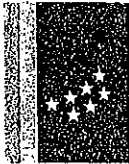


DURHAM



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March 25, 2009

Dr. Richard H. Brodhead  
Duke University  
Office of the President  
207 Allen Building  
Box 90001  
Durham, NC 27708-0001

Subject: Duke University Students Off-Campus Housing

Dear President Brodhead:

The City of Durham and Duke University continue to pursue every opportunity to establish partnerships of mutual interest to enhance the quality of life in our community. Attention has been brought to the city council that some Duke University Students are engaging in negative behavior in some city neighborhoods. If this is true then it is imperative that the impact of the allegations of negative behavior, of some Duke University students electing to live off-campus on surrounding neighborhoods be addressed by Duke University, such that this behavior is discontinued.

Over the last several months a series of meetings between Duke Staff, City Staff and law enforcement, and representatives of the Trinity Heights Neighborhood Association has resulted in a focused effort to identify the problems and solutions when Duke Students off-campus housing behavior negatively impact the neighborhood. These so called "party houses" result in increased law enforcement, excessive late night noise and unsightly trash and debris; all of which unnecessarily disrupt the lives of citizens and potentially negatively impact property values.

One of the key mitigating factors identified during this recent dialogue was the manner by which Duke University's disciplinary code was being assessed against students who were found to be causing these problems. Even though fruitful discussions and recommendations resulted from these recent meetings many question whether Duke Administration staff will take serious and decisive action to invoke more severe penalties on the students causing these problems.

Report and Recommendations on Party House Problems in Durham's Central City Neighborhoods  
Prepared by  
Trinity Heights Action Committee  
(Carol Louis, Philip Rupprecht, Cathy Shuman, Christine Westfall)  
February 11, 2009

## A. REPORT

Most Duke Students living off campus are good neighbors and are welcomed in the wider Durham community. However, it is no secret that our neighborhoods have also been plagued for years by problems from student party houses. Although these party houses represent a minority of off-campus student households, their negative impact is disproportionately large.

Throughout the academic year, party houses hold loud, late night parties on both week nights and weekends. Parties generate disruptive noise and crowds of drunken undergraduates, usually between 11pm and 3am; trash strewn down streets and thrown in our yards; cars blocking our driveways; broken glass on sidewalks; and taxis honking horns late at night.

The disruptions created by student party houses are intolerable for residents of adjacent properties in Durham's neighborhoods. Although we in Trinity Heights have worked with Duke and with students to educate them about our neighborhood's expectations, we find that we must re-invent the wheel every year as new students move in. About 800 Duke Undergraduates (half the senior class) live off-campus in Durham every year. Only a small fraction of these regularly organize disruptive parties. But this small group -- at least three addresses in Trinity Heights, for example -- generate frequent 911 calls to Durham PD and Duke's Campus Police, and numerous recorded complaints filed with Duke's Judicial Affairs. Ultimately, the never-ending pattern of these problems has caused long-term residents to move out of our neighborhoods. Both the City and Duke should understand that these party houses have caused disinvestment in the central city, and will continue to do so unless policy changes are made to mitigate this problem.

We believe the party-house problem can be solved with effective policy and procedural changes. The purpose of this report is to recommend and request those changes from Duke. We also request that the City advocate for these changes, in support of its residents and central city neighborhoods. The 2006 Lacrosse incident thrust the disruptive and abusive behaviors caused by Duke party houses into a harsh national media spotlight. Although this event had enormous negative consequences -- legal and financial -- for both Duke and Durham, it is by no means clear that Duke has yet enacted any major changes of policy for off-campus student life in response. Fraternity-sponsored parties remain a chronic disruption to residential life in neighborhoods adjacent to Duke's East Campus.

Our recommendations are based on research done in a series of committee meetings by a task-force formed with Duke Administrators, City officials, neighbors and student representatives, held between September and December 2008. We would like to express many thanks to the Duke Administrators, students, city officials and staff who attended committee meetings and shared invaluable knowledge and insights. The task-force was formed at the suggestion of Dr. Larry Moneta (Duke Student Affairs), in response to a petition we circulated in the Trinity Heights neighborhood. The petition called upon Duke to make more extensive and proactive efforts to quell party-house problems, and was signed by 40 residents of Trinity Heights. In canvassing door to door, we found that our neighbors voiced enthusiastic support for the petition, thanked us for organizing it, and shared their own experiences of party-house problems.

In concluding this summary, we would like to highlight three of the most important points in our attached recommendations:

1. *It is time for Duke to take more responsibility for the behavior of its student's off-campus. Residents should not have to bear the burden of policing problems caused by party houses year after year. Duke should enforce genuine "zero tolerance" of nuisance behavior.*
2. *Duke should take long-term steps to move student partying out of neighborhoods and onto campus, including building fraternity houses on campus. Fraternity parties don't belong in neighborhoods.*
3. *The City should advocate with Duke to make these policy changes, both to protect the quality of life of its residents and to protect central city neighborhoods from disinvestment.*

## **B. RECOMMENDATIONS TO DUKE**

### **1. Frequent and regular patrolling of Trinity Heights by Duke Campus Police every night between 10p.m. and 4a.m., and the issuance of citations to students when appropriate.**

We recommend that Duke Campus Police proactively police party houses. By proactive, we mean that Duke should patrol known party houses and write citations for violations of City ordinances (noise, littering, etc.) **without waiting for resident complaints** or 911 calls.

