

BRIEFING NOTES

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

NAME OF GROUP:	PLANNING COMMISSION
DATE, TIME AND PLACE OF MEETING:	Wednesday, April 2, 2025, 11:45 am, City Council Chambers, County-City Building, 555 South 10 th Street, Lincoln, Nebraska.
MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:	Lorenzo Ball, Dick Campbell, Maribel Cruz, Gloria Eddins Rich Rodenburg, Christy Joy, Brett Ebert, and Cindy Ryman Yost (Bailey Feit absent)
OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:	David Cary, Paul Barnes, Andrew Thieroff, Rachel Christopher, Jill Dolberg and Kristi Merfeld of the Planning Department, and other interested parties.
STATED PURPOSE:	Briefing on “2026-2029 Transportation Improvement Program” University Place Subarea Plan

Paul Barnes came forward and began the meeting by stating that Rachel Christopher would present the annual Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) today, which is part of the MPO's annual work. Additionally, a second briefing on the University Place Subarea Plan would also be discussed today.

Yost arrived at 11:53 am

Rachel Christopher stated that a briefing for the Planning Commission is held every year regarding the annual Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The Lincoln Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is responsible for the TIP, and it is a federally mandated program that covers all of Lincoln and Lancaster County. Larger urban areas across the United States that have over fifty thousand population have an MPO, which are essential for federal transportation funding and decision making. The MPO is housed within the City of Lincoln Planning Department, and it covers all of Lancaster County, including Lincoln, Bennett, Waverly, and Hickman, as well as

other towns and villages within the boundary. TIP is similar to a capital plan specific to transportation. It lists transportation projects coming over the next four years, based on the Federal fiscal years of 2026-2029, which runs from October 1 through September 30. We adopt a new TIP each year and it can be amended and revised between annual adoptions.

All projects in the TIP are to be included in the Long Range Transportation Program (LRTP). When a project is added to the TIP, it must be consistent with the LRTP. The TIP must also be fiscally constrained. The project funding, schedule, and budget by phase are listed. The TIP is coordinated with City, County, and State programs. The TIP includes a list of projects in Lancaster County that will receive federal or state funds and/or are considered regionally significant. The TIP is coordinated with the Lincoln CIP, although they follow different fiscal years, and they are not the same document. The State has a TIP that covers all of Nebraska and incorporates the Lincoln MPO TIP. The TIP is divided into sections by agencies, which handle different aspects of transportation. These include Lancaster County, City of Lincoln, pedestrian, bike, and trails, Railroad Transportation Safety District (RTSD), and other facilities. There is a section for transportation planning projects as well.

The annual TIP involves working with all of the agencies that manage transportation modes and facilities in the MPO boundary. The MPO coordinates with the agencies and sends the draft to be reviewed and receives input on the projects. Any new projects that are added have to be consistent with the LRTP. The TIP may be updated with new projects and ongoing projects that carry over from one year to the next, and projects may also be removed. Many projects carry forward from one TIP to the next because it takes multiple years to complete a project. Therefore, most of the projects in the TIP draft are also included in the current TIP.

Christopher stated that after working with all of the different departments involved, the MPO will meet with the subcommittee called the programming and funding committee, which is comprised of staff only. They will review the TIP and make a recommendation to move it forward. After this step, it will go to the MPO Technical Committee. This will be held on April 9, 2025. It also moves on to the Planning Commission for recommendations. The Planning Commission action date is in two weeks on April 16, 2025. The next step will be the MPO Officials Committee. This committee is made up of the mayor and representatives from the City Council, County Board, and the state. This is the final local action, and it will be held on May 2, 2025. The state, as well as the Federal Highway Administration and the Federal Transit Administration, will approve the TIP document. This approval typically comes at the end of September. The TIP will go into effect at the start of the next fiscal year on October 1st.

Christopher shared a new interactive tool called ClearGov. It is an online interactive version of the TIP rather than the standard PDF version that has been previously available. Christopher demonstrated the use of the tool. It pulls all the projects together and organizes them, so each

section can be looked at in depth. There is also the capability to go into each project and see the funding sources and the amounts by year.

Other changes in the TIP are to the State of Nebraska Department of Transportation highway and interstate projects in Lancaster County. A project that has been removed from the TIP is the B Street Bicycle Boulevard. This project had been previously selected for funds through the MPO but does not have an assigned Responsible Charge (RC) staff member to manage it. The funds will be reallocated to other qualifying trail projects. Even though this item has been removed, it is still a project to be pursued.

There are several new State of Nebraska projects in the proposed TIP that include intersection improvements and safety improvements coming soon.

Current TIP amendments from Lincoln Transportation and Utilities (LTU) reflected in the TIP include the N. 14th Street project, which is from Salt Creek to Adams and involves bridge, road, and sidewalk work. This project will be going before the Planning Commission in two weeks and requires an amendment to the LRTP due to updates on costs and other things. Also, costs for the Cotner Boulevard, O Street to Star Street project are being revised.

