets.

While much has changed on and around the Mall, the function of the Mall has not achieved the original design aspiration of serving as Sacramento's and the State Capitol's "Front Door." Nor does it serve pedestrians and vehicles in the most convenient way possible. Currently, a clear vision for the use and design of the Mall has not been developed (see Attachment 4). The City and the Capitol Mall stakeholders have an opportunity to build upon earlier efforts to create and energize Sacramento's historic "Front Door," by creating a process that, when completed, will: 1) put in place a strong, clear gateway to the City, 2) build upon the decades of history and sense of place that exists from the Sacramento River and the State Capitol, 3) provide a framework for Capitol Mall to realize its full potential as a vital culturally and historically significant public space, and a place of visual distinction truly reflecting the diversity, environment and creative vision of the people of California. Creating a vision for Capitol Mall as "California's State Mall" is like developing a Sacramento version of the Capital Mall in Washington DC.

**Policy Considerations:** There are several policy documents that frame the development of design for Capitol Mall including state legislation, the City's General Plan, the Sacramento Riverfront Master Plan and the City's Zoning Code. The main policy documents are outlined in Attachment 5.

**Environmental Considerations:** City Council direction to staff to establish special event programs and to develop a plan to provide for the design of Capitol Mall is authorized under the California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines Section 15262, planning for possible future action.

**Rationale for Recommendation:** Earlier this year, the City hired Robert Waste & Associates to facilitate stakeholder interviews with property owners, developers, major tenants, and special interest groups (AIA, ULI, environmental groups, neighborhood interest groups, planning commission and CalPERS) to gather their thoughts on a Capitol Mall renovation. A small working group of these stakeholders was assembled to review background information, develop core values, identify key issues, and identify specific opportunities for Capitol Mall improvement. The feedback from the stakeholders was extremely varied, but all agreed that Capitol Mall is a major attraction for Sacramento and Capitol Mall should be further improved to strengthen the link between the waterfront and the Capitol. Key components of the feedback to improve Capitol Mall included:

- Energize the space between Capitol Mall and Tower Bridge
- Attract high end signature events and festivals
- Build signature streetscape, tree canopy, and lighting
- Include more public space
- Learn from existing great streets like the Champs Elysees
- Attract cultural resources with an emphasis on museums
- Include iconic art installation

The outcome of these efforts was the development of a vision statement for Capitol Mall, core project values, and key implementation strategies, which are included as Attachment 6.

As a part of the working group efforts, staff also outlined key challenges and opportunities, which are graphically summarized in Attachment 7. The greatest opportunities include:

- Create nodes of activity along Capitol Mall to entice visitors from one location to another and link Capitol Mall to the waterfront and other downtown attractions
- Capitalize on creating opportunities at existing activity nodes including the light rail stations on 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> streets
- Improve the pedestrian experience and eliminate intimidating elements including the pedestrian walkway from the waterfront to 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and high traffic volume intersections like 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> streets
- Redesign underutilized street connections to provide more visual interest and create connections between lettered streets
- Capitalize on the City of Sacramento Department of Transportation's effort to reconnect downtown to the waterfront through Capitol Mall improvements
- Strategically activate ground floor uses to provide services to office uses on Capitol Mall and to provide points of interests along the Mall
- Create visual interest all along the Mall

Additional elements along Capitol Mall have changed over the last couple of years that create an ideal situation to move forward with improvements to the Mall.

- Capitol Mall from Tower Bridge to 10th Street was a State Route, which was relinquished to the City of Sacramento in 2005. Becoming a City street allows more flexibility for street design, processing and improvements construction. The State transferred limited funds to the City for improvements to Capitol Mall as a part of this transaction.
- In 2008, improvements to Tower Bridge were completed improving pedestrian and bicycle access on the bridge.
- In 2007, improvements were made to the intersection of Tower Bridge and Neasham to improvement the pedestrian experience.