### **2. We recommend Duke Campus Police shift to a zero-tolerance policy for party-house violations and hire more officers to enforce that policy.**

Duke Campus Police shares joint jurisdiction over off-campus neighborhoods with Durham PD. Current Duke policing levels (8 officers per shift, 2 stationed at Duke Hospital, most others responding to calls on campus) are inadequate for the number of students living off-campus. Duke Campus police has a stated mission to "keep the peace." We recommend that they adopt the Durham PD's "zero-tolerance" policy towards noise and behavior problems arising from Duke Student party-houses. Enforcement of zero tolerance will require more Duke police officers. Duke Officers claim to police parties before they get out of hand, yet we in Trinity Heights never witness evidence of this. Our experience is there are too few officers on duty in a given evening to make any meaningful difference.

What would "zero tolerance" mean in practice? Consider littering, as one example. At present, student's off-campus faces no punishment for throwing garbage in our neighborhoods during parties. Throughout the school year, yards and streets in Trinity Heights are strewn with beer bottles, broken glass, plastic cups, and other party debris, left for residents to clean up. The issuance of littering citations to Duke Students by Durham and Duke Police would quickly change student attitudes and behavior.

### **3. More effective preparation of Duke Students by Student Affairs for off-campus residence.**

Student Affairs produces a range of literature covering topics such as noise ordinances and alcohol laws. But students do not currently understand how to hold a successful party without disturbing neighbors. Parties must be kept indoors. 80-100 guests is not a manageable population for most houses in our neighborhoods: fire risk and lack of egress are major problems for social events held in older homes. Duke should meet regularly with Executive Officers of each of its fraternities, and require them to educate their members about acceptable party behaviors. Duke Student Affairs needs to confer more directly with the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life on the whole question of off-campus partying.

### **4. Explicit and strictly enforced regulations governing Duke students living off campus, clearly posted on the Duke website, with a simple way for residents to complain about infractions and to find out the result of their complaints.**

Neighbors making a complaint with Student Affairs against student behavior are entitled to confidentiality if they so request; they also deserve to know the outcome of specific complaints.

Student Affairs has told us that legal restraints prevent full communication to complainants of disciplinary actions against students whose behavior is found to violate City ordinances. But this lack of feed-back perpetuates a sense that documented disruptive behavior off-campus is never held accountable and rarely punished. We do not ask Duke to compromise the privacy of its students (and we expect equally that the privacy of residents complaining will be respected). What neighbors need to see is clear evidence that students are being held accountable. The continued fact of the party-house problem, and the existence of this Task Force, leads us to believe that current Student Affairs sanctions have not been effective.

**5. Duke should create Fraternity housing on campus, in line with policies at universities nationwide. Fraternity party houses do not belong in the neighborhoods of Durham.**

The ongoing development of Duke's Central Campus offers the ideal opportunity to make this change in student housing. Duke students involved in the Task Force often mentioned that many students prefer to socialize on campus, avoiding the hassle of transportation to off-campus events.

Duke fraternity members we have spoken to say they would welcome a move back to campus. Currently, Duke Fraternity members must pay a fraternity housing fee to *national* chapters, a fee that doesn't benefit them. While Duke allows fraternities to occupy sections of its dormitory residence buildings, it lacks stand-alone houses designed to host large parties. As a result, these groups prefer to use off-campus neighborhood rental housing.

Many Duke Seniors pay as much as \$5,000/month to live off-campus in groups of six or seven in houses that become a de facto fraternity scene in neighborhoods. Many of these residences are sub-standard, and unsafe for large groups. Duke's current off-campus housing policy creates a fraternity housing bubble in Durham.

**C. RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE CITY OF DURHAM**

**1. Proactive response from City officials to complaints about trash and other violations, including the logging of complaints for possible nuisance abatement actions, and the imposition of penalties on property owners. This can be accomplished in several ways:**

**(a) Communications:** Designated City staff should be members of all neighborhood listservs, actively viewing and commenting on concerns that involve the City, and posting general information. For example: City PR campaigns, news releases (meetings, weather closings, and trash schedules), planning information (addresses sited for demolition), NIS and ComNET information (updates to neighborhoods on current work, task-forces) should be regularly posted online. This is an up-to-date and free way of communicating with the target audience.

**(b) Collaborations with universities and neighborhoods:** Nearly half of Durham residences are rental properties. Durham City started a Landlord Training Program in 2005. Duke University has also hosted workshops with local property managers since 2007, for managers with a critical mass of Duke Student tenants. We recommend the City and Duke partner in these endeavors.

**(c) Rental registries and licensing:** In 2005, Old West Durham Neighborhood Association presented a resolution to Durham City Council proposing that all rental property owners be required to list their properties by address in a public registry. This resolution was not accepted by the City, though backed by other Neighborhood Organizations. We believe there is still a need for this registry, and also that Durham should adopt ordinances requiring rental properties to be licensed. Four cities in North Carolina (Greensboro, Asheville, Morganton and Reidsville) currently do so. We ask the City to pursue these recommendations.

**2. The assignment of a permanent City staff person to work with Duke on policy enforcement and changes related to quality of life issues.**

This person would represent any neighborhood's interests and concerns with Duke and Durham City in all Duke-Durham partnerships. Many neighborhood organizations have and are asking for a similar ombudsman position that would be responsible for handling neighborhood concerns and complaints.

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*In closing, we thank you for reading this document. We anticipate a follow-up meeting in three months' time, to review progress with Duke and the City in response to these recommendations.*