

FACTSHEET

TITLE: A resolution approving and adopting **Comprehensive Plan Conformance No. 15010, VA Campus Redevelopment Plan**, requested by the Director of the Urban Development Department, on property generally located on the east side of South 70th Street, extending from just south of O Street on the north, to just north of South Wedgewood Drive on the south

BOARD/COMMITTEE: Planning Commission

APPLICANT: David Landis, Director of the Urban Development Department

RECOMMENDATION: Planning Commission Public Hearing and Action scheduled for August 5, 2015 - (Final Action by Planning Commission to be delivered to City Council under separate memo after the public hearing.)

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: A finding of conformance with the Comprehensive Plan.

OTHER DEPARTMENTS AFFECTED: Urban Development

SPONSOR: Planning Department

OPPONENTS: None

REASON FOR LEGISLATION: To review the VA Campus Redevelopment as to conformance with the 2040 Lincoln-Lancaster County Comprehensive Plan.

DISCUSSION / FINDINGS OF FACT:

1. The proposed **VA Campus Redevelopment Plan** covers approximately 65 acres, consisting of 5.3 acres of street right-of-way. The proposal consists of the long-term development of the VA campus, including adaptive reuse of all historical buildings facing South 70th Street for veteran and senior housing, medical offices, and possibly a new VA outpatient clinic and other office and commercial uses under a planned unit development. The **VA Campus Redevelopment Plan** document is being provided to the City Council under separate cover.
2. The staff recommendation to find the proposed **VA Campus Redevelopment Plan** to be in conformance with the 2040 Comprehensive Plan is based upon the "Analysis" as set forth on p. 3-5.
3. Testimony by the Director of the Urban Development Department is found on p. 6-7. Other testimony in support on behalf of the development team is found on 7-8.
4. There was no testimony in opposition.
5. On June 18, 2015, the Historic Preservation Commission held public hearing on this proposal and voted 6-0 to recommend approval; see excerpt of meeting record on p.11-15.
6. On July 22, 2015, the Planning Commission held public hearing on this proposal and voted to delay action with continued public hearing on August 5, 2015, in order to meet public notification requirements.

FACTSHEET PREPARED BY: Geri Rorabaugh, Administrative Officer

DATE: July 29, 2015

REVIEWED BY: David R. Cary, Acting Director of Planning

DATE: July 29, 2015

LINCOLN/LANCASTER COUNTY PLANNING STAFF REPORT

for July 22, 2015 PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

- PROJECT #:** Comprehensive Plan Conformance No.15010
- PROPOSAL:** To review the VA Campus Redevelopment Plan as to conformance with the 2040 Lincoln-Lancaster County Comprehensive Plan.
- LOCATION:** East side of S. 70th Street, extending from just south of O Street on the north to just north of S. Wedgewood Drive on the south
- LAND AREA:** Approximately 65 acres
- CONCLUSION:** The VA Campus Redevelopment Plan is in conformance with the Comprehensive Plan.

<u>RECOMMENDATION:</u>	In conformance with the Comprehensive Plan.
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GENERAL INFORMATION:

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: Lot 66, Irregular Tract located in the northwest quarter of Section 27-10-07, and the adjacent right-of-way of South 70th Street, in Lincoln, Lancaster County, NE

EXISTING ZONING: P Public Use District

EXISTING LAND USE: VA Medical Center

SURROUNDING LAND USE AND ZONING:

North:	R-3 Residential	Memory care residence, under construction
	B-1 Commercial	Bank, drug store
	O-2 Office	Offices
	R-1 Residential	Multi-family and single family housing
South:	R-1 Residential	Single family housing
East:	R-1 Residential	Multi-family and single family housing
West:	B-1 Commercial	Retail
	R-1 Residential	St. Elizabeth Medical Center

HISTORY:

1929 320 acre Leavitt farm acquired for a veterans hospital.

