



Capitol

Historic District Plan

Physical Description & Boundaries

The Capitol Historic District is located within Sacramento’s original 1848 street grid and centers around the 12 city blocks bounded by L, N, 9th, and 15th streets that contain the State Capitol building, Capitol Park, and Capitol Extension Group. The district preserves a significant concentration of buildings that are representative of state government-related development in Sacramento and is characterized by large, state government buildings as well as several smaller, privately-owned buildings that were drawn to the streets around Capitol Park because of the benefits and prestige of an address across from the State Capitol. The district is bounded by multi-story commercial buildings on the north side of L Street, 1950s redevelopment-period development to the west of 9th Street, recent government office buildings on the east side of 15th Street, and surface parking lots along O Street.



Figure 96. The Capitol Building, surrounded by Capitol Park.



Figure 97. State Office Building No. 1 (now the Jessie M. Unruh State Office Building), part of the Capitol Extension Group, is situated beside a circular fountain.



Figure 98. Three Streamline Moderne style state government buildings, dating to the 1930s, border Capitol Park to the south of N Street. Directly across from these buildings, rows of evenly spaced palms line the perimeter of Capitol Park.



Figure 99. The tracks of the Sacramento Regional Transit light rail and several parking lots line O Street to the south of the district.

Brief Historic Context

Sacramento was chosen as the state capital of California in 1854 because of its central location, accessibility by steamships traveling up the Sacramento River, and the availability of accommodations for state legislators.¹ In order to lure the capital to Sacramento amid fierce competition from other cities, the Sacramento City Council offered the state a public plaza on the block between I, J, 9th, and 10th streets (now Cesar Chavez Park) to serve as the site for the new State Capitol building. A lack of funding and lawsuits over the legality of the arrangement prevented the capitol from being constructed on the plaza, forcing the City to identify a new site for the building.² In 1860, a new, four-block site, bounded by L, N, 10th, and 12th streets, was deeded to the state for the construction of the state capitol. The new site was advantageously located two blocks away from the city's business district and centered on M Street (later renamed Capitol Avenue), the city's widest street.³

Groundbreaking for the California State Capitol building, designed by architect Reuben Clark, took place in 1860. The Classical Revival style building was designed to house the chambers of the state's legislative, executive, and judicial branches.⁴ Construction progressed slowly because of funding and supply shortages during the Civil War and

1 Nathan Hallam, "We Must Give the World Confidence in the Stability and Permanence of the Place: Planning Sacramento's Townsite, 1853-1870," in *River City and Valley Life: An Environmental History of the Sacramento Region*, ed. Christopher J. Castaneda and Lee M.A. Simpson. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013), 68.

2 Thor Severson, *Sacramento, An Illustrated History: 1839-1874, From Sutter's Fort to Capital City* (San Francisco: California Historical Society, 1973), 186-191.

3 Hallam, 69-70.

4 "California State Capitol History Part Two: Construction: Concept to Reality," California State Capitol Museum, accessed September 13, 2018. <http://capitolmuseum.ca.gov/architecture-and-history/california-state-capitol-history-part-two>.



Figure 100. State Capitol building, looking south (ca.1890). Source: California History Room, California State Library, Sacramento, California.

devastating floods during the winter of 1861-1862, which required the building's foundation to be raised by six feet.⁵ Government activity began in the new building in 1869, although the building wasn't finally declared complete until 1874.⁶

In the meantime, the Board of State Capitol Commissioners, which had been created to oversee the project, decided that the Capitol grounds should be expanded to create a suitably grand and parklike setting for the new capitol building. The resulting Capitol Park would occupy ten city blocks between L, N, 10th, and 15th streets. The commissioners first

5 Severson, 193.

6 "Capitol Mall State Buildings," Historic Resources Technical Report, 2017, 4-2.

