

**FOCUS GROUP ON RENTAL PROPERTIES NEAR THE COLLEGE
MINUTES
Thursday, March 19, 2009**

The Focus Group on Rental Properties Near the College held a meeting on Thursday, March 19, 2009 at 7:30 pm in the third floor conference room of the Municipal Building, 401 Lafayette Street.

ATTENDANCE

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

AGENDA

Approval of Minutes for March 12th, 2009 Meeting

Ms. Keller requested that the March 12th, 2009 meeting minutes be approved as submitted. The minutes were unanimously approved.

Discussion of Preliminary Best Practices Findings and Feasibility in terms of Zoning Ordinances, Cooperative Community Efforts, and Other Local Non-Zoning Policies

Ms. Keller reminded the group that the evening's agenda was not to reach a consensus, but to discuss possible alternative solutions group members researched and to receive brief updates regarding sub-group statuses.

Mr. Dell stated that he had talked with city employees from Fredericksburg, Virginia and Ashland, Virginia where Mary Washington University and Randolph Macon College are located. He stated that the City of Fredericksburg also has a three person rule but has difficulty enforcing it, as only one violation went to court in the past three years despite numerous suspected violations. Fredericksburg has no safety inspection program, but does have a landlord tax based on a percentage of the revenue generated from a property, which is also a potential way to identify the number of people in a rental dwelling. Mr. Dell stated that Ashland, VA has little success in enforcing its three person rule, and that the College cooperates with violations.

Mr. Dell stated that the sub-group of which he is a member agreed that the College of William & Mary should have some involvement in an off-campus housing solution. The sub-group also agreed that if a four person rule is instated, all qualifying four person homes should be included in the Rental Inspection Program. Additionally, other size restrictions should be considered, as 1200 square feet may be too small for four people. Finally, the sub-group agreed that it is important to remember that not all renters are students.

The Focus Group then discussed ways to incentivize more landlord participation, specifically when tenant behavior is in question. The group discussed the idea of landlords receiving phone

calls when police receive a complaint regarding one of the landlord's tenants and the importance of rental dwelling upkeep. Parking regulations and whether or not the number of parking spaces should match the number of tenants were also briefly discussed. The Focus Group members then acknowledged that a different enforcement mechanism is needed, as the current enforcement burden is placed on the residents.

Mr. Fitzgerald briefly summarized the discussions from the sub-group of which he was a part. He stated that the quality of renters, not the specific quantity, is important, and that the transition from on campus to off-campus must be smooth. He suggested that neighbors might need to complain if transitional problems are not being addressed, and that neighborly contact from residents might better facilitate student communications and address behavioral problems.

The group noted that there are a small number of specific houses that regularly cause behavioral complaints. Ms. Shackelford noted that this number is not as small when property maintenance complaints are considered as well. Mr. Dell stated that the more occupants that are allowed to rent in a home, the more money landlords can charge for it, and the more likely it is that single family homes will be converted to rental dwellings. Mr. Fitzgerald stated that students do not attempt to take over neighborhoods, and the role of absentee landlords was briefly discussed.

Mr. Talley stated that there is a three-way partnership in neighborhoods which includes renters, landlords, and residents. He explained that there are several common themes he found when researching other localities with adjacent educational institutions. Mr. Talley said that the most common theme was that the college or university was at the forefront of renter education, and that many require rental permits for houses which incorporate an affidavit between the renter and landlord. The use of an affidavit could lead to recommendations for higher fines or fines for other commonly non-fined tenant problems, such as noise or maintenance complaints. Additionally, some localities require certification for renters, which consists of a renter education class. It was suggested that this certification could give neighbors more capacity to discuss problems with renters, as they would be aware of the fact that renters had to become familiar with neighborhood expectations during the certification process.

Mr. Talley also stated that some universities and localities have partnered together to create incentive programs to get more faculty in rental homes. The agreement allows the city to create long-term leases with the university for rental dwellings, and then the university subsidizes salaries with the homes. Mr. Fox agreed that junior faculty members at the College are in need of housing and that the College is starting to consider feasible methods to meet this housing demand. The possibility of clustering rental units for students was discussed, as were the long-term options for the use of the Dillard Complex and the significant problems with the facility. Mr. Fox stated that if the Dillard Complex were ever to be utilized again, it would not be for student housing. The city council and administration's devotion to student needs was briefly discussed, and Mr. Dell gave the example of low fines for parking violations despite a recommendation for higher fines as an example of this dedication.

Agenda Topics for March 26th Meeting

Mr. Witkowsky asked if the Focus Group members would prefer an Honor Council representative be present at the next meeting to answer questions and partake in discussion. After a brief conversation on the amount of time available at the next meeting, the group members agreed that this would be beneficial. Mr. Fox reminded the group that Ms. Ginger Ambler would be returning, along with Ms. Anna Martin, both of the College of William & Mary.

Public Comment

Timmy Siverd, a current on campus resident, stated that 1200 square feet is not too small for four people, as most students are accommodated in small quarters on campus and used to such close quarters. Mr. Siverd noted that significant college involvement concerned him, as the College is already dealing with state budgetary issues, students already have difficulty getting in to required courses, and maintenance staffs are kept busy on campus.

Barbara Ramsey of Griffin Avenue stated that she both lives on and rents a home on Griffin Avenue and noticed that a deteriorating appearance of a house leads to other home problems, as this unkempt home mentality is easy to adapt behaviorally. She stated that she loves the vitality students bring to the community and enjoys the beginning of the school year block parties. Ms. Ramsey believes these block parties should continue throughout the year and stated that she thought the suggestion that residents introduce themselves to student neighbors is a good idea and will begin to do so herself.

Sharon Baker of Skipwith Farms stated that there is a reason that the Focus Group is focused on areas near the college and consists of no non-student renters. Ms. Baker noted that the Focus Group has yet to get any concrete understanding of the total number of off-campus students living within city limits. She also stated that a few bad examples always ruin it for everyone else.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:59 pm.