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

Lincoln City Council 6/1/26

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?

City of Lincoln Aging Partners Senior Center manager Ben Middendorf received the Mayor's Award for Excellence in Inclusion & Belonging and Customer Service.

The council has new leadership. Brody Weber was appointed the new council chair. Tom Duden and James Michael Bowers were both nominated for vice-chair, and Duden was appointed vice-chair in a 4-3 vote, with Beckius, Duden, Shobe, and Washington voting for Duden and Weber, Carlson, and Bowers voting for Bowers.

The council unanimously approved comprehensive plan conformance of the Belmont Neighborhood Redevelopment Plan, which will enable potential funding for improvement projects in the area, which was declared blighted and substandard in 2021 to incentivize first-time and owner-occupied homes. Urban Development Director Dan Marvin spoke on the project. Up to $23 million could come in over 20 years. An emphasis of the plan will be on connecting the area to the rest of the city, such as through signage and improved trail crossings. The 14th Street bridge area over Highway 6 will be addressed and the bridge reconstructed, and investments will be made in the Belmont Park area. The first project might be a mural on 14th Street. Emily Koopmann of the Belmont Community Center spoke in favor and talked about the amount of outreach the center had done within the neighborhood, noting that there was always a resident present at planning meetings. Councilman Weber also spoke favorably about the plan to direct investment, particularly in the area of Belmont Park.

Any general comments about the meeting?

There is now a live caption service available at the meetings. One screen in the ceiling on the left side of the chamber shows English; the one on the right shows Spanish.

Observed by Katie Bradshaw

Lancaster County Board of Commissioners 6/2/26

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

Yes. The board appears to have an executive session every meeting. I don’t have any reason to believe the commission is abusing executive sessions, I’m just pointing it out. The board meetings also have almost no explanations about agenda items. That discussion sometimes occurs during the staff meetings.

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

There was nothing of interest.

Any general comments about the meeting?

The board serves as both legislative and executive branch, so some of the decisions are pretty mundane.

Observed by Nancy Rose

Staff Meeting, Lancaster County Board of Commissioners 6/4/26

No meeting due to statewide officials meeting

Lincoln City Council 6/8/26

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

One Council Member not present. James Michael Bowers

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

Resolutions approved:

One for storm water management between the City and Lower Plate NRD approving agreement on Storm Water Management. The agreement manages water quality, flood warning systems and wetland management.

Approved Amendment of annexation and zone changes for a housing development at No. 112th and O street. This included "Lincoln on the Move" funds for street upgrades.

There was a public hearing on zoning changes from agricultural to residential on property located near NW 56th and West Holdrege Street near new high school. Also additional zoning changes for area near 98th and Pine Lake Road. There is a plan for 404 single family homes and 275 multi family dwellings with some commercial space. Plan to build smaller single family homes.

Very interesting public comment from a retired traffic engineer (Scott Upford?) talked about need to add sidewalks to bridge on Adams street over I-180 between N 6th and N 9th. This was investigated in 2005 by the Civil Rights Division of the DOJ for not being ADA compliant and plan submitted by this engineer, but he retired and states there has been no further action on this. Councilman Weber reports he will follow up due to concerns about senior housing being only a block away and a lot of lower income and immigrant residents live in this area.

Weber also said that the Mayors Budget was just released today.

Observed by Julia Metcalf

Lancaster County Board of Commissioners 6/9/26

Were there any items of concern in terms of open meetings and good government?
Yes. Meeting was not streamed on YouTube or LNK TV as usual. It was available live on Facebook, though.

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

Executive session that re: strategy session on real estate transaction and legal advice from 9:09 am to 10:12 am. Several motions for road and bridge paving and repair which carried 5-0. No public comment.

Board of Commissioners will attend a joint meeting with Lancaster County villages and cities on Thursday, June 11 at 8:30 am in Room 113

Any general comments about the meeting?