1930 Construction began on Lincoln VA Hospital, first patients accepted.

1931 April, formal dedication of Lincoln VA Hospital.

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1956	Wooden cupola removed from main hospital building.
1983	VA Outpatient Clinic constructed.
1998	Cessation of in-patient services.
2011	VA selected Lincoln's Seniors Foundation to redevelop the VA Campus under an Enhanced Use Lease (EUL).
2012	Lincoln VA Hospital campus was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.
2015	Veterans Administration solicited interest from property owners/developers for a new Lincoln VA outpatient clinic, to be built within the Lincoln Corporate limits. June 16, public meetings with veterans and neighbors. July 7, 2 nd public meeting with neighbors.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN SPECIFICATIONS:

Implement a public policy of the careful stewardship of significant, publicly owned historic resources, including a full and open examination of alternatives when major alterations or demolition are considered. (p.4.9)

Seek incentives and regulatory support to maintain, rehabilitate, and minimize energy utilization of existing buildings in order to make it more feasible to rehabilitate and continue to use older buildings. (p.4.9)

Seek to efficiently utilize investments in existing and future public infrastructure to advance economic development opportunities. (p.5.2)

Encourage and provide incentives for mixed uses in future developments. (p.5.2)

Develop infill commercial areas to be compatible with the character of the area. (p. 5.14)

Encourage a vertical mix of residential and commercial use types. (p.5.15)

Provide a diversity of housing types and choices throughout each neighborhood for an increasingly diverse population. (p. 6.2)

Create housing opportunities for residents with special needs throughout the city that are compatible with and integrated into residential neighborhoods. (p. 6.2)

ANALYSIS:

1. This is a request to review a proposed VA Campus Redevelopment Plan for a determination of conformity with the Comprehensive Plan. The boundaries of the redevelopment area include the current VA Medical Center campus and the adjacent right of way of South 70th Street, as identified in the attached map.

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2. The project consists of the long-term redevelopment of the VA Campus of nearly 60 acres, including adaptive reuse of all of the historic buildings facing S.70th Street (referred to by VA as Building 1—the main hospital, Building 2—now attached to #1 to the south, Building 4—the Auditorium attached to Building 1 to the north, and the historic, freestanding housing buildings north of the main hospital (called Buildings 5, 6, 7, and 8, from south to north). The lawn/Parade Ground between S. 70th Street and the main hospital group (Buildings 1, 2, and 4) would also be retained. New construction would be concentrated in areas around the periphery of the site to the north, east, and south. Future uses will include housing for veterans and seniors, medical offices, possible siting of a new VA Outpatient Clinic, and other office and commercial uses under a Planned Unit Development (PUD) format.
3. The first phase of the project would include a 70-unit apartment building for veterans at-risk for homelessness, under a Dept. of HUD program (through Lincoln Housing Authority) call VA Supportive Housing or VASH. Construction of the VASH housing is required to begin by Oct. 1, 2015. Also included in the first phase is a medical office building at the southwest corner of the site.
4. The sequence and timing of subsequent phases of development will be determined by future decisions such as site selection for the new VA Outpatient Clinic and market forces.
5. The campus will remain in federal ownership under a VA Enhanced-Use Lease of up to 75 years. Improvements on the property will be privately owned and Tax Increment Financing generated on those private improvements will be requested as a source of funds for infrastructure and other eligible improvements.
6. Since this project will request TIF assistance and since the campus is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Redevelopment Plan was reviewed by the Historic Preservation Commission. The Historic Preservation Commission recommended approval of the project on June 18, 2015. The minutes of the Commission meeting are attached.
7. The Preservation Commission expressed concern about the proximity of proposed VASH housing in the southeast corner of the campus to nearby single story housing, and recommended further contact between the developers and neighbors. The site plan was subsequently revised and a second neighborhood meeting (1st June 16th, 2nd July 7th) was held. The Redevelopment Plan now before the Planning Commission includes the revised site plan with the VASH housing more central to the campus, located behind the historic residences for doctors and nurses.

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8. Redevelopment Plans are broad outlines for future redevelopment. Greater detail is provided by Redevelopment Agreements, which are reviewed by City Council. In this case, a PUD is also required to address zoning, which is scheduled for the Planning Commission agenda of August 5th and will also provide more specific detail on the proposed development, prior to the Redevelopment Agreement.
9. This project meets the goals of the 2040 Comprehensive Plan by providing for the continued use and up-keep of a significant historic site in Lincoln, adapting historic buildings for mixed uses, redeveloping an underutilized site, providing needed community services and uses. The VA does not have plans for use or upkeep of the site once the new Lincoln VA Outpatient Clinic is built and operating.