acquired the block between L, N, 14th, and 15th streets in 1870 to serve as the site for the future governor's mansion and then began the process of acquiring the remaining five blocks to the east of the Capitol. The last block became part of Capitol Park in 1872.⁷ The governor's mansion was completed on the northeast corner of the park as planned; however, no governor ever lived there, because legislators refused to fund decorations or furnishings for it. The building was converted into the State Printing Office and later demolished in the 1920s.⁸

The landscaping of Capitol Park proceeded through the 1870s.⁹ By the end of the decade, its lawns were considered to be "unsurpassed in the State," and were "the subject of praise by all strangers visiting the State's property."¹⁰ The park was planted with 800 trees and flowering shrubs and designed in a typical Victorian style, with lanes laid out between beds of annual flowers and an elliptical carriage drive between the Capitol building, State Printing Office, and the Agricultural Pavilion, which was built on the southeast corner of the park in 1884 as an exhibition hall for the annual state fair. Surviving English elm and California fan palms that were planted along the carriage path preserve its route through the present-day park.¹¹

7 Hallam, 70.

8 Jeff Kearns, "A tale of two mansions," *Sacramento News & Review*, December 5, 2002, accessed October 16, 2018, <https://www.newsreview.com/sacramento/tale-of-two-mansions/content?oid=13731>.

9 Hallam, 70.

10 "Capitol Grounds Improvements," *Sacramento Daily Union*, June 16, 1877.

11 "California State Capitol Museum: Capitol Park Monument and Memorial Guide" (guide, California State Parks, 2016), 2-3; Cheryl Anne Stapp, "The First State Ag Pavilion," last modified July 13, 2017. <https://cherylanestapp.com/state-ag-pavillions/>.

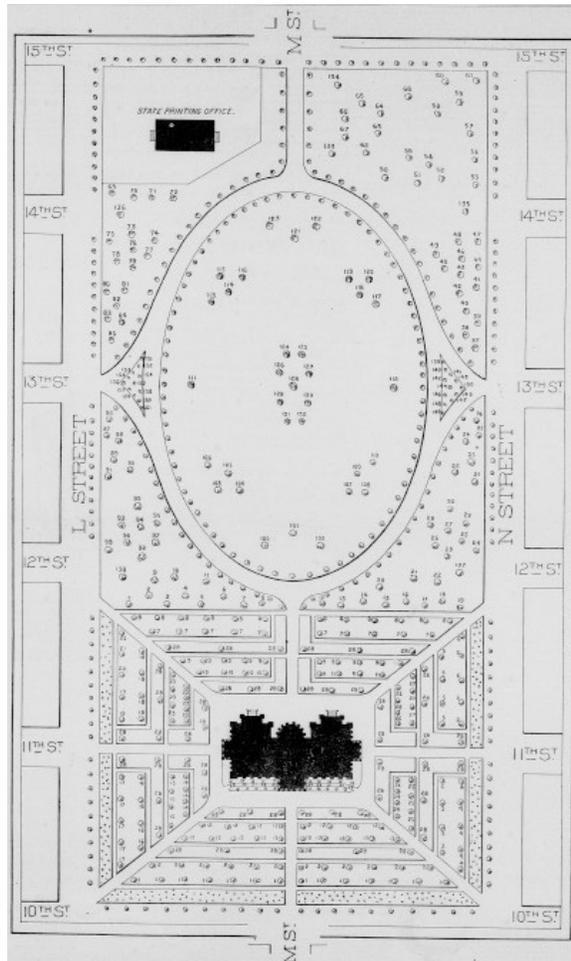


Figure 101. Plan for Capitol Park landscaping (1878). Source: “The State Capitol Park,” *Sacramento Daily Union*, November 25, 1878, California Digital Newspaper Collection, Center for Bibliographic Studies and Research, University of California, Riverside, <<http://cdnc.ucr.edu>>.

