

MEETING RECORD

NAME OF GROUP: URBAN DESIGN COMMITTEE

DATE, TIME AND PLACE OF MEETING: August 2, 2016, 3:00 p.m., Conference Room 210, County-City Building, 555 S. 10th Street, Lincoln, NE.

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE: Emily Casper, Tom Huston, JoAnne Kissel, Gill Peace, and Michelle Penn; (Tammy Eagle Bull and Michele Tilley absent).

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE: Ed Zimmer, Stacey Groshong Hageman, David Cary, George Wesselhoft, and Teresa McKinstry of the Planning Department; Lynn Johnson of Parks and Recreation; Jim Berg, Dan Spiry, and Brittany Coudriet of BVH Architects; Nick Cusick; Kevin Abourezk of the Lincoln Journal Star; and other interested parties.

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

Penn then requested a motion approving the minutes for the regular meeting held July 12, 2016. Motion for approval made by Kissel, seconded by Huston and carried 5-0: Casper, Huston, Kissel, Peace and Penn voting 'yes'; Eagle Bull and Tilley absent.

LINCOLN CHILDREN'S ZOO EXPANZION (ZOO AND PARKS & RECREATION DEPT.)

Members present: Casper, Kissel, Peace and Penn; Huston declaring a conflict of interest; Eagle Bull and Tilley absent.

Huston declared a conflict of interest on this item due to the fact that he represents the Lincoln Children's Zoo in dealings with the City of Lincoln.

Dan Spiry presented the master plan concept diagram. They started working on the plan around the first of the year. There are many moving parts. For years, the Zoo has been looking for opportunities to expand. Existing parking for the zoo is about 195 stalls. Over the years, the Zoo has looked at different opportunities. The expansion plan has been tested with the community, the Mayor's office, and other city departments. The plan shows the Zoo expanding onto their existing parking lot. The goal is to get as much parking as possible off the triangle. The Chet Ager Building will be part of a year-round Zoo with a new entrance on the east side. The entrance gate to the Zoo will move to the south. Parks and Recreation would stay in their current location and the water reservoir on the triangle will stay active. A connection needs to be made to the south entrance from parking across A Street. The existing lot will be paved and slightly expanded. Another parking lot farther south will be developed on top of two water reservoirs that are in the process of being decommissioned. There will be a walkway from the south side parking to the Zoo across the street. This will be a pedestrian bridge across A Street. It has been envisioned that the Zoo experience will start on the walkway. The intent is for interactive exhibits. One point of conflict has been where the driveway between the

parking lots crosses the bike trail. Everyone is comfortable with managing the vehicular traffic. In previous plans, Zoo patrons were taken across the trail to a collection point. The current plan shows a collection point before pedestrians cross the trail. There would be some kind of barrier between the pedestrian collection points, the cars, and the entrance to the walkway. A new pull-off area on the north side of A Street is shown for school buses. This would also be a drop-off and pick-up point for non-school bus vehicles. There is a sloped walk that climbs in grade toward A Street, trying to discourage anyone from darting across A Street. The thought is the walking ramps across A Street would be supported by an architectural pre-cast wall. He believes at the last meeting, there was discussion of the Parks and Recreation building parking and entrance. It will be maintained as visitor parking for their building, but it will also be handicapped parking for the Zoo. There is a rain garden to the north of the Parks building. Summer camp drop-off for the Zoo program was a concern as well. The entrance off S. 27th Street will have a roundabout-type entrance to allow drop-off for parents. He hopes they have addressed most of the concerns. He showed a sketch of the parking configuration which included underground utility locations. They are working with all utility departments for coordination of the parking across A Street and the pedestrian bridge.

Kissel questioned why they are showing a 50 foot wall along A Street. Spiry replied it is part of the ramping of the pedestrian pathway, up to the bridge across A Street. The Zoo has acquired two properties to allow more parking and a landscape buffer. There is a concern to discourage people using Washington Street in the neighborhood as overflow parking. That came out of a neighborhood meeting. There will be a narrow landscape area in front of the wall on A Street. With the bridge, the pump house, and the wall, you are entering a zone where things are happening all around you.

Kissel questioned if the applicant thinks this will feel like an entrance to the Zoo when it is done. Spiry replied that what has been talked about is branding the bridge. If there is any kind of marker, it will be the bridge.

Kissel wondered why the water system will vacate the reservoirs to the south, but not the north ones. She asked what the difference is between them. Spiry believes there is a difference in the life span of the reservoirs. The south two reservoirs were in the plan to be decommissioned at some point. The timeline for decommissioning has been moved up to coordinate with the Zoo expansion. Lynn Johnson added that it is his understanding that the reservoir north of A Street is integral with the reservoirs across Capitol Parkway. It is critical for the water flow.

