

## 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, April 25 2025, 8:30 a.m., City Council Chambers, County-City Building, 555 S. 10<sup>th</sup> Street, Lincoln, Nebraska.

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

**OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:** Collin Christopher, David Cary, Clara McCully and Kristi Merfeld of the Planning Department; Danielle Vachel and Marc Rosso, of Transportation and Utilities Department; Brett Daugherty and Matt Hansen Office of the Capitol Commission and other interested citizens 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 March 28, 2025 and stated that there were corrections from the minutes of the last meeting on March 28, 2025 and it was noted that they would be corrected.

Motion for approval with corrections made by Quade seconded by Bergt and carried 4-0: Bergt, Post, Johnson, Quade, voting "yes". Gebhart, Landis and Cuda absent.

### **PUBLIC HEARING AND ACTION**

#### **UDR25014- 14<sup>TH</sup> AND LINCOLN MALL INTERSECTION IMPROVEMENTS**

**Public Hearing**

**April 25, 2025**

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

**David Cary Planning Department, 555 So 10<sup>th</sup> Street, Lincoln NE** came forward and stated that he is representing the Planning Department and LTU. The goal today is to get to consensus on one of these designs and it will need a 4 -0 vote so this can move forward. The plan is to have construction yet this year. This item is the intersection at Lincoln Mall and 14<sup>th</sup> Street, which has been under discussion for over a year, and the point is to improve the pedestrian factor in both safety and comfort at this crossing. There is a lot of activity here with pedestrians and the capital building. The designs are appropriate, and the Planning Department would like to focus on plan B or C.

These different considerations have a lot to do with historical significance, the quality and experience of the capitol, and the capitol block face, as well as the pedestrian experience, so the different interests of those involved must be balanced. Changing the block face with the capitol is a concern, and careful consideration needs to be taken regarding those impacts. The focus is to find the best answer for all stakeholders.

Commissioner Gebhart did provide her comments even though she is not here today. It does provide commentary on her opinion of the issue. Her reasoning is solid, and it focuses on the B or C option. The comments were presented as Exhibit 1 and distributed to the committee members.

Cary stated that there were comments at the last meeting about the angle of the crosswalk and how it could be considered in the action taken today. One option has the bump out on the West side and how it matches up with the existing pedestrian access point on the capitol block face side, that is a little less of an angle.

LTU did go back and look at this again as requested by this commission and created a third option, or option C. This would bring pedestrians to a center island and provide a shorter crosswalk, and then it is straight across, crossing to the block face for the capitol. This is an acceptable option. This would require a slight change on the block face by adding a new pedestrian ramp.

The choices are the original design with both bump-outs, which caused some concern with the historical change to the block face of the capitol and the East side extension of the curb. This shortens the crosswalk and removal of 50 feet of street parking. This would remove one or two parallel parking stalls, which is important because there is a line of sight looking South as the pedestrian is standing at the crosswalk. The other choice is the new idea from LTU, which also removes the parking spaces on the South and brings the pedestrians to the center island, and then crossing in the middle. There is some concern with this concept, as to how many pedestrians would follow and go to the center island.

Post asked if eliminating parking areas, would there just be a no parking sign or would there be other improvements to prevent parking.

Cary said there would be signs at least, and several of those signs are already in place around the capitol. Enforcement becomes a key factor, and it probably will be enforced since there has been such a focus on getting something accomplished here.

Bergt asked if they could stripe the pavement and the sidewalk and thought it was out there already.

Cary stated it is something that LTU would be willing to consider, and if there is no effective endorsement of the no parking, maybe another step could be taken.

Bergt commented that she liked option B with the crosswalk. The center island is creative, but it feels like people won't use it. Option B is the solution. Is there a reason why the curb cut on the West side of the street has to be at the edge of the pavement, or could it be further in, like it is now? There is one curb ramp, and it makes people walk straight across, so as you bump out, it could still be over and have a concrete island or pavement on the edges or even shorten up the crosswalk.

Cary said this would extend the crossing edge to shorten the crosswalk and make it straight. If you move the ramp further into the red zone it actually lengthens the crosswalk.

Johnson asked what the thought of Gebhart's suggestion is that blind people might have a problem, and the swing of the buses could be a problem in concept C.

Cary stated that we all need to be conscious about ADA accessibility and improvements. This option does meet the ADA compliance factor.

Johnson feels that there would be concerns after installation and whether people would actually use it or would they go straight forward. He likes option B. Option A was voted against in the past, so that is out of the running.

Quade said he thinks most people will stray across the lawn. Doesn't mind option C but likes both option B and C.

Post likes option C and would follow the sidewalk, to shorten the distance. This also separates the pedestrian from the traffic but could make it less effective. She said she would be willing to accept B or C based on the panel's comments.

Johnson said it is nice that there has been an attempt to come up with options to move this ahead.