The construction of the Capitol grounds coincided with Sacramento’s gradual expansion eastward and increased the value of surrounding properties in what was then considered to be the outskirts of town. By 1895, rows of wood-framed, single-family houses filled the parcels surrounding Capitol Park.¹² As the city’s population continued to grow at the start of the twentieth century, many of these single-family houses were converted into flats or apartment buildings that could accommodate multiple families.¹³ Purpose-built apartment buildings were also constructed during this period. The Thayer Apartments and Lewis Apartments, completed in 1914 and 1925, respectively, are remnants of the residential character of the blocks surrounding Capitol Park in the early twentieth century. The elegant apartment buildings attracted high-ranking government officials, such as the superintendent of the state motor vehicle department and the governor’s private stenographer, who chose to create a family home there.¹⁴

Just as the city continued to grow, so did the California state government. By the 1910s, it was apparent that the State was in desperate need of additional facilities, and in 1917, the two blocks directly to the west of the State Capitol were acquired for the purpose of building new spaces for the State Supreme Court, State Library, and other scattered state departments. Construction began on the Library and Courts building and State Office Building No. 1 in 1922, and they were in use by 1928. The buildings’ Neoclassical design, orientation along the central axis of M Street, and cohesive landscaping of fan palms reflected the

influence of the City Beautiful Movement as well as the intention that this new “Capitol Extension Group” be considered part of Capitol Park.¹⁵

Although construction slowed throughout the city during the Great Depression, the 1930s were a period of significant development on the blocks surrounding the Capitol thanks to federal funding and city planning efforts that allowed state government construction to continue through the decade. Between 1936 and 1939, the Department of Motor Vehicles Building, Department of Public Works Building, and Business and Professional Building were all constructed on the south side of N Street in a variation of the Streamline Moderne style, sometimes known as Public Works Administration (PWA) Moderne, that is characteristic of public buildings constructed during the Great Depression.¹⁶



Figure 102. State Office Building No. 1 and the Sutter Club (1931). Source: California History Room, California State Library, Sacramento, California.

¹² Sanborn Map Company, Sacramento, California [map], vol. 1, 1895.

¹³ Sanborn Map Company, Sacramento, California [map], vol. 1, 1915.

¹⁴ “Mr. and Mrs. French Return,” *Sacramento Union*, September 19, 1916.

¹⁵ Dorothy F. Regnery, “Capitol Extension Group” (National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination Form, California Office of Historic Preservation, 1983).

¹⁶ “Capitol Mall State Buildings.”

The state government expanded rapidly in the 1940s to meet the demands of World War II, creating a larger demand for additional government facilities in the postwar period. In 1949, the Capitol's original nineteenth-century apse was removed as part of the construction of the East Annex, which created new office space for the governor and other state officials.¹⁷ Still, more space was needed. In the 1950s, additional multi-story annexes were added to the rear of the Depression-era government buildings on N Street. The last of these annexes was constructed in 1957 for the Department of Veteran Affairs. Although they were constructed almost two decades later, these new annexes reflected the style and massing of the earlier buildings on N Street and represented the last state government buildings constructed around the perimeter of Capitol Park until the twenty-first century.

The 1950s marked a major shift of state government-related development, as the construction of new state buildings moved west to blocks surrounding Capitol Mall. The completion of a grand row of modern state government buildings along the street was part of a redevelopment plan to turn the West End neighborhood, which the Sacramento Redevelopment Agency had identified as blighted, into a grand entrance to the Capitol grounds. In 1950, the area west of the Capitol Extension Group was designated as Redevelopment Area No. 1, and the construction of new state government offices along

Capitol Mall began shortly thereafter.¹⁸

The building boom of the 1950s did not bring an end to the State's constant need for more space. By the 1970s, the East Annex was full, and additional space for government offices was once again needed. State officials considered demolishing the Capitol building and replacing it with an entirely new building, but ultimately decided to restore the original nineteenth-century building. In 1975 and 1980, the State passed bills to restore the Capitol, the largest restoration project in North America at the time. After six years of work, the building reopened in 1982.¹⁹



Figure 103. Aerial view of Sacramento, showing the Capitol Extension Group to the west of Capitol Park and the complete Business and Professional Building, Department of Motor Vehicles Building, and Department of Public Works Building along N Street (1940). Source: Special Collections of the Sacramento Public Library.