Spiry continued that LES (Lincoln Electric System) will be moving a security fence along the southern boundary of the substation farther south into the southern parking area. Therefore, the parking configuration will have to change. They are considering diagonal parking or landscaped islands to make up for the loss in area. This hasn't been reflected on the plan yet. They just found out yesterday.

Penn questioned if they will build a wall around the LES site. Spiry believes it will be surrounded with a chain link fence, probably with secure wire on top. He imagines it would be secure like other LES equipment he has seen.

Penn stated that the Zoo is something where visitors go from out of town and it should look nice. LES has proposed some different things downtown to screen their equipment, which looks much nicer than the usual. She would like to see that investigated.

Huston questioned the parking count. Spiry replied the total will be around 400 combined stalls, with all the parking implemented. They are going from 198 existing stalls to around 400 shown in the plan. He believes down the road, there are opportunities for a two level parking deck south of A Street. The parking could essentially double by taking advantage of the sloping grade.

Kissel understands that the existing main entrance off 27th Street essentially becomes the main entrance for the gardens. She wondered how this would be controlled. You can't keep people from parking there. Spiry believes you start by taking away the Zoo sign at that entrance. He thinks this can be explained in the Zoo's enrollment package as well. That entrance would be de-emphasized.

Kissel wants to know how people would be discouraged from walking across A Street. Spiry stated that the wall, the walkway and the experience have all been geared to encourage people to use the overpass to cross A Street. There is a team working on conceptual ideas. Nothing has been committed to yet. One of the big ideas for the pathway is to have landmarks along the way. It would be possible to have sculptures or other interactive activities. Designing that would be the next step.

Peace would like to know why the property on the corner of 27th and A Streets can't be used for expansion. Johnson stated that the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board has been involved from early on. The Board was interested in maintaining the public gardens and respecting donor's wishes. They also wish to continue to maintain a green edge along 27th St. From an experiential standpoint, they believe the green edge is very important. Long term, the Parks and Rec Administration Building probably goes away making more property more available for Zoo expansion.

Penn doesn't see why Parks and Rec isn't moving to the south so the Zoo could expand parking into the current Parks and Rec space. This would create more accessible parking for the Zoo, moms with kids, and closer parking for everyone. Nick Cusick responded that part of the answer is finances. The Mayor has given very specific parameters. As things have evolved, there have been ongoing discussions about the Parks and Rec building. Today, it has been set aside for some future master plan. They are in the midst of a capital campaign for fundraising for the Zoo. He believes at this point it is finances and time constraints.

Kissel believes, in terms of looking at alternatives, there is a lot going on in this area. It seems that more is trying to be put on the triangle than comfortably fits. It is pretty optimistic to think people will use the south parking the way it's intended. She asked if something has to give, what other things are possible. Kissel also wondered if they looked at a bigger Zoo on a different site. It seems to her a matter of prudence that the Zoo needs a different site. She questions how much thought went into that alternative. Cusick replied that the Zoo looked at different sites. They were asked to look at the current site of Chet Ager Junior Golf. Based on a wide variety of things, the estimate was \$45 to \$50 million dollars just to move the existing Zoo. They also found out that the golf site was pretty small. The Children's Zoo isn't the Henry Doorly Zoo and doesn't ever want to be, but the golf site is just too small. Johnson agreed. Significant infrastructure and investment have been placed into the current

site. Cusick noted they were very conscious that the Zoo is in the inner city and is accessible to families in need.

Jim Berg added that it will come as no surprise to anyone that the Zoo does not receive any public funding. Cusick thinks that the Zoo is trying everything they possibly can to accommodate more parking and to encourage people to walk across the ramp. There aren't many non-profit projects that are \$15 million dollar projects.

Huston thinks one of the biggest obstacles is A Street. He wonders if any consideration was given to vacating a portion of A Street. Johnson believes there was some consideration given to it, but Public Works felt they needed to maintain it for connectivity.

Kissel believes it seems like a cluster of challenges. These are all treasured things; Sunken Gardens, the public gardens, the Zoo, the bike trail. We love all these things. She doesn't want to jeopardize the success of any of these items.

Kissel asked the applicant to explain the plan for the Rock Island Trail. Spiry showed the current path of the trail. He showed the path of the secure fence around the Zoo. The edge of the bridge plaza will have a taller ornamental fence and will pick up with the existing fence. The Rock Island Trail would remain outside the Zoo boundary fence.

