



Annual Report | Urban Design Committee

# UDC 2024



# URBAN DESIGN COMMITTEE

## COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Michelle Penn, Chair

Gill Peace, Vice-Chair

Frank Ordia

Emily Deeker

Jill Grasso

Tom Huston

Mark Canney

Michael Harpster

## PLANNING DEPARTMENT STAFF

Collin Christopher

Teresa McKinstry

Juan Carrasco

Paul Barnes

Arvind Gopalakrishnan

## APPROVED

The Urban Design Committee approved this Annual Report on March 4, 2024.

## PHOTO & IMAGE CREDITS

Cover Image and inside Cover Image: Planning Staff

All other project photos, images or illustrations were provided by applicants that appeared before the Urban Design Committee and are considered part of the public record unless otherwise noted.

# Background

The Urban Design Committee was established by ordinance in 1981 to advise city government on enhancing the physical environment of our city to increase enjoyment of living in and visiting Lincoln. Per Section 4.36 of the Lincoln Municipal Code, the Committee is to consist of seven appointed citizen members serving three-year terms. The Committee meets as necessary on the first Tuesday of the month at 3 p.m. in the Council Chambers.

The Urban Design Committee member roster remained unchanged until August 2024, including Michelle Penn (chair), Gill Peace (vice-chair), Emily Deeker, Jill Grasso, Tom Huston, Frank Ordia and Mark Canney. Subsequently, Frank Ordia resigned from the committee, and Michael Harpster assumed his position in November. The Committee was staffed by Collin Christopher and Arvind Gopalakrishnan, with support from Teresa McKinstry,

Juan Carrasco, and Paul Barnes.

The committee advises the Mayor, City Council, Planning Commission, city boards, city departments, and other public agencies in matters relating to urban design, visual relationships, architectural design, and aesthetics. Reviews are generally limited to projects sponsored, initiated, or financed by the City (public projects); projects in which the City will make some financial contribution (public/private projects); and projects located on City right-of-way or other City property (private projects).

## Project Review Summary

In 2024, the Urban Design Committee reviewed 15 unique projects, with some receiving multiple reviews. Those 15 consisted of 7 TIF projects, 6 city-led projects, 2 sidewalk cafe applications (one of which was TIF funded), and 1 neighborhood design standards appeal.

# 15

**UNIQUE PROJECTS**





## TIF Project Reviews

The Urban Design Committee provided a total of eleven advisory reviews for projects requesting Tax Increment Financing (TIF). These projects vary widely in scale, scope, location and land use. Of note, they include two affordable housing projects, a sidewalk cafe project, a rowhouse redevelopment project, a townhome complex, an art studio expansion in downtown, a redevelopment of some underutilized sections of a shopping center, and a city-led streetscape project. What follows is a brief summary of each of the TIF project reviews that came before the Committee in 2024.



**Review Date(s):** January

Reserve Development proposed the redevelopment of the 130,000-square-foot former Sears building at Gateway Shopping Center, 6400 O St. The project aims to transform the existing structure into an upscale, multi-tenant space featuring three new-to-market retailers, a high-end green electric vehicle service facility, and a Lincoln hospital-affiliated urgent care and outpatient medical office. While preserving the building's original shell, the redevelopment proposed to incorporate sustainable design elements, including improved glazing, energy-efficient HVAC systems, LED lighting, and low-flow plumbing features. The south façade was planned to be modified to accommodate signage while maintaining architectural continuity through the retention of existing brickwork, a stone base, and cornice details. Additionally, site improvements included enhanced landscaping, pedestrian connectivity, and the replacement of ash trees along the east access road. As a TIF-funded project in an area without established design standards, the applicants engaged the Urban Design Committee to ensure the project contributes to reducing blight and improving the customer experience. The committee recommended approval,

# Pioneers Mixed-Income Row Housing Redevelopment

*South 46th St and Pioneers Boulevard*



**Review Date(s): February**

The Pioneers Mixed-Income Row House Redevelopment Project, located in the proposed College View Redevelopment Area, was brought to the Urban Development Department by NeighborWorks Lincoln (NWL) for tax increment financing (TIF) consideration, necessitating a review by the Urban Design Committee. The project aimed to transform a vacant lot at the northeast corner of South 46th Street and Pioneers Boulevard into a 17,000-square-foot mixed-income residential development, featuring three- and four-bedroom interlocking row houses. The plan included 12 dwelling units across three buildings—a six-plex, a four-plex, and a duplex—with seven units permanently designated as affordable housing for buyers earning 65% of the Area Median Income (AMI). The redevelopment introduced a midblock multimodal court, improved sidewalks, and additional street trees. The Urban Design Committee reviewed the project for conformance with neighborhood design standards, focusing on building design, landscaping, neighborhood integration, and blight mitigation. Based on these factors, the committee recommended approval.