**Brett Daugherty Interim Administrator of the Capitol Commission 1445 K Street, Lincoln NE** came forward and stated he was not able to make the last meeting and commented that there is a fourth option that the senators originally requested, which is just a three-way stop. They are not in favor of option A , but option B or C meets more of the guidelines. One issue is who is going to scoop the center island in the winter. The snowplows have enough trouble plowing the streets and it plugs up the wheelchair ramps. The city island will not belong to anyone. So people are going to have to walk into the street to get across. Option B would be the option to choose and place a three- way flashing light on top of the stop sign to draw attention. Possibly a solar lighted yellow light flasher, would be a good idea, before going to the expense of the curbs.

Bergt thought this proposal included a stop sign.

Daugherty, said yes, all three plans do include a stop sign. Also, there is no parking enforcement around the capitol and no place for visitors. The parking enforcement officials do not want to give tickets around the capitol.

Johnson said there are two stalls removed, and they are protected by signs for no parking on the South side. There are currently 2-3 stalls open.

Daugherty agreed that they would be removed, and it would push back two more stalls to give a better view for the people coming from the capital crossing to the West and shorten the distance.

**Julie Harris, Bike Walk of Nebraska, 108 N 49<sup>th</sup> Street, Omaha NE** came forward and stated that Bike Walk is the bike and pedestrian advocacy organization for the state, and they want to improve pedestrian safety around the capitol. She knows the importance of this and thinks it can be improved. This would not be out of the ordinary based on other Midwest capitals. Pedestrian safety comes first over car parking and this organization supports the city and appreciates the consideration of this design.

**Danielle Vachel, Senior Engineer LTU, 949 W Bond, Lincoln NE** came forward and stated said the city standard is not to allow parking within 25 feet of a stop sign and up to 50 feet. 25 feet is the minimum for the northbound direction.

Bergt asked Daughtery how far the is distance today.

Daugherty said it has been pushed to the minimum of 25 feet.

Vachel commented that it looks as if the stop sign will be placed where the first no parking sign is located. The other stop sign would be about where the second existing no parking sign is located.

Post commented that on option A, there were bumpouts to help with pedestrian visibility. Option B is relying on no-parking signs to give the pedestrian visibility without the bumpouts.

Vachel agreed that yes, that is true and pedestrians are not coming out from the curb anymore, so they will be standing off the curb in traffic. If a car is parked there, the pedestrian is required to stand further off the curb in the street to see a car coming from the South. It is critical that no parking is enforced. It is also important that the drop off and pickup between those crossings be a no-parking spot as well. The focus has been on the South crossing, but the North side is critical for having no buses or vehicles parked along the straight side of the curb. This will block pedestrians trying to cross on the North leg.

Post said she was concerned with visibility and pedestrian safety, parking will need to be enforced and was willing to support option B today.

Motion to approve option B by Bergt , seconded by Post; Bergt, Post, Johnson, and Quade voting "yes". Motion carried 4-0; Gebhart, Landis and Cuda absent.

### **UDR25037- O STREET WATER MAIN REPLACEMENT**

#### **Public Hearing**

**April 25, 2025**

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

**Collin Christopher, Planning Department, 555 S 10<sup>th</sup> Street, Lincoln NE** stated that this project is part of a complicated series of improvements happening along O Street in the next couple of years. It is from 9<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> street on O Street. This project has two goals. One is that there were significant water main breaks over this past year. This

affects not only the streets, but sidewalks and businesses also. This has resulted in flooding in some of the basements. This needs to be fixed, to have a good water main for the next several years. Another aspect is trying to achieve completion ahead of a major streetscape project that is part of the downtown corridors project that Urban Development and Planning are leading. That is a similar stretch of O Street from 9<sup>th</sup> Street to Centennial Mall. This also includes work along 14<sup>th</sup> Street on the edge of the Capitol Environs district. There is an effort to get this work done earlier, so it is not done twice. The lead engineer is the same on both projects, so there is a lot of design coordination happening at once.

Christopher said that part of the water main project will include building or rebuilding the parking trays along O Street as part of the downtown corridors project. The other thing is the timeline, which hasn't been decided yet. It is thought to start work on the streetscape project early next year. It could begin in the fall, but more likely in 2026 as weather allows. This is not a significant part of the water main project, but is significant to the overall improvement of street trees along O Street.

There are a large number of ash trees along this street and they will need to be removed soon because they have become a hazard. Also, other trees will need to be removed as well. The tree replacement will be twice as much as the number that is being removed.

Christopher displayed a map showing where trees will be removed and replanted. Right now, 18 ash trees are a hazard that need to be removed soon. Those are located all on the Northside of O Street and in the stretch from 9<sup>th</sup> Street to 16<sup>th</sup> Street. Five ash trees are impacted by the water main project and two non-ash trees for a total of seven. Some of the trees are not in immediate danger, but it makes the most sense to remove them with the streetscape project.

Also, the focus is to resurface the street, all the pavers in the intersections and crosswalks, and do curb work. They will be replaced with concrete crosswalks except at the 13<sup>th</sup> and O Street intersection. There are Lincoln star designs that are trying to be preserved. They will also make it more pedestrian friendly and fix the tripping hazards that exist in the roadway and the sidewalk itself. The main water project is the first step and this will be reviewed again with revisions in the next 6 months. Attached in the staff report is the basic idea of what this will look like and will be repeated throughout the corridor. The type of plants and trees have not been decided yet.

