

To: Urbana City Council and Mayor

From: Charlie Smyth, Ward 1

RE: Ideas on Neighborhood Preservation, Draft 3, 9/6/2005

What I am/we are interested in doing is developing an all encompassing approach to neighborhood preservation and simultaneously minimizing the impact of rental properties on various neighborhoods. To do so, I/we propose the following steps be taken:

**Implementation Items:**

- 1.) Rental Registration: closes the loop on the new provision in the 4 unrelated living in a unit
- 2.) Family definition needs to be tightened up to something along the lines of other university cities' definitions of functional family unit, eg Ann Arbor, MI
- 3.) Expand rental inspection to include 1 and 2 unit properties.
- 4.) Need to better define green space requirements on side and backyards to eliminate back and side yard parking on properties not designed for more than a vehicle or two. In fact many properties just barely accommodate one vehicle
- 5.) Remove crushed gravel/limestone as an alternative landscaping material and ban its use as a renewal cover over existing except for driveways (ie. can't be used on any surface other than a main driveway)
- 6.) Designate certain areas for conservation districts with design and review guidelines that have real requirements and teeth.
- 7.) Require minimum levels of maintenance inside and out (so called housekeeping ordinance)
- 8.) Scope of the area covered by most provisions could be the whole community. There are those that think we should apply this to historic districts while others think it is needed everywhere to keep non-historic areas from decaying.
- 9.) If it is applied to certain areas, it can be done on the same basis that we have university district/campus district parking where they overlap historic neighborhoods. Or you could use this designation to modify restrictions in some areas.

**Some Alternative/Additional Ideas that should be discussed as part of the process:**

- a.) Cost of on street parking. Maybe it should go up with additional cars per household/structure. This could vary by number of units in the structure.
- b.) Number of vehicles allowed both off street and on street based on the size of the property. This might be an attractive way to combine with (a).
- c.) Similarly you could regulate the number of unrelated individuals in a rental based on size/number of bedrooms. I think the biggest issue is the impact of so many cars on converted properties.
- d.) Licensing landlords like restaurants so that with certain levels of negative evaluations they get fined and/or closed down. We could also look at charging for visits by inspectors or police/fire if they become excessive.

### **Issues:**

- 1.) Justification and rationale to tear down existing housing and replace with junk is essentially through demolition by neglect. The landlords, or a series of landlords doesn't take adequate care of the property one reason being because they cost it out based on "economic lifespan" of the house which is usually different for commercial properties.
- 2.) The replacements are done without design guidelines and have no esthetic sense of the area thus resulting in a loss of character to the neighborhood
- 3.) Replacements don't have the "Institutional" quality of homes built 80 or more years ago
- 4.) Infrastructure can't handle the impact of the many vehicles though, particularly for larger houses, the number of people may be doable.

### **Related thoughts and ideas:**

The quality and quantity of rentals affects the liveability and viability of a neighborhood.

Make duplexes/condos out of boarding houses. Square footage issues.

Justification for Rental registration/affidavit program: The tenant needs to sign on the dotted line. Nothing from keeping them from crossing the line and claiming "family" relation – Our current ordinance is only half the answer without rental registration as we need to complete the loop on this one.

The city needs to provide aggressive monetary assistance to those willing to convert back to single family. Assistance to those willing to convert R7 boarding houses/large homes to condominiums and either rent or sell them. Maybe a build Urbana incentive to doing something like this (Robert and Dennis's ideas on Rebuild Urbana/Paint Urbana). There are also tax incentives to look at for anyone wanting Historic designation. We probably need more condominiums available *for sale* in the campus area.

How would we get the community involved in this? I can see students, tenant union, renters, WUNA members, preservationists, landlords and so on. I'd hate to put together a task force that would take too long but maybe that's the way to go?

Tenant behavior: tools for landlords to deal with this so that it can be stopped before a crime problem develops.