

MEETING RECORD

NAME OF GROUP: NEBRASKA CAPITOL ENVIRONS COMMISSION

DATE, TIME AND PLACE OF MEETING: Friday, August 9, 2013, 8:00 a.m., Room 210, County/City Building, 555 S. 10th Street, Lincoln, Nebraska

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE: Christie Dionisopoulos, John Kay, Tom Laging, Karen Nalow, Jeff Searcy, Cecil Steward and Jon Weinberg.

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE: Jennifer Klein (The Clark Enersen Partners); Lynn Johnson, Jerry Shorney and JJ Yost (Parks & Rec); Bob Ripley (Capitol Commission); Ed Zimmer, Stacey Hageman and Michele Abendroth (Planning Department)

STATED PURPOSE OF MEETING: Special Meeting of the Nebraska Capitol Environs Commission

The meeting was called to order at 8:00 a.m. The Nebraska Open Meetings Act was acknowledged.

Certificate of Appropriateness for design development of Centennial Mall Master Plan, for N. and S. Centennial Mall in the Nebraska Capitol Environs District.

Yost began by stating that they would like to get some Native American recognition on the Mall. They want to tell the story of the Native Americans and their role in the State of Nebraska. Nalow stated that they want to incorporate additional features into the Mall. The presentation will be focusing on the two north blocks. Throughout the Mall, they are looking at how the tribute tiles can focus on leaders from different tribes and start to tell the story of the tribes. There are 24 tribes that have had influences in Nebraska and four main tribes that are represented in Nebraska. Those tribes will be represented in the tribute tiles. They are looking at patterning that is seen in pottery and beadwork. On the two north blocks, this became an opportunity to tie those two blocks together and embrace the Q Street intersection that divides them.

Yost stated that the reason for the special meeting is that the fundraising team wants to present these concepts to the representatives from the Native American groups that they are approaching about fundraising. He noted that Phase I, which is the three central blocks, is substantially complete. Phase II was to be the eight intersections, and they hoped to get started this fall. The bid on the project was substantially higher than the estimate in the budget. They want to repackage Phase II with Phase III, which is the two north blocks and the two south blocks. So the intersections probably will not get started until next spring. It does not change the end schedule and will have completion in the spring of 2015.

Nalow stated that the area adjacent to the Children's Museum has the lower plaza and water feature. It is very dynamic and has lots of movement. There are ramps on either side with a slight elevation change. They are looking at a modification to what was more of a long space and transition to campus.

With this, they are looking at incorporating some additional features. They are looking at how to incorporate native materials and how these change work together. They are bringing in the native grass toward the center. It brings that view in as you look toward the capitol, and it starts to embrace that intersection. They are looking at creating two spaces for people to gather. From P to Q Street, the idea of a light fountain was mentioned. The lights on the Mystic Lake Casino in Minnesota were suggested as a conceptual model. It has lights shooting up creating a teepee effect.

The design team explored a design in which each light would represent a Native American tribe. There were some concerns with having this in front of the capitol and well as the light shooting up into the sky. In examining the kind of fixture that might produce the desired effect, Klein stated that there are concerns with the size of the fixture that would be on the ground and vandalism of that fixture.

Even though there are some concerns but they didn't want to go away from a circular light feature. Nalow continued by stating that from there they started to look at how to represent the tribes in a more elegant and fitting way. They are still working through design development. They are looking at creating a circle of native prairie grass in which to create the light feature, giving it a daytime presence. They would still have a light source for each tribe but something that is more subtle and something that has been used on the Mall as well. The county seats have a small LED light and they are looking at that. It could be a circular band set in concrete or granite so it would be a gentle twinkle and wouldn't overpower the Mall. Having that masonry band gives you an opportunity to do a little more interpretation. You can identify the cardinal directions in there.

Steward stated that the more literal identification you can give in the circle would be good. For the casual pedestrian, a more literal interpretation would be better.

Ripley stated that he agreed with Steward. There is a certain good feeling you get when you create the perfect architectural view, but unless you are on a platform, you are never going to see this. There needs to be something a little more literal to it.

Laging stated that a mockup would be good to tell you how that grass gets lit. Some kind of lighting on the grass might make it feel like some kind of enclosure.

Nalow stated that as we move north, there is the open green space with the walkway and a true transition to campus. They started to look at maintaining those walkways but introducing the native grass. They are looking at creating a flat area for a gathering space. The reason they are looking at the circle is so that you could have a powwow in this area. The idea of the powwow is that you have a dense dance space with audience around it. They started to look at how to light it. They started to think about having the lights point down. Klein stated that they were guided toward a directorial fixture. They are directed to the ground and would be on the sides. They can play different themes and can change colors and pattern. It adds a lot of visual interest on the ground. It can be more than a powwow space. They would do one pole on each side with two fixtures. They would be approximately 25' off the ground but they will have to play with that. There would be a light event nightly.