All projects in the proposed draft TIP have been found in conformance with the Long Range Transportation Plan and are supportive of the locally adopted goals for transportation. The Planning Commission action in two weeks will be a recommendation to move this item on to the MPO Officials Committee.

Campbell asked if this plan considers some of the changes that are currently being implemented by the federal government, and whether citizens will vote on the upcoming bond issue.

Christopher stated, yes, this plan takes into consideration the changes in policy at the federal level from the new presidential administration and reflects those changes in the document language. Since the federal landscape is changing, there could be additional changes needed to the TIP between now and when it is formally reviewed at the federal level.

Campbell asked if there would be changes in the federal funds.

Christopher noted that there will most likely be changes in federal funds.

Campbell asked if the documents would come back to the Planning Commission to respond to the recommendations.

Christopher commented that if the document were not approved at the federal level, significant changes may need to go back through the public review process again to make revisions.

Campbell asked about the status of Lincoln on the Move funds.

Christopher said that the TIP includes current approved Lincoln on the Move Funds that rise above a maintenance level of construction and thus need to be included. Many Lincoln on the Move projects don't need to be listed in the TIP because they are not regionally significant or using federal and state funding. If Lincoln on the Move funding was renewed, it would be reflect in the TIP as needed, likely through an amendment to the document.

Campbell asked about the South Bypass project and what is left to do on this item.

Christopher stated that the project is pretty much wrapped up, but since some exchanges of funds are still taking place on it, the project continues to be listed in the TIP.

UNIVERSITY PLACE SUBAREA PLAN

Barnes introduced the next briefing to be discussed is the University Place subarea plan led by Andrew Thierolf.

Andrew Thierolf presented a video highlighting the strengths of this neighborhood, what people in the community like about this area, and the strategic vision and draft plan being proposed to improve the University Place neighborhood.

Thierolf discussed the study area that this involves is 33rd Street on the West, Cornhusker on the North, 56th Street on the East and Holdrege Street on the South. Nebraska Wesleyan is right in the middle of the study and East Campus is right outside of the study area, on the South end.

A subarea plan allows the focus to be on a specific area of the community and creates a strategic vision for the neighborhood and identifies strategies to achieve that vision. The things that are looked at include quality of life, economic development, housing, and land use. These are adopted as part of the comprehensive plan. The application is a comprehensive plan amendment that will be reviewed. Thierolf stated that this subarea plan is a bit of a new process, that the last one was about eight or nine years ago when the South Haymarket neighborhood plan was done. This one is integrated with Urban Development's redevelopment plan efforts.

The University Place subarea plan will be at the Planning Commission meeting in two weeks on April 16, 2025 and then at the April 30, 2025 meeting, there will be a blight and an extreme blight study presented. For, Tax Increment Financing (TIF) eligibility, the area must be blighted. Then, on May 14, 2025 there will be a redevelopment plan, which shows how much TIF funds will be allocated and how they will be spent. The subarea plan looks at everything in the neighborhood, and the blight studies and redevelopment plan look specifically at how we use the TIF to

implement some of the plans for the subarea plan. The TIF will allow several things to be completed.

Thierolf explained some of the demographics of this neighborhood with some visuals. The area has about nine thousand residents. The median age is younger than Lincoln overall, driven by the college-age residents in the area. Almost a quarter of residents are age eighteen to twenty-four, which makes sense with Nebraska Wesleyan and East Campus right there. There is also a higher proportion of multi-family housing compared to the rest of Lincoln and an older age of housing as well. Over 50 % of housing is multi-family in University Place and in Lincoln overall, it is about 33%. The median housing age is also about two decades older than the median housing age in Lincoln. The median housing value is also lower than in Lincoln.

One strength for this area is that it is an art hub, and it was designated as the creative district in 2023 by the Nebraska Arts Council. This creative group of stakeholders are now in the process of becoming an official nonprofit. The creative district is being run by Nebraska right now. The state of Nebraska gives them a little bit of money for administrative activities related to the district. This makes them available for state art grants and to do art related things within the creative district boundary. Another strength is the historical character. This was a former suburb of Lincoln and was annexed in 1926. Around 48th street, a lot of that old character still exists. The old Main Street is the Main Street for the independent community of University Place.

There have been some successful redevelopment projects in the past few years in this area. The Leighton District at 48th and Leighton Ave is one of them. There is the square at 48th and Holdrege and then 48th and Madison. The 48th and Madison has been approved and expected to be built very soon. These are three examples of mixed- use projects that have brought in new housing and new commercial spaces in the neighborhood. There has also been recent infrastructure. The 48th street improvements include upgrading the streets, sidewalk signals and the water main replacement. There were challenges for businesses, and the project took longer than expected. But now, there are sidewalk signals, new water infrastructure, and a new street. There is the dead man's flood reduction project that is expected to be completed by 2028. It is estimated that this will remove around 480 structures from the floodplain. This is good if you are living in the floodplain. The final project is the 33rd and Cornhusker intersection improvement project. This is the overpass over the railroad tracks at 33rd Street. This will be a major project and the estimated completion date is 2031. This will have some positive impacts on the University Place neighborhood and traffic.