Prepared by:

Ed Zimmer
Planner

DATE: July 13, 2015

APPLICANT: David Landis
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COMPREHENSIVE PLAN CONFORMANCE NO. 15010

CPC # 15010 VA Campus Redevelopment Plan

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN CONFORMANCE NO. 15010
VA CAMPUS REDEVELOPMENT PLAN,
ON PROPERTY GENERALLY LOCATED AT
600 SOUTH 70TH STREET.
PUBLIC HEARING BEFORE PLANNING COMMISSION:

July 22, 2015

Members present: Corr, Cornelius, Harris, Hove, Lust, Scheer, Sunderman, and Weber;
Beecham absent

Staff recommendation: Conformance with the Comprehensive Plan.

There were no ex parte communications disclosed.

Rorabaugh stated Public Hearing for new information will be continued to August 5, 2015. Action by the Planning Commission will also occur on that date.

Staff presentation: **David Landis, Director of Urban Development**, the applicant, reviewed in general, the process and various steps by which redevelopment projects such as this are eventually approved. This is the general plan and description of the Victory Park Project which includes the 60 acres of the current VA Campus. It is under consideration for a 75-year lease to the lead developer, the Seniors Foundation. Other members of the development team include Sampson Construction, America First, and Olsson Associates. The area includes handsome historical buildings known as "Doctor's Row" and the existing hospital, a portion of which is currently used as a clinic. The areas in use are well maintained but, unfortunately, those not in use have fallen into a state of dilapidation that allowed for the official finding of "blighted and substandard" determination. If anything is to be done to improve this site, it will be through redevelopment. A profit-generating development is needed to justify the immense expense of taking on such a large project.

Neighbors in surrounding areas love the beautiful vista this campus has provided for many years so there is naturally some resistance to change. There is concern about the changing view, location of parking lots, tree removal, and water drainage. The developer has been responsive to these concerns. The proposed site plan has been revised, which includes the relocation of the large VASH building and many of the drainage issues have been resolved and could even be improved. The neighborhood continues to be apprised of plans and this negotiation is a work in progress.

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There is space reserved on this site for a new VA outpatient clinic but the Veteran's Administration has not yet committed to the site. If it does not end up there, the area would be developed and would likely remain true to the intent of the overall site by remaining a health-oriented commercial site designated for seniors and veterans.

Hove asked whether the streets on the site are public or private.

Ed Zimmer of Planning staff came forward to state that they are currently private. Some, particularly the main road that curves through the campus, will be built to public standards with the hope that in the future they might be accepted as such.

Corr inquired whether the water and sewer are public or private?

Landis stated that they are currently private and substandard. Part of the plan includes significant replacement of these systems.

Kent Seacrest of Seacrest and Kalkowski came forward as legal representative of the development group to state that as the systems are replaced, they will be converted to public, with some connection to private lines.

Proponents:

1. **Tammy Ward, Executive Director of Seniors Foundation**, came forward as applicant to state that the mission of Seniors Foundation is to enrich the lives of seniors by supporting aging partners. Approximately five years ago, the foundation contacted the Veterans Administration and submitted a proposal for redevelopment. A short-term lease was awarded in 2011 and, since that time, the project team has worked to develop this beautiful campus in order make a big difference in the lives of veterans and seniors. This is the first lease to be awarded to a non-profit organization and this project could very well serve as a model for the entire nation.

Hove asked if the Seniors Foundation has had a long connection with veterans. Ward replied that Vets will have priority on the campus and this is a natural extension of services.

Hove went on to note that many Vets feel ownership of this property. He inquired about the extent to which this development and campus will remain veteran focused. Ward said that it will also serve seniors in general, but veterans will have priority on the campus. They will additionally be served by Aging Partners on the location. Outreach continues with local vets and they are heard loud and clear. The foundation will meet with the Veterans Council at the end of the month.

