



NEBRASKA CAPITOL ENVIRONS COMMISSION

The Nebraska Capitol Environs Commission will hold a meeting on **Friday, April 24, 2026 at 8:30 a.m.** in the County-City Building, 555 S. 10th Street, Lincoln, Nebraska, in **City Council Chambers** on the 1st Floor. For more information, please contact the Lincoln City/Lancaster County Planning Department at 402-441-7491.

AGENDA

April 24, 2026

1. Approval of meeting record from [February 27, 2026](#)

Public Hearing & Action

2. [LPS Parking Lot at 2403 and 2411 J Street](#) – Certificate of Appropriateness
(Lincoln Public Schools: UDR26024)

Discuss & Advise

3. Staff report & miscellaneous

AT THIS TIME, ANYONE WISHING TO SPEAK ON AN ITEM

NOT ON THE AGENDA, MAY DO SO.

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MEETING RECORD

Advanced public notice of the Nebraska Capitol Environs Commission meeting was posted on the County-City bulletin board and the Planning Department's website.

NAME OF GROUP: NEBRASKA CAPITOL ENVIRONS COMMISSION

DATE, TIME AND PLACE OF MEETING: Friday, February 27, 2026, 8:30 a.m., City Council Chambers, County-City Building, 555 S. 10th Street, Lincoln, Nebraska.

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE: Eileen Bergt, Kile Johnson, David Quade, Andrea Gebhart, David Landis and Ann Post.

Heidi Cuca absent

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE: Collin Christopher, Paul Barnes, David Cary, Arvind Gopalakrishnan and Kristi Merfeld of the Planning and Development Services Department; Bob Ripley, Heidi Uhing of Woods Park Neighborhood Association, Erin Bright of Olsson and other interested parties were present.

STATED PURPOSE OF MEETING: Nebraska Capitol Environs Commission Meeting

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

Johnson then called for the approval of the minutes of the regular meeting held January 23, 2026.

Motion for approval made by Landis; seconded by Gebhart

Minutes were approved 6-0: Bergt, Gebhart, Landis, Johnson, Post and Quade, voting "yes"; Cuca absent.

DISCUSS AND ADVISE:

UDR 26015 Sidewalk Playbook (Planning & Development Services Department)

February 27, 2026

Members Present: Bergt, Gebhart, Landis, Johnson, Post and Quade.
Cuca absent.

Collin Christopher, Planning and Development Services Department, 555 S 10th Street, Lincoln NE came forward and stated that this is a preliminary, advisory review for a project the Planning Department has been working on for the past year. Paul Barnes will go over the larger concept behind the sidewalk café regulations, but we want to provide a little background of how this came together and mention a few things. The sidewalk café is something Urban Development has managed for many years at this point. Since its establishment of this update project in the last year, there have been conversations for Planning to take it over. Arvind, the staff planner for the Urban Design Committee, will also be taking it to the Urban Design Committee for approval, and most of the café spaces go to the Urban Design Committee so this makes sense. The permitting process is something that we are trying to improve and clean up. There is an effort to make this as easy as possible and the guidebook being discussed today is a big step towards making that happen.

While this was occurring, the City was also finalizing plans for Project O Street. One concept that came from that project was the idea of allowing cafes to push away from the building; not requiring them, but allowing them. From a landscape architect perspective, it would provide a more dynamic scenario where the cafes really feel integrated into the streetscape and cafes could be in the same place where mature shade trees are and other outdoor furniture. This frees up that space against the facade of a building to be used for shopping and retail. Another goal of the streetscape project is to allow the barriers that define the sidewalk cafe spaces to be a little bit more flexible in how they're implemented. Almost every barrier that's out there today has a 36- to 42-inch railing and is not very attractive. When there is a change of ownership of that space or a period of time with no tenant, we end up with a fenced off area with no use. This is hard to remove without participation from the property owner, so we are looking for more flexible ways to define that space. We're also thinking about the investment that has been made in the sidewalk and streetscape so we can create design standards where the café railing is more easily movable and not mounted to the concrete.

The discussion today is also focused on adding sidewalk café allowances to the O-1 districts. Currently, cafes are only allowed in the B commercial districts. Lincoln Mall is zoned O-1 and four years ago when the South of Downtown PUD was worked on, there were some changes made to O-1 to accommodate more restaurants within that zoning district. Previously the regulation stated that if there was to be a food service restaurant for that use, it had to be relocated entirely within a building and could not

have an exterior door that went directly into the building. The restaurant had to be accessed from the interior and had restrictions on how big it could be. Some of those restrictions were scaled back to allow it not to be entirely internal and allow some additional floor area. This zoning change would now allow a restaurant to have access to the adjacent sidewalk to put a café out there. This change isn't likely to dramatically impact Lincoln Mall as much, but it could have impacts on how South Haymarket develops as it goes from more industrial and office uses, to a little bit more of a mix of residential and maybe some retail. There are some opportunities as this district redevelops, to allow some sidewalk cafes to exist within O-1. This is how we got to this point and how it impacts Capital Environs. Paul will go into more detail now.

