

MEETING RECORD

Advanced public notice of the Urban Design Committee meeting was posted on the County-City bulletin board and the Planning Department's website.

NAME OF GROUP:	URBAN DESIGN COMMITTEE
DATE, TIME AND PLACE OF MEETING:	Tuesday, March 4, 2025, 3:00 p.m., County-City Building, City Council Chambers, 555 S. 10 th Street, Lincoln, NE.
MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:	Mark Canney, Jill Grasso, Emily Deeker, Michael Harpster, and Gill Peace. Tom Huston and Michelle Penn absent.
OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:	Arvind Gopalakrishnan, Collin Christopher, Andrew Thierolf, Kristi Merfeld and Clara McCully of the Planning Department.

Acting Chair Peace called the meeting to order and acknowledged the posting of the Open Meetings Act in the room.

Deeker moved approval of the minutes of the regular meeting held on February 4, 2025, seconded by Canney, and approved 4-0; Canney, Deeker, Harpster and Peace voting yes. Grasso, Huston, and Penn absent.

Grasso entered at 3:04 pm.

UDR25011 Bison Witches Sidewalk Cafe

March 4, 2025

Members present: Canney, Grasso, Huston, Deeker, Harpster, and Peace. Huston and Penn absent.

Collin Christopher, Planning Department, 555 S 10th Street Ste 213 Lincoln, NE, came forward and stated this item has been in front of the board multiple times over the last couple of years. The sidewalk café at Bison Witches, located at Tower Square, originally received approval in 2013. In 2022, a red enclosure was attached to the structure, and an internal review determined that it had not been approved for a sidewalk café.

The first concern is aesthetics. The enclosure does not align with the surrounding design and contrasts with the public space's intended openness.

Second is lack of transparency. The current enclosure obstructs sightlines, diminishing pedestrian engagement and disrupting the synergy between public and private spaces.

Third is approval from the artist. Modifications to the blue tile wall or pavers require approval from the artist under a 30-year agreement. Staff have reached out multiple times but have yet to receive a response. If the proposed design does not require removing pavers, it may proceed. However, any modifications requiring footings must be approved by the artist.

Rob Otte, U.S. Property, 129 N 10th Street, Suite 313, Lincoln, NE 68508, came forward and stated he does not represent Bison Witches, but they are the tenant for their property. They are exploring alternative solutions that reduce expenses while maintaining compliance.

Commissioner Peace stated his proposal includes installing clear motorized curtains manufactured by a Canadian company that specializes in these systems. The goal is to create a design that allows staff to open and close the enclosure as needed, rather than dealing with a permanent fixture.

Along the existing handrails, he proposes a segmented wall that follows the curvature of the tower. This system functions better if the enclosure height is limited to about six or seven feet. The floating yellow wall will provide a sealing surface for the curtains. The color is currently proposed as yellow to align with the surrounding aesthetics, but it could be a neutral gray if necessary. The plan also proposes installing an aluminum and glass storefront system on the north and south sides, ensuring greater transparency. This approach minimizes invasiveness and avoids deep foundations or structural changes.

Canney asked about water runoff.

Gill stated there are not any proposed changes to the roof. The steel structure is currently there. This change would not alter the existing roof or drainage system.

Grasso asked if Gill thought about wall that encapsulates the existing wall, and what is the construction?

Peace stated the existing handrail is a stout steel structure with vertical bars. We plan to attach a floating steel-clad or stucco wall to this handrail without tearing out the pavers or installing deep footings. If the artist has input, he will certainly take it into account.

Christopher stated, short of the artist's feedback, staff would take the Commission's recommendations on texture, color, or other elements.

Grasso asked if the design matches the storefront of the current building.
Peace confirmed.

Grasso if they considered painting the roof and columns to match so it doesn't look monolithic.

Peace stated they haven't discussed it but would take recommendations.

Grasso stated she likes the idea of opening and shutting.

Peace stated the storefront is almost the same north and south. One side is a bit longer as the circle radius for the sculpture is offset.

Harpster stated he appreciates the transparency and ability for cross breezes in the design.

Eric Schmeling, citizen, came forward and asked if the wall replace the enclosure, or will there be both a wall and a curtain?

Peace stated there will be both. The curtain will retract, but the low wall remains for structural support.

Canney stated he has mixed feelings about the color and design of the low wall. It would be good to have further clarification, especially if the artist provides input.

Grasso stated, thinking of it as cladding for the existing handrail, it broadens the range of materials that could be used. She does not want to step on the original artistic intent.

Otte stated they like the proposed designs, but want to come back with final pricing. They are looking to soften the costs, considering how it will affect the monthly rent for Bison Witches.

Grasso stated the Commission has talked about this a lot and have determined the specifics of what is important. Ultimately the design intent is for similar attributes to outdoor seating otherwise it is just an extension. Motorizing is costly, but they could do manual.

UDR25012 University Place Sub-Area Plan**March 4, 2025**

Andrew Thierolf, Planning Department, 555 S 10th Street, Suite 213, Lincoln, NE, came forward and stated staff has been working on this subarea plan for about a year, focusing on the University Place neighborhood and its surrounding areas. Subarea plan allows focus on specific areas, create a strategic vision for a neighborhood. This strategic vision aligns with Lincoln's comprehensive plan.

University Place is home to approximately 9,243 residents, with an average age of 27.9. The neighborhood is a designated creative district with strong artistic and historic character. Infrastructure projects, including improvements at 33rd and Cornhusker and water main replacements, have contributed to recent revitalization efforts. Key concerns include heavy traffic on North 48th Street, outdated buildings, and high rates of building code violations. Public input gathered from surveys and meetings highlighted a need for traffic calming, more diverse commercial uses, and quality affordable housing.

Plan recommendations include reconfiguring 48th Street to a main street-style corridor, supporting TIF-funded revitalization efforts, and integrating modern and historic preservation strategies.

Eric Schmeling, citizen, came forward and asked if there would be any grocery space in this neighborhood.

Thierolf stated there are no current plans for a grocery store, but we are ensuring that zoning and financial incentives are in place to encourage one.

UDC 2024 Annual Report**March 4, 2025**

Members present: Canney, Grasso, Huston and Deeker, Harpster, and Peace. Penn absent.

Christopher stated the annual report summarizes key projects and committee actions over the past year. Highlights include progress on downtown corridors, the

multimodal center, and South Haymarket improvements; updates on major urban development projects, including public-private partnerships; key policy changes that impact urban design approvals and infrastructure planning; and continued efforts to enhance pedestrian-friendly urban spaces through revised zoning and design incentives.

Grasso stated there are some exciting projects.

Canney thanked staff for their work.

ACTION:

Canney moved approval, seconded by Deeker, and approved 5-0. Canney, Grasso, Deeker, Harpster, and Peace voting "yes." Huston and Penn absent.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:11 p.m.