

to: **Nebraska Capitol Environs Commission**

from: Ed Zimmer

re: Agenda of November 20, 2008

date: November 13, 2008

Item 2: At the Environs Commission's meeting of October 23, 2008, members heard a request from Gateway Sertoma (via Parks & Rec. Dept.) to remove two granite benches from Centennial Mall and reinstall them in Veterans Memorial Garden at Antelope Park. That Sertoma club donated the benches in honor of veterans of various conflicts. (See illustrations).

Commission members in attendance supported the idea, on the condition that Parks Department provide alternative seating on that block of the Mall. Lynn Johnson indicated willingness to meet that condition.

Endorsement of this discussion by a quorum of members would be appreciated.

Item #3: At the August 28, 2008 meeting, the Commission approved a Certificate of Appropriateness for Kaplan University for demolition of a dormitory at 18th & J, remodeling of the existing academic building at 18th & K, and expansion of that building to the east. Images of the approved plans are attached.

Kaplan has determined that reductions in the cost of their project are necessary. Some of the changes seem to me non-issues—substitution of a lawn for a parking lot proposed at 18th & K (SE corner) and elimination of the metal screens proposed for addition to the existing building.

Two items require Commission review and response:

1. Kaplan proposes to eliminate a low wall originally included in the design for the new parking lot on J Street (former dormitory location).

The Commission's design standards state:

Design Standard 5: Parking Lots

Surface parking facing the Capitol Square or one of the Malls is inconsistent with the long-term goals of the Commission. Where such use currently exists, it is desirable to improve these properties by installing permanent, high-quality decorative fences, walls, or hedges at the defined "built-to" line, with due consideration for security and screening.

The amended landscape plan appears to establish a substantial "edge" between the

public right-of-way and the parking lot, as intended by the Standard, using a line of nine maple trees as the major vertical element and a dense planting of spirea, juniper, and lavender to further strengthen the edge. The suggested mature heights of the juniper and spirea (3 feet) seems to meet the standard for a wall, fence, or hedge (emphasis added).

2. Kaplan proposes a substitution of “Platinum Colored EIFS, Panelized” for the architectural metal panels approved at the west end of the new addition. On the north (K St.) elevation, this portion of the building is a curved wall, intended as a focal point at the south terminus of the new 19th St./Antelope Valley Parkway. At that location, the EFIS is proposed in bands between the first and second story windows and above the upper windows. On the south side, the EFIS would be adjacent to the parking lot entrance, from grade level to parapet.

The most pertinent Environs Standard for reviewing this proposal states:

Design Standard 2: Proximity

The nearer a property is to the Capitol, the greater responsibility it bears in the District. Buildings and other improvements facing Capitol Square should meet very high standards for design, construction, and maintenance. Improvements facing the Capitol Malls (Centennial/north, Lincoln/west, south, and east) should also meet high standards. Other improvements within the District but not facing the Square or the Malls should not intrude upon the Capitol's setting and should contribute to the overall quality of the District. [emphasis added]

The Kaplan property has been zoned O-1 and hence is subject both to the Environs District Standards and to the recently adopted Downtown Design Standards. Synthetic stuccoes such as EFIS are permitted by those standards, above twelve feet in height. The elevation drawings are not dimensioned but the north facade appears to meet at least the intention of this standard by keeping less-durable materials out of harm’s way.

The south facade is far less visible to passersby but will presumably provide a major entrance from the new parking area. Using a more durable material for at least the lower portion of this area would be preferable. The Commission should determine whether this south elevation is a street facade and whether strict conformance with the Downtown Design Standards in this detail is required.

Staff recommendation:

- The landscape plan for the south parking lot appears to conform with the Environs Design Standards.
- The substitution of EFIS at the focal point of the north facade is regrettable but probably meets the Environs and Downtown Design Standards in this location.
- The south facade, set back a considerable distance from J Street, probably should not be regarded as a street facade under the Downtown Standards

- and has little impact on the Capitol setting under the Environs Standards. The Commission should determine whether to “contribute to the overall quality of the District,” a more durable alternative to EFIS should be used on the south facade at ground level, adjacent to an entrance.

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