Paul Barnes; Planning and Development Services Department; 555 S 10th Street, Lincoln NE; thanked Collin for providing a really good overview and now we will get into a little more of the details of what is being discussed with this proposal. Let's start with what is currently in the code that talks about sidewalk cafes and why we like them. The code as it is today states that we want to promote sidewalk cafes as they make our B zone districts active and attractive pedestrian environments. They provide opportunities for creative colorful pedestrian focused commercial activities on a day, night and seasonal basis. They encourage commercial activities which add excitement, charm, vitality, diversity and good design. Also encouraging the upgrading of storefronts in the development of compatible and well designed elements within these districts and promoting land conservation, redevelopment, energy savings and indirect tax revenue is in the code.

Today that is what is really trying to be promoted with this program. Barnes referred to the map to give a reference of the areas that we are talking about. This doesn't only apply to the downtown. We have B zone districts all across the city, so in a sense this is citywide but for this presentation we are focusing on downtown and the Capital Environs District. The blue outline areas are Capital Environs and the teal are highlighting those areas that are O-1 and not currently allowed to apply for a sidewalk café. As mentioned before a lot of that is along Lincoln Mall. The Landmark Café that used to exist had a table outside but it wasn't a formal sidewalk café. If a café was to go back there it could be approved for a more formal designated space under new rules. There are B zone properties where this could happen today within Capital Environs. The Centennial Mall right of way is also highlighted and that is handled a little bit differently. We would coordinate anything on that with parks because it has a higher level of review and regulation.

The Mayor's Office has been heavily involved with this effort and as Collin noted, this has been coordinated with Project O Street. The significant investment that is going on with that project along many corridors in downtown and the music district has been a really transformational project for our downtown. The Mayor is very interested not only in the impact on Project O Street but how these standards will apply throughout. This guidebook embodies the design standards that have been drafted that would be adopted into code, but would be a more public facing document that applicants and members of the public would be able to refer to in a more readable way and be published on the website. We will walk through what we talked about in this book in terms of the application process. We are trying to streamline some of it and want to create an online application process that makes it easier for people to apply. In some cases, but not with Capital Environs, some of these applications could be approved administratively if they meet all the criteria and design standards. Most of the right-of-way changes within Capital Environs require a certificate of appropriateness. It is something to lean on in terms of sidewalk cafes. Applications for sidewalk cafés would be submitted online and reviewed by a multi-department Sidewalk Café Review Committee consisting of representatives from Planning and Development Services, the Health Department, the City Clerk's Office, Transportation and Utilities, the Police Department, Urban Development, and the Fire Prevention Bureau. If they meet the standards, they could be approved by the City Clerk's Office. Applications that deviate from the standards may require review by the appropriate board.

There are different cases of eligibility because we do need to have setbacks and buffers from existing elements within the streetscape for safety purposes. So we want to make sure that sidewalk cafes and barriers aren't near things such as fire hose connections or fire hydrants. Whether it be benches and trash receptacles or parking meters, we want to make sure that all of that is accessible by anyone using those facilities on the sidewalk. We do have a pretty specific distinction with alcohol sales within a sidewalk café. We've been talking to the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission about this, but for any sidewalk cafe that does serve alcohol a barrier of a minimum 36 inches is still required. We are relaxing that though, if alcohol sales are not included in the sidewalk café. I'll get to some of that but there is a differentiation between alcohol sales or not, and then this table just talks a little bit more about those buffers.

Barnes stated that Arvind has created diagrams to show what we mean by all these standards. This diagram shows areas we want to highlight in terms of clear zones or areas where sidewalk cafes could be located. The orange area shows a frontage zone and an area adjacent to the building where sidewalk cafes could be. The purple color would be an entrance into the building. Then there is this curb zone so if people want

to separate that sidewalk café from the building, they could move it out to the curb zone. One of the most important pieces is the yellow area that is called the pedestrian passageway, and we need to make sure there is still a 5 foot minimum of clear zone for pedestrians to travel through to meet ADA. It needs to meet design standards and have adequate space whether someone is walking or rolling along the sidewalk. This set of diagrams demonstrates the different types of configurations that could be allowed under these design standards regulations. There are different configurations where a cafe could extend further in front of an adjacent building if approved by the City and the adjacent neighbor. We are making things more flexible because we want to encourage these as they do create vibrant space in our downtown. This also talks about in a more diagrammatic way where the buffers are required. The different elements are highlighted in the streetscape and show the distances that we need to have to keep those elements safe and stable. Accessibility is a big component and want to make sure that it's maintained. There is a detail of that showing where the ADA routes will be located not only along the sidewalk or outside of the café but also up to the building entrance and within the café and also the requirements for the furniture within the café to meet those standards. The code today does talk about maintenance, but we do want to get into that a little bit more with this effort about internally having more routine inspections of these sidewalk cafes. This has not been a part of the past practice but we do want to make sure these are well kept. The approval permit is issued by the City annually, so inspections can occur to make sure that they are not falling into disrepair and are following the rules. Of course this is a public right of way so if there is every an emergency or in need of this for the City to get into this space, that will happen and so the operators just get put on notice. These permits are approved on an annual basis, which gives us an opportunity to review any changes proposed. There is also an annual fee and then an inspection would happen as well.

