

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, September 25, 2026, 8:30 a.m., City Council Chambers, County-City Building, 555 S. 10th Street, Lincoln, Nebraska.

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

Heidi Cuca and David Landis absent.

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE: Collin Christopher, Paul Barnes and Kristi Merfeld of the Planning and Development Services Department; Former State Senator Anna Wishart; John Shaw, Scott Schafer 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 August 28, 2026.

Motion for approval made by Gebhart ; seconded by Bergt.

Minutes were approved 5-0; Bergt, Gebhart, Johnson, Post and Quade voting "yes".

Cuca and Landis absent.

DISCUSS AND ADVICE:

CAMERON THE CAPITOL CAT SCULPTURE

September 25, 2026

Members Present: Bergt, Gebhart, Johnson, Post and Quade.

Cuca and Landis absent.

Collin Christopher, Planning and Development Services Department, 555 S 10th Street, Lincoln NE, introduce the continued discussion regarding the proposed sculpture honoring “Cameron the Capitol Cat.” The original proposal – an elevated bronze statue on a pedestal – raised concerns about competing with historically significant monuments within the Capitol Environs, such as Standing Bear, Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte, and the State Capitol Hall of Fame. Commissioners also encouraged a more interactive, pedestrian-scale concept. Christopher displayed the former design and then introduced the updated concept, which included a natural stone bench with a bronze sculpture of Cameron seated on it, accompanied by a plaque describing Cameron’s significance. The proposed location has also changed. Instead of the public right-of-way at the southeast corner of Goodhue Boulevard and H Street, the sculpture is now proposed on state-owned land adjacent to the surface parking lot at the same corner. This location removes sight-distance concerns and is preferred by city staff. If a Certificate of Appropriateness is pursued, the State must provide a maintenance plan. Staff would recommend approval if materials are appropriate, maintenance is addressed, and the work aligns with Environs standards.

Commissioner Johnson asked for questions.

Commissioner Bergt asked whether this remains a discussion item before proceeding to a formal vote.

Christopher confirmed that additional information – material specifications, plaque text, and maintenance strategy – will be required before formal action.

Anna Wishart, Former State Senator, 1314 O Street, Unit 401, Lincoln, NE, thanked the Commission for prior feedback. She emphasized that the intention is not to compete with historical monuments but to honor the joy and nonpartisanship Cameron brought to the Capitol community. The new bench concept is smaller and lower to the ground, more interactive, and well-suited to the staff parking lot area. Wishart stated that sculptor Benjamin Victor supports the interactive nature of the piece and views natural wear from public touch as part of its beauty. She requested Commission guidance on whether this qualifies as acceptable public art within the Environs and whether the location is appropriate before the group proceeds with detailed planning.

John Shaw, 5121 State Hill Drive, Lincoln, NE, noted that materials such as granite or limestone have not yet been finalized and remain flexible. He also suggested that landscaping could be part of the actual proposal, but that the details for that still needed to be worked out.

Scott Schafer 1202 273rd Road, Seward, NE, added that the Capitol Commission's Brett Doherty suggested the proposed location and supports it. Schafer reiterated that stone selection and landscaping details will be finalized as the concept advances.

Commissioner Quade expressed support for the new location and format, noting that it is more welcoming and well-integrated into the surroundings. He advised careful selection of durable materials, as some limestone types may weather poorly.

Shaw noted the availability of concrete designed to resemble limestone.

Schafer asked whether the Commission preferred stone coloration similar to the Capitol.

Quade and Bergt both recommended harmonizing with the Capitol's limestone and emphasized using authentic materials rather than imitations.

Bergt praised the lower, more interactive design and recommended expanding the landscaping to create a more intentional plaza-like setting. She

encouraged considering views both toward the parking lot and toward the Capitol for photography and public engagement.

Wishart agreed and said they will return with additional layout options.

Bergt noted that while a mulched area had been discussed, the final location should be chosen based on overall experience and integration.

Gebhart expressed strong support for the new design, noting it functions as art rather than a monument. She appreciated the plaque explaining Cameron's significance and supported the parking lot-adjacent location as a subtle, meaningful everyday reminder.

Post agreed, noting the improved interaction potential and appreciation for the updated proposal.

Johnson stated that high-quality public art is appropriate for Goodhue Boulevard and praised Victor's artistic credentials. He supported both the concept and location.

Courtney Witstruck, Citizen, 5937 Woodstock, Lincoln, NE, came forward and stated that the proposal does not ask the commission to place Cameron in the same category as the honorees at the Capitol. The Capitol was designed to communicate values through symbols. The Sower is not honored as an individual farmer but to represent agriculture and building civilization. The bison are for Nebraska's first people and native prairie and the pioneer family represents citizens. Cameron is about what he represents. He had no political party or influence. Staff, children and tourists were all simply people worthy of welcome. After a long day the cat served as a common ground for all. Cameron embodies these expressions of values this building was designed to teach. The question is not simply whether the cat is important enough to Nebraska history to deserve a statue? The better question is whether the values he came to represent are important enough to Nebraska's future to deserve a symbol?. Many years from now this statue will remind us of the values worth remembering and not make him an exception to the symbolic tradition of the Capitol, but a part of it.

Johnson asked if there were any other comments in support or opposition?

Bob Ripley, Citizen, 3022 Williams Street, Lincoln, NE spoke in a neutral capacity and asked for clarification regarding approval requirements for installations on state property. Christopher confirmed that the Capitol Environs Commission is tasked with reviewing all site and exterior building improvements within the district, including city and state-owned land.

Ripley expressed concern about precedence and long-term land use, noting that the parking lot may eventually be redeveloped. He emphasized the importance of thoughtful application of Environs standards.

Hearing no additional comments, Christopher asked for final feedback. He observed overall Commission support and noted that, if executed with proper materials, maintenance planning, and integration into the site, the proposal appears consistent with the expectations for public art along Goodhue Boulevard.

Staff Report and Miscellaneous:

Christopher stated that there will be an October meeting. The one proposal on the agenda to date involves a secure, combined entrance to the County-City Building and the Hall of Justice. This will be a public hearing and action item. It is possible the meeting will also include an update on the federal garage streetscape project that could be ready for review by that time.

Johnson asked if there was anyone that wished to speak on any item not on the agenda. There were no further comments.

Johnson stated that with no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:08 a.m.