¹⁷ "California State Capitol History Part Three: Growth," California State Capitol Museum, accessed September 13, 2018. <http://capitolmuseum.ca.gov/architecture-and-history/california-state-capitol-history-part-three>.

¹⁸ Lee M.A. Simpson and Lisa C. Prince, "The Invention of Old Sacramento: A Past for the Future," in *River City and Valley Life: An Environmental History of the Sacramento Region*, ed. Christopher J. Castaneda and Lee M.A. Simpson. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013), 297; Capitol Mall State Buildings," 4-7.

¹⁹ "California State Capitol History Part Four: Restoration," California State Capitol Museum, accessed September 14, 2018. <http://capitolmuseum.ca.gov/architecture-and-history/california-state-capitol-history-part-four>.

Significance

The Capitol Historic District was designated for listing on the Sacramento Register of Historic and Cultural Resources by the City Preservation Commission in 1985 in Ordinance #85-076. The Capitol Extension Group has also received national designation as a historic district and was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1984 as the Capitol Extension District. Because it is listed on the National Register, the Capitol Extension Group is also automatically listed on the California Register of Historical Resources.

The following table provides a current evaluation of significance under the requirements and considers the factors based on the above historic district context and the 2018 historic district survey. Additionally, this historic district relates to the State Government Context Statement of the city’s General Plan Technical Background Report.

(B) Listing on the Sacramento Register – Historic districts	
(1) Requirements	
(a)	The Capitol Historic District meets requirement (a) for listing on the Sacramento Register, because it is a geographically definable area.
(b)(i)	<p>The Capitol Historic District meets requirement (b)(i) for listing on the Sacramento Register as an area that possesses “a significant concentration or continuity of buildings unified by: (A) past events or (B) aesthetically by plan or physical development.”</p> <p>The buildings in the district are unified aesthetically and thematically by their association with Sacramento’s role as the state capital of California and the physical development of the Capitol building and Capitol Park. The majority of the buildings and contributing resources in the district were constructed for the purpose of housing the various offices, meeting chambers, libraries, storage spaces, and other facilities of the California state government. The Classical Revival design of the Capitol building, constructed between 1860 and 1874, heavily influenced the design of the government buildings that were built around Capitol Park as the role and function of the California state government expanded in the twentieth century. Ranging from the later Neoclassical style of the Capitol Extension Group immediately west of the Capitol to the utilitarian expression of Classical design visible in the Streamline Moderne style state office buildings along N Street, all of the state government buildings in the district reflect the Classical design and monumental scale of the Capitol building.</p>

Period of Significance: 1860-1957

The period of significance for the Capitol Historic District begins with the start of construction on the State Capitol building in 1860, includes the construction of the Capitol building’s East Annex in 1951, and ends with the completion of the Veterans Affairs building at 1227 O Street in 1957.

Property Types from the Period of Significance

- Civic/Institutional
- Recreational
- Residential
- Monument (Object/Structure)

Architectural Styles from the Period of Significance

- Classical Revival
- Neoclassical
- Beaux Arts
- Italian Renaissance
- Streamline Moderne
- Late Moderne