We also talked about reasons why there could be a revocation of that permit. The reasons might include if they're not maintaining any of those accessible paths, if they're not operating within the hours that we've set or approved, not keeping it clean or not following up on the inspection reports. If they are not following through with what they've said on their application those are all reasons why that permit could be revoked. We do get into details about the elements within the café. We want to make sure the furniture placed within there is going to be durable and meant for outdoor use. We want it to be commercial grade and we don't want any of the furniture to be affixed to the sidewalk. That is something new with this package. Today you can actually bolt or anchor in some furniture or the railings into the sidewalks. With the significant investments that were thought about along the O Street corridor and also within the Capital Environs area, we do not want to disturb any pavers or work that has already been done and want to keep it protected. Instead, heavy barriers with

heavy bases and possibly planters that are heavy enough that can't be moved, but delineate the space are allowed. This will not disrupt or be anchored into the sidewalk. This feature is another area that is offering a lot more flexibility, especially if alcohol is not served within the café. A lot of other cities do relax this as well, requiring an enclosed sidewalk café where alcohol is sold or not. If the barriers are not otherwise required and are self-imposed by the City, we can make it more inviting, more open and less gated. Proposing planters, other types of bollards or ropes could be used in this case for delineating that space. A fence could be used but not required.

Bergt asked so does that mean that you can have nothing? Pictures that are shown here have nothing.

Barnes replied, yes, if there are no alcohol sales and no desire to have that delineation as the operator, they could just have tables and chairs. It would still need a permit, insurance and all the requirements, but they would not have to be a fully enclosed space with the barrier. Other cities do this, and it is more common in other countries. We are trying to make that environment just welcoming and open overall. If there are going to be rigid barriers, we will talk about what is acceptable and things we don't want to see. Anything that is unstable is not wanted in the public right of way, as it is a safety issue. Trash cans or plastic lattice are not an acceptable barrier. We don't want it to be chain link fence or untreated lumber that will rot or is not made for outdoor use. There is still a sense of pride within our public spaces that is desired to be well kept and maintained. Barnes displayed some examples of different kinds of barriers that could be used. Planter boxes really do create an inviting space, but we also want to make sure they are well maintained and watered. They also need to be kept free of debris and litter. We do also allow under certain rules outdoor heaters in some cases, those are used as part of a defining feature for the barrier or they're just within the space itself.

We also talked about overhead elements that are permitted or not. Awnings are permitted today even without a sidewalk cafe. Umbrellas are permitted within the sidewalk café permit, but no advertising is allowed on them. Any sort of picture would be considered off premise advertising. We just want to keep it neutral and clean. Shades like roller shades are permitted, because in some cases the café faces west, and we want it comfortable for the patrons. However we also want it to be a viable space for people to see in and out. The openness percentage has to be at least 5% for the roller shades, so it is not completely opaque and blocked off because it is public space. Lighting is allowable under certain circumstances. We don't want to bolt lighting into the ground, so it has to be secured in some sort of planter or heavy base. Then there needs to be a minimum clearance of 7 feet for overhead features. The Fire Bureau would have specific approval over any heaters as they do today. Heaters in

the café spaces can not be wood burning fire pits for many reasons. There are also rules for overhead sprinklers and things for safety. There are some areas that are an exception, if we go down the route of including Capital Environs it would include the district as a called out area. This is just like South Haymarket which has local landmark designation and existing historic preservation. The design standards would be referred to in addition to some of the others like durable furniture, but an emphasis put on the historic buildings. In the West Haymarket there has been an implementation of a very specific streetscape with a barrier. The photo shown imitates a railroad track along the railing and it also provides safety. Some cases there will have to be a barrier, in case it is a loading dock or a grade change, to prevent injury. There are additional resources that will be copied into the city code references. Part of the package includes code changes to the municipal codes for sidewalk café section, public right of way and proposed changes to the alcohol section that would address these changes as well. An extensive team of the Law Department, Urban Development, Police Department, Health Department, the Mayor's Office and all of Planning and Development Services have worked for over a year putting this together and would like committee input on this.

Landis commented that the Police Department has been very sensitive to the existence of permanent barriers, so alcohol does not get passed over to people on the sidewalk. In the past it has been bolted permanent fencing and was part of the O Street plan. Since the desire is to not bolt into the concrete, another way is a wonderful idea. Permanent fencing doesn't work in the winter and has to be left up. Why do we require people to block passage when they won't be eating outside at that time of year?

