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Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee
March 13, 2012

[LR473]

The Committee on Government, Military and Veterans Affairs met at 9:30 a.m. on Tuesday, March 13, 2012, in Room 1507 of the State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska, for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on LR473. Senators present: Bill Avery, Chairperson; Les Seiler; Kate Sullivan; and Norm Wallman. Senators absent: Scott Price, Vice Chairperson; Charlie Janssen; Russ Karpisek; and Rich Pahls. [LR473]

SENATOR AVERY: All right, we're...this is the last hearing of the session for the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee. My name is Bill Avery. I chair the committee and represent District 28 here in the south-central Lincoln. We're pleased to have with us today Senator Mike Flood, Speaker of the Legislature. The other senators, Senator Pahls, Seiler and Janssen and Price are running a little bit late today. On my immediate right is Christy Abraham, the committee counsel. We have a couple of senators here, Karpisek and Sullivan, who...Karpisek will not be here; he is delayed. Senator Sullivan, though, is probably coming. [LR473]

SENATOR FLOOD: Here she is. [LR473]

SENATOR AVERY: And Senator Norm Wallman from Cortland is here. [LR473]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Sorry. [LR473]

SENATOR AVERY: And on the end down here is Sherry Shaffer, who is the committee clerk. And our page for today is Emily Gilmore from Lincoln. And there comes Senator Seiler. Thank you. [LR473]

SENATOR SEILER: How you doing? [LR473]

SENATOR AVERY: So counting the Speaker, we have a quorum. All right, we are here today for the purpose of a hearing to approve a gift of materials of \$450,000 of labor and in-kind work from the Norfolk Veterans' Home Heroes Park Foundation to the Norfolk Veterans' Home Heroes Park project for Phase I improvements to Heroes Park. I'm going to dispense with the reading of procedures since this is an usual, special hearing, and invite you up to tell us what you want to do. This looks interesting. [LR473]

JERRY EISENHAUER: Chairman Avery and members of the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee, my name is Jerry Eisenhauer, J-e-r-r-y E-i-s-e-n-h-a-u-e-r, administrator of the Norfolk Veterans' Home. I am here to testify in support of the acceptance of the gift from the Norfolk Veterans' Home Heroes Park Foundation for the enhancement of our veterans' home in Norfolk by the establishment of what is referred to as Heroes Park. Heroes Park will be basically be our home's backyard. It will be a place for our veterans and their families and visitors to enjoy the fresh air of the

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outdoors. They will be able to relax and visit in pleasant surroundings, in open spaces, perhaps enjoying a picnic not only to harken back to the special times that they spent together at family reunions and picnics years ago but to create new memories, hold new events, and to know that there are meaningful and special days yet to come. Although we look forward to the community using their collective green thumb to establish gardens for all to enjoy, we are committed to maintain the park within our resource parameters. This gift from the Norfolk Veterans' Home Heroes Park Foundation is comprised of in-kind donations of grading, subsequent overseeding, and activities necessary for such development. These gestures of support, this commitment to caring has been administered by the Norfolk Veterans' Home Heroes Park Foundation. Therefore, although this gift from the Norfolk Veterans' Home Heroes Park Foundation is a singular gift, it represents the contributions of many caring individuals, businesses, and organizations. We are grateful and humbled for this expression of support from the northeast Nebraska community. We welcome veterans and their families to use this park. We will be proud to have the Norfolk Veterans' Home a community focus for celebrations and commemorations. We invite you, our policymakers, to visit Heroes Park for the groundbreaking once it is completed. First, though, we must respect our processes and exercise our collective due diligence. Therefore, I request that this committee act favorably on this resolution and send to the full body in hopes of favorable consideration. I am more than pleased to be able to answer any questions that you might have. Thank you. [LR473]

SENATOR AVERY: Thank you, sir. Eisenhower--great name. [LR473]

JERRY EISENHAUER: Yes, sir, thank you. [LR473]

SENATOR AVERY: This figure, \$450,000, that includes land too? [LR473]

JERRY EISENHAUER: No. [LR473]

SENATOR AVERY: It doesn't? [LR473]

JERRY EISENHAUER: It includes just the working of the land that already exists. [LR473]

SENATOR AVERY: So the veterans home already owns the property. [LR473]

JERRY EISENHAUER: Yes. Division of Building Services, yes. [LR473]

SENATOR AVERY: Uh-huh, okay. Questions from the committee? Senator Sullivan. [LR473]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Senator Avery. Thank you for your comments, and it

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looks like an exciting project. How many residents do you have at the home? [LR473]

JERRY EISENHAUER: We currently have about 135 residents. We have a capacity of 159. [LR473]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Okay, so this park will just basically, for families and their residents, just add a nice space for them to use, I presume? [LR473]

JERRY EISENHAUER: Definitely. [LR473]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Okay. [LR473]