(B) Listing on the Sacramento Register – Historic districts	
(1) Requirements	
(b)(ii)	<p>The Capitol Historic District meets requirement (b)(ii) for listing on the Sacramento Register as an area “associated with an event, person, or period significant or important to city history.”</p> <p>The Capitol Historic District is associated with the early period of state government-related development that took place in Sacramento in the late nineteenth century until the 1950s in response to the rapid and continuous expansion of the California state government. During this period, the construction of state government buildings and facilities was concentrated around the streets that immediately bordered the Capitol building and Capitol Park. The presence of the Capitol building also heavily influenced the architectural style and orientation of these newer state government buildings, which were designed to complement the Neoclassical style Capitol.</p> <p>Starting in the 1950s, the construction of state government buildings shifted west, to the blocks surrounding Capitol Mall, whose initial planning in the 1940s and development in the 1950s coincided with the City’s plans to redevelop the central city. The buildings from this period were constructed in Mid-Century Modern styles that reflected this new phase of development.</p>
(c)	<p>The Capitol Historic District meets requirement (c) for listing on the Sacramento Register as it aligns with the goals and purposes of historic preservation in Sacramento, as well as the city’s other goals and policies. Per the Sacramento City Code, the preservation of the district enhances the “city’s economic, cultural and aesthetic standing, its identity and its livability, marketability, and urban character.”</p>
(B) Listing on the Sacramento Register – Historic districts	
(2) Factors to be considered	
(a)	<p>Factor (2)(a) states that “a historic district should have integrity of design, setting, materials, workmanship and association.” The Capitol Historic District retains sufficient integrity to meet this factor for consideration as a historic district.</p>
(b)	<p>Factor (2)(b) states that “the collective historic value of the buildings and structures in a historic district taken together may be greater than the historic value of each individual building or structure.” The Capitol Historic District meets this factor because its buildings and structures represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose collective historic value is greater when taken as a whole.</p>

Character-Defining Features

Element	Character of Historic District
Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Predominately large, institutional/civic buildings mixed with a smaller number of high-style multi-family apartment, commercial, and recreational buildings situated around Capitol Park
Mass & Form	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buildings generally two- to seven-stories tall, with none taller than the Capitol building • H-shaped building plans • Monumental scale • Frontages of state government buildings often extend nearly the full-width of an entire block • Privately-owned buildings built on narrow parcels more characteristic of the rest of the city • State government buildings horizontally massed with wide, street-facing frontages • Apartment buildings more often vertically massed • Symmetrical facades with prominent central entrances, often flanked by long wings with evenly-spaced rows of windows and doors
Cladding & Foundation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Predominately granite, stone, stucco, or painted cement
Roofs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dome and dual pitched hipped roof of the Capitol • Predominately flat roofs with low parapets • Few steeply pitched hipped roofs covered with red clay tiles
Entries & Doors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paneled wood or metal-framed doors with integrated glazing • Most entries centrally located
Windows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long, narrow casement, double-hung, or picture windows with steel or wood frames

Element	Character of Historic District
Ornamentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decorative stone, terracotta, or copper ornamentation • Classical Revival and Neoclassical design details, including architraves, friezes, cornices, and pediments with figural statuary supported by evenly spaced rows of Ionic or Corinthian columns; pilasters; arched windows; cornice line dentil courses; egg and dart molding; acroterion, and rusticated bases • Italian Renaissance style details, overhanging eaves supported by decorative brackets, round arches above doors or porches, entrances accented by small classical columns or pilasters, and rusticated first stories • Streamline Moderne style details, such as flat metal awnings with rounded corners, metal casement and glass block windows arranged in long, continuous bands
Property Landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orderly arrangement of trees in front of the principal, west-facing façade of the Capitol building, beginning with the row of California fan palms along the street, followed by camellia trees planted along the sidewalk; large, mature deodar cedars on the sloping lawn, and southern magnolias and low, shaped hedges on the last tier on the front of the Capitol • Clusters of smaller palm tree varieties at corners of Capitol building • Grove of coast redwoods along rear of Capitol building • Park planted with a wide variety of native and non-native trees but generally dominated by varieties of redwood, cedars, magnolia, cypress, camphor, oak, and citrus trees • Surviving English Elm and California Fan Palms planted along the nineteenth-century carriage path in Capitol Park • Landscaping punctuated by free-standing monuments, memorials, and memorial garden

