ENVIRONS COMMISSION

Created in 1988, the Nebraska Capitol Environs Commission is composed of 11 members, five appointed by the Mayor with City Council confirmation, prescribing an architect, landscape architect, urban planner, real estate developer and member of the public at-large. The Governor appoints two members, one who shall be a resident of the City of Lincoln. Four ex-officio non-voting members represent the City of Lincoln Planning Director, the City Parks and Recreation Director, the Nebraska Administrative Services Director and the Office of the Capitol Commission Administrator. Meetings are held at least quarterly with one annual joint Environs and Nebraska Capitol Commission meeting.

STATUTES/ORDINANCES

The Environs Act (Neb. Rev. Stat. § 90-301 thru 90-309) codifies, intent; the boundaries of the Environs District and building height limits; allows the creation of a Nebraska Capitol Environs Commission; an action/appeal process; and a required annual report from the Environs Commission to the Legislature. Cooperatively the State of Nebraska and the City of Lincoln have developed statutes and ordinances which govern protection and enhancement of the Capitol Environs District. (*http://nebraskalegislature.gov/laws/statutes.php?statute=90-302*)

The Lincoln Municipal Code, Chapter 27.56, identifies the membership and scope of work for the Nebraska Capitol Environs Commission; and defines the Environs District Design Standards & Guidelines which regulate architectural, landscape and urban design in the District; and provides for public participation in the design process. (*http://online.encodeplus.com/regs/lincoln-ne/doc-viewer.aspx#secid-11926*)

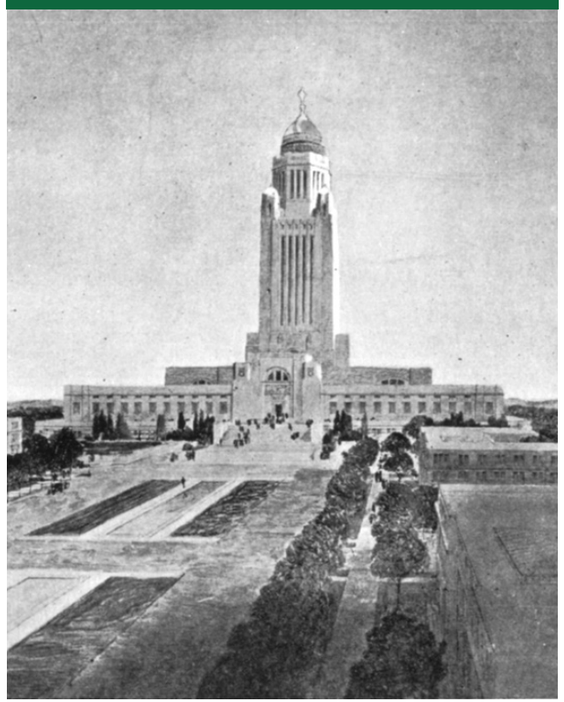
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Nebraska State Capitol

ENVIRONS DISTRICT



Birch Burdette Long rendering from Bertram Grosvernor Goodhue's 1920 Nebraska State Capitol competition submission.

Goodhue's program called for the development of axial streets leading outward into the city with medians/malls and construction of future state office buildings across the streets surrounding the Capitol site emphasizing the tower as a focal point in the cityscape.

MISSION

To preserve and enhance the aesthetic quality, historic value, spiritual dignity and physical dominance of the Capitol over the cityscape; to foster pride in the beauty of the Capitol and its environs by studying and publicizing their essential aspects; to provide a fit setting for the Capitol by encouraging appropriate public improvements and private development, especially in the Capitol Environs District and the maintenance of improvements; and to protect views to the Capitol by proposing regulations and guidelines for

HISTORY

Upon Nebraska's Statehood in 1867, the capital was moved west from Omaha. The capital selection committee chose the the village of Lancaster, later renamed Lincoln, as the new capital city. The original plat of Lincoln featured wide streets and large tracts of land for public uses, such as the Statehouse, a State University and a City Park. The site for 'State House Square' was the highest knoll of land in the 245 block original plat.

In the 1919 competition for the third and current Capitol, architect Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue created an architecturally unique, innovative design intended to dominate the visual landscape of Lincoln and the surrounding area. Goodhue's design statement noted, "The site is a square in the heart of the City.., the point of intersection of two great avenues...from the midst of which rises a great central tower, which with its gleaming dome of golden tiles, would stand as a landmark for many miles around." Goodhue's 1920 jury indicated, "... this program, is the proposed extension of Fifteenth Street further north, the widening of "J" Street east and to the west...to be a successful architectural monument...it will be all the more important that these street extensions and widening should be made." In 1921, the Chamber of Commerce completed a plan for the Capitol Environs which included a city zoning ordinance restricting building heights and opening wide boulevards on the four axial streets.

