

## Experts weigh in on arena proposal

By DEENA WINTER / Lincoln Journal Star  
Thursday, Aug 21, 2008 - 01:07:00 am CDT

A panel of design experts from around the country gave the city's arena plans high marks after spending three days in Lincoln studying them.

The arena proposal was one of four chosen nationwide for in-depth study by the Mayors' Institute on City Design, a partnership of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, the National Endowment for the Arts and the American Architectural Foundation. The institute was created in 1986 to help mayors find solutions to urban design challenges.

Mayor Chris Beutler presented the arena plans at the institute last year, and the institute selected Lincoln for the follow-up study.

A team of four studied the city's plans to build an arena, ice center, three parking garages with offices, stores, restaurants and housing incorporated into the parking garages and elsewhere. Their findings were released in a presentation at city hall Wednesday.

Maurice Cox, director of design for the National Endowment for the Arts, said the team was impressed with Lincoln's plans, which he called "extraordinarily good urban planning." He said he hopes Lincoln has the courage to move forward with the plans for what he called a "very, very doable project."

Some of their suggestions to tweak the city proposal:

- \* Create a three-lane historic railroad "canopy street" (an extension of Sixth Street) just west of Lincoln Station that makes use of the existing railroad canopy running from O to R streets. This pedestrian promenade could become a main street from the ice center to the arena and could be closed off for events like a farmer's market.
- \* On the west side of the canopy street, they would put 300-by-430-foot blocks (a typical downtown block is 300-by-300-feet) that could accommodate a variety of uses. This is where parking garages could be combined with open space, stores, restaurants and offices, for example.
- \* Allow new buildings to be up to six stories high to create more density and generate more economic activity.
- \* Make the Breslow ice arena — now slated to be just north of Harris Overpass — an "iconic entry" by putting a tower on the southeast corner. Retail or restaurants could be incorporated into the ice center's fringe.
- \* Make the ice arena LEED-certified, perhaps with a green grass roof. To get certified, construction must meet environmentally responsible building standards set by the U.S. Green Building Council.
- \* Define and soften the northeast entryway into the Haymarket by dividing the Interstate 180- Ninth Street entryway into downtown with a tree-lined median. Faster-moving traffic would be diverted east, and traffic would be slowed on the west side, giving it a "Parisian boulevard feel."
- \* Enhance R, Q and P streets along Ninth Street with bulbouts — curb extensions at intersections that make pedestrian crossings safer.
- \* Integrate the area into the city's trail system.

\* Create a festival space on Seventh Street between Q and R streets that incorporates the Haymarket's historic flavor.

Cox said the team thinks incorporating a hotel into the arena would work and could be a "significant headpiece" to the festival area.

Chris Abel recently moved to Lincoln from Sydney, Australia, to serve as visiting professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln College of Architecture. He attended the institute's Wednesday presentation and questioned the decision to put "so many large structures" in the 150-acre target area. Lincoln, he said, needs a large-scale public space.

Cox said his team believes the buildings have been placed appropriately and noted a public "festival space" is planned on the arena's doorstep.

Beutler said the institute's advice and ideas will be "thrown into the mix" and discussed by the public during a Sept. 3 public meeting at Memorial Stadium's West Stadium Clubhouse.

Reach Deena Winter at 473-2642 or [dwinter@journalstar.com](mailto:dwinter@journalstar.com).

---

**Copyright © 2002-2008 Lincoln Journal Star. All rights reserved.**

Print Page