**Review Date(s):** April, May

This proposal included two two-story buildings, each containing four townhome units, and was reviewed for development at the northwest corner of 26th and U Streets (Hawley Corners CUP). Situated within 300 feet of the Hawley Local Landmark District, the project required review by both the Historic Preservation Commission and the Urban Design Committee due to its request for tax increment financing (TIF). The Historic Preservation Commission evaluated the project's impact on the district and provided recommendations on its design. The townhomes, oriented east-west with porches facing U and Vine Streets, featured attached rear garages accessed via a central driveway from 26th Street. The Urban Design Committee reviewed the project in April, focusing on façade enhancements, including porches, railings, columns, doors, windows, and siding. The applicant incorporated committee feedback and presented two revised façade options in May, out of which, the first design option received approval. The project met Neighborhood Design Standards, and the committee recommended approval based on building design, landscaping, neighborhood integration, and blight mitigation.

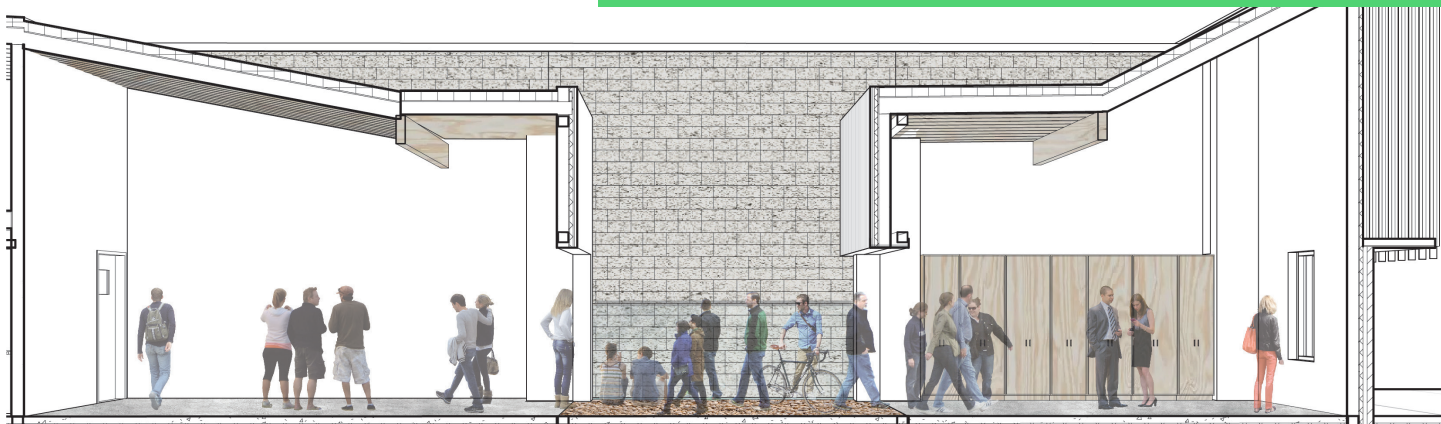


## Review Date(s): October 2023, June 2024

Hoppe Development presented their proposal of a mixed-use residential project at 1000 S 13th Street, featuring 125 affordable apartment homes, ground-floor commercial space for a clinic, and over 90 open-air parking stalls beneath the building. The development integrates public amenities, including a pocket plaza, food truck/clinic pop-up infrastructure, a linear park, and a roof deck for social gatherings.

Given its request for Tax Increment Financing (TIF) assistance, the Urban Design Committee provided preliminary feedback on October 3, 2023, and the project came back with updated drawings in June, 2024. The UDC reviewed the architectural aesthetics and material choices, choice of landscaping and outdoor elements, compatibility of the design with the existing houses in the neighborhood, and blight mitigation. Despite nonconformance with Neighborhood Design Standards, staff recognized the project's thoughtful design approach and alignment with the City's Comprehensive Plan goals. The UDC recommended approval, requiring a future review of the streetscape design to ensure a cohesive urban environment.

