URBAN DESIGN COMMITTEE
2009 ANNUAL REPORT
(DRAFT)

The Urban Design Committee was established by ordinance in 1981 to advise city government on enhancing the physical environment of Lincoln. By Section 4.36 of the Lincoln Municipal Code, the Committee has seven appointed citizen members serving three year terms.

The Committee membership in 2009 was Margaret Berry, Mike Eckert, JoAnne Kissel, Michelle Penn, Gordon Scholz, Scott Sullivan (chair), and Mary Ann Wells. The Committee meets as necessary on the first Wednesday of the month at 3 p.m. Ten meetings were held in 2009, including two special joint meetings with the Historic Preservation Commission to advise on the West Haymarket Redevelopment.

The 25th annual Enersen Urban Design Awards recognized the Harris Overpass and the Liberty Village project on Vine Street as the public and private projects for 2009.

The Committee advised the Urban Development Dept. and the City Administration on several public-private redevelopment projects in 2009, including Lincoln Flats at 1314 O Street, the Assurity campus in Antelope Valley, the Matt Talbot Kitchen and Outreach relocation to 27th and Center Streets, the Shoemaker Travel Plaza project on West O Street, the Little Saigon redevelopment on North 27th Street, and the West Haymarket project.

Haymarket Park brought interior improvements before the Committee in May, under its agreement with the City. That same month, Panera Bread brought its design for the sidewalk café at 12th & P Streets. Major enhancements to the streetscape in College View on South 48th and Prescott Streets were discussed at the summer meetings. The Committee heard and approved an appeal to the Neighborhood Design standards for a house at 1243 Belmont Avenue in September. The review of the Assurity project included review and approval of aspects of the project under the Downtown Design Standards. A report on the first year of implementation of those Standards is attached.

Finally, a major effort of the Committee, along with the Historic Preservation Commission, resulted in the attached recommendations on the West Haymarket project. Ordinarily the Committee does not review projects in which the Commission has jurisdiction, but West Haymarket is not an ordinary project as it has major implications for Historic Haymarket and for other major aspects of the City's urban form including the West "O" and I-180 entryways and interaction with major districts of the City including Downtown and the City Campus. The discussions were substantive and both design review boards expressed willingness to continue to collaborate on this major undertaking.

Respectfully submitted — Ed Zimmer
January 29, 2010 — Lincoln Planning Department
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Downtown Design Standards

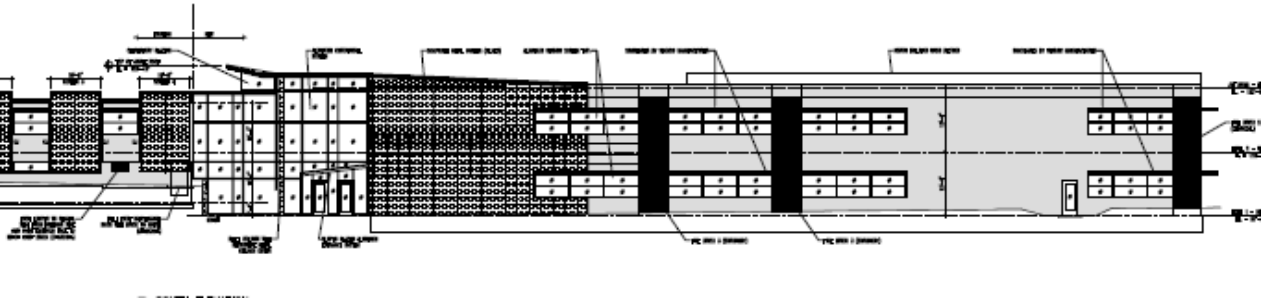
Report on First Year, Sept. 2008-Nov. 2009

