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Re.: The Imperative and Urgent Need for More On-Campus Housing at UC Davis (UCD)

The Yolano Group of the Sierra Club has reviewed the latest draft update to UCD's Long Range Development Plan (LRDP). Our analysis has determined that elements of the draft plan could significantly and adversely impact the environment and unnecessarily increase the university's carbon footprint. We further believe that the sustainability of the LRDP will be vastly improved by substantially increasing the number of on-campus student housing units identified in the plan, which can be attained in a timely fashion through construction of well-designed and strategically located high-rise student apartment buildings on readily available campus land. Details regarding our concerns and recommendations follow.

Overview

The draft LRDP assumes that UCD enrollment will grow from 32,000 students in 2015 to 39,000 by 2027 (over 21% in just 12 years), yet the plan anticipates that only 40% of the students expected in 2027 will live on campus. Further, the draft LRDP does not identify how soon the university will build the housing necessary to reach the 40% goal. Because of the aggressive expansion contemplated by the LRDP, the actual number of students living off campus in 2027, about 23,400, will unfortunately exceed the number residing off campus now. This plan would thus continue making it necessary for most UCD students to commute from throughout Davis and other cities in the greater Sacramento region which will vastly expand the university's carbon footprint and unnecessarily degrade the environment.

The model of widely dispersed, low rise buildings that has until now typified on-campus residential development at UCD represents an inefficient land use pattern, one that induces excessive land consumption, higher energy usage, greater public infrastructure requirements, and a larger carbon footprint. UCD's growth in the absence of adequate on-campus housing puts unnecessary external growth pressures on the City of Davis. The magnitude of UCD's contemplated growth coupled with insufficient on-campus housing will also burden the city's water supply and sewage treatment capacity and further crowd City roadways.

Recommendations

The Sierra Club Yolano Group urges UCD to take a completely different approach to accommodating its expansion goals. We advocate that UCD should immediately implement a robust and accelerated program of building efficient high-density housing on-campus. If this cannot be done, then UCD should greatly slow

down enrollment growth until the housing backlog is eliminated. Given the amount of land available to UCD compared to other UC campuses, we also recommend that the LRDP should include a goal of accommodating no less than 50% of total enrollment in campus housing at any given time, and that the university adjust the enrollment of new students downward whenever it becomes apparent that adherence to this target cannot be maintained.

Background

In 1989 UCD executed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the City of Davis that obligated the university to provide new on-campus housing at a pace commensurate with enrollment growth. In spite of this obligation, UCD has been among the UC campuses that have historically provided the least amount of on-campus housing. In addition, in November 2002 the UC Regents published a report titled “UC Housing for the 21st Century,” which stated UCD was to provide on-campus housing to 38-40% of enrollment by 2020, but this target will not be met. It is disappointing that *UCD, with 5,300 acres—the largest land asset of any UC campus--has had a long history of being among the UCs that provides the least amount of on-campus student housing.* Berkeley is the only other UC campus that provides less on-campus housing.

UCD’s inaction in providing on-campus housing is primarily responsible for the fact that at least 70% of UCD students currently reside off campus. After living in dorms during freshman year, the vast majority of UCD students are required to find housing off-campus rather than having the option to continue living on-campus near lecture halls, classrooms, recreation fields and other campus facilities. As a result, UCD students occupy a disproportionate amount of Davis rental housing relative to the small size of the city and its constrained boundaries.

Impact of UCD’s Failure to Address Student Housing Needs

UCD’s historically poor performance in providing sufficient on-campus housing has caused at least 70% of current UCD students to commute daily to and from the campus. The result has been growing traffic congestion and higher carbon emissions, combined with the displacement of workers and families from Davis rental housing. Providing on-campus housing to at least 50% of UCD students would significantly lower carbon emissions well beyond Davis because students are now forced to commute from rental housing in Woodland, Winters, Dixon, West Sacramento, Sacramento and beyond due to the lack of on-campus housing. Residents in at least several of these neighboring cities have complained about the significant volume of rental housing occupied by UCD students.

The LRDP and Other Recent Growth Programs

UCD has been accelerating student population growth through its “2020 Initiative,” an endeavor not compelled by the State, and which can therefore be halted at any time. The initiative aims to enroll an additional 5,000 students by 2020 (including 4,500 nonresident students for the enhanced revenue they bring). This growth surge is in addition to 1,100 new students recently mandated by the State as UCD’s proportional share of 10,000 new students to be admitted throughout the UC system in exchange for increased State funding. UCD has not, however, brought new housing on line to accommodate this accelerated growth.

The draft LRDP currently states merely that UCD will merely “*attempt*” to provide on-campus housing for just 40% of its total student population during the 2027-28 academic year and for only 90% of the enormous number of new incoming students. Meanwhile, UC Irvine, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz, San Diego, Riverside, and Merced--all of which have significantly less land than UCD--are aiming to provide on-campus housing for at least 50% of their total student population. UC Santa Barbara and CSU Cal Poly

San Luis Obispo (SLO) are planning on providing on-campus housing to 100% of new incoming students. In fact, SLO will be providing on-campus housing for 65% of its total student population.

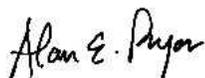
What UCD Must Do to Improve the LRDP

At a minimum, UCD needs to match the goal set by other UCs: housing 50% of total enrollment on campus and 100% of new students. In addition, because the majority of UCD's current on-campus housing is comprised of freshman dorms that students must vacate after one year, UCD needs to build far more high density apartments and other housing configurations that would allow students to live on campus for the entire four or more years they attend the university.

Conclusion

Combined with the projected growth in student enrollment by 2027-28, the LRDP's modest proposal to accommodate no more than 40% of total enrollment will in actuality perpetrate the negative environmental and sustainability impacts embodied in UCD's current limited housing program. To truly be sustainable, UCD needs to quickly construct significantly more on-campus, higher-density student housing like other campuses in California and throughout the nation. The many impacts of dispersed off-campus housing (including but not limited to commuting) are negatively effecting UCD students, our community, and the environment.

Sincerely,



Alan Pryor
Chair, Sierra Club Yolano Group

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