

The Honorable Governor Kristi Noem
Governor of South Dakota
State Capitol Building
500 East Capitol Avenue
Pierre, SD 57501

19 September, 2023

Dear Governor Noem:

The Pierre Vietnam/ERA Veterans Association (VEVA) would like to salute your efforts to improve the Capitol Grounds and, in particular, the area around Capitol Lake and the Flaming Fountain Memorial area.

At a General Membership meeting held on September 13, 2023, at Legion Post 8 in Pierre, the members **OVERWHELMINGLY DISAPPROVED** of the planning efforts and plans for the War Memorials put forth by the A/E Firms from Sioux Falls. We have outlined below the specific comments made by the membership and those which we intend to forward to all Veterans Organizations in South Dakota if we are not able to resolve the issues beforehand:

- The Bureau of Administration,, specifically Andy Gerlach, met with the VEVA membership and local legislators last spring to assure veterans that “veterans would be involved in the planning efforts for the Flaming Fountain Memorial and war memorials”. No veterans, other than the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, were ever contacted nor were any combat/non-combat veterans were ever contacted. In fact, the Bureau of Administration and other state officials involved in the planning process, did not return repeated phone attempts and did their best to not involve veterans, experienced people or former state employees familiar with the Capitol Complex.
- The Capitol Lake/Grounds Improvement (War Memorial) Plan and public meeting was first announced on KELO Television approximately 10 days prior to the public meeting, giving little time for veterans of South Dakota time to attend and have input.
- The Architect and Engineering Firms from Sioux Falls conducted a poorly attended “public meeting” at the Capitol Lake Visitor Center and did not open the meeting for open discussion, rather asked participants to submit their comments on a sheet for an email response later. When asked by a local veteran, the questions were dismissed. Two local legislators, Mortenson and Weisgram can confirm this information.
- Specific comments by VEVA members are as follows:
 1. Members were **100% in agreement** that the Korean and Vietnam Memorials **should not be relocated to the other side of Capitol Lake** and they should remain in close proximity with the other Memorials. By moving those memorials, they designers are subjugating them back to a “conflict” which they were called in the 1960’s. Anywhere that there are bullets, bombs and people dying.....it’s a WAR!

2. Members were **100% in agreement** that improvements in the Medal of Honor and Purple Heart Memorial were desirable.
3. Members were **100% in agreement** that the Code Talkers Memorial should be co-located with the other Memorials. Some members felt that moving the Code Talkers Memorial to a remote location away from the site may offend Native Americans, much akin to moving to a “special place” on the Reservation in the 1860’s. More Native American veterans need input into this subject.
4. Members were **100% in agreement** that the “Flaming Fountain” is **MANDATORY** in the Memorial Site. The existing Flaming Fountain contains the cremated remains of numerous veterans over its history. The Flaming Fountain is a sacred place and is known worldwide as the place where “South Dakota Honors Its Veterans.” The issue can easily be resolved by a dignified water fountain, supplied with natural gas, the flow, of which can be controlled by the central computer in Buildings and Grounds. It could be turned on and off automatically for special events and evenings remotely.
5. Members were **100% in agreement** that a new Visitor Center is appropriate however **the design does not fit the architectural décor of the Capitol.**
6. Members were **100% in agreement** with the Iraq and Afghanistan Memorial idea
7. Members were **100% in agreement** that the proposed amphitheater idea should be eliminated and those areas should be revised for Memorials and the new Flaming Fountain.
8. Members had **no comment** of relocation of EMT, Law Enforcement, or Firefighters memorials.
9. Members had **no comment** on the remainder of the Capitol Lake Improvements.
10. Members were **100% in agreement** that the proposed plan should be partially rejected and design committee revised **to include combat/non-combat veterans from Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Native Americans on a new design committee concept with the Architect/Engineering firms from Sioux Falls.**

Members all agreed that:

- We enlisted together
- We were drafted together
- We trained for military service together
- We were deployed overseas together
- We fought and died together
- We deserve to be honored together with fire and water

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Governor, we sincerely appreciate your efforts to improve the State Capitol Grounds and all that you have done for veterans in South Dakota. We hope that you will make the potential changes and take the steps necessary to honor South Dakota veterans as they should be.

Thank You.

