

SUMMARY OF MEETING DISCUSSION

NAME OF GROUP: Urban Design Committee

DATE, TIME AND

PLACE OF MEETING: Wednesday, August 7, 2002, 3:00 p.m., Room 206, County-City Building, 555 South 10th Street, Lincoln, Nebraska

MEMBERS AND OTHERS

IN ATTENDANCE:

Members: Joanne Kissel, Third World Oforah, Gordon Scholz, and Scott Sullivan

Others: Polly McMullen (Downtown Lincoln Association); Ken Smith & Allan Abbott (Public Works & Utilities); Ed Zimmer & Missy Minner (Planning Dept.)

STATED PURPOSE

OF THE MEETING: Regular Meeting of the Urban Design Committee

Discussion of sign/banner proposals for downtown parking garages - Sullivan explained that DLA and Public Works have been working on ideas for improving the visibility of the public and private parking garages downtown. The public garages are currently identified by 8' tall signs, however those are difficult for drivers to see from much distance. They are considering a banner concept. It has been suggested that the word "parking" be the primary focus on the sign. They are also considering incorporating the new downtown slogan. Oforah suggested the use of the "circled P" parking symbol might be more recognizable and at a greater distance. He noted that Scott's illustrations show how visible the universal symbol is. Polly McMullen pointed out that the "P" is used widely (even internationally).

The original plan had been to attach these signs to the LES poles that are near the garages. LES has indicated that the poles are old concrete poles, some of which need to come down and others that would not structurally be able to support the signs.

Now they are considering the possibility of placing the signs on the existing traffic signal poles if that can be worked out with Public Works. Allan Abbott believed that something could be worked out with the traffic poles. He cautioned that the signs must be strictly informational signs as advertising on public poles is not allowed. He added that they would want to make sure that the signs would only be for parking and that there would be no requests to put up signs for lodging or restaurants. Additionally, this will need to be reviewed by a committee that reviews the appropriateness of directional signs.

Kissel asked where the funding for signs for the private garages would come from. McMullen indicated that the DLA has money encumbered from the last 2 fiscal years for signage. They would like to fund the signage for those private garages that want to be part of the program. If they had additional funds to support a contribution to the City garages they would consider that.

Kissel pointed out that surface lots should also be marked.

Since the main goal of the program is to identify the places where public parking is allowed, the Committee members advised that a uniform simple sign with the circled 'P' and arrow would be the most appropriate.

Discussion of potential modifications to regulations for private landscaping in the public right-of-way Allan Abbott explained that there has been some discussion concerning the existing ordinance regarding what planting and other landscape treatment is allowed in the City right-of-way. The existing

ordinance is enforced on a complaint driven basis. Recently, a complaint was received about river rock being placed in the right of way. The property owner was asked to remove the rock. That owner took photos of many other places with the same thing. Public Works sent out about 80 letters notifying people of their illegal landscaping in the City right-of-way. The City Council has since asked them not to enforce the ordinance.

Councilman Jonathan Cook has initiated a revision to the ordinance. A draft ordinance has been written that says that within the City right of way you can plant whatever you want, that is less than 30" high, except vegetable gardens. The draft ordinance would allow the placement of river rock or gravel in the City right of way. Public Works is not in favor of the use of rock because it has the potential to cause accidents or be used in vandalism. The basic concept of the ordinance is to allow reasonable plantings. The sight distance triangles will need to be maintained. The ordinance would allow bushes to be trimmed to the edge of the sidewalk.

The draft ordinance states that you plant at your own risk. Abbott noted that the City would not be liable for anything that gets damaged, for instance by snow plowing. It should also state that if the right of way is needed for widening the property owner will not be compensated for landscaping that is removed. It should also say that the property owner is responsible for damages or any accident that happens because of the rock. The new ordinance governs what is allowed. These are not required plantings.

Zimmer mentioned that in a conversation with Committee member Todd prior to the meeting, she indicated that she would be on the side of flexibility. If the City moves toward a more flexible ordinance, she sees the opportunity for County Extension classes and brochures for smart and appropriate things to do in this space.

Abbott stated that this is not going to be a simple issue. If a subdivision has covenants that outlaw certain plants, even if the city ordinance is liberalized the covenants will take precedence. Kissel observed that there should be different standards for downtown areas than there are for suburban areas.

Zimmer stated that this was an introductory discussion of this issue. He thought that the proposed ordinance would come before the Committee for review.

Kissel stated that she was in favor of flexibility. However, it is important to educate the public.

Update on downtown banners -

Zimmer stated that the changing banners in the downtown area have been extremely successful this summer. Several sponsors have worked with DLA to install banners including the State Fair, the Roller Sports Association, and United Way. For the first time, two organizations requested installation for the same period and DLA had to assign some blocks to one group and other blocks to the other group. This seems more successful and attractive than mixing banners within a block.

The next campaign planned will incorporate the "Do It Downtown" slogan with the different aspects of downtown activities represented. Since the banner program has always stressed that they are temporary and that it is desirable to see the banners change frequently, timing makes it difficult to bring each design before the Committee for review. Ed suggested keeping the Committee updated on the status of the program to monitor whether the urban design goal of attractive, changing banners is being met. Members concurred with that approach.