

BRIEFING NOTES

NAME OF GROUP: PLANNING COMMISSION

DATE, TIME AND PLACE OF MEETING: Wednesday, March 21, 2012, 11:00 a.m., Room 113, County-City Building, 555 S. 10th Street, Lincoln, Nebraska

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE: Greg Butcher, Michael Cornelius, Dick Esseks, Wendy Francis, Leirion Gaylor Baird, Chris Hove, Jim Partington, Lynn Sunderman and Ken Weber. Jeanelle Lust absent.

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE: Steve Henrichsen, Ed Zimmer, David Cary, Sara Hartzell, Brandon Garrett and Michele Abendroth of the Planning Department; Dallas McGee of the Urban Development Department; Terry Uland and Todd Ogden of Downtown Lincoln Association.

STATED PURPOSE OF MEETING: Downtown Master Plan Update

The meeting was called to order at 11:00 a.m. The Nebraska Open Meetings Act was acknowledged. McGee introduced George Crandall and Don Arambula of Crandall Arambula. He stated that Crandall Arambula has been working on updating the Downtown Master Plan. The city's Downtown Master Plan was approved in 2005, and they are proposing some amendments to the Plan.

Crandall stated that the tasks are to assess M & N Street, 14th Street and P Street. They are currently in final design, and the final step is the Master Plan update. Many projects have been completed since the Downtown Master Plan was adopted. Many of these ideas were generated from public input during the Master Plan process. The M Street park block concept was part of the Master Plan. They found that as part of the refinement, they could not make the connection across the Antelope Valley Parkway and currently over to Arena Drive. The feasibility of the park blocks was not very practical, and it was suggested to move the promenade concept to N Street. The off-street bike system was part of the Master Plan as well. They found that the redesign of Centennial Mall did not include the bike system, so it was moved to 14th Street. As far as retail, there was a concept in the Master Plan that showed P Street as the primary retail. These projects are the focus of the update.

Arambula stated that a lot of communities do not understand that 30% of the downtown is in the public realm. If you take care of the public realm, you will have a healthy downtown, and it creates new investment in downtown. The idea is to accommodate all modes of transportation. It also means designing for the most vulnerable, as everyone will be well-served if you do this. There has been an emphasis on cycling. There are three categories of cyclists which include the cycling enthusiast, the capable and cautious rider, and those who will never ride. One way to increase ridership is to have a protected bikeway. The key component is that Lincoln has a robust trail system, but you are left at the front door of the downtown. We want to be able to get people to their destinations, particularly to the P Street retail street. They are suggesting a direct and relatively easy to implement idea. Traffic

engineers have reviewed this plan to install a protected bikeway, and they support it. On N Street, they are proposing to take one lane of travel out and replace it with a bi-directional bike lane. Angle parking would be on the north side, and parallel parking would be on the south side. There would be a curb separation with landscaping between the parking and the bikeway. It would create a green corridor downtown and establish a hierarchy of streets downtown. That system would continue along 14th Street and connect to P Street and the University. There are busses on 14th Street today, and they think a better approach is a curbside in-travel lane bus stops. There would be a bus shelter within that zone. There would also be parallel parking. They think they can get an increase in the amount of parking without impacting the pedestrian zone on 14th Street.

Esseks commented that an avid cyclist he spoke with regarding the protected bikeway is opposed to it because it is dangerous at intersections where you are competing with vehicles. Arambula stated that there are a lot of approaches in dealing with this issue which include painting the crosswalks and increasing visibility. The traffic engineers are going to continue to look at this. Crandall stated that he is right to be concerned, but there are solutions.

Butcher stated that he is concerned with traffic jams at 14th & O Street during the lunch hour and asked how we address that issue. Arambula stated that this is a traffic signalization issue with getting the right phasing. The traffic engineers can work this out. This is an issue but it can be solved.

Gaylor Baird asked if using 14th Street for the bikeway detracts from the placemaking effort with Centennial Mall. Arambula stated that they have a different role. Part of the idea is that you need to connect to your destinations. The other issue is that we want to bring them into the retail area. That does not mean that you still cannot ride on Centennial Mall. Maintaining the historical character of the Mall is important, and they are complementary to each other.

Esseks noted that there are inadequate setbacks on M Street and asked if this would be an issue. Arambula stated that this would all happen within the existing right-of-way and that it would be on N Street only without the park block concept.

