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## PRIORITY LINCOLN: WE'RE LISTENING A COMMUNITY CONVERSATION ON THE CITY BUDGET

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# PRIORITY LINCOLN: WE'RE LISTENING

## A COMMUNITY CONVERSATION ON THE CITY BUDGET



This is a background document to prepare you for the *Priority Lincoln: We're Listening* discussion on the Lincoln City Budget on April 12. This discussion guide is intended to serve as a jumping-off point for our upcoming conversation. The discussion is not a test of facts, but rather a chance to offer your perspectives on the issues with other Lincoln residents.

### Lincoln: By the Numbers

	Lincoln	United States
Total Population	238,302	299,398,485
% Under 18 years of age	23%	24.6%
% Over 65 years of age	10.4%	12.4%
% American Indian and Alaska Native	.7%	.8%
% Asian	3.7%	4.4%
% Black or African-American	3.9%	12.4%
% Hispanic or Latino of any race	4.8%	14.8%
% Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0%	.1%
% White	88.4%	73.9%
% Some other race	1.9%	6.3%
% Multi-racial	1.4%	2%
Average household income	\$45,982	\$48,451
Per capita income	\$23,188	\$25,267
Average travel time to work in minutes	17.6 minutes	25 minutes
% Families below poverty level	7.5%	9.8%
% Persons over 16 in the labor force	73.6%	65%
% Persons with a bachelor's degree or higher	34.5%	27%
% Persons speaking language other than English at home	10.6%	19.7%

*Source: 2006 American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau.*

### The Budget Outlook: Now and the Future

Lincoln is currently facing a budget crisis, and in such times cities are forced to make tough decisions. In July of 2007, Mayor Beutler proposed a 2007-2008 budget of 131.7 million dollars and made significant cuts to address a shortfall of approximately 9 million dollars.<sup>1</sup> In doing so, dozens of jobs were eliminated through lay-offs, a hiring freeze on vacant positions, and an early retirement program, and many departments were forced to cut their budgets by significant amounts as well.<sup>2</sup> Mayor Beutler called it “the toughest budget in memory”<sup>3</sup> – but it was ultimately passed by the City Council. Changes in the final budget included:

- *Mayor's Department:* The Council eliminated the Women's Commission and Affirmative Action Commission.
- *Area Agency on Aging:* Eliminated the Calvert ActivAge Center, reduced Belmont Center hours, and eliminated special events, trips, and tour programs.

<sup>1</sup> Deena Winter, “Big changes to city budget may be in store,” *Lincoln Journal Star*, page A1, July 8, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> *City of Lincoln 2007-2008 Council adopted operating budget*, available at: <http://www.lincoln.ne.gov/city/finance/budget/pdf/sum08.pdf>.

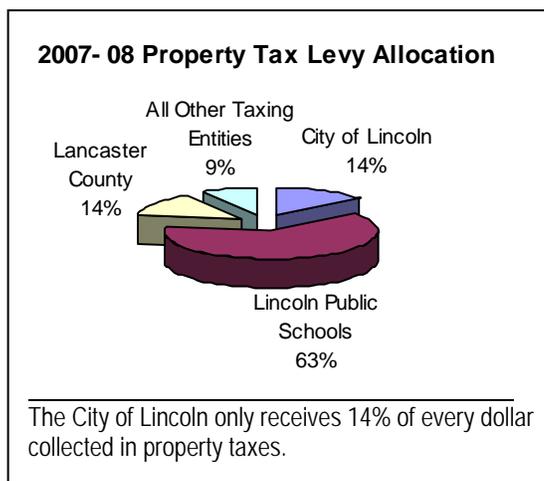
<sup>3</sup> Matt Olberding, “Council Republicans react positively to budget plan,” *Lincoln Journal Star*, page B1, July 10, 2007.

- *Parks and Recreation Department*: Closed 3 park restrooms, 1 pool, and 14 youth sports and recreation programs, and increased user fees for recreation and sports.
- *Lincoln Public Libraries*: Eliminated nearly 5 library positions, reduced hours for the Polley Music Library and increased library book fines.
- *Public Works/Utilities Department*: Eliminated 6 engineering positions and increased residents' fees for water and wastewater services.
- *Health Department*: Reduced dental services by 530 patient visits and increased animal control and environmental health service fees.
- *Fire and Rescue*: Required \$350,000 in discretionary budget cuts.
- *Police Department*: Eliminated 6 positions.
- *Urban Development Department*: Eliminated 2 positions and delayed neighborhood improvement projects.