Barnes replied yes, it is not intended to be permanent but more temporary in nature. It is in conflict with the requirements to bolt them in place but, also disturbs the surface of the sidewalk. The space can be cleared when not in use so during off seasons the barrier could be completely removed and the sidewalk would be available. The permit is valid for a year.

Landis asked if they are free to not have outdoor dining when they don't want to.

Barnes said yes, they are not forced to have it if they do not want to.

Gebhart responded that this is a great playbook. One suggestion would be to offer guidance on storage for the winter, and did not prefer to shove all the furniture up against the building and cover with a tarp. Adding the Capital Environs like a special district is a good addition. Gebhart suggested a more consistent use and aligning the

new sidewalk cafes with existing cafes on the same block to accommodate a consistent feel.

Barnes appreciated the comments and recognized that Capital Environs is different than other areas.

Bergt stated that when the O street project was first introduced, it was thought that they would be pushed to the curb. Sitting outside, next to the curb with traffic did not sound like fun. Now that the option is there to move the tables around, it is a great idea. Not being able to walk on the sidewalk was always an issue. The only comment would be to have the 5 foot minimum sidewalk as that seems narrow. UNL campus has 7 feet sidewalk all over. 7 feet wide, so they can be plowed and pass easy would be helpful.

Barnes responded there has been a lot of conversation about 5 feet and the minimum required by law. There is still a review and approval process and in this case 5 is the absolute minimum. Also, many of you know that a curbside café would be better on 11th Street or one that is more calm and has less traffic. Maybe we will see more of those cases.

Landis asked what the purpose of the meeting was today? Is it to inform everyone of the playbook or are we to endorse it one way or another? Landis asked Johnson if there was a direction.

Johnson replied that we are just looking of information at this time correct Paul?

Barnes responded yes, we are bringing it today and then next week we're meeting with the Urban Design Committee and then possibly with our Historic Preservation Commission as well in March. The package will go to the Planning Commission on March 18th since there are design standards to be reviewed and adopted, and then on to City Council in April. We can have a conversation about that timeline with this group but that's the path we're on today. I would be looking for any comments you have on the material that's proposed. The inclusion of O-1 or any particular notes or things that we should call out within Capital Environs. Also to be more sensitive about adding the districts as a special call out in the guidebook and then getting a recommendation from this group.

Landis commented that there is time to consider recommendations before April.

Barnes stated they would like to take the recommendation forward today onto the Planning Commission March 18 and then City Council.

Johnson asked for additional comments before a motion.

Quade replied this is a great asset for people, very straightforward and easy to understand. One comment would be tied to the sidewalks from the O Street project. It is hard to walk downtown as there are a bunch of liability concerns that come from the weather. Is there more damage that comes from the sidewalks than the bolts?

Christopher responded that they have been talking about that with Project O street and the business owners are responsible for managing their portion of the sidewalk. There is a lot of deicer that we do not get to control. In the last 2 years of projects, it has been noticed that the nodes get hit pretty hard with the deicer and the concrete has started to flake. It has become really important for business owners to understand to not use deicer for a period of 24 months. This helps the sidewalk get established and lessen the risk of damage. Maybe a campaign to educate on how to preserve the sidewalks would be helpful.

Johnson stated that he likes the O-1 expansion. Lincoln Mall would be good for that. Billy's restaurant is not an O-1 but it would be great to have a sidewalk café.

Barnes replied that Billy's is more in a residential area. If they wanted to do outdoor dining on private property, they could without getting approval for a sidewalk café. They own the space and most sidewalk cafes are in the public right of way.

Johnson mentioned that across the street is a large parking lot, that used to have little residential houses. The parking lot would be a great place for development and work sidewalk cafes into that development that could be O-1.

Barnes said that if there is any proposal for development, we would look at the zoning and one in Capital Environs would definitely be part of the conversation.

Johnson liked the guidebook and if the process can be further streamlined would be great.

Post stated how the playbook is appreciated for all the work that went into creating it and is user friendly. She is interested in seeing the design standards and the code changes. The book is a great tool.

Johnson asked for a recommendation.

Barnes requested that the recommendation is clarified for everyone.

Johnson stated the motion is to include a recommendation to put O-1 into the process and to proceed with the guidebook and make any necessary changes that are appropriate.

Gebhart added calling out the Capital Environs would be helpful. Many folks do not realize that it exists.

Many were in agreement with that comment.

Johnson asked if there was anyone that wished to comment. There were no comments.

Motion for approval made by Landis; seconded by Gebhart

UDR26015 was approved 6-0: Bergt, Gebhart, Landis, Johnson, Post and Quade, voting "yes"; Cuca absent.

Johnson stated the next item is the LPS parking lot at 2403 J and 2411 J Street and this is a preliminary discussion.

UDR 26016 LPS Parking Lot at 2403 J Street and 2411 J Street- Preliminary Discussion (Lincoln Public Schools) February 27, 2026

Members Present: Bergt, Gebhart, Landis, Johnson, Post and Quade.
Cuca absent.