- In 2003, the City Council approved a professional service agreement to complete the planning phase and the environmental document for a proposal to connect Downtown to the Sacramento Waterfront. Program recommendations, which were presented to City Council in August 2009, focus on a solution to provide enhanced alternative mode improvements across Interstate 5 widening Capitol Mall, widening O Street, providing a new connection at N Street and an at grade connection at Neasham and 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue. The environmental review process will be kicked off in October 2009. Development of a Capitol Mall Planning Project could dovetail with DOT program efforts to improve connections over Interstate 5.
- The Docks Riverfront Promenade improvements from O Street to the extension of R Street and a park at R Street are currently under construction. The promenade improvements will connect with R Street Bridge which was recently improved to provide pedestrian and bikeway access from the Waterfront to Downtown.

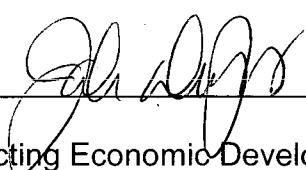
**Recommendation:** In an effort to continue the momentum from these current and past projects to improve Capitol Mall to create a stronger and more vibrant connection from the Sacramento River to the Capitol, and to increase efforts to activate Capitol Mall to create a lively destination of choice and a cultural center of statewide significance, staff is recommending that the City, in partnership with the American Institute of Architects and stakeholders:

- (1) Develop a program to hold a design competition for the development of a comprehensive Capitol Mall Plan from the riverfront to 9<sup>th</sup> Street and;
- (2) Select a specific location for project level design (eg: streetscape between Tower Bridge and 3<sup>rd</sup> Street).


**Financial Considerations:** The City of Sacramento intends to partner with the American Institute of Architects to solicit contributions to conduct the design competition and for the preparation of the Capitol Mall Plan and specific project design. Staff will report back to City Council if any City funds are requested.

**Emerging Small Business Development (ESBD):** Minority and Women’s Business Enterprise requirements will be applied to all activities.

Respectfully Submitted by:   
 Leslie Fritzsche  
 Downtown Development Manager

Approved by:   
 John Dangberg  
 Acting Economic Development Director

Recommendation Approved:

