The Urban Core: Downtown Lincoln

The ‘P’ Street corridor linking the Haymarket District to the Antelope Valley Parkway is a place of many possibilities. What are the conditions & attributes that will successfully transform the ‘P’ Street Corridor into downtown Lincoln’s primary retail streetscape? How does the community maximize retail, housing, & employment opportunities; integrate and enhance its transportation options; and enrich economic, social, and cultural foundations?

Robert Hanna
The 20-block “P” Street corridor connects Lincoln’s historic Haymarket District with the Antelope Valley. This west-to-east corridor is part of a transitional zone (along with Q street) between downtown and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s City Campus. P Street intersects the north-south Centennial Mall at 15th Street, which connects the campus to the State Capitol along a pedestrian mall.

The charrette team (consisting of local citizens, retailers, planners and city officials including the mayor) divided the P Street Corridor into three distinct districts: the Haymarket, “Middle ‘P’ Street,” and “East ‘P’ Street.” The Middle P Street Zone was defined as between 10th and 15th Streets, with 9th to 10th and 15th to 16th serving as “Transition Zones” between the districts.

The transition zones were deemed critical for defining a strong mix of uses (first floor retail, with office/residential above) that can successfully blend one district into the neighboring district. Rather than compete against each other, the team urged that the three districts should work toward a common synergy for the P Street Corridor and that the city should encourage both high- and low-tech solutions to the overall design.

**DOWNTOWN ‘LIVING ROOMS’**

Building in a step back approach—in which the first floor extends to the lot line but upper stories are set back to create visual “view-sheds,” were favored as a way to open-up streetscapes and create opportunities for landscaping throughout the downtown. Step-backs create visual connections between street level and surrounding buildings. Moreover, apartment balconies, office terraces and outdoor cafes (street level and above) could incorporate plants and other elements that would collectively create “green corridors” linking larger public plazas and lending a sense of unity and rhythm.

For the public plaza site at 13th & P, it was recommended that the first two stories of a proposed high-rise building (25 to 30 stories) next to the plaza include green “living rooms” that allow the plaza to extend into the building. It was suggested that an outdoor cafe, as well as offices and apartments, could overlook a plaza designed to “get people outside of four walls and touch as many senses as possible.”
INCENTIVES FOR CHANGE

The charrette team favored a continued strong retail environment for downtown’s traditional “main street” at O (downtown’s “retail engine”), and noted government’s need to acknowledge the necessity of incentives and reduce public policy barriers for responsible development/growth” through:

- Incentives to encourage green building design.
- Identification of key people in city government to champion changes such as revised building codes to encourage green, sustainable design.
- Offer financial incentives, including those that provide housing opportunities for all income levels.
- Examine opportunities for revitalizing Centennial Mall as a transition zone along the P St. Corridor.

The plaza was defined as “more than a park—a place to make connections that requires a high level of activity.” Overall, downtown buildings should demonstrate that the natural environment can exist in the urban realm through open spaces in unique places, softer building edges and true urban residential experiences.

MORE THAN ‘ONE WAY’

The charrette team recommended that both P and Q streets return to two-way traffic. The current one-way system emphasizes the rapid movement of cars through the downtown but is not conducive to pedestrian safety or street-level retail development. Two-way traffic flows will create opportunities to get people at a speed to see retail and make turns necessary for parking.

In addition to creating a environment more conducive to walkers and bikers, a street car running the nearly length of the P Street Corridor (with turnarounds on either end) would provide yet another transit option as well as strong visual reference for the corridor. The team suggested that the trolley follow a landscaped corridor that undulates from one side of the street to the other in successive blocks, making center-of-the-street stops possible (this design is successfully used in other U.S. cities). It was also suggested that the street grade could be split on P Street at 9th or 10th to allow the trolley and pedestrian traffic to pass underneath.

Finally, Lincoln must be true to its history and culture in continuing and advancing an atmosphere of an open, deliberate and engaging discourse, one that is available to all community stakeholders. The following indicators are suggested as starting points in identifying those key factors that will be used for measuring progress toward sustainability:

Environmental
- Continue, and enhance Lincoln’s urban landscaping installations, i.e. street trees, water features, street furniture, and sidewalk art.
- Design P Street as a pedestrian-friendly, calm traffic shopping street and connect the street, pedestrian experience to the adjacent, intersecting nodes of green spaces.
- Anchor the east and west ends of the “Market Place” with a major public green space (Antelope Creek, Haymarket).
Socio-cultural
• Visible emphasis to the intersecting 12th Street Arts Corridor, the intersecting Centennial Mall, and to University entrances from P Street.
• Visible recognition to civic/cultural facilities on P St, i.e., Children’s Museum, State Museum, YMCA, Historic Federal Place, Haymarket, etc.
• Civic Plaza and the surrounding redeveloped facilities at 13th and P streets designed to function as Outdoor Downtown Living Room.

Technological
• WiFi technologies showcased up and down Market Place.
• Multi-modal transit systems along length of downtown P Street (use new strategy for P Street circulation to motivate re-planning of entire circulation system for downtown).
• Electronic news and information system on P Street (work with Lincoln Journal Star and UNL School of Journalism to provide/maintain).

Economic
• Market Place Economic Development Coalition formed with Chamber of Commerce (CC), Lincoln Independent Businesses Association (LiBA), Downtown Lincoln Association (DLA), the City, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and Downtown Action Team (DAT) (install Incentives and Training Program for new local business owners).
• Low-interest microeconomics program for start-up of locally owned businesses (investigate feasibility among local financial institutions).
• Strategic plan for affordable housing (engage the Nebraska Investment Finance Authority, the Lincoln Urban Development Department and the Lincoln/Lancaster Planning Department).

Public Policy
• Market Place priorities and timelines (identified by coalition of the DAT, the City, the DLA, and representatives of the developers).
• All new development along P conforms to new policies (to be established by the “Lincoln: Green by Design” program).
• City plans, ordinances, and zoning laws clearly enable a new, pedestrian-friendly, energy efficient, green Market Place comprised of mixed uses, mixed-income residential, and retail/commerce that support the new urban demographics of the future downtown.

City plans, ordinances, and zoning laws that enable a pedestrian-friendly, energy efficient corridor comprised of mixed uses, mixed-income residential, and retail/commerce are among policy indicators.
This report was prepared by the Joslyn Castle Institute for Sustainable Communities in cooperation with its Envisioning Regional Design partners including the Nebraska Environmental Trust Fund, AIA Nebraska, and the Nebraska Innovation Zone Commission.