

## MEETING RECORD

*Advanced public notice of the Planning Commission meeting was posted on the County-City bulletin board and the Planning Department's website. In addition, a public notice was emailed to the Lincoln Journal Star for publication on Tuesday, June 17, 2025.*

**NAME OF GROUP:** PLANNING COMMISSION

**DATE, TIME, AND PLACE OF MEETING:** Wednesday, June 25, 2025, 1:00 p.m., Hearing Room 112, on the first floor of the County-City Building, 555 S. 10<sup>th</sup> Street, Lincoln, Nebraska.

**MEMBERS AND OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:** Lorenzo Ball, Dick Campbell, Gloria Eddins, Bailey Feit, Cristy Joy, Rich Rodenburg, and Cindy Ryman Yost; David Cary, Ben Callahan, Steve Henrichsen, Shelli Reid, Andrew Thierolf, and Laura Tinnerstet of the Planning Department, media, and other interested citizens.

**STATED PURPOSE OF MEETING:** Regular Planning Commission Hearing

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

Chair Ryman Yost requested a motion approving the minutes for the regular meeting held June 11, 2025.

Motion for approval of the minutes made by Campbell, seconded Joy.

Minutes approved 6-0: Ball, Campbell, Feit, Joy, Rodenburg and Ryman Yost, voting "yes". Cruz and Ebert absent. Eddins abstained.

Chair Ryman Yost asked the Clerk to call for the Consent Agenda Items.

### **CONSENT AGENDA**

### **PUBLIC HEARING & ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION**

### **BEFORE PLANNING COMMISSION:**

**June 25, 2025**

Members present: Ball, Campbell, Eddins, Feit Joy, Rodenburg and Ryman Yost. Cruz and Ebert absent.

**The Consent Agenda consisted of the following items: Special Permit 25019 and Special Permit 25020.**

**There were no ex parte communications disclosed.**

**There were no ex parte communications disclosed relating to site visit.**

Campbell moved approval of the Consent Agenda; seconded by Joy.

Consent Agenda approved 7 -0: Ball, Campbell, Eddins, Feit, Joy, Rodenburg and Ryman Yost, voting "yes". Cruz and Ebert absent.

**Note:** This is **Final Action** on the following items **Special Permit 1123D unless** appealed by filing a Notice of Appeal with the **City Council** or the **County Board within 14 days**.

**COMPREHENSIVE PLAN CONFORMANCE 25005 TO REVIEW AS TO CONFORMANCE WITH THE 2050 LINCOLN LANCASTER COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN, AN AMENDMENT TO THE CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (CIP) TO AMEND THE DOWNTOWN CENTRAL LIBRARY PROJECT WITH AN UPDATED LOCATION OF 1111 O STREET AND REVISED FUNDING SOURCES AND TIMING.**

**PUBLIC HEARING:**

**JUNE 25, 2025**

Members present: Ball, Campbell, Eddins, Feit, Joy, Rodenburg and Ryman Yost. Cruz and Ebert absent.

Staff Recommendation: In conformance with the Comprehensive Plan

**There were no ex-parte communications disclosed.**

**There were no ex-parte communications disclosed relating to site visits.**

**Staff/Applicant Presentation-**

**Andrew Thierolf, Planning Department, 555 S. 10<sup>th</sup> Street, Lincoln, NE,** came forward and provided a brief presentation regarding the proposed amendment to the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) related to the Central Library project. Thierolf explained that the Central Library has been included in the CIP for several years, as part of a six-year planning effort. The proposed amendment addresses two primary updates.

Thierolf explained that the amendment identifies an actual location for the future library: 1111 O Street, also known as the Education Square Building. Previously, no specific location had been determined. Thierolf noted that the amendment also revises the project's total cost and funding sources. The current CIP reflects a \$70 million project, primarily funded by general obligation bonds. Under the amended proposal, the total cost would be revised to \$46.2 million, to be financed by municipal improvement bonds, general revenues, and private contributions. Thierolf clarified that while the staff report referenced "municipal infrastructure bonds," that terminology is not used in Lincoln. The CIP will instead reflect the correct term, "municipal improvement bonds." Thierolf then introduced Ryan Wieber, Director of Libraries, to provide additional details about the project.

