

NEBRASKA CAPITOL ENVIRONS COMMISSION

2010 ANNUAL REPORT

(DRAFT)

The Nebraska Capitol Environs Commission was established in 1988 to strengthen existing protections for the setting of Nebraska's landmark Capitol. The Commission is required to meet at least quarterly by Section 27.56.060 of the Lincoln Municipal Code. Four of the appointed citizen members constitute a quorum of the Commission, assisted by three non-voting, *ex officio* members representing State government, the Lincoln Parks & Recreation Dept., and the Lincoln-Lancaster County Planning Dept.

Commission membership in 2010 remains unchanged from 2009: Jeff Searcy (chair), Jim Hewitt, John Kay, Tom Laging, Cecil Steward, Larry Stoll, and Kim Todd. The *ex officio* members are Bob Ripley (Office of the Capitol Commission), Marvin Krout (Planning Director), and Lynn Johnson (Parks & Recreation Director). A quorum of the Commission met four times between January and October, 2010, and is scheduled to meet again in November and December. Commission members gathered on two other occasions and offered guidance on projects affecting the Environs.

In February Commissioners advised the Planning director on effects on the Capitol view corridor (N. 56th Street, between Arbor Road and I-80) of a special permit for soil mining.

In March the Commission reviewed and approved a master plan for improvements to the Beechner Athletic Complex at Lincoln High School. (The Commission is charged with reviewing public and private projects in the Environs District, including LPS, City, and State activities.) The Commission also reviewed the demolition of an abandoned apartment building ("The Juliet") at 17th & J Streets and improvements at The Gathering Place at E St. and Goodhue Blvd.

A major review on 2010 was Lincoln Electric System's Central Lincoln Reliability Project, on which the Commission received information and offered guidance in May, July, and August. Rob Schmidt of LES represented the project and his agency very well. This major project will replace and upgrade transmission lines through the heart of the City, including crossing the east axis of the Capitol (J Street) and intersecting high-value Capitol view corridors. The routing recommended by LES staff for consideration by the LES Board in Nov. 2010 incorporates the Commission's advice, crossing the Environs in an underground facility.

The Commission closely monitored progress on the redesign of Centennial Mall and advised on fund-raising efforts. A potential obstacle to the project was cleared with the resolution of a conflict between the Downtown Master Plan and the Mall design team's recommendations for the P-Q and Q-R blocks. The Master Plan recommends reopening those blocks to traffic to improve vehicular circulation. City, Downtown, and Commission representatives met and agreed that alternative traffic patterns could be strengthened and the Mall blocks will be designed to remain as park spaces. A major progress report on Centennial is scheduled for the December meeting of the Commission.

In July and August, the Commission advised on and then approved design of new shops at 234 N. 14th (north of "Noodles & Co.") which are now under construction. In August the Commission also reviewed

tree planting plans for Goodhue Blvd. and resolved a long-standing (since 1986) conundrum about the relative locations of street trees and sidewalks, approving a current tree replacement program which will also guide long-term streetscape improvements.

In September, LPS returned to the Commission with another project—the renovation of McPhee Elementary School, which gained Commission approval. Lynn Johnson subsequently convened a meeting of LPS, LES, City and Environs Commission representatives to coordinate joint efforts to improve the streetscape of Goodhue Blvd. in the F-G block. There appears to be prospects for major improvements including new street trees and sidewalks and removal of overhead utility lines in this important block near the Capitol.

Summary: Despite the general depression of construction activity, 2010 saw improvements in several areas of the Capitol Environs, including a welcome renovation of several existing apartment buildings on J Street (“east mall”). Even more encouraging are upcoming major projects including rebuilding of Centennial Mall, Farmers Mutual headquarters on Lincoln Mall, and the McPhee School renovation on Goodhue Blvd.

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(The final report for 2010 will incorporate the Nov. and Dec. meetings.)

