

**DEVELOPING A STRATEGIC PLAN**  
**RELATIVE TO ISSUES RELATED TO DENSITY IN THE**  
**UNIVERSITY AREA**

**UNIVERSITY NEIGHBORHOOD PARTNERSHIP**  
**JANUARY 2007 – OCTOBER 2007**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### MISSION AND METHODS

The University Neighborhood Partnership's (UNP) purpose is to enhance the university residential community and address the dynamics of the college neighborhood by providing a process of communication and constructive action. It operates on consensus. In December 2006, the UNP decided to undertake "Developing a Strategic Plan relative to Issues Related to Density in the University Area." The original membership of the UNP was expanded for the purposes of developing this plan (See Appendix 1). It designed a series of study sessions geared at finding solutions for quality of life issues that result from an increased population density in specific neighborhoods in the City of Syracuse. One of the triggers which brought about this study was a petition brought to the Syracuse Common Council by members of a university area neighborhood association called SEUNA (South East University Neighborhood Association). The petition asked the Common Council to reduce the number of unrelated adults, from five down to three, allowed to occupy single-family housing units. The exception would be for groups of unrelated adults who live together in a way similar to a family. This type of ordinance brought strong arguments both for and against its adoption. At the same time, the UNP had been discussing a number of quality of life concerns and avenues to address them. The UNP opted to develop the study sessions to bring all constituencies together in a public forum to brainstorm ideas for resolving the quality of life concerns related to high density.

The study began with a "kick off" meeting for expanded UNP membership on January 4, 2007 at the Bishop Harrison Diocesan Center. The purpose of the kick-off meeting was to gather information about the university area so that everyone was working from the same general fact. Following the kick-off meeting, the UNP held four study sessions between January and June 2007. Topics included: Code Enforcement, Health and Safety, Parking and Trash (See Appendix 2: Study Session Notes).

Study sessions were held in the Common Council Chambers. All study sessions were open to the public and notices of the session were widely distributed. The format remained constant each month. Once the topic of the study session was determined (See Session Topics and Panelists), UNP members contacted staff from relevant City Departments and other panelists (i.e. neighborhood associations). These panelists provided baseline information and data in their area of experience/expertise. Members of neighborhood associations were then invited to share their concerns and offer solutions. An open discussion of statements, questions, comments or thoughts from those in attendance followed. Those who presented at the session were permitted to submit written statements and articles or documentation for further review by the UNP. Sessions lasted no more than one hour and 30 minutes. Notes were prepared by Syracuse University's Office of Government and Community Relations and the UNP discussed the study session at its subsequent meeting.

## SUMMARY OF ISSUES

The UNP collected a variety of proposed solutions to quality of life issues along with examples of programs that have helped other cities. Study Sessions addressed the realities and challenges faced by the City of Syracuse, particularly the Syracuse University area neighborhoods. Study Sessions were intended to be city-wide discussions about quality of life and population density, however each subsequent meeting brought fewer general participants and the scope of discussion narrowed to include mainly the Syracuse University neighborhood (mainly, the east side of the City of Syracuse). The key quality of life factors which were most frequently raised as impacting the east neighborhood were the following:

*Code Enforcement.* Code Enforcement issues are a city-wide concern, they do not exist solely in the Special Neighborhood District (SND)<sup>1</sup>. The Department of Code Enforcement explained that as a department, its purpose is to observe structure stability, available sleeping areas (what is permissible and what is prohibited- residents can evacuate during an emergency), plumbing/electrical hazards, severe infestation of rodents or insects, and locating a clear path out of the home in the event of an emergency. Code Enforcement admitted it has difficulty keeping up with the inspection process required under New York State law for the large number of multi-unit dwellings in the SND. The Zoning Office felt that participants need to be clear on what is meant by “density” when they describe the quality of life concerns in the neighborhood. Simply having many residents is not the issue; the physical impact of those densities is where the problem is created. Investors explained that they share the same concerns as residents, including possible fire hazards, parking issues and trash. They also cautioned about describing all landlords as “absentee.” Some property owners may not physically live in the neighborhood, but many have offices located in the area and they are in tune with the neighborhood challenges.