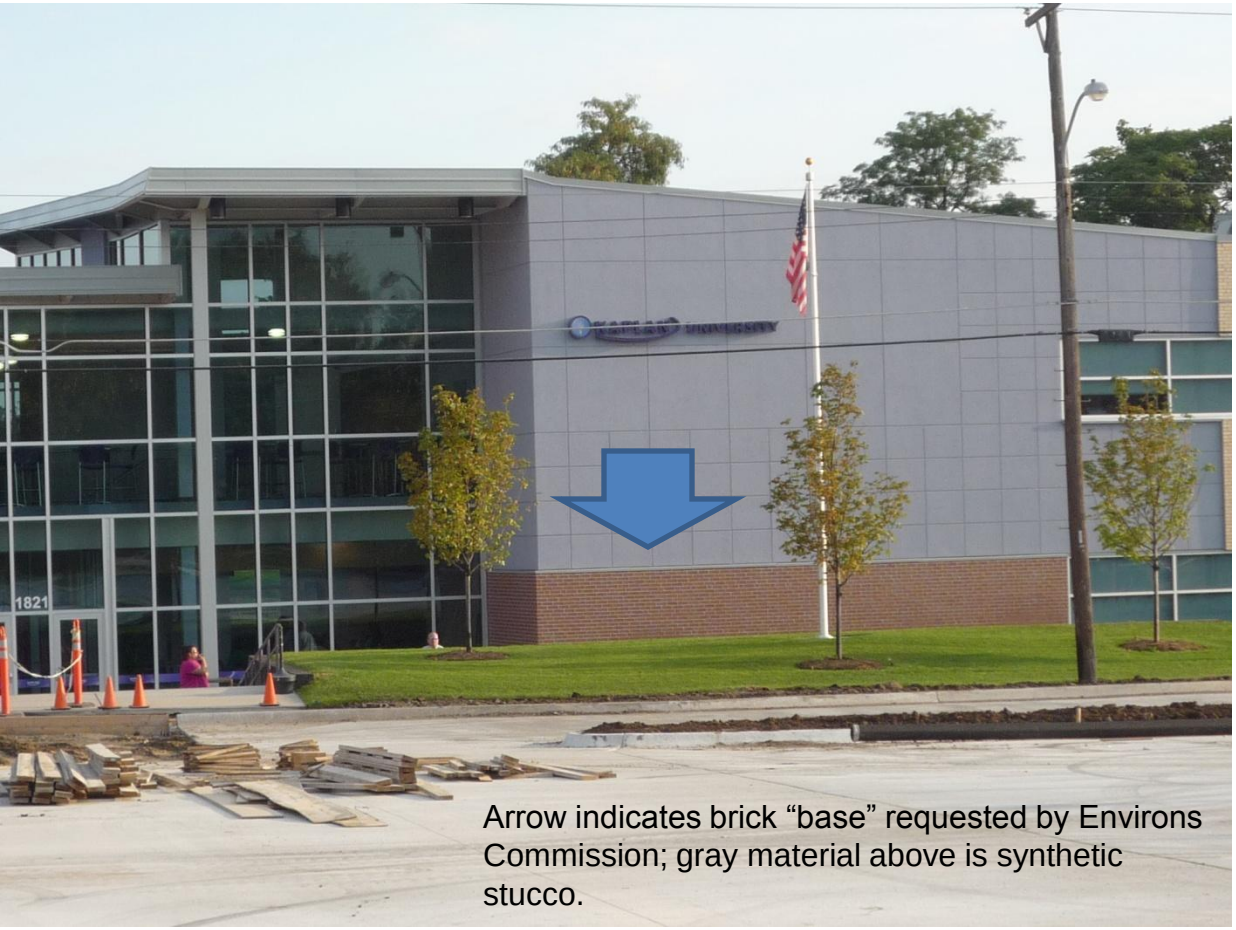
In adopting the Lincoln Downtown Design Standards (LDDS/LMC 3.76) in September 2008, the City Council requested a report on their implementation after the first year.

Building activity in the Sept. 2008-November 2009 period has been impeded by overall economic conditions, so only a handful of projects have been reviewed under the new design standards, as discussed below. Staff has offered advice on or courtesy reviews of a small number of additional projects that have not progressed to the point of seeking building permits. Prior to formal application, developers of those projects typically request and are extended confidentiality.

The projects reviewed in 2008 and 2009 were remodelings or additions to existing buildings, except for the Assurity and Archrival buildings.

The remodeling of the former Eastern Ambulance building at S. 9th and Rosa Parks Way was in process when the Standards were adopted. Staff reviewed it for "practice" in applying the standards and found that it would have qualified for administrative approval of a substantial remodeling by adding durable brick cladding to the street facades (east and south) and by introducing additional windows on the east façade.





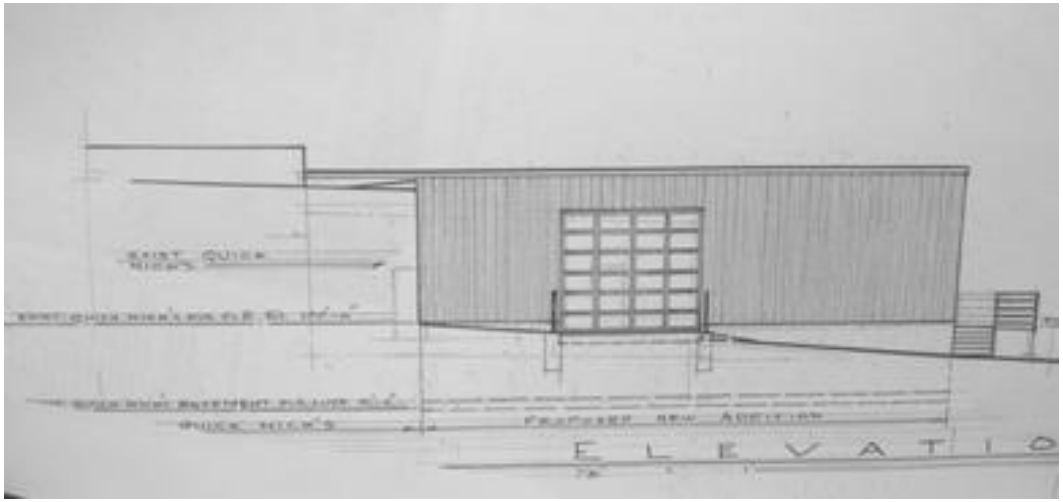
Arrow indicates brick “base” requested by Environs Commission; gray material above is synthetic stucco.

