

## BRIEFING NOTES

**NAME OF GROUP:** PLANNING COMMISSION

**DATE, TIME AND PLACE OF MEETING:** Wednesday, May 23, 2018, 11:45 a.m., City Council Chambers, Room 112, County-City Building, 555 South 10<sup>th</sup> Street, Lincoln, Nebraska.

**MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:** Tom Beckius, Tracy Corr, Tracy Edgerton, Deanne Finnegan, Chris Hove, Maja Harris, Christy Joy, Dennis Scheer and Sändra Washington.

**OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:** Paul Barnes, Tom Cajka, Andrew Thierolf, George Wesselhoft and Teresa McKinstry of the Planning Department; Dallas McGee of Urban Development; Brad Segal and Daniel Makela from Progressive Urban Management Associates (P.U.M.A.); Chris Parezo from Civitas; and other interested parties.

**STATED PURPOSE:** Briefing on “**Downtown Master Plan**”.

The Open Meetings Act was noted as being posted in the room.

Paul Barnes stated that some of the consultant team is in town today to give an update on the Downtown Master Plan Update. At this time, we are actively working on the charrette. There is an open house tonight.

Brad Segal appeared. He is from Progressive Urban Management Associates. He has over 30 years experience and has worked in Lincoln in the past. He has had the thrill of watching the downtown area evolve and grow over the years. Some of the information he has today is real time information. He wants to give an update on where they are at in the process. He is hoping that Planning Commission members come to the open house tonight. It will be held from 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. at 330 S. 21<sup>st</sup> Street.

Segal continued that he has four items to present: the schedule/charrette, input overview, market assessment update and framework diagrams. A lot of input has been received at this point. In terms of project schedule, we are about halfway through the whole process. We had an open house at the Rococco Theater in April. We have had an online survey. There is a neighborhood outreach specialist on the team. She has spent her time going to neighborhoods. She is spending about 15 hours in the adjacent neighborhoods talking to a multitude of groups. Today and tomorrow will conclude the extensive outreach. We will work through the summer and the Planning Dept. will continue the outreach. We will be back in late summer, early fall.

There are a variety of stations set up at today's charrette. Tomorrow will be a project committee that will debrief City staff. We have had almost 2,000 inputs from a variety of sources. The Project Steering Committee completed ideas for the overview. Ideas fall under livable, innovative, destination, welcoming and connected. We want to address family friendly, competitive, entertaining, safe and clean and walkable and accessible, along with other priorities. Then we got into the working group's priorities. There are some exciting opportunities for Lincoln at this time. Ideas being mentioned are a new central library, activating ground floors, diversity of housing, amenities and services and activating green space. The number one priority was a kid friendly downtown. Lincoln is one of the first communities that will be testing a new autonomous shuttle this summer. That is exciting. Making downtown more pedestrian friendly and bicycle issues are all priorities.

There was an open house in April. Transportation, housing and downtown amenities were discussed. Economic development and innovation was discussed with relation to what is next. As far as urban design issues and opportunities, there is a lot of public space in this downtown and we feel we can be more inventive. There was an online survey. Almost 2,000 responses were received. The website is [plandowntown.com](http://plandowntown.com). We learned from the survey that 46 percent come downtown weekly outside of work, 35 percent are downtown employees. We asked people online to give three words describing downtown. The responses align with what we saw from the Steering Committee. Words such as vibrant, innovative, accessible, safe and walkable were used. The number one draw for coming to downtown was restaurants and bars, concerts and movies, UNL sporting events and museums and galleries. Most people walk once they come downtown. There is a strong emerging bike culture here. We asked what sort of amenities would make downtown more attractive for living. Full service grocery was the most listed. Parks and playgrounds, additional parking, improved safety and a new modern library were on the list. We gave folks about 15 specific projects to improve downtown. Redevelopment of unused and vacant land such as Pershing or the Post office was number one.

Daniel Makela will present highlights from the market assessment and talk about background research. The market assessment is a big part of the initial planning. We have an initial draft completed. We look to finalize it over the next month. The goal here is to inform the master plan. We try to organize these into intuitive sections. These can get pretty data heavy. Downtown at a glance is 12,496 residents. The area is less than two percent of the City's land, but over four percent of the City's residents and 22 percent of Lincoln's workers. Downtown has seen a residential resurgence in the last decade. We do a lot of peer city comparisons. Nationally, downtowns are doing well right now. We think there is opportunity for more growth. A big trend is rising costs. Lincoln has long been affordable. We mapped home sales in downtown from the last two years. There are distinct pockets of activity. In the Haymarket, median sales price are north of \$500,000.00. Central downtown is around \$250,000.00 and south of downtown is \$57,500.00. We looked at family data. Numbers back up what we heard,

that downtown could be more family friendly. Regionally, Lincoln has a very steady and stable economy. There is great unemployment rates. But also, the booms aren't as large. Downtown is an economic engine. 36 percent of workers are in the public section. 16 percent of workers are in the startup and the tech cluster. The survey noted how many people go downtown for retail and bars. Dining and nightlife is increasing. Shopping downtown is dwindling. That is a national trend. Lincoln has a multifaceted art culture. Convention space is the third item. Lincoln has no convention space. We want you to think about existing conditions.