*Health and Safety.* Participants of this study session agreed that health and safety concerns impact a person’s appreciation for the neighborhood. If safety needs are met, residents would feel comfortable enjoying the diversity of the City of Syracuse and its neighborhoods, making Syracuse a great place to live, work and play. Many of those who participated in the study sessions commented on their personal safety fears and the need for more police coverage. Similarly, participants stated that code enforcement violations such as bedroom conversions, year-round rental signage, and paving lawns for parking creates the image of a transient population, which invites criminal activity. The Syracuse Fire Department and residents worry about the use of grills too close to structures and on balconies. Many spoke of their concern about litter, food, bottles strewn around attracting animals/insects. Study session participants

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- <sup>1</sup>In 1993, SU and the city entered into the Service Agreement (Ordinance #553) requiring the University to pay a fee of \$250,000 annually to address quality of life issues on neighborhoods southeast of the University. This area, known as the Special Neighborhood District (SND), extends east and west from Comstock to Cumberland Avenues and north and south from East Genesee to East Colvin Streets. Increasing each year with the Consumer Price Index, the fee for FY 2007-08’s Service Agreement is \$352,581, bringing the University’s total contribution to over \$3 million to date. The ordinance also established the University Neighborhood Service Agreement Advisory Committee (UNSAAC) to oversee the distribution of funds. Each year, neighborhood groups apply for portions of the Service Agreement payment to fund programs addressing quality of life issues (Housing & Density, Police, Fire, Code, Public Works, Public Green Space, and Community Coalition). UNSAAC reviews applications and makes recommendations to the Syracuse Common Council for final determination on grant funding.

voiced their unease with parking on both sides of the street as emergency vehicles cannot get by. Missing street signs make it difficult for these vehicles to get to properties in need of medical, police or fire attention. Similarly, the continued snow removal problem and lack of clear sidewalks in the winter causes pedestrians to walk in the road.

*Parking and Traffic.* The encompassing concern in this area is that there are currently more cars in the neighborhood than there are available parking spaces. This is not unique to the SND, for example, “Tipp Hill” properties have no driveways at all and in Downtown, the City is experiencing a parking problem due to a recent increase in residential living. The Syracuse Police Department stated that enforcement of parking laws is the key to improving the current situation. Participants were urged to keep in mind the homes were built well before citizens owned so many cars. The Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC)<sup>2</sup> encouraged residents to become more familiar with its current study visiting their website and actively participating at any public presentations and meetings.

*Trash.* The City’s Department Public Works (DPW) is responsible for residential waste collection, including solid waste, recycling, yard waste, construction debris and tires, etc. The University area is a “special” area with unique needs, and DPW pays special attention to this particular area because of the large number of students living here. It is mindful of move out (early-mid May) and move in (late August) of the student population. DPW is aware that concerns exist about early trash set-outs and the volume of materials set out, particularly in this area of the City.

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<sup>2</sup> The Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC) is the State-designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), responsible for administering the continuous and comprehensive transportation planning process in Onondaga County, and small portions of Madison and Oswego Counties. SMTC is involved in the University Hill Transportation Study at this time. The Needs Assessment is complete at this time, please visit: <http://www.universityhillstudy.com/HomePage.htm> to review it.

## **STRATEGIC PLAN FOR DENSITY REDUCTION IN THE UNIVERSITY AREA'S SPECIAL NEIGHBORHOOD DISTRICT**

**GOAL:** The goal of this process is to study current practices and prepare recommendations for area administrators (in order) to reduce specific quality of life issues faced by long-term and temporary residents (students) associated with increased density in the Special Neighborhood District.

**OBJECTIVE:** To review and develop recommendations to address/resolve the following key density issues:

- Parking
- Code enforcement of existing ordinances
- Litter

**TIME FRAME:** December 2006 – June 2007

**COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP:** The Density Reduction Committee will be comprised of members of the University Neighborhood Partnership, in addition some or all the following individuals/organizations:

- Tomorrow's Neighborhoods Today (TNT)
- Hospitals (1 each from Crouse and Upstate)
- Downtown Committee
- University Hill Corporation
- South East University Neighborhood Association (SEUNA)
- Westcott East Neighborhood Association (WENA)

### **STRUCTURE:**

Chair – Van Robinson, Councilor at Large, City of Syracuse

Facilitator – Tom Wolfe, Dean, Hendrick's Chapel, Syracuse University

Coordinator/Writer – Karen Kerling, Administrative Analyst, City of Syracuse

- **Study Sessions** will be open to the public. A schedule of the topics to be discussed will be announced in advance of each session. For each study session, the Committee will invite one or more presenters to speak about a particular topic. These sessions will take place at a convenient time for both residents and students to attend. There will be an opportunity at each session for the public to ask questions and/or provide information. Each Study Session will not exceed 1 ½ hours.
- **Review Sessions** will be scheduled for Committee membership to discuss and deliberate on the topic presented at the prior Study Session. Review Sessions will be held within two weeks following the Study Session and will not exceed 1 ½ hours.
- Information and schedule of meetings will be posted on the following website:  
<http://www.universityneighborhoodpartnership.org/>
- Each Study Session will have written notes that will be posted on the website.

- The Final report will be distributed both electronically and in print. A copy of the report will be provided to: Mayor Driscoll, all City of Syracuse Common Councilors, Chancellor Cantor, President Murphy, and President Beirne.