**Ryan Wieber, Lincoln City Libraries, 136 South 14th Street, Lincoln, NE**, came forward and addressed the Commission by first commending the Planning Department for producing a comprehensive and well-prepared staff report. Wieber then provided historical context and a forward-looking overview of the central library replacement project. The project, formally added to the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) in 2006, had been in discussion for even longer. Originally slated for the Pershing site as part of phase three of a redevelopment agreement, the library was initially envisioned as a 100,000-square-foot facility, later reduced to 80,000 square feet. In 2023, after conducting over 30 community engagement sessions, the plan was revised again to 65,000 square feet to better align with public input and fiscal realities.

Wieber explained that, in exploring alternatives to the Pershing site, the library evaluated renovation options for the existing Bennett Martin Public Library location. He noted that cost estimates for a full renovation and rebuild at that site were approximately \$57 million. After determining it was not the most viable option, he said the library was approached by Southeast Community College regarding potential use of the Education Square building—historically known as the Centrum—at 1111 O Street. Wieber stated that the timing and availability of the building presented a unique opportunity, which led the library to pursue it as the preferred site. Wieber described the building as an 80,000-square-foot, well-maintained facility with a city-owned parking garage offering 157 stalls—ample dedicated parking for future library users. Plans include a 65,000-square-foot library within the existing structure, plus a new 4,000-square-foot rooftop auditorium. Architectural partners BVH (local) and MSR Design (national) are leading the design efforts. The building’s layout offers a spacious, open environment, supporting collections, programming areas, study rooms, and community meeting spaces.

Wieber also discussed the next steps, which include continued community engagement sessions, the next of which would be held at Walt Branch Library, followed by a final session at the Centrum building on July 7. City Council is scheduled to act on the issuance of municipal improvement bonds, ratify the purchase agreement, and adjust the CIP on July 28. Internal demolition is slated to begin in spring, with construction taking approximately two and a half years and an anticipated opening in spring 2028. Wieber concluded by offering to answer questions from the Commission.

### **Staff Questions**

Campbell inquired whether, structurally, an additional floor could be added to the existing building in the future.

Wieber responded that while a definitive answer would require input from an architect or structural engineer, the project’s current architects have indicated that the building was originally designed to support upward expansion. Wieber noted that structural testing is currently underway to confirm that potential.

Rodenburg asked for clarification on the project’s status, specifically whether the library is currently under contract for the building and whether there are any contingencies associated with that contract.

Wieber requested clarification on the meaning of "contingencies." Wieber explained that the library already has a purchase agreement for the building. He also noted that the Mayor has signed an executive order, and the City Council is expected to ratify the agreement next month.

Rodenburg asked whether, if the City Council fails to ratify the agreement, the contract would be nullified.

Wieber responded that the contract would potentially be nullified if the City Council did not ratify the agreement. However, he expressed full confidence that there is nothing to be concerned about and that the process will move forward as planned.

Chair Ryman Yost asked if there were any additional questions from the Commission before proceeding further.

Eddins asked whether the library plans to expand its programming space beyond traditional offerings. She noted that public libraries across the country are increasingly serving as multifaceted community hubs and asked what types of programming spaces, beyond meeting rooms and book collections, are envisioned for the new central library.

Wieber responded that it was a great question and confirmed that the new central library will include expanded programming space beyond traditional offerings. He explained that plans include a makerspace or creative lab with equipment such as 3D printers, Cricut machines, and digital software for music creation, photo scanning, and converting photographs and film to digital formats. Wieber noted that a recording studio will be connected to the Polley Music Library. He added that the local history hub, currently located downtown at Bennett Martin, will be expanded and become more prominently featured alongside the Polley Music Library and the Heritage Room for Nebraska authors, all of which will be located together on the second floor. Wieber also mentioned that the library envisions a teaching kitchen to support classes and programming that align with the library's collection of food and cookbooks.

