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

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Lincoln/Lancaster County Planning Commission 4/1/26

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

Just five of the nine commissioners attended, so there had to be unanimous votes, which there were. Commissioners present were Christy Joy, Cindy Ryman-Yost, Dick Campbell, Gloria Eddins, Rich Rodenburg

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

Commissioners approve increasing number of hospice residents from 16 to 25 to be taken of at Grace Space, 1740 Superior St., despite some neighbor concerns about parking. The number of parking spots met code. This was a special permit for a neighborhood residential health care facility. Grace Space will add 4500 square feet to their building,
Rodenberg pointed out that 40 percent of baby boomer are over over 65. There are waiting lists almost everywhere for senior care and a need for more rooms.

The commission also approved future expansion plans of the Grand Lodge at the Preserve, near 84th St, and Pioneers Blvd, an independent and assisted care facility in southeast Lincoln. The Grand Lodge, owned by Immanuel, expects to replace Elevate Church with no more than 60 independent living apartments, expanding by 1.7 acres. The Grand Lodge currently has 119 units.

The commission approved changes to a community unit plan for nine single family homes on 6.5 acres at 6400 Old Cheney Rd. (Willowmere Forest Estates), despite concerns from current homeowners that new houses using a private road would not be required to help pay for maintenance of that road. The developer is trying to negotiate a payment to offset the potential damage of construction equipment that will be using the private road.

The commission approved new, more flexible rules and design standards for sidewalk cafes in the public right of way that will be in effect as the city renovates downtown. This moves to the City Council for approval.

The commission approved more flexible rules for outbuilding locations in agricultural residential districts, acreages, where lots are at least three acres, larger than in the city. This moves to the City Council for final approval.

Any general comments about the meeting?

Though the plan to build 9 new homes was not related to affordable housing, the discussion did relate to private roads. The city has allowed many stretches of private roads (to be maintained by homeowners associations). These roads are not built to city standards. They are often narrower and not as deep. I expect this to be a future problem as smaller and lower income HOA's discover they don't have the money to maintain them. The private roads allow developers to build more units on the land.

I also listened to the briefing on the Transportation Improvement Plan and the Capital improvement Program.

Observed by Nancy Rose

Staff Meeting, Lancaster County Board of Commissioners 4/2/26

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

Yes. Christa Yoakum was absent. Copies of Legislative Update were not available so made it difficult to follow legislative update and all the bills that were mentioned.

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

Legislative Update - one bill discussed at length by attorneys and Dennis Meyer (fiscal and budget officer) was called the pink postcard bill and the impact the changes will have on the county starting in 2027. It will require sending out postcards to property owners regardless of what the property tax increase is. Currently postcards are required to be sent when taxing entities (schools, cities, counties) propose increasing their property tax requests by more than 2%. Also timing of when postcards need to be sent will change and will impact amount of detailed information available to property owners at the property tax meetings.

Briefing on MISC26002 (The Preserve at Branched Oak Addition) - changed to community unit plan and now needs 5 lots instead of 4. On next Tuesday board meeting for approval.

Briefing on Ball Vineyard and Estates Liquor - special permit since outside of Lincoln but in 3 mile city zoning. On next Tuesday board meeting for approval.

Department Budget Hearings - Dennis Meyer (budget and fiscal officer) presented proposed department budget hearing meetings for May and June to be held after Tuesday board meetings and during Thursday staff meetings. Meetings are open to the public.

County Audit - new firm (Allen, Gibbs & Houlik, L.C.) was hired to do audit for this past year and was completed ahead of schedule and county received high marks. Audit will be on Tuesday board meeting agenda next week in order to be noted and put on file with the clerk's office.

Any general comments about the meeting?

There was an Executive Session on the agenda which I learned is private and viewers had to leave room while board discussed potential litigation, pending litigation and legal advice from attorneys. Executive sessions are not unusual, but was first one I had encountered with staff meeting. Usually session is at end of staff meeting but was moved to earlier on the agenda due to time constraints.

Observed by Diane Freese

Lincoln City Council 4/6/26

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 short, 23-minute meeting. The item that took the most time and brought the most questions from council was the resolution to allow Oxford House a disability waiver for people in recovery to allow 8 unrelated people to live in a house at 1035 S 12th St and waive the parking requirements. The house has been a communal recovery house for years and has had no complaints. Planning commission supported 6-0. No one spoke in opposition. It was approved by council 6-1, with Councilman Duden opposing.

On first reading for discussion next week is a "University Place Neighborhood Redevelopment Plan" to address a blighted and substandard designation in the area.

Observed by Katie Bradshaw

Lancaster County Board of Commissioners 4/7/26
No report

Staff Meeting, Lancaster County Board of Commissioners 4/9/26

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

Yes. Meeting started late because Commissioners Yoakum and Johnson were a few minutes late. We had to take an unscheduled break because the meeting was running faster than scheduled and some of the expected speakers were not there.

