

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, May 24, 2024, 8:30 a.m., City Council Chambers, County-City Building, 555 S. 10th Street, Lincoln, Nebraska.

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE: Eileen Bergt, Heidi Cuca, Andrea Gebhart, Delonte Johnson and Kile Johnson; (Ann Post and David Quade absent).

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE: Collin Christopher, David Cary and Teresa McKinstry of the Planning Department; Liz Elliott, Director of Lincoln Transportation and Utilities; Carla Cosier, StarTran; Brett Daugherty, Acting Capitol Administrator; and other interested citizens.

STATED PURPOSE OF MEETING: Nebraska Capitol Environs Commission Meeting

Chair K. Johnson called the meeting to order and acknowledged the posting of the Open Meetings Act in the room.

K. Johnson then called for the approval of the minutes of the regular meeting held April 26, 2024. Motion for approval made by Gebhart, seconded by Cuca and carried 5-0: Bergt, Cuca, Gebhart, D. Johnson and K. Johnson voting 'yes'; Post and Quade absent.

MULTI-MODAL TRANSPORTATION CENTER PRESENTATION: May 24, 2024

Collin Christopher stated this project is just outside the Capitol Environs district. The location is currently an employee parking lot for city and county employees. This is an advisory review. He would encourage members to think about how this project would complement the Environs district.

Liz Elliott stated the ultimate goal is to provide safer and more efficient transportation for the City of Lincoln. Right now, the current transfer center is at 11th Street and 'N' Street, but will be temporarily be moving to 11th Street and 'L' Street. There is limited room at that location and has no ability to expand, lacks restrooms or indoor waiting areas and has limited access to other transportation options. They are looking at developing a Multi-Modal Transportation Center to better serve the community. The first Multi-Modal Transportation Study was completed back in 2004. Since that time,

they have done a number of different types of engagement, including studies in 2004, 2007, 2016 and 2018. In 2023, they held a design charrette. The site selection criteria consisted of numerous items, including proximity to downtown, being able to accommodate the full program, accessibility from surrounding streets, avoidance of sites with environmental or historic restrictions, proximity to bike corridor(s), multi-modal connectivity, and sustainable, feasible and social and economic benefit. They looked at where the majority of passengers were coming from and going to. It was clear that this was the downtown area. Students are heavy users of the system. 17 potential sites were reviewed. Many were ruled out due to criteria not being met. A couple of years ago, the former Police station a few blocks north of the County-City building was evaluated. An environmental study was done and it was concluded that it used to be a gas station. There were other issues as well. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) said federal money could not be invested in this block. More recently they focused in on two blocks jointly owned by the City and County. Block 101 is the north lot, block 106 is the south lot. Both lots were almost identical with the exception of the parking garage on the north lot. The north lot is surrounded by four very busy arterial streets. As they started to do the modeling, the turn radius for buses was inadequate. The number of bus bays would have had to be reduced. The ultimate goal is for bus storage, as well as the Multi-Modal Center. They started looking at the possibility of separating the parking from the Multi-Modal Center. The north parking lot has the ability to add three more levels to the garage. They started focusing on the south lot for the Multi-Modal Center. They looked at how the current bike routes would fit with this center. The connectivity pulls together the multi-modal aspect. The preferred site is Block 106, the south lot. If 'H' Street is vacated, this would give the city more space. The block would include a small two-story building approximately 1,200 square feet in size, with public amenities. They would be able to have customer service and ticket sales. The second floor would be space for StarTran employees and staff, as well as a large meeting room. The remainder of the site would have 18 bus bays, plus one intercity bay for possible future use. The area would be lighted, with covered walkways and signage. She showed a possible rendering of the new facility. There aren't specific materials to propose yet, but they plan on keeping the design in line with the current County-City buildings to the north. The first floor would be the waiting area on the northeast corner. About 50 parking stalls would be south of the building for StarTran employees. Ride Share has been considered as well, and was suggested at public meetings. 'H' Street would be vacated. The sidewalks would continue to be the wider paths on both the 9th Street and 10th Street sides. She showed a view of a possible bus bay area design, followed by some renderings of what the site might look like. Wayfinding will keep everyone informed. They would be enhancing the pedestrian experience through improvements such as safer crosswalk, trees and landscaping. There would be covered bike space on the north side of the building for bikes, scooters, and other possibilities. There is a bus stop on 10th Street that is heavily used. That stop would be removed and routes would be slightly shifted to accommodate that. Ultimately, they are trying to enhance the level of service provided. They will be able to have all the buses come in at the same time without delays or conflict. This will reduce the time of transfers. It will be more efficient. Due to this, the hope is that more people will be drawn to use the system. This is estimated

