



Antelope Valley Design Rules Helpful

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Lincoln's elected officials are about to begin a ticklish phase in development and redevelopment of the Antelope Valley project.

They're about to set the rules for what will be permitted and what will not.

Unsurprisingly, the exercise involves a fair amount of tension. Put us down among those who see rules as necessary and important to achieve a good outcome — an attractive, vibrant swath of the city where investors will feel welcome and where they can have assurance that their investments will be protected against intrusion by businesses that are unsuited to the community's vision for the area.

Planners have used the example of a coffee shop wanting assurance that a car wash would not be allowed to move in next door.

Goals of the new standards and guidelines include creation and protection of an identity for a research corridor, stimulation of job opportunities, creation of pedestrian-friendly streets and an emphasis on sustainable neighborhood design.

The process has roots that go back years to creation of the original Antelope Valley Redevelopment Plan, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's master plan and the pre-existing downtown master plan and design standards.

Development of the new set of standards and guidelines began last year with a series of meetings of stakeholders and interested members of the public with the idea of getting the process headed in the right direction.

In the past few weeks, the draft document has been presented and feedback gathered in a series of meetings. More will be scheduled before the rules go to the Planning Commission and City Council for approval.

As elected officials near decisions on the standards and guidelines, discussion can be expected to follow a familiar pattern. Some business interests will argue in favor of looser standards on the theory that rules mean red tape that will stifle creativity and growth.

Consultants George Crandall and Don Arambula and some business interests — most notably the 2015 Vision group — will argue that the rules are needed in order for the community to achieve its goals.

Proponents of the rules have more than theory on their side of the argument. They can point to other communities that used guidelines to good effect. Those examples include Racine, Wis., Centennial Campus, a research campus at North Carolina State University and even Omaha, which adopted citywide urban design standards last year.

Those examples inspire confidence that practical and realistic regulations can encourage investment. The proposed rules for downtown Lincoln and the Antelope Valley project have been developed carefully after much listening. Some final refinement might be in order, but overall the standards and guidelines are worthy of support.