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Corr asked if the Vets Council has statewide representatives or if it is more local. Ward responded that it is a statewide organization. The Lincoln campus will focus on service to those who do not go to Grand Island or Omaha.

Harris questioned what would become of the area designated for the clinic if that site is not selected and whether it would become additional housing. Ward replied that even if it is not selected, the rest of the plan would move forward. Harris asked if it would still serve veterans. Ward said yes, the intent would be the same. Seacrest said that it might be more likely to be a commercial development, due to its location. There are plenty of commercial uses that would still cater to veterans and seniors.

Corr asked the height of the buildings behind the relocated VASH building, near the neighbors. Seacrest responded that they are two-story buildings.

Seacrest stated that he is providing legal representation for the seniors foundation and this redevelopment team. This is an extremely complicated project on hallowed grounds. Since the Veterans Association owned the property and it is entrusted for Vets, it gets a high standard of attention and care. There are six different government entities involved and all thresholds must be met at each level. This project started approximately five years ago and now there is a deadline in October of this year that must be met.

This campus was built in 1930 and was mainly a hospital and housing for staff. In 1995, the hospital was eliminated and downsizing occurred. The VA has done an excellent job maintaining the areas in use, but the other areas need a great deal of care. The VA and Congress have approved money for a new clinic and the hope is that it will be on this site. It is important to recognize that the clinic will be leaving the former hospital building and something else needs to take its place, otherwise the historical building could be lost.

The developers have listened carefully to the concerns of the neighbors and much progress has been made to address their concerns. At the same time, not all of the new development can be pushed up against the historical buildings and a certain density must be reached due to economic factors.

Corr asked how the main building will be affected once the clinic is removed. Seacrest said the newer, modern appendages will be removed. The historical portions of the red brick buildings will remain. That historic vista as seen from 70th Street will stay the same.

Corr went on to inquire about the access to the property and if it will be built in conjunction with the memory care area. Seacrest said the eventual goal is to shift the location of access slightly to the north.

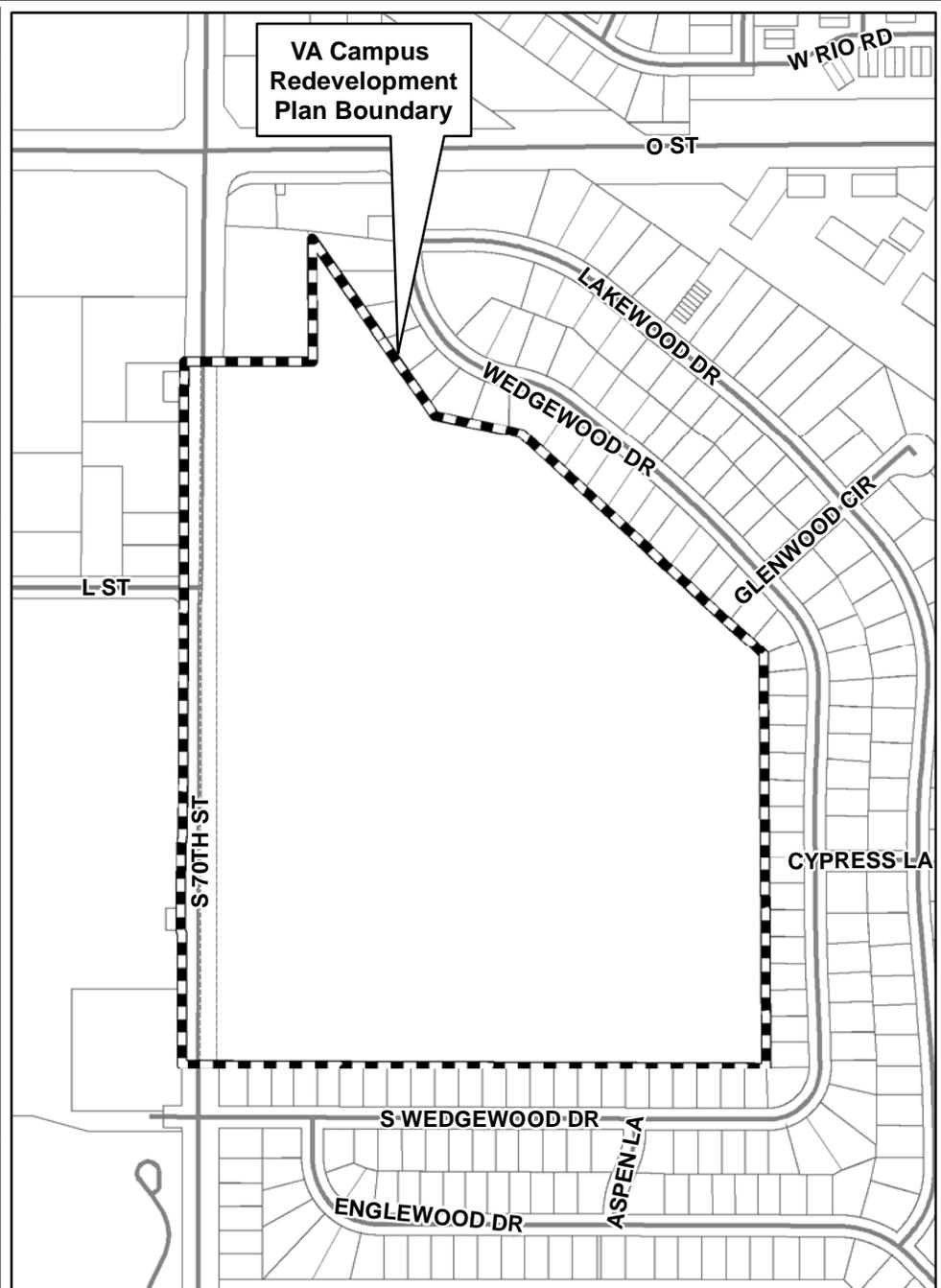
CPC # 15010 VA Campus Redevelopment Plan

