



# Navigating STUDENT HOUSING Challenges

Three comprehensive strategies offer potential solutions

By Ryan Jensen and Katelyn Hansen

**E**mpty cups in the yard, old couches curbside, and loud music into the middle of the night. If these scenes are familiar, you may find yourself within a campus town neighborhood surrounding any number of colleges across the country.

While the complaints may sound clichéd, the housing conflicts created by large student populations infiltrating traditional single-family neighborhoods are no laughing matter. They affect local housing markets, leading to challenges related to differences in lifestyle and behavior, and in many cases, significantly impacting the supply of owner-occupied housing, diminishing neighborhood character, and straining local resources.

These challenges can be addressed. A study of town-gown communities

nationwide, reveals a variety of case studies wherein a school and its surrounding neighborhood(s) have worked together to develop strategies that lessen these housing challenges.

The study was part of the 2017 Strategic Housing Plan for the University of Iowa and surrounding communities. The intent of the study was to analyze town-gown best practices and address university and local housing issues at other flagship and land grant institution communities across the country. The intent was also to devise cohesive housing strategies applicable to the university and its surrounding areas.

Even beyond town-gown communities, many of these strategies are

applicable to housing issues experienced in communities of all types and sizes across the country.

While the potential approaches are vast, they generally fall into one of the three categories outlined here.

## 1 Mitigating Challenges – Reactive Approach

Many communities have attempted to deal with student-renter conflicts after problems have arisen through reactive strategies. These approaches typically include educating student renters on how to be better neighbors.

Urbana, Illinois, has enacted an educational outreach program for student renters in which the city distributes

welcome packets to inform students of such residential neighborhood regulations as trash pickup and parking.

Other communities have taken a more common regulatory approach by enacting noise ordinances, parking limitations, and occupancy limits per dwelling unit, among other strategies.

While these policies can be effective in campus towns, they are not unique to student renters and could be applied to any renters or transient population.

For communities trying to reverse the trend of owner-occupancy to student-rental conversions, rehab programs provide an incentive for this type of housing. The UniverCity Program in Iowa City, Iowa, for example, will fund up to \$50,000 in renovations to single-family homes close to downtown and the University of Iowa in exchange for a 20-year owner-occupancy deed restriction.

The program focuses on areas in the center of the housing conflict—single-family character but located close to downtown and the university, making them heavily demanded by renters. To date, more than 60 properties have been renovated and sold as owner-occupied through this program.

## 2 Guiding Development – Proactive Approach

Some communities partner with their neighboring higher education institution(s) to get ahead of any housing challenges through a proactive approach. These strategies generally try to spur or influence the type, location, and character of development to limit negative interactions.

One proven strategy includes encouraging development in other areas better suited to accommodate students; this approach could work for any specific population subgroup that may require specialty housing, including senior housing near health-care facilities, workforce housing adjacent to specific centers of employment, or housing targeted at

post-grad young professionals in central business districts.

One such example includes the creation of a development district encouraging high-density, student-oriented rental housing near a campus edge. A primary objective of creating these districts is to allow for high-density, attractive development within close walking distance to campus, which in turn relieves the pressures from student renters encroaching into single-family, owner-occupied neighborhoods.

Lawrence, Kansas, has used this approach by creating the Oread Neighborhood Plan adjacent to the University of Kansas, which upzoned portions of a historically single-family residential area that had transitioned to primarily student house rentals. The overlay zoning district allows for high-density housing and mixed-use development targeting students.

The types of purpose-built housing options encouraged in this area help keep off-campus student renters proximate to campus resources, limiting the encroachment into other areas of the community while keeping students more engaged in the on-campus environment.

Purpose-built student housing properties are defined as facilities catering specifically to student renters by offering individual bed leases, academic lease terms, roommate matching, and all-inclusive utilities. Industry research has shown that town-gown communities with less than 30 percent of student renters in purpose-built housing are at risk of greater housing conflicts with more pressures on the general housing stock, including single-family neighborhoods.

Other communities have actively worked to spur development through investment in infrastructure. West Lafayette, Indiana, home of Purdue University, used a public-private partnership (P3) to fund infrastructure improvements that encouraged the redevelopment of land west of campus.

