

MEETING RECORD

Advanced public notice of the Nebraska Capitol Environs Commission meeting was posted on the County-City bulletin board and the Planning Department's website.

NAME OF GROUP: NEBRASKA CAPITOL ENVIRONS COMMISSION

DATE, TIME AND PLACE OF MEETING: Friday, July 26, 2024, 8:30 a.m., City Council Chambers, County-City Building, 555 S. 10th Street, Lincoln, Nebraska.

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE: Eileen Bergt, Ann Post, Andrea Gebhart, Kile Johnson, and David Quade (Delonte Johnson and Heidi Cuca absent).

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE: Collin Christopher, Jennifer McDonald and Juan Carrasco of the Planning Department; and other interested citizens were present.

STATED PURPOSE OF MEETING: Nebraska Capitol Environs Commission Meeting

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

K. Johnson then called for the approval of the minutes of the regular meeting held July 12, 2024.

Motion for approval made by Gebhart by Seconded by Bergt.

Minutes approved as corrected 5-0: Bergt, Post, Quade, Gebhart, and K. Johnson voting 'yes'; Cuca and D. Johnson absent.

DOWNTOWN CORRIDORS STREETScape PROJECT (UDR24101): July 26, 2024

Members present: Bergt, Post, Quade, Gebhart, and K. Johnson voting 'yes'; Cuca & D. Johnson absent.

Collin Christopher, Planning Department, 555 S 10th Street, Lincoln, NE came forward and stated that this is a large project that has been worked on for the last 4-5 years and a small part of the project intersects with the Capital Environs District.

Christopher also stated that he would like to start with a presentation to showcase an overview as to what the Downtown Corridors Project is and to essentially seek advice from the committee to move forward with the project. Christopher started the presentation by introducing the Downtown Corridors Project. The project was born out of the Downtown Master Plan which was completed in 2018 and included a series of recommendations directed towards improving the public realm within downtown. Specifically, the plan targeted vehicularly-focused streets like 9th, 10th, and O Street and ways to make them more pedestrian-friendly. Essentially, the project seeks to balance the dynamic between pedestrians, bike riders, and vehicular traffic. Christopher continued by adding that this is also an opportunity to use public city dollars to catalyze and create the synergy between the streetscape, the adjacent buildings, and the development around them. Shortly after the Downtown Master Plan was completed, portions of the plan were pulled into a proposed streetscape project. In 2020, the City Council approved the creation of a TIF District that now provides a primary funding source for the identified enhancements. In 2022, a design team led by Olsson was hired to begin the visioning process. The team also included landscape architecture firm EDSA, BHV, and a local marketing and advertising firm. Christopher added that Phase I is the priority of this meeting. Over the last year there has been focus on phase one to narrow in on what it's going to look like, how much it will cost and what the timeline is. Christopher continued by stating that there have been three open houses, two of them in 2022 and the last one being just last month which was very well attended.

There was an online survey that got good traction from adjacent businesses and property owners as well. Christopher mentioned that it is important to continue reaching out to these businesses and property owners to schedule one on one meetings to help better understand their needs as the design is finalized. Phase I's goal is to start construction in 2025, therefore the plans should be finalized by the end of this year to bid them out and get a contractor on board. Phase I's focus area targets 9th and 10th street from S Street to K Street, O Street from 9th to Centennial Mall, a small portion of S Street up towards the north, two blocks of P Street, two to three blocks of 11th Street, and two blocks of 14th Street, which has been identified as the Music or Creative District. Christopher added that Phase I is divided between priority "A" which are projects that are going to be funded, and priority "B" which are projects that they would like to get done but won't be able to decide on it until after the budget is finalized. Improvements will include street trees, including the replacement of 40-50 ash trees and other shade opportunities, understory landscaping possibly including bioretention beds like P Street, sidewalk and pedestrian intersection improvements like pedestrian and sidewalk bump-outs. Consideration of existing and future on-street parking needs, outdoor living room spaces, north-south bike connectivity along 11th street, and City of Lincoln downtown monumentation and branding. Christopher