ACTION BY PLANNING COMMISSION:

July 22, 2015

Cornelius moved to continue public hearing for new information only and action to August 5, 2015, seconded by Hove.

Motion carried 8-0; Beecham absent.



2013 aerial



Comprehensive Plan Conformance #15010

VA Campus Redevelopment Plan

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Excerpt of MEETING RECORD

NAME OF GROUP: HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

DATE, TIME AND PLACE OF MEETING: Thursday, June 18, 2015, 1:30 p.m., Conference Room 214, 2nd Floor, County-City Building, 555 S. 10th Street, Lincoln, Nebraska

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE: Tim Francis, Jim Hewitt, Jim Johnson, Berwyn Jones, Liz Kuhlman, and Greg Munn; (Jim McKee absent). Ed Zimmer, Stacey Groshong Hageman and Amy Hana Huffman of the Planning Department; Kevin Abourezk from the *Lincoln Journal Star*.

STATED PURPOSE OF MEETING: Historic Preservation Commission

Greg Munn called the meeting to order and acknowledged the posting of the Open Meetings Act in the room.

DISCUSS AND ADVISE ON THE REDEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR THE VETERANS AFFAIRS HOSPITAL CAMPUS:

PUBLIC HEARING:

June 18, 2015

HPC Members present: Francis, Hewitt, Johnson, Jones, Kuhlman, and Munn; McKee absent.

Zimmer said an application was received from the Urban Development Department for review of the plan. The process begins with receiving a request for a blight determination. That goes to the Planning Commission and then to the City Council and does not come before this body because it is merely a technical determination.

The next step is the more substantive redevelopment plan that serves as a broad framework document. When the application falls within a historic district, HPC discusses and advises the Planning Commission and City Council. The plan is followed by the redevelopment agreement which is essentially a contract. Tax Increment Financing (TIF) might be used for specific elements in that plan. Brad Korell from Olsson Associates is on hand to answer questions. Jill Dolberg is consulting from the State Historical Society because there is a parallel Federal process occurring. Phil Boehr is here representing his neighborhood, and Wynn Hjermsstad is here from Urban Development.

Francis asked if this project will ultimately go back to the tax base. Zimmer said yes; It is not part of the tax base now. With TIF funds, the money is not captured from the zero amount, but from the difference. This is Federal land; not much of it is on City utilities

so it is more blended. Adding public infrastructure would be a traditional use of TIF funds. There are mainly single family houses surrounding the property.