Christopher stated this is a proposal related to J Street on the far east edge of the Capital Environs corridor. At 24th street the Capital Environs district along J Street goes from the blocks to the North and the South, to just including the right of way. The two properties in question that will be discussed today are right along the edge of that transition. Displayed in red represents the edge of the Capital Environs district along J Street. It then travels up north and lines up with the property lines. The first 20 feet of these two lots are technically in the Capital Environs District. This falls in line with the start of the proposed parking lot. The first lot would be considered part of Environs and the second wouldn't, but both lots are being used to build the parking lot.

Lincoln Public Schools is granted exemption from certain design standards. Landscaping design standards both talk about screening the parking lots. If they are

not in the Capital Environs district they would not have to do any landscape screening to this parking lot. There would also be no restrictions on the fact that they're building a parking lot on this site itself. This comes to you because it does technically fall within the district and that means that you do have the ability to weigh in on how they are screening the parking lot and we would look at that guidance number one. Everybody is aware on the commission that design standards don't look favorably on parking lots and do expect that when parking lots are allowed that there is a more substantial screening effort taking place. The landmark buildings on Lincoln Mall are a great example of that on a different portion of the Environs district that has parking lots that are allowed. So this is where we are at with this, and that we have got a project that doesn't have a lot of direction at this point and how it should be screened. From the staff's perspective and what we have conveyed to the project team is that we would expect some level of screening. Fronting J street is important and that we would ask all to weigh in on the degree of that screening, the density how far it goes back, and what is really important to you. We have also conveyed to them that this is far east within the district. It is not clear if staff believes that a masonry wall or a more significant masonry product that would screen that parking lot is necessary at this point. We would probably be supportive of just the landscape screen. But again, this is something that is for your review and so we're really asking for your guidance on what would be recommended in this situation. We do have representatives from the design team here that can answer any other questions that you might have and so I'll just open it up to go with this where you want to.

Christopher stated that the design team's attempt at a solution is not one that the staff has vetted yet. The recommendation is to focus on the two corners of that parking lot and screening it from J Street. We are interested in feedback.

Landis questioned if there was a positive reaction to this design or an alternative design that anyone might have. Landis thought that the buffering was a really good idea, but not sure if it needs to extend as far as it does.

Erin Bright; Olsson and Associates; 601 P Street; Lincoln NE; came forward and stated that he was here on behalf of Lincoln Public Schools. Bright mentioned that Collin laid out the conversations to date on this project. In terms of the overall schedule, it looks like a permit and construction will occur over the summer. We have some time, so it is just initial feedback that would go back when meeting with LPS. Prior to getting the permit, we would come in front of this group again with the next level that is desired.

Johnson asked if the screening is part of their design.

Bright responded that yes, it is, and he is responsible for the civil engineering of design and there is a landscape design team providing recommendations for the screening.

Johnson asked, is that something the client would be willing to accept?

Bright stated that they were committed to providing some level of screening.

Johnson asked if the screening shown is consistent with what Planning would recommend, or whether there are differences.

Bright replied that they have not talked about anything that might be different. It might be in terms of material selection from plants, but he is an open book on that part of it. It could be a little harder if they are talking about walls or something above and beyond.

Johnson asked Christopher for comments and the thought process on this.

Christopher stated that this is something that could be solved with landscaping and Planning would like to see a double row fronting on J Street. They are packing in as much as possible within the property, but Planning often allows property owners to extend into the right of way in certain circumstances. So there may be an opportunity to add landscaping all the way up to that sidewalk on the east side and maybe on the west side as well. It could create a regular bed there that allows for a second row of landscaping whether it extends down south or not. Christopher was not sure if there was a strong preference towards that when we talked to Erin. Christopher said to basically wrap the corner of that parking lot. If we were to beef up that J street side just a little bit and maybe not come down as far south that might be my preference from a screening perspective.

Quade agreed with that and wondered why not take it out on both sides, both the east and west to the corner and make nodes on the edge. Quade was not sure if there would be the height that is being talked about. A tree or something that anchors on both edges could be added. Also lowering the landscaping that is coming into the south. As long as it has that sort of line on J Street it would look nice.

Gebhart replied having no preference.

Bergt stated that it seems arbitrary the way it stopped. The line for the Capital Environs is invisible on site, so it seems that it would be better, if we did maybe go to the sidewalk or make it at the edge where it kind of comes together. Have a tree on the side and kind of accentuate the J street side of it rather than this arbitrary on the

other side but that would be my suggestion. There may be a couple trees. It is disappointing that LPS has so many parking lots and there are no plants out there. They don't have to meet the code but it's kind of disappointing to see that. Bergt mentioned that she went by and looked at all these parking lots and there's no screening at all. The University doesn't have to comply either but we do try.

Bergt suggested to start over on plant material and not fussy plants that need special conditions and water. If this is not irrigated it needs to be Juniper and Spirea. That is a little tougher so that it will live. Sometimes plants die and then don't get replaced. The front of J Street needs to be accentuated and add a couple of trees. Over story trees not under story trees.

