

BRIEFING NOTES

NAME OF GROUP: PLANNING COMMISSION
DATE, TIME AND PLACE OF MEETING: Wednesday, June 26, 2013, 12:00 p.m., Room 113, County-City Building, 555 S. 10th Street, Lincoln, Nebraska
MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE: Cathy Beecham, Michael Cornelius, Tracy Corr, Chris Hove, Jeanelle Lust, Dennis Scheer and Lynn Sunderman. Ken Weber absent.
OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE: Beth Baldwin, BrightLights; Paula Nichols; Bob Benes, Aspen Builders; Claire Hauser; Marvin Krout, Steve Henrichsen, Brandon Garrett, Sara Hartzell, Stacey Hageman and Michele Abendroth of the Planning Department.
STATED PURPOSE OF MEETING: Planning Department Self-Assessment

Chair Cornelius called the meeting to order at 12:04 p.m.

Hartzell explained that the Planning Department recently conducted a self-assessment survey and held discussions with several focus groups. Representatives from four of the focus groups reported their discussions to the Commission. Each of the four representatives introduced themselves. Baldwin was a member of the business owners and professional group and noted that she works at BrightLights. Paula Nichols stated that she is retired and that she participated in Mayor's budget process and attended the neighborhood associations and interested citizens group. Bob Benes stated that he owns Aspen Builders and was a member of the developer's group. Hauser is a counseling and psychology major and was a member of the neighborhood association and interested citizens group.

Baldwin stated that overall her group likes the community. They like the small, cohesive feel of Lincoln. They have concerns about historic preservation and if there will be enough resources for things for families like libraries and pools. They feel Lincoln is business friendly. There is a lot of focus on college students and young professionals in downtown. They would like to see that expanded to the community at large and it is important to be conscious of that. They would like to see transportation expanded especially biking and public transportation.

Nichols stated there her group was on the same track. Overall, the group is pro Lincoln. They talked a lot about transportation and the sorry state of the bus system. They talked about preserving older neighborhoods and the small town feel; as we grow, it may be hard to maintain, but it is a good goal. They talked a lot about the arena and the positive impacts. This is a good avenue to state your opinion and see if anyone cares.

Benes stated that his group talked a lot about the planning process and evaluating the department. They all feel that from 10 years ago, going through the process of developing land, it is unbelievably better. The feeling of the "us vs. them" is not there anymore, which is really great. To make a project succeed, we need to be on the same page. Their job is to make sure we're doing it right. All in all, it was positive. Some things they don't like are impact fees and that we need growth to continue to grow, but

we want smart growth. We talked about redevelopment and infill projects. The ones that are hard to do are not profitable, and no one wants to do those. The developers and city need to work together to make it happen. TIF works, and although no one wants to do condemnation, you have to look at what is good for the many. We also talked about design standards. We want to encourage walking neighborhoods, but we need to encourage character and curved streets. We don't want a grid pattern all over. We would like to see more cul-de-sacs.

Hauser stated that their group had some nice diversity. What we love about Lincoln is the green space and the trail system. Downtown development was a little bit of a concern. They would like to have more residential development downtown. The bus system was discussed in terms of its limited service. In keeping the small town feel, having more local businesses downtown makes it feel more like a community, instead of having all chain restaurants.

Lust asked if the groups had any suggestions for improving the bus system. Nichols stated that the transfer area is obsolete. She does not feel that where the transfer system is located is conducive to transferring. She believes that 48th & O Street would have been a perfect place for a bus transfer. Corr asked if there were concerns with the hours that the buses run. Nichols stated that they talked about needing extended hours, but did not have any suggestions. Hauser stated that her group talked about how people use the bus system when they do not have other options. Parking is so accessible downtown. Baldwin added that the hours do limit being able to get to functions and employment opportunities. They also would like a metro between Lincoln and Omaha.

Beecham asked about infill projects that are more challenging. Benes stated that in the older part of town, buying up a block and redeveloping it is a big job and takes a lot of money. There may be some environmental issues as well. Just to demolish some of the sites would be so expensive. Other cities have done that, but they have had some assistance. Krout stated that in the Comprehensive Plan, we talked about financial incentives, but there are state and local limitations.

Scheer asked if there was one aspect of putting together land for redevelopment in the urban area that is more difficult to solve. Benes stated that his group just talked in general, but land acquisition is a big thing and can be an issue. Sometimes you have to use eminent domain for the good of the many. That's not what we want to do, but sometimes we have to. Scheer stated that it would be interesting to know what some of the most important tools would be. Krout stated that they have talked with developers about some of those tools, and some would require a change in state constitution. They also looked at impact fees and broadening the exclusion area. There is a big savings in infrastructure to the city when you do infill.