## Constellation Studio Expansion *S 21st and O St*



## Review Date(s): July

Constellation Studios, located at 21st and O Street in the Telegraph District, presented their plan expansion to include professional artist studios, a retail shop, an art demonstration room, and an open-air courtyard. The design emphasized open interiors, extensive glazing for natural light, and flexible outdoor spaces connected with the retail and demonstration areas.

The project sought Tax Increment Financing (TIF) assistance and was reviewed as part of a Redevelopment Agreement with the Urban Development Department. It aligned with Downtown Design Standards, incorporating brick and metal panels, and successfully integrated new and existing structures. As part of the streetscape plan, to address safety concerns, bollards were ruled out, and planters were proposed instead to prevent vehicle encroachment while enhancing aesthetics. The Urban Design Committee (UDC) recommended approval of the project, with landscaping plans scheduled for later review to ensure ADA compliance and pedestrian accessibility.

# Central at South Haymarket

205 S 10th St



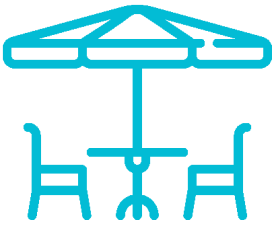
Review Date(s): August

The Annex Group proposed a 6-story, 173-unit affordable housing development at 205 10th Street, targeting families. The project requested TIF funding and underwent design review under the Downtown Design Standards on November 7, 2023. It featured one-, two-, and three-bedroom units, with off-site parking negotiated with the City at 11th & N Street. The project came back in August, 2024 to present the streetscape design and some revisions in the façade.

The building's design, materials, and neighborhood integration were reviewed, ensuring compatibility and blight mitigation. Streetscape plans included sidewalk enhancements, benches, bicycle racks, trash receptacles, landscaped bump-outs, tree grates, and planting beds to improve pedestrian accessibility and sustainability. The N Street bike lane remained, with modifications at intersections for safety.

Further refinements included courtyard seating, a dog run, a playground, and planters for privacy. The building's window and balcony placements were adjusted, enhancing the design without cost-cutting. The UDC recommended approval, with minor streetscape modifications under discussion.





## Sidewalk Cafe Reviews

The Committee provided design review for 2 sidewalk cafe applications in the downtown area in 2024, one of which requested TIF assistance.



**Review Date(s):** January

MCO-LLC, owners of Aragon Tavern located on the ground floor of the 22-story Lied Place Building at 1125 Q St., applied for a sidewalk café permit to extend their dining space into the surface space abutting the public right-of-way. The proposed café, measuring 47'-2" x 9'-10", featured railings, planters, and seating designed to align with the Lincoln Municipal Code. The project requested Tax Increment Financing assistance, and after careful review, the Urban Design Committee found the proposal compatible with city standards and approved the application, allowing for an enhanced streetscape and expanded outdoor dining experience.

# Bison Witches Bar & Deli Sidewalk Café

1320 P Street

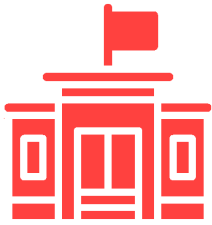


Review Date(s): July

Bison Witches proposed replacing an existing red tarp canopy with a black, more transparent structure to improve durability and functionality. The Urban Development Department sought feedback on the design, materials, and fire code compliance. Concerns were raised about the permanence of the structure, its lack of transparency, and whether it aligns with downtown standards.