  
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Ray Kerridge  
City Manager

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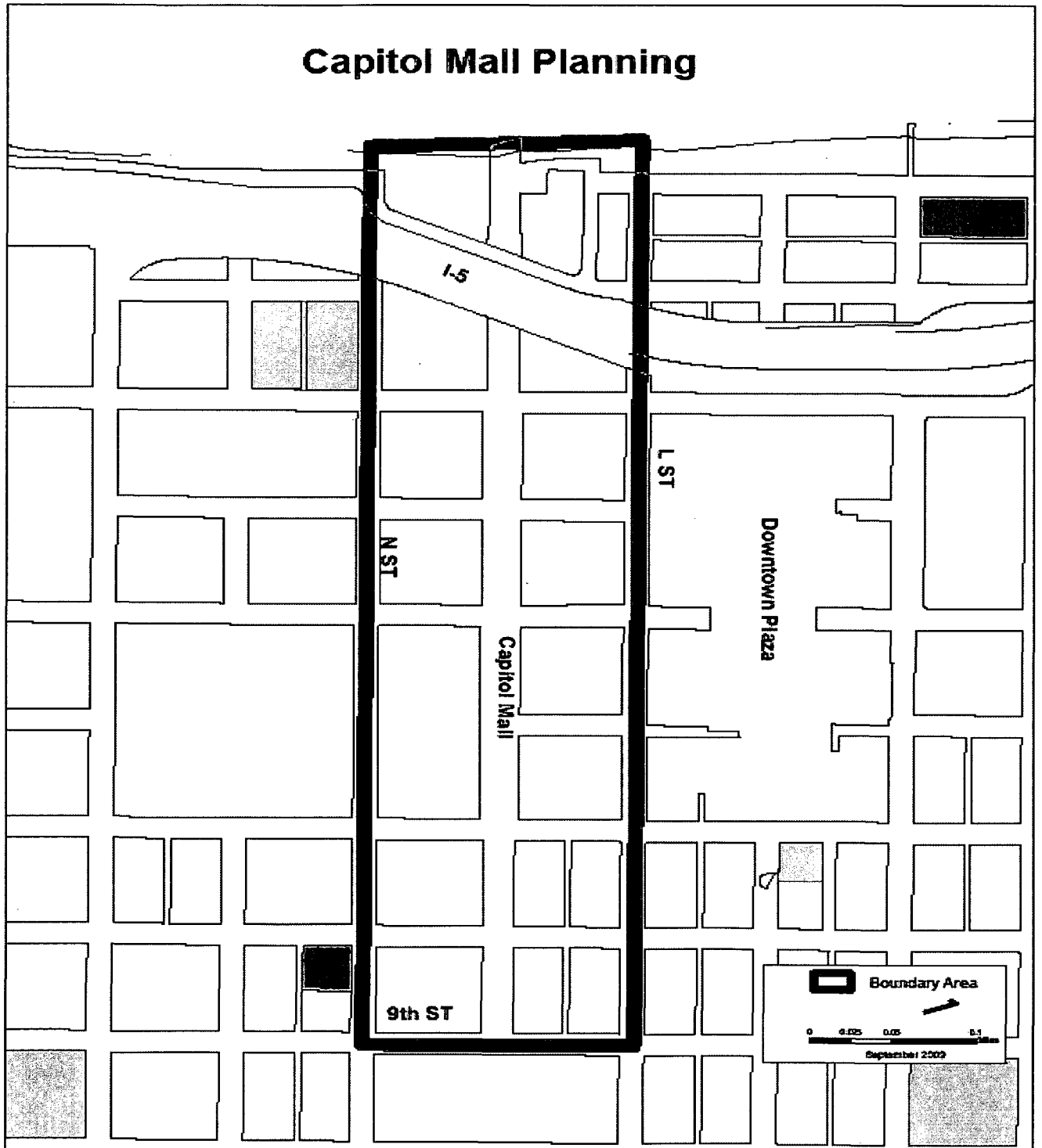
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**Attachment 1  
Background**

