BRIEFING NOTES

NAME OF GROUP:	PLANNING COMMISSION
DATE, TIME AND PLACE OF MEETING:	Wednesday, May 9, 2012, 11:45 a.m., Room 113, County-City Building, 555 S. 10th Street, Lincoln, Nebraska
MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:	Greg Butcher, Michael Cornelius, Dick Esseks, Wendy Francis, Leirion Gaylor Baird, Chris Hove, Jeanelle Lust, Jim Partington, Lynn Sunderman and Ken Weber.
OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:	Marvin Krout, Nicole Fleck-Tooze, David Cary, Sara Hartzell, Brandon Garrett, Rashi Jain and Michele Abendroth of the Planning Department;
STATED PURPOSE OF MEETING:	2012 Indicators Report; LPlan Draft Action Strategies

The meeting was called to order at 11:45 a.m. The Nebraska Open Meetings Act was acknowledged.

Jain began by explaining that the Community Indicators Report is prepared annually to coincide with the Annual Review of the Comprehensive Plan. This report provides data that assists the Planning Commission in their evaluation and update of the Comprehensive Plan. It is based on benchmarks in the Comprehensive Plan. It continually evaluates information for validity, understandability, reliability, and availability. She noted that there were some indicators added this year.

Jain provided a snapshot of the report, as follows: there were 285,407 people in Lancaster County as of April 1, 2010; there has been increased migration since 2001; there is an ample supply of approved dwelling units; and a reviving economy shows increased wages, decreased unemployment rate, and increased building activity. There has been a 1.28% annual rate of population growth since 2000; the Comprehensive Plan projects a 1.2% increase. 90.53% of Lancaster County residents live in Lincoln in 2010. This has increased from 89.74% in 2000 and 89.86% in 1990. The Comprehensive Plan assumes a 90-10 city/county split.

Jain then reported on the Growth section of the report. She noted that 2/3 of the population increase is due to natural growth since 2000. 34.07% of the increase is due to migration. There are 6,898 international migrants in the County since 2000. Between 2005-2009, a net 884 people moved to Lancaster County from Douglas and Sarpy Counties. She noted that Lincoln is becoming more diverse. There are 84.34% non-Hispanic white people in 2010 as compared to 88.4% in 2000. Lincoln Public Schools are consistently more diverse than the county as a whole.

Next, Garrett reported on Housing trends. Increasing building activity shows a reviving economy. There are 900 units permitted in 2011 as compared to 604 in 2009, which was the lowest since 1982-84. Lincoln building activity accounts for 83.4% of the total residential building permits in the county in 2011. There has been increased building activity in the 3-mile limit, from 1.9% in 2001 to 8% in 2011. He noted that this equates to 36 units in 2001 to 86 in 2011, so the increase is not as high as it may appear. Multi-family housing is showing signs of growth. There were 350 multi-family units in 2011 as compared to 388 for single-family units in 2011. In terms of availability of approved land for new dwelling units, there are 16,408 already approved or platted dwelling units in Tier I. There is a 11.5 year supply based on the 10 year average of 1,430 dwelling units per year (19.7 year supply based on 5 year average). The more infill there is, the longer the Tier I land supply will last. Lincoln housing is still more affordable than the U.S. average. In 2011, the ratio of income to housing price (existing homes) is 259% for the U.S. and 184% for Lincoln. Greater Downtown shows increased activity. 2010-2011 has shown an increased level of activity. There are 69 new dwelling units, and there is 355,000 square feet of commercial development.

Esseks asked if we know how many of 16,408 approved or platted dwelling units are in parts of the county that are unlikely to develop. Garrett responded that they are all in Tier I growth areas. This number is primarily on the edge, and they are viable lots.

Next, Jain explained that the Business and Commerce sectors are increasing by about 1% per year since 2000, but the Plan projects a 1.75% increase. Industrial sectors were particularly hard hit during the recession. Jobs are decreasing by 0.63% annually, and the Plan projects a 1% increase.