This process is intended to review current policies and practices, stimulate an open and honest discussion, and create improved or new processes and procedures to improve the quality of life in the University's Special Neighborhood District

## **2007 STUDY SESSION TOPICS AND PANELISTS**

*All sessions were open to the public and were held in the Common Council Chambers, City Hall*

### **Code Enforcement: January 18, 2007, 5-6:30 pm**

James Blakeman, City of Syracuse Code Enforcement  
 Chief John Cowin, City of Syracuse Fire Department  
 Chuck Ladd, City of Syracuse Zoning Office  
 Nancy Larson, City of Syracuse Corporation Council  
 Rory McMahon, City of Syracuse Corporation Council

### **Health and Safety: March 15, 2007, 5-6:30 pm**

James Blakeman, City of Syracuse Code Enforcement  
 Chuck Ladd, City of Syracuse Zoning Office  
 Margaret Martin, Livingston Avenue  
 Sharon Sherman, Greater Syracuse Tenants Network  
 Melinda Sorrentino, Syracuse Property Owners Association (SPOA)  
 Annetta Turek, Livingston Avenue

### **Parking and Traffic: April 19, 2007, 5-6:30 pm**

Lieutenant Joe Cecile, Syracuse Police  
 Ollie Clubb, Westcott East Neighborhood Association (WENA)  
 James D'Agostino, Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC)  
 Jennifer Deshaies, Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC)  
 Donna (O'Mahany) Rhode, Tomorrow's Neighborhoods Today (TNT) Area 5 (East Side)  
 Martin Sage, Outer Comstock Neighborhood Association (OCNA)  
 David Sutherland, Syracuse Property Owners Association (SPOA)  
 Patricia Tinto, South East University Neighborhood Association (SEUNA)

### **Trash, May 17, 2007, 5-6:30 pm**

Donna (O'Mahany) Rhode, Tomorrow's Neighborhoods Today (TNT) Area 5 (East Side)  
 David Sutherland, Syracuse Property Owners Association (SPOA)  
 Jamie Williams, South East University Neighborhood Association (SEUNA)  
 Jeff Wright, City of Syracuse Department of Public Works

## STUDY SESSION THEMES AND IDEAS EXPRESSED

### CODE ENFORCEMENT

- Code Enforcement issues are a city-wide concern, not just in the Special Neighborhood District (SND) and university area.
- The Department of Code Enforcement looks at: structure stability, available areas for sleeping (what is permissible and what is prohibited- residents can evacuate during an emergency); plumbing/electrical hazards, severe infestation of rodents or insects; is there a clear path out of the home in the event of an emergency?
- The Department of Code Enforcement has difficulty keeping up with the inspection process required under New York State law (Certificate of Compliance) for the large number of multi-unit dwellings in the SND. Currently, the inspections are required every 5 years. If the new law is enacted (Certificate of Sufficiency), it will happen every 3 years. It is also a challenge to keep up with the special regulations specific to the SND.
- The Department of Code Enforcement feels that if the density were changed from 5-3, they'd have to handle and manage more inspections and verifications, which in turn, would leave the city with more vacant structures and properties.
- The Zoning Office feels that in discussion, participants need to be clear on what is meant by "density." Simply having people is not the issue, but the physical impact of those densities is where the problem is created. Participants need to consider the impact a change in density would have on the City and the neighborhoods, on real estate characteristics, and especially on unintended consequences.
- 2098 residential properties in the area; density is not the issue, the changing nature of the neighborhood is
- Transition areas are ones to be focused on, otherwise, you have to treat all properties the same and this could end up being more harmful than beneficial
- Investors caution about describing all landlords as "absentee;" some may not live in the neighborhood but have offices located here so they know what is going on
- Investors share same concerns as residents, including fires, parking issues and trash
- Sign ordinance needs to be rewritten because it's unclear and may be unconstitutional

### HEALTH AND SAFETY

- Concern with attics being converted into bedrooms
- Concern about paving over front and back lawns
- Fire Department and residents concerned about the use of grills too close to structures and on balconies
- Concern about litter, food, bottles strewn around attracting animals/insects
- Concern with parking on both sides of the street/emergency vehicles cannot get by
- Concern with snow removal/lack of cleared sidewalks; people have to walk in the road

- Concern with police coverage; need more of it
- Concern with year-round rental property signs
- Stolen street signs