also stated that other improvements include public and interactive art, decorative lighting, activation of prioritized alleys, improvements that help cultivate a Music District along 14th Street, like the ability to more easily close off the street for events, other pedestrian amenities that enhance the downtown experience and eliminate “dead zones” along O Street, and targeted two-way conversions. Christopher mentioned that the Downtown Corridors Project cannot address two-way conversions for all of Downtown. Instead, the focuses will be on conversions north of O Street, including P Street from 9th to 10th Street, 11th Street from O to Q Street, and 14th Street from O to Q Street. Christopher added that they will also be setting up future conversions along the entire stretch of O Street in the way that improvements are made with the bump-outs at the intersections. The project is primarily funded by a TIF district. Christopher added that they also have some state and federal funds that they received, as well as general fund contributions for irrigation replacement which they have in their CIP budget. Christopher mentioned that it is anticipated that the TIF district will generate about 15 million dollars over its life, though that depends on what the legislature does over the course of the summer with property tax relief.

Christopher then proceeded to explain each corridor and what improvements are to be made. The 9th and 10th street goals include improved pedestrian connectivity, both north-south and east-west, wider and more consistent sidewalks, reduced lane crossings, improved first impressions through Downtown by widening landscape beds with large street trees, and added pedestrian lighting to add security. Christopher mentioned that on the east side of 10th Street there will be a one lane reduction. Christopher mentioned that the sidewalk on 10th Street is very narrow, and it is unsafe to walk on today in spots. The sidewalk is right up against the street and the solution to this will be eliminating the second turn lane and adding a combination of on-street parking and a sidewalk buffered by landscaping and street trees. Both ends of the block will have bump-outs which will reduce lane crossings for pedestrians. Christopher also mentioned that they want to install lots of overstory trees to fill in the urban canopy. Ninth Street will take a similar approach to 10th Street, though there are some challenges on 9th, 10th, and O Street due to underground vaults and basements that extend out onto the sidewalk and in some cases into the street.

Post stated that it is very hard to grow trees in the downtown area because the roots interfere underground or there isn't enough space for them to grow. Post asked Christopher how they are planning to go about this.

Christopher mentioned that they are making sure to create a large landscape bed with enough soil volume to accommodate the trees, though it will never be the same as a tree being planted in an open park. Other options include Silva Cell or engineered soil, which create volume underground and limit soil compaction. Compaction is one

of the key factors that make trees in the downtown area fail. Collin mentioned that P Street used Silva Cell for their trees though that solution was not as affordable. Christopher added that they are trying to come up with more affordable solutions which will allow the trees to thrive. Christopher mentioned that the utilities are an obstacle that must be dealt with, especially in O Street. Christopher said that from what is understood through previous redevelopment projects is that there isn't a way of knowing exactly where all of the utilities are prior to construction. There are decades of abandoned utilities that are not useful but get in the way of the project. There is a lot that can be solved in the design phase, but there are obstacles that are to be solved in the field. Christopher continued the presentation by displaying 10th Street, north of Q Street and its proposed improvements. On the west side of 10th Street the proposed Drury Hotel, formerly the Journal Star building site, has a property line that goes up very close to the roadway and in some areas goes into the roadway. This imposes a challenge in creating a consistent buffered sidewalk. Christopher mentioned negotiations that have been done with Drury Hotel through the permitting process to provide a 14-foot easement from back-of-curb, allowing for some combination of turf and sidewalk. Christopher continued by mentioning that on the east side of 10th Street, they have worked with David as well as UNL staff to find a solution for making the sidewalk connection bigger along the new music building site. Christopher mentioned that they hope to provide some additional funding to said project that will allow a 16 – 20-foot sidewalk buffered by turf and street trees along this stretch to accommodate gameday pedestrian traffic. As you go further north the landscape bed becomes on-street parking that could potentially benefit the university.