In the Employment section, Jain reported that 6,438 jobs were added in the last decade. Employment growth was higher in the 90's. The labor force grew by 0.68%. The unemployment rate was 3.81, lower than both Nebraska and the U.S. Total employment has increased by about 1.5% per year. This is much less than the 2.75% increase in the 90's, and the Comprehensive Plan projects a 1.4% increase.

In the Economy section, Jain reported that the average wage increased in 2010 over 2009. This is only slightly higher than Nebraska, but lower than the U.S. Between 2000 and 2010, both Nebraska and the U.S. showed a higher percentage increase. In 2009, per capita income decreased by about 1 percent over 2008. Sales tax and lodging tax collected in 2010-11 was higher than 2009-2010. Sales tax increased by 5.5%. There has been an average annual increase of 2.58% since 2000. Lodging tax increased 19.5% after a dramatic decrease of 26.5% in 2008-09. We have an educated labor force. We rank above the U.S. and Nebraska as a whole. Electrical consumption by non-residential customers has increased by 2% annually since 1990.

Jain continued with a report on the Environment section. We continue to preserve floodplain areas. Over the past decade, there generally has been a decrease in fill permits issued. Air quality is still very good in the county. Recycling was an impressive 97.7 pounds per person. Voluntary drop-off decreased but curbside pickup increased. Community efforts led to increased composting and appliances and institutional recycling. Residential water consumption suggests a correlation to annual rainfall data. Community efforts and the rate structure have contributed to lower water consumption.

In the Recreation section, Jain explained that as of 2011, there are more than 85,000 street trees. In general, more trees are currently removed from public property than are planted. Generally, one street tree is planted for every 4 removed within the existing city; 735 trees were removed and 181 were replaced. 82% of homes are within ¼ mile of a neighborhood park.

Esseks asked if the new Plan addresses the reduction in street trees. Fleck-Tooze stated that the Plan identifies a strategy to increase street trees.

Cary continued with a report on the Transportation section. StarTran ridership is at or above 1.79 million each of the past 6 years, which is a continued increase in ridership. We are no longer using transit service coverage as an indicator based on the new direction for service in Plan. Bike racks on buses are used extensively, and he noted that September 2011 had 2,210 rack users. There is an expectation that ridership in FY 2012 could possibly reach 2 million. In the trails system, 94% of all residences are within 1 mile of a trail. There are 9.7 miles of new trails funded and scheduled to be built. 84 miles of additional trails are planned in the Comprehensive Plan. 83 miles of existing on-street bike routes and an additional 53 miles of new bike routes are identified. 19.3% of work trips used alternative modes in 2010. This number was much higher in 1980 (37.7%) primarily due to the energy crisis. The mean travel time to work in 2010 was 17.3 minutes, up from 15.8 minutes in 1980. This is a 9.5% increase, but Lincoln increased in size 51%.

Krout noted that staff is working on a report identifying strategies to increase alternative modes of transportation, and that report will be brought to the Commission for review soon.

Esseks asked if there is much data showing if the on-street routes are used. Cary stated that there is not a comprehensive data system showing where and when the routes are used. We do have data in downtown, and we will continue to track that data. Esseks then asked what the advantages of on-streets routes are. Cary stated that the advantages are speed, ease of travel and low cost of the facility. Esseks asked if they are less safe. Cary stated that there is data showing that on-street routes are safe. Lust stated that more driver education is needed on the use of on-street routes.

Cary noted that bike use increased to 1.4% from 1% between 2000 and 2010. Daily vehicle miles traveled (VMT) increased 3.6% per year from 1985 to 2000. Since 2000, growth in VMT slowed to an average increase of 0.95% per year. Growth in population since then averaged 1.28% per year. This slowdown is in part due to the recession and increased gas prices. The vehicle crash rate decreased again in 2010 to 4.2 crashes per million vehicle miles traveled. The average annual decline is 3.63% per year since 1985. There were about 21 crashes per day in 2010 with a total of 7,710 crashes in 2010, which is down from 9,251 in 2000.

