



Urban Design Committee

2015 Annual Report

The Urban Design Committee was established by ordinance in 1981 to advise city government on enhancing the physical environment of our city to increase enjoyment of living in and visiting Lincoln. By Section 4.36 of the Lincoln Municipal Code, the Committee has seven appointed citizen members serving three year terms. The Committee meets as necessary on the first Tuesday of the month at 3 p.m.

Twelve meetings were held in 2015, including two joint meetings with the Historic Preservation Commission. After many years serving as the Committee Chair, JoAnne Kissel stepped down from the position and elections for a new Chair and Vice-Chair were subsequently held in July. Michelle Penn, who previously served as Vice-Chair, was elected as the new Committee Chair. Beginning in July, Urban Design Committee members included Michelle Penn (chair), Gill Peace (vice-chair), Emily Casper, Tammy Eagle Bull, Tom Huston, JoAnne Kissel, and Michele Tilley. With the appointment of Emily Casper in February, the Committee returned to full strength. The Committee is staffed by Stacey Groshong Hageman, with Ed Zimmer, supported by Teresa McKinstry.

The past year brought numerous projects to the Urban Design Committee for review and advice, as described below. The year also saw substantial progress of some significant projects reviewed in previous years including the Aspen Heights student housing project generally located at 18th and P streets and an addition to the Swanson Russell building at 12th and P streets.

Redevelopment Project (23rd & O Streets)

This year, the Committee continued review of the 23rd and O Street redevelopment converting the former retail building into a healthcare facility. Among the improvements will be to convert the rear loading dock along N Street into an outdoor area including green space.



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Outdoor Area from N Street

Birdseye of Outdoor Area



StarTran Bus Stop (11th & N Streets)

In 2013, the Committee approved, with reservations, a proposal to install of a wrought iron fence to replace the existing chain link at the 11th and N bus stop with hopes that more large-scale improvements would be made at the location in the future. StarTran did not install the wrought iron fence and in March, returned to Committee with a plan to make incremental improvements to the bus stop. These improvements included removal of chain link fencing, benches, access panels, and one of the canopy structures. The Committee, as in 2013, urged a long term solution for this site. They recommended denial of the project, encouraging StarTran to develop a phased plan for the complete redevelopment of this site. Some improvements have been made by StarTran.



Bus Stop Before



After

Robber's Cave

In March, the Committee heard plans for the reuse of the Robber's Cave site located at about 9th and High streets. The cave, dug out of Dakota Sandstone for a brewery in the 1860s, was proposed to be the site of a new home for Blue Blood Brewing Company. The project was reviewed by the Committee because TIF was requested for site acquisition and to return the cave, once a tourist attraction, to some degree of public access. The design of a building to sit atop the cave was approved by the Committee.

Proposed Building



West Haymarket Redevelopment

One of the Committee's major contributions in the past few years has been its review of West Haymarket redevelopment. In June, the Committee held a joint meeting with the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) to review designs for the Hudl Headquarters at Canopy and P streets. Because the project had city involvement through TIF and land acquisition, the Committee made suggestions in its role as urban design advisor on public-private projects. HPC reviewed the project based on its proximity to the Historic Haymarket District.



The joint review was triggered by a request for a special permit to allow a building height of 110 feet, where the by-right requirement was 75 feet. HPC discussed the impacts of exceeding the height limit and the effects it might have on the historic district. Both design review boards (voting separately) recommended approval of the special permit and were favorable of the proposed building design.

Proposed Site Plan



Proposed Hudl Headquarters

Telegraph District

A second joint meeting with HPC was held in October to review the “Telegraph District” redevelopment project by Speedway Properties and Nelnet in the vicinity of 21st and N streets. This project will return to the Committee in the future for specific advice on individual phases and projects. HPC reviewed the project because the National Register-eligible LT&T Warehouse and the Landmark Muny Building are within or near the district. HPC requested UDC’s participation not only because this is a TIF project with public investment, but also because of the large-scale, urban design impact that this project will have.