Christopher moved to P Street, where the goals are to complete the final two blocks of the P Street streetscape from 9th to 11th Street, two-way conversion, and reduced lane crossings.

Post mentioned that in previous instances, people have gotten upset over two-way conversions. Post asked what the difference here is.

Christopher stated that there really isn't a difference here, but the hope is that that by doing these conversions incrementally, it will cause less confusion and reduce public outcry.

K Johnson asked what "reduced lane crossings" meant.

Christopher answered by stating that there is a blue dashed line showing the existing curb of the street. The goal is to extend the sidewalk at intersections, therefore reducing the number of lanes pedestrians must pass while crossing the street. These are known as bumpouts. Christopher continued the presentation by mentioning that

they are considering flipping the on-street parking scenario to better align the two-way conversion of P Street. This would entail reversing the angled and parallel parking to the other sides of the street.

Eleventh Street is more ambitious; the idea is to create two greenway streets within downtown. Eleventh Street will be the north-south greenway and M Street will be the east-west greenway. Christopher mentioned that the plan is, with a lane reduction in the roadway itself, to create a wider pedestrian greenway along the west side of 11th Street. That greenway will be as much as fifty feet wide in some locations and it will provide lots of bike and pedestrian amenities. The greenway will also connect pedestrians and bike riders from the University to the south of downtown neighborhoods. There will also be a two-way conversion north of O Street and reduced lane crossings. Eleventh Street will be the most unique of the corridors, and every block will be a little different. The darker colored pavement shown on the plan reflects a bikeway which will be at sidewalk level. Christopher added that they will be using the landscaping to separate the pedestrian route from the bike route, with the pedestrian route being closer to the building. Because of the space there will be room for rain gardens and play amenities. They are also considering the idea of creating a kiosk for programming or business incubation. Christopher mentioned that they are only capturing about a three-block stretch of downtown and future expansion of the greenway will have to be funded separately over the next ten years or so. Christopher mentioned that the plan is to use more wood in some of the furnishings, like tables and chairs, and some unique lighting solutions.

Christopher continued by mentioning the 14th Street Music District goals, which are to cultivate a vibrant streetscape that organically supports the existing businesses and grassroots music venues. The project will also facilitate the use of the street for events and programming of varying scales, making 14th Street a true community space. Additionally, it will maximize flexibility and use of the pedestrian streetscapes using moveable and modular street furniture and amenities. Christopher continued by stating that they will also use art, unique lighting solutions and interactive design elements to make 14th Street a destination within the larger downtown environment. Lastly, they want to use 14th Street to tell a story about the past, present, and future of music and art within downtown Lincoln.

Post asked if it'll be easier to block 14th Street from vehicular traffic for events and if it'll be done more often.

Christopher mentioned that they really want to consider how to close off 14th Street with ease. Christopher mentioned that creating a template on how closing 14th Street

will work for future events would be ideal. A template will help guide the set-up of the event and it will limit the impact on the surrounding businesses.

KJohnson asked if the Music District includes the area South of O Street, on 14th Street.