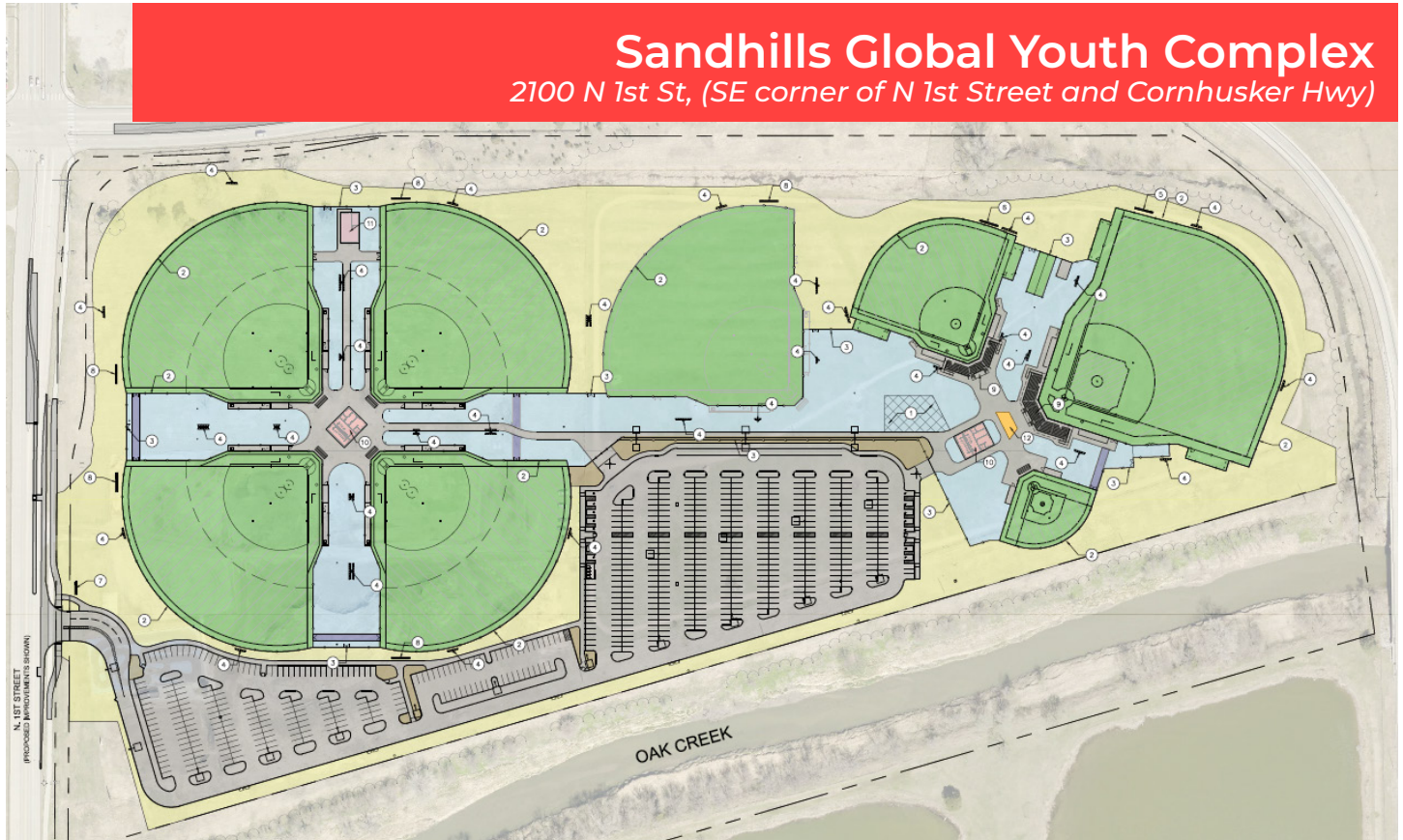
Committee members questioned the need for egress, seasonal usability, and material longevity, with some viewing the enclosure as an attempt to extend the building rather than a temporary solution. While the updated direction showed improvement, the committee requested more details and renderings before making a decision.





## City Project Reviews

The Urban Design Committee provided design reviews of 5 City projects ranging from Streetscape plans to Park masterplans, and sports facilities.



Review Date(s): April, May

The Sandhills Global Youth Complex (SGYC), a 40-acre baseball and softball facility at Cornhusker Highway and N. 1st Street, was reviewed by the Urban Design Committee in April. Designed for youth of all backgrounds and abilities, the complex will feature five synthetic turf fields for multi-age use, two championship fields for Nebraska Wesleyan teams, and a Homer's Heroes field for players with disabilities. Supporting amenities included concession buildings, grandstand seating, a playground, and over 600 parking spaces. This project requested funding from different public entities, including the City and the County. Given the site's location along I-180, a key entryway corridor to Lincoln, the committee emphasized the importance of its visual and functional impact. Key discussion points included landscaping enhancements, emergency vehicle access, shade structures, seating areas, and sustainability features. While no design standards existed for this area, the committee provided recommendations to improve the site's aesthetics and usability. Despite ongoing site work and scheduled completion in spring 2025, the committee noted that the site plan had yet to reflect certain suggestions, such as additional landscaping. Based on the

## Multi-Modal Transportation Center

701 S 10th St.



Review Date(s): May

At the May meeting, Liz Elliott provided an update on the Lincoln Transportation and Utilities (LTU) StarTran Multi-Modal Transportation Center, which received a \$23.6 million RAISE grant. The project aims to improve transit accessibility and safety at a new location on 10th and H street, selected after extensive site evaluations. The facility will include 18 bus bays, indoor waiting areas, bike parking, and pedestrian improvements, with environmental studies currently underway. Additional considerations include landscaping, parking adjustments, and wayfinding enhancements. Community engagement efforts are ongoing, and construction is planned to begin in 2025. The Urban Design Committee was invited to provide comments but did not conduct a formal review. The project will return for further input as designs are refined.