What is the cause of Lincoln's budgetary woes?

Currently, the largest source of projected City funding comes from sales taxes (42%), followed by property taxes (31%). The remaining sources of revenue come from occupation and motor vehicle taxes, and various user fees and permits.<sup>4</sup> However, the revenue increases from sales taxes have not been as high as they were in previous years. In the 1990s, the City's sales tax growth was very healthy. Pursuant to a request by Mayor Beutler, the State Department of Revenue examined why sales tax revenue from the 1990s had leveled off.

According to their analysis, the high amount of revenue collected from sales taxes in the 1990s was explained by the expansion of retail opportunities in Lincoln during that decade, such as the North 27<sup>th</sup> Wal-Mart Supercenter, and the SouthPointe Pavilions shopping center. The Department of Revenue analysis suggested that retail growth in Lincoln may have reached a plateau – along with the growth rate of the City's sales tax revenue. For example, motor vehicle sales taxes declined every year between 2004 and 2006. Additionally, personal income in Lincoln does not grow as fast as it does in other parts of the nation, further constraining sales tax revenue.<sup>5</sup> With this leveling off of sales tax revenue, the City's overall revenue intake has suffered.



What about property taxes? With the exception of voter approved bond issues, the property tax rate in Lincoln has actually decreased since 1993-94. The City receives only 14% of each property tax dollar, with the majority (63%) going to support Lincoln Public Schools.<sup>6</sup> Some commentators have suggested that raising property taxes is a politically unfeasible move for any mayor of Lincoln. Yet with sales tax revenue not keeping pace with the increasing costs for services, the City is caught in a bind.

<sup>4</sup> Mayor Chris Beutler, *2007-2008 Mayor's recommended City of Lincoln annual operating budget*, available at: [http://www.lincoln.ne.gov/city/mayor/pdf/budget\\_07\\_08.pdf](http://www.lincoln.ne.gov/city/mayor/pdf/budget_07_08.pdf).

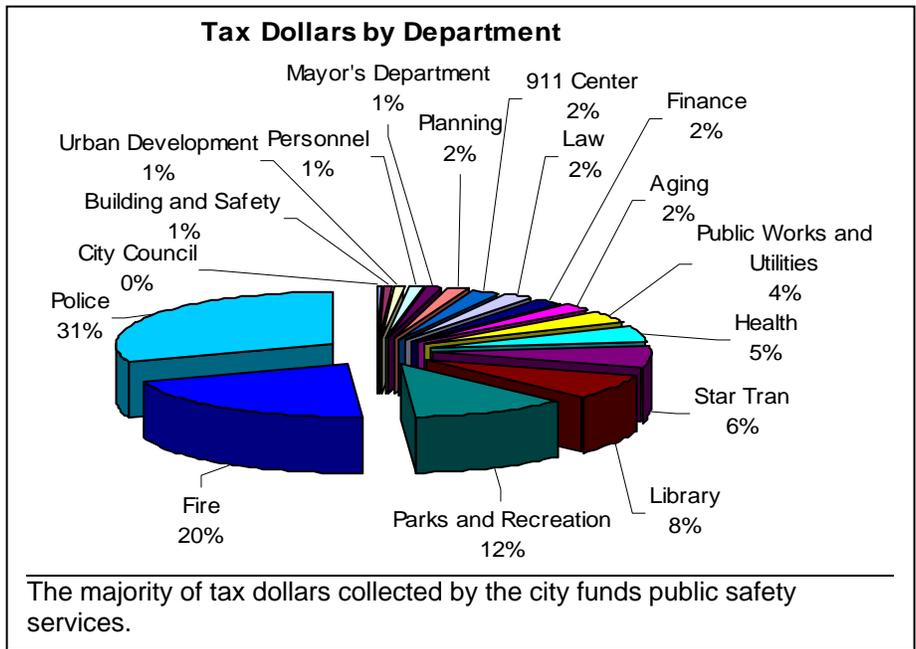
<sup>5</sup> Deena Winter, "The falling growth rate for city's sales tax has the Mayor asking why," *Lincoln Journal Star*, page A1, January 8, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Mayor Chris Beutler, *2007-2008 Mayor's recommended City of Lincoln annual operating budget*, available at: [http://www.lincoln.ne.gov/city/mayor/pdf/budget\\_07\\_08.pdf](http://www.lincoln.ne.gov/city/mayor/pdf/budget_07_08.pdf).