Post added that if LPS does not have screening anywhere else, they will need to remember to maintain this space. It would be a good idea to have plants that will live longer.

Landis responded that it seems to be no objections and a number of members supporting the idea of the J Street angle piece being more important over the piece that goes north and south. A double row of plants is a general direction and likes the idea very much of picking plant material that has the best chance of long life without a great deal of maintenance. It is hard to get a continued process and a lot of organizations don't do these. They are sensitive growing materials and we lose them quickly. It won't make a difference, because they won't be there, so it is important to pick the right plant choices.

Johnson commented that there is an argument on the west side and it is the view you get looking across Antelope Parkway and the Antelope Creek to extend the landscaping down along the west side.

Bob Ripley; Citizen; 3022 Williams Street; Lincoln NE; came forward and stated he was in the room when the boundaries of the East leg of Capital Environs Commission was created and beginning with a little background. The two block wide Capital Environs leg north, south, east and west includes blocks on either side of the axial Street and ends at 24th. The intent was to capture Antelope Park at that far end of the east axis. It could have stopped at Capitol Parkway and it could have stopped any number of places. Antelope Park does go and it catches the creek and does go to 24th Street. So that 2 block wide normal strip goes across Capitol Parkway, across the creek and captures what little bit of Antelope Park there is in

that two block wide strip. The intent was to hook on next to them and include just the public right of way going east and that is the reason why that long little skinny finger of the eastern Capital Environs leg goes out to 35th street. 35th Street is the greatest distance that you can view the capital on axis within the city. It cannot be done from the north, south or west. because it's terminated by this government complex. The only place you can drive toward the capital on axis and see it at a great distance and then have a continuous view of the capital tower coming into the city starts at 35th street. That is why that skinny little leg of the public right of way of J street goes as far as 35th Street. That was to control street tree planting and not have street trees brought in so close to the curb, that you obliterate the very view that you capture from 35th along J street. Ripley just wanted to give a little background on why that transition occurs and why it was put in place the way it was.

Landis asked if that sightline continues to exist from 33rd and 35th Street?

Ripley replied yes, it does. There are our friends at LES who have been incredibly accommodating with regard to removing cross street wiring over the vista from the south. Kevin Wales with LES moved all lines that cross mid-block from A Street. They used to be in every single block and have all been eliminated. So you can drive the length of Goodhue Boulevard from A of the capital and from the capital back with no lines passing over the street. The same thing was true with LES on the West mall because that used to have one block that had lines. Even Centennial Mall which was built without cross street wires had wires crossing at the campus in the alley. The location just south of R street are still there and those haven't because there is really no kind of formal access to the east. There is an access street right of way east of the Capitol one block to 17th Street and so on. There is plenty of opportunity to work with our friends at LES who've been very cooperative up to this point, to relocate some significant power lines going over J street. It would be nice to have those removed. It would also be nice to work with Parks and Rec to see about when we replant trees along J street to establish some lines that could allow for the vista to continue to be viewed from as far east as 35th Street.

Johnson stated the written material states that the Capitol should be formal in character and in line with Oaks. On the first block, 16th to 17th it should be closed to vehicular travel and have a quiet and inviting character taking advantage of its grade level accessibility from the capital and existing trees.

Ripley responded that the premise was put in place in 1986 when more formal development of the South and East axis of the Capitol was put in place, by consulting team of Sinclair Healey architects and Kim Todd landscape architect. They took a plan that had been developed, a brief time prior to that and they made a more formal development and created a transition. This would allow for development in the block and a half east of the Capitol as it exists now. Allowing for

future acquisition of additional land that would allow the east access of the Capitol to be more fully developed. They simply did kind of an interim thing for an immediate solution and it's now with some of the discussion of that's going on with the city and the state at the current time. Regarding property between 17th and 18th and so on I think if the goal had been known in 1986 there might have been a slightly different approach taken to that next block east from 17th to 18th. The standard that was accepted and has been on the Environs Commissions approval list is the one that was done in 1986 and time goes on, things are modified and what has done with design standards. For the Environs District and for the corridors I think now is the time with what's going on, a chance to revisit that.

Johnson said the half block that is owned by the state would be desirable to have in different hands.

Ripley stated the reason the proposal was put together was for the extra half block east. There is a jog in J Street that doesn't allow for easy transition across 17th Street without going somewhat against traffic. We are trying to solve some problems that city traffic had with the way the jog occurred. They thought to close the street and eliminate the problem and have people turn off J Street before they get to 17th with the possibility of some changes going on that may amend the design.

Johnson asked if anyone had any recommendations on what to do with the screening on the lot?