Observed by Judy Kelly

Lincoln Board of Education 6/9/26
No report

Lincoln/Lancaster County Planning Commission 6/10/26

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 approved a request for a zoning change at North 112th Square and O Street from Agricultural to General Commercial and Residential. One landowner appeared in opposition because of water drainage issues and the potential of light pollution. This landowner stated that others would have joined him but there was a lack of notice.

The commission approved a request to annex property at South 88th and Taliesen Drive. There was a request for annexation from one landowner and planners decided to annex all property in that area. There was opposition from several neighbors who do not want to be annexed. One landowner said they moved to the neighborhood 50 years ago and at that time they were 20 miles from the Lincoln city limit. This is not a final action by the Commission and it will go next to the Lincoln City Council where neighbors can present their case.

The Commission approved a zoning change to create a Planned Unit Development south of Union College along 47th and 48th streets. There was no testimony in opposition.

The Commission approved a request from Oak Grove Personal Wireless Tower to allow a cell tower at NW 140th very near the Seward County line. There was opposition from

neighbors who stated there were many cell towers in the area and they were ruining the view. The applicant stated they had attempted to build the tower in Seward County but could not come to terms with the landowner there. This was a final action by the Commission and it will not go to the City Council.

The Commission approved a request from the Branched Oak Observatory to expand zoning regulations to allow passive recreational uses such as telescopes and observatories. There were comments of concern from neighbors regarding the need for further studies of traffic in the area, but the speakers, at the same time, expressed support for the Observatory and its programs.

Any general comments about the meeting?

The Planning Commission meetings are well organized and include excellent staff presentations for each action requested.

Observed by Janice Walker

Lancaster County Board of Commissioners Joint City and Village Meeting 6/11/26

Were there any items of concern in terms of open meetings and good government?
Only three out of the five county commissioners were present - Vest, Schulte, and Johnson

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

Lincoln City Libraries Bookmobile – Ryan Wieber, Director, Lincoln City Libraries. Bookmobiles serve county towns and rural communities, youth, seniors, and neighborhoods without nearby library access. There are two bookmobiles now instead of one. New with the bookmobiles: Collections – 2,000 items with current and trending items, Staffing – increased with the two bookmobiles, Stops – farmers markets, children's museum and pop ups at city/town events (coordinate with town leaders on best time to do a pop up in their community); also stopped at Tool Library where those in need can check out tools for DIY projects, bookmobile dropped off DIY books for check out

Election Boundaries – Todd Wiltgen, Lancaster County Election Commissioner. Mr. Wiltgen reminded townships present about election law section 32-552 and the need to provide to election commission when boundaries change. Townships need to update boundaries and provide a new map to the election commission. There have been annexations in the past that were not provided to the election commission, but fortunately the errors have been caught. He also went over filing and certification deadlines.

A question was asked by Commissioner Schulte about how the new voter id requirement went with the primary in May. Mr. Wiltgen reported that only three people were unable to vote and out of the three, one did present their voter id to the election commission and have their vote count.

SquareOne Update – Sara Hoyle, Director, Lincoln-Lancaster County Human Services. SquareOne is a 24/7 crisis response, crisis therapy and post-crisis ongoing support for children

and youth, up to age 19, and their parents/caregivers. It has been twenty years in the making that took partnership with many resources. It is located on 220 S. 17th and serves the Southeast Service Area (mainly Region 5). One side of the building is the walk-in crisis family services area and the other side houses six crisis respite beds in case a child needs to stay until they can get moved to Cedars or go home. Services are provided by CenterPointe.

Waverly Economic Development Committee and Water Update – Stephanie Fisher, City Administrator. Working on commercial and retail development with consultant. Test Well project – 6 of 8 current wells are located just south of Waverly and looking for other sites not located close to current wells. She gave example of storm Wednesday morning that downed power lines and some of the wells were without power until LES could restore power. City would want wells where water would not need to be significantly treated. Out of 12 test wells, 6 came back with water and only 1 met EPA standards but that well was close to current wells.