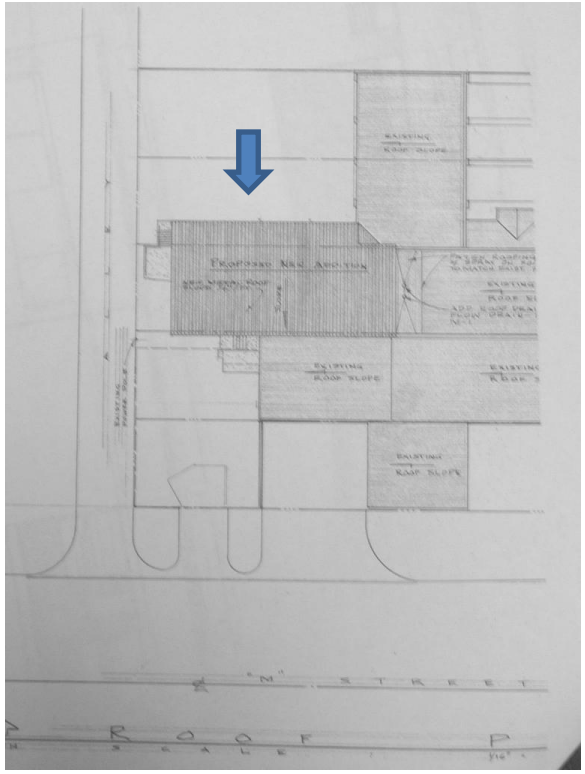
Kaplan University: The Kaplan extension had been designed and approved by the Nebraska Capitol Environs Commission before the LDDS were enacted, but a change of zone to O-1 and a “value engineering” of the approved design brought the project back to the Commission and subject to the new standards. The proposed changes met the Design Standards and met with Commission approval, except for a detail on the south façade. The Commission requested and the applicant agreed to a change in materials to introduce a brick base near the south entrance/student plaza, meeting the DDS requirement for durable materials at ground level. The addition has been completed as approved.

In December 2008, designs were reviewed for a substantial remodeling of the former “Barker Printing” building at 13th & K Streets for **Nebraska Rural Electric Association**.

The redesign retained ample windows and introduced durable ceramic tile over existing stucco finishes. The project met the Design Standards and was approved administratively.

Walker Tire at S. 9th and M Streets sought a building permit for a utilitarian extension on the west side. The project qualified as a minor remodeling and met the design standards as it did not impact a street façade and did "not cause greater deviation from these Design Standards than currently exists."





Arrow indicates west addition.

This “major remodeling” was approved administratively as meeting the LDDS.

A building permit was sought for the **Shinn Building** at 126 N. 16th in early 2009, converting it to residential units. The proposed work included reopening the blocked windows and introducing a grade-level entrance.

The remodeling of the former P. O. Pears building as “**Red 9**” at 322 S. 9th Street involved few material changes to the building exterior. The corner of the parcel at 9th and M Street would not have meet the screening requirements of the Design Standards if it had stayed a gravel parking area but its development as a fenced beer garden does not deviate from any standard. The grasses planted outside the fence are not required but enhance the pedestrian experience.

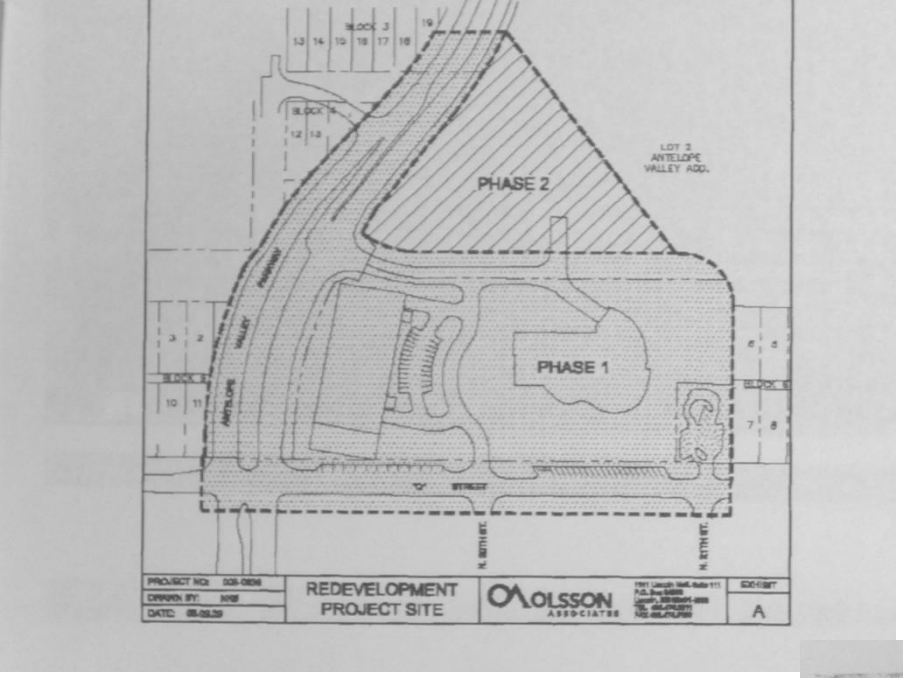
2008

An initial courtesy review early in the design process for the renovation of the former Kirk Motors building at 18th & O Streets into the new home of "**N Street Liquors**" raised a question of blocking up the large show room windows. An alternative solution retaining the windows and creating "window boxes" for display behind each one met the Design Standards, earning administrative approval of the design.