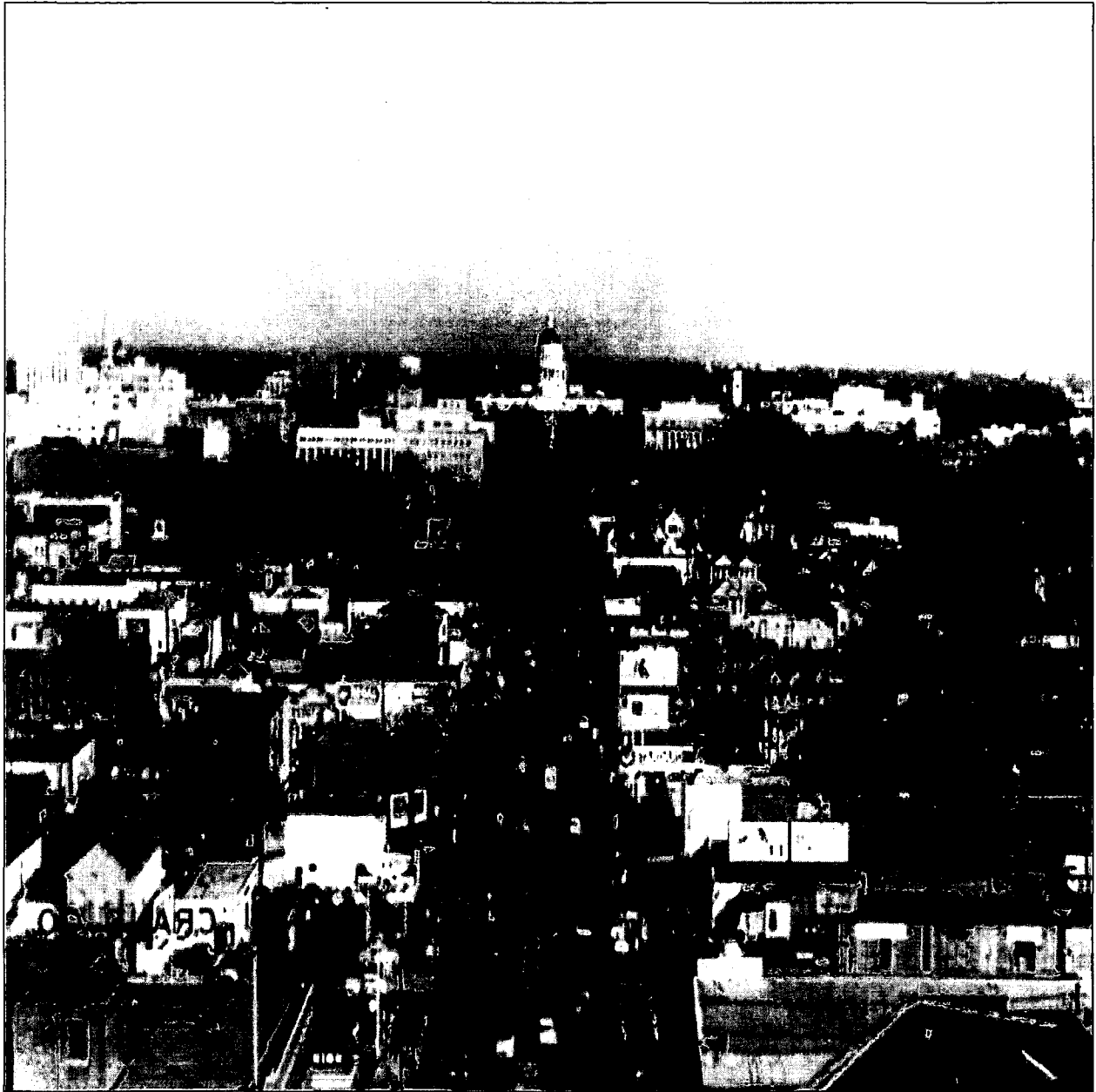
Over the last several decades, a series of decisions led to several challenges to fully achieving the design/development potential along Capitol Mall. These decisions included:

- During the 1950's, the State of California widened what was initially called M Street (now Capitol Avenue) between the State Capitol and Tower Bridge into the Parisian style design for which it is known today. This became Capitol Mall.
- The introduction of Interstate 5 bisected the city's Downtown area from the Sacramento Waterfront.
- The introduction of Macy's and Downtown Plaza created the need to redirect traffic into the Downtown area. Traffic was redirected to other arterials such as J, L, N and Q Streets replacing Capitol Mall as the main western entry to the City.
- The completion of Highway 50 and Interstate 5 construction in the 1960's allowed freeway access around downtown.
- The development of broad sidewalks and long pedestrian street crossings add to an intimidating pedestrian experience from the riverfront to 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and at 5<sup>th</sup> Streets.
- Because of the primarily office use and lack of ground floor uses developed along Capitol Mall, it does not encourage people to travel down the Mall from the river to the Capitol.
- The capitol view corridor present design limitations to heights and setback of hard and softscapes.

