

HUSKERS READY FOR 2004 SEASON



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Planners share ideas for downtown plan

By Andrew Moseman / Daily
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The projects won't arrive for years, but the dreams begin immediately.

George Crandall and Don Arambula, the Portland, Ore., consultants designing the first new Downtown Master Plan for Lincoln, returned to town Tuesday with their ideas in hand.

Lincoln residents filled the large activity room at St. Paul's United Methodist Church to hear and respond to grand schemes about downtown Lincoln's future.

"It's a very public process," Crandall said. "That's why you're out here tonight."

After tapping the public's original concerns at their initial meeting August 10, the urban designers brought preliminary solutions to downtown's tribulations.

Bill Lee, senior vice president of national firm Economic Research Associates, said Americans are returning to urban shopping after the gargantuan shopping malls of the late 20th century, which were often located away from town and surrounded by shopping malls.

"You couldn't walk there if you tried," said Lee, whose firm provided economic research for Crandall Arambula.

Downtown Lincoln could accommodate growth of 600,000



square feet of retail space, Crandall said, but it needs to be well organized.

O Street has been Lincoln's traditional retail strip, but Crandall said the street has too much traffic, making it unfriendly to pedestrians.

P Street, he said, sees far fewer cars per day. And the new Grand Theatre, which Crandall said would attract 1 million moviegoers a year, could anchor a stream of stores stretching from 12th Street to Centennial Mall.

Crandall and his team weren't shy about introducing more radical solutions, either. He proposed an entirely new "Neighborhood Marketplace" district between 9th and 10th streets and M and O streets.

The project would include new housing stalls and possibly a grocery store, which Crandall said downtown badly needed. Arambula said the venture would likely require vacating N Street between 9th and 10th.

Downtown, Crandall said, also has a dire shortage of open public space.

He said Centennial Mall could be redeveloped into a series of blocks with green space in the middle and on the edges, but still accommodate traffic flow both directions, like 15th Street on the south side of the Capitol.

"It can still be elegant and simple and technically correct," he said.

He and Arambula advocated a "civic square," an open space in

the heart of downtown where people could congregate, play games, host sales or shows or just about anything else.

Good locations in Lincoln, Crandall said, would be the old Douglas 3 Theatre at 13th and P Streets, or the current Walgreen's locale at 13th and O.

During the discussion session, though, many audience members said they worried neither of those options was large enough. And Crandall said the third choice, the current location of the Pershing Center, might be too far from the center of downtown.

"It doesn't really function as your living room or your crossroads," he said.

Tom Brennan, a senior associate out of Portland with Nelson/Nygaard firm, developed new ideas for Lincoln's transit systems.

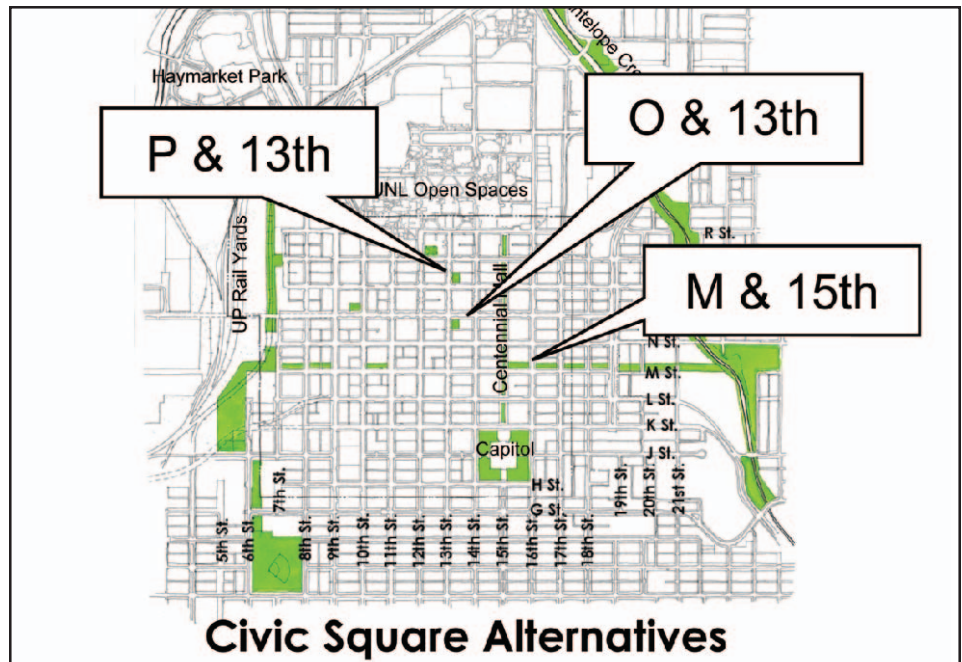
Currently, he said, downtown shuttles use the same buses as all other routes, with only a different sign on the front.

Cities with successful, widely used shuttles, like Austin, Texas, make it easy for travelers to differentiate them from regular shuttles. Austin, he said, uses a completely different marketing campaign and color scheme for its downtown shuttles.

Brennan drew up two new shuttle routes, one of which would run from the Haymarket all the way to near 17th and Vine streets.

"It makes that crucial connection to the university," he said.

He envisioned even a possible streetcar system, with rails in the road, which could loop around on P and Q streets from the Haymarket as far as 19th Street.



The crown jewel of a revitalized downtown Lincoln could be a new arena and convention center. Patrick Helwig, who lives in the Haymarket, said he would be excited to see such a project.

"They need to build the arena to rival the Qwest Center (in Omaha)," he said. "That's where the money's going."

Crandall and Arambula presented three possible arena locations: on the north, west and south sides of the Haymarket.

Both men said they favored the north location where the old post office currently sits. It would be closer to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, as well as Lincoln's other main attractions, like Haymarket Park.

After the consultants concluded their presentations, audience members discussed the proposals at their round tables, and then told the rest of the room about their discussions.

Marc Wullschleger, who works with Lincoln Urban Development, told

Crandall his table wasn't crazy about the arena proposal. They thought it should be combined with a convention center, he said, instead of separate like they were in Crandall and Arambula's proposal.

"We don't think you hit the nail on the head there," he said.

Many audience members said they liked the shuttle suggestions and the streetcar pitch, as well as developing P Street into a retail corps.

But as exciting as the ideas are, Eileen Bergt, UNL director of landscape services, said developers shouldn't get ahead of themselves.

"Saving our historic buildings is really important," she said.

Crandall and Arambula took survey sheets from audience members, asking their responses to all the proposals. They will return to Lincoln for the third community workshop on Nov. 30.