Christopher mentioned that in the long run it will include the area South of O Street, but in this first phase the focus is really on the block from O to P Street. Christopher added that it is anticipated that the block from N to O Street will be a part of the Music District though the block does need some redevelopment to make it a viable Music District block. Christopher also added that there are alley improvements planned on the N to O block. As a separate project, it is planned to do streetscape improvements to the parking garage at the south end of the block along 14th Street. Christopher mentioned that 14th Street today has two one-way lanes with a bike lane going through the middle, it also has four parallel parking spots and 16 angled parking slots, one public garage entry and two private entries. Christopher mentioned that the goal for 14th Street is to convert it into a two-way street, eliminate the center bike lane, and eliminate the private access drive along the west side of 14th Street. Christopher added that amongst the improvements, the parking will also be converted to all parallel slots which will reduce the count on the block to 18 spots, which will allow for a larger streetscape for pedestrians. Christopher stated that another goal for 14th Street is to make the streetscape as movable as possible, apart from the bumpouts. Christopher mentioned that they want to make sure most of the furniture is moveable so that the adjacent businesses can create and change the atmosphere as they please. This will also help with events where you can pack up all the moveable furniture and store it to better accommodate a block party or event when more space is needed. Christopher continued by mentioning the restrictions with sidewalk cafes, specifically on 11th, 14th, and O Street. The first restriction is that sidewalk cafes must be directly attached to the building of the business and the second restriction is that the business must have a railing on all sides of the sidewalk café to conduct business. Christopher stated that having a permanent railing on the sidewalk is an obstacle because if the current business moves, often the new business doesn't use the sidewalk café, leaving an unused, unmovable railing in the streetscape. Christopher stated that the railing issue can be fixed by making them more flexible on how they are applied so if a business owner wants to shift their sidewalk café away from the building they can do so and they can better integrate into the proposed landscaping. Christopher added that they also want to create unique pedestrian lighting experience in downtown, which is not something that is available at this moment. Other ideas for the district that Christopher brought up were painting murals on the garage and uplighting them, the focus of using signage and art, and interactive music amenities. Christopher also mentioned that there are two undeveloped spaces under the garage that are privately owned, and they are working with the owner as there are plans to attract new

business opportunities in those spaces that are preferably music-focused. Christopher mentioned other music-focused amenities like studio spaces that can cater to local, emerging bands and teach them how to record music.

Christopher mentioned that the primary O Street goals are to reestablish the street as less of a highway and more a main street from 9th Street to Centennial Mall. Other goals include improved pedestrian connectivity, enhanced landscaping, carving out protected spaces for outdoor dining and other pedestrian amenities, and rethinking on-street parking.

Post asked what dynamic parking meant.

Christopher mentioned that the idea really came about from observations that there's not a ton of turnover with these two-hour metered stalls. Christopher added that it hasn't been decided yet whether dynamic parking will be available all the time or only certain hours of the day. Dynamic parking will essentially change the parking time limit to a shorter one so that turnover is much quicker, enabling services like Uber Eats or Postmates to use these parking slots to pick up orders. Dynamic parking would also help delivery companies to get in and out of the area with ease. Christopher added that having dynamic parking can help business with to-go orders since the delivery company runners can get in and out of the area providing more convenience to the establishments and their customers.

Christopher continued the presentation by touching base on the Old City Hall block, which is between 9th and 10th Streets. This is one of the blocks that was identified as a key possibility for improvements that can impact Downtown Lincoln in a positive way. Christopher mentioned that the building feels hidden when people are experiencing Downtown Lincoln, and they would like to highlight the building and make it feel more integral to the area. One of the things that is being attempted to be created is a second walkway that would run up to the front of the Old City Hall building. Christopher mentioned there are some obstacles with this improvement which are the two historic walls on the O Street side that are not in great shape. It's known that they want to preserve the walls, maybe fence them off to keep them from becoming a liability and build the improvements around the walls and reroute the drainage away from the walls.

Post asked where the right-of-way was. Christopher mentioned that the right-of-way ends at the top of the stairs.

Christopher continued by stating that there is a maintenance issue when it comes to pavers being from curb to building, which is the case in a lot of blocks Downtown,

especially on O Street. Christopher stated that as part of this project they want to make sure that the streetscape is consistent and concrete in most cases so that it is kept as accessible as possible. It is known that pavers can pop out and create tripping hazards that need to be addressed as soon as possible.

Post asked if there has been any feedback from businesses regarding the sidewalk cafes and the intention of making them removable and adjustable.

