

## 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
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### 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 24<sup>th</sup> Street, though the J Street right-of-way is included in the district all the way to S 35<sup>th</sup> 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**

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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 (16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup>) 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 (17<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> Streets) could be expanded southward when possible, to remove the awkward visual terminus of this Mall at 17<sup>th</sup> 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 16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> 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 16<sup>th</sup> 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





