

January 8, 2003

MEMORANDUM

To: Dan Williams, Vice President for Administration  
Anne Leavitt, Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students

From: Michael Fifield, Chair  
Campus Planning Committee

Subject: Living Learning Center – Site Review

On behalf of the Campus Planning Committee (CPC), I am submitting the following observations about the proposed Living Learning Center Project. At your request, the CPC discussed the proposed project at its November 12, 2002 meeting to provide advice to you on three items:

1. The campus planning consequences of proceeding with the proposed site (15<sup>th</sup> Avenue tennis courts) for the living learning center project (186,000 gsf). The site as proposed would violate facilities planning policies for density and for preserving land within the seven minute walk circle for academic uses. These policies are contained in the Long Range Campus Development Plan (LRCDP).
2. The campus planning consequences of proceeding with the alternate site.
3. The campus planning consequences of waiving the planning policy (as contained within the LRCDP) that requires projects to replace functions or uses they displace.

For the most part, the CPC focused on item number one, the campus planning consequences of proceeding with the proposed site for the living learning project. Four main consequences to consider arose from the discussion:

- a. Development Density: The pastoral campus character would diminish.
- b. Thoughtful Planning: A campus-wide analysis of the proposed increase in density would be required.
- c. Appropriate Use of the Site: A significant site within the academic core would be lost.
- d. Consider Alternatives: A thorough analysis of the project intent and possible alternatives would be required.

**A. Development Density: The Pastoral Campus Character would Diminish**

*Preserving the pastoral character of the campus is essential to maintain the overall quality and character of the university. Open spaces and the overall pedestrian scale of campus are essential components of its pastoral character.*

Open spaces on this campus are important to faculty, staff and students for many reasons; they define the pastoral character of the campus, define the physical framework for campus development serving as a unifying design element, establish a pedestrian circulation network, provide essential recreational areas (passive and active), and create a feeling of openness with views and green spaces.

Density standards ensure that open spaces are maintained and established. As stated in the LRCDP, density standards are essential:  
to preserve the historic character of the University campus as a setting conducive to thoughtful and reflective endeavor, while at the same time allowing for accommodation of needed new facilities ...

The proposed Living Learning Center (186,250 gsf) exceeds the allowed additional gsf by 500% (about 150,000 gsf). Amending the LRCDP to change the allowable GSF and footprint to allow for development has not been done on the main campus (although some technical corrections were made).

Although the current character of this open space (tennis courts and recreational courts) may not be ideal, the feeling of openness and transparency is important; it serves as relief space between the large dormitory buildings. The proposed project would make the entire area feel smaller and create a barrier. Currently, the view from the EMU promenade extends to 18<sup>th</sup> Avenue. If a large residence hall is placed on the proposed site in an effort to improve the residential living options, the positive benefits may be defeated due to a loss of open space. As stated in the LRCDP:

Existing recreation spaces, both active and passive, located in these areas [Analytical Areas 41 and 42] are essential elements in the residence hall program and are to be preserved and, wherever possible, enhanced.

The importance of the full potential of the open space, not its current state, should be considered. If the open space is not being used effectively, it should be improved rather than removed.

Traffic resulting from required service access and resident parking needs (approximately 71 spaces) also should be taken into consideration.

#### B. Thoughtful Planning: A Campus-wide Analysis of the Proposed Increase in Density would be Required

*The proposed increase in density has a substantial impact on all surrounding areas. A thorough analysis of the resulting densities and the possible need to alter densities in other areas to decrease the negative impacts would be required.*

If development pressures continue, the university will ultimately be left with two options for future development: increased density in the central area or building

further out. It is possible that building on the proposed site will ultimately make sense. If density is increased in one area, however, then it creates a lopsided campus density.

A density increase in one area of campus should not be done in isolation – the committee should look at the entire campus to assess the full potential impact. Also, the related open space systems and how we define them, keeping the mind the difference between residential and academic areas, should be considered.

### **C. Appropriate Use of the Site: A Significant Site within the Academic Core would be Lost**

Reserving all potential central campus lands for academic uses has become even more important as demand for academic space has increased while options for academic development has decreased. If the academic core must expand outward beyond the ten minute walking circles, the pedestrian character of the campus will deteriorate.

If density increases in the area, it is very important to determine *what* kind of development the proposed site should contain. Since the proposed site is one of the few remaining large, buildable spaces left in the core area, it should serve the greatest need of the university.

When one considers the limited amount of academic space currently available on campus, it is hard to justify using the last large development site in the central academic core for a residence hall. As stated in the LRCDP:

To the maximum extent possible, major instructional facilities are to be located within an instructional core that can be traversed in a six- to seven- minute walk.

The campus plan is based on the model of learning in the center (the library) surrounded by academic uses and then ringed by housing. Instead of developing housing in the academic core, the university should develop academic space in the core and move housing outwards. This concept is described in the LRCDP:

Historically, residence halls have been converted to non-residential use when the needs for central campus academic space have warranted such a conversion.

### **D. Consider Alternatives: A Thorough Analysis of the Project Intent and Possible Alternatives would be Required**

*The potentially negative consequences of the siting the Living Learning Center on the proposed site are substantial and long lasting. Given the serious negative consequences of the proposed solution, it is necessary to consider all other alternatives and carefully consider the reasons for violating the LRCDP.*

The committee understands that the current on-campus housing situation is inadequate. If the university is going to maintain its status as a residential campus, it needs to seriously consider improvements. Furthermore, the committee understands that the proposed facility is more than a typical dormitory – it is

designed to bring together academic and residential activities addressing fragmentation that occurs on campuses.