Ripley asked if they considered a berm on the south side as well as on the north where it defines the edge of the space.

Laging stated that early on there were a lot of concerns about safety on the Mall especially at night. Zimmer stated that there is a strong pedestrian light feature on the Mall in the plan. Nalow stated that the plant material selection has changed so that people can see around or through them. Steward asked if the plan incorporates any campus style notification for emergency response. Nalow stated that they do not have anything incorporated.

Dionisopoulos asked if it is feasible to have a gathering there. Yost stated that this wouldn't be a highly programmed space with a lot of infrastructure but it is a more simplified small gathering space. Nalow stated that the fundraisers are trying to achieve more programming in their funding. There can be things like storytelling, not necessarily larger scale events. Kay asked if there are organizations or groups who have an interest in using this space. Yost stated that there is a group in the Parks Department who works on programming, and they could answer that question. Zimmer stated that the historical museum has been interested in doing Native American themed events. Yost stated that they have heard from all the neighbors on the Mall, and they would all like to have activities that spill into the front yard. Ripley stated that there is a specific program for types of events that Parks could absorb without much trouble.

Laging pointed out that there should be a right-of-way strip on the west side of the north half of the P-Q block, adjacent to Arby's. He asked if there is a possibility for planting there. Nalow stated that the only area open to planting between the transformers and the Mall is the green space and the trees. Laging then asked if there is an opportunity for a vertical planting. Nalow stated that on the west side, it is all alleyway or transformer. They had looked at creating an alcove to screen the alleyway and create an opportunity for artwork, but it is a very narrow strip.

Searcy stated that the design team is doing a great job of responding to the requests within the fundraising effort and staying with the Centennial Mall Master Plan. He believes the recognition of the tribes is appropriate. He asked about the change on the north end and the scope. Nalow stated that there are three parts to the scope: the light circle and the space around it with the planting, and the change from Q to R with the general layout with the gathering space, and third would be the overhead lights shining down. Ripley asked if this is a conceptual approval. Yost stated that this could potentially go into construction documents by October. Ideally, they would like to move ahead quickly.

Yost stated that when they relocated Tem and Ptah a few years ago they visited with the artist and he was in favor of moving them to the mall and Yost believes shifting them would be okay with him. The artist was most concerned with their relation to each other. Mention was made that Jene Highstein died earlier this year.

Laging asked about the words "Nebraska's Centennial Mall" on the circle. Yost stated that the approach has always been "Nebraska's Centennial Mall" and the fundraising team has always referred to this by that name. Laging stated that he does not believe the design should be driven by the fundraising. Nalow stated that this has always been included in the design. Laging stated he does not recall that.

Steward stated that some clear graphic communication for the visitor is important. Kay asked about how the letters are done as he believes something subtle would be best. Nalow stated that they would be engraved.

Steward stated that we have been very careful about the pedestrian access. These are wide enough for a vehicle to drive on, and what is going to prevent people from driving into them. Nalow stated that there will be bollards at every intersection.

Kay stated that the more literal connection to the tribes for the light circle is needed. It is important to have a name or symbol per tribe that connects that metaphor more literally. Perhaps the south edge of the performance circle could be raised so that as you approach from the south, there is a lip, and it would define that space a little more.

Laging asked if there is a possibility of downlighting that ring. Nalow stated that they talked about using that circle function in other ways during events. Laging stated that he is thinking about something low like a bench that would provide a circle of light that would light down instead of up. Steward stated that the problem with downlighting is that it requires a structure which is not what the Mall is trying to accomplish. Nalow stated that the individual lights represent an individual tribe. Ripley stated that there is no way to see that this is a representation of the Native American tribes and a more literal interpretation is needed. Laging stated that maintaining those light structures requires a lot of maintenance. Klein stated that with them being LED they have longer life spans.

Weinberg moved approval of the modifications from P to Q Street with the light fountain and from Q to R Street with the gathering space, the shift of Tem and Ptah and the overhead light; it was seconded by Steward. Motion carried 6-0. Dionisopoulos, Kay, Laging, Searcy, Steward and Weinberg voting 'yes'; Nalow abstaining.

Zimmer thanked the Commission for a quorum at this special meeting. Searcy thanked the Commission for their attendance and for their enthusiasm about Centennial Mall.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:06 a.m.

Please note that these minutes will not be formally approved until the next meeting of the Capitol Environs Commission.

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