Sincerely,

Ken Rausch, U. S. Army MSGT (Ret)
President, Vietnam/ERA Veterans Association
% Pierre American Legion, Post 8
Pierre, SD 57501

CC: Darin Seeley, Commissioner, Bureau of Administration
Kristine Day, State Engineer

MEMORIAL

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The proposed redesign, put together by Sioux Falls-based Stockwell Engineers, would involve capping the well and potentially piping water in from a different source.

With the lake's frontage host to the structures that house South Dakota's three branches of government, and some of its most iconic landmarks; Stockwell's lead project architect, David Locke, said the design sought to give visitors a "sense of arrival."

"Whether that be schools and kids from a learning standpoint, or families visiting, we want to create a better visitor experience for them and the people of Pierre who utilize this like a public park," he said.

Arrival at the complex would become easier under the plans, Locke said. Stockwell's design adds about 100 parking spaces, both for personal vehicles

and larger ones like buses and RVs.

The complex would also include a revamped visitor center that would be adjacent to a new outdoor amphitheater, which also connects to the existing, six soldier World War Two memorial. And it would all be tied together around a new memorial for Medal of Honor recipients.

Nearby, on a peninsula jutting out about halfway between the Governor's Mansion and the Capitol, would be a new addition that Locke calls a "South Dakota plaza."

Current plans feature a drawing of the state's outline marking its counties and county seats, tributes to the state's Native American heritage, and monuments to informative information about South Dakota, like the state bird and motto.

"A lot of the memorials around Capitol Lake revolve around conflict or tragedy," Locke said. "Our approach is that we wanted to create a

peninsula that honors South Dakota and is a place to display information about the state."

But even with some welcome new amenities, Moisan says the removal of the flame from the fountain takes away from what has made the monument special, and was made without insight from the same veterans who fought for the changes.

"No fire in the water is a dealbreaker for veterans," Moisan told *The Dakota Scout*. He also raised concerns about stylistic details, such as potentially moving the existing war memorials around.

Locke said the decision to source the fountain with water from the river was out of his hands.

"The flaming fountain is an abandoned well that once fed the Capitol," said Leah Haugan, a spokesperson with the state's Bureau of Administration. The Bureau is tasked with overseeing state grounds. "It was lit

and burned for many, many years — but the well no longer has enough gas supply to sustain the flame."

The veterans gripes are on the radar of Pierre Rep. Will Mortenson, who said he hopes to see some compromise.

"The reason that I have made this project such a priority is because I had veterans groups reach out to me several years ago letting me know it was their priority," said Mortenson, who helped earn the project's support from state appropriators. "I know that there have been some process concerns, I hope that the feedback is heeded."

Stockwell will meet with state officials at the end of the month to discuss next steps for the project and go over feedback they've gotten from the public.

"The Capitol Lake renovations provide us with the opportunity to celebrate our great state," Haugan said. "South Dakota is a land rich with history and culture — and we want to showcase that."