Chris Parezo stated that it is our job is to take a holistic look at downtown and start to think about a strategy about where investments might be made. The area is little more than a mile across. This is an easily walkable downtown. We are aware of various historic sites and districts downtown. There are a lot of new projects since 2005 such as Pinnacle Bank Arena, O Street and the plaza and the N Street Bikeway. The Near South neighborhood is the only neighborhood linked to downtown. We also look at the building footprints. The core of downtown is relatively built out. There are some gaps along the periphery. Primary landmarks are Pinnacle Bank Arena, Memorial Stadium, Lied Center, UNL (University Nebraska Lincoln), State Capitol Building and Lincoln High School. We also looked at the street network. O Street is the downtown front door. We are looking at the possibility for two way streets downtown. We know from history than two way streets help retail traffic.

Finnegan wondered what the response has been regarding two way streets. Parezo answered that there was one person who was very vocal that it won't work. They have heard from the City that they are open to converting some streets if it makes sense. We are starting to look at the options and trying to figure where the two way streets would make sense. Because of logistics of how one way couples come in and out of downtown, how they are converted needs to be considered.

Parezo continued that land use is being looked at, along with parks and open space. A lot of people want park space and dog parks downtown. We consider how to get creative with those ideas. We are also taking a look at parking and vacant lots. You can see downtown has a lot of parking supporting businesses. There isn't a lot of parking in the southern portion. There are significant amounts of under-utilized land. The majority of streets are 100 feet for right-of-way. 54 percent of land in the Downtown is privately owned. 43 percent is right-of-way and 3 percent is parks space. There are a lot of conditions downtown. We are working with traffic engineers. We would like to see about taking out a lane and give it back to pedestrian greenspace. With regard to urban design framework thinking, we have a lot of energy centers occurring downtown such as around Pinnacle Bank Arena and south. There are major connections to downtown such as 9<sup>th</sup> St. and 10<sup>th</sup> St., and K St. and L St. One theory is how do we build on the energy of the periphery of downtown? The other idea is what do is we create a catalytic move in the middle of downtown. The third idea is smaller ideas in numerous locations. One of the things we started thinking about was the different areas of downtown.

Washington is curious about paired streets. She sees 16<sup>th</sup> St. and 17<sup>th</sup> St. as major pairs. Parezo is well aware of 16<sup>th</sup> St. and 17<sup>th</sup> St. We know those are major routes in and out. Washington stated that one of the things she wonders about is 16<sup>th</sup> St. and 17<sup>th</sup> St. being removed on campus. She doesn't see them as big a barrier as Antelope Valley Parkway. Parezo responded that the team is aware that those streets carry a lot of traffic.

Finnegan wondered if they see the library as a potential anchor east of the Capitol. Parezo answered that they haven't dove into that topic yet.

Parezo continued that downtown is complex, there are a lot of different areas and nuances. He showed drawings of the different areas. There are blocks that might be an area of catalytic development. Telegraph District is starting to get a lot of momentum. What about Pershing? There is an area that the State is looking at for a geothermal site. There are various ideas to consider. West of Centennial Mall, we are exploring ideas of vacant land. Another idea is where 12<sup>th</sup> Street connects to the campus. There could be space for a small grocer.

Harris would like to know about an example of a street conversion. Parezo replied we are thinking a street could become a two-way street. This would calm traffic and create pedestrian connections. Creating a bike facility is an idea as well. Another idea is what if 13<sup>th</sup> St. had a bikeway and 12<sup>th</sup> St. was two-way with parallel parking. Harris questioned if 12<sup>th</sup> St. is a more obvious two-way street. Parezo doesn't have a candidate at this point. These are the points we are debating. We heard 13<sup>th</sup> St. has a lot of utilities in it. There are many restrictions on moving curbs and planting trees. 12<sup>th</sup> St. has a little more opportunity. 11<sup>th</sup> St. has recently come back on the table for discussion.

Corr questioned if a bike route was installed on 11<sup>th</sup> St. or 12<sup>th</sup> St., do you remove the route on 14<sup>th</sup> St.? Parezo replied we are still looking at that. We are working with the bike committee. Many ideas are still being debated

Scheer stated that 11<sup>th</sup> St. in downtown has 120 feet of right-of-way. Perhaps these could be taken advantage of. There is some historical reference to 11<sup>th</sup> Street as well. It was the original introduction to the University.

Washington likes the idea of doing something different with 13<sup>th</sup> St. She likes the idea of anything that looks at how to create vibrancy, without excessive gentrification. She worries about the neighborhoods south and southeast of downtown. She doesn't want to create more unaffordable housing, but she can see the attraction to creating holistically, a better downtown. Her one comment is that for her, there is a disconnect between the density of student housing and the other goals. She worries we are creating a downtown that is catering to 19 and 20 year olds. This isn't family friendly. Transient students don't have the same

commitment to downtown as someone who lives there. There is an excessive amount of partying happening downtown. Parezo shares the same concerns about the neighborhood to the south. In the Midwest, cities with good schools and affordable housing, people will start moving when word gets out. We see that with tech companies.

Harris is curious about a convention center. A convention center is a catalyst. But then it has spurts of no activity and whatever it draws in, has to be supported when the center isn't buzzing with people. She inquired about the success rate of convention centers. Segal responded they are doing a high level analysis of that. We want to tread carefully. It is hard for a convention center not to be just a big box. It can be a difficult structure. There are a lot of investment opportunities to come out of this. We are trying to do a quick analysis and what would be the appropriate size. Lincoln does have meeting spaces. We will look at 100,000 to 150,000 square feet. Locational decision will be key. We want to make sure this plan provides the analytic background to make a good decision on this.

Segal continued that they are meeting with neighborhoods and doing an assessment of infrastructure in the existing neighborhoods. Part of the solution is through community development. Ultimately, in Lincoln and any city we are working in, community development relates to the health of the city. A city like Lincoln provides opportunity and more value and we need to know how to preserve this.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:50 p.m.