How is the City budget currently allocated among services? Public safety services receive the most funding in the City budget, with the police department receiving the most support, followed by fire and rescue. Parks and recreation, and the public library system follow. All of the City’s service areas have been cut this year, and likely face further reductions. Yet remarkably, Lincoln continues to provide high quality services to its increasing number of residents. For example, even though Lincoln has the smallest number of police officers per capita in Nebraska, its violent crime rate remains at a level below that of other similar sized communities in the nation.<sup>7</sup> In the face of continued growth, increasing demands on services, yet limited financial resources, how should Lincoln prioritize its budgetary goals?

## Budgeting for Outcomes

In Lincoln, as in most other cities, the budget is developed each year when the Mayor proposes a budget and the City Council approves it. Typically, the task begins each year when the Mayor asks each city government department to submit a request based on its needs. Most of the time, each department will base its funding requests on how much money it was given in the previous year, and will adjust that figure as it predicts how much money it will need in the upcoming year. This is known as “incremental” budgeting, since the budget changes incrementally from year to year.<sup>8</sup> Once the Mayor receives all of the budget requests from each department, he or she meets with the departments and members of the City Council.



and members of the City Council.

The Mayor then uses discretion to determine how much money to allocate to each department. After the entire proposed budget is ready, it is forwarded to the City Council, which can accept or reject the proposal, or request changes it feels are necessary. Once the Mayor and City Council work out any differences, and after public hearings regarding the budget have been held, the final budget is voted upon by the City Council.

A number of observers have criticized this type of budgeting approach because it can allow the process to be driven largely by political considerations, as government officials avoid making tough decisions out of fear of angering certain interests.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, with incremental budgeting municipalities can

<sup>7</sup> Mayor Chris Beutler, *2007-2008 Mayor’s recommended City of Lincoln annual operating budget*, available at: [http://www.lincoln.ne.gov/city/mayor/pdf/budget\\_07\\_08.pdf](http://www.lincoln.ne.gov/city/mayor/pdf/budget_07_08.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> William D. Berry, “The confusing case of budgetary incrementalism: Too many meanings for a single concept,” *Journal of Politics*, 52: pages 167-196, 1990.

<sup>9</sup> David Osborne & Peter Hutchinson, *The price of government: Getting the results we need in an age of permanent fiscal crisis*, New York: Basic Books, 2004.

use accounting gimmicks to make it look as though the city is in fine financial shape. In such cases the budget problem is simply put off to deal with in the future, but the budget problem may be compounded if economic conditions worsen.

As a result, some observers have proposed the “Budgeting for Outcomes” approach that is not based simply upon “incremental” methods, but instead relies upon citizen input and the identification of essential community needs. Through this approach, governments rely partly upon citizen input to determine the city’s budget priorities. Once those priorities are determined, the city develops strategies to meet them, and develops measures to help determine whether they are being adequately addressed.

While the “Budgeting for Outcomes” approach is relatively new, it has been utilized with great success in the State of Washington, which faced a serious budget crisis and economic downturn about five years ago.<sup>10</sup> Although Washington was not able to avoid tough decisions such as layoffs and reductions in government services, their budgeting for outcomes process allowed the state to take a long-term approach rather than simply trying to rely upon “quick fixes” to deal with its deficit. Even though Washington did make drastic changes in its operating budget, its outcomes-based process was viewed favorably by residents, government officials, and members of the media because of its innovative approach.

Just like the State of Washington, the City of Lincoln will be forced to make the tough decisions that come with determining a budget, even though it is using the Budgeting for Outcomes method. In this time of economic stress, the City of Lincoln, along with many other governments, will be forced to make decisions that will make some citizens unhappy. But by using this process, the Mayor hopes to provide a new direction to the City’s budget process by allowing citizens to provide input and help make decisions about the future of Lincoln.



## Lincoln: City Government 101

Lincoln’s City Government is comprised of thirteen departments, excluding the City Council. Each of the departments is listed below, along with a description of the work that each does:

### *Building and Safety Department*

The Building and Safety Department ensures that the health, fire, and housing safety needs of the public are maintained through adherence to those requirements established by law in the construction or use of every building in the community.<sup>11</sup> In order to meet this responsibility, the Building and Safety Department issues permits to individuals and businesses interested in constructing new

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<sup>10</sup> “Government performance project: State reports,” *Governing Magazine*, February 2005, available at: <http://www.governing.com/archive/2005/feb/gp5state.txt>.

