

Meeting Notes
"Neighborhood Integrity" Meetings 2-4-08
College Station Texas

NOTE:

1. *The "issues" listed in this document were each identified by at least one person attending the particular session. Others present may have disagreed with whether a particular issue exists or is a problem if it does, but people were asked not to contradict others at the meeting. This is thus what staff and the consultant believe is a reasonably complete list of issues raised, but it is not a consensus or final list. A separate document provides the consultant's attempt to synthesize and simplify the issues.*
2. *The "solutions" listed in this document were each identified by at least one person attending a particular session. It was very clear at the meeting that others have concerns (ranging from moderate to severe) about some of these possible solutions. The suggested "solutions" listed here are presented merely as a list of items raised by participants – and not as specific recommendations. There will be more discussion of possible consensus or compromise solutions on 23 February.*

Opening Session

Issues

- University role in solution (not been included before)
- Student adjustment to new environment contributes to behavioral issues
- Apparent lack of consequences
 - Parking on street
 - Noise from parties
 - RV/Boat Parking
- Lack of communication to and from city
- Property maintenance
- Perceived lack of code enforcement
 - On-street parking
 - Number of unrelated
 - Parties – what happened to no tolerance
- Student perceptions of sense of animosity from neighbors/city towards all students
- Inconsistent responses by City
 - Zero Tolerance Policy not always in effect

- Inadequate maintenance of some commercial properties near neighborhoods contributes to this problem
- Procedural and other limitations on City under state zoning enabling laws
- Question raised about ability of City to enforce covenants
- Students may not always provide adequate pet care
- Sprawl
 - This problem may lead some residents to move farther out
 - Won't find students out that far
- This issue may limit the attraction of College Station as a retirement community for former Aggies
- Question raised about noise abatement – can city control vehicular noise?
- Possible adverse effect of rental properties on single-family property values
- Density of rental units contribute to this issue
- Student Participation
 - Students present pleased to be involved and regret that they were not involved earlier
 - At least one neighborhood representative expressed the view that students should not be involved
- Many neighborhoods built under design standards that are not adequate for many uses today – particularly off-street parking
- Aging housing stock (see issued immediately above)
- 37,000 students living off campus
- Parking a particular problem where it results in blocking driveways

Solutions

- Rental Registration
- Neighborhood information packet
 - Distributed to all new residents, including renters
 - Summarizes covenants and sets standard of expectations
- Neighborhood relations dept. important
- City might provide model lease language, giving landlords more tools to use in dealing with tenants who pay their rent but are neighborhood problems
 - Many (most?) landlords currently use Texas Apartment Association lease, which provides a good model
- More code enforcement officers

Current level of service (information provided by staff at meeting):

- Five people, including one supervisor
- Drive by most properties in city two times per week

- 96% of current enforcement activity is proactive (initiated by City, rather than by complaint)
- Ordinance limiting occupancy of single-family dwellings to not more than two unrelated persons
 - Such restrictions might be imposed city-wide or just in designated neighborhoods
- Separate zoning district for rental units
- Review effectiveness of existing ordinances:
 - Enforce existing ordinances before drafting new ones
 - May need to be rewritten

Neighborhood Session

Issues

- Deterioration and apparent lack of maintenance of rental properties
- Requiring signatures of 60% property owners to sign petitions to create neighborhood conservation district seems too high to some
- Since parking is a major part of the issue, maybe City should reevaluate parking rules:
 - Consider prohibiting on-street parking on all streets that are 27 feet wide or less?
 - Part of the problem arises from parking large SUVs and pick-up trucks, which are common in College Station but much wider than cars
- Some neighborhoods don't have sidewalks
- Associations need to know the ordinances and how to target the program
- Rotation of city staff big difficulty in achieving neighborhood goals
- Improved communication may not make a difference in student behavior – at least some present believe that there is already a “wealth” of information available to students and that they do not pay much attention to it

Solutions

- Allow each neighborhood to design guidelines for addressing rental housing in that neighborhood
 - Process would be same as with the neighborhood conservation district but would be expanded to address rental housing issues

- Decrease required number of signatures to from neighborhood conservation district to 50% + 1
- Rental Registration
- Parking permit program to limit on-street parking
- Creation of Council of Neighborhood Associations to discuss issues and communicate
- Question raised as to whether the City should be enforcing architectural standards contained in covenants

Answer from consultant and staff was "no;" however, some basic design standards are included in the neighborhood conservation district, and those can be enforced by City.

Other discussion

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Investor/Realtor Session

Issues

- Some developers have tried to address parking issue by providing rear parking provided for some units
- Developers and investors have turned to renting single-family houses in part because City has zoned against duplexes in areas near campus
- Issue now affects more of City, because price of homes no longer dictates areas where parents buy for students to use and sub-lease
- Issues not a function of occupancy – landlords do not believe that reducing occupancy from 4 to 2 will solve the problems

Solutions

- Professional lawn maintenance helps
 - Provided for large complexes and some neighborhoods of rental housing
 - Provided by some landlords if tenants fail to do it
 - Installing sprinkler systems to keep landscaping green helps
- Point system tied to rental registration
 - Cumulative
 - Gainesville, FL
- Owners should have local representation
- Increased street width with smaller lots
- Might have different design standards for proposed rental neighborhood, but hard to implement and enforce
- Rear alley or other access to rear parking seems like good idea

Student/A&M Admin Session

Issues

- Issue is trying to solve the residents issues
- Students feel discriminated against
- Students want to be part of the solution
- College Station 101 – student version of Citizens University
- Generational difference in finding solutions to problems, don't have to limit ourselves to get what we want
- Cultural differences with international graduate students – international student orientation

Solutions

- Original proposal in Living Among Aggies has been revised
 - Revised proposal has little involvement of University Administration
 - Depends more on student leadership
- Fine students who abuse citizen privileges
- New student conferences as an avenue to start education
 - Have Neighborhood Services participate?
 - Invite representatives of homeowners associations?
- Student mediation and intervention may be helpful, because students respond differently to other students vs. cops, CE officers, etc.
- Handing out Neighborhood Info Sheets could help
- Tickets deferment/dismissal program – Living among Aggies
- Invite student leaders to meet with neighborhood associations or City-wide Council of Neighborhood Associations