CITY OF LINCOLN NEBRASKA

# THE URBAN PAGE

THE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE URBAN DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

**1st Quarter 2020**

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www.lincoln.ne.gov, keyword: urban



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EQUAL HOUSING OPPORTUNITY

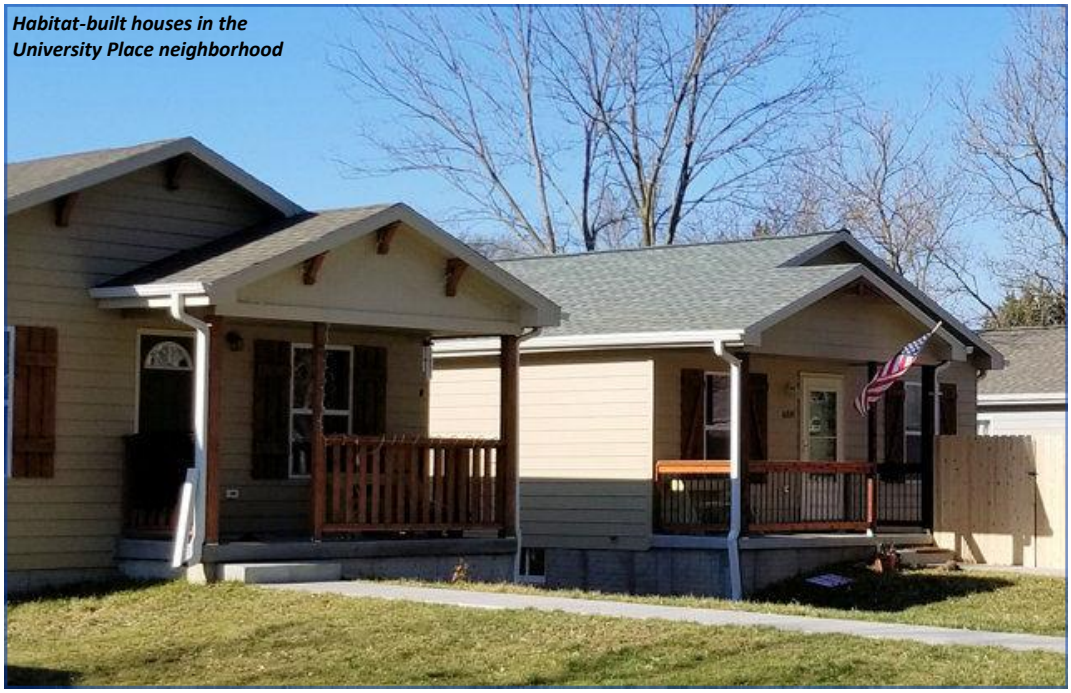
EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER


## Habitat for Humanity of Lincoln = Housing

One of the Urban Development Department's primary funding sources is the federal Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG). CDBG has a stated goal of:

> *". . . developing viable urban communities, by providing decent housing, a suitable living environment and expanded economic opportunities."*

The goal of decent housing is one shared by many individuals and organizations, including Habitat for Humanity of Lincoln (HHL). Urban Development assists HHL (and other nonprofit home builders) by funding acquisition of parcels on which the nonprofits build new homes.



***Habitat-built houses in the University Place neighborhood***

HHL was established in 1988 by local community leaders, faith leaders, and city officials to address the need for decent, affordable housing locally. In the intervening years, HHL has built or repaired more than 170 homes and housed more than 800 men, women and children. However, the amount of affordable housing needed is not a static quantity; as Lincoln has grown, so has the need.

HHL has seen the need, too. In 2019, they had 21 percent more applications than in 2018. To better address increasing housing needs, they have developed a new three-year strategic plan that maps out a more effective construction model for new housing and adds a home repair program that will serve existing low-income homeowners in the community. The strategic plan will take the organization step-by-step toward serving more families in the community.

According to the City of Lincoln's *Affordable Housing Coordinated Action Plan* (see box, right), the greatest shortage of housing units is for

### Affordable Housing Coordinated Action Plan

The draft plan is now complete and available for review and comment at the project website: lincoln.ne.gov, keyword: affordable.

In an effort to keep the public safe and help prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus, public meetings planned for March were cancelled. However, the presentation on the Plan from the February 24th pre-City Council meeting is available on the website. Feedback is encouraged and the public comment period will continue until May15th. All comments will be considered when the final draft is completed in May/June. Check the project website periodically for timing updates. For questions and comments, contact Wynn Hjermstad, Community Development Manager, whjermstad@lincoln.ne.gov.

