

## A Downtown Civic Square? Let's Dream

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It's refreshing to pause occasionally, lift your gaze from the sidewalk and take a longer look at what lies ahead.

Especially when you're looking into a future that includes the possibility of an inviting new open public square near 13th and P streets.

The process of envisioning the future puts new ideas on the table, it stimulates discussion. It connects movers, shakers and policy makers. It generates momentum.

That's why cities like Lincoln every few decades put together documents like the downtown master plan released to the public last week.

At the top of the list is the public square suggested by consultants George Crandall and Don Arambula as a "catalyst project" to spark private investment and activity.

The new civic square would give downtown a new focal point. It would be a site for gatherings and special events, as well as a spot to sit and enjoy the outdoors with a friend or two.

Designed with special brick or concrete pavers, decorative greenery and without curbs, the



new civic square could be expanded for special events by temporarily closing 13th Street.

At the spot now occupied by the former Douglas 3 Theater, the public square and secondary square areas to the north and south would visually link the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus with downtown O and P streets.

Adding to the appeal of the public square as a catalyst project is that it's relatively doable, amounting to only a small slice of the overall \$92 million cost of the master plan. Its impact on downtown's appearance and activity patterns, however, would be dramatic.

Admittedly, some parts of the downtown master plan are ambitious. The proposed new arena on Eighth Street for 12,000 to 18,000 people, creating

underpasses for traffic on Ninth and 10th streets so pedestrians can cross at ground level, conversion of the Journal Star building at 926 P St. (gulp) to retail would require significant commitment of private and public resources.

History probably will treat the new exciting master plan much as it did the last one. Some of the ideas became reality

quickly. Others took a long time to materialize. Some were revised or forgotten.

The city must keep its priorities in order. As author Joel Kotkin, a frequent critic of urban redevelopment, put it, cities need to focus their resources on basic issues of the majority, such as schools, infrastructure, boosting small business, and creating jobs — "not serving the interests of artists, hipsters, and their wealthy patrons."

At the same time, a community has to be willing to dream, to make plans for the future. Imagining a new public square in downtown Lincoln is exciting. Making that catalyst project happen would make it easier to imagine other parts of the new downtown plan becoming reality.