Element	Character of Historic District
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capitol Extension Group grounds planted with a variety of cedar, cypress, redwood, juniper, and camphor trees and situated around a circular, central fountain and traffic roundabout
Streetscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buildings oriented to face a central axis formed by the Capitol Mall, Capitol building, and Capitol Avenue • Perimeter of Capitol Park and L and N streets lined with evenly-spaced rows of California fan palms, planted in six-foot-wide parking strip, around perimeter • Principal paths at main east-west axis along the line of the Capitol Mall and corresponding to north-south line of city streets with smaller spurs of meandering paths running at diagonals • Eight-foot-wide sidewalks around perimeter of Capitol Park • Low, rounded curbs around Capitol Park with some granite curbs on N Street

Boundaries & Location

The following map shows the boundaries and location of the Capitol Historic District.

To view the statuses of individual properties as contributing or non-contributing resources to the historic district, refer to the Sacramento Register of Historic and Cultural Resources.

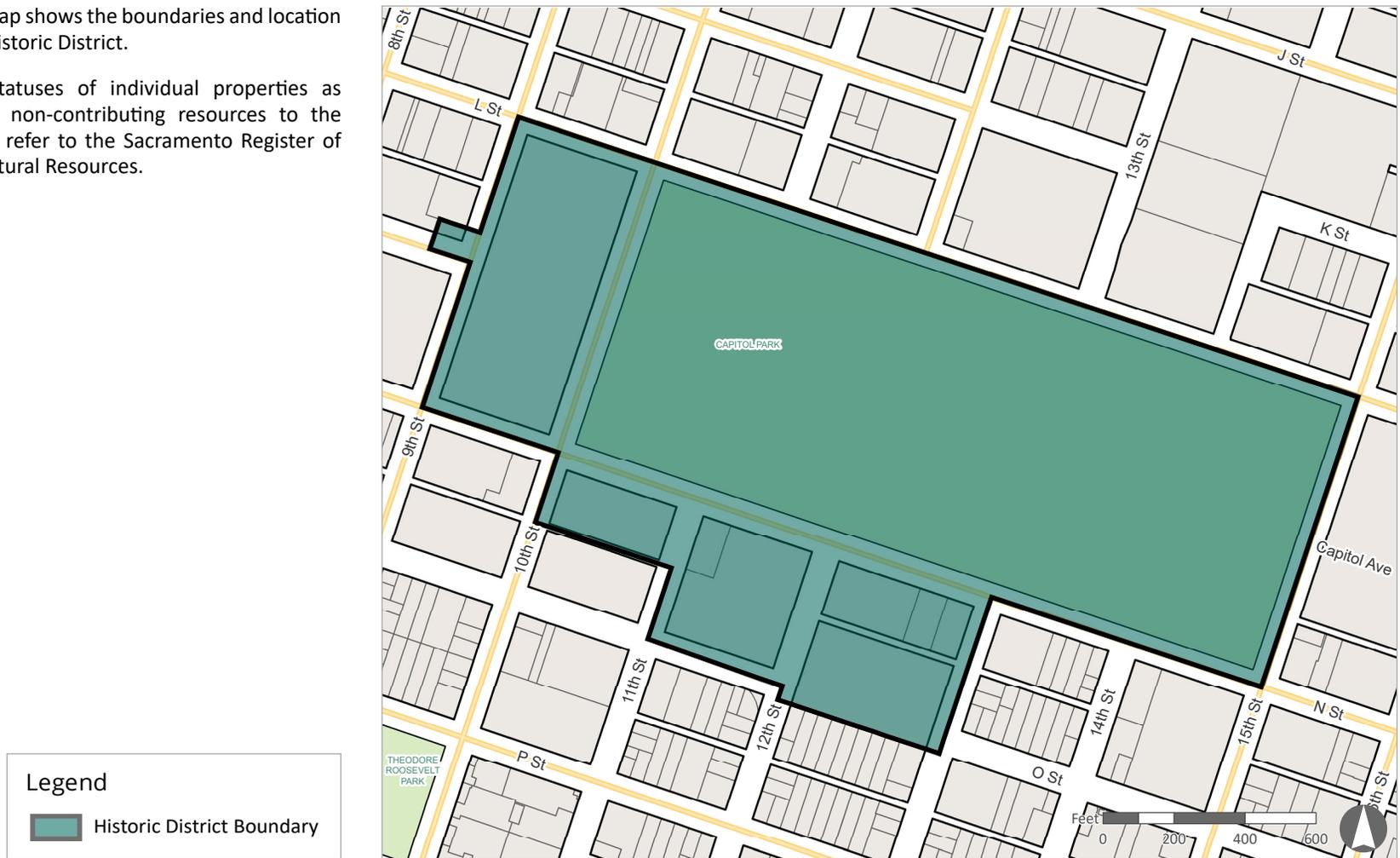


Figure 104. Map of the Capitol Historic District. Source: City of Sacramento and Page & Turnbull, 2019.

District-Specific Standards & Criteria

Design Principle

Preserve and enhance the historic relationships and interplay between building architectural styles, siting, landscaping, and overall composition that contribute to the Capitol Historic District’s central role in Sacramento.

Rationale

The Capitol Historic District is the focal point of Sacramento, containing the city’s most recognizable landmark in the State Capitol and a high-integrity grouping of state government buildings arranged around Capitol Park. Minimal infill has taken place in the historic district, preserving the pattern of early state government related development in Sacramento with few modern intrusions

In addition to the Standards & Criteria Common to Sacramento's Historic Districts in Section 1, the following district-specific standards and criteria apply when planning a project in the Capitol Historic District.

1. Rehabilitation of Contributing Resources

