



Love Library Special Collections

The scale model of the future UNL City campus, as seen by 1932 planners.

Looking across the grounds of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln from a window on the eighth floor of Hamilton Hall, one might ponder a question:

How did this happen?

"If you look at the City Campus, it's quite clear there's never been an overriding set of guidelines," said John Benson, director of Institutional Research Planning and Fiscal Analysis.

Although planning at UNL these days is a long process in which each proposal has to fight its way through a myriad of committees, faculty members and administrators, that hasn't always been the case.

In the 1960s and early '70s, the university experienced a period of rapid growth that required fast action. "Basically, the director of physical plant, chief business officer and chancellor were probably the people who made the decisions," said Ray Coffey, UNL manager of business and finance. "They had increased enrollment and appropriations to get buildings built, and they did it."

In those hectic days of physical planning, most of the decisions were made by top administrators, perhaps in consultation with department heads.

"I can remember a meeting of a chancellor making a statement and just like that the project changed," Coffey said. "Buildings wound up designed without reflecting all requirements needed."

Coffey said enrollment began growing so fast that administrators just wanted to build while money was available. Emphasis was placed on creating space for students rather than on identifying what the academic programs needed.

Buildings put up during this rushed

period of the late '60s and early '70s include Oldfather Hall, Hamilton Hall, the Sheldon Art Gallery, Love Library North and Harper-Schramm-Smith, Abel-Sandoz and Cather-Pound residence halls.

Coffey said that beginning in the mid-'70s, projects began to be scrutinized by a broad group.

"Now things are looked at more closely. The planning process has been refined and extended. Projects get a more complete and comprehensive review at all levels," Coffey said. "In the past decade, we've done a pretty good job of defining programs. As money has become tighter, we've become more efficient in defining the needs of the program to go into the facility."

Projects first are proposed at the department level. From there, several entities, including the Central Planning Committee, the Academic Planning Committee and Institutional Research Planning and Fiscal Analysis, get a chance to debate what is needed before the proposal

reaches the NU Board of Regents and the Nebraska Legislature.

Benson said today's Central Planning Committee is an internal group that includes him, Coffey, the university architect, representatives of Campus Landscape Services and Facilities Management and the Lincoln architecture firm Clark Enersen Partners.

This team meets with the chancellor and other administrators regularly, Benson said, and tries to keep in touch with many representative people, such as the six neighborhood committees from areas surrounding the university and UNL's transportation and parking consultant.

Benson said physical planning by the committee is highly dependent on academic planning. One of the university's current academic goals is to provide "excellent instruction and opportunity for students," he said.

"In order to do that, we need good spaces in which to teach," Benson said. "So we look at teaching facilities now and how they need to be modified or what we need to add as far as teaching space is concerned."

Coffey said that because additional people have entered into the decision-making process, it is possible to pay more consideration to many details in proposed buildings. For example, today's structures are built with added attention to fire safety and other government regulations, he said.

"Twenty or 25 years ago (government regulation) wasn't as important. Now, all plans get reviewed before a shovel hits the ground," Coffey said.

Other planning trends Coffey identified are the growing considerations for service requirements, such as better docking facilities, and energy-saving measures such as extra insulation and double-glass windows.

Benson said that over the last 50 years, campuses have been moving away from classical design traditions.

"Many campuses (in the past) were formally structured and architecture and spaces were very classical externally and internally," he said. "That approach is still valid; it can produce some impressive views. But (in many campuses today), we see a much more

Cohesiveness campus goal

Current proposals must survive intense scrutiny

BY ALAN PHELPS/STAFF REPORTER

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