to be about a \$33 million dollar project. That is 2022 dollars. Most of the project will be funded by a \$23.6 million dollar federal grant. Because they want to make sure they are doing this right, they have done robust community engagement. Carla Cosier and herself have gone door to door and talked with people. They talked to over 70 people in the neighborhood. They have also sent mailers to everyone. They have reached out to the adjacent neighborhood associations, as well as the Mayor's Roundtable. They had a public open house in March 2024. There was a City/County employee lunch and learn in April and May of 2024. Employee parking would be displaced. They are developing a construction phase parking plan. They are continuing to do local organization outreach. They are now in the Section 106 review for environmental review. They do not want to have a negative impact on the neighborhood. They hope to wrap up the 106 review this summer. That has to be submitted to the FTA for review. They can't start property acquisitions until the FTA says they are okay to move ahead. After the FTA has signed off, they will be able to complete the rest of the design. They are still on schedule to start construction in 2025, and are planning to be open and in the new center at the beginning of 2027.

Bergt stated overall, she understands all the issues but the site seems a little south of perhaps where everyone wants to go. She was thinking about people coming in and completing a transfer. At one point, there was an inner city bus. Innovation Campus also tested a self-driving vehicle. Elliott understands this is a little further south than originally envisioned. It is nearly impossible to find a site closer to the existing site. She believes as the City grows, this provides everything they need. There is a downtown trolley every 7 minutes. They are looking at how to expand a rapid connection to the downtown trolley. There is still a contract with University Nebraska Lincoln (UNL) to provide a bus between campuses. The concept of a self-driving vehicle is still there. They are still looking at options. They are also looking at micro transit for the future. This concept would utilize more ride shares to help get users to the center.

Bergt likes the layout and thinks it is nice. Having it staffed is a great idea. She wondered where StarTran employees are currently located. Elliott pointed out where they are located at 7th Street and 'J' Street. It will take a while to move everyone to the new facility. Bergt asked about possible canopies for the riders to move from the waiting area to the buses. Elliott responded that is something they will definitely look at, so passengers don't have to walk in the weather. Bergt believes the design looks a little trendy. Columns might be nice like in the Haymarket area. Also, the planting beds look a little small. She believes they should be a little bigger. Understory trees could make it hard to see the signs. You don't want to place planting beds under the canopies. There is the impression that native plants are easier to maintain, but they are not. She would hope for irrigation as well.

Elliott is very cognizant that they are next to a residential neighborhood. They want to make sure and have a buffer. She understands they have a lot more work to do with the landscaping plan.

Bergt believes benches are good, but pointed out they can be abused by skateboards. She encouraged Elliott to think about the design.

D. Johnson thinks this will be a good enhancement to the community. It sounds like a lot of due diligence has been done.

Cuca complimented Elliott on a well put together presentation. She would like to hear about what other cities our size are doing. She asked about the first and last mile. She assumes walking is the primary method to get here. Elliott stated that the first and last mile is the toughest transit challenge there is. You can't have bus stops every 100 feet. She believes there has been more emphasis on this. They are trying to be more strategic with bike shares, bike racks, and other methods such as that. When they applied for this grant, they tried to keep that in mind. As they go through the Complete Streets concept, they will continue to make sure the focus is on all forms of transportation. When they were in the pandemic, they looked at how Lincoln's transit system compared to similar cities. They looked at Sioux Falls, South Dakota and Missoula, Montana, for example. Sioux Falls built a new transit center within the last ten years.