The \$120 million project, which included roadway improvements and

## 2020 CENSUS UPDATE

The United States Census Bureau (<https://www.census.gov>) has published these key milestones related to Census Day 2020:

- 2018**
  - 2018 End-to-End Census Test.
  - 2020 Census questions sent to Congress by March 31, 2018.
  - Six regional 2020 Census offices and 40 area census offices open.
- 2019**
  - Partnership activities launch.
  - Complete Count Committees established.
  - Remaining 248 area census offices open.
- 2020**
  - Advertising begins in early 2020.
  - Public response (online, phone, or mail) begins.
  - **Census Day**—April 1, 2020.
  - In-person visits to households that haven't responded begin.
  - Apportionment counts sent to the President by December 31, 2020.
- 2021**
  - Redistricting counts sent to the states by March 31, 2021.

More coverage of the Census will be provided in PM throughout 2019.

**DIONNE HINES** is assistant to the county manager, Durham County, North Carolina ([dhines@dconc.gov](mailto:dhines@dconc.gov)).



streetscape enhancements among other components, is funded through a tax increment financing district, along with the Purdue Research Foundation. The State Street Corridor Project has a long-term goal of attracting a mix of uses supporting a live-work-play technology hub that will include 2,000 to 3,000 beds of new student housing.

The initiative's goal is threefold: 1) provide a better campus gateway and jump-start development of the Discovery Park District; 2) support the needs of a growing institution; and 3) ease development pressures in other areas of this relatively small community.



### 3 Controlling Supply – University Approach

Often the most direct solution to take pressure off the general housing market is for universities to provide more housing options to students. While this may sound straightforward, it is often not desired by the institution due to such reasons as limited debt capacity, land availability, and other competing priorities, to name a few.

Institutions, however, have found creative ways to partner with the private sector to deliver the needed student beds while limiting their risk and responsibility. One example is the private-certified housing program at the University of Illinois.

This program provides more than 3,000 beds of student housing that are privately owned on non-university land but fulfill the institution's first-year, live-on campus requirement. For them to remain certified, the facilities must adhere to strict residence life programming requirements and pass annual facility inspections from the city.

There are also examples of institutions partnering with the private sector to develop new housing facilities on

university land. These P3s can be structured through long-term ground lease agreements where the private sector designs, builds, finances, and, in some cases, operates and maintains the facility.

UMASS Boston is just one of many examples of this type of arrangement. It is opening a 1,077-bed residence hall in 2019 as its first on-campus housing option.

Part of the reason for this development is a response to Boston's initiative, as outlined in *Housing a Changing City: Boston 2030*, to create 16,000 new on-campus student housing options across the city's universities to help combat escalating rent and unsafe living conditions in the private rental market.

The goals of this project are to provide safe, affordable, and convenient living options for students while also taking pressure off of an overheated housing market.

University and college employees also must navigate local housing issues and proximity challenges. Institutions can foster live/work environments for their faculty and staff by providing financial assistance programs (i.e., primary mortgage assistance), referral

programs, or rental or for-sale housing developments.

An example: UC Irvine created its own Irvine Campus Housing Authority, which developed the University Hills community, providing rental and for-sale housing options to university employees. Another example is Bucknell University, which offers a mortgage guarantee program for employees relocating to the Lewisburg area.

Such strategies are crucial in campus and town environments surrounded by expensive housing markets or markets needing to bolster homeownership.

No matter the situation, whether a rural community with a large land-grant institution or an urban center with a small liberal arts campus, it is vital for stakeholders to work together on a comprehensive housing strategy. Even communities without a higher education institution face challenges related to a housing supply that provides for a diverse mix of residents whether young professionals, workforce, seniors, homeless populations, or others. **PM**



**RYAN JENSEN** is senior project manager, Brailsford & Dunlavey, Chicago, Illinois (rjensen@programmanagers.com), and **KATELYN HANSEN** is assistant project manager, Brailsford & Dunlavey (khansen@programmanagers.com). They also conducted the town-gown best practices study referenced in this article.

While the complaints may sound clichéd, the housing conflicts created by large student populations infiltrating traditional single-family neighborhoods are no laughing matter.