

RESOLUTION NO. 2006-01-002R

RESOLUTION TO ENDORSE THE WEST URBANA NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION
DOCUMENT ENTITLED "PRESERVING AND REVITALIZING THE WEST URBANA
NEIGHBORHOOD"

WHEREAS, the City of Urbana is an active participant in the West Urbana Neighborhood Association's University-Neighborhood-City Group, whose goals are to improve the quality of life for all residents of the neighborhood, to maintain an attractive campus gateway, to preserve the West Urbana residential neighborhood, and to promote pride in property ownership and neighborhood residency; and

WHEREAS, in coordination with the University-Neighborhood City Group, the West Urbana Neighborhood Association has prepared a document entitled "Preserving and Revitalizing the West Urbana Neighborhood", the purpose of which is to promote increased participation by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in efforts to stabilize the West Urbana neighborhood by maintaining a solid base of owner-occupied, single family residential housing and investing in the neighborhood through active collaboration with the City and the community; and

WHEREAS, the goals and recommendations set forward in the "Preserving and Revitalizing the West Urbana Neighborhood" are consistent with the City's 2005 Comprehensive Plan policies and strategies for the West Urbana area to explore neighborhood conservation designation, to promote single family residential uses in areas zoned for single family residential, to preserve existing zoning protections, and to respect the traditional physical development pattern for new development; and

WHEREAS, increased participation by the University in efforts to stabilize the West Urbana neighborhood in recognition of its value as an asset for faculty recruitment and retention and consistent with the efforts of other major universities is critical for the successful achievement of the goals set forward by the City and neighborhood, as expressed in the 2005 Comprehensive Plan and in the document entitled "Preserving and Revitalizing the West Urbana Neighborhood"; and

WHEREAS, the Urbana City Council desires to express its support for the document entitled "Preserving and Revitalizing the West Urbana Neighborhood."

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that we, the members of the City Council of the City of Urbana; do hereby endorse the document entitled "Preserving and Revitalizing the West Urbana Neighborhood"; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this resolution, duly adopted, shall be sent to the Chancellor of the University of Illinois.

PASSED by the City Council this _____ day of January, 2006

Phyllis D. Clark, City Clerk

APPROVED by the Mayor this _____ day of January, 2006

Laurel Lunt Prussing, Mayor



Preserving and Revitalizing the West Urbana Neighborhood

“The university has benefited from the values of our community and from the attractive life here that lures fine faculty....” –Chancellor Richard Hermanⁱ

“Central Illinois will never be able to offer a mountain range or ocean for scenic backdrop to its campus. However...neighborhoods such as West Urbana do offer a setting many Universities can only dream of. The quality of life in such a neighborhood is a rare asset...”

–CFA, Department of Finance, College of Business

“My extraordinarily short commute (8 blocks) has allowed me to remain a bench researcher despite having a large laboratory and serving as a department head.”

–Alumni Professor and Head, Department of Microbiology

“One of the major reasons that I chose to accept the job offer from Illinois was that my family and I would be able to live in a community where neighbors really know each other and where I could live within walking distance of both my laboratory and the excellent, neighborhood public schools.”

–Assistant Professor, Cell and Developmental Biology

“This summer I was offered a tenured position at the Max-Planck-Institute for Astrophysics... my decision to remain in Illinois is in part due to the excellent quality of life I enjoy in West Urbana.”

–Assistant Professor of Physics and Astronomy

“...the area of west Urbana where I live...is very convenient to the University, but it is also very fragile. The university will definitely have a substantial impact on the future of this neighborhood.”

–Professor, Department of Mathematics

Preserving and Revitalizing the West Urbana Neighborhood

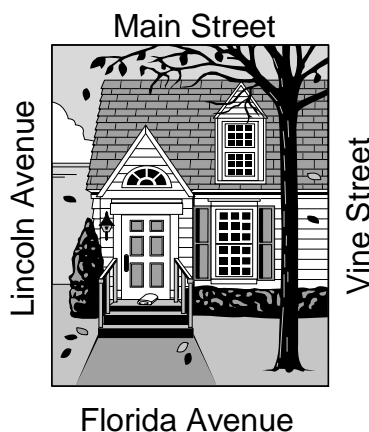
Executive Summary

The West Urbana neighborhood is critical in recruiting and retaining faculty at the University of Illinois. It offers affordable housing adjacent to campus in a historic, quiet, tree-lined residential neighborhood. West Urbana residents enjoy a quality of life with an easy commute to campus, excellent schools, a nationally ranked public library, and other family amenities. Faculty members who live in the West Urbana neighborhood are quite explicit about its role in attracting them to come and remain at the University of Illinois.