CAPITOL

Vets unhappy with memorial redesign

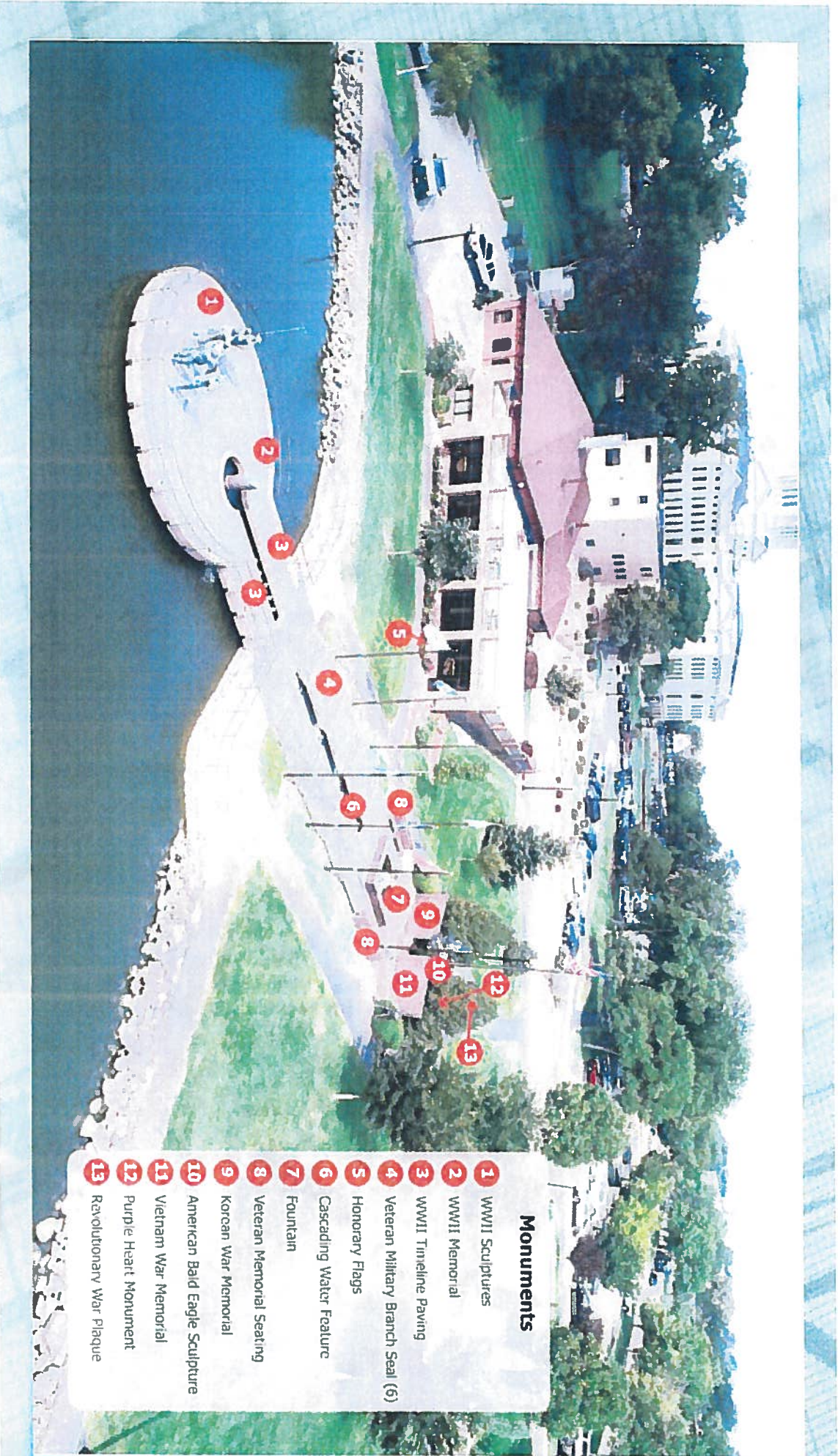
By Austin Goss

PIERRE — The South Dakota Capitol Complex and its most famous memorial are scheduled to get a multi-million dollar facelift in the coming years.

The grandiose designs for the \$20 million overhaul of the area surrounding Capitol Lake — unveiled in July — have veterans who've been pushing for the project's funding unhappy.