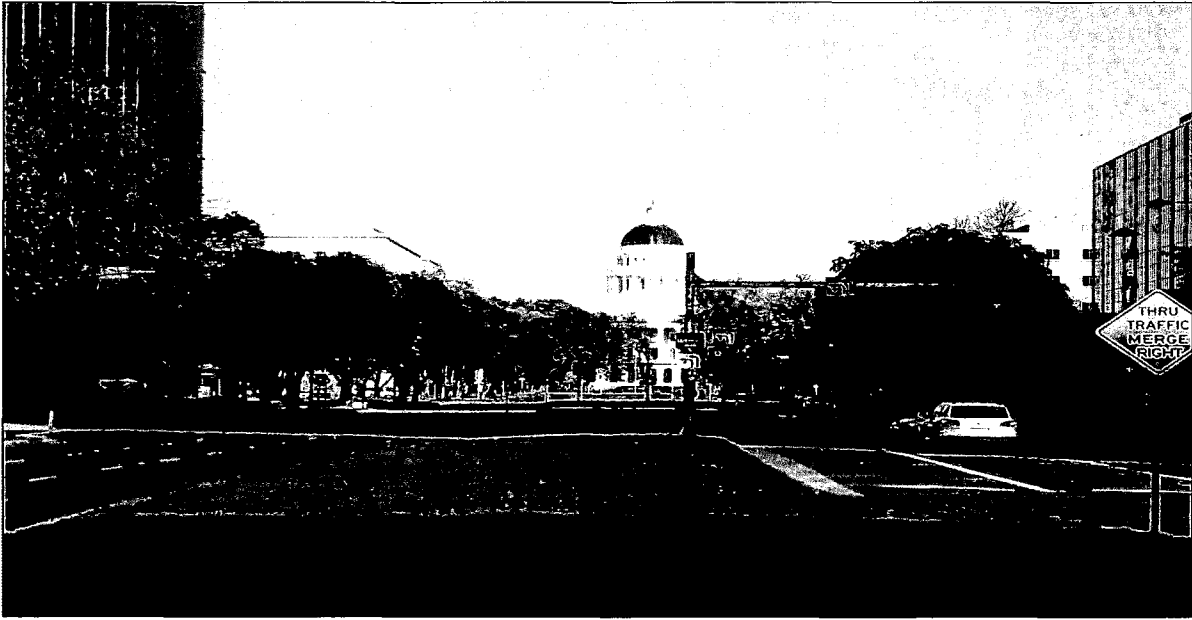
**Attachment 2  
Location Map**



**Attachment 3**  
**Capitol Mall – Circa 1950**



**Attachment 4**  
**Capitol Mall- 2009**



**Attachment 5  
Policy Considerations****State Policies:**

- *Capitol Mall Plan (GC 8160)*: The 1997 Capitol Mall Plan vision is to create a vibrant, mixed-use community of State offices, housing and retail on State-owned land in Sacramento's Central City. The 1997 Capitol Mall Plan is an update of the 1977 Capitol Area Plan, which by law is the official State Master plan for development in the Capitol Area. Capitol Area Development Authority (CADA) and the City of Sacramento share the responsibility of implementation of the residential and neighborhood commercial components of the Capitol Area Plan. Two committees oversee implementation of the Capitol Advisory Committee chaired by the Department of General Services (DGS) and the Capitol Area Committee with members appointed by the Governor and the Legislature. A proposal by the City to modify the center median along Capitol Mall to develop all or a portion of the existing median would be subject, as would be all efforts to improve and strengthen Sacramento's "Front Door" on Capitol Mall, to an advisory review and comment by these committees.
- *Capitol View Projection Act (GC Section 8162)*: The Legislature enacted a law to limit the height of buildings, public or private located near the Capitol to reserve the historic views of the Capitol. Development within the half block west of 9<sup>th</sup> Street has a height limit of 150 feet and the half block west of 8<sup>th</sup> Street has a height limit of 400 feet.
- *Capitol Mall Master Plan (GC Section 8166-8168)*: In 1970, the Legislature delegated to the DGS the responsibility and authority to develop a beautification plan for Capitol Mall extending from Tower Bridge to 9<sup>th</sup> Street. The principle objective of the master plan is to provide a physical and aesthetic expression in the approaches to the State Capitol Complex.
- *Historic State Capitol Commission: (GC Section 9249-9149.17)*: The purview of this commission is the review proposed alterations to the Capitol building, Capitol Park, and the capitol views.

