

Fort Sanders Quality of Life Committee  
*Notes from July 2, 2009 Meeting*

- I. BACKGROUND – Bob Whetsel introduced the Fort Sanders Long Range Planning Process to the group and described the evolution of the Quality of Life subcommittee as a branch of the overall larger planning group, which is dealing with a myriad of issues facing one of the most densely populated areas in the state of Tennessee.

For purposes of our inquiry, the Fort Sanders boundaries are Grand Avenue on the north, Neyland Drive on the south, the World's Fair Park on the east, and Concord Street and Neyland Drive on the west.

- II. GOALS – Whetsel stressed the need for solutions as well as accompanying action plans to be developed to help both the City and its partners increase Fort Sanders' quality of life. The committee will meet at least two more times – in September and November. The hope is that the committee can produce an action plan by the end of the year or in early 2010.

- III. INTRODUCTIONS – *Each individual present at the meeting briefly introduced themselves and their stake in Fort Sanders. Present were:*

Residents

Anne Gallegos	
Cathy Irwin	Fort Sanders CDC, and Historic Fort Sanders Neighborhood Assn.

Landlords – Owners and/or Managers

Anna Gallegos	
Jon Haas	Haas LLC
Toby Sledge	Crowne at Campus Pointe

Other Businesses or Property Owners

Elizabeth Elliott	1640 Professional Building
Fareed Nasser	18 <sup>th</sup> Street IGA

University of Tennessee

Maxine Davis	Student Affairs
Tim Johnson	University Housing
Ken Stoner	Student Affairs

UT Police Dept.

Debbie Perry
Meshia Thomas

UT Students

Tommy Jervis  
Tom Whitworth

Student Govt. Association  
Graduate Student Senate

Other Institutions

Eddie Young

Redeemer Church and  
Redeemer Hope Ministries

City of Knoxville

Michael Gillespie  
David Massey

Fire Dept.  
Office of Neighborhoods/  
Community Development Dept.  
Police Dept.  
Building, Zoning, Plans Review  
Economic Development

Kenny Miller  
Tom Reynolds  
Bob Whetsel

IV. PROBLEMS, ISSUES, AND CONCERNS IN FORT SANDERS – *David Massey*

*asked the group to brainstorm problems, issues, or concerns they have about Fort Sanders. The following items were named:.*

- a. Noise – specifically noise after 10 p.m.
- b. Safety – particularly for students
- c. Numbers of homeless, poor and working poor people who live or visit the neighborhood.
- d. Apparently homeless individuals who go through garbage and leave it spread all over the place.
- e. Bars
- f. Sub-standard housing
- g. A large number of renters without pride
- h. A large number of absentee landlords
- i. Traffic
- j. Lack of lighting, which is related to safety
- k. Lack of transportation
- l. Infrastructure, pot holes and sidewalks in disrepair.
- m. Alleys are not paved, potholes, vegetation blocking sight distance and creating dangerous entrances onto streets.
- n. Illegal parking – on street and in yards
- o. Trash – Renters feel no need to put trash bags in the cans, and leave them on the sidewalk. Not enough trash cans. No public trash cans.
- p. Crime – Some feel that although crime numbers are down, the neighborhood still feels unsafe at times. There were also concerns about crime not being reported, with an example of seeing drug deals. “Hot spots” tend to shift from one place to another in the neighborhood.
- q. Attitude and behavior of residents who demonstrate lack of respect and who make poor choices, including use of drugs/alcohol and creation of noise/disturbances.

- r. Upscale apartments have attracted higher-income people, who may be targeted for crime, exacerbated by their own poor decisions.
- s. Irresponsible students are not the sole source of behavior problems. Non-students also live in the neighborhood. Although not all subsidized housing is problematic, there is a development in the neighborhood that is not well maintained and which has always been a source of problems.
- t. Communication issues: Some neighbors don't understand about laws, garbage, party rules, and consequences. About 16,000 people live in Fort Sanders, making in one of the densest 2 square miles in Tennessee. The sheer numbers make communication difficult and challenging.
- u. Short-Distance Driving -- People drive cars six blocks from where they live, creating traffic, parking and air pollution problems.