Zimmer said that the buildings that are historically crucial to the site will remain open. Hjermstadt said the buildings being removed are mainly services buildings.

Commissioners viewed the plan as presented at this meeting and discussed drainage on the property as well as the location, size and use of the potential new buildings.

Zimmer said the property will be rezoned from P-Public to allow private uses, probably including O-2, B-3 and R-4, and will be mapped accordingly to show what uses are allowed. Munn said that in essence, the historic view from 70th will remain and the entire property will be put back into use. Zimmer said it is not unused today. There is an active VA clinic operating in portions of the main hospital. The new development is to the south and east. The VA is firmly committed to building a new 100,000 square foot building to operate from and are in the process of selecting a site. It could be on this campus, and a potential location is shown in the northwest corner. Kuhlman said she appreciates that this proposal is maintaining some of the buildings.

Jones asked for clarification about the location of the new buildings in relation to neighbors. Brad Korell, Olsson Associates, answered that homes to the south face out to a separate street and share a backyard property line with the hospital campus. Kuhlman asked how those property lines will be treated. Korell said part of the area is a utility corridor. There will be landscaping and as many trees as possible will be preserved. Francis noted that this is a well-funded neighbor.

Phil Boehr, 7340 Wedgewood, is a property owner directly to the south. He said that a letter was also submitted to the Commission from another neighbor, Ed Schnabel. The four story building that is proposed in the southeast corner of the VA Campus property is directly in his backyard and does not keep the nature of the neighborhood. He was told that the plans could go back to the drawing table to consider the objections of the neighbors. It is natural that the neighbors prefer the park like setting in the back, but they are not opposed to progress. They were only very recently made aware of the project a week ago via a letter and then at a neighborhood meeting.

Korell said the Seniors Foundation was chosen as the primary lessor and they are negotiating a sublease.

Jones said he is very sensitive to this kind of change occurring right in the backyards of neighbors and has experienced this situation himself. This seems like another case of exceptions to zoning in areas to build whatever is proposed.

Boehr said he does not see a problem in terms of historic preservation. Further to the north, there is a berm and mature trees so neighbors in that portion will not be able to see new buildings. The southeast corner is also a major drainage area. It seems like

there could be other options. Jones added that new paving will exacerbate the drainage issue.

Boehr said that this project, particularly the southeast corner, is moving quickly and could begin in October. The neighbors wish they could be more involved. Maybe a shorter building is more appropriate for the site, or perhaps it could be relocated to another spot on the campus. We do understand the need to take advantage of financial vouchers and the need to help Vets.

Korell said the corner building is being called "Veteran supportive" housing, with 70 units exclusively for Vets. The middle section of development will be more open. To the north and east, those are proposed to be designated for Veterans and seniors.

Jones wondered how the neighbors were not aware of these ideas earlier in the process. Korell said that there are many entities involved, all the way up to the Federal government. This proposal was only recently decided on. This rendering has been in front of the VA for about twelve months.

Kuhlman said that this body will just make recommendations. Zimmer confirmed. He said in one discussion, it was asked how concrete these plans are and Korell had stated that there is still room for change.

Korell said working with the VA is not simple; they have been working with them since August of last year. No plans could be presented earlier because it was unknown what the VA would agree to. That was just returned in March, allowing us to finally firm up the plan to some extent. There are also other concurrent processes taken place that complicate things further. The intent of a meeting held last Tuesday was to get the Vets and neighbors involved. As Mr. Boehr said, the main concern was the height of the southeast building and the lack of transition to the hospital. It is fairly abrupt. We have taken those concerns to heart. That that has led to an attempt to create a better transition and a better setback and will be discussed in the near future.

Korell went on to say that HUD grant vouchers will help to pay for this Vet's housing and they granted 70 for this property. Lincoln Housing Authority is also involved with that allocation. The condition is that these vouchers could be pulled if the building is not under construction by a certain time. We received approval in March, so this has been on a fast-track to get an agreement with the City and all other entities. These tight timelines are imposed on us by others. Having Vet housing on this site is important to us and is key to the project and its financing to make it work from a developer's standpoint. We have to find a way to use those voucher and take the concerns of neighbors into account. There are also many City requirements to meet. The good news is that the campus is sixty acres so it is easier to deal with some of these issues, including the drainage.