## Downtown Corridors Phase-1 Design

9th, 10th, 14th and O St.

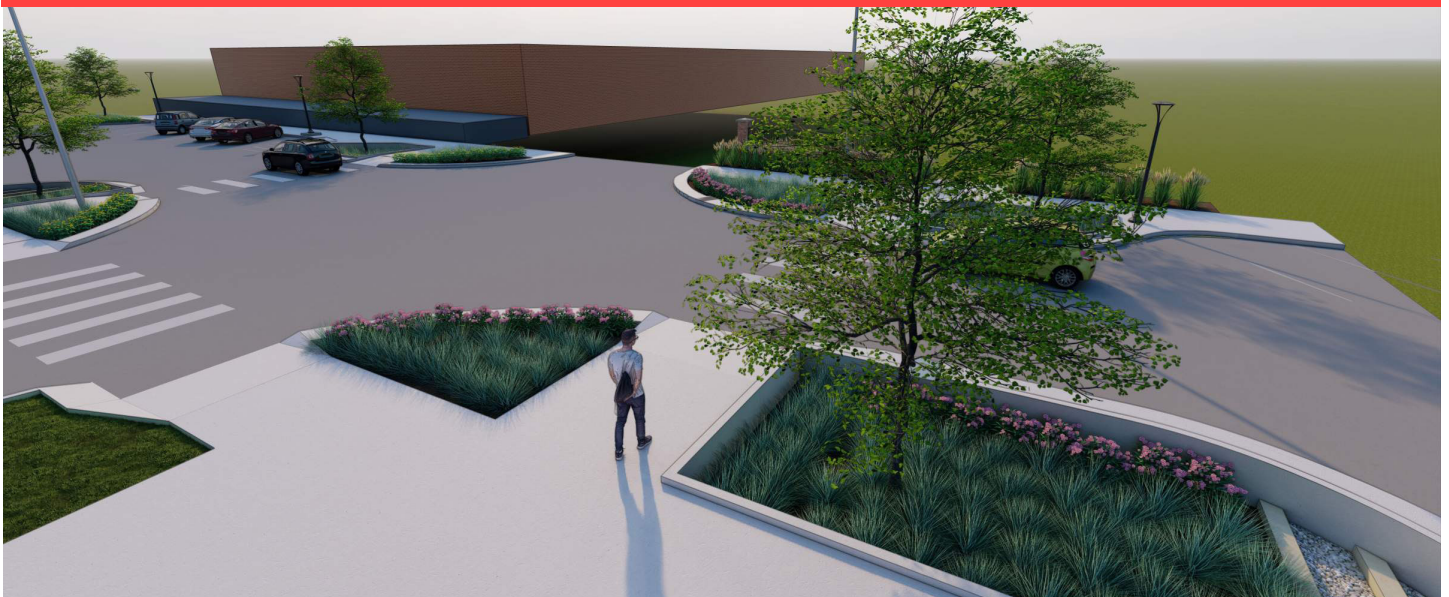


The Downtown Corridor Phase 1 Improvement Project stemmed from the 2018 Downtown Master Plan and aims to enhance streetscapes, pedestrian accessibility, and outdoor spaces. The design team began the visioning process in 2022, with construction planned for Spring 2025. Key upgrades include replacing Ash trees, sidewalk and intersection improvements, decorative lighting, and outdoor seating areas.

Funding sources include TIF districts, general funds, and State/Federal grants. The plans also addressed bike lanes, moveable street furniture, kiosk spaces, and updated parking/drop-off zones. The committee discussed branding, Husker game-day impact, bike parking, and liquor law compliance. Feedback from meetings and open houses would shape final adjustments before construction. The Urban Design Committee was in full support of the project, and recommended approval.