**City of Sacramento Policies:**

- *2030 General Plan*: There are multiple General plan policies that pertain to the Capitol Mall including:
  - **Goal LU 2.4 City of Distinctive and Memorable Places**: Promote community design that produces a distinctive, high-quality built environment whose forms and character reflect Sacramento's unique historic, environmental, and architectural context, and create memorable places that enrich community life.
  - **Goal LU 5.6 Central Business District**. Promote the Central Business District (CBD) as the regional center of the greater Sacramento area for commerce, culture, and government.

- **Goal M 1.1 Comprehensive Transportation System.** Provide a transportation system that is effectively planned, managed, operated, and maintained.
  - **Goal M 4.2 Complete Streets.** Provide complete streets that balance the diverse needs of users of the public right-of-way.
  - **Goal ER 7.1 Visual Resource Preservation.** Maintain and protect significant visual resources and aesthetics that define Sacramento.
- 
- *Sacramento Riverfront Master Plan:* The main concepts outlined in the Riverfront Master Plan include: creating new riverfront neighborhoods and districts, establishing a web of connectivity to downtown and surrounding neighborhoods, strengthen the green backbone of the community, and make places for celebration.

**Attachment 6  
Draft Vision Working Paper****Capitol Mall****The Emerging Vision**

The emerging vision is that Capitol Mall will be a major attraction for both residents and tourists by the year 2015. The variety of festivals and activities that regularly occur in its beautiful public spaces will draw hundreds of thousands of people annually. The magnificent public art and public works projects that connect the waterfront to the Capitol will be featured on web sites and in magazines around the world. The freeway will no longer feel like a dividing line. Instead, a tree-lined concourse with water features will lead people to and from the riverfront to enjoy the magnificent gateway to California's Capital.

Retail activity will bustle amid the tree-lined sidewalks and cafés. The market for residences along Capitol Mall will thrive and the immediate neighborhoods will have become some of the priciest real estate in Sacramento. As a result, Capitol Mall will be viewed as the "iconic" symbol of Sacramento, defining the city to the state, to the rest of the country and to the world.

**The Core Values**

- Protect and enhance the Capitol view shed and Tower Bridge view shed
- Integrate and connect Capitol Mall to the river and the waterfront
- To create distinctive, "iconic" architecture, gathering spaces, public art
- Healthy balance of mixed uses (residential, retail, restaurants, office space, and green space)