Christopher stated that there's been mixed feelings about the idea, mainly from the businesses that have alcohol sales. There are three different scenarios that can take place. The first one being that the current sidewalk cafes can stay where they are and there is no change to them. The second scenario being fully taking away the sidewalk café and pushing it away from the building, and the third one being more of a hybrid solution to have some seating against the building and then more seating away from the building. Some businesses expressed concerns about cafes with no railing because having no railing means anyone can sit in the area. There are also certain insurance liability issues when it comes to alcohol sales. Christopher mentioned that these separate amenities don't have to be used by the businesses in the area and can be simply used by downtown visitors.

Bergt asked who would oversee maintaining the separate sidewalk café areas.

Christopher stated that if a business has a sidewalk café it would be their responsibility for the upkeep. If the common areas aren't leased as detached sidewalk cafes, then DLA maintenance crews will take care of them as common spaces. Christopher stated that the common spaces are being designed with the understanding that they may or may not be leased, so that if they aren't leased anyone can use them. The area doesn't have to be fenced unless the business sells alcohol or wants to fence it. Christopher mentioned that for some businesses there is benefit in fencing the area and that's fine, but they would still like to see the fencing be less permanent.

Christopher mentioned that there will be an update on the sidewalk café ordinance to make this change compliant with city code. Christopher also mentioned they hope they can come up with a plan that can get these sidewalk cafes approved administratively by using approved standard railings and furnishings to keep a sense of cohesiveness. Christopher mentioned that if the business would like to do something more unique, that they would have to go through the regular Urban Design Committee process.

Christopher mentioned that since the proposed street trees will take a while to mature, they would like to add supplemental shade structures to address the harsh summer conditions.

Next steps are to continue to meet with stakeholders over the next month, analyze feedback from those meetings and open house, finalize a preferred design and boundary for Phase 1 based on feedback and cost estimates, be ready to put streetscape work out to bid by November, have additional open houses prior to the start of construction, and hopefully start construction in early 2025. Christopher stated that one common concern has come up occasionally regarding future additional funding to support these projects in the future. Christopher added that there are three funding categories that will take care of the upkeep. The funding categories are the DLA Maintenance Budget, the Downtown CIP Fund (which are 100% City funds and are used for repair and replacement), and endowment revenues.

K Johnson stated that on the west side of 10th Street, making a left on O Street the pavers look awful and broken up. K Johnson asked if there are talks on using stamped concrete rather than pavers and how that will work in some of these situations.

Christopher mentioned that there are as many issues with stamped concrete as there are with pavers. The first issue is that there is difficulty when matching the color when it comes to replacing the stamped concrete and the second issue is that in some cases stamped concrete can deteriorate much faster. Christopher mentioned that he believes clay pavers can last from 40 to 50 years if they have a good subbase and are looked after and taken care of in comparison to the much shorter lifetime of a standard concrete sidewalk.

Post asked Christopher how much of the project he has presented is going out to bid and the time frame as to when they are going to be completed. Post also asked Christopher for more information on TIF funds and some individual project contributions.

Christopher mentioned that during the next two weeks they'll have a better understanding as to what phase one is going to look like. Christopher added that anything in the orange color in the map shown is a priority like 9th, 10th, and O Street, which are all a part of Phase 1, Priority A. Anything in Phase 1, Priority B are projects that they would like to get to but don't know if they'll have enough funding to do so. As for the timeline in which these projects will be completed, Christopher mentioned that it is hard to tell because they don't know if they'll have a local contractor or if the size of this project will attract a regional contractor that can complete the project in a shorter time. Christopher added that Phase 1 could be a two-season project, 2025 to

2026, and he is taking into consideration any outrage of the larger community and business owners caused by a total shut down of all streets at once. Christopher also mentioned that it is important to be strategic when it comes to the closures as it will directly impact businesses in the area. Lastly, Christopher gave more information on TIF Funds. Christopher stated that there is a district which captures the bulk of the phase I area, and then there are TIF projects where streetscape contributions have been negotiated with the developer. Examples of those projects include the new Residence Inn and the redevelopment of the Gold's block.