However, the intent of the living learning project is not clear enough for the committee to be able to thoughtfully consider all possible design and siting alternatives. The university's planning process is well set up to resolve such a situation. The use of patterns is designed to establish a shared set of common planning and design principles. Developing (or revising) a pattern or series of patterns for the living learning center would clarify the intent of the project for all involved. The importance of defining the project's intent and the use of patterns is further discussed in the attached letter from CPC member Donald Corner.

Once a clear understanding of the project's intent is established, possible design and siting alternatives could be explored that would make better use of existing facilities and repair the parts of campus that most need it.<sup>1</sup> Possible solutions include building an academic space that would tie into the existing residential halls or renovating existing, underused residence halls. It would be short sighted to do anything less than explore all possible options.

The CPC also discussed the campus planning consequences of waiving the planning policy (as contained within the LRCDP) that requires projects to replace functions or uses they displace.

#### **A. Replace Existing Uses: All Projects Should be Treated Equally**

Members felt that shouldering this cost is clearly mandated in the LRCDP. Making an exception would set a bad precedent; why should this project be different from other academic projects? A member noted that space is in high demand on campus. As a result, it is unlikely that there are unused spaces; all current uses would merit replacement elsewhere on campus.

The CPC thanks you for the opportunity to provide input into the initial stages of this planning process. Please feel free to contact me if you have questions or would like additional input.

cc: Campus Planning Committee members  
Mike Eyster, University Housing  
David Frank, Clark Honors College  
Chris Ramey, University Planning  
Karen Sprague, Administration  
Fred Tepfer, University Planning

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<sup>1</sup> The LRCDP Site Repair pattern states: Site Repair [PL 104]

Buildings must always be built on those parts of the land which are in the worst condition, not the best.

Therefore: On no account place buildings in the places, which are most beautiful. In fact, do the opposite. Consider the site and its buildings as a single living eco-system. Leave those areas that are the most precious, beautiful, comfortable, and healthy as they are, and build new structures in those parts of the site which are least pleasant now.



November 20, 2002

MEMORANDUM

To: Michael Fifield  
Chairer, Campus Planning Committee

Christopher Ramey  
Director of University Planning

Fr: Donald Corner  
Professor of Architecture

Re: Development of University Housing

I believe that the discussion of new student housing on the campus gives us a nearly textbook-perfect opportunity to use the Oregon campus planning traditions to the benefit of everyone involved. If we ignore this opportunity, we can do significant and lasting damage either to the campus, or to the planning process, or both. We could do that harm without really knowing why we have done it, or what other options were available to us at this critical time.

Let us take this opportunity to make things better.

Living/Learning Communities:

The housing department has proposed a concept that falls exactly into the format of a pattern. I propose that we name the pattern Living/Learning Communities. Patterns, by definition, establish critical relationships between elements in the physical environment. They describe essential connections between human activities and architectural space. They resolve conflicts and they fill needs. All of these concepts apply directly to the present situation.

Living/Learning Communities calls for the direct integration of residential settings and certain kinds of educational settings. There is clearly evidence, from Oxford, to Yale, to U.C. Santa Cruz, that this can be a very effective idea. While I have no direct knowledge, I can easily accept that the institutional benefits of this idea have already been thoroughly discussed by the appropriate parties here at the University of Oregon. Our recent CPC meeting suggests that there might not have been enough discussion with student representatives, but that situation could be corrected, if the goals were more clearly articulated. I am willing to assume that, in the end, everyone will understand how this concept fits the current strategic objectives of the University: quality, access and student life. If the idea has been, or soon will be accepted, how do we proceed with the physical planning?

I believe that this pattern, Living/Learning Communities, needs to be written up. We should all be favored with a short and compelling statement of the key objectives and the intended benefits. Beyond that, the pattern should establish the critical planning parameters:

- What kinds of educational settings should be developed in close proximity to residential settings?
- When will these settings be used by the students living closest to them?
- How will it be possible to organize student schedules to make this direct physical connection meaningful?
- What is the most effective or desirable ratio between the number of residential units and amount of classroom space?
- How do we define close proximity? Are the classrooms and meeting spaces down the hall, or across the courtyard? Will it still work if they are in an adjacent building? What is the appropriate "walk circle" in this case?
- How else will these educational spaces be used? When? By whom?
- Does the scheduling of these rooms for general uses inhibit the development of a community among the immediate neighbors?

Once these parameters have been fully developed, we should perform a systematic diagnosis of the existing dormitories and the available construction sites to determine how readily we could establish the living/learning pattern in each place. This diagnosis should include the following issues:

- For each of the potential living/learning clusters, how many residential units fall within the stated proximity criteria?
- In very general terms, how would it be physically possible to develop the classroom and faculty office space needed within each cluster?
- In each location, how much supplemental funding will be required to complete construction of the living/learning cluster? (Funds needed over and above the financing package directly related to the new and/or remodeled housing units and their expected revenues.)
- In each location, what additional forms of university support will be required to complete the project package? (For entirely new construction, the greatest of these will be the granting of a site and recognition that the site will no longer be available for other institutional needs.)

- Assuming that it will prove possible to develop living/learning communities in a number of places, how do we evaluate proposals for new housing units purely in terms of housing criteria? Specifically, is there evidence that a proposed site is the most cost effective location for housing development, given all of the project costs that will apply to work in that location?

I believe that competition for space within our core campus will become even more intense than we presently recognize. This will result not just from enrollment growth, but from the rapid and necessary increase in externally funded research activities within the core academic units. Our space standards for program support must be far below the norms for comparator universities. Given this pressure, we have an obligation to plan carefully and thoroughly. We have at our disposal very powerful planning tools, if we will only use them.

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