Casper would like to know how bikers would be encouraged to visit the Zoo. Spiry replied that has yet to be developed. Discussions are continuing with the trails groups. Long term, a bike trail bypass is being explored to connect the Rock Island Trail to the Billy Wolff Trail, south of A Street. The only challenge is the high water events. Casper wondered about bike parking for the Zoo. Spiry responded in one scenario, one trail becomes a destination. There could be bike parking by the Zoo entrance.

Kissel sees that the service drive crosses the Rock Island Trail. Spiry stated that exists now.

Zimmer questioned if the Zoo School will continue to use the existing Camelot Commons space inside the current Zoo. Cusick believes the long term answer is no. A new space will be created for the school in the expansion area.

Spiry would say the overall schedule is to finish design work early next year, bid, and get under construction. There will probably be a temporary entrance near the southwest corner of the current Zoo during construction. They are looking at a phased transition. Cusick added that the RFP (Request For Proposals) is out for decommissioning the water tanks.

Peace recalled Cusick mentioning the Zoo doesn't want to be as big as Henry Doorly Zoo. He loves the Lincoln Children's Zoo. He likes that you can park close with a stroller. He doesn't feel that looking at this as a master plan, that parking has been addressed properly. There is the parking north for the gardens, with an entrance. There is the entrance to the Parks and Rec building and the entrance for parking to the south. There are conflicts with ramps, bikes, and car connections. There are a lot of hurdles to jump through for a parking lot so far away that may not be used all that often. He wonders why. It is complicated and expensive to get the people from Point A to Point B. It involves a bridge, a

wall, and landscaping. As a master plan goes, there are a lot of questions to the expansion. He isn't sure visitors should be asked to park so far away and walk such a long way. As a master plan, this is missing the feeling that Lincoln Children's Zoo has always had and is losing its character.

Cusick agrees that they want to maintain a more intimate atmosphere. Ninety-three percent polled said Lincoln Children's Zoo should expand and approximately 97 percent believed they should expand where they currently are. He agrees that people don't want to see it turn into Henry Doorly Zoo. The exhibits maintain a "hands-on" experience. There are issues of how to deal with parking on a constrained space. They had to look at many different options and believe this to be the best of what was available. Peace doesn't think there is an option of moving the Zoo. What you have is great. He would lean toward a smaller master plan that can fit without all the extra parking, switchback, ramps, etc.

Berg added what you are seeing is Phase One. Fifteen to twenty years from now, this will look different. Peace agrees. He thinks a master plan needs to be created. A wall isn't necessarily needed now. Kissel agreed. If this will grow beyond what we see, and what we see doesn't fit in her opinion, let's plan it now. She would love to see an intimate, well planned zoo. She would hate to see something that people don't like anymore. There are a lot of things going on. She thinks a lot of compromises are being made. From a design point of view, there are better solutions. Spiry thinks this plan solves the problems. Peace thinks that these compromises are not the solution.

Penn would like to see the Parks and Rec office area become parking. Most people want convenient parking. Parks and Rec could move to the south. It would seem logical to move them down closer to the park. The immediate parking to the south and Parks and Rec parking in the extreme south, becomes extreme overflow parking.

Casper thinks these are some of the comments that were made last time. The south parking is a long way for a young child to walk. She thinks it could hurt the Zoo. It makes sense for Parks and Rec to move south adjacent to other Parks uses and a park. She is concerned about accommodating ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) parking. You have to be close or you won't do it. She believes the demographic for the Zoo is a parent with a young child. For a long walk, people will go to the Henry Doorly Zoo. This is a zoo for an hour or two. Penn agreed. That is what is great about our zoo. Casper continued that when relocating admissions and the food court, what happens to existing functions? These should all be addressed. The Zoo School location is another question that needs answered. She wondered what the plan is for all the functions that are being moved out of the existing Zoo. Spiry responded that those answers are with the Zoo staff. Cusick added that the current entrance is not being replaced. All administrative staff stays where they are.

Kissel questioned if the new buildings are large animal exhibits. Spiry pointed out the animal holding exhibits. Kissel knows that the backs of the buildings aren't particularly attractive. The new buildings will be right across from the public gardens. This plan is taking great pains to preserve the gardens. Maybe it is trying to make something happen that should turn a no into a yes for the greater good. Cusick explained that they looked at a possible expansion if the gardens moved. Spiry noted there were seven or eight versions of master plans looked at. Cusick stated that if this commission ultimately decides that parking needs to be on the current Parks and Rec site, then that is something

else that they have to deal with.

Huston has a conflict of interest on this item, but he finds it ironic that the lawyer is more optimistic than the design professionals. He doesn't see all the demons everyone else does. He doesn't want to give away a good plan.