This project raised a question about State energy improvement requirements and whether the Downtown Design Standards conflict with State regulations.

The current energy regulations apparently allow state officials little or no discretion in applying the requirements to renovation projects, despite the inherent energy savings in reusing rather than replacing existing structures. The huge windows on a building like "Kirk Motors" require other upgrades such as extra roof insulation to achieve the required scores, that might be more expensive than simply reducing the size or number of windows. This review was rendered more complicated by the current arrangement of assigning review to the State and enforcement to City building officials. Unifying the review and enforcement at the City level might expedite local projects. The handsome renovation of this building for N Street Liquors demonstrates what can be achieved under current codes.

2009

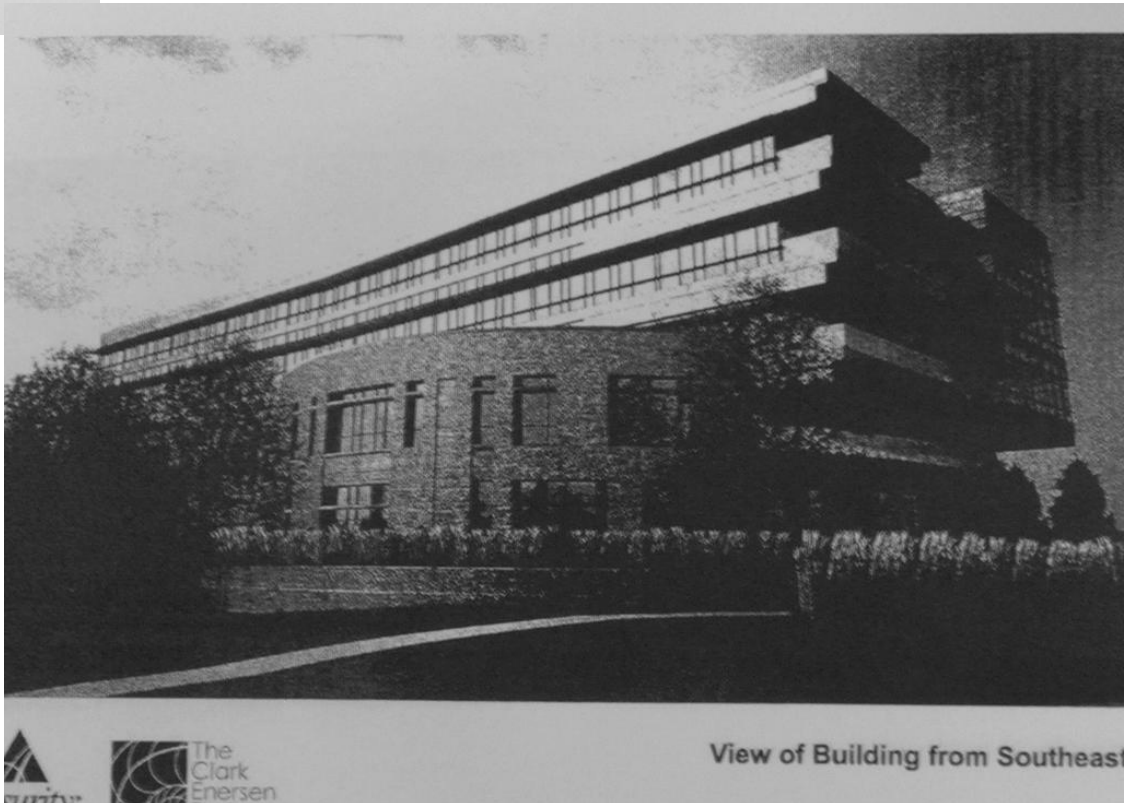


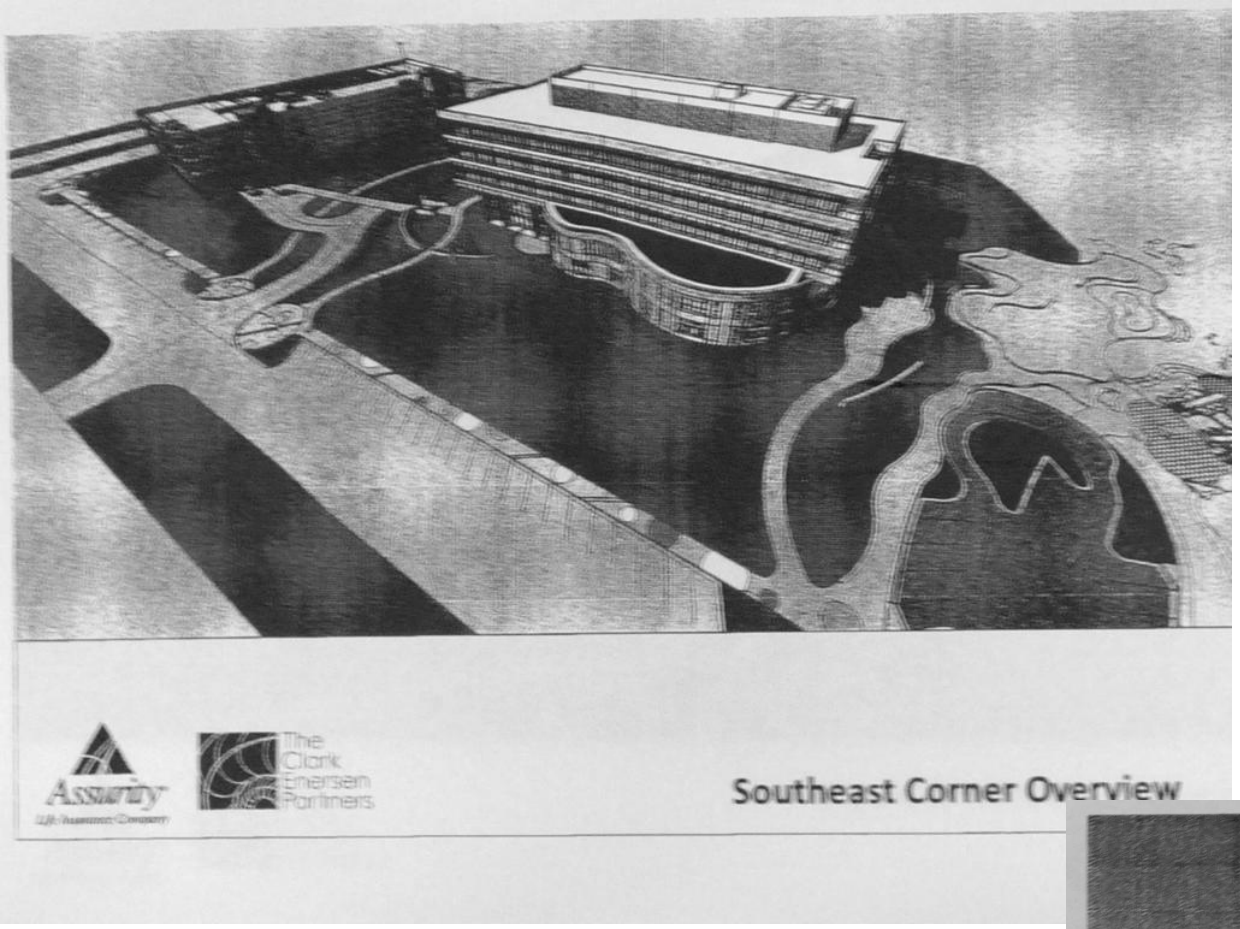
Assurity

The only new buildings reviewed in the first year of the Downtown Design Standards were the office building and parking structure for Assurity bounded by19th and 21st Streets, Q and R Streets. As a public-private redevelopment project, the design was already subject to advisory design review by the Urban Design Committee. The LDDS review was incorporated into that existing review process.

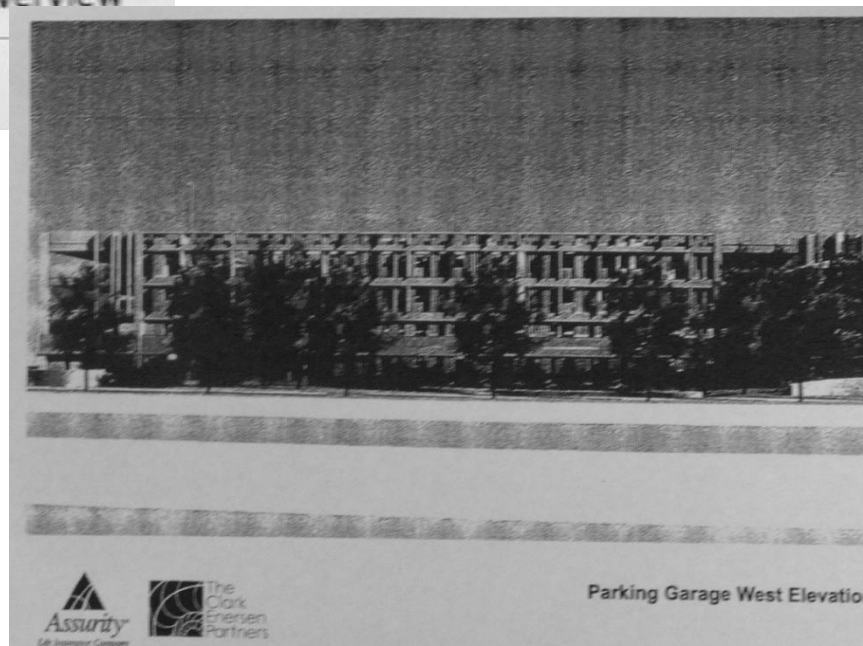
The office building is positioned on the east side of the parcel with well-developed facades addressing Union Plaza park.