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households making less than $25,000 per year. With unpredictable rent increases, overcrowded conditions and/or a lack of access to affordable financing, these families live with the constant fear of losing the roof over their heads. For some, HHL may offer a way to live in a stable, safe home where their children can be healthier and more academically successful.

HHL homeowners are chosen based on their need for housing, income level, and willingness to partner with HHL. A family's income must be below 50% of the median income for Lancaster County. Participants receive homeownership training familiarizing them with the increased responsibilities of homeownership and community upkeep. HHL's homebuyer program accepts applications each year from August 15th through September 5th.

HHL strives to build green, sustainable, energy-efficient housing that is both environmentally friendly and more cost-effective for low-income homeowners to maintain. To keep costs manageable, Habitat homes are modestly-sized – large enough for the homeowner's family's needs, but small enough to keep construction and maintenance costs down. Quality, local construction materials are used. The construction labor is provided by volunteers and partner families. HHL homeowners pay an affordable mortgage. Their mortgage payments are recycled into the building fund, which is used for the construction of more homes.

Sponsors, contributors and volunteers are vital to HHL's success. There are fulfilling volunteer opportunities for everyone – from groups to individuals – to use their skills, time, and knowledge. Contributors include the Realtors Association of Lincoln, the Home Builders Association of Lincoln, and the Community Services Fund of Nebraska. To learn more about applying, go online or contact Theresa Gerlach, Homeownership Coordinator, tgerlach@lincolnhabitat.org.

### The UDD Connection

The Urban Development Department also works with other nonprofit home builders in Lincoln by helping acquire lots on which new, affordable housing can be built and by funding the First Home Loan Program for first-time homebuyers.

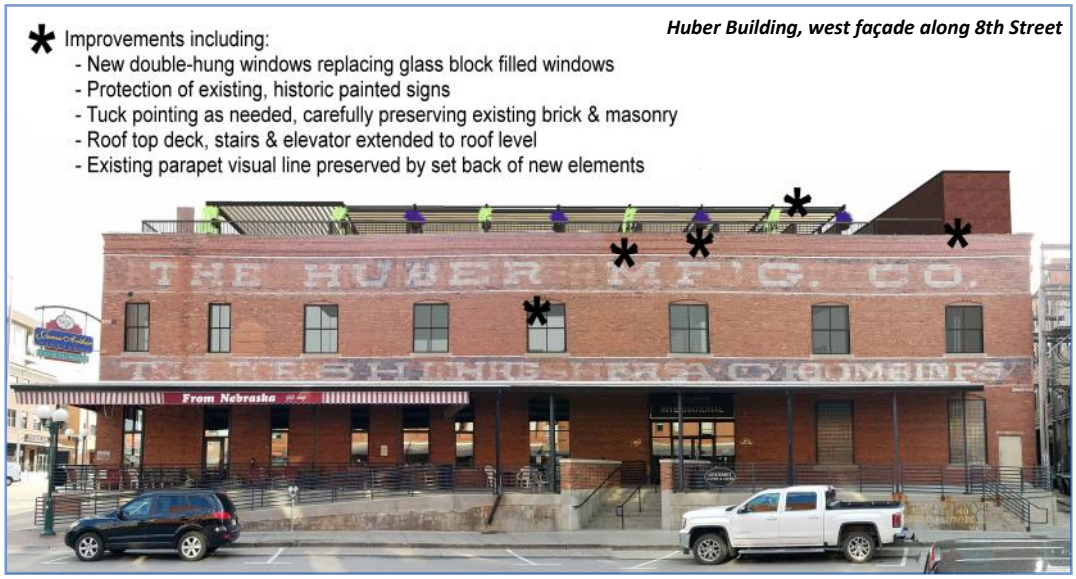
Local nonprofit home builders include:

- Affordable Housing Initiative (AHI)
- Lincoln Housing Authority's High School Build Program
- NeighborWorks-Lincoln
- South of Downtown Community Development Organization

## Redevelopment Projects—the Early Stages

*Redevelopment projects go through stages of "life," beginning as mere ideas, becoming more real as details are worked out and commitments are made. Many, but not all, concepts make it to completion. These projects are beyond the conceptual stage, but still have several stages to go.*

**Huber Building:** Located in the Haymarket at 8th and Q, the Huber Building is an important part of Lincoln's history. Demolition work is underway for the six condominium units that will be installed on the second floor of the Huber Building. New windows will be installed, the brick façade will be repaired, and the historic signage will be preserved. A new elevator and roof top amenities will also be constructed. This project will have great views of the Historic Haymarket's 8th Street pedestrian traffic, as well as the Farmer's Market on Saturdays