Unfortunately, the high profitability of turning single-family homes into rentals threatens a healthy balance of owner-occupied homes. Dilapidated rental properties invite the mindset ‘to raze, build cheap and rent high.’ There is a resulting increase in noise, crime, traffic, limited parking availability, and drug and alcohol abuse at student houses when large social gatherings take place. This negatively impacts and erodes the quality lifestyle for faculty living near campus. These problems also diminish the attractiveness of the Campus Gateway, the President’s residence, and the redevelopment of Orchard Downs.

Nationwide, colleges and universities have recognized that maintaining a solid base of owner-occupied, single-family residential housing revitalizes the residential neighborhoods adjoining their campuses. Their proactive collaborations with cities and neighborhoods have resulted in major financial programs that provide low- and no-interest loans, mortgages, and grants for the purchase of homes, renovation of properties, and conversion of rentals to owner-occupancy. They have also supported revitalizing commercial areas.

The University of Illinois can be a leader by actively joining with the City and neighborhood to stabilize and revitalize this critical tool for the recruitment and retention of its faculty, and to assure the attractive life in this heritage neighborhood remains for generations to come.



Why Should the University of Illinois Care About West Urbana?

West Urbana Is an Asset for Faculty Recruitment and Retention

Faculty members concur with Chancellor Richard Herman that the attractive life here (especially West Urbana) is what lures fine faculty. See the attached letters from faculty and staff.

“I believe that this neighborhood is a resource to be cultivated by the university, not least for the purposes of retaining and attracting faculty... [M]y decision to remain in Illinois is in part due to the excellent quality of life I enjoy in West Urbana. Leading contributors to this quality of life are the proximity to campus, the safety and beauty of the neighborhood and also a sense of history and continuity... My colleagues from our peer institutions are very pleasantly surprised when they come to visit me here...”

–*Assistant Professor of Physics*

“...so the deciding factor became living standard. On that account, there was no contest between Davis and Urbana... The West Urbana neighborhood offered affordable, beautiful homes within walking distance of the university. An investment in West Urbana is money in the bank for UI.”

–*Ecologist, USDA-ARS, Assistant Professor of Crop Sciences*

“Several years ago I was offered an attractive endowed chair by another Big Ten university... We were unwilling to change our lifestyle and stayed in Urbana.”

–*Alumni Professor and Head, Department of Microbiology*

“...I was reluctant to give up big city amenities for a much smaller town...this neighborhood was the determining factor in changing my mind. No other university offered this type of setting...”

–*Associate Professor of Mathematics*

The neighborhood was absolutely one of the key selling points... over other top-ranked national universities in Bryan’s decision to accept ...the position...”

–*Assistant Professor, Agricultural and Consumer Economics*

What are the Issues Facing West Urbana?

The Profitability of Converting Single-Family Homes to Rentals, and to “Build Cheap and Rent High” Threaten the Stability of a Diverse, Long-Standing Residential Neighborhood

Older neighborhoods near campus face preservation and enhancement challenges. Smart growth policies must be evaluated in light of the realities and pressures of trends in college towns. Development opportunities next to campus are, as one real estate developer said, as desirable as “beachfront property.” There is a strong profit motive to convert single-family homes to rentals and for developers to “build cheap and rent high.” Both activities endanger the stability of a historic, residential neighborhood.

One need only visit the Champaign neighborhood next to the University of Illinois campus to see that there is virtually no neighborhood of older homes left; in fact, the developers have replaced those homes with box-like apartment buildings appealing only to students. Gone is the mix of people that creates a stable, diverse neighborhood. Many residents only live in their campus

housing eight months a year, contributing to the instability and transient nature of the neighborhood.

“We notice with growing uneasiness the tendency to replace single family houses with apartment buildings and parking lots.”

–*Professor, Institute for Communications Research*

“My husband and I work hard to recruit new faculty to our university. Almost without exception the potential recruits want to buy a home in the State Street area. They are thrilled with the affordable prices, compared to East and West coast prices, the proximity and the ambiance. If the neighborhood were to continue to include more student rentals and fewer families it could seriously impede our efforts to recruit the best and brightest to our community.”

–*AICP Planning Consultant*

“I see some of the undesirable characteristics of eastern Champaign creeping into west Urbana.... I firmly believe that students and permanent residents can co-exist, but rules must be established and enforced that keep slumlords from destroying the east side of campus like they have done on the west. Once the charm and the trees are gone, it would be nearly impossible to get them back.”

–*Interim Co-Director, Manager of Copying Services*

What Will Stabilize the Neighborhood?