Long term projects – new fire station to be completed fall 2027 in partnership with the city and rural fire depts; new city office building and rec center along Highway 6; HUD grant for new street development; also new subdivision on east side with up to 500 lots

Budget Update and Roundtable Discussion – I was unable to stay for these updates/discussion.

Any general comments about the meeting?

Learned a few things about bookmobile and all it does for the county and not just Lincoln. The more I go to these meetings the more I appreciate what our city/county and surrounding communities do. I have heard Todd Wiltgen before from election commission and am also a poll worker and have learned so much about county election process the last few years.

I didn't have much background on these meetings and how often they are scheduled and which townships come to the meeting. There were two other townships there (Hickman and Raymond) besides Waverly presenting.

Observed by Diane Freese

Staff Meeting, Lancaster County Board of Commissioners 6/11/26

Were there any items of concern in terms of open meetings and good government?
The executive session portion of the agenda went exceedingly long.

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?
Director of Lincoln/Lancaster County Health Dept (LLCHD), Director of Convention and Visitors Bureau (LNK), Election Commission Director. Budget discussions. More detail requested from Commissioner Vest from the LLCHD on 13.5% increase in budget, deemed excessive.

Any general comments about the meeting?

Todd Wiltgen, Election Commission Director, indicated it was very likely that the number of polling places would be reduced. He explained that, for example, if there are 500 people registered to vote in a precinct, and only 75 come to vote, collapsing precincts together is the most likely outcome. Low voter turnout = fewer polling places. Mr. Wiltgen indicated verifying petitions takes a good deal of time and money. He thought there would likely be three possible charter amendments on the ballot for the next general election. A space study is currently underway at the EC offices, to determine how the space is being used. It seems the office has necessary storage "in the K Street building."

Observed by Tari Hendrickson

Lincoln City Council 6/15/26

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

Sandra Washington absent

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

Generally a standard meeting with 6-0 votes on all items; reappointed Jeffrey Johnson for three-year term to Electrical Advisory, Appeals, and Examining Board; reappointed Orville Jones to Lincoln Housing Authority Board for five-year term.

Urban Development Director Dan Marvin presented FY 26-27 Annual Action Plan for HUD Entitlement Programs for approval, including Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), Home Investment Partnerships (HOME), and Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG).

Planning Director David Cary and Historic Planner Jill Dolberg presented 2nd reading on zoning change to designate Thematic (rather than geographic) landmark historic district for Corner Stores.

Any general comments about the meeting?

Brody Weber took over as chair of Council; I watched on FB and was able to leave a comment that LWVLL Observer Corps was present

Observed by Judy Kelly

Lancaster County Board of Commissioners 6/16/26

No report

Staff Meeting, Lancaster County Board of Commissioners 6/18/26

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

No. Chelsea Johnson absent

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

The county engineers staff described a watershed capital improvement study, funded 75 percent with a federal grant, where, using data, staff narrowed 4,000 potential projects down to the top 25, across 8 watersheds. Part of the equation is to counteract stream erosion. My understanding is that these projects will be engineered and “shovel ready” should federal funds become available.

The commission approved purchase of a new vehicle for the sheriff’s office since one new cruiser, with 1,000 miles, was totaled in a recent crash. The officer was on the way to a domestic disturbance.

Commissioners discussed several budget issues.

The county self-funds employee health insurance, and will need to increase that funding by least 10 percent in each of the next two years. There will also be some changes in the programs that will be discussed later. The county has increased its funding for health insurance just once in seven years.

Corrections Director Brad Johnson described raises for unrepresented (non union positions) employees to bring their total increases since 2020 from an average 22.4 percent to 31.4 percent. Union pay raises have totaled around 33 percent.

The county employee average salary and benefits is $102,000.

Any general comments about the meeting?