***Huber Building, west façade along 8th Street***

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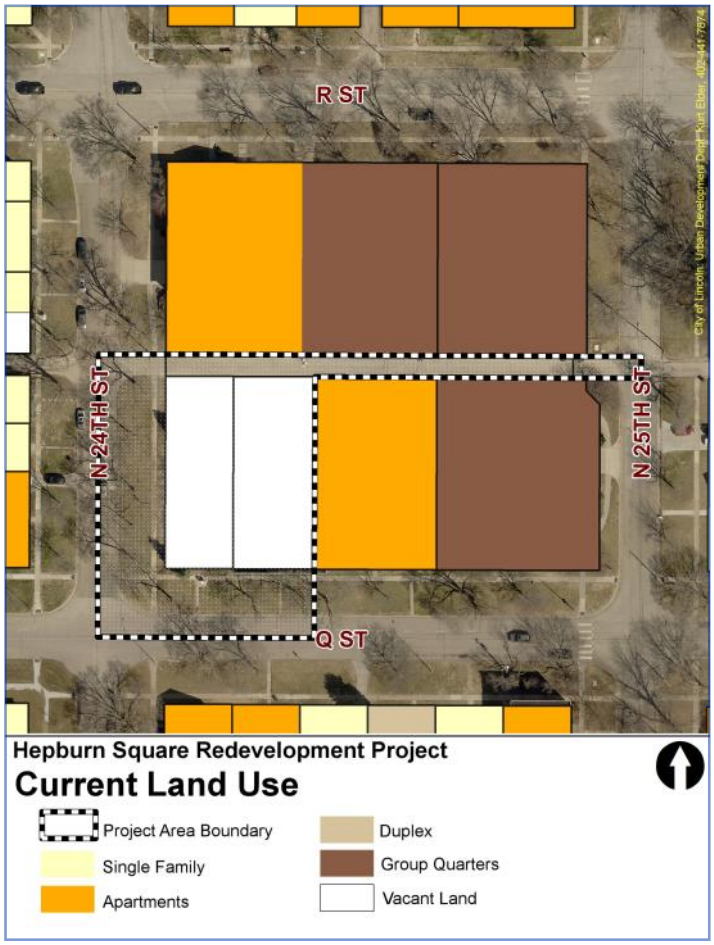
*Central Hotel — 22 new residential units coming*

**Central Hotel/13 & O:** While the project takes its name from an historic use of one of its buildings, it will not be a hotel. Instead, upper floors of three buildings — 1317, 1319, and 1325 O Street — will be renovated into twenty-two residential units. The active businesses at street level will be retained, while the three building façades will be restored to their original condition. If the City Council determines that the project conforms to the City's Comprehensive Plan, the next step will be negotiating the Redevelopment Agreement and getting City Council approval of that as well. Tentatively, work is expected to begin this spring.

**Hepburn Square:** If approved, the Hepburn Square project will redevelop the currently vacant property at 2400 Q Street into a twelve-unit, mixed-income apartment building. Tentatively, the project will include five one-bedroom units, five two-bedroom units, and two three-bedroom units. Hepburn Square will increase the supply of affordable housing in the area. In conjunction with an adjacent, newly remodeled twelve-plex, the project will include two units of affordable housing for households earning 60% of area median income and will accept an additional four households with Lincoln Housing Authority housing vouchers.

Based on recommendations from a March meeting of the Urban Design Committee, Hepburn Square is moving ahead, but design changes will be reconsidered at the April meeting. The project is included in the Antelope Valley Redevelopment area and an amendment to the Redevelopment Plan to include the project is scheduled for public hearing at the April 15th Planning Commission meeting.




*Hepburn Square — map showing project area boundary and the current land use*

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# Redevelopment Projects—the Idea Stage

*The City has open Invitations for Redevelopment Proposals (IFRP's) posted online for consideration by public, private, and/or nonprofit entities interested in and able to propose a project in a redevelopment area. Once the City receives a proposal, an announcement is made and others are encouraged to submit alternate proposals for that same site. Two redevelopment projects are in this early "idea stage."*

***Pershing Center, on Centennial Mall between M and N Streets***

**Pershing Center**: The City recently announced in a press release that a proposal for the redevelopment of the Pershing Center site had been received. Other proposals for this site will be accepted until Noon, May 11. After that, a selection committee will review all proposals submitted and make a recommendation to the Mayor's Office. Since the press release, the City has received a great deal of interest in the site, so several proposals may be offered. Ideally, the City will receive several proposals which will provide a variety of projects from which to choose.

Pershing Center, formerly the City's event center, is strategically located in the eastern part of downtown, near federal and state office buildings, along recently renovated Centennial Mall, and beside the N Street Cycle Track. The site is one of five catalyst projects identified in the 2018 Downtown Master Plan. For further details, see the press release or see the Pershing Center IFRP.