<sup>11</sup> City of Lincoln, Building and Safety Department, *Mission Statement*, available at: <http://www.lincoln.ne.gov/city/build/mission.htm>.

buildings, and is involved in the inspection of buildings to make sure that each is in compliance with the City's regulations.<sup>12</sup>

### *City Attorney*

The City Attorney's Office provides legal advice to the Mayor, City Council, departments, committees, and commissions. The office also initiates and defends legal actions on behalf of the City, which may include appeals of City actions, labor relations, condemnations, civil rights, and contract disputes.<sup>13</sup> The City Attorney's Office also prosecutes misdemeanor offenses such as traffic and motor vehicle violations, general peace and moral offenses, and building code and health violations. The office also researches, drafts, and reviews contracts, ordinances, resolutions, deeds, executive orders, certificates of insurance, and various applications and permits.<sup>14</sup>

### *Finance Department*

The Finance Department is primarily a service provider to the other departments within the City and County governments and to citizens. The department is responsible for the appropriation, collection, investment, and disbursement of City funds. The department also assists the Mayor in the development of the annual budget, and preparation of all City bond issues and audit reports. Divisions in the department are: City Treasurer, Budget, Purchasing, Auditing and Accounting, City Clerk, Communications, and Information Services.<sup>15</sup>



Government and education drive much of Lincoln's economy.

Credit: Rob Evans.

### *Fire Department*

Lincoln Fire and Rescue service is a multi-discipline organization. The goals of the Fire and Rescue Department are to proactively facilitate community risk reduction to lives and property, to provide basic and advanced life support emergency medical services, to raise public awareness of fire prevention and public safety, to provide competent special operations, to develop and orchestrate programs in the reduction of fire losses through suppression and inspections, and to seek compliance with modern fire codes.

### *Health Department*

The Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department is responsible for assessing the health of the community and assuring that systems are in place to address health problems. Among its many goals are to decrease environmental risk factors and behaviors that adversely affect personal health and environmental quality, diminish chronic disease complications by increasing access to care and early intervention, integrate substance abuse and

<sup>12</sup> City of Lincoln, Building and Safety Department, *Frequently Asked Questions*, available at: <http://www.lincoln.ne.gov/city/build/faq.htm>.

<sup>13</sup> City of Lincoln, City Attorney's Office, *Mission Statement*, available at: <http://www.lincoln.ne.gov/city/attorn/mission.htm>.

<sup>14</sup> City of Lincoln, City Attorney's Office, *Frequently Asked Questions*, available at: <http://www.lincoln.ne.gov/city/attorn/faq.htm>.

<sup>15</sup> City of Lincoln, Finance Department, *Frequently Asked Questions*, available at: <http://www.lincoln.ne.gov/city/finance/faq.htm>.

mental health services into public health, and reduce the incidence of preventable injury, death, and disease.<sup>16</sup> It maintains an extensive child vaccination program, environmental health program, and restaurant inspection system.

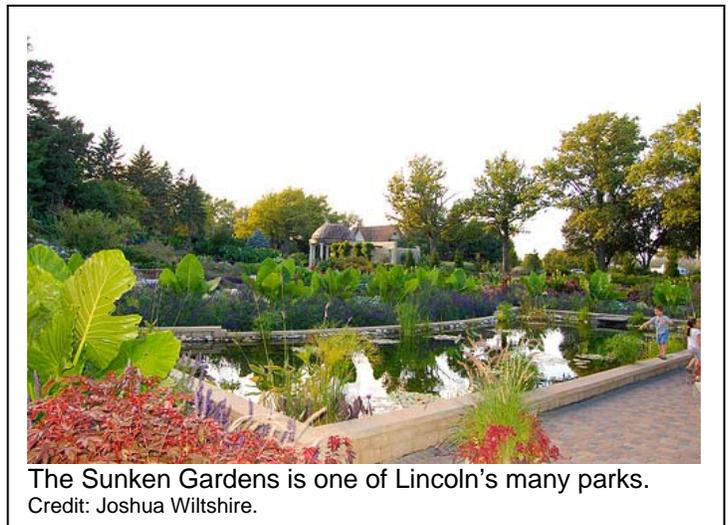
### *Lincoln City Libraries*

Lincoln City Libraries provide services at 8 facilities throughout the City and at 27 bookmobile sites throughout Lincoln and Lancaster County, with 1,891,572 visits last year. Materials for informational and recreational needs are available via print, E-book, downloadable audio, DVD, CD and electronic databases. Reading and discussion programs are available for youth and adult customers. Storytimes are held for preschoolers, elementary age children, and families. Public internet computers are available at all locations as well as wireless internet access. Collections, equipment, and study space are available for English Language Learners. Resources include 796,000 books, 12,500 E-books, 56,000 audio recordings, 19,000 videocassettes, 23,000 DVDs, 1,800 magazine subscriptions, 41 electronic databases, and 570 downloadable audio books.

