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

Staff Meeting, Lancaster County Board of Commissioners 7/2/26

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

Yes. David Cary, Director , Planning & Development Services, provided a quarterly planning update. His presentation was not available ahead of the meeting. He provided a physical copy of his report to David Derbin & all of the county commissioners, but none were available to the public. He also had slides, but they did not work for the first half of his presentation and when that was fixed, they were still difficult to read. According to the Open Meetings Act, "At least one copy of all documents being considered at the meeting is available at any physical site open to the public where individuals may attend the virtual conference. The public body shall also provide links to an electronic copy of the agenda, all documents being considered at the meeting, and the current version of the Open Meetings Act", which, I believe means a copy should have been provided to the public.

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

Randy Jones from Aging Partners, presented their budget (10% of Aging Partners Budget is the County's responsibility.). They are requesting a $5,000 budget request from the county for a shortfall in the Rural Transit program. The County Commissioners said they would vote on this at the Tuesday, July 7 Board meeting, but I do not see it on the agenda.

Any general comments about the meeting?

Provided a copy of LWV- NE's new Elder Care position to Randy Jones, director of Aging Partners.

Observed by Jean McGuire

Lincoln City Council 7/6/26

No meeting

Lancaster County Board of Commissioners / Lancaster County Board of Equalization 7/7/26

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?

Standard business. Proclaimed July 19-25 as Pretrial Probation and Parole Supervision Week. Jeff Kilpatrick (Community Corrections) and Jeff Curry (Probation) and their staffs were present.

Any general comments about the meeting?

VERY brief. Equalization board was only 7 minutes long

Observed by Judy Kelly

Lincoln/Lancaster County Planning Commission 7/8/26

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 consent agenda was approved in full. It consisted of a conservation easement at South 70th and Yankee Hill Road, and two street and alley vacations, one at H Street between South 9th and 10th and another alley vacation between South 13th and 14th Streets and L and M.

The Commission then took testimony on a proposed change of zone to allow the addition of 90 dwelling units to the existing north Forty Plaza Planned Unit Development at North 84th and Adams Street. There are currently 92 apartments at this location and the zoning change would allow up to 90 more. There was opposition from neighboring homeowners who believed this expansion was too big for the existing space, did not complement the existing neighborhood, and would impact traffic and parking to the south. The proposed change was approved unanimously.

Observed by Janice Walker

Staff Meeting, Lancaster County Board of Commissioners 7/9/26

Were there any items of concern in terms of open meetings and good government?
Sean Flowerday was absent and Rich Vest was three minutes late.

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

Semi-Annual Chamber Update – Jason Ball, President and Chief Executive Officer, Lincoln Chamber of Commerce.

Ball and Commissioner Shulte will be visiting Madison, WI next week to see how the city is reusing industrial areas for a public market and event spaces (old Garver Feed Mill), They will

also be visiting the EPIC campus (medical records software company used by many medical facilities including Bryan and UNMC).

Working with a 3rd party PR firm; there will be three social media influencers in Lincoln this month for several events happening including archery, rodeo and skating events. The chamber is taking a bigger social media approach leveraging TikTok and hiring a social media associate this past year.

Economic Development - Ball referred to advocacy tab on their website where they work at the local, state and federal level to advocate pro-growth policies for the city. Also working with Omaha Chamber of Commerce on I-80 corridor.

Briefing on Amendments to Article 2 of the Lincoln-Lancaster County Air Pollution Control Program Regulations and Standards – Gary R. Bergstrom, Environmental Health Supervisor, Air Quality Section, Lincoln-Lancaster County Health. The department is adding a formal mechanism to rescind permits in place. There are unique situations where a piece of equipment is decommissioned in place. For example, ADM elevator had a coal boiler that isn't used anymore but there was no plan to remove the boiler due to infrastructure in place. This new change would allow the permit to be rescinded. These types of permits are usually for a lifetime. The permit can be transferred if equipment is sold, but the department had no regulation for when it is decommissioned and stays in place. Approval for this change was reviewed and approved by the air pollution advisory board and dept of health and also consulted with the EPA. There will be a hearing on July 21 for final approval.