Christopher mentioned that one last thing to discuss was the street tree removal during the interim. There will likely be a gap between the tree removal and the project. The city administration would like a limited window between when the trees are removed and when they are replaced. If the window can't be tightened, the plan

is to install temporary trees, where a tree has been removed. These would then be planted in a park at a future date.

The trees will be larger than the city likes to plant. Smaller trees actually establish quicker and start growing at a faster rate than a large tree. However, the visual is a very important factor here, with the loss of trees the goal is to plant larger trees in the wood crates for this situation.

Johnson asked if this topic will be presented again at a future meeting.

Christopher said yes, if it is approved today, within the staff report a condition can be attached to ensure the project is brought back to a meeting this year.

Johnson asked does this fit into the timeline of the project.

Christopher said yes, he was pretty sure it did.

**Marc Rosso LTU Design Engineer, 540 W Bond, Lincoln NE** came forward and stated that Christopher described everything about the project and that it is a 12 inch water main that is being replaced. There are also three lead services that will be replaced.

We were trying to fit this into football season, but it will probably be moved into late fall bidding and construction to start next year.

Bergt asked how deep the main is on O street.

Rosso said 5 ½ feet and the current main is 10 feet deep. It was put in around 1977 and has had several failures. It is called an opportunity main and they prefer to do things above ground without having to tear up the main after the corridors project. There is a risk of breaks in the future , so it is being done now.

Bergt asked if there would be a temporary pavement.

Rosso said that some pavement will be temporary and will be replaced. It may be a different material or thinner, but it will make it so people can get across, and the sidewalk will still be open.

Bergt asked if wooden boards would be used also.

Rosso commented yes, some board will be used, and with an open cut so the water can be taken out below it, when it is abandoned.

Bergt asked if the trench will go down 10 feet.

Rossco said in places yes.

Post moved approval of the project that it complies with the Capitol Environs design standards and issues, it is approved with conditions that the streetscape project returns for a certificate, when the final plans are approved; seconded by Quade, and carried 4-0: Bergt, Post, K. Johnson, Quade, voting "yes" Gebhart, Landis and Cuda absent.

**STAFF UPDATES:**

Next meeting is May 23, 2025

There are not any new applications, but there will likely be a reason to meet, and there will also be a new commissioner attending. That will be David Landis.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:14 a.m.

Hi Collin,

I'm sorry to miss the April 25 meeting of the Nebraska Capitol Environs Commission, but I've reviewed the packet and wanted to pass along the following comments for the Commission's consideration.

### **14th and Lincoln Mall Intersection Improvements**

- I appreciate LTU taking another look at this intersection and giving more attention to minimizing impacts to the Capitol's curblines.
- I do not believe Concept A aligns with the Commission's mission and responsibilities. Given the proposed impact to the Capitol's curblines, I would not support this intersection improvement.
- Both Concept B and Concept C improve pedestrian safety by reducing crossing distances while maintaining the Capitol's curblines. I encourage the Commission to consider both, with the following in mind:

#### **Concept B**

- My primary concern is accessibility. As noted in the last meeting, the Capitol is both a historic and functioning building; we should ensure it, and its Environs, are fully accessible to all. The public spaces around the Capitol are integral to its use and experience.
- Would the curb ramps on both the west and east sides of 14th Street be positioned such that it would naturally guide users into the diagonal, non-perpendicular crosswalk?
- How will visually impaired individuals or those using mobility aids be able to detect and navigate this angled crossing? Would this design meet best practices for accessible pedestrian infrastructure?

#### **Concept C**

- The extended median feels like a natural extension of the Lincoln Mall aesthetic.
- A few practical questions:
  - Would the extended median create challenges for larger vehicles like buses and snow plows?
  - The median directs pedestrians from both sides of Lincoln Mall into a single crosswalk with improved visibility. But how many pedestrians can this median realistically stage, or queue, at once? Is the median large enough for the pedestrian volume typically observed here?
- In addressing safety concerns, I would prioritize removing parking spaces before making any changes to the Capitol curblin, especially since this is the only curblin with the historic sandstone installed. Our design standards note that the closer a project is to the Capitol, the more it should meet "very high standards for design." Since this involves the Capitol Square itself, preserving the Capitol's original square design is a top priority for me as a member of this Commission.
- Assuming the design fully addresses the accessibility concerns noted above—and not just in theory but as experienced by those with disabilities—I lean toward Concept B, as it presents less impact on the Capitol Environs. However, if these concerns cannot be fully mitigated, I would prefer Concept C.

### **O Street Water Main Replacement**

- Given that "the project will ultimately replace all the lost trees in even greater quantities," that the City is pursuing an interim aesthetic solution, and considering there is only one tree within the Capitol Environs district, I would support a certificate of appropriateness for the O Street water main replacement project, with the condition that the streetscape project come back before the commission when the final proposed design is complete.

Thank you for relaying these comments to the commission in my absence.

Until the next meeting,

Andrea Gebhart