### *Mayor's Department*

Within the Mayor's Department are a number of administrative entities and commissions of varied scope and areas of focus. Among them include:

- The Lincoln Area Agency on Aging, which serves Lancaster and seven adjacent counties. The agency's mission is to ensure that persons over age 60 have access to services that help them stay independent and in their homes. It serves 26% of the people who are 60 and older living in Lancaster County. It provides congregate meals at 8 sites in Lincoln and Lancaster County, home delivered meals, caregiver assistance, financial counseling, nutrition counseling, healthy living programs, transportation, social work services, case management, job placement assistance, volunteer service placement opportunities, and more.



The Sunken Gardens is one of Lincoln's many parks.  
Credit: Joshua Wiltshire.

- The Human Rights Commission, which receives, settles, and investigates complaints alleging discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, disability, national origin, familial status, age, ancestry, marital status, and retaliation. The Commission works with public and private entities to promote understanding between races, cultures, and sexes, and eliminate inequalities and sources of inter-racial friction.

### *Parks and Recreation Department*

The mission of the Lincoln Parks and Recreation Department is to enhance the quality of life in Lincoln by providing and maintaining quality parks and green spaces, and by offering enriching

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<sup>16</sup> Lincoln/Lancaster County, Health Department, *Mission, Vision, and Goals*, available at <http://www.lincoln.ne.gov/city/health/mission.htm>.

recreation activities and facilities for all people in Lincoln.<sup>17</sup> The Department is responsible for administering and maintaining all City parks and approving the planting, maintenance, and removal of City street and park trees. Responsible facilities include recreation centers, golf courses, swimming pools, play fields, an observatory, indoor rifle range, recreational trails, wildlife center, and day camps.

### *Personnel Department*

The Personnel Department provides support to all City and County Departments. The Department is responsible for applicant recruitment, testing, and selection in accordance with sound merit principles. The Department coordinates employee training, conducts salary surveys, performs classification studies, and recommends compensation. The Department is also responsible for labor relations, maintaining employee records, and administering all insurance and benefit programs.<sup>18</sup>



### *Planning Department*

The Planning Department provides technical information and advice to elected and appointed boards and citizens on the use of land for private and public purposes, and generates maps and information about the community. The Department is responsible for developing and maintaining the Comprehensive Plan for Lincoln and Lancaster County, preparing Lincoln's Capital Improvement Program, maintaining zoning and subdivision regulations, and processing hundreds of development applications that involve those regulations each year.<sup>19</sup>

### *Police Department*

The goals of the Police Department, among others, are to ensure that all persons may pursue lawful activities without fear or impediment by maintaining order; to reduce the impact of crime, fear of crime, and public disorder on the daily lives of Lincoln residents through, patrol, crime prevention, criminal investigation, and law enforcement; and protect safe and orderly transportation through traffic direction, law enforcement, and accident investigation.<sup>20</sup>

### *Public Works and Utilities*

The purpose of the Department of Public Works/Utilities is to serve community growth, well-being, and economic success. Working together to provide quality services to the community, the Department finances, designs, constructs, operates, and maintains: municipal water, waste disposal, drainage, and transportation systems.<sup>21</sup> The Department is also in charge of StarTran, which provides city-wide transportation to residents of Lincoln.

<sup>17</sup> City of Lincoln, Parks & Recreation Department, *Mission Statement*, available at: <http://www.lincoln.ne.gov/city/parks/faq.htm>.

<sup>18</sup> City of Lincoln & Lancaster County, Personnel Department, *Mission Statement*, available at: <http://www.lincoln.ne.gov/city/person/mission.htm>.

<sup>19</sup> City of Lincoln, Planning Department, *Frequently Asked Questions*, available at: <http://www.lincoln.ne.gov/city/plan/faq.htm>.