I don’t think any of the discussion directly involved League interest areas. And while I find the budget discussion interesting, I’m not sure we need to get into much of the detail. I was unable to stay beyond the closed session.

Observed by Nancy Hicks Rose

Lincoln Electric System 6/19/26

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

Yes. Committee reports given were spoken quickly and hard to follow without much context, especially since this was my first time attending a LES meeting. There were many acronyms I didn't understand. Chelsea Johnson was absent.

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

Meeting started at 9:03 and ended at 11:08.

Ken Winston of the Nebraska Sierra Club spoke online after some difficulty coming off mute. He asked for updates on the net zero goal, that Hawley Hamlet be considered as an example of aggregate distributed solar, and for development of a policy including safety standards for plug-in solar.

Report from operations & power supply committee included mention of followup on a few resolutions from 2025 that I had a hard time following. One was related to solar hosting, one to the Great Plains Consortium on a new nuclear facility in Nebraska, and one to clean energy resources. The Ted Bundy Generating Station (TBGS-a natural gas plant) is being expanded to add 2 turbines. Projected costs are increasing due to tariffs and scarcity of general contractors.

Report from finance committee expected a 24.4% increase in sales, primarily due to the commercial sector. I believe this anticipated increase was in the next year, but I'm not sure.

There was a lengthy presentation by CFO Emily Koening about the LES bond sale that's been in the news lately. In 2001, the Lincoln City Council had authorized LES to issue bonds. Issuance requires approval by LES and city council. LES goes before the council periodically for a "series approval" to give them a 2-year window to work out the strategy for a bond sale, which is currently capped at $300 million (a cap that LES might want to increase in the future). The current bond will include payment for capital construction (primarily anticipated to the the TBGS), since LES revenue isn't sufficient for large construction projects. Because the bond sale project also involved buying back bonds and paying down debt, it will result in cost savings that will help keep electricity rates lower. Despite taking on new debt, LES is in a better financial state than it was decades ago, because it has built equity.

CEO Emeka Anyanwu talked about "board-related initiatives", including revamping board committee structure, moving away from "show and tell" routine reports, providing better access to board materials, and implementing a board orientation.

Any general comments about the meeting?

I now know a little bit about what goes into a bond sale for a public utility. It's complex! But I'm curious - Why is the bond sale going to pay for expansion of a natural gas plant, when there was a statement by the CFO that they don't borrow for fossil fuel construction?

Observed by Katie Bradshaw

Lincoln City Council 6/22/26

No meeting - Juneteenth

Lancaster County Board of Commissioners 6/23/26

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

Chelsea Johnson was absent

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

The items seem to be fairly mundane. The commissioners did approve a three-year labor contract with sheriff deputies, with 3.5 and 4% salary increases, and moved $1.5 million of contingency funding into the group self insurance fund because of higher than expected costs

this year. Recent budget discussions during staff meeting, indicate this higher than normal cost will be continuing. The county, like the city and state, self-fund their health insurance programs.

Observed by Nancy Hicks Rose

Lincoln Board of Education / budget work session / ESU 18 meeting 6/23/26

Were there any items of concern in terms of open meetings and good government?
No. Marilyn Johnson-Farr was absent.

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

The property tax levy will remain the same, but the district budget will increase to $27million because of an increase in property values.

A key point in the budget message was the volatility in funding that the district is needing to manage. State aid will decrease because of the increase in property valuations. A federal grant ended and another was pulled, so the district had to incorporate into its budget the cost of school mental health counselors and behavioral coaches, which are an important part of the district's strategic plan element of student well-being. One cost increase in the budget is due to a mandate to increase background checks.

Other foci of the budget in line with strategic plan elements were early childhood education and staffing needs for related positions, staff well-being and salary increases with a special focus on recruiting and retaining special education instructors. It was noted that personnel costs are the largest part of the budget by far. Figures tracking the increases in the district budget were compared both to the inflation rate and the "employment cost index", and district budget increases more closely track the latter.

