

West Pensacola Sector Plan - Priority Issue 2 – Quality of Life

The Planning Department met with the residents, property owners and other interested people to discuss the topic – Quality of Life. Resident-owners and Rental-owners were concerned about the factors diminishing the quality of their ~~neighborhoods~~ sector. Student impacts were the main reason mentioned for this deterioration. Participants identified the following specific concerns:

- Noise
- Garbage
- Public Safety
- Flooding

The Planning Department asked various City departments to speak to the participants ~~residents~~ about each of these issues. This provided the resident-owners and rental-owners ~~residents~~ an opportunity to ask department representatives their questions directly while also receiving a better understanding of the level of work currently underway.

The ~~residents~~ overarching concern is the lack of care for the community from the students. The participants also believed that the students did not understand the responsibilities of living in a neighborhood. Another problem is the dependence in the City's delivery of services (garbage, public safety and code enforcement) upon residents contacting the City for assistance. Most City services are dependent upon a request for service or the knowledge to know who to call if there is a problem. In the West Pensacola Sector and its high percentage of students, there is ignorance or apathy of these responsibilities. Also, there is constant turnover with residents moving each semester.

Based upon these comments, three general strategies were identified to improve the sector's neighborhoods. The strategies are as follows:

General Strategies

1. Communication – Communication is a relatively inexpensive tool that can improve the quality of life in the neighborhoods. All parties have responsibility in better communicating the expected norms of living in a neighborhood. Those needed to help address this issue include the City, residents, landowners and tenants. Examples include the following:
 - City – can improve communication by providing the residents, landowners and students with the information needed to address noise violations, garbage pickup, party patrol and other issues. The City has taken measures to improve communication but as identified in the Student Affairs Advisory Committee report, through the internet and other venues the City can better communicate, especially to the students.
 - Landowners – can educate their tenants of the responsibilities of living in a neighborhood. Landowners can also screen tenants to reduce the risk of problem tenants moving in an area.

- Students – can accept the responsibilities of living off campus. This includes reading the information provided regarding garbage pickup, crime/safety, requirements for hosting parties and working with their neighbors to ensure they are not creating problems in the neighborhood. This information could be addressed during student orientation.
2. Articulate Homeowner responsibilities – Homeowners are responsible to ensure a safe/well maintained home. Resident-owners suggested annual inspection of rental properties and licensing of landlords as potential tools to address problem homes in neighborhoods. This program could require that rental-owners distribute certain documents to tenants including “So you want to live off-campus”, bus schedules and garbage pickup schedules. However, Rental-owners strongly objected and raised questions regarding subjecting rental homes to inspection and not other homes in the area as well as the larger City. Rental-owners also stated that enforcement of current codes would be sufficient to address the problems being faced in the sector. Resident-owners clarified their main concern was the lack of care from some property owners for the neighborhoods especially by absentee owners. Also the fast-growing trend of “kiddie-condos” are becoming problem homes in the neighborhoods as well. No consensus was identified beyond the need for the neighborhoods and property owners to work together to improve these issues in the sector. As mentioned in Priority Issue 1 report, the establishment of a stakeholder committee could be a tool to get all parties to work together to resolve these common issues.
 3. Participate in Neighborhood Improvement – As stated above, many of the services the City provides are dependent upon residents informing the City when there is a problem. Citizen participation is a must to ensure neighborhood problems are addressed. Participation includes:
 - Meeting students as they move in. Be friendly but let them know you care about the area. Meet their parents during the move if possible.
 - Report violations – City Departments must have a record in order to do address the problem or to establish a pattern.

In addition to these general strategies, the report includes the residents four specific concerns: noise, garbage, public safety and flooding. Below is a further analysis of each of these issues.

Noise

The Tallahassee Police Department (TPD) and Department of Neighborhood and Community Services (NCS) attended the Priority Issue Meeting to present the programs underway to address noise issues as well as to hear the concerns from the public. TPD explained that their response was based upon a hierarchy from life safety to noise and other infractions. In addition, it is difficult for TPD officers to address noise violations because they are so often random, such as a passing car. However, if there is a pattern then by informing TPD the officers can patrol the area looking for this problem. TPD

also utilizes the party patrol to control noise and underage drinking during peak party times.