<sup>20</sup> City of Lincoln, Police Department, *Missions and Goals*, available at: <http://www.lincoln.ne.gov/city/police/mission.htm>.

<sup>21</sup> City of Lincoln, Public Works and Utilities Department, *Mission Statement*, available at: <http://www.lincoln.ne.gov/city/pworks/mission.htm>.

### *Urban Development Department*

The primary objective of the Urban Development Department is to improve the quality of life for Lincoln's citizens by maintaining and enhancing Lincoln's built environment, supporting neighborhoods and business districts, and creating economic opportunity. Through its mandate for federal funding, the department strives to provide decent housing, a suitable living environment, and expanded economic opportunities for low and moderate income persons. The One Stop Career Center assisted 7,200 people who found jobs in 2007. The Parking Division is responsible for 8,585 parking spaces in garages, lots, and street parking, along with meter enforcement. Community Development is responsible for implementing the Downtown Master Plan and neighborhood redevelopment projects and plans.

## What Should Lincoln's Budget Priorities Be?

When it comes to setting priorities for Lincoln's budget, what are the major issues at stake?

**Economic Opportunities:** As the state capitol and home of the University of Nebraska's flagship campus, Lincoln's economy centers around education and government, followed by health care. The City's largest employer is Lincoln Public Schools, followed by the State of Nebraska, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, BryanLGH, and Saint Elizabeth Health Systems.<sup>22</sup> Lincoln has a well-

educated workforce, with 34% of adults over 25 having a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to a national average of 27%.<sup>23</sup> The debate is open about growing Lincoln's economy. Some residents favor making wide-ranging investments to maintain the City's current businesses and attract new ones, such as revamping the City's existing infrastructure and expanding it to encompass new growth, and revitalizing the downtown and Haymarket areas with greater recreational, retail, and housing options. Others ask how such projects would be financed, and argue that the financial costs of such wide-scale investments will increase Lincolnites' tax burden.



**Effective Transportation:** Lincoln's continuing growth has increased traffic congestion throughout the City. Without a major highway running through Lincoln, and the lack of a completed beltway, interior roads shoulder nearly the entire strain of Lincoln's cars and trucks. The Antelope Valley Project – an ongoing multi-year development project to alleviate floodplain concerns, revitalize core areas of Lincoln, and provide new research infrastructure for UNL – is designed to alleviate some of the traffic congestion affecting the City's center. However, during rush hour it is still common for traffic to back-up on major arterials. According to traffic count data, close to 40,000 vehicles traverse O Street near the intersection with 27th each day.<sup>24</sup> Despite these challenges, the average commute

<sup>22</sup> Lincoln Partnership for Economic Development, *2007 Directory of Largest Employers*, available at: <http://www.lincolncdev.com/Upload/pdf/largestEmpDirec.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> Lincoln Partnership for Economic Development, *Economic and demographic profile, July 2007*, page 5, available at: <http://www.lincolncdev.com/Upload/pdf/Exectivebriefing.pdf>.

<sup>24</sup> City of Lincoln, Public Works Department, *Traffic Operations Section, 2006 Estimated 24 hour traffic volumes*, available at: <http://www.lincoln.ne.gov/city/pworks/engine/trafsaf/adtv/pdf/map/city2006.pdf>.

time for Lincoln’s workers is well under the national average. Besides concerns over traffic congestion and wear and tear on interior roads, rehabilitating old roads and expanding new ones have long-term growth implications. Sound traffic management and solid infrastructure can enhance Lincoln’s commercial potential and help draw new businesses to the City.

**Environmental Quality:** Lancaster County is fortunate to have thousands of acres of native prairie, saline wetlands, and natural stream corridors which surround Lincoln – contributing to the City’s overall pleasant, plains-state environment. Lincoln enjoys very good environmental quality for a city its size.<sup>25</sup> For example, air quality in Lincoln – measured by ozone levels, particulate matter, and carbon monoxide levels – are significantly lower than U.S. Environmental Protection Agency standards, and Lincoln has not experienced a violation of federal standards for a decade.<sup>26</sup> Although many environmental standards are regulated at the federal level, the City-County Health Department plays a large role in protecting public health and the environment from risks such as contamination of ground and surface water, toxic emissions to the air, improper disposal of waste, and spills of hazardous material. Overall environmental quality and safety is critical to the well-being of Lincolniters, and makes it a pleasant city in which to live and work.