Hove asked if there have been traffic counts done on the use of the bike lanes. Crandall stated that the top reason people do not bicycle is because of safety. It is difficult to predict, but they think you may get a couple thousand trips a day. There is no data to support that, but is based on experience. This would free up many parking spaces downtown. This is a quality of life benefit and is attractive to employers in bringing in potential employees who are looking for these types of amenities. Cary added that traffic counts on the existing bike lanes are approximately 200-300 bikers per day.

Arambula continued with the retail streets. Cities that are successful have a good retail system. It is also a critical component to draw housing. The retail corridor is on P Street and 14th. Currently, we have breaks in retail on P Street, which is a challenge to overcome. Since 2005, 25 new businesses have relocated in this zone. We want to maintain that and build upon it. They would like to see some infill in uses that are currently not consistent. It is important to create pedestrian friendly zones with shopper-friendly storefronts. There should be an effort to activate dead edges. When thinking about seating, there are a couple different approaches which are café seating and restaurant seating on the outer edge

of the sidewalk. Another concern is maintenance issues. They have identified intersections and would like to see low maintenance corners. They would like to replace a few on-street parking spaces with bike racks. They would like to see consistent fixtures and lighting so there is a common theme downtown. P Street is an arterial street and provides through access to the entire region. The thought is to keep the three lanes of travel and supplement it with additional angle parking and maintain the existing curb dimension as it is today. They would also like to see additional landscaping. They want to make the driveways more pedestrian friendly.

Arambula stated that the proposal is to create a timeless, elegant, simple environment that reflects the history, character and culture of Lincoln. They are suggesting to replace the planting beds with dark pavers. They can create color and life by adding planting baskets. The other thing for the Planning Commission to think about is how the buildings are treated. They need regulations for weather protection. Many awnings are used for advertising, but they should really be used for rain protection. There should be an emphasis on signage, particularly pedestrian signs, but they should be heavily regulated. It is important to identify in your standards what is not acceptable.

Crandall stated that streetcars were part of the Master Plan. Streetcars stimulate investment in downtown, and the P and Q Street corridor is a perfect opportunity to do a streetcar.

Gaylor Baird asked how you encourage broad support for aesthetics. Arambula stated that this is grounded in history. The first step is to evaluate and review what has worked in the past and what makes Lincoln unique. Crandall stated that there is typically very little discussion about taste if it is simple and elegant.

Esseks asked if the recommendations will include housing and grocery in downtown. Crandall stated that housing is not part of the scope of this work.

Gaylor Baird asked if they have worked with Urban Development on things such as awnings to give a more cohesive look downtown. Arambula stated that typically is the next step.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:58 a.m.

BRIEFING NOTES

NAME OF GROUP:	PLANNING COMMISSION
DATE, TIME AND PLACE OF MEETING:	Wednesday, March 21, 2012, 12:00 noon, Conference Room 113, County-City Building, 555 S. 10 th Street, Lincoln, Nebraska
MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:	Leirion Gaylor Baird, Greg Butcher, Michael Cornelius, Dick Esseks, Wendy Francis, Chris Hove, Jeanelle Lust, Lynn Sunderman and Ken Weber. Steve Henrichsen, Tom Cajka, David Cary, Brandon Garrett and Teresa McKinstry of the Planning Department; Rick Peo of the City Attorney and Wynn Hjernstad of Urban Development.
STATED PURPOSE OF MEETING:	Workshop on the "Redevelopment Plan Process and proposed amendment to the Innovation Campus Redevelopment Plan".

Wynn Hjernstad opened by noting that every state has a redevelopment process, but every one is different. The process is governed by state statutes. Different cities in Nebraska interpret the state statutes differently. The point is to get to TIF, tax increment financing. This is really the only tool we have to help with redevelopment.

Urban Development Department is Lincoln's designated redevelopment authority, as designated by the City Council back in the 1970's. There are several steps involved; Blight and Substandard Determination Studies, Redevelopment Plans, TIF, invitations for redevelopment proposals, redevelopment agreements and implementation of projects. Planning Commission is involved in the first two steps. These also go before City Council. The next steps go directly to City Council. If a project would need rezoning, this would come back before Planning Commission. Community development law can be found in the state statutes.