***Block 65, site of future City parking garage and other redevelopment, looking NW from 14th and M Streets***

**Block 65 Parking Facility Site:** The City has received a redevelopment proposal for City-owned property on Block 65, which is bounded by 13th, 14th, M and N Streets. Alternative proposals for the Block 65 site will be accepted until Noon CDT on Monday, April 6, 2020.

The City purchased a portion of Block 65 in 2019 to build a new parking garage, at least six stories high, with 700 to 900 stalls. The exact size of the garage will depend on the orientation of the garage, cost, and area need. The garage has not yet been designed, but part of the site is expected to remain open for redevelopment. The City would also consider private development on the first floor of the garage and/or above the top level of the garage. For additional information about the site, limitations, and parking garage site parameters, see the press release or the Lincoln Center IFRP, Block 65 Site Info.

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# Timely Tidbits

***2020 Civil Rights Conference:*** The 2020 Civil Rights Conference has been canceled due to the corona virus pandemic. See you next year!

***2020 US Census:*** April 1, census day, is rapidly approaching! Many households have already been notified. New with the 2020 Census is the option to complete the form **on-line** or by **telephone**. The City has established a website with much information about the census at **LNKCounts.org**. You can also click on the census link on the City's home page at ***lincoln.ne.gov***.

Why is completing the census important to Nebraska and Lincoln? For the next ten years, the 2020 census data will be used to determine:

- Annual distribution of $4 billion in federal funds back to Nebraska that are used by the state, tribal, and local governments. This distribution is based on Census population, and over a 10-year span every missed household in Nebraska results in a $51,980 loss in federal funds.
- Redistricting of state legislative districts.
- Areas eligible for housing assistance and rehabilitation loans.
- Statistics and trends used by federal, tribal, state, and local governments in planning and implementing programs, services, and emergency response.
- Statistics and trends used by private businesses with market-based decisions.
- Future transportation needs for all segments of the population.

During this time of uncertainty, this is something you can do from the safety of your home that will have a significant positive impact on your community. And it's even easy!

***Vendor Truck Ordinance Amendment:*** Lincoln's vendor truck owners are again reaching out to City officials, asking for an amendment to the Vendor Truck Ordinance. The City has proposed a two month vendor truck pilot. The pilot will help identify the policies and procedures that should be enacted by the City to allow vendor trucks to operate while still protecting the health, safety, and well-being of residents and visitors to the congested Downtown area. While COVID-19 has put a temporary hold on this pilot, the City is preparing to start the pilot when gatherings are once again permitted.

The City and vendor truck owners identified four initial locations to be tested. These locations are some distance from existing restaurants, have seven or more parking stalls that could be reserved, and have parallel parking stalls that would allow vending to a wide sidewalk well away from vehicular traffic. The vendor truck owners will work together to reserve stalls through the Urban Development Department's Parking Division office. The reservation process is expected to eventually be through the Parking Division website, with the ability to reserve stalls if a truck has an active vendor truck permit number. Those wanting additional information on the pilot can contact Hallie Salem at hsalem@lincoln.ne.gov.

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# 11th Street Wins 2020 CD Week Award

The 11th Street Project has won Lincoln's 2020 Community Development Week award – at last! 11th Street has been a study in tenacity and perseverance. Over nine years ago, the City and Everett Neighborhood Association were partnering on community revitalization efforts. The neighborhood had identified improvements to the 11th Street corridor as a priority. When City staff heard about a federal initiative called Greening America's Capitals (GAC), it was the perfect opportunity and perfect timing. Lincoln applied for and was chosen as one of the first five state capital cities to participate.

*Lighting, signage, landscaping, sidewalk improvements along 11th Street*

At that time, *Greening America's Capitals* was a project partnership between three federal agencies: Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and Department of Transportation (DOT). GAC's purpose was to help state capitals develop an implementable vision of distinctive, environmentally friendly neighborhoods that incorporate innovative green building and green infrastructure strategies. Now known as *Greening America's Communities*, the program has been expanded beyond state capital cities, but the basic purpose remains the same.

*Bike racks, signage, landscaping, sidewalk improvements along 11th Street*

In late 2011, GAC sent a design team to provide design assistance for the project -- 11th Street between A Street and Lincoln Mall. The GAC team facilitated a workshop to hear ideas and suggestions from the people who knew the 11th Street area best -- neighborhood residents, local small business and property owners, students, and local organizations active in the area. The community needs that emerged most strongly were improving safety and security, retaining neighborhood history, adding lighting, and increasing green space. The GAC design team recommended concepts to address the needs: outdoor amenities and a festival space at 11th & G Street, bike lanes, landscaping with native plants, a roundabout at 11th & D Street, an urban garden at Everett Elementary, and green alleyways.