JERRY EISENHAUER: It will be, like I said, pretty much a backyard because right now our members have some small courtyards that they can go out to off of their living areas. But they need a backyard because families come in to take their members out in wheelchairs, scooters, and they have to use our parking lot, basically, which is...it doesn't look correct, it's not right, it's dangerous, and our veterans deserve better. [LR473]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: So the park is...that will be developed will obviously be handicapped accessible, and it will be... [LR473]

JERRY EISENHAUER: Yes, ma'am. [LR473]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Okay, all right. [LR473]

SENATOR AVERY: Any other questions? This is Phase I? [LR473]

JERRY EISENHAUER: Yes, sir. [LR473]

SENATOR AVERY: How many other phases do you have? [LR473]

JERRY EISENHAUER: If I am correct, I believe there will be one other phase. [LR473]

SENATOR AVERY: And that would...and we're going to hear about that next? [LR473]

JERRY EISENHAUER: When it is ready to be gifted, yes, sir. [LR473]

SENATOR AVERY: Okay. Any other questions? Thank you, Mr. Eisenhower. Anyone else wish to testify in support of this resolution? This is Phase II, right? (Laughter) [LR473]

RON STAUFFER: No. My name is Ron Stauffer. I am the campaign chair for the project

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and a volunteer... [LR473]

SENATOR AVERY: How do you spell your name? [LR473]

RON STAUFFER: Pardon? [LR473]

SENATOR AVERY: How do you spell your name? [LR473]

RON STAUFFER: S-t-a-u-f-f-e-r, resident of Norfolk and a volunteer within the city. And I volunteered to be the campaign chair to raise some funds for this, make sure that there's some endowment funds to maintain it. The first part of the project was to form a board. And we have some community leaders, a very strong foundation board that will be around in perpetuity and also, like I said, endowment funds to make sure it's maintainable. The \$400,000 gift that was given is by a local, Kenny Porter, who does dirt work; and that's an in-kind gift, so he's really stepped up for this. We feel very strongly that the veterans need to be honored. They need to have a nice place to be able to go outside, and their families take them out there and walk around. There will be walking paths and everything of that sort. [LR473]

SENATOR AVERY: The endowment you talked about,... [LR473]

RON STAUFFER: Yes. [LR473]

SENATOR AVERY: ...that's for maintenance and repair? [LR473]

RON STAUFFER: Yes. [LR473]

SENATOR AVERY: How much will that be? [LR473]

RON STAUFFER: Probably around \$400,000. [LR473]

SENATOR AVERY: In addition to this amount we're looking at here? [LR473]

RON STAUFFER: Oh, yeah. [LR473]

SENATOR AVERY: Yeah, that's wise. Centennial Mall over here where we're redoing that... [LR473]

RON STAUFFER: Hmm. [LR473]

SENATOR AVERY: ...and they're building in a \$1.5 million maintenance endowment. [LR473]

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RON STAUFFER: Yes. You learn that with experience in other fund-raisers. [LR473]

SENATOR AVERY: Oh, yes. [LR473]

RON STAUFFER: We had to go back and build an endowment. People don't like to give to endowments, so you need to build it in, in the initial project,... [LR473]

SENATOR AVERY: Right. [LR473]

RON STAUFFER: ...so that you can assure that it's going to be around and maintained and kept properly up. [LR473]

SENATOR AVERY: Any other questions? Yes, Senator Sullivan. [LR473]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Senator Avery. I just thank you very much. And this is, as I said, an ambitious project. I'm just trying to get a visual scene of what it's going to look like. So \$400,000 for dirt work,... [LR473]

RON STAUFFER: Right. [LR473]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: ...that will include maybe smoothing out the area. Are you going to have a pond or anything like that? I mean, is there landscaping? [LR473]

RON STAUFFER: There is...yes, there will be landscaping. There will be a pond which somebody has donated a windmill to put by the pond. And basically what it will be is a catch pool for water drainage off of the site and will not have water in it all the time, but in the rainy season it would have water in that pond. It's a total of about eight acres. There's going to be a lot of walking paths and things like that and eventually activities for the families. [LR473]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Trees, I presume? [LR473]

RON STAUFFER: Trees, many trees. We're working with NRD and some other state agencies to do some arboretum. We're putting in for grants with different agencies that give grants, you know, to put trees in and so on and so forth. [LR473]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: So that endowment for maintenance will include taking care of the landscaping and the mowing and everything that will go with that. [LR473]

RON STAUFFER: Right, right. Actually, it will reduce the mowing from what there is now because we're going to use a lot of native grasses which will not be mowed. Right now, they have to maintain, I believe, the whole eight acres. [LR473]

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_____: Right. [LR473]

RON STAUFFER: And so this will reduce it down quite a bit as far as the maintenance that the veterans' home will have to do. [LR473]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Okay, thank you. [LR473]

SENATOR AVERY: Any other questions? Thank you. Thank you for your service to this project. [LR473]

RON STAUFFER: You bet. Thank you. [LR473]

SENATOR AVERY: Anyone else wish to speak in support? Anyone wish to speak in opposition? Any neutral testimony? Don't see any, thank you very much. That ends the hearing on the resolution and the hearing for today. Thanks for coming. [LR473]