Zimmer said this site is currently zone P-Public. The grounds will stay public. It will be zoned and regulated like any other area. The VA is exempt, but they will not pass that

exemption to this project. This project is still developing, so this is not a recommendation on the exact plan as presented today. This body would be saying that it generally agrees or disagrees with the direction.

Munn said that in general this seems like a wonderful project. The details just need to be worked out.

Jones said he would like to see closer collaboration with neighbors from this point forward.

Hewitt asked if there are physical problems with swapping the location of the four and two story buildings. Korell said that option was considered. When the VA first came forward, they had reserved a spot in the center for a clinic. We suggested moving that out to 70th Street to keep it further away from residential. Aging Partners would move from its downtown location to occupy a wing of the hospital. They provide a number of services so it is convenient to be located so close to Vet housing and to provide opportunities for better access to exercise, food programs, and other similar services. The bus route also goes to this campus. There are a lot of things that made sense for the tall building as shown in the southeast location, but we also understand the concerns of the neighbors.

He went on to say that the large existing building was built in the 1930s and was used as acute care services. The VA abandoned some of the buildings and they have not been used since the 1990s, so there is a lot of damage. The VA cannot get the money to make repairs. If you visit the site now, it would be a real eye opener; there are areas that are falling apart and even areas where copper was stolen and damaged. If the VA does not get this leased, they have said that they are just going to completely close the facility and move the clinic. They have done a good job in keeping up the areas that are in use, but as you know, if anything else is allowed to be abandoned, the more difficult it will be to save. The old hospital could be repurposed into living units when VA moves out. Then there is still considerable area to be used for office, non-profit, and other organizations that provide services to seniors.

Hjermstad added that there could be a delay until the clinic decision is made, but that is a separate process. The developers and the City would like to see it stay on this site, but it is the VA's decision. We do not know how many proposals they have received. That still leaves this campus in the state it is in now, whether the clinic stays or not. Therefore, delaying this plan to wait for the clinic decision does not change anything. Boehr said if the potential northwest corner site is not selected, it frees up space for the taller proposed buildings and then the neighbors would have no objection.

Zimmer said he toured the site a couple of times and there is a sharp contrast inside between the active clinic spaces, which are pristine, and the inactive which are virtually abandoned; they have focused funds in the areas that are still used and not in maintaining unused areas.

Commissioners discussed various options for recommendation, such as whether or not to include language about collaboration with neighbors. Zimmer noted that someone from Sampson would visit each back yard to look at the impact on individual property owners. The public process is an additional outlet for communication. Hewitt said the plan presented is intelligent and this body now has awareness that neighbors are troubled by some aspects of it. He is confident they will work together, and it is not the job of the Commission to manage that process. He would not feel comfortable adding those types of conditions.

Kuhlman said the only reason this is on such a fast track is the vouchers. Korell agreed. No exceptions would be allowed. Kuhlman wondered what the exact definition of being "under construction" would be. Korell said there is a small amount of flexibility, but there needs to be a good plan in place.

Jill Dolberg, Nebraska State Historical Society, explained that in order to make this program work, it was made clear some of the buildings needed to go. They are primarily the single story garages and some mechanical buildings. A few are a bigger loss than others, but it was negotiated to maintain continuity of the historic vista. Korell added the buildings, while designated, do not add much to the site. Munn asked Dolberg whether or not the Historical Society was content in terms of which buildings were being maintained. She said yes. The buildings being removed are not highly visible. Ultimately, it was preferred that the four that are highly visible from 70th Street remain intact. She added that the Historical Society does review for compliance when it comes to Federal licensing and the public is involved in that process. She assured Commission that the neighborhood would be involved.

ACTION:

Munn moved approval of the redevelopment plan for the Veteran's Affairs Hospital campus, seconded by Johnson and carried 6-0: Francis, Hewitt, Johnson, Jones Kuhlman and Munn voting 'yes'; McKee absent.

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