Processing of Statewide and Local Petitions – Todd Wiltgen, Election Commissioner. Wiltgen went over petition information (see below), Very informational. Lot of work for county election commission to verify petition signatures and would take statutory or constitutional changes to streamline the process (such as moving deadline up to submit petitions to give counties more time to verify or try and get distribution of signatures throughout the state and not the majority in the three most populous counties (Lancaster, Douglas and Sarpy). Dan Osborn petition signatures have been verified in Lancaster County. Was also discussion on process to remove your signature from a petition and deadlines for that (different for local vs. state petitions). Petition complaints for state petitions go to the secretary of state and for local petitions goes to city clerk.

ITEM 4 Petition Presentation 2026. New Meeting Notice Requirements Under the Nebraska Open Meetings Act Due to the Passage of LB596 – Courtney Lyons, Deputy County Clerk. She explained that counties may now publish required notices in a digital newspaper when a print is unavailable, noting that this could affect Lancaster County only on Mondays, when the Journal Star is digital-only. The major update allows counties to publish their regular meeting schedule in the newspaper quarterly instead of issuing a notice for every individual meeting. Lyons said the Board must designate what additional public notice it wants for meetings held outside the regular Tuesday and Thursday schedule, and this will be reflected in a resolution being drafted by the County Attorney's Office. She noted that larger counties must already post agendas on their websites at least 24 hours in advance, and other clerks statewide generally rely on website posting as their primary method. Board members agreed that website posting is sensible and consistent. Lyons added that public hearings still require separate newspaper notice. Board members concluded that Lancaster County's website would be the most reliable place for notices.

STRATEGIC PLAN SEMI-ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT – Michelle Kennedy, Project Manager and Lead Facilitator, Berry Dunn. Kennedy presented a mid cycle update on the county's three year strategic plan. She emphasized that the strategic plan's reporting cycle ensures transparency and allows course correction when needed.

Any general comments about the meeting?

Election Updates from Todd Wiltgen are very informational esp in regard to petitions and deadlines for those.

Presentation on petitions by Election Commissioner Todd Wiltgen

Type of Petitions

State

- Initiative/Constitutional Amendment
- Candidate for federal or state office State
- New Political Party

Local

- Initiative
    - City of Lincoln Charter Amendment
    - City of Lincoln Ordinance
- Candidate for local offices

2026 State Initiative & Constitutional Amendments

These petitions are sponsored by one or more Nebraska registered voters. Initiatives implement a new law or change an existing law, and a constitutional amendment revises the constitution. Submission deadline was July 2nd. These are filed with the Nebraska Secretary of State.

- **Both** require 5% of registered voters in 38 counties
- **Initiatives** require 7% of Nebraska registered voters
    - Online Sports Wagering
- **Constitutional Amendments** require 10% of Nebraska registered voters
    - Fairness for Girls
    - Online Sports Wagering Authorization
    - Protect Nebraskans' Initiative and Referendum Powers

2026 Candidates for Federal and State Offices

These are nonpartisan candidates whose names would appear on the general ballot in November should they collect enough signatures Submission deadline is August 1st. The words By Petition would be printed on the ballot after the name of each candidate.

- Dan Osborn for U.S. Senate
    - 4,000 signatures statewide, 750 from each congressional district
- Austin Ahlman for 1st Congressional District
    - 2,000 signatures districtwide

2026 New Political Parties

Any person, group, or association desiring to form a new political party shall present to the Secretary of State petitions containing signatures totaling not less than one percent of the total votes cast for Governor at the most recent general election for such office
1/3 signatures from each congressional district
Submission deadline is July 15th

- Nebraska Working People Party
- America First

2026 Local Initiatives

These petitions are sponsored by one or more Lincoln registered voters
An ordinance would implement a new law or change an existing law in the City of Lincoln and requires 5% of total voters registered for the '25 Lincoln City Election
A charter amendment revises the City of Lincoln's Charter and requires 5% of total votes cast for Governor in November 2022
September 1st is the deadline for City of Lincoln to certify a special issue for inclusion on the general ballot

2026 Local Candidate

These are nonpartisan candidates whose names would appear on the general ballot in November ballot should they collect enough signatures
Filing deadline is August 1st
The words By Petition would be printed on the ballot after the name of each candidate

- Bryan Seck for Lancaster County Commissioner
  District 3
- 2,000 signatures districtwide

Observed by Diane Freese

Lincoln City Council 7/13/26

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?

