Student Family Housing Redevelopment Committee – Meeting Minutes Summary

Date: 3-10-2015        Time: 1:00PM – 2:30PM PST

Participants: Associate Dean Lenora Timm (Chair), Derby (Project Manager), Brittany Derieg (Project Assistant), Graduate Student Assistant to the Dean and Chancellor Angel Hinzo, Graduate Student Representatives Cutcha Risling Baldy, Carlos Colman Meixner, Gordon Rees, and Paul Johnson, and Undergraduate Student Representative Ryan Reynolds.

Discussion

There is an ongoing issue with the process to apply and move-in to Orchard and Solano Park. Due to the month-to-month lease system, which benefits students who are currently living at the Parks, potential applicants have no way of knowing which month will give them the best chance of being able to move-in, and often cannot string their family along for several months of uncertain housing. This drives many potential residents away, who are forced to sign other leases before they hear from the Parks.

Regarding building the new housing complex in stages: if our recommendation is that the campus must construct and manage student family housing, and not a third party, and that we need to at least maintain the current number of affordable units, we may need to rebuild in stages. According to housing and central campus planning the University cannot afford to take out a $100+ million loan, which is what would be required to build 400 units on the Orchard Park property. However, they would be able to take out a loan half that size, build the first 200 units, and within a few years, take out another loan to build the remaining 200. This is how they have built undergraduate housing in the past few decades. This plan heavily relies on the ability of Solano Park to remain open for the foreseeable future. How long can Solano Park remain open before the maintenance on it exceeds the revenue it generates?

During the community workshop the idea of building in towers was discussed. By building one or two towers we could stack all of the market rate units so that the rest of the buildings could be for families and would not have to be build above 3 or 4 stories. This would also allow us to add as many market rate units as needed to subsidize the affordable units without taking up any more green space. However, there has been significant research done which shows that crime and misconduct increases significantly in housing above 4 stories.

Community Workshop Summary: Quality of Life

1. What makes the parks special?
   - Community activities
   - Playgrounds and greenspace for children
   - Communal values
     - Education
     - Modest lifestyle
     - Study time (and other shared student needs)
• In the past, units were furnished. This encouraged residents to deprioritize material possessions and spend more time developing other, more communal values (and they did so by spending lots of time outside of their apartments).
• Families are together / encourages students to start families if they want to
• Support for families
• Safety
• Downtown Access (Solano Park)
• Nearby food access (Solano Park)
• Sharing of resources and information
• Affordability
• The “vibe”
• Strong sense of community
• Tree-friendly
• Connected to the environment
• Hub for education

2. Living in Orchard and/or Solano Park has helped me develop as a person.
Identities Reinforced by the Park Community:
• Extroverted nursing mom (increased my confidence/pride in being a nursing mother)
• Successful first generation college student
• Proud student (encouraged me that I made the right decision in pursuing a graduate degree)
• Advocate for families
• International student with a family
• Feminist
• Disabled student without boundaries
• Married student
• Part of a diverse international community
• Undergraduate researcher
• Future applicant

3. How can we make the Parks more interactive?
• Add a community thrift store
• Schedule regular community yard sales / Aggie Reuse
• Increased garden access / Have garden in center of community, not off to one side (more likely to be actively used and maintained year round)
• More kids activities
• More couples activities
• Make office hours more flexible
• Increase the Parks online identity
• Create an ongoing student advisory committee
• Increase the student/resident voice in decision making that will affect the community

4. How does family housing support students & families?
• Community babysitting / caring for children
• Clothes and other items are passed on to younger children through the community
• Shared resources
• Serves as a center for support / shared adversity
• Connects graduate and undergraduate student families
• Bathrooms for families / babies
• International community
• Proximity to campus
  o Helpful for nursing mothers
  o Allows for a flexible work schedule (experiments do not follow a 9-5 work day. Neither do children)
  o Reduces stress when you know you can get right back home to check on your children while working on campus
  o Encourages travel on foot and bike (reduces car use)

5. How can community members be better supported?
• Increased daycare access (increased information about access)
• Community run programs
  o Writing retreats in/near the parks
  o Study nights
  o Open access to the community center / streamlined reservation system (online?)
• Set fee per month to tap into campus resources

Community Workshop Summary: Facilities

1. What do you want to see more of?
• More/larger windows. More natural light
• Views from patios/windows are important
• Nice architectural style (urban) (#3)
• Like the buildings to look different from each other / colors (#4)
• Trees
• More interesting green space
• More social/sitting/gathering spaces/tables
• Raised beds for gardens
• More enclosed green space / open space with function / Age specific open space
• Passive solar
• Natural ventilation / Increased sound proofing for train
• Private spaces
• Pool (if affordable)
• Places to do different sports
• Designated parking spaces rather than all around
  o currently difficult to see children, safety concern
• Add a wall/landscape feature to separate SP from vagrant population

2. What do you want to maintain?
• Central playground
• Good paths and accessibility between buildings
• Balconies
• Focused lighting
• “Human scale” buildings
• Playgrounds that are close to apartments / good visibility on playgrounds
• Paths for bike riding

3. What are your concerns or comments on densification?
• Don’t want it to be too crowded/uncomfortable (beehive)
• Mixing housing types allows for more movement, helps reduce feeling of density
• Liked many of the denser examples shown, would live there if they were affordable
• Don’t want it to look like a hotel (#3)
• Don’t want too much concrete/pavement
• Willing to share balconies

Community Workshop Summary: Affordability

1. What does affordability mean?
• 30% of income would be ideal, but is unrealistic. 50% should be limit ($900-$1100)
• Sliding scale rent (with lowest determined by average GSR salary)
  o How would this apply to undergraduate students?

2. How can we meet these goals?
• Green tech to reduce cost (initially cost prohibitive but save money over time)
  o Funding from University or Donor interested in sustainability?
• Increase information about enrolling in Section 8 Housing
  o Many students are eligible, but few think it is possible to get in
• Seek nonprofit, alternative forms of financing the loan
  o Can the UC system act as lender (low interest rate?)
• Lobby for exemptions to codes that mandate cost-prohibitive designs/features
  o Are the parks on City or State land?
• Reserves from the Parks helped pay for undergraduate housing, why isn’t undergraduate housing helping to pay for graduate housing?
Hold a fundraising gala; university invites potential donors, they meet residents

How do subsidies work for childcare? Could something similar be done with housing?

3. **How can our affordability goals be translated into recommendations for the Parks?**
   - We should be increasing the number of affordable units to better meet demand
   - Consider towers with families on bottom and “richer” residents on top? At what story does the extra income from more market-rate units cover the cost of the more expensive building materials (steel, etc)?
   - More floors in general (build up not out)
   - Add micro-units for single graduate students
   - 3 General Choices:
     - Regular multi-bedroom units
     - Micro-Units
     - Shared living space units
   - Reduce administrative overhead, increase student leadership
   - Pool profits from market rate units and distribute according to need
     - Factors to consider: grad programs pay differently, number of children
     - What to do about professional students? No salary while in school, but larger promise of future income. How much do they pay relative to TAs and GSRs?
     - Deciding rents for undergraduate students also difficult (should family contributions be considered equal to graduate monthly salary?)
   - Keep the total number of “affordable” and “market-rate” units flexible, based on make-up of community year to year. Years with more market-rate units can generate more income to cover years with more affordable units
   - Don’t separate affordable and market-rate units. Mix all together.
   - Increase transparency of unit availability. Advertise ideal times to apply and move-in based on past patterns.