Riley responded no, because he just looked at the agenda a couple of days ago and needed to see it in relation to a larger piece of the real estate. He would like to see what it looks like from in front of Lincoln High over to this location and from that location a little bit further all we're seeing is one parking lot. The edge of the Environs District is showing. The other recommendation is to see it in a bigger context because landscaping really relates more to what the whole axial approach to the east of the Capitol is, and it would be interesting to kind of look at it in that context. Looking at just this one kind of parcel makes it difficult to make a recommendation. The idea of the trees is a good one, but again we need to plant a tree in a location where it's not in competition with the very view corridor we're trying to create. That is why a little larger view of what's proposed would be helpful for anything. The recommendation of the trees generally is don't plant them close to the curb, plant them further back correct and there's what we did. What we had in place for Goodhue Boulevard was done because the street was there already. The access and the distances were already determined. We've never gotten into that kind of detail because there just wasn't the opportunity prior to this and so now we're getting into a whole different realm. Stepping back and looking at a little broader piece of real estate was another recommendation. I had talked over with

Kyle about the prospect of relocating a center located utility pole that has traffic lights on it, when traffic pulls up to Capitol Parkway on J street it's dead center on the very view we're trying to protect. We need to look at this thing and step back and look at this whole view corridor and not have a utility pole smack center on the view of the Capitol when you pull up to the traffic light on J street.

Johnson asked if Riley had brought this to the attention in the memo that was discussed.

Riley responded that the city this last summer is this whole nexus of what is going on at Capitol Parkway. This could all be a part of a little broader view of things in light of the fact that the jog on J street is perhaps being corrected.

Heidi Uhing; Past President Woods Park Neighborhood Association; 627 S 28th Street; Lincoln NE; came forward and stated that their neighborhood association encompasses this area and was the big point of discussion at the board meeting last night. Safety concerns were discussed with Sergeant Dennison and wanted to relay some of those concerns to the members today. There is the Capitol View and Lincoln High, which has been on the national registry since the 80's. We are all interested in protecting it and it is close to the creek and trails. This is an opportunity to protect the openness of the area and prevent an overrun of concrete in that space. It would have paving on both sides. This would be an opportunity to bring some greenery and some dimension into that. People at the board meeting liked the idea of adding greenery and shrubbery to their plan to balance the interest of protecting the sight line again. Locating a tree further down along the trail is a better option. It would sit more between the creek and the proposed parking lot, rather than in front facing J Street and in Woods Park. It is noted by the Sergeant that it is north of the bottlers building, which is kind of a small alley area and access to the parking lot and convenient for bad behavior. We wanted to make sure the parking lot would have some cameras. This was not itemized in the document that was presented. Since the conversation came up about the sightline, we also want to relay concerns that have been mentioned. We agree with Mr. Ripley in that the light sitting against Lincoln High School facing the capital building is really unfortunate bid being with lights along Capital Parkway that divides the view in that location. If that could be reconsidered, it would go a long way in protecting a breathtaking view from the East side. There is an elevated hill where the view is better than expected. There is also a beautiful stretch of J Street that has very uneven brick and the trees are overgrown. It used to be visible to 35th Street and today it is not. If the city could prioritize keeping that tree growth down to protect the line to 35th Street it would add beauty of that space and appreciation of the building.

Johnson asked if they liked landscaping along the West side of the lot to the alley.

Uhing responded no, not necessarily but the West side of the lot might be a better location for a large over story tree to protect the sightline. There are a few concerns about first thing in the morning, there can be really heavy traffic at the intersection. Having a new driveway off of J Street right at the bridge could add some congestion in the area. Not sure if there is a way around that situation. It is so narrow on the street that two cars really can't get past each other at the same time. There seems to be an extra entrance that is needed and no other way to get it.

Johnson asked for other questions and comments.

Christopher added this is just for discussion no votes. Adding more J Street landscaping and more trees, but the location is unsure of where the trees should go. This will come back next month with a refined plan.

Landis replied don't forget the planting material should be towards longevity and minimum maintenance.

Bergt responded to even plant trees on the edge if LPS is ok with trees along the parking lots. That is part of the Capitol Environs zone so a couple more trees and some shrubs is a good suggestion.

Christopher mentioned the next meeting is on March 27. We may have a revised proposal by then.

Staff Report and Miscellaneous

There is one update on the federal garage topic from last month. From the meeting with the property manager, they are very opposed to anything other than concrete on the 14 feet of property along 16th Street. The biggest concern is security and being able to hide things in the understory landscaping. Turf was discussed like the Centennial Mall side, and it was noted that there is no guarantee it will be maintained. There is not really any moving off of that decision in Planning's view. That leaves us with preserving the 14 feet of sidewalk along 16th Street and create an additional 6 feet of public sidewalk. It doesn't quite line up with the ramp on O Street but is much closer. David had mentioned at the last meeting that we were cutting short this landscape bed; Christopher clarified that that area is an existing bus stop. There has to be some level of room for a pad but it doesn't seem to have a shelter planned. The

sidewalk width leaves about 18' of landscaping bed. On a positive note, we are saving money by not removing as much concrete. This is not what we would have liked to see, but it will still be a major improvement. Christopher asked for feedback from the members.

Quade stated this is better than all concrete

Bergt responded this is good, not perfect, but better than today.