**Key strategies****In short term (1-3 years):**

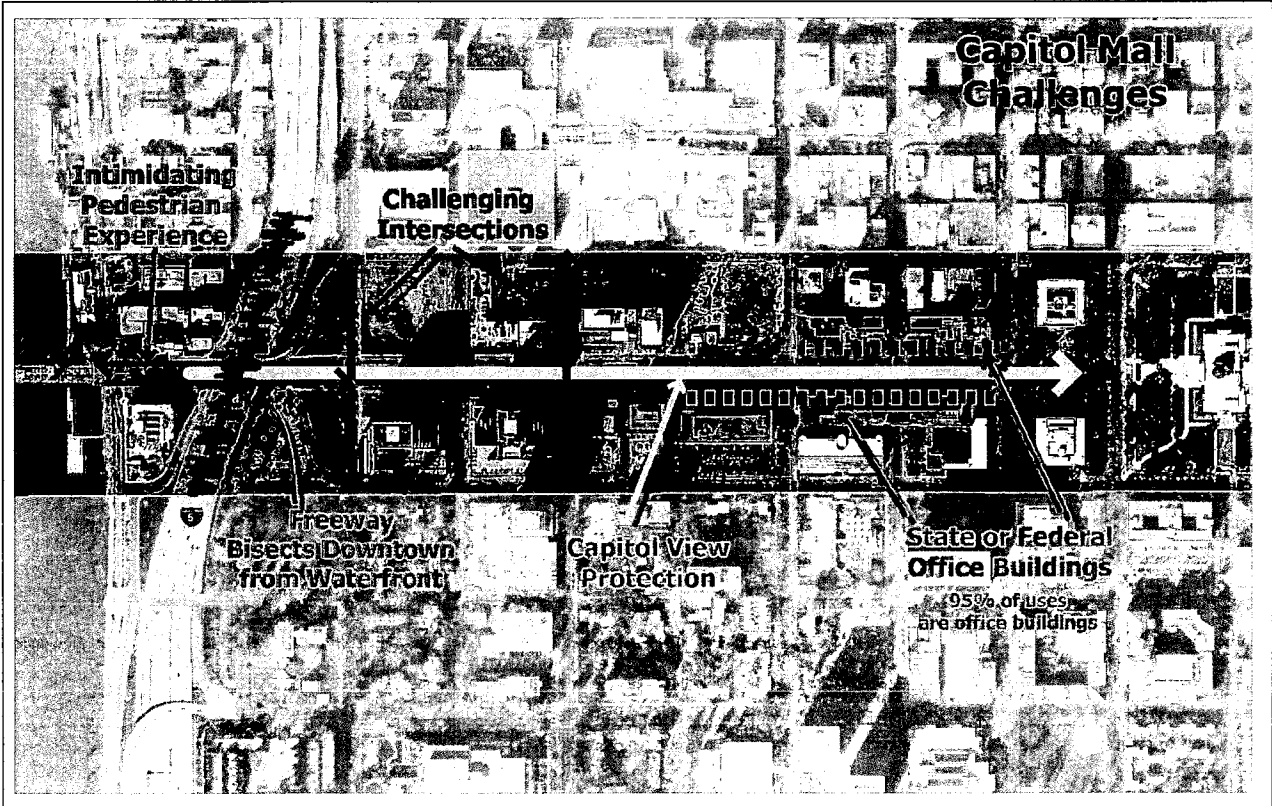
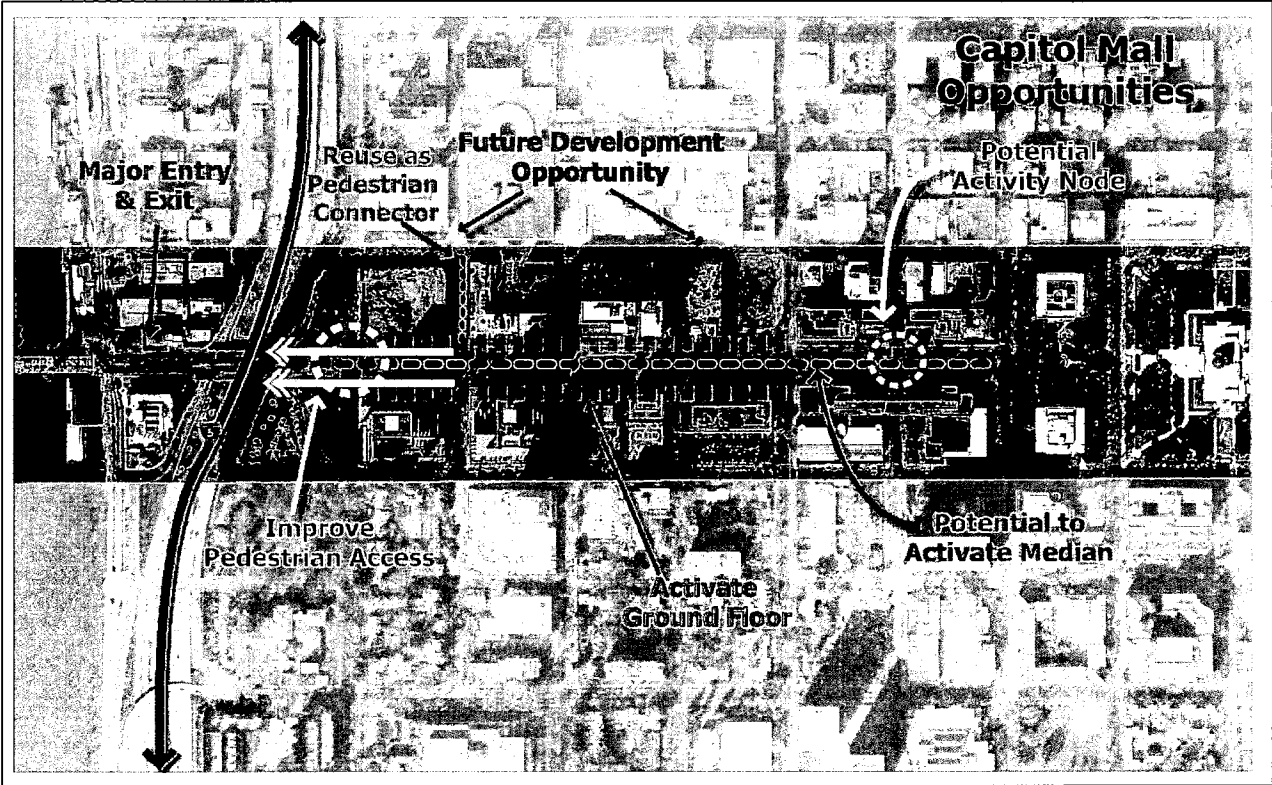
- Create more events, more festivals to draw people to the Mall
- Focus on "moveable pieces" e.g. I-5 bridge, Mall median, Lot X (southwest corner of 3<sup>rd</sup> and Capitol Mall)
- Leverage existing transportation funds to get something done now that supports the long term vision
- Deploy circulator buses to enable people to move freely and easily from Capitol Mall to Downtown Plaza, K Street, Old Sacramento, the Railyards, mid-town, R Street, and West Sacramento