A general plan for the outlined area was discussed at the meeting, but only Phase I was being brought to the group for a recommendation. Phase I includes redevelopment of the office building and parking garage which flank L Street on the west side of 21st Street.

Proposed Redevelopment
in Telegraph District



Downtown and Neighborhood Design Standards

Infill projects that meet the Downtown and the Neighborhood Design Standards can be approved administratively by Planning staff, which occurred for over two dozen projects in 2015. Applicants proposing alternative solutions can appeal to Urban Design Committee. The Committee handled four such requests in 2015.

Urban Development Dept. is undertaking an especially challenging project at 224 N 28th, intending to produce a model, affordable home for a very small lot. A proposal was offered to the Committee in June and was approved, after UDC members expressed concerns about size and structural choices as they would affect affordability. Subsequent bidding bore out these concerns and an alternative design was brought to the Committee in October. Members suggested the modernistic design lacked compatibility with the context of the established Hartley neighborhood and Urban Development offered to revisit the issue and return to the Committee in 2016.

The Committee granted an appeal of the Downtown Design Standards involving the “Douglas Building” at the northwest corner of 13th and P Streets. The remodeling of this building for law offices and a fitness studio fell just short of the desired percentage of glazing under the Standards. The committee endorsed the work as a welcome enlivening of that prominent corner.



Proposal for Fly Fitness and Brown Law Office at 201 N 13th

In August the Committee approved a duplex design for 5331-3 Roose Street, accepting a modernistic design on a street with widely varied styles of existing houses. The discussion considered, in part, the handsome outcome of an adjacent development a few years earlier by the same designer/builder, as both helping set the area’s character and as a strong indication of a likely positive outcome of the new project.

North Elevation of 5331-3 Roose St



A unique infill project reviewed in December involved a joint proposal from NeighborWorks Lincoln and Professor Jeff Day and his UNL College of Architecture design studio, for a house at 2028 S. 8th Street (just north of South Street). The small house would utilize two steel shipping containers as part of its structure, and a third smaller container as a rear-yard accessory building. Students

would also contribute labor to the construction of the residence. The Committee carefully evaluated the overall character of the area and the wider context of the South Street setting and approved the experimental, innovative design.



Other Reviews

Other projects the Committee reviewed in 2015 included three sidewalk cafes at Tom & Chee, Cottonwood Cafe, and Burger Fi. They also reviewed pavement and lighting improvements in March for the alley in the Q-R-16th-17th block, and recommended approval of streetscape improvements to P Street between Centennial Mall and 18th Street in November.

Proposed P Street Improvements



In February, the Committee reviewed streetscape improvements to the west side of 9th Street between L and M streets which used Color Court's remaining TIF. The Committee also approved a request to vacate right of way along Rosa Parks Way to expand the project's parking lot in March, but these plans were put on hold.

The South Haymarket Neighborhood Plan was presented to the Committee at the joint meeting in October, and the Urban Design Committee enthusiastically endorsed the plan's approval. The South Haymarket plan recommends land uses, circulation improvements, and enhancements in the public rights-of-way to support current projects and to foster the long-term redevelopment of South Haymarket as a vibrant mixed use area, including a variety of types of residences.

Larry Enersen Urban Design Award

The Committee has annually recognized significant urban design enhancements to the City through the Larry Enersen Urban Design Award, which was initiated in 1984. Beginning in 2013, the Committee strengthened the award process by enlisting a “jury” of former UDC members and other design professionals to nominate award-worthy projects to the Committee for endorsement. Michele Tilley and Gordon Scholz co-chaired the jury, which also included Bob Ripley, Margaret Berry, and Tom Laging, with Planning staff support. The 2014 winner—announced in 2015—was The Pinnacle Bank Arena and associated West Haymarket Redevelopment. The Urban Design Committee cited the unified plan which guided the overall development and the project's success in implementing that broad vision to create a vibrant urban place, extending the energy of the adjacent Historic Haymarket District.

The jury's recommendation and Committee's choice for 2016 will be announced among the Mayor's Arts Awards.

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