The site is campus-like and the Downtown Design Standard recognize this possibility by allowing greater flexibility of positioning buildings east of 19th Street/Antelope Valley Parkway. West of the Parkway, buildings are to be “built-to” their front property line. “East Downtown”/Antelope Valley was intended to offer some larger campuses near to but not in the Downtown Core and the Assurity project is just such an opportunity.

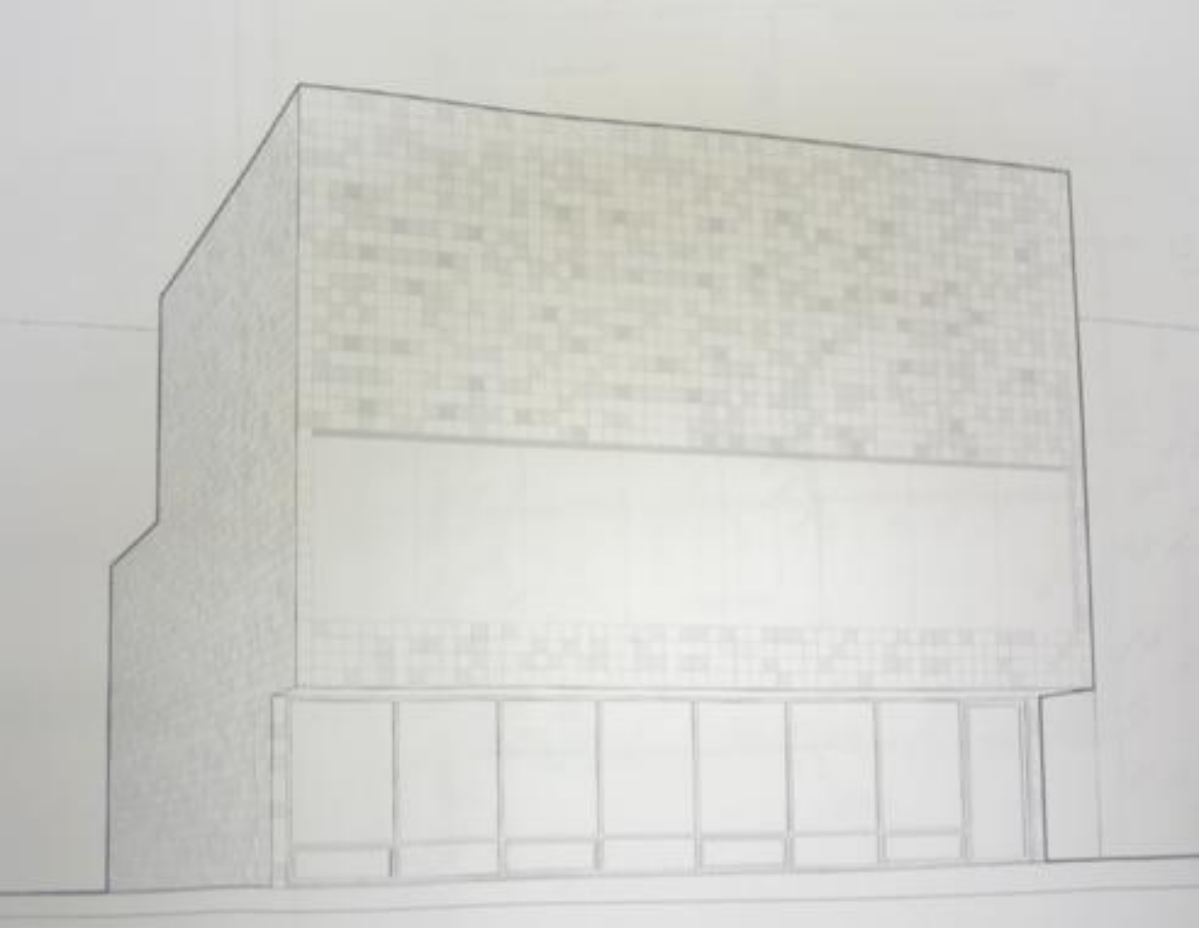




The office building's main entrance is oriented westward, toward the interior of the campus and the parking structure on the west side. Urban Design Committee received a preliminary presentation on March 4, 2009 and offered suggestions regarding the parking structure and the pedestrian connection to Q Street. The project was approved as meeting the intent of the LDDS on April 1, 2009



Assurity Parking Garage, Antelope Valley Parkway façade (west), as presented and approved April 1, 2009.



Archrival, 330 S. 9th St. :

Archrival has applied for a building permit for a new structure at 330 S. 9th Street, currently a parking lot in the "Color Court" complex. The process on this application is on-going.

The proposed structure has a recessed storefront at the first floor, a band-window at the second, and concrete block as the primary material of the facades. On the principal, 9th St. façade, the upper portion of the wall would incorporate a "scatter" of glass blocks, so some light would penetrate the wall.