**Equal Access and Diversity:** Lincoln is fast becoming a diverse community. Presently, 58 different languages and dialects are spoken in Lincoln.<sup>27</sup> According to Census Bureau estimates, between 2000 and 2006 the numbers of racial and ethnic minorities in Lancaster County increased by 31% for



The Historical Haymarket is a hub for fine dining and antique shopping in Lincoln. Credit: Craig Kohtz.

African-Americans, 26% for Asians, and 40% for Hispanics/Latinos, whereas for Whites the growth rate was 6% in that same period.<sup>28</sup> However, complaints of discrimination have also increased. According to the City of Lincoln Commission on Human Rights – which investigates complaints of employment, housing, and public accommodations discrimination – there has been a general trend in Lincoln of increasing numbers of complaints over the past ten years. In 1997, there were 67 complaints of discrimination filed with the Human Rights Commission, and 113 filed in 2007.<sup>29</sup> Ensuring that Lincoln is a vibrant, welcoming city for people of all backgrounds is important to its residents and business community.

**Healthy People:** Lincoln faces many of the same health challenges that communities across the country do. In 2005, the single leading cause of death in Lancaster County was cancer, followed by heart disease.<sup>30</sup> Chronic diseases associated with old age and unhealthy behavior such as smoking and

<sup>25</sup> Lincoln City – Lancaster County, *Comprehensive Plan 2025*, appendix page E-32, available at: [http://www.lincoln.ne.gov/city/plan/complan/2025/ex\\_envir.pdf](http://www.lincoln.ne.gov/city/plan/complan/2025/ex_envir.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> Personal Communication from Scott Holmes, Director, Environmental Health, Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department.

<sup>27</sup> Bruce Dart, *Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department*. Power Point presentation.

<sup>28</sup> Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department, *Estimated population from the American Community Survey (ACS), Lancaster County, 2006 and Change Since 2000*.

<sup>29</sup> City of Lincoln, Commission on Human Rights, *2007 Annual Report 2007*, page 10, available at: <http://www.lincoln.ne.gov/city/mayor/human/pdf/annual07.pdf>.

<sup>30</sup> Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department, *Leading causes of death, Lancaster County 2005*.

poor diets are expected to increase as the population becomes older and lives longer. However, these trends can be delayed by promoting greater physical activity and better nutritional habits. In Lancaster County, projections estimate that the number of residents aged 65 or older in 2010 will increase from 29,306 to 43,214 by 2020.<sup>31</sup> Simultaneously, Lincoln also continues to grow and become much more diverse. According to the Census Bureau, in 2006 about 13% of Lincoln residents reported being minorities or multi-racial.<sup>32</sup> Some minority groups often experience particular challenges, like cultural, linguistic, and financial barriers to health care, higher rates of low birth weight babies, higher infant mortality, and higher rates of other diseases. From 2003-07, the Health Department immunized nearly 70,000 children to protect them against diseases and help prevent the spread of diseases in the community. Still, many public health and environmental health challenges lie ahead for Lincoln's residents.

**Livable Neighborhoods:** Lincoln has a diverse array of neighborhoods, ranging from historic, core areas like Russian Bottoms, Near South, Malone, and Clinton, to outlying parts of the City in the south and southeast that have experienced recent residential and retail growth. Most people agree that neighborhood quality is intimately tied to low crime, access to retail and recreational opportunities, and good schools. Many Lincoln neighborhoods benefit from high overall livability, but others are facing decay and increasing crime. Because many believe that livable, safe neighborhoods are the bedrock of a healthy community, the Mayor's Office has recently announced a comprehensive plan to restore housing, generate economic activity, and reduce crime in some of Lincoln's core neighborhoods.<sup>33</sup>

**Quality of Life:** Lincoln has a variety of amenities that provide a diverse range of cultural and recreational activities for residents and visitors alike. The State Capitol Building attracts visitors from around the world. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus, with the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery and Lied Center, is a year-round hub for educational events and performing arts, as well as the home of Nebraska Cornhusker athletics and Memorial Stadium. Lincoln has an extensive parks, trails, and recreation system. Notable components include 123 parks with 5,169 acres of park land, 85 playgrounds, and 128 miles of recreation, walking, and biking trails that crisscross the City.<sup>34</sup> Lincoln's eight public libraries have nearly one million items on the shelves for residents to borrow, and in 2004, users ranked it second in a national satisfaction survey of libraries.<sup>35</sup> Quality of life can play a major role in overall livability, particularly as Lincoln would like to attract new residents and high wage earning jobs to the community. Lincolnites are scheduled to vote on whether or not to construct a new arena to replace the aging Pershing Center in 2009.