Hartzell then addressed the draft action strategies identified in the 2040 Comprehensive Plan. The Planning Commission had asked for a reporting system on how we are addressing these strategies.

Hartzell stated that the vision is detailed in Chapter 1: Vision & Plan. Chapter 1 also includes goals which represent statements of the desired state. Each chapter then identifies guiding principles that set the course for achieving the goals. Finally, strategies for accomplishing the guiding principles are listed. All strategies in the Comp Plan were pulled into a single spreadsheet. There are 467 separate strategies identified, but there was some duplication. Staff then consolidated these strategies into 200+ strategies. The strategies were analyzed to assign primary and supporting roles by local, state and federal agencies as well as a timeline identifying whether the goal is near term, mid term or long term.

Strategies were then sorted according to topic. Similar strategies were consolidated and numbered with a topic code. Other strategies stood on their own and maintained numbering according to the page on which they appear in the Plan. Many strategies are part of established operations; these are continuing strategies and are in a separate document.

There are five strategy groups, including natural resource conservation, transportation and mobility, urban design and buildings, parks and recreation, and community facilities. There is also a miscellaneous category.

This document was sent to over 25 different agencies which have primary or secondary responsibility for accomplishing the strategies. Eight agencies have responded. We will refine the strategies according to the responses and then deliver a final copy to the Planning Commission. Staff will do an annual report on the progress of the strategies, and a report will be submitted to the Planning Commission with the Indicators Report.

Krout stated that staff will continue to seek input from the agencies and will report on their progress.

Esseks stated that there is specialization by type of service in the Planning Department. It is useful to have a perception by the other departments that there is staff in the Planning Department who will monitor their progress.

Fleck-Tooze stated that Rick Hoppe is here to address the funding in the budget for sidewalks. Hoppe stated that he understands the Planning Commission is concerned about the level of funding in the CIP for sidewalks. We have infused $7 million per year into the transportation budget when the changes made at the City Council level last year are fully implemented. We asked the Council to make a significant increase in property taxes, on LES bills, and the wheel tax. The Council was very specific about where they wanted this money to go. For instance, we essentially committed to put $3 million in the Residual Wheel Tax fund in 2013-2014, which rehabilitates arterial streets. So how do you reconcile the needs of the City Council and the needs of the Planning Commission? Unfortunately, that put us in a rut for the first two years of the budget. The solution was to see a path for year 3. LB 84 passed last year which will infuse additional state dollars into the budget for transportation needs and frees up some money to move into the sidewalk budget and increase it by $500,000. He felt it was important to share the specifics of the process with the Commission.

Esseks asked if we will face the same issues in two years. Hoppe stated that he does not think it will be a problem because they will have completed a number of arterial street projects over the next two years and that will take some pressure off.

Lust stated that as it stands now, we have a Comp Plan that, as amended, only requires a level of sidewalk funding at $500,000. If the Commission wanted to send a message that we want that level of funding in year 3 at $1 million, we will have to amend the Comp Plan. Krout stated that the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) was separated from the Comp Plan, and we will have to revisit the LRTP in the future.

Hoppe stated that a possible alternative is to pursue a new revenue source by the legislature of an extra half-cent sales tax authority in the City. This is limited to infrastructure, so they feel that sidewalks have to be part of that conversation. If we do not get this new revenue source, they do not know where the funds will come from.

Lust stated that there is no guarantee that this will happen in year 3. Hoppe stated that there are no guarantees, but it is important to note our goals.

Gaylor Baird stated that she can appreciate the difficulties of the budget process, but our job is to judge how we are planning for the future. What we have today isn't necessarily what is best for the City. We had a tool that we surrendered in this process, and now we don't have that tool anymore. If we want to keep focus on this issue, we need to be vocal about it, even when it is difficult.

Hoppe also pointed out that the City has implemented a survey which includes capital projects. Hoppe stated that it includes one capital project about fire station relocation. Sunderman asked how valid the online surveys are. Hoppe stated that they are not scientifically valid, but when you have 2000 people tell you something, they believe you should listen.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:51 p.m.

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