Christopher agreed that this is so much better.

Christopher replied there were no other staff updates and no new applications yet for the next meeting. He appreciated everyone's attendance today.

Bob Ripley; Resident 3022 William Street, Lincoln Ne, came forward and stated he had a suggestion to contact the GSA to see if they would work with the ideas we had. This was done after the Oklahoma City bombing when they had new landscaping around the Federal building. They were able to meet with congressional delegation in Washington and get something figured out. GSA is very agreeable and easy to work with. The property manager may be a little more negotiable with this approach.

Johnson stated that with no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:00 a.m.

NEBRASKA CAPITOL ENVIRONS COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

APPLICATION NUMBER	Urban Design Record #26024
APPLICATION TYPE	Advisory Review
ADDRESS/LOCATION	2403 and 2411 J Street
HEARING DATE	April 24, 2026
ADDITIONAL MEETINGS	February 27, 2026 (Preliminary Discussion)
APPLICANT	Erin Bright, Olsson
STAFF CONTACT	Collin Christopher, 402-441-6370, cchristopher@lincoln.ne.gov

RECOMMENDATION: APPROVAL OF CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS

Summary of Request

Lincoln Public Schools is proposing to build a parking lot on the two vacant lots – 2403 and 2411 J Street – at the east end of the J Street environs corridor. The primary environs boundary stops around 24th Street, though the J Street right-of-way is included in the district all the way to S 35th Street. As a result, only the western 20’ of the 2403 lot is deemed to be in the district. This, combined with the fact that LPS is exempt from other design standards that may otherwise apply here, makes this a unique proposal

As the Commission knows, parking lots are generally discouraged in the district. When they are allowed, there is a high bar to meet. That said, staff is of the opinion that the site in question should be viewed with much more flexibility than one much closer to the Capitol might be. In February during a preliminary discussion about the project, the Commission agreed that a reduced screening solution should be applied here and provided the applicant with the following direction:

- Add shade trees along the west edge of the parking lot;
- Provide a consistent screen along the entire J Street frontage, preferably with more than one row of landscaping; and
- Specify plant material that will have a good chance of survival in a low maintenance environment.

The Commission also discuss the possibility of adding street trees along J Street and extending the landscaping into the right-of-way to meet up with the sidewalk.

The applicant has now submitted an updated parking lot plan with landscaping that aims to match this direction and are asking for a Certificate of Appropriateness.

Compatibility with the Design Standards

As previously noted, LPS is exempt from typical landscape design standards, which would require landscaping around the entire perimeter of the parking lot. Further complicating the situation is the fact that

the entirety of the parking lot itself is outside of the district. While the J Street design standards and guidelines have been copied below, this proposal requires a unique solution that meets the needs of the site and its position along the eastern edge of the district.

In staff's opinion, the direction provided by the Commission in February should serve as the primary basis of evaluation for this proposal.

Design Standard 26: J Street/East Landscape

By its long-established pattern of land subdivision, J Street/East is and can remain the least symmetrical of the Capitol Malls. Its topography lends special interest to approaching the Capitol along J Street/East, which makes it especially desirable to support vehicular, bicyclist, and pedestrian use of this corridor. The impact of J Street/East can be enhanced by addressing its various segments differently. The "South and East Mall Plan" approved by the City Council in 1986 provides general guidance to the development of the public landscape of this Mall.

The first block and a half east of the Capitol should be formal in character, lined with oaks. The first block (16th to 17th) could be closed to vehicular traffic and have a quiet but inviting character, taking advantage of its grade-level accessibility from the Capitol and existing trees.

The open space of the second block (17th to 18th Streets) could be expanded southward when possible, to remove the awkward visual terminus of this Mall at 17th Street. The off-center right-of-way of the rest of J Street/East is mitigated by topography and need not be adjusted.

Guideline 26.1:

Develop the 16th to 17th block of J Street/East with wide sidewalks at the north and south edges, a central area of low, colorful plantings, seating parallel to the sidewalks, and attractive lighting based on the original streetlights on Capitol Square.

Guideline 26.2:

Enhance J Street/East from 16th to Capitol Parkway by continuing the established line of red oaks on the north side, improving the south sidewalk as a bike path, and allowing variety or interest in landscape features on private property.

Recommendations/Action

Staff is confident in the direction that the Commission provided in February, and the submitted proposal does generally address that direction. While the screening could certainly be more substantial along J Street, there is a balance that exists for projects like this in understanding what the applicant is willing to and capable of maintaining. Given the lack of irrigation associated with this project and the limited area between the property line and the edge of parking, a double row of landscaping seems appropriate. That said, the Commission is encouraged to review the updated proposal and determine whether the applicant has appropriately responded to the feedback from February.

Recommended finding: The proposed parking lot and its associated landscape screening meets the intent of the city's relevant design standards for parking lots.

Recommended action: Approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness for a new parking lot and its associated landscape screening at 2403 and 2411 J Street.

ATTACHMENT A – LOCATION MAP