A map of blighted areas is available on the City of Lincoln website. Blight studies are paid for by the private sector. The city won't do a blight study unless there is a pretty good indication up front that the area will be declared blighted and substandard. Urban Development staff will review the studies if a private company requests it, but it is usually the private company that brings the study before the City Council. The statutes allow a city to declare up to 35% of the city as blighted and substandard. Lincoln is currently at about 12%. There are factors that have to be looked at. They are very objective. A study is not required, but evidence has to be provided.

After the blight study, a Redevelopment Plan is prepared. This is comprised of two major sections. Existing conditions, things such as current land use, utilities, transportation

systems, parks and open space are identified. This notes what deficiencies there may be. The second piece is the plan itself. This includes guiding principles, generally taken from the Comprehensive Plan. Every project that is included in a Redevelopment Plan does not get implemented. The plan is not binding. But a project can't be done if it is not in the plan. State statutes spell out what needs to be included.

The next step is Invitation for Redevelopment Proposals, IFRP's. These are available on the Urban Development website. This invites the public sector to bring projects forward. The next step is a Redevelopment Agreement. This is a contract that spells out what the project will include. These are very specific. They identify what the project will look like. These are approved by City Council. Then the fifteen-year clock starts. Tax Increment Financing is used for anything that is considered a public benefit. It eliminates blight. For comparison, Lincoln has 32 active TIF projects, Omaha has 179, Gothenberg has 19 and Ogallala has 18.

Gaylor Baird wondered if there are any concerns about maxing the capacity of TIF projects. Hjermstad replied that she does not imagine we would ever get to the maximum. The city is constantly growing.

Hove questioned if TIF is ever stopped. Hjermstad replied yes.

Hjermstad stated that there is a distinction between core area TIF and outer area TIF. The distinction is how we use TIF. The core area is a traditional blight purpose. The outer area is more for economic development projects. It has to be a primary employer. The TIF process includes the tax base, which is determined one year before the project began.

Esseks inquired about the length of TIF bonds. Hjermstad replied up to fifteen years. There are different ways to do bonds. They can go through the city, which is likely for a large project. For a smaller project, it is paid for by the general fund and then this is reimbursed. Developer purchase is the preferred method. They are the one who goes out and finances the bond and the money pays back the developer. It takes the city out of any risk.

Esseks questioned if during those 15 years, the TIF is used to improve the site and pay off the bond. Hjermstad replied that the bond is used up front to get all the money to build the project. Every year of the 15 years, taxes are generated to pay back the bond. The final piece is construction of the project itself.

Hove questioned if TIF is available for residential or just commercial. Hjermstad replied that it is mostly for commercial, but can be available for residential in the core, generally on a small scale.

Hove wondered how TIF is used in other communities. Hjermstad replied that TIF is generally not used for new construction. Other cities allow it.

Gaylor Baird understands that TIF is a heavily regulated process. She asked how it is determined what exactly is paid for. Hjermsstad believes one thing that people forget about, TIF is still property tax. It is still a government funding source.

Rick Peo stated that the law states what you can specifically spend the money on. There is a balancing game. There is a definition of public improvements. You can identify specifically what is being paid for. He doesn't believe Omaha follows where the dollars are spent to the degree that Lincoln does.

Hjermsstad noted that we require invoices. We track dollar for dollar where the money is spent. We go out and verify that money was spent where it was supposed to be spent.

Hjermsstad stated that the Innovation Campus amendment incorporates the Theresa Street area. This is a major revision that goes through the plan and updates it. They have some projects now for NIC. This is referred to as Phase One. The Theresa Street Blight Study map is included. We are doing a land swap with the Board of Regents. As we started looking at the surrounding area, we saw that it was experiencing some decline. What we have done is gone through the existing conditions and guiding principles and incorporated that into Innovation Campus. A lot of things have changed since this was initially done. At the time, the Board of Regents was required by the Legislature to provide a master plan. Since then, a new model has emerged and there has been a request for proposals. Zach Wiegert and his company have done a whole new master plan and are working with developers. Utilities in the area are all old and bad. The primary use of this TIF is to rebuild all the utilities. Phase One is the transportation system, water, sewer and storm system. The 4H building will be renovated and have an addition built on. It will be used for office space and a dry lab. There will be lecture space and exhibit space. The Industrial Arts building is a new life science building. Two additional buildings are in the planning stage. They want to start construction yet this year. This application will have public hearing before Planning Commission on April 4, 2012. Then it will go on to City Council. They are in the process of working on a Redevelopment Agreement.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:45 p.m.