**In mid-term (3-5 years):**

- Encourage the development of select numbers of retail establishments
- Develop the CalPERS site (northwest corner of 3<sup>rd</sup> and Capitol)

- Connect Capitol Mall to the river, metaphorically, physically in all aspects
- Design highly visible, world-class gathering points for tourists and residents along the Mall
- Develop more public transit solutions to enable people to circulate from Capitol Mall to Downtown Plaza, K Street, Old Sacramento, the Railyards, mid-town, R Street, and West Sacramento

Attachment 6  
Capitol Mall  
Opportunities and Challenges



**RESOLUTION NO. 2009-**

Adopted by the Sacramento City Council

**BACKGROUND**

- A. Capitol Mall between the waterfront and the Capitol is a significant street with significant importance to both the City of Sacramento and the State of California.
- B. Capitol Mall is a critical link to destinations in Sacramento, Old Sacramento and West Sacramento and is a prominent gateway into the west end of Sacramento.
- C. The City of Sacramento adopted the 2030 General Plan that contains multiple general plan policies including land use, mobility, cultural and historic resources, and economic development, policies that facilitate the improvement of Capitol Mall.
- D. The State of California passed legislation that protects the Capitol View Corridor from Tower Bridge to the Capitol and provides for the preparation of a Capitol Mall Master Plan that addresses the physical and aesthetic expression in the approaches to the State Capitol Complex.
- E. The City of Sacramento has adopted pedestrian friendly street standards including street design that enhance and improve pedestrian safety and comfort and encourage non-motorized travel modes, and balance street design so that streets will be accessible, safe, convenient, and intriguing.
- F. The City of Sacramento hired Robert Waste and Associates to facilitate stakeholder interviews with property owners, developers, major tenants, and special interest groups to gather information and to garner thoughts regarding Capitol Mall renovation and key issues related to the renovation.
- G. A small working group of stakeholders was assembled to review current plans, develop core value, identify key issues, and identify area of Capitol Mall that could be improved.

**BASED ON THE FACTS SET FORTH IN THE BACKGROUND, THE CITY COUNCIL RESOLVES AS FOLLOWS:**

Section 1: The City, in partnership with the American Institute of Architects and stakeholders, will develop a program to hold a design competition for a comprehensive Capitol Mall Plan from the riverfront to Capitol Mall, and the development of a project level design for a specific location.