As the University of Nebraska-Lincoln continues efforts to grow enrollment to 30,000 students, private housing companies are preparing for the surge by developing housing complexes near campus.

Since 2002, 914 rooms have been built by private housing companies near campus, creating beds for 1,922 people. Two more complexes are under construction currently – Aspen Lincoln and 8N Lofts – and will add 354 rooms with 1256 beds.

8N is owned by Trinitas Student Housing, which also has properties in other states, including Arkansas, Illinois and Georgia.

“We are always concerned about a market getting over built, but we believe that the Lincoln market is a strong market and the desire for properties like 8N Lofts is high,” said Alie Hrabe, Vice President of Marketing and Leasing for Trinitas.

Hrabe said Trinitas uses a lengthy research process to analyze markets before deciding to build.

“We look at population growth, enrollment trends, demographics of renters, quantity and quality of existing housing, as well as pipeline projects,” Hrabe said. “We then look to develop a product that we believe is needed and desired in the market.”

After analyzing downtown Lincoln, Hrabe said Trinitas came to the conclusion a housing complex would be successful.

“The Lincoln market has been in need of additional housing for quite some time and recent developments are simply providing the supply for the enrollment and population growth downtown Lincoln has seen over the last several years,” Hrabe said.

While housing complexes continue to be built downtown, UNL has no plans to build additional residential buildings, even with the impending demolition of Cather Hall and Pound Hall.

“We did a study in late 2009 into 2010 and the result of the study was that it was going to be inordinately expensive to renovate Cather and Pound halls,” said Sue Gildersleeve, Director of Housing for UNL. “So, in summer of 2011, we proposed to the Board of Regents that we would build University Suites and Eastside Suites.”

Even though Pound is still used to house students during the academic year, Gildersleeve said there are enough empty rooms in other halls to offset the loss in rooms.

Gildersleeve said the housing department keeps a close eye on enrollment and they analyze how many rooms they need.

“We are always watching,” Gildersleeve said. “We don't want to over-build, but we don’t want to be in a situation where students who want to live on campus aren’t able to because there isn’t enough capacity.”

With the recent growth in housing, Gildersleeve said she has yet to see an impact on students living on campus.

“Last year, we didn't really observe any difference,” Gildersleeve said. “Parkhaus had opened a few years previously and 50/50 had opened the year before. This past summer, Latitude opened and then Prime Place. We didn't notice a big change.”

Brandon Garrett, a long range planner for the city of Lincoln, said the downtown housing options allow residents access to local attractions.

“There’s a trend of it being more popular to live in the downtown area with all of the amenities,” Garrett said. “Restaurants, bars, entertainment, campus, employment, sporting events – those are some of the main reasons for the student housing.”

Garrett said the added residents will enliven the area.

“Once these other two large developments are completed next fall, we may see a different environment downtown,” Garrett said. “By that time, we will have added 3,000 beds. That basically translates into a number of people. That’s larger than many cities and even counties in Nebraska.”

Gildersleeve said she sees the downtown housing complexes as viable options for UNL students.

“We certainly don't expect students to stay on campus all four years,” Gildersleeve said. “That's not realistic. We wouldn't have room for all of them. It's a good thing if there's good, quality housing that is close to because we know students do better if they live near campus and can easily access the campus facilities.”