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

Legislative Update by Kissel, Kohout, ES Associates, LLC. They expect that the Legislative session (day 58 today), will go today, tomorrow and next Friday because of all of the work yet to be done. Introductions and brief interviews were held for the 3 applicants for the Board of Zoning Appeals. Two items were just provided as briefings today and will be voted on next week at the Board of Commissions meeting. They voted to propone the Visitors Improvement Fund Grants until next week. They also went into Executive Session.

Observed by Jean McGuire

Lincoln City Council 4/13/26

Were there any items of concern in terms of open meetings and good government?
3 city council members were missing, Sondra Washington, Tom Beckius, Brody Weber

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

Public hearing on Comprehensive Plan for the proposed new "University Place Neighborhood Redevelopment Plan". Improvements include street space enhancements, mainly along No. 48th street. This is supported by University Place Neighborhood Association. There was extensive community involvement with the plan including 3 open houses going back over 2 years. City Council approved.

Any general comments about the meeting?

A lot of planning and consultation with University Place neighborhood. Very extensive open houses. Should be a real improvement to the community in this neighborhood

Observed by Julia Metcalf

Lancaster County Board of Commissioners 4/14/26

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?

Business-as-usual, All votes passed unanimously except when Rick Vest abstained on vote related to claim of Mediation Center, Student Government Day with many high school students in attendance,

Any general comments about the meeting?

Commissioner Chelsea Johnson was absent. Meeting adjourned at 9:41 am.

Observed by Judy Kelly

Lincoln/Lancaster County Planning Commission 4/15/26

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?

1. Commissioners considered a request to annex two lots adjoining, but not part of, the Wandering Creek Planned Unit Development and to change the zoning of the same area from agricultural to residential. This property is located generally at south 98th Street and 1/2 mile north of Van Dorn Street.

The owners of the two lots under consideration spoke against the annexation, stating that they had received notice only one week ago. They asked for the decision to be deferred so they could gather more information on how this would affect the general area in terms of road maintenance, etc. and how it would specifically affect their property.

A representative of the city attorney's office reminded the commissioners that their decision would be simply a recommendation and that the final decision would be made by the city council.

After further discussion, the Commission voted, 5 to 2, to approve the change in zone and defer the annexation request until June, 2026 when a request for annexation of property to the north of Wandering Creek will be presented.

2. The Commission reviewed the City of Lincoln's Capital Improvement Program for FY2026/27 to FY2031/32 to determine its conformance with the 2050 Lincoln Lancaster County Comprehensive Plan. The plan includes 186 projects for the improvement of the City of Lincoln and was approved by the Commission.

3. The Commission reviewed the FY2027 to FY2030 Transportation Improvement Program for conformance with the current Lincoln Metropolitan Planning Organization Long Range Transportation Plan. The TIP covers all projects having to do with transportation - trails, bike paths, bus service, bridges, railroads and streets. The Commission approved the TIP.

Commission members spoke about detailed staff briefings on both the CIP and TIP, which have allowed them to fully understand the projects involved.

Any general comments about the meeting?

The Planning Commission meetings are very organized and staffed, which allows Commissioners to efficiently work through the agenda each meeting.

Observed by Janice Walker

Staff Meeting, Lancaster County Board of Commissioners 4/16/26

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?

Commissioners unanimously approved distribution of $12 million in visitor improvement funds (hotel tax) as follows:
Meadowland Pool, $400,000
Lincoln Parks Foundation, $330,000
Star City Optimist Foundation, $750,000

DLA (old city hall renovation), $250,000
Museum of American Speed, $500,000
Lincoln Youth Football, $750,000
Sheldon Museum, $1 million
Lincoln Sports Foundation, $1 million
Lincoln Children's Zoo, $2.52 million
Lincoln Children's Museum, $300,000
UNSM - Elephant Hall, $1 million
Sandhills Youth Complex, $2 million
Lied Center, $1.2 million.

Rick Vest, who worked out the distribution with other commissioners said that $4.1 million is going to family programs, $4.5 million to sports, and $3.2 to the arts. The county had $32 million in requests.

Commissioners also heard the last Legislative report and an annual report from their Employee Assistance Program. They also approved applications for several law enforcement grants. They also went into exec session for lawsuits, including issues related to the jail as the corrections director attended the exec session.

Observed by Nancy Rose

Lincoln Electric System 4/17/26

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?

Big study of solar value presented; Chelsea Johnson pointed out the social impact for folks on low income: they typically can't afford the thousands of dollars it takes to install solar in order to lower their electrical bills.

Any general comments about the meeting?