Eddins responded enthusiastically, expressing her full support for the expanded programming plans.

Rodenburg asked whether there had been any consideration of installing solar panels on the rooftop of the new library facility.

Wieber replied that he had not yet heard specific discussions about installing solar panels but emphasized the library's strong commitment to ensuring the building is energy efficient. He expressed optimism that the new facility would generate cost savings in utilities and staffing. Wieber added that as the project moves toward final design, they expect to incorporate numerous improvements focused on creating a green, sustainable building designed for the future.

Chair Ryman Yost noted that there were no additional questions at this time and moved the hearing forward.

## **Proponents:**

**Carl Eskridge, 128 N 13<sup>th</sup> Street, Lincoln, NE,** came forward to speak in support of the revised central library project. He noted that it was good to be back in a familiar place, referencing his time as a city council representative for central and northwest Lincoln from 2011 to 2019, during which downtown Lincoln was part of his district. Eskridge recalled that shortly after he began his council service, the West Haymarket project broke ground, and two years later, the arena was completed, leading to the closure of the Pershing site. Since then, there has been ongoing uncertainty about how to redevelop the Pershing property.

Eskridge explained that there were several rounds of proposals for the site, including one that featured a library, on which he served as a committee member reviewing those proposals. However, at that time, the administration did not strongly consider the library as a primary use because the intent was for the Pershing site to generate tax revenue. None of the proposals were accepted, and the site remained undeveloped until a more recent mixed-use development was approved, including residential, office space, and potentially a library, as Wieber had explained.

Eskridge acknowledged the challenges and rising costs associated with the previous proposed sites, including rebuilding the current Bennett Martin location, which stalled progress for years. He described the recent announcement that Southeast Community College was vacating its downtown facility as a surprise to many but a timely opportunity. The city was approached about using the Education Square Building as the new central library location. After touring the space, Eskridge said it was clear that the building, originally designed as an educational space, could be adapted to a library without much difficulty.

Eskridge praised the exterior design proposal, noting that although it is a 50-year-old building, the renovation would make it look like a brand-new, sustainable structure. Eskridge highlighted that the reuse is less costly, faster to build, and provides a long-term downtown tenant, checking all the necessary boxes. He also pointed out that the building's existing connection to the skywalk system, which needs some maintenance, and its parking garage accommodating cars and bicycles, were additional benefits.

Walking through the interior, Eskridge could envision the library's various uses being accommodated, and he expressed excitement about the new exterior, rooftop auditorium space, and even a coffee shop. Eskridge concluded by stating that this proposal is "simply perfect" and that good things come to those who wait. He thanked the Commission for its attention.

**Dan Sloan, 405 S. 28th Street, Lincoln, NE,** came forward and spoke on behalf of the Library Board as well as in his capacity as a local business owner of Mill Coffee and Tea. Sloan expressed strong enthusiasm for the project, noting that he has served on the Library Board for seven years. He acknowledged that, as Eskridge mentioned, the Education Square proposal came somewhat unexpectedly, shaking up prior assumptions, but upon further review, it meets all the necessary criteria.

Sloan emphasized that the area of downtown where the library will be located is currently underutilized and that the new library would serve as a major catalyst for revitalization. Sloan highlighted ongoing positive developments in the area, including new hotels, and predicted that the library would be a valuable amenity. Addressing concerns about parking, he remarked that having a parking garage adjacent to the library would be a significant benefit.

Sloan shared that the Library Board unanimously supports the project and is very enthusiastic about moving forward, reflecting years of work toward replacing the Bennett Martin Library. Sloan mentioned attending the first open house and engaging with many members of the public, most of whom expressed excitement for the project. He acknowledged a few exceptions in public feedback, but noted that opposition was generally about other priorities, not the project itself.