NCS presented the various projects underway including implementation of the Rooming House policies and conducting at home meetings with residents who are consistently creating problems. These individual meetings, usually targeted to students, are intended to both educate and explain the seriousness that Tallahassee takes these infractions. NCS also explained many of the reforms identified in the Student Affairs Advisory Committee taskforce including improved education of students regarding the responsibilities with living off-campus.

Resident-owners and rental-owners were in agreement that noise and garbage (mentioned below) are issues that need to be improved. Suggested was a notification system (could be web-based) where City departments and property owners could be notified if there is an infraction.

Garbage

Reginald Ofuani, Manager and Julia Dupree, Inspector with Solid Waste Services attended the Priority Issue Meeting in order to present the programs that were underway and to address the frequency of garbage pickup in this highly student area as well as to receive inputs and/or concerns from the public. Solid Waste explained that they have increased the frequency of garbage pick up during peak times. The problem according to the Department is with students not following the requirements of taking their trash to the street, putting their trash in the dumpster or knowing the days of trash pick-up. The Department also recommended that residents be aware and report illegal dumping, which mostly occurs on vacant lots in neighborhoods.

In addition to the on-going efforts of the Solid Waste Department, citizens identified the following recommendations:

- Increase frequency of garbage pick-up or additional service at end of semester during students moving in or moving out. Some even suggested a rate increase to improve service in the area. Rental-owners could pass on the rate increase to the renters.
- Issue tickets/fines for leaving bulk items out too long in advance etc.
- Partner with Law Enforcement to have community service work for underage drinkers to clean up the neighborhoods impacted by their behavior.
- Charge higher rates for higher densities (Rental-owners object to this approach)

Garbage in the sector is a problem that resident-owners and rental-owners all agree that is a major problem. All parties need to work together to identify solutions that will help solve the problems that are unique for this area. Students appear to generate more trash especially during peak times (moving in and out) and generally do not demonstrate care for the area as long-term residents do.

Public Safety

The Tallahassee Police Department (TPD) attended the Priority Issue Meeting in order to present the programs underway to address public safety concerns as well as to hear the concerns from the public. TPD explained that this is primarily a problem in the student areas because students are an easy target with money or valuables mixed with naivete such as leaving their apartments or cars unlocked. In addition, during holidays student areas are deserted and easy targets. TPD can assist as follows:

- Help establish a crime watch program as a first defense for neighborhoods.
- Conduct lighting surveys for both residential and commercial areas and make recommendations to improve safety.

Residents were encouraged by the efforts underway but recommended further actions to improve the safety of neighborhoods including:

- Post illegal parking signs. Once signs are posted then TPD can enforce.
- Increase directed patrols in problem areas. This is especially needed during student holidays. Citizens need to contact TPD so they identify problem areas. Citizens can communicate them to the Alpha or Charlie Commanders. Citizen calls help establish the problem areas.
- Call party patrol if party disturbance
- Encourage police to reside in neighborhoods
- Improve TPD's reporting procedures so property owners can be informed if problems are taking place at their rental properties.

Flooding

John Buss, Director of the Stormwater Division for the City of Tallahassee presented the programs underway to address flooding as well as to hear the concerns from the public. Mr. Buss identified the projects that are currently underway that will help with flooding in certain locations. Improvements proposed include:

- Lake Elberta
- Pepper Drive
- Lipona Road

These projects will help but will not solve the flooding problems for certain areas in the sector. This is because some of these areas were originally low areas and part of the natural floodplain. As heavy rains occur the water flows according to the natural drainage paths causing isolated flooding. Citizens can help by calling the Stormwater Division when flooding occurs in the City streets or in homes. This will ensure that the Stormwater Division is aware of all instances of flooding.

In addition to these projects, the residents had the following recommendations:

- retrofit city streets with curb and gutter

- Retrofit localized stormwater problems including Pepper Drive
- Address stormwater drainage problems in the Cactus Street neighborhood. In the short-term, ditches are very shallow and need maintenance. In the long-term, the stormwater system needs to be upgraded to handle the volume of stormwater to alleviate standing water conditions.