The final strength that will be mentioned today is the city parking. There are not many neighborhoods outside of downtown that have city maintained free parking lots. There are three city maintained parking lots in University Place that creates 133 parking stalls.

Some of the challenges that this neighborhood is facing right now, and people have mentioned since day one of this project, is the traffic on 48th Street. There are around 19,000 vehicles that travel on 48th Street each day. That is almost double of 33rd and 56th Street. The way the streets are aligned today and the railroad tracks on 33rd Street is causing a lot of through traffic on 48th Street and creating several challenges for this neighborhood. Cars are speeding and it doesn't feel safe walking on the sidewalks.

There has been an extensive public input process going on for almost an entire year. Two in-person open houses were held as well as a virtual open house. The virtual open house was successful because people have limited time to attend an in-person event. Also, surveys were conducted at a local coffee shop MoJava, and a couple of Nebraska Wesleyan student events. The renters of the neighborhood were not giving much input, so a special focus group was created to target that demographic. Over all the events, 467 written comments were received. There was also a tile decorating activity, to get people engaged and thinking about their neighborhood. Most of the comments were traffic issues, more mixed use buildings and more affordable housing.

The recommendations are organized into three topics: N 48th Street commercial corridor, neighborhood revitalization, and historic preservation. Each of these topics have a vision statement. The vision for 48th Street is to create a vibrant, walkable mixed use commercial district, that encourages residents, students and visitors to spend time in the University Place neighborhood. A way to improve this would be to reconfigure the driving lanes and direction of 48th Street. Making it one lane each direction, making curb extensions and parallel parking on one side of the street. This makes for an improved pedestrian experience. The 33rd and Cornhusker overpass will help make it safer for pedestrians and shift some of the traffic off N 48th Street. This won't be completed until after 2031.

A couple of projects in the five to ten year range would be roundabouts at Adams Street and Leighton Avenue. There are several mixed use and residential opportunities available. One is 48th and Madison and 48th and Saint Paul Avenue, which is also seen as a key pathway. Wesleyan considers this to be the main gateway to campus and thus not using the commercial space. If the connection can be increased, then more students may hang out in the University Place area. Another goal in mind is to have a space for pop up neighborhood events. Street art is being considered, and a Bloomberg grant has been applied for. Street art not only makes a pleasant environment but also draws attention to the crosswalks by being brightly decorated. There are also looking at signature lighting for Saint Paul Avenue maybe a reproduction historical acorn light or perhaps a more modern style. The other item with the 48th Street corridor is city parking enhancements by adding a canopy to shade cars and use at events for vendors. Also, the welcome signs to University Place need repair.

Next is building on the neighborhood's role as an arts hub. They are looking at doing a sculpture program in the right of way. Sioux Falls is a model for this idea, and they have an art walk every

year that centers around the sculptures. Also, the bus stops in University Place need to be improved as none of them have any shelter. Other ideas include new landscaping, wayfinding signage to parking lots that have a low occupancy rate.

The next topic is neighborhood revitalization. They want to utilize city resources, including financial tools to support the continued redevelopment of University Place, one of Lincoln's great neighborhoods. So this topic can show how TIF could be used . Thierolf mentioned again, that the blight studies would be completed by the summer of 2025 and the results will help guide how the funds from TIF will be used. Signage, entryway structures, public right-of-way is TIF eligible. Housing rehabilitation could also be an area that a TIF program could help support.

The subarea plan identifies over 30 potential redevelopment sites and most of these are vacant. The final topic is historic preservation, and the vision is to celebrate the historic character of University Place and integrate new and exciting improvement that reflect the neighborhood's role as a creative district. This area would build on the historic character and National Register or local landmarks could be an opportunity as well. The biggest benefit for property owners would be the tax credits on restored buildings that are designated historic too.

Thierolf stated that no federal funds are being used for this plan, except if a roundabout were to be built, but the 33rd and Cornhusker project does have federal funding.

Barnes stated that this project is representative to Lincoln and University Place.

Lorenzo asked what type of feedback the community has provided on the blight study.

Thierolf commented that people don't necessarily understand what a blight study is so it sounds negative. There haven't been very many comments. Blight studies are actually the beginning of something positive. They open up new funding opportunities.

Eddins said an extreme blight study opens up immediate opportunities with a 5,000 tax credit and commented on the 33rd area next to East campus. She wants this taken into consideration that 33rd Street could see an increase in traffic. This is a busy area with the University employees and students crossing the street. This situation requires the need to look at the crosswalk accessibility for people and the ADA guidelines for the sidewalks.

Barnes said city departments are looking at the sidewalk guidelines that are required by the ADA laws, with new projects presented.

Ryman - Yost stated it has been mentioned to look at the slope of the sidewalk.

Barnes thanked Thierolf for doing a great job, along with Jill Dolberg for the historic preservation and Arvind Gopalakrishnan for the graphics.

Ryman – Yost commented on what an exciting project this is and how it inspires other neighborhoods.

There being no further questions, the briefing was adjourned at 12:50 p.m.