*Traffic circle at 11th and D Streets, native plantings in pedestrian "bump outs"*

Using the GAC concepts, City staff, local design consultants (*The Clark Enersen Partners*) and neighborhood residents prioritized implementation actions. The top priorities were pedestrian lighting and pedestrian bump outs. Lighting would improve safety and visually create a sense of space. Pedestrian bump-outs at street intersections would improve pedestrian safety and allow bio-retention planting areas for aesthetics and to improve storm water drainage. The next priority level included a traffic circle at 11th and D Street, street amenities like bike racks, trash receptacles, recycling receptacles, signage, gathering space at Klein's Corner, sidewalks, parking improvements and painted bike lanes. Alleyway "greening" and the urban garden at Everett Elementary were at the lowest priority level, mostly because both were beyond the scope of the project.

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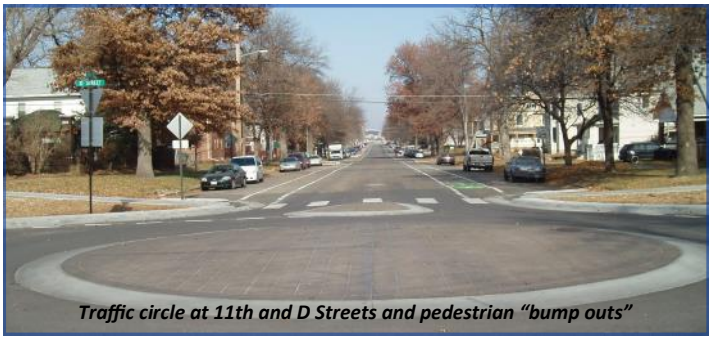
Ironically, pedestrian lighting was the last part of the project completed. Bids in 2013 and 2014 exceeded available funding. Finally, with some adjustments to the specifications, a bid in 2018 was accepted. In 2019, the final pedestrian lighting improvements were installed – persistence paid off!

While waiting for the lighting, many other things were accomplished:

- The traffic circle was built at 11th and D Street to help slow traffic.
- Bump-outs were constructed where D, E, F, and G Streets intersected 11th Street and the accompanying bioswales are planted with native species. The bioswales help reduce stormwater run-off and pooling.
- Bike lanes were painted on 11th Street from D Street to Centennial Mall.
- The Klein's Corner signage at 11th & G Street was cleaned and restored and new neighborhood signs were installed at the 11th & D Street traffic circle.



*Traffic circle at 11th and D Streets and pedestrian "bump outs"*

- A map of historic neighborhood sites was built by the Everett Neighborhood Association and installed at 11th & G Street.
- Bike racks, trash receptacles, and recycling receptacles were installed.
- Sidewalks were repaired and/or replaced.
- Trees were planted.
- RESTORE (**R**evitalizing **E**leventh **S**treet **T**hrough **R**ehabilitation of **E**xteriors), a housing rehabilitation program, was made available to both rental and owner-occupied housing units along the 11th Street corridor. Using about $73,000 in CDBG funds, the exteriors of one single family house and nine multi-family units (in three buildings) were rehabilitated.

*Native plantings in pedestrian "bump outs"*

- Lincoln Transportation and Utilities Department (LTU) replaced storm sewer along the corridor earlier than scheduled, so the street would only need to be disrupted once. The project helped reduce standing water in several locations.
- Sculptures (created by nationally known artist, Jim Huntington) were installed on the east side of 11th Street at G Street. The sculptures were also lit in conjunction with the recently completed pedestrian lighting.
- Banners celebrating the area's historic past are now being installed on select pedestrian lights throughout the corridor.

*Designated bike lanes on both sides of 11th Street*

- The streetscape project is currently maintained by the City of Lincoln and managed by LTU staff.

Over $1.1 million in Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds leveraged nearly $420,000 of additional investment from Lincoln Transportation & Utilities for storm sewer replacement, bioswales, and traffic circle design and construction. Investment by neighborhood residents continues to illustrate neighborhood pride of place, with building murals, community gardens, and monthly alley clean-ups.

And those green alleys that were "beyond the scope" of the plan? The Everett Neighborhood Association is forging ahead, in partnership with the South of Downtown Community Development Organization and the City, to improve drainage, safety and aesthetics in alleys throughout the corridor – as visualized nine years ago in the Greening America's Capitals Plan for 11th Street. Persistence does, indeed, pay off!