Well run, organized meeting

Observed by Alyx Knight

Lincoln Board of Education 4/19/26
No report

Lincoln City Council 4/20/26

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?

Zoning special permit approved by Planning Commission, appealed by many neighbors speaking against the special permit for a 12-resident memory care facility. Parking was the primary issue voiced by neighbors. Planning Director David Carey and Transportation & Utilities Director Elizabeth Elliott responded to questions from Council members to clarify some issues raised in testimony. Motion carried 5-1 (see below) with Duden voting no.

Any general comments about the meeting?

All Council members were present but Council Chair Carlson left the meeting during discussion and voting on the residential health care with Councilman Brody assuming leadership of the meeting until vote on residential healthcare facility was complete. Also presentation by Planning Director David Carey regarding upgrade to sidewalk cafe process and requirements.Meeting adjourned at 5:31 pm.

Observed by Judy Kelly

Lancaster County Board of Commissioners 4/21/26

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?

The meeting was primarily approving purchases and contracts. The only interesting tidbit is that County Engineer Pam Dingman pointed out that a contract for striping county roads called for wider stripes…more expensive but easier to see.

Any general comments about the meeting?

All commissioners were present. I watched the meeting on youtube.

Observed by Nancy Rose

Staff Meeting, Lancaster County Board of Commissioners 4/23/26
No report

Lincoln City Council 4/27/26

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?

The meeting only took approximately 20 minutes and there was no substantive discussion other than approving a permit for a joint liquor permit of various businesses to allow alcohol to be taken outside their establishments during a festival this Thursday on O Street. All votes were 7 to 0 with no substantive discussions.

Observed by Shirley Williams

Lincoln Board of Education 4/27/26

Were there any items of concern in terms of open meetings and good government?
Two board members were absent but excused

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

Lindsay Pierce of Northwest High School was recognized for receiving the Nebraska State Council for Social Studies outstanding teacher of the year award.
LPS staff updated the Board on the district's sustainability program and the Indian Education Program.

First-round approval for a custodial compensation package that calls for an overall 4.36 percent increase in 2026-27 and a 4.44 percent total increase in 2027-28. Final approval is expected at an upcoming meeting.

Initial approval for a compensation package for associate superintendents and the ESU administrator that includes salary increase of 4.26 percent and an overall package increase of 3.87 percent for 2026-27.

Final approval of a $1 million contract for theater lighting projects at North Star and Southwest high schools.

Final approval for attendance area assigns of the newly annexed areas of Grandview Estates 18th Addition, South 91st Street and Yankee Hill Road and the Woodlands at Yankee Hill to Wysong Elementary School, Moore Middle School and Standing Bear High School.
In 2026-27, school districts that send special education students to LPS will pay the district according to the approved following rates: Grades K-6: $73.43 per day or $12,850 per year; Grades 7-8: $88.00 per day or $15,400 per year; Grades 9-12: $102.86 per day or $18,000 per year.

The following compensation packages were approved:

Technicians: For 2026-2027, the 4.35 percent includes a 4.21 percent salary increase and an increase to the service year stipend. For 2027-2028, the 4.43 percent salary package includes a 3.49 percent salary increase and an increase to the service year stipend.

Administrators: The total package for 2026-2027 is 4.14 percent, which includes a 4.26 percent salary increase.The total package for 2027-2028 is 4.21%, which includes a 3.53% salary increase.

All agreements also include increases in FICA and retirement costs and an estimated 7.44 percent increase in health insurance premiums. LPS will cover 80 percent of the out-of-pocket health insurance increase for the 2026-2027 and 2027-2028 years.

Observed by Betty Ann VanDeventer

Lancaster County Board of Commissioners 4/28/26

No report

Lincoln/Lancaster County Planning Commission 4/29/26

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 commission unanimously approved a special permit allowing Bryan Medical Center East to add on to its emergency room and at some point in the future relocate William Jennings Bryan's historic home, the Fairview House. That relocation decision is in the future. William Jennings Bryan was "the most significant individual who ran but was never elected president in our nation's history," according to the staff report on this special permit. This was the only agenda item except for routine issues, passed on consent agenda, and not discussed.

Observed by Nancy Rose

Staff Meeting, Lancaster County Board of Commissioners 4/30/26

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?

Briefing on a change of zone application from AG to AGR. Will vote on it at next Commissioners meeting. Application for Nebraska Crime Commission STOP Grant Program for $471,427 approved. Discussion of Board Member Meeting Attended included an Election Commissioners Meeting demonstrating the testing of voting machines, Yoakum and Schulte

along with Secretary of State Evnen were in attendance. The demonstration boosted confidence in the election process.

Any general comments about the meeting?

Commissioner Johnson was not present

Observed by Jean McGuire