Approved Proposed Revisions to the Lincoln-Lancaster County Air Pollution Control Program. A representative from the County Health Department testified that these revisions would update County regulations to conform with evolving state and federal standards and would better align with the Ne. Dept of Environment and Energy Regulations. This would assure consistent enforcement of standards and air quality permits across the state.

The Council also approved an Interlocal agreement between the City of Lincoln on behalf of the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Dept and the city of Crete for health regulation and enforcements related to a one mile area inside the jurisdiction of the City of Crete which extends into Lancaster County. This would include investigating public health nuisances, site wastewater, septic water and public water.

The Council also approved a zoning change for a new Planned Unit Development at 48th and Pioneers for mix of commercial and residential.

Any general comments about the meeting?

Background info on how City Council Meetings worked [made it] a lot easier to follow the discussion.

Observed by Julia Metcalf

Lancaster County Board of Commissioners 7/14/26

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

Meeting started 8 minutes late; Matt Schulte absent

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

Most consent agenda items and new business were around grants for human services/youth programs. All passed unanimously - 4-0. Leslie Ahrens of Human Svc Dept spoke on several items. Christa Yoakum abstained from vote on El Centro grant and Rick Vest abstained on The Mediation Center grant

Any general comments about the meeting?

It lasted less than half an hour.

Observed by Judy Kelly

Lincoln Board of Education 7/14/26

No meeting

Staff Meeting, Lancaster County Board of Commissioners 7/16/26

No meeting

Lincoln Electric System 7/17/26

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

Yes. The meeting was moved one hour earlier, and I was unaware of the change and missed the meeting.

No report

Observed by Katie Bradshaw

Lincoln City Council 7/20/26
No report

Lancaster County Board of Commissioners 7/21/26
No report

Lincoln/Lancaster County Planning Commission 7/22/26
No meeting

Staff Meeting, Lancaster County Board of Commissioners 7/23/26

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?

Mariella Resendiz Alvarado was introduced as the new Welcoming Coordinator for the 5 Cultural Centers, acting as the bridge between them and the city and county.

They then went into a 50-minute Executive Session.

Dennis Meyer, Budget and Fiscal Officer, covered Budget items.

Commissioner Johnson then introduced a small solar project that would be partially funded by federal tax credits and the remainder out of the general fund balance. Of the 4 properties initially assessed, the Lancaster County Youth Services Center would be the likely candidate. The board supported moving forward with the full assessment.

Observed by Jean McGuire

Lincoln City Council 7/27/26

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 main issues concerned individuals with property damage claims due to falling tree branches and uncontested liquor license applications or annexations that were approved on unanimous votes.

Observed by Shirley Williams

Lancaster County Board of Commissioners 7/28/26

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 17 minutes long and consisted primarily of paying bills and approving grants. Commissioners did approve a zoning amendment expanding the definition of recreational facility to include passive activities, so Branched Oak Observatory (stars) sheds do not have to meet rigid set back requirements.

Observed by Nancy Hicks Rose

Lincoln Board of Education 7/28/26
No report

Staff Meeting, Lancaster County Board of Commissioners 7/30/26

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?

All five commissioners were present. Commissioners met for 15 to 20 minutes in closed executive session for legal matters and contract negotiations.

Commissioners listened to a budget presentation from Dennis Meyer, budget officer. The commission expects employee health insurance cost to rise by 12% in each of the next two years. Commissioners approved several cost saving measures, including steering employees to generic drugs and to Brian Medical Center facilities and encouraging people with diabetes and prediabetes to take advantage of a counseling type program.

Meyer expects a 3.6%. Increase in property tax valuations. About half the increase, 1.7% is new growth, newly constructed homes and buildings. Commissioners expect the county levy to be less than this year,

Commissioner Chelsea Johnson reported that NACO, the Nebraska Association of County Officials has developed zoning recommendations for counties that include dealing with data centers.

Observed by Nancy Hicks Rose