Spiry is intrigued with Penn's idea. The south reservoirs could be decommissioned and Parks and Rec could be moved down there. He wonders at what point you say the bridge is not necessary. Penn believes there could be a crosswalk. During 'Boo at the Zoo', Police could block off traffic. Casper agreed it gives a nice entry point. Kissel agreed as well. The entrance design that was presented seems very not worthy of our great zoo.

Cusick stated there have been various constraints. Some donors have specifically committed to the bridge across A Street. There are a whole host of issues involved with changing things.

Kissel thinks if the City stepped forward and offered to move Parks and Rec, and committed to a really great Zoo, she can't imagine a donor not seeing that as an improvement.

Penn stated that this commission looks at it from an urban design solution and sees the potential. We don't see the politics behind it. That isn't going to stop what she thinks is a good solution. This could be a viable solution to move Parks and Rec to the south.

Johnson clarified that this master plan has a whole series of actions involved. There is the lease agreement, action by the Historic Preservation Commission on possible landmark action for the Ager Building and a special use permit for parking on private property. Currently, the relationship with the City and Zoo is spelled out with 50-year-old municipal code language. Ultimately, some new language is wanted. The desire is for all this to happen in the next three months or so.

Cusick stated this feels like the Parks and Rec Advisory Committee efforts. They made a recommendation with caveats.

ACTION:

Kissel made a motion to recommend that the City not accept the Children's Zoo Master Plan, as presented to the Committee, seconded by Peace and carried 4-0: Casper, Kissel, Peace, and Penn voting 'yes'; Huston declaring a conflict of interest; Eagle Bull and Tilley absent.

Zimmer suggested the Committee may wish to offer its recommendations in the form of a second motion.

Kissel is glad everyone has gotten along so well, but she believes they are starting to compromise everything. She thinks it is starting to be seen as the long term home for the Zoo. A master plan should take a harder look at other functions that could be equally successful somewhere else. She recommends the City reconsider allowing the Zoo to use the Parks land on the corner.

Peace understands this is a limited triangle of land. The guest experience should stay on the triangle and the Parks and Rec building and their additional space should be in question on whether they stay on the triangle or not. Guest experiences that require overpass or parking across the street should not be considered.

Kissel thinks there are other parks where you could incorporate memorial gardens. She believes we have to make this work for the Zoo first.

Peace thinks the triangle should be used for Zoo space and everything is negotiable. Workarounds and fixes should be avoided. Penn agrees. She would like to see a master plan. Peace thinks there are plenty of great solutions across the street for buses, staff parking, etc. The other space is available for any other pieces that can't fit into the guest experience. The guest experience includes parking. Switchbacks, bridges and bike lanes crossing parking lots should not be allowed. The reservoir, the Parks and Rec building, the decision-makers who said no should be asked to reconsider. The triangle should be balanced and maintain the guest experience.

Kissel understands the need for overflow, special event, staff parking etc. There are some feasible alternatives since the City owns land in the area that could be displaced. She thinks it is important for the committee to express that they support the Zoo and its expansion, but they see alternatives that are worth exploring.

Johnson heard from this group and other groups that the primary use of this Zoo is for families with young children and it needs to be easily accessible for young children. The committee members agreed.

Peace made a motion stating: Because the primary users of the Zoo are families with young children, the Urban Design Committee recommends that the Zoo Master Plan be reconsidered to contain all of the Zoo guest experiences, including guest parking, within Antelope Triangle. Urban Design Committee further recommends reconsideration and re-evaluation of each use on the Triangle, including the Parks & Recreation Dept. office, the southwest corner of the Triangle, the Gardens and the Retired Teachers Fountain, to avoid the complex parking and entrance solution required by locating the primary Zoo patron parking south of A Street. Motion seconded by Kissel and carried 4-0: Casper, Kissel, Peace, and Penn voting 'yes'; Huston declaring a conflict of interest; Eagle Bull and Tilley absent.

STAFF REPORT:

- Zimmer stated that there are still some joint projects that are in progress. They aren't ready yet. The hotel project for 9th St. and O Street is moving along. Progress is being made on the Telegraph District.

- Zimmer stated that the next regular meeting of the Urban Design Committee would fall on the day after Labor Day. He suggested perhaps it could be moved to the following Tuesday which would be September 13, 2016. Everyone was agreeable to the suggestion. Zimmer will coordinate with all the committee members.
- Hageman noted that the application for N. 48th St. and Leighton will appear on the agenda next month.
- Zimmer introduced George Wesselhoft as the newest planner with the Planning Dept. George Wesselhoft stated that he comes from Pella, Iowa where he was the sole planner. He is excited to be working as part of a team.

There being no further business, the joint meeting was adjourned at 5:05 p.m.