K Johnson asked how the endowments are funded, whether they're private or city funds and if they are growing.

Christopher mentioned that every endowment is different. Christopher stated that when Mayor Buetler noticed the spaces being created weren't receiving proper maintenance, he pushed to find money within the budget to fund an endowment. In some cases, it was city dollars and in other cases it was privately funded. Christopher added that typically they expect the endowments to grow 7-8 percent from year to year. They are allowed to capture 4 percent of that for annual use, while the rest is held in the fund to keep up with inflation. A one-million-dollar endowment allows for forty thousand dollars every year to pay for improvements with City funds that can be reimbursed. Christopher added that endowments do grow over time and the goal is for the endowments to last for the full lifecycle of the project.

Gebhart mentioned that there are inconsistencies with the shade structures that were presented by Christopher, and if those will come back before the board for approval.

Christopher mentioned that they will bring it back for final approval. Christopher stated that by September they should have 90 percent drawings ready.

K Johnson asked if that portion of the project needs the committee's approval.

Christopher stated that the committee's approval is needed.

Bergt expressed some concern regarding having plants so close to the street. Bergt mentioned that salt can get on them during the winter months and mentioned the snowplow can cause some harm to the plants. Bergt mentioned that she likes the current situation where the sidewalk cafes are up against the building which she feels is safer. Raingardens are hard to plant and maintain. Bergt also mentions that businesses have more ownership of their space if the sidewalk café is against the

building rather than separate. Bergt added that rain gardens are hard to plant and maintain and asked if there are going to be curbs around the planting beds.

Christopher stated that the beds will have some kind of curbing. He mentioned that he likes what they refer to as the Omaha model, where the curbing has a shall curve to it.

Bergt mentioned that the bike lane in 11th Street is nice but doesn't align well with the university. And asked if there is a good way to get bikes into the campus without dumping them on to the sidewalk. Bergt also brought up maintenance stating DLA's budget has increased but they have also taken on more responsibility and that doesn't mean they're going to spend more time in Downtown Lincoln.

Christopher stated that they have identified within the Capital Improvement Fund the money for plant replacement. The other change that has happened within DLA is a new position with a focus on proactive repair and replacement, like plant replacement, irrigation repair, and site furnishing repair/replacement. There is also an online system that tracks the amenities that they are responsible for maintaining. Christopher mentioned that they are better positioned today than they have been for a long time.

Bergt mentioned that there are trees that were planted 30 years ago, and she hopes that they can work around them instead of removing them since it is very hard for trees to grow downtown.

Christopher mentioned that if there are any trees that they can keep they will. Christopher mentioned that there are 50 ash trees that will have to be removed which will have a bit of an impact, but other trees will stay. Christopher added that there are some streets in which there isn't much sidewalk space and maybe only planting overhead trees in those streets is a better option rather than having so much understory landscaping. Christopher mentioned that having them planted in a silva cell bed to help them grow would be ideal.

Bergt mentioned that silva cells are tricky because of what happens if you must take out the tree. Bergt thinks it better to have engineered soil and have it not so compacted so that the trees can grow.

Bob Ripley, 3022 William St, Lincoln NE 68502, mentioned that he has two comments. The first one being that he would like to see 13th Street return to two-way its entire length. The second one being that he doesn't understand why 12th Street isn't used as a one-way bicycle lane going north just like the very nice one on 11th Street

going south. Ripley mentioned that having a bike lane on 14th Street isn't ideal because of it being a bus route and it is also very busy.

This is not a matter that is voted on today.

Discuss & Advise: *Staff Report & Miscellaneous*

Christopher mentioned that there is a scheduled meeting for August 23rd.

Christopher also mentioned that the Downtown Corridors Project will be back in the next couple of months for a formal review.

Meeting adjourned by K Johnson.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:13 a.m.