

City Pitches Standards for Antelope Valley and Beyond

By Deena Winter / Lincoln Journal Star
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George Crandall was attending a groundbreaking ceremony in Racine, Wis., where his consulting firm had done an award-winning downtown development plan.

He asked the developer why he'd decided to do a project in Racine, and the developer said, "Because the city has decided what it wants to be when it grows up."

Crandall likes to think his Portland company's guide for the future had something to do with that. And he hopes Lincoln city officials will be similarly convinced of the value of the road maps his company has helped write for Lincoln's Antelope Valley Project area.

The proposed package of new codes and design standards would govern new development or redevelopment in a huge swath of Lincoln from K and L streets north through a proposed research and development corridor that could extend all the way to the state fairgrounds.

After a month or two of public meetings, a final package of rules governing future construction in the area will likely be ready for City Council consideration sometime this spring.

Now that the \$238 million Antelope Valley Project is inching toward completion, the Lincoln attorney



Construction continues on "O" Street as part of the Antelope Valley Project. A proposed package of new codes and design standards for the project will govern new development in a large area of Lincoln, from K and L streets north to the state fairgrounds. (Heidi Hoffman)

who has helped shepherd the project from the start, Kent Seacrest, says it's time to make sure that what develops in the corridor is what the city wants to see.

He said several big and small companies are knocking on the city's door, interested in investing in the Antelope Valley area, but they want some assurance that their investment will be protected — from a car wash opening up next door, for example.

"They will go where they feel safe and where the development environment is predictable," Crandall said.

Urban Development Department Director David Landis acknowledges he's already getting some pushback from developers who bristle at the thought of more rigid regulations. They say less regulation leads to

more vitality, but Landis said it also leads to a discombobulated patchwork of buildings.

"Yep, we're going to make it harder to build a car wash next to a coffee shop," he said. Arambula said many developers prefer to know the rules of the game. "You're going to get pushback from developers you don't want," he said.

They say a master plan will ensure that the research corridor — from O Street to State Fair Park — ends up looking as good as Centennial Campus, a research campus at North Carolina State University. Oversized development parcels called "superblocks," with lots of open space, and low, sprawling buildings create a campus feeling that's a hallmark of a successful research corridors, they say.

To that end, the chamber of commerce, private 2015 Vision group, and the UNL Foundation donated about \$70,000 to help pay Crandall Arambula. The consultants have analyzed more than 100 main streets and their theme is "revitalizing America's cities."

"We know what works," Don Arambula said. "You can't just say you're creating research and development; you've got to create the environment."

They take some credit for taking Racine — “a classic, rust-belt city” that had stagnated since the 1950s – and helping it come up with a downtown vision that they say has since attracted hundreds of millions in private investment.

They say design guidelines they helped draft for their hometown of Portland helped turn faceless, “hostile” blank walls facing streets into pedestrian friendly, engaging storefronts. A blank wall became a Tiffany’s store at the base of a parking lot, for example.

“We often say without the guidelines, we would not be the city we are today,” Crandall said.

The process of coming up with a vision for Lincoln began last summer, with meetings with “stakeholders” and property owners, Arambula said. They are now recommending the city adopt four pieces:

- * A master plan, or general vision, for the R&D corridor that they say will encourage development.

- * Zoning and design standards — from land use, to building heights to setbacks to parking — primarily in the R&D corridor to realize the vision in the master plan.

- * Design standards for new construction downtown, all the way from the Haymarket District

to the Antelope Valley Project. These standards would govern things like fencing, landscaping, building material and designs. The transparency of walls facing P and Q streets, for example, would be regulated.

- * The proposal also suggests that the streetcar route envisioned in the city’s Downtown Master Plan be extended all the way to UNI’s East Campus.

It took Omaha three years to put the force of law into its citywide urban design standards last year, but the resulting blueprint has been hailed as one of the country’s most creative. ...