The design meets most of the Downtown Design Standards for its location as it is "built to" the front property line, has ample transparency on the ground floor, and locates parking to the rear. The recessed first floor is permitted as the location is not one of the key retail streets (P Street and N. 21st Streets).

However, concrete block is not permitted as a primary façade material and therefore the design does not qualify for administrative approval. The applicant's options include modifying the material choice or appealing the design to the Urban Design Committee.

NeighborWorks Lincoln

The NeighborWorks Lincoln office and condominiums at 23rd and P Streets is not located in the B-4 and O-1 zones subject to the LDDS, but those standards are included as guidelines for review in the PUD (Planned Unit Development) authorizing this project.

The project includes the agency's office and rental commercial space on the ground floor and residences above. The design proposed brick cladding for the ground floor and "cement-board" lap siding on the residential upper floors, to differentiate the uses and provide a transition between downtown and the residences on the rest of the block. Exercising his authority specified in the PUD, the Planning Director accepted the lap siding on this design—a material not allowed in the B-4 and O-1 districts under the LDDS.

The wind turbines which are a prominent part of this building's design cannot meet the LDDS requirement that rooftop mechanical equipment be screened with architectural materials consistent with the overall design, nor are they regarded as "necessary mechanical appurtenances" under the zoning code. Planning staff proposed that the turbines would be acceptable if well-integrated into the original design as clearly "purposeful" features. The applicant accepted that condition and the project designers will offer details to show the turbines' placement and support structures as "purposeful" elements of the design. Energy devices such as wind turbines and solar collectors may need to be more explicitly addressed in both the zoning code and the Downtown Design Standards.

SUMMARY

Only a handful of projects were built in the B-4 and O-1 districts of Downtown and Antelope Valley this year, so the Lincoln Downtown Design Standards have not been very thoroughly tested. Nine projects were reviewed and approved, some with slight modifications to meet standards. The Archrival building has not been approved, pending resolution of the façade material (concrete block). The multiple paths to approval (administrative, Planning Director, Urban Design Committee/Capitol Environs Commission) were helpful in expediting the review and approval of diverse projects that ranged from modest additions or remodels to new construction estimated at over $40 million. No project was appealed to City Council.

Areas for improvement of the standards may include

- screening of outdoor uses in addition to parking lots, and
- specific language to address wind turbines, solar collectors, and other mechanical appurtenances that cannot or should not be screened in the manner that cooling towers or similar HVAC equipment should be screened,
- continued attention to materials, so as not to disadvantage innovative projects. For instance, applicants might be offered the option of an alternative design review process by one of the citizen design boards—Urban Design Committee, Historic Preservation Commission, or Nebr. Capitol Environs Commission—under a descriptive set of design goals, in lieu of the current administrative process of review under the current prescriptive set of design standards. In effect, that option is available now as an appeal from a negative finding by staff, but a more positive option might be to go directly to a design board with an innovative project.

Respectfully submitted,
Ed Zimmer, Planning Dept.
November 25, 2009

RECOMMENDATIONS ON WEST HAYMARKET DEVELOPMENT

adopted December 2, 2009

The Urban Design Committee and the Historic Preservation Commission offer the following comments and recommendations to the City in pursuing the laudable goals of creating a new Arena for the community and developing the West Haymarket rail yard as a new urban place, adjacent to and compatible with a Great American Place--Historic Haymarket. The joint design review boards stand ready and willing to participate efficiently in this exciting public/private endeavor, as called for in the "Powers and Duties" assigned by ordinance to these boards. **We recommend that the City recognize the unique location and scope of the West Haymarket project by acknowledging that the boards acting jointly will provide design review for this project.**

The Commission and the Committee recognize that preliminary designs for arena and other West Haymarket features are illustrative–not definitive. The **"West Haymarket Integrated Development Plan" (IDP)** provides an essential starting point for articulating the community's purposes in this vast undertaking and **should be referenced in the redevelopment agreement** with the private developer.

Zoning of the West Haymarket Redevelopment area south of R Street and the proposed arena should be comparable to Haymarket district in uses and heights.

- **B-4 Lincoln Center Business District** allows very wide range of uses; west of 9th Street B-4 limits heights to 75'.
- **B-4** zoning also requires the Downtown Design Standards–an appropriate minimum in lieu of more specific design standards for area. Public and public-private projects such as West Haymarket further require design review by bodies such as Urban Design Committee and Historic Preservation Commission.

Framework for Design Review

- The IDP identifies laudable "Community Values" and accompanying goals that set higher aspirations than Downtown Design Standards. The IDP shall be used as the general yardstick for design review of individual elements of the West Haymarket redevelopment project. Quality of design and materials, wise use of resources, compatibility with Haymarket, and creation of an exciting urban place attractive to a wide range of Lincoln residents and visitors are core principles expressed in the IDP.
- Projects shall be reviewed by the joint design review boards, at an early (conceptual) point and at more well-developed stage(s) as determined by the boards.
- UDC and HPC would welcome an Executive Order or other administrative instruction to clarify the future process for this unique and monumental project. The two design review boards offer to work jointly, reviewing project components with the city and the private developer, then advising the mayor and city departments whether to sign-off on each as meeting the community principles and goals set forth in the IDP.