In conclusion, Sloan described the project as great for downtown Lincoln and a reflection of the city's commitment to its public institutions, akin to investments in schools, police, and fire services. Sloan stated that the new library would be a strong attraction and retention tool for talent, reinforcing Lincoln's reputation as a great place to raise a family and significantly enhancing the city's cultural and community assets. Sloan thanked the Commission for its attention.

**Leslie Huerta, 130 S. 13th Street, Lincoln, NE,** came forward and spoke in support of the library project. Huerta shared that libraries have been a significant and personal part of her childhood, even though she did not grow up in Lincoln and moved frequently. Huerta described the magical experience of discovering libraries during those moves, emphasizing that this sentiment is not quaint but very real. Huerta owns a small bookstore near Bennett Martin Library and witnesses the community's engagement, particularly through programs like the summer reading program, which encourages children's love of books and learning.

Huerta noted that the library instills a sense of wonder, education, and exploration in children, alongside the support of parents, teachers, and librarians. Speaking from a business perspective, she expressed a desire for increased foot traffic in her downtown neighborhood, which has struggled with reduced activity during and after the COVID pandemic. She praised the idea of a new, attractive library building, drawing more people to the area, which she finds very appealing.

Additionally, Huerta suggested that a vibrant downtown library would complement efforts by the convention center and local officials to attract new airlines and businesses, contributing to a bustling city center. Huerta concluded by affirming that every great city deserves a great library, Lincoln is a great city, and she is excited about the project. She thanked the Commission for the opportunity to speak.

**Neutral:**

No one approached in a neutral capacity.

**Opposition:**

No one approached in opposition.

**COMPREHENSIVE PLAN CONFORMANCE 25005**

**ACTION BY PLANNING COMMISSION:**

**JUNE 25, 2025**

Campbell moved to close the public hearing; seconded by Joy.

Campbell moved to approve Comprehensive Plan Conformance 25005; seconded by Joy.

Campbell stated that this project represents a great opportunity, noting that while it has taken 20 years to come together, it involves a significantly underused building. Campbell emphasized that the planned renovation would bring new vitality to that part of downtown, both in terms of the building's appearance and increased foot traffic in the area. He expressed his full support for the project.

Eddins attended college nearby and is excited about the new library location at Bennett Martin. She stated that the accessibility there has been somewhat challenging, and the elevator has always been a bit intimidating to her. Eddins is thrilled that the new site offers nearby parking, as accessible parking downtown has consistently been a struggle. Overall, as Eskridge mentioned, this project checks all the boxes.

Joy said it was very exciting to be able to vote on the project and recommend it to the City Council. She reflected on past efforts to support the initiative and how the area has evolved over the years, with many growing up nearby while attending school. Joy thanked everyone involved for keeping the project moving forward and for considering public input throughout the process. Joy noted that this marks a significant step forward in terms of affordability and said the work was well done.

Rodenburg shared his long-time connection to the Bethany Library and expressed appreciation for how libraries have evolved. He supports the project as a great addition and commends the team for their fiscal responsibility and timing.

Chair Ryman Yost stated that she is very excited about the project coming before the commission. She emphasized the importance of libraries as valuable public amenities and shared that her family enjoys visiting libraries while traveling. She recently visited newly constructed downtown libraries in other communities and found them impressive, noting that this project will similarly be a fantastic addition to the community. Ryman Yost commended the fiscal responsibility demonstrated and the ambitious vision behind the project and expressed her full support.

Ball acknowledged that there are pressures across the board and emphasized that finding a space that meets their needs, supports programming, and comes at a lower cost is a rare opportunity. He expressed appreciation for the work done and stated that he would be supporting the project.

Motion for approval of Comprehensive Plan Conformance 25005 carried 7-0: Ball, Campbell, Eddins, Feit, Joy, Rodenburg and Ryman Yost, voting 'yes'.