Beecham asked if there are any issues with newer neighborhoods. Benes stated that they had a person who lives in an acreage community, and she did not have any issues. Nichols stated that she feels her neighborhood has a good community feel. Benes stated that there are some neighborhoods that are going to the cookie-cutter feel, and we need to stay away from that. We need neighborhoods with character and things like curved streets, cul-de-sacs, green space and mini-parks.

Hartzell thanked the representatives for participating in the focus groups and for coming in and reporting their group's discussion to the Commission.

Hartzell then asked the Commission to give their thoughts on how Lincoln is progressing.

Corr stated that it has been positive and streamlined. She feels that Building and Safety needs some work.

Cornelius commented that when he looks at the Comp Plans and how they have developed, he feels like they might not meet the potential when they put together the plan. We aim higher than we achieve.

Sunderman noted that change is tough for people. Development used to mean outside, and it's becoming more and more to the inside. He feels that sort of change is going to continue to happen, but it is not going to happen as fast as we like. Until people feel comfortable with that change, it is tough to do those changes with the developers.

Krout commented on the bus transfer system at 48th & O. Downtown is off center, and we have not grown as concentric as planned. We want to keep a good focus on downtown, but it may be more efficient and effective to have another location for a transfer system. This is talked about in the Comp Plan to have those nodes.

Scheer stated that we plan well in this community, but we never quite hit the markers. The planning process should have higher goals than what the plan can deliver. One thing that bothers him regarding character is that we define character different than what it should be. When we talk about character, we should be talking about what defines Lincoln. We need to design for what makes Lincoln unique. 48th & O is a great example. It is a vast improvement over what is there, but it doesn't feel like Lincoln to him. The jury is still out on whether Haymarket is going to feel like Lincoln. To define the character of Lincoln, it is socio-economic, it is design related. He deals with character of the place. The Great Plains should have an influence on how we design here. There are a lot of factors, and it's who we are as a community. He can only give his perspective, but all professionals and all people need to define it.

Corr stated that as Lincoln has grown, we have engulfed some areas, and we have specific ideas for these areas, like Havelock and Bethany. It is important to create that identity so people can come together.

Beecham stated that people have always wondered why Lincoln doesn't do more of the new urbanism where people have front porches to congregate. The other one is why we don't have planned communities for disabilities. Why do they have to live downtown where there is the bus system? When we build the transit system, can't it be developed to be ADA accessible? Also, in terms of neighborhoods, we need help with sidewalks.

Cornelius stated that the talk about downtown is interesting with the focus on keeping downtown as downtown and not keeping it separate. There are nodes that create a sense of place.

Hartzell then asked the Commissioners about their role in guiding the process.

Sunderman stated that he sees their role as using the principles they have learned in terms of connectivity and making sure those are applied to the city.

Lust stated that each individual process that comes before them is important to somebody. Giving people the consideration on the research they deserve is important.

Scheer he is amazed and impressed with how all the members look at what comes before the Planning Commission on its own merit and how it fits into the big picture as well. This is the only group of citizens that deal with that aspect of it. That is a huge benefit that the Commission does.

Beecham stated that this board is a great vehicle for the public to come and give their opinion. That plays a very important role.

Hartzell asked if there is anything the Planning Department can do to help in their role.

Lust stated that the staff reports are always very comprehensive but it would be helpful if the reason why somebody wants to do this is on the first page of the report. Krout stated that sometimes the developer has a specific project but we need to look at the bigger picture.

Cornelius has no complaints with the reports, but there are time constraints. It would be nice to get it two weeks early, but he knows that is not feasible. Scheer added that the time constraints help to streamline the process.

Sunderman asked if staff could take them through the website and the maps. Cornelius stated that a workshop on the electronic resources that are available would be beneficial.

Krout stated that this has been a useful process. It ties into the city-wide effort to look at performance measures and outcomes. These are helpful comments. A couple things have come out in this process. We need more neighborhood scale planning. We have done it for downtown, and we are working on it for the South Haymarket. That area has a nice character and can develop in a different way. We need to be more pro-active. That's when you can bring in people and have them talk to you. It's hard to get people to participate unless you're talking about a smaller area. The Neighborhood Design Standards make sure there is some compatibility to the neighborhood. They try to avoid the worst instead of proposing the best.

The meeting adjourned at 12:56 p.m.