

**FOCUS GROUP ON RENTAL PROPERTIES NEAR THE COLLEGE  
MINUTES  
Thursday, March 12, 2009**

The Focus Group on Rental Properties Near the College held a meeting on Thursday, March 12, 2009 at 7:30 pm in the third floor conference room of the Municipal Building, 401 Lafayette Street.

**ATTENDANCE**

Present were Messrs. Dell, Fitzgerald, Granger, Pons, and Talley, and Meses. Murphy, and McCord. Also present were Facilitator Bill Porter, and Recorder Kaitlin Keller. Absent were Messrs. Fox and Witkowsky, and Ms. Shackelford.

**AGENDA**

**Approval of Minutes for March 5th, 2009 Meeting**

Mr. Porter requested that the March 5th, 2009 meeting minutes be approved as submitted. The minutes were unanimously approved.

**Subgroup Discussions of What is Required to Meet Previously Specified Interests**

Mr. Porter stated that the Focus Group Members will be divided into two sub-groups that will meet as necessary over the next several weeks to conduct research and discuss alternative solutions that have been implemented in other localities with off-campus housing demands. Group One consists of Messrs. Dell, Granger, and Witkowsky and Meses. Murphy and Shackelford. Group Two consists of Messrs. Fitzgerald, Fox, Pons, and Talley, and Ms. McCord. When evaluating other localities' solutions, both sub-groups are to consider all interests and necessary components of final Focus Group recommendations as defined at the February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2009 Focus Group meeting. Each sub-group shall appoint a recorder to report findings to the Focus Group as a whole on April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2009. The Focus Group will then discuss each sub-group's findings during the April 9<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, and 23<sup>rd</sup> meetings before making a final recommendation for City Council. Mr. Porter gave several example solutions that the groups may want to consider researching, such as a city "one-stop shop" for all property related complaints. Discussion occurred as to whether or not the two sub-groups should decide on areas of research beforehand to ensure there will be no overlap. This was deemed unnecessary, as it is expected that there will be a vast amount of research to consider.

**Discussion of Aspects to Consider When Researching Other Off-Campus Housing Solutions**

Mr. Porter suggested that the sub-groups' not focus on differences in state laws, but rather that they focus on local policy and how to influence local policy. He reminded the Focus Group members that the final recommendations can consist of policy changes, such as changes to the Zoning Ordinance, legislative actions for City Council, and/or further negotiations with College

of William & Mary administration. The Focus Group members acknowledged that the current system is flawed, as it requires a third party to enforce local ordinances. Overlay districts were briefly discussed as an ordinance change to consider that could alleviate concerns regarding the number of additional rental units in a neighborhood. They discussed the need for cooperation from the College, education of landlords, and compromises from stakeholders, particular students. The group also considered the difficulties in defining the desired demographic makeup of a single family neighborhood, and how final recommendations would change current neighborhoods. Mr. Dell offered a clarification from a prior meeting comment regarding the use of city visitor tags. He stated that only three visitor tags are available per dwelling.

### **Agenda Topics for March 19<sup>th</sup> Meeting**

Mr. Porter asked the Focus Group Members if the full group meeting should be cancelled on O ctej 19<sup>th</sup> due to the sub-group meetings and his expected absence. The members decided that the regularly scheduled meeting would still be beneficial. Mr. Porter informed the Focus Group that Ms. Ambler and Ms. Martin of the College of William & Mary are likely to attend the March 26<sup>th</sup> meeting, and the Focus Group also requested that a representative from Christopher Newport University (CNU) attend a future meeting as well to discuss CNU's off-campus housing solutions.

### **Public Comment**

Sharon Baker of Skipwith Farms asked for clarification regarding the sub-group meeting process and the ability to give public comment at these meetings. Mr. Porter informed her that these meetings will not be open to the public, but that the regular Thursday night meetings will continue to have public comment periods. Additionally, the findings of the sub-groups will be presented at the public meeting on April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2009. Ms. Baker also asked the group to consider the quantity of rental dwellings per neighborhood, not just the overall percentage, as the percentage can be misleading depending on the size of the neighborhood. She also informed the Focus Group that she had recently compared the Honor Code and Code of Conduct of CNU to those of the College of William and Mary. She noted that there are significant jurisdictional differences as well as differences in the definitions of certain conduct, such as lying, and suggested that these are possible areas in which students can offer a compromise.

Gladys Victor stated that students are not a protected class. Thus, landlords maintain the right to choose whether or not to rent to them. Ms. Victor also stated that she was told by worker that there are approximately eight people living in a dwelling on Griffin Avenue. Additionally, she stated that deans of several universities reserve the right to take academic action against students based on lease or property maintenance problems off-campus.

### **Adjournment**

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:02 pm.