**SPECIAL PERMIT 1123D, AMENDING THE EXISTING SPECIAL PERMIT, ALLOWING A TEMPORARY SHELTER FOR THE HOMELESS TO INCREASE THE SPECIAL PERMIT AREA FOR A NEW 69,000 SQUARE FOOT ADDITION ON PROPERTY GENERALLY LOCATED AT 100 AND 154 P STREET.**

**PUBLIC HEARING:**

**JUNE 25, 2025**

Members present: Ball, Campbell, Ebert, Feit, Joy, Rodenburg and Ryman Yost. Cruz and Ebert absent.

**Staff Recommendation:** Conditional Approval

**There were no ex parte communications disclosed.**

**There were no ex parte communications disclosed relating to site visits.**

**Staff Presentation-**

**Ben Callahan, Planning Department, 555 S. 10<sup>th</sup> Street, Lincoln, NE,** came forward and provided a brief overview of the request to amend the special permit for the People's City Mission. He explained that the amendment would expand the existing special permit boundary to include the block south of Q Street, along with an updated site plan.

Callahan noted that following deferral, the applicant met with Planning staff, Clark and Enersen, and Lincoln Transportation and Utilities (LTU) to revise the plan. Key updates included the removal of angled parking—identified as a safety concern due to its proximity to the intersection—and the addition of a 90-degree parking layout with a shared, gated entrance off First Street. Additionally, the midblock pedestrian crossing was eliminated to encourage safer crossings at either end of the block.

Callahan confirmed that LTU supported the revised layout, and commissioners were provided a memo outlining the updated Condition 1.4, requiring the applicant to submit a revised site plan matching the new concept. Callahan concluded by inviting any questions.

**Staff Questions**

Campbell thanked staff and the applicant for working together on the revisions, stating that the updated plan simplifies the entire project.

**Applicant-**

**Tim Gergen, Clark and Enerson, 1010 Lincoln Mall, Suite 200, Lincoln, NE,** representing the applicant, came forward and noted a last-minute oversight in the previous site plan and thanked the Commission for granting a two-week deferral. He said this allowed them to work collaboratively with LTU to address concerns related to the loading dock and site circulation. Gergen expressed appreciation for the outcome and invited any questions.

**Proponents:**

No one approached in support.

**Neutral:**

No one approached in a neutral capacity.

**Opposition:**

No one approached in opposition.

**SPECIAL PERMIT 1123D**

**ACTION BY PLANNING COMMISSION:**

**June 25, 2025**

Campbell moved to close the public hearing; seconded by Joy

Campbell moved to approve Special Permit 1123D; seconded by Joy.

Campbell stated that the revised plan is a great solution and effectively addresses the questions and concerns raised previously.

Eddins, who attended college nearby, expressed enthusiasm for the new library location at Bennett Martin. Eddins noted that while she has always appreciated the space, accessibility has been somewhat challenging, and the elevator has often felt intimidating. She is especially pleased that the new site will offer nearby parking, as finding accessible parking downtown has consistently been difficult. She agreed with proponent Eskridge that this project truly checks all the boxes.

Chair Ryman Yost expressed appreciation for the collaboration between the applicant and the Planning Department in prioritizing the safety of those who will use the service. She also shared her support for the development of a low-barrier shelter, noting its critical need in the community, and thanked everyone involved for working together to make it a reality.

Motion for approval of Special Permit 1123D carried 7-0: Ball, Campbell, Eddins, Feit, Joy, Rodenburg and Ryman Yost, voting 'yes'. Cruz and Ebert absent.

Campbell moved to adjourn the Planning Commission meeting of June 25, 2025, seconded Joy.

Motion to adjourn carried 7-0: Ball, Campbell, Eddins, Feit, Joy, Rodenburg and Ryman Yost voted "yes." Cruz and Ebert absent.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 1:37 p.m.