V. ASSETS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN FORT SANDERS – *The group then compiled this list of Fort Sanders assets and opportunities:*

- a. Diversity of people and backgrounds
- b. Proximity of residences, UT campus, hospitals, health care, businesses, restaurants, libraries, downtown, interstate, etc.
- c. “Knoxville’s Front Porch” or “Downtown with Yards”
- d. Pedestrian friendly (at least during the daytime).
- e. Historic Architecture
- f. Parks, Trees, and Green Spaces
- g. (Potential for) support and community for students
- h. Cooperation between UTPD and KPD.
- i. History and heritage of community and Civil War History
- j. UT and Hospital – economic impact, healthcare services, culture, brain trust, community involvement.
- k. The Historic Fort Sanders Neighborhood Association provides many partnership opportunities.
- l. Mixed use buildings

Massey summarized the two brain-storming exercises, stating that the purpose of the group is to address problem issues, but the group must also focus on the good things about Fort Sanders in order to solve problems. Problems may abound, but there are good things about the neighborhood – a great place to work and live. The goal, by the end of the year, is to come up with an action plan on how to address priority problems -- using Fort Sander’s assets.

The group was then asked to prioritize concerns. The numbers in parenthesis were the number of people who felt a certain issue should be the priority.

- (8) Safety
- (7) Substandard Housing/Absentee Landlords
- (1) Homeless/ Poor/ Working Poor
- (1) Traffic
- (1) Crime

Massey then tasked the group with determining greatest assets in Fort Sanders. The numbers in parenthesis were the number of people who felt a certain asset was the greatest.

- (10) Proximity
- (3) University/Hospital connections
- (2) Architecture
- (2) Mixed Use

Massey noted that the group seems to like the idea that this is a walkable urban core -- a cool place to live and to work. It also feels like a small town. We can leverage the "small town" aspect of Fort Sanders when addressing problems.

VI. FOCUS STEPS – *Group members were then asked how assets could be used to solve problems. Some of the ideas included:*

- a. Addressing traffic problems at specific intersections.
- b. Reducing vehicular traffic.
- c. Revisiting the recommendations of a recent study on safety issues and of numerous planning commission studies over the years.
- d. Focusing on realistic goals with realistic plans.
- e. Leveraging & combining assets and stakeholders to address the issues.
- f. Realizing that implementation is a community responsibility.
- g. Being clear about exactly who or what group or groups will be in charge of making sure action steps are implemented.

Much of the ensuing discussion centered on landlord versus tenant responsibilities; landlords who do not reinvest money into houses; and tenants who leave apartments and houses in disrepair, and related issues.

Suggested solutions included citations for noise violations; a landlord education program (e.g., how to find and keep good renters); and a rental property registration program with inspections. The frequency of inspections was an issue, with some suggesting annual inspections, and others saying that inspections should be complaint driven so that inspections do not upset the timetable for moving in new renters.

Should landlords be held responsible for tenant behavior, or is this the responsibility of local police? This was a topic with differing viewpoints expressed. One problem for landlords: If a landlord enforces behavior through eviction, and if the eviction occurs mid-way through a semester, he/she likely could not re-rent the apartment until the next semester, thus losing revenue.

Another issue: Currently, the city's building codes inspectors can inspect an occupied property only if there is a complaint. It is likely that some housing units in Fort Sanders are not in compliance with city building codes. If, through a rental inspection program, the City's Codes Enforcement officers were to discover codes violations in rental housing, by law the City in some cases would have to

declare the buildings unfit for human habitation. This, in turn, would create vacant properties, which would pose another set of problems for the neighborhood.

Historic preservation was also discussed. City representatives said there are ways for a property owner to preserve the historic character of a structure and, at the same time, conform to safe building standards.

VII. INFORMATION NEEDED – *Massey then asked what information was needed to go forward. It was suggested that we:*

- a. Examine ordinances and best practices of other university communities to see what we can learn from them.
- b. Conduct a survey of substandard property. (There exists a database of all properties in Fort Sanders, but there needs to be a way to ID problem properties.)
- c. Come up with a definition of substandard property.
- d. Identify “landlord training” resources.

VIII. NEXT MEETINGS –

Full Committee Meeting will meet on Thursday, August 6 at 3:00pm in the Baker Center.

The Quality of Life Subcommittee will next meet at 3 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 3, at the Baker Center.