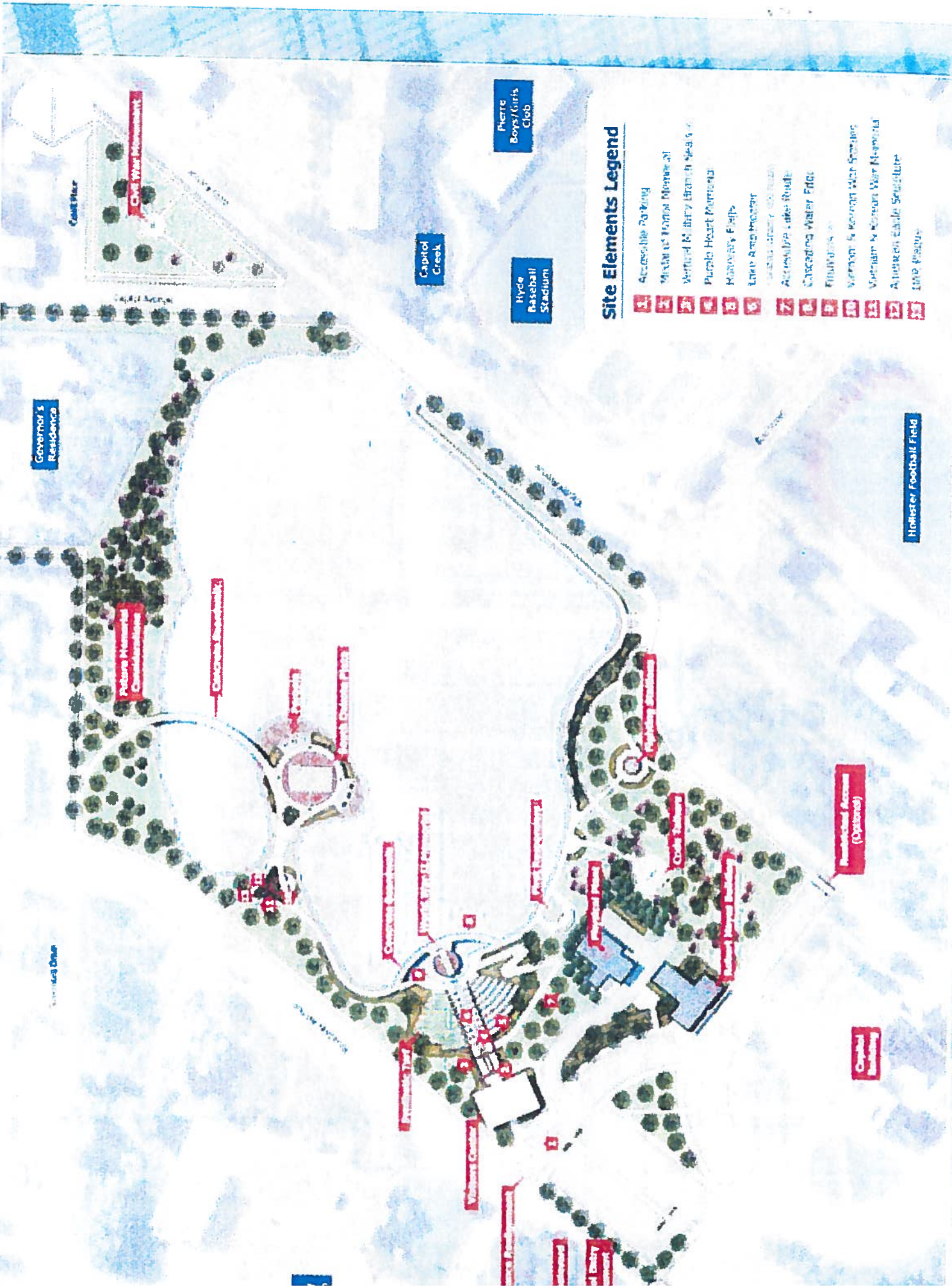
"I don't think this is a war memorial proposal," said John Moisan, who has led a group of Pierre area veterans since 2015 in fighting for updates to the complex that features the Flaming Fountain and the Fighting Stallions memorials. "I think it just comes across more as an upgrade at the Capitol grounds now."

Chief amongst Moisan's concerns in the redesigned version of the area is the removal of the Flaming Fountain. The memorial earned its namesake because of an underground well that feeds both water and natural gas to the surface, illuminating the water coming from the fountain. The "flame," however, went out about 15 years ago, said to be a result of the natural gas below the lake running dry. Surveys have also concluded that water from the well is likely leaking into unwanted places in the ground too, potentially causing long-term structural dam-



Monuments

- 1 WWII Sculptures
- 2 WWII Memorial
- 3 WWII Timeline Paving
- 4 Veteran Military Branch Seal (6)
- 5 Honorary Flags
- 6 Cascading Water Feature
- 7 Fountain
- 8 Veteran Memorial Seating
- 9 Korean War Memorial
- 10 American Bald Eagle Sculpture
- 11 Vietnam War Memorial
- 12 Purple Heart Monument
- 13 Revolutionary War Plaque



Site Elements Legend

- 1 Accessible Parking
- 2 Mistral of Tonal Memorial
- 3 Memorial to Barry Branch Seal
- 4 Purple Heart Memorial
- 5 Military Flags
- 6 Little Amphitheater
- 7 Accessible Lake-Road
- 8 Cascading Water Falls
- 9 Fountains
- 10 Veterans & Korean War Statues
- 11 Vietnam & Korean War Memorials
- 12 American Battle Statuette
- 13 Little Theatre

Governor's Residence

Pittsburg Memorial Chamberlain

Concrete Remembrance

Capitol

North Chamber Plaza

Concrete Remembrance

World War II Memorial

Little Amphitheater

Capitol Plaza

Code Station

Memorial Plaza

Proposed Access (Optional)

Capitol Building

Hindster Football Field

Pierre Boys/Girls Club

Hyde Baseball Stadium

Capitol Creek

Coal Hill

Chill War Monument

Capitol Avenue

State Street

Rocky Hill

State Street Drive

State Street

Veterans Center

State Plaza

State Plaza

State Plaza