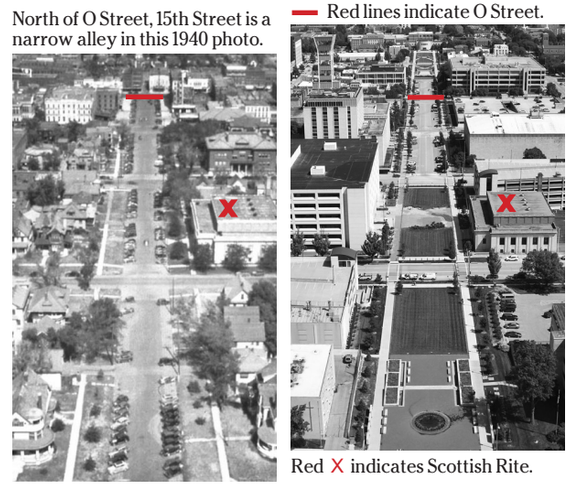
During its 1922-32 construction, discussions occurred on how to protect the visual dominance of Goodhue's Capitol in the city skyline. In 1927, the City and State joined forces to form the first official Capitol Environs Committee which proposed opening 15th Street (now Centennial Mall) north to the University; opening 'J' Street east from 17th Street to the city limits and locating the Governor's Mansion on the center-line of 15th Street (now Goodhue Boulevard) between 'A' and Washington Streets. In 1937 a separate State Planning Board reaffirmed the previous proposals and specified building heights and setbacks in the Capitol area.

The 1952 City Comprehensive Plan proposed development of future government buildings around the Capitol. The Lincoln Center Development Program of 1974 supported a unified State Office Complex around the Capitol and identified Lincoln Mall as a Special Office-Residential District. In 1975 the UNL College of Architecture published "The Nebraska Capitol and Environs Plan" with recommendations incorporated into the Nebraska State Capitol Environs Protection and Improvement Act, passed by the Nebraska Legislature in 1977. As a result, Lincoln's mayor appointed an ad-hoc Nebraska Capitol Environs Advisory Planning Committee which then created the "Urban Design Plan for the Nebraska Capitol Environs". The committee defined special urban assets in the Capitol environs and specifically recognized city and county "Capitol View Corridors." In 1984 with funding support from the Lincoln Community Foundation, UNL's College of Architecture created a supplemental study, "The Nebraska Capitol Environs- East and South Mall Proposal", identifing major environs design improvements and encouraging the creation of a permanent joint City and State Nebraska Capitol Environs Commission.

With passage of City and State enabling legislation, a permanent ten member Environs Commission was created in 1987 to provide on-going advocacy and oversight for the Environs District. The Commission successfully merged the recommendations of the previous twelve years into a unified document called the Capitol Environs Design Standards.

North of O Street, 15th Street is a narrow alley in this 1940 photo.

Red lines indicate O Street.



Red X indicates Scottish Rite.

Compare 15th Street north of the Capitol with Centennial Mall. The alley north of O was opened 3 more blocks to the University in 1947. Residences west of the Scottish Rite were replaced with the Nebraska State Office Building in 1976 as Goodhue envisioned.

View Corridor-- Interstate 80 and 180 circa 1988



East Axis View Corridor-- 27th and J Streets



View Corridor-- Holmes Lake Golf Club House





View Corridor-- Bison Circle Pioneers Park

NEBRASKA CAPITOL ENVIRONS DISTRICT

LINCOLN, NEBRASKA

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- DISTRICT BOUNDARY
- 57 FOOT HEIGHT LIMIT
- 45 FOOT HEIGHT LIMIT

N

2020

Within the District, Capitol Environs Design Standards prescribe building heights and setbacks; approval for demolition, construction and exterior alteration of structures; and approval for all above-ground utility and landscape improvements within the public right-of-way. These standards apply to all property, public, private or quasi-public and emphasize the long-term enhancement of the State Capitol's setting and the enjoyment of the building by the citizens while respecting the economic interests of property owners and their desire for predictable, expeditious review.

http://online.encodeplus.com/regs/lincoln-ne-ds/doc-viewer.aspx#secid-865