Maintain a Solid Base of Owner-Occupied, Single-Family Residential Housing

In 1990, the Urbana City Council had the vision to pass the Downtown to Campus Plan. It was adopted because of a “growing concern that the neighborhood’s many single-family homes, historic characteristics and unique appearance are being lost.”ⁱⁱ The concepts put forward in the Downtown to Campus Plan were carried forward into the 2005 Comprehensive Plan. This Plan identifies a number of strategies for neighborhood stability in the West Urbana area, including:

- Exploration of a neighborhood conservation district.
- Promotion of single family residential uses in areas zoned for single family.
- Preservation of existing zoning protections.
- New development to respect the traditional physical development pattern.

There are also specific strategies to address the “Lincoln/Busey Corridor” area from Illinois to Pennsylvania.

The Plan has been critical in maintaining the neighborhood one sees today. However, it is not sufficient. To encourage and maintain the stability and viability of residential neighborhoods, home ownership must be vigorously promoted. Specific benefits of a vibrant, stable residential neighborhood include:

- A positive image for the campus gateway.
- A positive image of Urbana when traveling from campus-to-downtown Urbana.
- Improved property maintenance.
- Increases in property values which in turn increases city tax revenues.

- A neighborhood in Urbana for those who value homes with historic features.
- An environment for families with children to walk to neighborhood schools, an award-winning public library and a vibrant downtown.
- Year-round consumers for downtown Urbana shops, restaurants and Market in the Square.

Many residents advocate for a healthy balance between the number of owner-occupied, single-family homes and rental properties to maintain a thriving, vibrant neighborhood. University students surely enhance the vitality of life in West Urbana, but problems are bound to occur, when rental properties dominate neighborhood blocks designed for owner-occupied, single family use. These problems include increased noise, crime and traffic, limited parking availability, and drug and alcohol abuse at student houses when large social gatherings take place.

As the balance shifts and problems intensify, the quality of life is degraded for all residents. Property values are eroded, as Urbana taxpayers subsidize profits on rentals in West Urbana.ⁱⁱⁱ The University loses a critical tool for recruitment and retention. An unsightly neighborhood diminishes the Campus Gateway.

“West Urbana is my idea of a perfect college town residential area—stately older homes with character, tree-lined streets, and a mix of faculty, staff and students.”
–Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering

“...the remarkable growth in the affluence of the undergraduate student body over the past ten years has put a lot of pressure on the neighborhood... This has resulted in a striking growth in the number of student-oriented apartment buildings. These have replaced some houses of beauty and character with what are often remarkably ugly edifices. The increased student affluence has also motivated landlords to purchase single-family dwellings and convert them to student housing... The blight of Stoughton Street in both Urbana and Champaign is a prime example of how this progression can destroy a neighborhood.”
–Alumni Professor and Head, Department of Microbiology

“During the 15 years that I have worked on Gregory Avenue, the portion of Champaign that is just east of the University has become an unsightly trash pit. The streets are strewn with litter...The lawns are dirt patches because the residents park...on what was grass...”
–Interim Co-Director, Manager of Copying Services

What Has Been the Involvement of Local Governments?

Protecting the Taxpayers’ Investment by Investing in the Neighborhood

Local governments, including the City of Urbana, Urbana School District, and Urbana Park District, have invested heavily in West Urbana. With taxpayer support, millions of dollars have been spent to renovate and expand Leal Elementary School, Urbana Middle School, Urbana Indoor Aquatic Center, Urbana High School and the Urbana Free Library – all located in the West Urbana neighborhood. The Urbana Board of Education has committed to maintaining the middle school and high school in the city core rather than moving them to the perimeter of the city, as has occurred across the country. By doing so, Urbana School District administrators have maintained quality schools to which children can walk.

It is time now to focus on preserving and revitalizing West Urbana. The City supports efforts to surround our schools and other community facilities with a viable, safe, residential neighborhood. But, without aggressive efforts, the downward trend can take hold.

“I see some of the undesirable characteristics of eastern Champaign creeping into West Urbana... many of the landlords in Urbana would allow overcrowding, parking on lawns and a Champaign-ization of west Urbana. I do not want to see west Urbana become a littered, dirt patch of dilapidated rental houses like east Champaign has.”

–Interim Co-Director, Manager of Copying Services

How Can We Address These Issues?

Through WUNA’s University-Neighborhood-City Group

The University of Illinois, the City of Urbana, and the West Urbana Neighborhood Association (WUNA) have joined forces to preserve and enhance the West Urbana neighborhood.^{iv} In 2003, WUNA spearheaded a University-Neighborhood-City group to work toward this vision. The group is modeled on similar efforts in other college towns. The UNC’s overall goals are to:^v

- Improve the quality of life for all residents: students, university employees, community members, young families, and older residents.
- Maintain an attractive campus gateway on both sides of Lincoln Avenue.
- Preserve the West Urbana residential neighborhood.
- Promote pride in property ownership and neighborhood residency.