Lincoln is surrounded by prairie and wetlands. Credit: Karin Dalziel.

<sup>31</sup> Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department, *Lancaster County's population 65 and older, 1980 to 2000 and projected for 2010 and 2020*.

<sup>32</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *2006 American Community Survey*.

<sup>33</sup> City of Lincoln Press Release, *Mayor kicks off "Stronger Safer Neighborhoods"*, March 6, 2008, available at: <http://lincoln.ne.gov/City/Mayor/media/2008/030608a.htm>.

<sup>34</sup> Lincoln Parks & Recreation, *Park area facilities inventories* – Summary Table, July 2007.

<sup>35</sup> Cindy Lange-Kubick, "City libraries director to retire," *Lincoln Journal Star*, page B1, February 15, 2008.

**Safety and Security:** Compared to cities the same size, Lincoln has a relatively low overall crime rate. According to FBI statistics, in 2006 there were 5 reported homicides in Lincoln, 162 robberies, and 989 aggravated assaults. For cities the same size that reported crime data to the FBI that year, the national average number of homicides was 12.4, robberies 530.8, and aggravated assaults 832.4.<sup>36</sup> Despite continuing population growth, overall crime rates in Lincoln decreased 4% from 2005 to 2006.<sup>37</sup> Many residents of Lincoln celebrate the “small town” feel of the City when it comes to crime and safety. Others point out that Lincoln must remain vigilant on public safety issues, particularly in core neighborhoods near the center of town.

## A Role for Philanthropy?

Government is certainly not the only provider of basic services in Lincoln. In the future there may be increasing opportunities for coordination between the City and the Lincoln philanthropic community through public/private partnerships.

Lincoln benefits from its numerous non-profit organizations, religious groups, and volunteers who serve the community in many needed ways. Whether its helping to feed or house the most vulnerable, clean and restore the natural environment, support the arts, or expand recreation, Lincoln’s charitable community plays a vibrant role in many aspects of the City’s life. Lincolnites themselves tend to be quite generous. Annually, residents of the City donate an estimated \$150 million to foundations, religious entities, social welfare groups, and the arts and humanities across the country. Local businesses add to that amount. In fact, philanthropy is a significant driver of the national economy. 2006 was the highest year recorded for charitable giving, with nearly \$295 billion in donations provided throughout the country.<sup>38</sup> Local non-profit agencies and faith organizations play a significant role in strategically serving Lincoln in addition to the services provided to the City.

In a survey of nonprofit organizations conducted by the Lincoln Community Foundation, one priority identified was to promote responsible community-wide philanthropy.<sup>39</sup> Other objectives that emerged were fostering community collaboration and being an effective convener.

Tax dollars will continue to support the framework for a city, but private dollars can provide the margin of difference to determine what a city becomes. The University of Nebraska Foundation is a model demonstrating the effectiveness of coordinated fundraising. Founded in 1936, the Foundation now directs over \$100 million dollars annually to the university, a tax supported institution.

As the City and the nonprofit sector work together to understand the overall priorities of the community, the coordination of these efforts may set a platform to discuss the role of philanthropy in relation to tax and City-supported efforts. A more focused and coordinated fundraising effort may result in a greater overall impact to strengthen and improve Lincoln.

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<sup>36</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigations, *2006 Crime in the United States, Table 8: Offenses known to law enforcement*, available at: [http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/cius2006/data/table\\_08.html](http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/cius2006/data/table_08.html). Four other communities with populations ranging from 239,000 to 249,000 reported crime data to the FBI that year: Chandler, AZ; Glendale, AZ; Henderson, NV; and Jersey City, NJ.

<sup>37</sup> Lincoln Police Department, *2006 Annual Report*, page 44, available at: <http://www.lincoln.ne.gov/city/police/annual/06annual.pdf>.

<sup>38</sup> National Philanthropic Trust, *Philanthropy statistics*, available at: [http://www.nptrust.org/philanthropy/philanthropy\\_stats.asp](http://www.nptrust.org/philanthropy/philanthropy_stats.asp).

<sup>39</sup> Personal Communication from Jessica Phillips, Assistant Director, Donor Relations and Marketing Lincoln Community Foundation.



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