January 2026 League of Women Voters Lincoln Lancaster County Observer Corps Report

Lincoln City Council 1/5/26

Were there any items of concern in terms of open meetings and good government?
Councilperson Weber was absent.

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

The city is leasing a decommissioned cruiser to the county for $1 to be used by Community Corrections for transfers, so LPD doesn't have to send an officer.

The following items were on second reading and will be voted on next week:

Urban Development Director Dan Marvin spoke at length about changes to parking ordinances, primarily downtown, to practice "curb management" and provide parking spaces for a variety of uses.

Planning and Development Services Director David Carey spoke on two items: One was a code change to reduce the minimum lot area in B-2 Planned Neighborhood Business District and allow ground floor residences in O-2 suburban office district by right instead of by conditional use permit. The effect of both changes would be to allow denser housing development to help meet Lincoln's need for housing. He also spoke on changes that would help allow more needed child care facilities in residential areas. He said the city council had been consistently approving waivers for child care facilities, which was an indication the ordinances needed to be changed. Anne Brandt, Executive Director of Lincoln Littles, spoke in support.

Dillon Murman of Neighbor Works spoke on a proposal to change the South of Downtown Planned Unit Development for two-family housing on lots created before November 1, 2025. A newer zoning code overlaid on an older neighborhood had resulted in some dwellings or lots that were unable to be brought up to code. The ordinance change would allow development of duplexes into usable low-income housing.

Any general comments about the meeting?
No residents spoke.

Observed by Katie Bradshaw

Lancaster County Board of Commissioners 1/6/26
No report

Lincoln / Lancaster County Planning Commission 1/7/26

Were there any items of concern in terms of open meetings and good government?
No

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

The planning commission unanimously approved special permits for two large battery storage centers , BESS, one near Waverly and one near Pawnee Lake. The facilities, which would look like a number of large storage containers that are filled with batteries, are being built by Sofos Power. The facilities, one on 21 acres and one on 41 acres, would store energy for either LES or NPPD during low demand and transmit it during higher demand periods.
Sofos employees and David Levy, a Lincoln attorney, supported the special permits. People who owned homes and or farms near the two facilities opposed the storage centers citing several concerns: potential drainage into ground water, noise issues from the loud humming of the equipment, dangerous toxic gasses that can be released from battery fires. They are also concerned about the long-term safety issues since the facilities will be remote and unmanned and will likely to be sold to others after they are built.

Both the Lincoln CityCouncil and the Lancaster County Board recently approved the special permit conditions so that private companies could begin citing the battery storage centers in the county.

One lawsuit has been filed against LES hoping to stop construction.

Any general comments about the meeting?
None

Observed by Nancy Rose

Lancaster County Board of Commissioners Staff Meeting 1/8/26

Were there any items of concern in terms of open meetings and good government?
The list of Committee Assignments was not included as a link on the agenda.

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

Christa Yoakum was elected Chair and Chelsea Johnson was elected Vice Chair. Matt Schulte expressed his desire to be Vice Chair and his desire to have more of a leadership role. Several items were presented that will come up for a vote at the next County Commissioner meeting including: Parking Garage Bond Issuance, Elected Officials Salaries for 2027-2030, Transferring remaining state allotted funds that will not be used to SENDD vs. returning to the state.

Any general comments about the meeting?
None

Observed by Jean McGuire

Lincoln City Council 1/12/26

Were there any items of concern in terms of open meetings and good government?
No

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

Reports of City officers for various appointments and re-appointments to Commission on Human Rights, Nebraska Environs Committee, Board of Zoning Appeals, and Examining Board of Plumbers. Appropriations approved for Keno Funds to be used for various Human Services. Assessment of costs incurred by City for fees and penalties for demolition of several buildings on neglected properties. Approval of liquor licenses and manager applications for 3 businesses in Lincoln. Approval or lease agreement for building for Municipal Services Center.

Ordinances: a lot of discussion about parking related to upcoming O street improvement plan downtown and also North Bottoms. There was a lot of discussion re: increasing parking ticket fees. I am not clear if this actually passed. Brody Weber had a lot of issues with this as his district is downtown? There is an ordinance to change the name of Parking Meters to Parking Payment Platforms.

Some land use/housing issues: Planning and Development Services Dept would like to amend the Municipal Code to reduce the minimum lot area required for dwellings in the B-2 zoning district from 2,000 to 1000 square foot. (B2 is for business). Approved application of NeighborWorks of Lincoln to amend the South of Downtown Planned Unit Development to reduce lot size for family dwellings from 3,000 square feet to 1740 square feet per lot with lot width reduced from 25 feet to 17 feet on property located between A and H street and 10th and 17th street.

Also approved allowing Early Childcare Facilities more flexibility with allowed occupancy to reuse an existing building in residential areas and improve safety if the facility is near an industrial zone. (Everyone was happy about this)

Public Discussion: one person spoke on housing issues and costs and dissatisfaction with lack of buffer zones in the Clinton neighborhood, specifically 27th and Starr Street. And also spoke about families in 48th and Madison area wanted a green space in a vacant lot but got a parking lot instead. Another person spoke about being dissatisfied with the Trump administration.