Cuca inquired if there would be all day parking for those commuting from Lincoln to Omaha. Elliott stated that would eventually be part of this. The idea was to have enough parking for people to park and ride. There are 18 bus bays with a 19th bay next to the County/City building. Cuca asked if there are 18 routes currently. Elliott noted that number includes room for growth. Cuca wondered as the north parking garage is expanded, if that is part of the \$33 million and who pays for that. Elliott stated that is not part of the \$33 million. That would be a separate project. There would be a bond and division between City and County payback. Those decisions have yet to be finalized.

Gebhart applauded Elliott for the outreach. She knows that buses change. She wondered if the new bus height has been considered in the design, along with electric bus charging. Elliott stated that the new center will have electric bus charging. Some buses now have natural gas. They want to make sure this is built to accommodate more electrical chargers as they are needed. This will allow us to extend the daily life of the charge. There is also a plan to add electric charging stations in the parking lot so the community and others may use it. That is part of the conversation. Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) buses are taller than others. That is something the designers have noted.

Bergt asked about the \$23 million dollar grant. She inquired if there have been discussions if cuts need to be made. Elliott noted they haven't had those conversations yet. There are other grants they are pursuing to see if they could pay for other systems. There are different grants for climate friendly landscapes as well.

Gebhart wanted to make sure this is timeless and ties into the Capitol.

K. Johnson stated this seems futuristic in terms of design. They want to make sure the quality of materials is maintained. He noticed the benches as well. This is south of the current government buildings. It goes right into the South of Downtown neighborhood. 94 percent of that area is rental. He believes the loss of employee parking during construction could have a big impact on the neighborhood. Elliott doesn't have a final plan yet. They are having conversations. They are looking at Carriage Park at 11th Street and 'L' Street as a location for temporary employee parking, along with Center Park. Both of those parking garages have a number of stalls available. That would be an option. They are looking at a shuttle system to move employees from the garages to the county-city building. There is no on-street parking on 9th Street and 10th Street. They are looking at all parking available on current County and City parking lots as well. There are a lot of puzzle pieces to be put together. K. Johnson emphasized that he would be concerned with parking migrating to the surrounding neighborhoods.

Gebhart wondered about the percentage of City and County staff that use the public transportation system and if there's a way to incentivize greater use. Elliott stated that is an idea on the table now. They haven't looked at that yet. Perhaps a type of wellness incentive could be done. She noted that Carriage Park is covered so employees might have to walk a little farther but wouldn't have to remove snow from their vehicle.

K. Johnson asked how many buses now are diesel. Carla Cosier responded that 16 are currently diesel, which represents 20 percent of the fleet.

K. Johnson wanted to know how many people attended the F Street presentation. Elliott responded about 65. Several neighborhood association meetings were held prior to that. She has been impressed with the feedback received. She noted the website: <https://www.lincoln.ne.gov/City/Departments/LTU/StarTran/Projects/MMTC> where comments can be submitted.

Bergt wondered about the timing. Would you be able to build additional spaces before the lot is taken out of commission? Elliott stated unfortunately not. The completion date would have to be pushed out. The idea is to do it as quickly as possible. Both lots would be under construction at the same time.

Brett Daugherty wondered about the size of the building. It seems to him that 1,200 square feet is not that big. It seems small to him. Elliott stated it could very well change, but she doesn't believe it would be much larger than that.

STAFF REPORT:

- Christopher stated that he is anticipating at least two items for the June commission meeting. One is regarding the planned permanent supportive housing project in South Haymarket that was talked about last month. The applicant will be presenting design concepts. Secondly, there is a small façade

rehab project from St. Mary's Catholic Church that will be coming forward for review as well.

MISCELLANEOUS:

- Christopher stated that Teresa McKinstry is retiring after 29 years with the City. This is her last meeting.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:30 a.m.