The UNC group has made progress toward achieving these goals. It has:

- Created a pilot Good Neighbor program with the area Greeks.
- Researched and encouraged the City of Urbana to change ordinances regarding over-occupancy, inspection of rentals and a rental registration program.
- Advocated for the creation of a Hearing Officer to preside over zoning violation cases throughout Champaign County.
- Proposed channels for funding rehabilitation of rundown properties.
- Promoted West Urbana as an asset to recruitment and retention of faculty and staff at University of Illinois.
- Encouraged the development of informational brochures to alert student residents to successful residency in the West Urbana area.
- Promoted community pride through placement of special street signs in the West Urbana neighborhood.

Although the UNC has made some progress, much work remains to preserve and enhance the West Urbana neighborhood. As a standard text on planning points out, “Almost anything can be accomplished with the right people, good relationships, and adequate resources, but these necessities do not show up automatically.”^{vi}

What Can the University of Illinois Do?

Actively Collaborate with the City as Other Universities Have Done

Around the country institutions of higher education — major universities and small liberal arts colleges; urban to rural campuses; public and private colleges — have formed partnerships with cities and neighborhoods which have spawned innovative and collaborative efforts to revitalize residential neighborhoods.^{vii}

Collaborations have resulted in major financial programs providing low- and no-interest loans, mortgages, and grants for the purchase of homes, renovation of properties, and conversion of rentals to owner-occupancy. They have also provided technical support, revitalized commercial areas and worked with school systems.

“Increasingly college leaders find it important to lead and support their institution’s active involvement in programs to improve the quality, safety, and appearance of the community outside campus boundaries.”^{viii} Locally, the University of Illinois could consider these specific programs modeled on what other universities have done:

- Provide financial assistance to new faculty/staff who buy in targeted blocks.
- Contribute towards a university-neighborhood-city revolving fund for renovation of a former rental or conversion of a higher density property to single-family.
- Build on previous Habitat for Humanity efforts to provide affordable housing for University of Illinois support staff.
- Collaborate with the Building Research Council and the University of Illinois Habitat for Humanity chapter in renovating homes for Habitat for Humanity.
- Collaborate with the Building Research Council [School of Architecture] in the restoration of historic properties and updating these properties with the incorporation of "Smart Design."
- Collaborate with the Historic Preservation program [Department of Regional and Urban Planning] in researching and nominating historic properties and districts.
- Develop programs through the Dean of Students office that will benefit students and long-term residents in West Urbana, such as: "maintain a street" litter clean-up campaign; and "Be a Good Neighbor" program. Establish a Police Bike Patrol program. Consider a joint effort with the City to sponsor "Keep the Neighborhood Clean" by providing dumpsters during 'move in' and 'move out' weeks.
- Support a comprehensive registration and inspection program for rentals to promote the safety of renters.
- Coordinate with city and county efforts to reduce commuter traffic by car and promote alternative means of transportation, including bicycling.
- Assist in efforts to educate and inform students about the responsibilities and concerns associated with living off-campus in a single-family residential setting.

Across the country, university administrators have worked with elected officials and city staff to preserve their historic residential neighborhoods such as West Urbana. “A paradigm shift is occurring in college towns across the country. Rejecting the ‘inevitable’ decline of neighborhoods adjacent to college and university campuses, increasing numbers of neighborhood

associations, cities, and universities are actively working to revitalize neighborhoods near campuses.”^{ix}

The West Urbana Neighborhood Association invites the University of Illinois to protect this critical tool for the recruitment and retention of its faculty, and to assure the attractive life in this heritage neighborhood for generations to come.

ⁱ Richard Herman: “UI, cities must work to make community even better,” *News-Gazette*, September 25, 2005, B3.

ⁱⁱ *Downtown to Campus Plan*, Adopted by the Urbana City Council, June 4, 1990, i.

ⁱⁱⁱ Based on analysis of MLS sales within West Urbana, from January 2003 through September 2004.

^{iv} For more information on the West Urbana Neighborhood Association, see: www.prairienet.org/wuna

^v For a complete list of goals, see the enclosed *Issues Defined as Important by the West Urbana Neighborhood Association*.

^{vi} Bryson, John M.: *Strategic Planning For Public and Nonprofit Organizations: A Guide to Strengthening and Sustaining Organizational Achievement, Third Edition*. (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2004) 391.

^{vii} See the enclosed *University/City/Neighborhood Collaborations to Revitalize Neighborhoods* for a sampling of what other campuses have done.

^{viii} Leslie Durgin, *Partners in Preservation: Institutions of Higher Education*, A National Trust Publication, 12.

^{ix} Planetizen web site, <http://www.planetizen.com/oped/item.php?id=51>.