## South Haymarket Street and Streetscapes Master Plan

*401 7th and N St, and 7th and M St*



**Review Date(s): September, November**

As part of the Cotswold Building Redevelopment Project and South Haymarket Street and Streetscapes Master Plan, the City is proposing pedestrian improvements to the South Haymarket District, particularly at 7th & N Streets and 7th & M Streets. These improvements align with the South Haymarket Streetscape Design Standards and anticipate the South Haymarket Park, set to begin construction in spring 2025.

For 7th & N Streets, the key changes include sidewalk widening, pedestrian lighting, defined crosswalks, and a shared-use path replacing the current cycle track. Bump-outs, raised intersections, and landscaped medians will slow traffic and improve pedestrian safety. A mid-block crossing with a flashing beacon will enhance connectivity to the Gold 4 Parking Garage.

At 7th & M Streets, the improvements include wider sidewalks, ADA-accessible connections, stormwater enhancements, and landscaped bump-outs to define parking areas. These enhancements support pedestrian movement and future connectivity.

The City staff, working with consultants, have integrated elements from the Downtown Master Plan (2005 & 2018) and the South Haymarket Neighborhood Plan to enhance connectivity, safety, and urban resilience. The project is set for bidding in September 2024, with construction completion by summer 2025. The committee recommended approval.

# South Haymarket Park Plan

*7th St and N St.*



**Review Date(s): November**

The Parks and Recreation Department presented the plans for South Haymarket Park, located in the South Haymarket District, covering 8.5 acres. The park aims to support economic development, create a larger downtown greenspace, connect the Haymarket District to southern neighborhoods, and enhance the urban area. Key features of the park include a skatepark, a dog park, and a gathering space with a water feature.

The park's design includes a community building, playground zones, a pump track, and a trail system connecting existing bike paths. A major goal is improving walkability downtown and increasing accessibility through new pedestrian crossings and bike connections. The park will also host events and feature informal spaces for relaxation, including a "Hearth" gathering area and swings overlooking the Haymarket District. The park is designed with attention to sustainability, with drought-tolerant plants and responsible water usage.

The construction phase is set to begin in spring 2025, with the park opening in 2026. The community building will be elevated to blend with the park's design, featuring both indoor and outdoor spaces. Staff parking options and public restrooms are also part of the plan. The committee expressed enthusiasm for the park's evolution, with a vote to approve the plans contingent on further review of the community building structure.

# Holdrege Streetscape Plan

Holdrege, 23rd to 33rd St



**Review Date(s): November**

The Urban Development Department and Erickson Sullivan Architects presented the streetscape enhancement project for Holdrege Street between 27th and 33rd Streets. Since the project aims to improve the public Right-of-Way and could receive TIF funding, the Urban Design Committee was asked to review the landscape design. The corridor, located between a busy commercial district and the UNL East Campus, was identified as a critical area needing improvements, including the replacement of aging street trees, damaged sidewalks, and inadequate public transportation amenities. The proposal focused on enhancing pedestrian safety, comfort, and aesthetics while maintaining the corridor's historic character.

Key design elements include ornamental pedestrian lighting, new benches at bus stops, and a landscaped median at 28th and Holdrege, featuring a decorative Clinton Neighborhood sign. Flowering ornamental trees were selected to create seasonal visual interest, particularly in spring. ADA accessibility improvements, such as the installation of new curb ramps and the replacement of damaged sidewalks, were prioritized. The plan also aims to enhance the entry to the corridor, improve the neighborhood's identity, and foster community pride. The project would be phased, with construction likely to begin in 2026 after final designs and funding are secured.



## Appeals

The Urban Design Committee conditionally approved a Neighborhood Design Standards appeal for a single-family house on 4207 Pioneers Boulevard that required a number of waivers and go through the appeals process.

### Gruenemeyer House *4207 Pioneers Blvd.*



In 2023 and early 2024, the Urban Design Committee reviewed a unique residential proposal featuring a fully underground home with only the garage visible above ground. Such designs are uncommon in Lincoln and do not align with established neighborhood design standards, requiring numerous waivers. The Planning Director denied these waivers, prompting a detailed review process. Over three months, the design team made significant revisions, integrating key design elements and presenting updated renderings that ultimately gained committee approval. However, due to property-related issues on the applicant's end, the project did not move forward, and the application was ultimately withdrawn. The original owner of the property then applied a design that was previously approved administratively by planning staff.

# URBAN DESIGN COMMITTEE

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