## **PARKING AND TRAFFIC**

- Residents should become more familiar with the SMTC study currently underway; visit website and actively participate at any public presentations and meetings
- The SMTC and City administrators should meet to discuss the recommendations from the SMTC study for ideas to implement to relieve the current strain on parking and plan for the future
- There are currently more cars in the neighborhood than there are available parking spaces; this is not unique to SND, “Tipp Hill” properties have no driveways at all
- Syracuse Police Department stated that enforcement of parking laws is key to improving the current situation
- Parking is an issue daily due to students ( residents and commuters), employees who work on the “Hill, and during Dome events
- Speeding, 3-way stop signs
- Keep in mind the homes were built well before citizens purchased so many cars
- Real issue is the stability of neighborhoods (recent acquisition of properties on Berkeley Drive has created a sense of urgency among residents

## **TRASH**

- DPW is responsible for residential waste collection, including solid waste, recycling, yard waste, construction debris and tires, etc.
- University area as a “special” area with unique needs
- DPW pays special attention to this particular area of the City because of the large number of students living here and is mindful of move out (early-mid May) and move in (late August)
- There are two pick-ups in this neighborhood per week, on Tuesday and Wednesday; there is a pick-up of yard waste during the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of every month
- DPW is aware that concerns exist about early trash set-outs and the volume of materials set out, particularly in this area of the city
- Concern as to whether landlords contribute to the cost of the extra work for DPW in the university neighborhood/pay a fee for the extra pick-ups; no fee at this time, however DPW works with SU’s Office of Off-Campus Student Services throughout move in and move out
- Concern that when students move out, there are “huge piles of junk” and large pieces of furniture left at the curb for pick up, which is an extra cost to the City
- Observation of a Westcott area resident installing empty white buckets/pails in the business area so that people will dispose of the trash in the bucket and not on the ground; it’s working

- Would like to see increased enforcement and faster citation and removal process when there is violation
- Appreciation voiced for the efforts of SU and DPW in the successful Ten Tons of Love program which collected 20 tons of materials to be donated in the community
- Statement that trash is a massive issue in this neighborhood; there are no trash issues over the summer
- Observation that there is a difference between owner occupants and rental property tenants in that owner occupants follow the City's trash ordinance
- Comment that not all landlords ignore the ordinance but there are many who do; e.g. Campus Hill Apartments has its own trash crew that takes care of its properties
- Landlords bring in trash from other areas to dispose of here
- Early set outs are a problem; trash cans sit out year round; sometimes trash isn't even in bags or receptacles; scavengers come by and pick through trash; there is a lot of visible loose trash and liter
- Laws and ordinances don't solve problems alone; there needs to be collaborative efforts in place
- Thornden Park is 76 acres of publicly utilized land and there seems to be confusion on who is responsible for trash in the park; is it DPW or Parks?
- Thornden Park is edged by public streets on three of its four sides
- Residents have seen people picking up trash in the park and in the Westcott business area; these are Jamesville prisoners/inmates; is there a way to utilize this service more?

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Recognizing that partnership is the key to achieving successful solutions for the future, the UNP plans to:

### Creating a Special District within the Special Neighborhood District

- Recommendation: Consider establishing a special district within the existing Special Neighborhood District, with a preliminary report within six months and action within one year.

### Parking

- Recommendation: Ticketing, booting and/or towing (or otherwise removing or penalizing) of illegally parked vehicles.
- Recommendation: Restrict parking on Euclid Avenue between Ostrom and Lancaster to permit parking by residents only, Monday to Friday, hours to be determined.

### Noise

- Recommendation: Fully fund the Neighborhood Safety Patrol from the Service Agreement funds and request a member of the Syracuse Police Department be designated as coordinator with responsibility for reporting to the UNP, as requested.

### Trash

- Recommendation: Fund extra trash pick-ups at the beginning and end of the semester from Service Agreement Funds.

### Health and Safety

- Recommendation: Fund property code education and enforcement services in the Special Neighborhood District during evening and weekend hours from Service Agreement funds.

## CONCLUSIONS

The University Neighborhood Partnership (UNP) has for the past eight months been engaged in a study of a series of issues impacting the residents of the East University Neighborhood. It has been a process that has sought to engage the many stakeholders and community organizations who are interested in improving the quality of life for the neighborhood.

The recommendations reflect the findings of the UNP. Each recommendation represents a commonly shared concern by all members of the UNP. The UNP operates by consensus and it is always its intention to arrive on common ground through discussion where all members can support each recommendation.

These recommendations will be communicated to the East University Neighborhood by the various members of the UNP and through its website. The agenda of the UNP will be to develop strategies for implementing the recommendations. This is intended to be a working document. It will serve as a centerpiece for discussion, action, and evaluation of the impacts as we move forward. We ask that this document foster increased communication and a new quality of relationship among the many constituents comprising the neighborhood.

Our thanks go to all of the neighbors, community organizations, and institutions that offered their expertise and who attended the study sessions at City Hall. We are grateful for your insights and shared concerns. With you, we look forward to seeing these recommendations implemented as we work together to continue to create a community where everyone enjoys living, working, and visiting.