- 1.1 Maintain, preserve, and, where necessary, repair and restore historic elements associated with the Classical Revival, Neoclassical, and Late Moderne styles of architecture
- 1.2 Utilize proper treatments for maintaining and, when necessary, repairing historic stone, stucco, wood, terracotta, copper, or decorative exterior features.

2. Additions & Accessory Structures for Contributing Resources

- 2.1 Design additions with proportions that maintain the characteristic symmetry and massing of contributing Classical Revival, Neoclassical, and Late Moderne style buildings.
- 2.2 Avoid additions that cause a contributing building’s height to significantly overshadow adjacent contributing buildings.



Figure 105. Stone and design features that draw inspiration from Classical architecture are common in the historic district.



Figure 106. Contributing buildings in the district share symmetrical designs with the Capitol building.

3. New (Infill) Construction & Alterations to Non-Contributing Resources

- 3.1 Draw inspiration for the design of new construction from the Capitol Building.
- 3.2 Consider contemporary interpretations of Classical Revival, Neoclassical, or Late Moderne architectural styles.
- 3.3 Consider buildings with symmetrical facades.
- 3.4 Avoid breaking up facade planes into small modules that do not reflect the grand scale of contributing buildings in the district.

4. Site Features, Streetscape, & Landscaping

- 4.1 Preserve, maintain, and, where necessary, repair and restore historic plantings and landscaping features in Capitol Park and around the Capitol Extension Group, including pathways, memorials, historic lights, and historic structures.
- 4.2 Preserve and maintain the historic open, planted character, and configuration of Capitol Park and Capitol Mall.
- 4.3 If it becomes necessary to replace mature perimeter palms, replace them in kind with the same or similar species that will grow to a similar height, size, and form at regular intervals in order to maintain the historic tree planting pattern.
- 4.4 Consider important views and vistas when implementing improvements to site and landscape features.



Figure 107. Historic plantings and landscape features around the Capitol Extension Group should also be carefully preserved and maintained.