Of the total budget requests, $2.6 million were not funded in the proposed budget.

The district can make a property tax request of up to 3% over the prior year, with an additional 4% increase if 70% of the board supports the decision. The current budget would request a 5.26% increase, so a vote will be required.

Policy updates were proposed to align with changes in law, including the law allowing for suspensions of students in 2nd grade and below, though the district states it hasn't been a practice to suspend younger students.

The district remains short on school bus drivers, and a contract with First Student to fill in the gaps was unable to meet full need due to driver shortages. Students are having to spend more time on buses due to route consolidation. The district's buses traveled 1.9 million miles in the last school year!

LPS noted that with solar energy installed at NW and Standing Bear High schools, the district is saving $485 per month per site on energy costs. The geothermal HVAC system at Park Middle School has lowered energy costs by 54%. The district has also diverted 56% of its waste stream to reuse, recycling, or composting.

Any general comments about the meeting?

Impressed with the lengths the board goes to to get input on the budget, with three virtual or in-person opportunities over two days following the budget presentation at the work session.

Observed by Katie Bradshaw

Lincoln/Lancaster County Planning Commission 6/24/26

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 held a 21-minute meeting with five members present. They were Lorenzo Ball, Brett Ebert, Christy Joy, Cindy Ryman Yost, and Gloria Eddins.

The commission agreed that a plan to redevelop Gold's Lot 3, conforms to the Comprehensive Plan. The proposal is for an 11-story apartment building, with 330 units, including 10 percent being "affordable" housing. The $85 to $90 million project, using $13.5 million in TIFF funding, conforms to 5 plans…Comp Plan, Downtown Master Plan, Affordable Housing, Climate Action, and Lincoln Center Redevelopment plans. The project is located north of N St. between 10th and 11th streets.

Observed by Nancy Hicks Rose

Staff Meeting, Lancaster County Board of Commissioners 6/25/26

No report

Lincoln City Council 6/29/26

Were there any items of concern in terms of open meetings and good government?
No. Justin Carlson was absent.

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

Approved a corner store special permit designation for a building at 17th Street and Harwood, with an agreement that precludes using it for a vape shop.

Held decision for two weeks on an amended PUD (planned unit development) that will be an apartment complex (N. 22 and 23, Y and W Sts.) to give time for Lincoln Lumber to

vacate a railroad track that could be used to straighten out a bike trail in that area. (Affordable housing).

Approved agreements for the county to purchase half of Block 65 downtown and an option to purchase another portion of that block. The land will be used in connection with a proposed convention center.

The city has either purchased or intends to purchase from the county land that will be used for a city bus terminal (multimodal transportation center). That land is Block 146 — bounded by Ninth, 10th, G and H streets.

Approved creation of a Corner Store local landmark thematic district. This applies to, specific buildings that were once little grocery stores. The district is scattered buildings, not a specific land area.

Many of the city employee pay schedule contacts are on First Reading.

Observed by Nancy Rose Hicks

Lancaster County Board of Commissioners 6/30/26

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?

A $140,000 grant for a contract with the Board of Regents for the UNL Law Psychology Program for analysis of juvenile justice data and adult criminal justice data was approved. This study examines data for recidivism.

There was approval for 2 grants awards received from the Bureau of Justice assistance from the Nebraska Crime Commission. These were federal grants. One for $220,069 for inmates exiting Saint Monica and the Bridge for funding peer support, residential treatment and housing support. The second grant was for $99,655 for a narcotics task force with the Lancaster County Sheriff's office.

They also approved a recommendation from the Joint Budget Committee for the 2026-2027 Juvenile Justice funding for the Indian Center, the Mediation Center, Rabble Mill and Youth for Christ. There was no dollar amount stated for this funding.

There was an approval of the Safe Streets for All grant projects for $399,949,71 for environmental engineering services until 12/31/29

Observed by Julia Metcalf