The IDP should be updated with a **current Project Plan** to have clarity and meaning–much has been updated since July 2009. These recommendations should be added as an appendix to that

report, or otherwise referenced in the redevelopment agreement.

The boards additionally offer the following comments on the IDP and the West Haymarket project plan (Exhibit A of 10/6/2009):

Avoiding adverse impacts on the historic Haymarket District will require careful attention to traffic congestion (especially during large arena events), visual intrusions, and material changes to historic features and buildings.

Traffic concerns include

- Introductions of roundabouts in Haymarket at 7th & Q and 7th & R. The joint boards recommend against this feature. Four-way stops are more typical of Haymarket and are usually regarded as more pedestrian-friendly than the continuous vehicular movement provided by roundabouts.
- Separation of major event traffic from Haymarket. IDP notes "It is anticipated movements along portions of those [extended R and Q] streets will be managed to limit (or prohibit) vehicular access of these streets during major events in the area." (p. 105) A stronger public statement of commitment is essential, such as: "Vehicular traffic related to major events in West Haymarket will be prohibited from access through Haymarket."

Visual intrusion should be avoided:

- The positioning of arena mitigates its height and bulk to the extent possible, associating it visually with the Modernist Post Office rather than Haymarket's historic structures. From more distant views (entering Lincoln on I-180, for instance) the arena will also be viewed in association with Memorial Stadium.
- Height of structures south of R Street, directly west of Haymarket, will be key to their compatibility with historic district. Rezoning as B-4 with similar height limits as Haymarket is strongly recommended.
- New construction in West Haymarket should be complementary in materials, scale, and design to the historic district but not mimic historic architecture (per IDP, pp. 33-34). In both overall design and in the individual buildings and streetscapes, West Haymarket should be clearly respectful to and reflective of its adjacency to Haymarket–its context–while achieving contemporary design excellence. (Every element of West Haymarket should meet this standard. Haymarket Parking Garage demonstrates clearly how design and function can be combined in a pleasing manner, enhancing its prominent setting, on a "utilitarian" building.)

Avoid or minimize and mitigate impacts on historic features:

- Renovation and incorporation of the historic canopy/platform system as a pedestrian amenity and "hinge" between Haymarket and West Haymarket is essential. The IDP "pavilion" concept (p. 73) is an excellent illustration of compatible contemporary design.
- Any reductions or interruptions of canopies and platform should be carefully reviewed, justified, and mitigated.
- Any relocation of Locomotive 710 should be carefully planned and reviewed for impact on its visibility, public enjoyment, and historic compatibility.
- The Humane Society fountain at 7th and Q Streets should be carefully preserved and well-located within the area if moving it is necessary.
- The joint boards recommend developing and implementing a **Historical Interpretive**

Plan that will strengthen West Haymarket's community connection and sense of place (p. 33). Early identification of a process, timeline, and budget is essential. Such a plan also broadens the lasting community benefit of expenditures required for project environmental/historic preservation approvals. Professional archaeological study of the **Emigrant Home** provides the area with a unique connection between Lincoln's immigrant origins and current events and residents.

Streetscape and open space

- **Outdoor dining opportunities, including sidewalk cafes** are desirable to enliven West Haymarket's streets. Sidewalk cafes should be carefully reviewed in location and size to coordinate with pedestrian traffic, enhanced pavements, infiltration basins, and other amenities. Plazas on private property may also provide opportunities for outdoor dining where the sidewalk width cannot accommodate all uses.
- **Landscaping of the public right of way** will provide a desirable distinction between Haymarket and West Haymarket. Planting in the streetscape also requires ample space and well-planned maintenance.
- **The spaces between the buildings** require careful design attention to create desirable urban places including aesthetic lighting mindful of human scale; excellent graphic design for signs; pleasing and maintainable "hardscape" and streetscape furnishings; water features with all-season design interest; well-selected and maintained public art.
- Incorporate a **children's play area** into a public open space .

Trail connections:

Lincoln's trail system is making great strides in connectivity. Consider a more direct connection from Arena Drive trail to Salt Creek Roadway (around the 2 roundabouts) – if it is not provided, the bike riders/walkers will make their own connection. (page 116)

Festival Spaces:

Smaller festival spaces should be designed into the open spaces and plazas of Haymarket and West Haymarket. At the large festival space, design the layout and amenities first; then configure the parking lot to fit into festival design, adding shade trees and green space to the fenced area. _____

Arena Parking Structure:

The scale of the arena provides an opportunity for the parking structure attached to the west to be appropriately of greater height than would be desirable for the other freestanding parking structures, offsetting need for additional surface parking.

Recreation (p. 166)**:**

Move the existing Charleston St. & bike trail further away from Oak Lake (south) and create a green buffer zone between the lake and street and separate the bike trail from the roadway.

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