Any general comments about the meeting?
Good meeting

Observed by Julia Metcalf

Lancaster County Board of Commissioners 1/13/26

Were there any items of concern in terms of open meetings and good government?
No

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

Lancaster County Employees 2025 Leadership Academy Graduates; 5-0 vote on five largest Nebraska counties (Douglas, Lancaster, Sarpy, Hall, Buffalo) adopting common legislative priorities for 2026 Nebraska Legislature session.

Any general comments about the meeting?

Votes on all seven New Business items were 5-0, recognizing the impact of the Commissioners Staff meeting. Adjourned at 9:37 am; meeting lasted less than 40 minutes

Observed by Judy Kelly

Lincoln Board of Education 1/13/26

Were there any items of concern in terms of open meetings and good government?

Yes. Meeting was not viewable on cable TV. LPS representative noted the problem was due to construction at the city-county building, where the school board meeting streams through. Observers can text to report any future problems.

No report

Lancaster County Board of Commissioners staff meeting 1/15/16

Were there any items of concern in terms of open meetings and good government?

Yes. One of the first agenda items was a Legislative Update by the outside firm of Kissel, Kohout, ES Associates. The consultants had provided a report which they referred to throughout their presentation and which the Commissioners and other staff members had, but it was not provided as a link in the agenda. I had to email a staff member after the meeting to receive it. This also occurred last week with the committee assignments.

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

The only part I was able to stay for was the Legislative update.

Any general comments about the meeting?
None

Observed by Jean McGuire

Lincoln Electric System 1/16/16

Were there any items of concern in terms of open meetings and good government?

No

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

Approved Dec. minutes; elect. Brd. officers; 2025 reflection video; state legisl. report; efficiency projects report ;adjourned at 11:01

Any general comments about the meeting?

Efficient, good listening skills, polite questions; 7 people in attendance, 9 online attendees

Observed by Alyx Knight

Lancaster County Board of Commissioners 1/20/26

No report

Lincoln/Lancaster County Planning Commission 1/21/26

Were there any items of concern in terms of open meetings and good government?

No

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

A requested change in zone to amend the Bishop Heights Planned Unit Development to allow for an additional 11,500 square foot of commercial area. This development is on South 27th Street, where apartments and other commercial spaces are planned. The Mill coffeehouse is seeking to use space formerly occupied by Wells Fargo Bank to open a new location that will include a drive-through. (See story in the January 22 Lincoln Journal Star). The only testimony was from the owner of The Mill and there was no opposition to the plan.

Any general comments about the meeting?

Very organized and on time.

Observed by Janice Walker

Lancaster County Board of Commissioners staff meeting 1/22/26

No report

Lincoln City Council 1/26/26

Were there any items of concern in terms of open meetings and good government?

No

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

Item that took the most discussion time was a resolution to proclaim January as Firefighter Cancer Awareness Month, introduced by Councilperson Bowers. One citizen asked a question about fees and penalties assessed on a property, and Chief Housing Inspector Sean Stewart responded and answered council questions. On 1st reading of potential interest next week: a resolution to authorize TIF for restoration of homes in the Hawley Historic Restoration Development Project and a revised TIF for a new apartment building at 18th and N.

Any general comments about the meeting?
No members of the public spoke at public comment.

Observed by Katie Bradshaw

Lancaster County Board of Commissioners 1/27/26

Were there any items of concern in terms of open meetings and good government?
Yes. Matt Schulte not present.

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

Approved several claims for goods and services, Special Presentation for Annual Service awards for County Sheriffs, Several consent items were approved. New business: annexing Bennet Rural Fire district into Southeast Rural Fire. Also the approved lowering the load ratings for several bridges in the county to make them safer as the bridges age.

Any general comments about the meeting?
Nice to see all the Sheriffs honored.

Observed by Julia Metcalf

Lincoln Board of Education
1/27/26

Were there any items of concern in terms of open meetings and good government?
No

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

Three language teachers received state-level awards. LPS has the first high schools in the state to offer Arabic language instruction. A bid was approved to build a new facility for high school behavioral skills, student support and transition programs. LPS is applying for a grant from the Nebraska Recycling Council to buy recycling equipment. Board member Annie

Mumgaard spoke about her experience attending the MLK Jr., Youth Rally. One person spoke at public comment on the UNL CASNR Food-Energy-Water and Societal Systems Early College and Career Program partnership with Lincoln Public Schools.

Any general comments about the meeting?

Every meeting begins with a video describing a program or aspect of the school district. Interesting to see the number of district staff present at the meeting. In addition to the council seats, there are tabled seats at the sides and back of the room that are reserved. Discussion occurs at first reading, and the second reading item at this meeting was a vote with no discussion, which is different from how city council operates. There are extensive resources available on the Board of Education website under the "meeting highlights" tab, including links that direct to relevant sections of the YouTube video.

Observed by Katie Bradshaw

Lancaster County Board of Commissioners staff meeting 1/29/26

Were there any items of concern in terms of open meetings and good government?
Yes. Commissioner Schulte was not in attendance and Commissioner Vest had to leave at 9:30.

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

The commissioners were provided a briefing by Steve Henrichsen, Development Review Manager, Lincoln-Lancaster County Planning on Pawnee Lake Resilient Power Project (Battery Energy Storage System - BESS). There will be a hearing on this on February 10.

The Public Defender, Kristi Egger, is seeking approval to hire new assistant public defenders. It will come up for vote at the next County Commissioner meeting on Tuesday. Sounded like a solid plan to reduce caseload.

Any general comments about the meeting?

Observed by Jean McGuire